

WHAT GOAL STRUCTURES MEAN TO HUNGARIAN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS?

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Keywords: goal theory; learning environment; learning motivation

In the past decades, goal theory has become a prominent perspective on students' motivation in school. The theory assumes that students' motivation is influenced by their individual features and also by the environment. Within the framework of goal theory, motivational characteristics of students are described by their goals, whereas the learning environment is described by goal structures. Goal structures describe the type of goals emphasized by the environment, which means two types of goal structures can be distinguished (Ames, 1992). Mastery goal structure is associated with adaptive student behaviors; performance goal structure is associated with maladaptive behaviors (Maehr and Zusho, 2009). One of the central questions in goal theory research is how teachers promote mastery and downplay performance goal structure.

The research aims to reveal the connection of goal structures, specific teacher practices and that of the social climate of the classrooms through the perceptions of young adolescents. 861 pupils of 10–14 years of age (from grade 5 to 8, respectively) participated in the research. Data was collected with the help of student questionnaires containing closed questions only. 11 scales were created to reflect different aspects of the classroom; Math was chosen as the focus of study. Some scales relate to goal theory, others to the classroom climate perspective.

In this research, mastery goal structure is associated with task, rule-oriented behavior of the teacher, teacher support, promoting mutual respect among students, evaluation emphasizing ones own personal responsibility; whereas performance goal structure is associated with task, rule-oriented behavior of the teacher, promoting competition, grouping. As regression analysis shows, the above mentioned variables explain 47.9% of the student differences in terms of the mastery goal structure and 24.7% in terms of the performance goal structure. Task plays an important role in both goal structures (mastery goal structure: 27.0%; performance goal structure: 10.2%). The importance of the other variables varied between 1.5% and 7.7%. Explained variances of the mastery goal structure differ considerably among grades; the higher the grade, the higher its value is (28.0; 37.2; 43.2; 50.9; $p < 0.01$). Explained variances of the performance goal structure are similar across grades (24.5; 19.6; 26.2; 23.2; $p < 0.01$). Findings suggest that the perceptions of the mastery goal structure are influenced by the circumstances more than the perceptions of the performance goal structure. The results contribute to unpacking what goal structures mean to young adolescents in terms of teacher practices and the social climate. It has practical implications and could guide further investigations in the field.

This research was supported by OTKA K83850 project.