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Achievement Goals and Behavioral and Emotional Engagement as Precursors of Academic Adjusting

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Abstract

This study identifies the role that behavioural and emotional engagement play in mediating the relationship between achievement goals and some dimensions of school adjustment. Results from the study were supportive of the hypotheses and revealed a differential predictive pattern for each of the achievement goals. Mastery goals were linked to behavioural and emotional engagement; performance-approach goals were linked to a behavioural, performance-avoidance goals were linked negative to behavioural engagement processes, and mastery-avoidance goals were linked negative to emotional engagement. These results will be more able to establish practices that prevent students' disengagement and enhanced they adjustment to school.

Keywords: achievement goals; behavioral engagement; emotional engagement; school adjusting.

1. Introduction

Active involvement in school is important to a student's adjustment to educational settings (i.e., dropout intentions, absenteeism, homework frequency, and educational aspirations) (Otis, Frederick, Grouzet, & Luc Pelletier, 2005). Students who are more engaged (behavioural and emotional) in school earn higher grades and show better psychological adjustment to school (Li & Lerner, 2011). Conversely, students who are disengaged from school are more likely to experience academic failure, school dropout, and a lot of other negative outcomes (Wang

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& Holcombe, 2010). Researchers and educators are increasingly focused on school engagement as a means for addressing problems of student boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). To increase student engagement in school, we need to better understand (a) the antecedent of school engagement and (b) the consequences of different school engagement on educational adjustment, both of which are addressed in this study.

Because researchers studying the effects of educational engagement on school adjustment have differed in their definitions and measures of engagement, it is difficult to integrate findings across studies. Often, researchers incorporated a wide variety of constructs in their measurement of engagement, an inclusiveness that makes it difficult to determine the unique precursors and consequences of different types of engagement. In the current study, we assess behavioural and emotional engagement to involvement in learning (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008). *Behaviour engagement* refers to participation in the learning environment, and although defined in different ways, has often been operationalized in terms of the effortful and persistence aspects of involvement in instructional activities. These aspects of engagement have been investigated as a potential precursor of school student's adjustment. *Effort* is the amount of energy expended in a learning process. *Persistence* refers to the continuous effort in learning especially when the student is faced with some barriers or obstacles (Mih, 2013; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Persistence / efforts not only reflect motivation but serve as important indices for adaptive behaviour (Goa & Newton, 2009).

Emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions in the classroom, which engage them in learning requires positive or negative emotional experiences (Mih & Mih, 2013). These emotion reactions, such boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety contribute to a classroom climate that forms the foundation for teacher - student relationships and interactions necessary for motivation students to learn (Meyer & Turner, 2006). The emotions included in these definitions duplicate an earlier body of work on attitudes, which examined feelings toward school and included survey questions about liking or disliking school, the teacher, or the tasks; feeling happy or sad in school; or being bored or interested in the work (Epstein & McPartland, 1976).

Some of the most important antecedents of school engagement are *achievement goals*. Achievement goal theory posits that students' behaviour in an achievement setting is guided by the achievement goals they construe for learning (Pintrich, 2000), and these goals determine their approach to, engagement in school learning (Urdan, & Midgley, 2003). Some of research has demonstrated the validity of using achievement goal theory to understand and promote adaptive behaviours in learning (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Achievement theorists have differentiated two types of achievement goals that characterize a student's purpose for task engagement: *performance goals*, which focus on the demonstration of ability, and *mastery goals*, which focus on the development of skills and abilities (Ames & Archer, 1988). Later, a more elaborate 2 x 2 achievement goal model was posited (Elliot, 1999) in which the mastery goal construct, as well as the performance goal construct, is bifurcated in terms of approach and avoidance. Thereby, the 2 x 2 achievement goal framework crosses the performance-mastery distinction with the approach-avoidance distinction (Elliot & Church, 1997). The performance-mastery distinction is construed as representing how competence is defined (according to a task-based or intrapersonal standard, respectively), and the approach–avoidance distinction is construed as representing how competence is valences (according to positive possibilities or negative possibilities, respectively). This framework comprises four achievement goals: mastery-approach, performance approach, mastery avoidance, and performance-avoidance.

A mastery goal refers to a striving to learn, understand, and improve skills based on an intrapersonal evaluative standard, while a performance goal is seen as a striving to outperform others and appear competent based on an interpersonal standard. Mastery-approach goals entail striving to do better than one has done before, whereas *mastery-avoidance goals* entail striving to avoid doing worse than one has done before (Van Yperen, 2006). These forms of regulation represent mastery goals, because they focus on intrapersonal development; they represent approach and avoidance goals, respectively, because they focus on a potential positive vs. negative outcome.

Many studies have revealed that a *mastery goal orientation* is associated with school adaptive pattern, such as having high levels of self-efficacy (Middleton & Midgley, 1997) and persisting longer on difficult tasks (Elliott & Dweck, 1988) and greater educational adjustment (i.e., educational aspiration, frequent courses, homework frequency) (Otis, et al., 2005).