Achievement goals and academic achievement

Achievement goals refer to the motivational orientations of people in learning and performance contexts. Different achievement goals have been distinguished from each other. Each goal shows differential associations to various educational variables and academic achievement outcomes. On the one hand, the goal of acquiring high skills or competencies ("learning goal") and, on the other hand, goals of demonstrating high skills to others or performing better than others ("performance-approach goal") or hiding low skills ("performance- avoidance goal") have been differentiated.

A large number of studies have found substantial associations between achievement goals and e.g. learning behaviour, school interest, learning strategies, and various performance indicators. In this context, we have examined the subject-specificity of achievement goals. In a comprehensive meta-analysis (published in Educational Research Review), we have analyzed the associations between achievement goals and different achievement indicators in detail. We found several relevant moderators regarding this association, e.g. concerning the operationalization of achievement goals. Especially performance-approach goals seem to be operationalized and assessed heterogeneously. In another meta-analysis (published in Journal of Educational Psychology) we found substantial associations between “self-handicapping” (strategy to protect one's own self-worth) and academic achievement.

Currently, we are focusing primarily on the operationalization and assessment of achievement goals. In particular, we examine the question under which conditions performance-approach goals are actually conducive to performance.

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