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*The Federal Chairwoman of the VCL, Mag.a Gertraud Salzmann, has evaluated an international study on the question of "learning under COVID-19 conditions":*

**Experience in Distance Learning**

The international study "Learning under COVID-19 circumstances" in which 25,000 students with an average age of 15 years in eight countries from Europe, Asia, North America participated came to interesting results.[[1]](#footnote-1) The study, in which Austrian researchers and students also participated, shows a higher risk of anxiety and depression among the respondents as well as a lack of resources and services that students usually receive in a normal school day, such as counselling, psychological services, special education support. As the economic and social sciences have warned about the long-term consequences of the covid school situation, the study explored the question of which characteristics have a positive influence on the emotions, intrinsic motivation to learn and on the quality of the learning process of the students during this period of homeschooling.

**Competence, autonomy and social inclusion strengthen learning success**

The study shows some factors very clearly: Students experience competence when they can manage their school tasks. They perceive themselves as acting autonomously when they complete their tasks in a self-determined and self-organised manner. In turn, pupils feel socially integrated when they feel part of a social group and experience mutual support from this group. The limited social interaction between students and teachers, on the other hand, proved to be a burden on the positive learning situation. It follows from this for distance learning settings that personal needs, feelings and difficulties should be addressed, as the feeling of connectedness correlates with well-being. Social contacts are even more important for adolescents than for adults, as adolescents predominantly experience their social relationships as providing meaning.

**e-learning as an opportunity for individualised learning**

Distance learning offers the students an opportunity to approach the tasks at their own pace, thus enabling individual support. Students need support and encouragement in order not to lose their motivation to learn - this in turn strengthens their competence and autonomy in independent learning. Support for self-organised learning is especially important for those learners who find it more difficult. Creating autonomy-supporting learning environments and learning strategies here in turn strengthens the experience of competence through learning success. If the basic needs are not in harmony, learning in distance learning quickly becomes a burden and the learning success is sometimes drastically reduced.

**What do we take with us? Certainly not a "lost generation**

Learning succeeds better when teachers give clear instructions as well as well-structured learning packages with clear timelines and objectives, and students are in regular contact with them. A unified use of a few learning platforms facilitates a good overview of the learning tasks. The importance of social interaction is shown by the approximately 7% of the students surveyed who had little contact with their classmates and with the teacher. For them, the lack of social inclusion is reflected in a lower sense of well-being and confidence, thus in a lower motivation to learn and a decline in learning success. Good and timely feedback from the teacher gives security and confidence and thus strengthens the sense of competence. The teacher cannot be replaced by e-learning, but has a key function in the virtual classroom - as in the real one. The result of the study shows very clearly: Strengthening the competence, autonomy and social integration of the students has a lasting positive effect on their learning progress and their learning success.

The students have acquired many skills during the Corona months, especially in the area of self-organisation, independent work and above all in dealing with digital work tools and resources. In addition, many have taken care of their family members - be it younger siblings or even the elderly - more intensively than usual. Our young people are certainly not a "lost generation"!

**Education needs diversity**

This is precisely why we now need to draw on our experiences and further develop education with good ideas and inspiration. Our free access to all educational institutions is a privilege, our different types of schools are open to all Austrian children - they must be strengthened and further developed.

**Education also means life-long learning.** In this context, the digital possibilities, which we had to test and expand intensively last year, can open up new opportunities for us. Especially people living in rural areas can benefit from the numerous good educational offers that we already have and can greatly expand in the future.

 Holzer / Korlat / Haider / Mayerhofer / Pelikan / Schober (eds.), Adolescent well-being and learning in times of COVID-19 - A multi-country study of basic psychological need satisfaction, learning behaviour, and the mediating roles of positive emotion and intrinsic motivation (2021), in: PLOS ONE 16(5), <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0251352>(29.5.2021).

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)