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Self-efficacy and successful school-to-work transition: A longitudinal study[☆]

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Abstract

A successful school-to-work transition is a precursor of promising career development. In the present longitudinal study we investigated whether academic self-efficacy beliefs and grades in school at the ages of 12–15 would be associated with unemployment and job satisfaction at the age of 21. We found that individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs and better grades were less likely to become unemployed and more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. The relationship between high self-efficacy and unemployment was mediated by higher career-related motivation and by less perceived application stress, measured at the time of vocational training at the age of 18. The relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction was primarily mediated by higher vocational congruence and less application stress. We conclude that school-based interventions targeted at increasing academic capabilities and self-efficacy would help prepare adolescents for a successful school-to-work transition.

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Keywords: School-to-work transition; Career development; Self-efficacy beliefs; Employment; Job satisfaction; Longitudinal study

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1. Introduction

Because career development is part of the general psychosocial development in adolescence, it should be studied in relation to other major dimensions of development, such as the development of school achievement and self-related beliefs. For example, Bynner's (1997) longitudinal study showed that problems in developing basic literary and numerical skills by age 10 were associated with later problems in the school-to-work transition, mediated through problems in the development of work-related skills and school achievement. Unfortunately, vocational theorists have often paid only minimal attention to general developmental processes (Savickas, 1999), and early precursors of successful career development in particular. Focusing on precursors of a successful school-to-work transition in non-college-bound adolescents, the present research investigated how self-efficacy and school performance at the ages of 12–15 relate to two outcomes of the school-to-work transition at the age of 21: finding a job without becoming unemployed and developing job satisfaction.

Because the present study concerns German adolescents, we begin with a short description of the German way of the school-to-work transition: Germany is a nation with one of the most developed apprenticeship systems. Apprenticeships are government-regulated vocational training programs in industry, crafts, banking, and other service-oriented trades, typically lasting for three years and combining on-the-job-training with trade-specific and general education. It is estimated that about 60% of German adolescents complete an apprenticeship that leads to entrance into skilled jobs (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2001); most others study at universities. Vocational training usually starts at the age of 15 or 16 (see also, Hamilton, 1990).

German adolescents in the non-college-bound track who cannot find an apprenticeship or job, or who dropout from apprenticeship, are on an uncertain life course because they have to face unstable or low-level employment with bleak prospects of improvement. Due to an economic recession and economic restructuring after German unification and the adaptation of the East German vocational system to West German standards, many companies reduced positions for apprenticeships and the number of available jobs in the early 1990s. Thus, the school-to-work transition became increasingly difficult for German adolescents, especially in East Germany (e.g., Heinz, 1996). Although other countries with a dominant on-the-job-training system differ from the German system, finding no full-term job after graduation from school or becoming unemployed soon thereafter has also been described as a risk factor for future individual development in these countries (e.g., Bandura, 1997), thus showing similarities across different countries. In addition, initiatives have been developed in the US recently for ways of meeting the needs of non-college-bound adolescents, the "forgotten half" (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988), such as the school-to-work opportunities act, in part inspired by the German apprenticeship system (e.g., Hamilton & Hamilton, 2000).

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