



Predictors of adolescents' academic motivation: Personality, self-efficacy and adolescents' characteristics



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors predicting intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation among secondary school students. In total, 455 students completed questionnaires measuring intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation, Big Five personality traits and self-efficacy. In addition, demographic information (sex, age and socioeconomic status) was obtained. Overall, self-efficacy and personality (specifically conscientiousness) predicted significant variance in intrinsic motivation, while only self-efficacy predicted significant variance in extrinsic motivation; self-efficacy and personality predicted more variance in intrinsic than extrinsic motivation. Demographic variables (sex, age and SES) were not significant predictors of academic motivation. Implications for raising academic motivation among secondary school aged students are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Researchers interested in the factors that influence student's achievement and academic success are more commonly studying the concept of motivation, due to increased evidence that motivation plays an important role in attainment (Gilman & Anderman, 2006; Gottfried, 1985, 1990; Lin, McKeachie, & Kim, 2003; McDermott, Mordell, & Stoltzfus, 2001). Indeed, even after accounting for cognitive abilities or intelligence, motivation has been shown to predict variance in different areas of educational attainment (Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2011; Spinath, Freudenthaler, & Neubauer, 2010; Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009), highlighting a need to understand more about motivation within an educational context.

Academic motivation is thought to decline throughout childhood and into adolescence, although developmental declines are greater for some subject areas (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001). Indeed, developmental declines in academic intrinsic motivation (Lepper, Henderlong Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005; Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005) have led to heightened concern about lack of academic motivation among adolescents (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). This is at a time when adolescents are required to work toward assessments that heavily

influence their opportunities for further study or employment. Therefore research focused on understanding the factors that influence or enhance (Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortega, 2010) adolescents' academic motivation is arguably crucial.

1.1. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Research investigating academic motivation often differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Covington & Mueller, 2001; Lepper et al., 2005; Otis et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000), referring to the different loci of causality with regard to engagement in learning. Academic intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in academic activities for their own sake, for example, to engage in learning due to interest or curiosity, or a desire to develop a greater understanding about a topic. However extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in learning due to external factors, such as to gain a reward or recognition. Although past research has suggested that these two aspects of motivation represent opposites on the same continuum (Harter, 1981), more recently it has been proposed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are better understood as separate facets that should be distinguished, as students can be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Covington & Mueller, 2001; Lepper et al., 2005).

In general, intrinsic motivation is typically correlated with academic success (Lepper et al., 2005; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004); however extrinsic motivation is often inversely related with academic attainment (Lepper et al., 2005; Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, & Senécal, 2007) as it is

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generally associated with shallow cognitive engagement in learning (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). Results from a large meta-analysis suggest that extrinsic motivators (i.e., tangible rewards) undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). However, the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is arguably more complex; a moderate level of extrinsic motivation may not necessarily be detrimental to student's achievement, if coupled with high levels of intrinsic motivation (Lin et al., 2003).

1.2. Personality

Personality refers to a set of underlying traits that determine how an individual typically behaves, thinks and feels. There are several different conceptualisations of personality; however one of the most widely used is the 'Big Five' framework (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This conceptualisation uses five factors to explain individual differences in personality. These factors are agreeableness, extraversion, emotional regulation (often termed neuroticism), openness to experiences and conscientiousness. A substantial body of research has examined the relationship between personality characteristics and academic attainment (Bratko, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Saks, 2006; Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003, 2008; Hair & Graziano, 2003; Kappe & Van der Flier, 2010; Kaufman, Agars, & Lopez-Wagner, 2008; Komaraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009; Laidra, Pullmann, & Allik, 2007; Nofle & Robins, 2007; Richardson & Abraham, 2009; Rosander, Bäckstrom, & Sternberg, 2011). Some of this research has been summarised in a recent meta-analysis which showed that conscientiousness was consistently most closely related to academic attainment, followed by openness to experiences and agreeableness; emotional stability (neuroticism) and extraversion were often weakly or unrelated to academic performance (Poropat, 2009).

Interestingly, Poropat (2009) illustrated that the relationship between personality and academic performance was not due to shared links with intelligence. Rather it has been suggested that personality may be related to academic attainment because of positive traits that naturally promote academic learning (Medford & McGeown, 2012; Poropat, 2009). Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that self-efficacy and academic motivation mediate the relationship between personality and attainment (De Feyter, Caers, Vigna, & Berings, 2012). Therefore, personality may predict other factors commonly associated with academic performance, for example motivation.

