

The National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) has been set up in Germany to find out more about how education is acquired, to see how it impacts on individual biographies, and to describe and analyze the major educational processes and trajectories across the life span. One of the major goals (and challenges) is to model and measure competence development over the life course. Reading and listening comprehension, math competence, and scientific literacy will be measured longitudinally and coherently across the life span. These data will be supplemented with regular assessments of metacognition and ICT literacy and single measurements of general cognitive ability and social competencies.

In order to obtain data and results more quickly, the NEPS starts with several cohorts, for example 5th-grade students (10- to 11-year-olds) and first-year higher education students. In all these cohorts the above-mentioned domain-general and domain-specific competencies as well as meta-competencies and social competencies will be assessed. In the higher education cohort, however, the NEPS attempts to also measure subject-specific competencies. On the one hand, this will be done by using self-report measures for the whole sample. On the other hand, competence tests will be carried out in selected subject areas. A competence test for students of business administration is just being developed. In future cohorts of the NEPS additional subjects will be included.

The advantage of assessing different competence domains separately lies in the possibility to analyze the interplay and relationship between them and to answer questions such like how important is numeracy for building up subject-specific competencies, what constitutes professional action competence and what competence domain influences the transition from higher education to work and the subsequent occupational career most.