How can we get students to put more effort into independent study?

New evidence from a large field experiment with brilliant collaborators @LAOuthwaite and Dr Sophie Bennett from @up_learn


As students mature, the importance of independent study grows. But surveys show student effort outside the classroom varies widely.

So how can teachers motivate their students?

This is particularly important right now:

22% secondary pupils missed school on one Thursday in November
and 77% of parents cite lack of motivation as constraining their child’s study during isolation

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolingingreatbritain/apriltojune2020

We worked with the scientifically-minded educators at

Up Learn - A*-A Exam Success Guaranteed
Up Learn uses AI and neuroscience to ensure every student can achieve an A* at A Level.

https://uplearn.co.uk/

Psychologists have long studied the effects of different types of goals on motivation. We tested two:

"Mastery Approach" (MAp) goals (aim to develop task mastery)

and

"Performance Approach" (PAp) goals (aim to demonstrate high performance, relative to some benchmark)

Our study is one of the first "real world" (non-laboratory) experiment testing the two in education.

We used simple messages, delivered via an @up_learn online course, to induce different types of goals among A-Level economics students.
We measured student study effort in two ways:

1) Number of educational videos watched on the @up_learn platform

2) Number of "progress quizzes" taken (see example quiz question below)

Embedding the experiment in the @up_learn platform allowed us to recruit 1,971 participants (!) across our three conditions: MAp, PAp, control.

I genuinely had no idea what results we would get...

In short:

- MAp goals induced sizable (17-26%) additional effort, relative to the control group (p<0.05)

- PAp goals had no effect, relative to control

Raw outcomes are shown below. More stats in the paper.
We had to randomise participants at the point of sign up - so some participants had higher exposure at the end of the 13-week trial.

Interestingly, we found a positive dose-response relationship. (NB: random permuted blocks ensured exact balance in exposure across the 3 groups).

We think the findings have direct implications for how teachers motivate pupils during the pandemic, and beyond.

For more on how to foster Mastery Approach goals, see the discussion & appendix of the paper: 

Next steps: 1) replicate this finding 2) get independent test score data, to understand if this translates into improved pupil achievement...
Big thanks to the awesome team who made this happen: Dr Sophie Bennett
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@threadreaderapp unroll

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