Motivational Correlates of Academic Achievement Among At-Risk Youth

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Background & Theoretical Framework

- "At-risk" students, including those who attend alternative schools, struggle with psychosocial, behavioral, and/or academic adjustment, which places them at a high risk of dropping out of school (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Zweg, 2003).
- According to self-determination theory (SDT), meeting the fundamental needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness is essential for fostering students’ intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002).
- Few studies have examined the relationship between SDT variables and academic performance among students who attend alternative schools.

Purpose of the Study

To investigate the relationship between
- perceptions of academic competence (self-efficacy),
- school belonging,
- perceived autonomy support, and
- academic achievement among adolescents attending an alternative secondary school.

Participants

Students from Grades 7 to 12 attending an alternative secondary school in Southern Eastern U.S. (N = 122; 35.2% girls, 64.8% boys; Mean = 16.7) participated in the study.

Measures

- Academic self-efficacy and self-regulatory self-efficacy, a proxy for perceived academic competence, were measured using a 6-item academic self-efficacy scale ("In general, how confident are you in your abilities in math?"; α = .72) and 10-item self-regulatory self-efficacy scale ("How well can you concentrate on your school work?"; Bandura, 2006; α = .90)
- Belongingness was measured using the 14-item Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale ("I feel like a part of my school."); Goodenow, 1993; α = .92
- Autonomy support was measured using the 15-item perceived autonomy-supportive climate scale ("I feel understood by my instructor.") from Learning Climate Questionnaire (Black & Deci, 2000; α = .90)
- Academic performance was measured using end-of-semester grade point average (GPA). Students’ GPA ranged from 0.25 to 4.

Research Questions & Analyses

- RQ1: What was the relationship among all the study variables?
- Pearson’s correlation
- RQ2: Did SDT variables predict end-of-semester GPA?
- Multiple linear regression

Results

- All SDT variables were significantly, positively correlated with each other.
- GPA was significantly correlated with sense of belonging and autonomy support but not with academic self-efficacy and self-regulatory self-efficacy.
- SDT variables collectively, but modestly, predicted students’ GPA, R² = .089, p < .05.
- Perceived autonomy support was the only significant predictor of GPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Std. Error</th>
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<td>Gender</td>
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Note. SE = Self-Efficacy. Mean scores for all variables range from 1(low) to 6 (high).

Discussion & Implications

- Perceived autonomy support was the only significant predictor of GPA, suggesting that students who feel a greater sense of autonomy support perform better at school.
- Research has consistently shown that in traditional school settings, perceived competence is positively related to achievement (Klassen & Usher, 2010); however, our findings suggest that at-risk students may show a different motivational profile.
- Alternative schools that can offer learning environments that are supportive of students’ sense of autonomy might facilitate students’ academic performance.

References


Multiple linear regression

Table 1


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</table>

Note. SE = Self-Efficacy. Mean scores for all variables range from 1(low) to 6 (high).

*p < .05. **p < .01.