



The Pygmalion Effect Believing Students to Success

The origin of *Pygmalion* comes from ancient Greek mythology.

It inspired many later works, including George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play *Pygmalion*, in which a phonetics professor sets out to transform the language and etiquette of a Covent Garden flower girl and pass her off as a lady at an ambassadors' ball.

Shaw's play later inspired the musical and film *My Fair Lady*.

In education, the "Pygmalion effect" refers to situations where, for example, a teacher's high expectations positively influence a student's behaviour and, in turn, improve their academic performance or conduct at school. It suggests that we do better when more is expected of us.

This principle is the result of a significant 1968 study by researchers Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. It shows that students often perform better or worse depending on what their teachers believe they can achieve.

In the original experiment, teachers were told—falsely—that certain randomly selected students were "academic bloomers" destined for intellectual growth. By the end of the year, those students showed significantly greater academic improvement than their peers. This was not due to superior initial ability but to the teachers' subtle, unconscious actions. Teachers invested more time and attention in the "bloomers," gave them more specific feedback, and created a warmer emotional climate.



On the reverse side, the "*Golem effect*" illustrates the negative consequences of low expectations; when students sense that others lack confidence in their abilities, they may internalise this belief, disengage from learning, and ultimately perform poorly - fulfilling the low expectations set for them.

Recognising the *Pygmalion effect* reminds us of our ethical responsibility to maintain high but attainable expectations for every learner. When we intentionally build a classroom and school culture grounded in belief and support, we set in motion a cycle of encouragement that empowers students to realise their potential and achieve outstanding success.

A Drop of Wisdom

Words that spiral
out of control
endanger reputations
and even careers.

Staffroom Chat



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inexplicable
moment
of your
career?

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Every family has
a weird relative.
If you don't know
who it is, then it's
probably you.



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