

# Learning Goals of Geography Students Participating in a Community-Based Research Service-Learning Course: A Qualitative Interview Study

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## Abstract

Research has demonstrated the importance of clearly defined learning objectives for students' learning success. The aim of this qualitative study builds on this but focuses on the individual learning goals that students often set for themselves, which do not necessarily correspond to those formulated by the course instructor. At the end of the investigated community-based research service-learning course for bachelor degree geography students at a German University, we conducted qualitative guided interviews with 13 students and asked the students about their individual learning objectives. The interviews were then analysed using qualitative content analysis method, combining inductive and deductive analysis steps. It became apparent that cognitive learning goals were particularly important to the students, followed by psychomotor and affective learning goals. The relevant cognitive learning goals include, in particular: developing in-depth knowledge of the research topic and deepening knowledge of research methods. Regarding psychomotor learning goals, the following were mentioned more frequently: learning how to work with others in a project group, applying qualitative methods and getting to know the work of a geographer. The acquisition of social skills was frequently referenced in the main category affective learning goals. These findings demonstrate that, regardless of the course instructor's considerations, students develop clear and reflective ideas about the learning goals they wish to achieve by attending a specific course. The fact that explicit learning goals were formulated in all three learning objective areas is attributable to the specific didactic teaching concept of the course, which the students had deliberately chosen.

**Keywords:** learning objective, educational goal, course participants, research-based learning, experiential learning