

The links between socioeconomic status, academic motivation and achievement in high-school: A motivational advantage of high-SES students?

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Socioeconomic status (SES) is a robust predictor of school achievement among students and schools/classrooms. However, there is a lack of understanding about potential mechanisms behind SES-achievement links on an individual and aggregate level. To address this gap we looked at the links between student SES, grades and key dimensions (mastery and performance, approach and avoidance) of individual achievement goals and perceived class goal structures. We hypothesized that high-SES students have motivational advantage over their peers, and explored whether this could explain achievement differences among students and classes with different SES backgrounds. Data come from the first wave of Goals' Lab study, conducted with a sample of adolescents attending 78 classes in selected Lithuanian high schools ($N=1,268$; 51.7% females; $M = 14.87$; $SD = 0.39$). The findings from multi-level path analyses reveal that higher within-class SES is related to higher levels on all assessed dimensions of academic motivation. While these links are relatively weak, the study provides some evidence that even this slight motivational advantage could explain some of the individual-level SES-related differences in achievement. At the same time, class-aggregated SES is related to higher avoidance motivation in a class, that is, students in high-SES classes tend to be motivated by fear of losing their achieved level of skills and grades. The study both supports and questions the implications of motivational advantage among high-SES students and emphasizes the responsibility of schools to support academic motivation of all students.

Keywords: Socioeconomic status (SES), Academic motivation; Academic achievement; Achievement goals orientations; Class goal structures