

THE LINKS BETWEEN THE 9TH GRADE STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT GOALS ORIENTATIONS AND PERCEIVED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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In the stage of middle adolescence educational goals become salient for students. However, their salience may change over the period of late adolescence (Massey et al, 2008). From the perspective of achievement motivation (Law, Elliot, & Murayama, 2012), achievement goals are considered to be cognitive-dynamic goals focused on educational competence. School goal structure refers to goal-related messages made salient by the policies, practices, and communication strategies that teachers employ with students (Park, et al., 2018). Students adopt the achievement goals that match the goals stressed in their environment. Pursuing mastery-approach goals is more beneficial for students' deeper learning, well-being and long-term outcomes than pursuing performance goals (Elliot & Hulleman, 2017). Metaanalysis of research over the past 30 years showed that the relations between school goal structures and achievement goals are robust and largely unbiased. However, the understanding of the relation between goal structures and achievement goals is insufficient (Bardach, et al., 2019). Therefore, the objectives of this two-wave study are twofold: (1) to investigate how the 9th grade students' achievement goal orientations and perceived school goal structure change over a school year and (2) to evaluate the (strength of the) relationship between the 9th grade students perceived school goal structures and achievement goals in two measurement waves (W1 and W2). It is not clear how Covid-19 pandemic situation with emphasis on distance learning affected students' motivation, so it is important to evaluate students' perceived school goals structure and achievement goals orientation in the 2020 spring semester (W2) as the different learning contexts might affect motivation and learning processes differently.

Methods

A sample of 1268 9th grade students (51,7% females) took part in both W1 and W2 of a longitudinal "Goals Lab" study on adolescent goals (sample retention 95,4%). Age at W1 – between 14 and 16 (M = 14.87 SD = 0.39), homogenous ethnically (> 98% Lithuanian), diverse family and socio-economic settings, from 36 gymnasiums across Lithuania (6 in a major city, 21 urban, 9 non-urban). Instruments used in an online survey: a revised Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ-R) assessment tool (Elliot & Murayama, 2008) and Perceived School Goal Structures scale (Park, et al., 2018). Our data analyses involved descriptives calculated using SPSS v. 23; the cross-lagged path analysis carried out with Mplus 7.4; MLR estimator; and TYPE=COMPLEX option used to control for non-independence of observations (clustered within classes).

Conclusions

Mean-level changes were observed in students achievement goals orientations over a school year: students became less oriented towards mastery-approach and performance goals, while their orientation towards mastery-avoidance goals remained stable at the end of the school year. The results also show that students, on average, perceived more performance goal structure at the end of the school year. These dynamics may reflect a complex interplay of individual and school level factors, such as normative change, school burnout and change in the learning contexts during Covid-19 pandemic (classroom vs distance learning).

Our findings also help to disentangle the links between school goal structures and students' achievement goals over a school year. Specifically, perceived performance school goal structure negatively predicted mastery goals structure and mastery goal structure negatively predicted performance goal structure, but positively predicted mastery approach goals orientation among students. At the same time, higher mastery approach orientation in students was related to higher perceived mastery school goal structure and lower performance school goal structure over time, as well as higher mastery avoidance orientation among students. Performance approach orientation was not related to school goal structures, but it predicted higher performance avoidance and, to a lesser extent, mastery approach orientation among students at the end of the school year.

Keywords: student achievement goals; achievement goals orientations; perceived school goal structure.