Compared to research examining the relationship between personality and attainment, research investigating the relationship between personality and motivation is more limited, and is almost exclusively focused on college or university students (Batey, Booth, Furnham, & Lipman, 2011; Bipp, Steinmayr, & Spinath, 2008; Clark & Schroth, 2010; De Feyter et al., 2012; Hart, Stasson, Mahoney, & Story, 2007; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Komaraju & Karau, 2005; Komaraju et al., 2009; Richardson & Abraham, 2009). These studies have quite consistently illustrated a relatively robust relationship between students' personality characteristics and their academic motivation. For example, Komaraju and Karau (2005) found that college student's openness to experiences and conscientiousness were positively associated with positive aspects of academic motivation (e.g., thinking, persisting, achieving) and negatively associated with negative aspects of academic motivation (e.g., disliking, discouraging). More recently, Komaraju et al. (2009) found that college student's openness to experiences and conscientiousness emerged as the strongest predictors of intrinsic motivation, while conscientiousness (and to a lesser extent neuroticism and extraversion) emerged as significant predictors of extrinsic motivation. Clark and Schroth (2010) analysed college student's academic motivation and personality further and found that different dimensions of intrinsic motivation (e.g., accomplishment, stimulation) were predicted by different personality traits. On the other hand, the personality traits predicting different aspects of extrinsic motivation were more similar.

Combined, these studies suggest that the relationship between personality and motivation differs for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and for different dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, the vast majority of this research has not been carried out within a secondary school setting. Secondary school students differ from university or college students in a number of ways; not only in age, but potentially in their level of academic motivation. Students at college or university have opted to continue in further education and therefore may be more academically motivated than secondary school pupils enrolled in compulsory education. In addition, university or college students are typically studying an area that they have chosen to specialise in, and therefore their academic motivation may be higher than those required to study a number of compulsory academic subjects. As it is in secondary schools in which low academic motivation is of most concern (Anderman & Maehr, 1994), a better understanding of the factors that predict motivation in this age group is important. However, in addition to personality, there are other factors which may predict academic motivation in this age group which could be considered.

1.3. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs or judgments that people have about their own ability to perform well in a variety of tasks or situations, but particularly in novel or difficult tasks, and is a concept that is closely tied to motivation (Schunk, 1991). Indeed, research illustrates a close relationship between self-efficacy and motivation; particularly intrinsic motivation (Boggiano, Main, & Katz, 1988; Walker et al., 2006), perhaps because self-belief is generally associated with an increased willingness or drive to engage in behaviours associated with high self-belief (Pajares, 1996). It is suggested that children who have higher perceptions of their competence or abilities have a greater preference to engage in challenging learning activities in particular (Boggiano et al., 1988). In addition to its relationship with motivation, research suggests a significant influence of self-efficacy on academic attainment (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992) and meaningful cognitive engagement (Walker et al., 2006). Indeed, in a recent study with adolescents, Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino, and Barbaranelli (2011) found that both academic self-efficacy and personality traits individually contributed significantly to academic achievement throughout school.

Furthermore, in a series of large scale studies with secondary school pupils, Trautwein, Ludtke, Roberts, Schnyder, and Niggli (2009) illustrated that competency beliefs (similar to self-efficacy) and conscientiousness were independent predictors of secondary school pupils academic effort and achievement. However, there is generally more research examining the relationship between self-efficacy and attainment (e.g., Caprara et al., 2011; Trautwein et al., 2009) than motivation (Boggiano et al., 1988). Nevertheless, student self-efficacy is likely to influence their motivation, but may be a better predictor of some aspects of motivation than others. For example, as self-efficacy is associated with feelings of confidence in ability, it may be more closely related to a desire to engage in challenging tasks rather than a general interest or curiosity to learn more. In the present study, general self-efficacy rather than academic self-efficacy was used to provide a fair comparison with personality characteristics (which are also general).

1.4. Demographic variables

Finally demographic variables, namely sex, age and socio-economic status may also predict students' academic motivation. There is some research to suggest sex differences in academic motivation (Martin & Marsh, 2005; Meece, Glienke, & Burg, 2006), however these differences are often narrow or not statistically or educationally significant (Lepper et al., 2005). In addition, age related declines in academic motivation are commonly reported (Lepper et al., 2005; Otis et al., 2005; Seeshing Yeung & McInerney, 2005). There is a lack of research investigating

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