



Empirical study

Generalizability of achievement goal profiles across five cultural groups: More similarities than differences

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ABSTRACT

Previous results have shown possible cultural differences in students' achievement goals endorsement and in their relations with various predictors and outcomes. In this person-centered study, we sought to identify achievement goal profiles and to assess the extent to which these configurations and their associations with predictors and outcomes generalize across cultures. We used a new statistical approach to assess latent profile similarities across adolescents from five cultural backgrounds ($N = 2643$, including Non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Australians, Indigenous American, Middle Easterners, and Asians). Our results supported the cross-cultural generalizability of the profiles, their predictors, and their outcomes. Five similar profiles were identified in each cultural group, but their relative frequency differed across cultures. The results revealed advantages of exploring multidimensional goal profiles.

1. Introduction

There are few questions in education as important as understanding what motivates students to achieve and persist in their studies (Covington, 2000). Achievement goals are directly relevant to this critical question in referring to the purposes or reasons underlying achievement-related behaviors among students (Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Pintrich, 2003). Although the exact nature of these goals differs across students, achievement goals represent key predictors of desirable academic outcomes (Covington, 2000). Research on achievement goals is abundant, but a number of questions remain.

Studies on achievement goals have been mainly conducted in Western cultures, and those assessing cultural differences using appropriate methodologies remain scarce (Murayama, Zhou, & Nesbit, 2009; Zusho & Clayton, 2011) and often focus on a limited range of achievement goals (King & Watkins, 2012). These observations have led to calls for a more systematic investigation of the cross-cultural generalizability of achievement goals (Elliot, Murayama, & Pekrun, 2011; King & McInerney, 2014; Murayama, Elliot, & Friedman, 2012). Because culture represents a shared system of beliefs regarding what is important, valued, and acceptable for members of specific cultural groups, the range of achievement goals considered should be expansive rather than restricted, validated within and between groups, and subjected to various analyses to demonstrate their influence on the emergence of specific combinations (or profiles) of achievement goals.

Interested in the cross-cultural generalizability of achievement goals, McInerney and his colleagues (e.g., McInerney, 2003, 2007, 2008; McInerney, Yeung, & McInerney, 2001) used a large range of achievement goals (task, effort, competition, social power, affiliation, social-concern, praise and token reward) derived from personal investment theory (PIT) and found more similarities than differences in terms of both the measurement properties and the predictive utility of these goals across cultural groups. Although these previous variable-centered studies are very informative, their contribution is limited by the fact that only average levels of achievement goals were compared across cultural groups. However, achievement goals are not isolated constructs. Rather, achievement goals combine according to specific configurations within students, so that a more nuanced and holistic interpretation is required to achieve a proper depiction of their underlying multidimensionality (Dowson & McInerney, 2003). Given that each student may choose to pursue a variety of achievement goals simultaneously, some have advocated the importance of adopting a person-centered approach allowing for the identification of profiles of students presenting a distinct configuration of achievement goals (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2012; Wormington & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2016).

Results from previous variable-centered research have supported the cross-cultural reliability and validity of achievement goals measures. These results also generally showed that achievement goals tend to predict a similar range of outcomes in different cultures. However, what remains unknown is the extent to which prototypical patterns of person-specific goal

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configurations (i.e., profiles) generalize across cultures, as well as the extent to which these profiles are similarly associated with predictors and outcomes. There is a clear need for research to explore whether and how youth from various cultural backgrounds combine these multiple goals in culturally specific ways. Based on a wide range of achievement goals and on a new method for multi-group comparisons of profile solutions (Morin, 2016; Morin, Meyer, Creusier, & Biétry, 2016), we extend previous research by comparing achievement goals combinations across five distinct cultural groups.

1.1. Personal investment theory

From its inception, PIT was formulated to provide a cross-culturally relevant model of achievement motivation (Maehr, 1984; Maehr & McInerney, 2004; McInerney, 2008; McInerney & Ali, 2006; Zusho & Clayton, 2011). PIT focuses on how persons choose to invest their energy, talent, and time in specific tasks and is particularly helpful in studying motivation in cross-cultural settings. PIT is anchored in the recognition that culture has an influence on motivational processes, but without assuming that all people from a given culture will necessarily invest their efforts in a similar set of activities or that they will tend to pursue similar activities for similar reasons (Ganotice, Bernardo, & King, 2012; King & McInerney, 2014; Maehr & McInerney, 2004). PIT predated achievement goal theory and has included a focus on social and extrinsic goals from its beginning, in addition to mastery and performance goals (Maehr, 1984; Maehr & McInerney, 2004). Each of these four types of goals is presumed to be universal and to incorporate two facets, for a total of eight goals forming a truly multidimensional approach (McInerney, 2012; McInerney & Ali, 2006): (a) Mastery goals include task involvement (i.e., being interested in schoolwork and in improving one's competence) and effort (i.e., readiness to try hard and persist to improve one's competence through schoolwork); (b) performance goals include competition (i.e., desire to do better than others at schoolwork) and social power (i.e., a desire to perform socially, to achieve social power and leadership, through schoolwork); (c) Social goals include affiliation (i.e., seeking opportunities to collaborate with other students at schoolwork) and social concern (i.e., being concerned for other students, seeking to help other students in the context of schoolwork); (d) extrinsic goals include praise (i.e., seeking social recognition, praise, and approval for one's schoolwork) and token reward (i.e., seeking tangible rewards for schoolwork, such as certificates and prizes). The validity of these pairings has been demonstrated through higher-order confirmatory factor analysis (e.g., McInerney & Ali, 2006). According to PIT, each goal facet is seen as important to the understanding of students' motivation to achieve in school, with relations that are expected to vary according to the sociocultural context.

In addition to this comprehensive multidimensional theorizing of achievement goals, PIT has led to the development of a companion measure covering these eight goals, the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM; McInerney & Ali, 2006). The cross-cultural validity of the multidimensional structure of the ISM has been systematically assessed and supported in various studies (Ganotice et al., 2012; King & Watkins, 2013; McInerney, 2012; McInerney & Ali, 2006; McInerney et al., 2001). Both the assessment of a wider range of achievement goals and the thorough cross-cultural validation of the ISM made this instrument particularly well-suited to the current study when compared to alternative measures such as the Achievement Goal Questionnaire – Revised (AGQ-R; Elliot & Murayama, 2008) or the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley et al., 2000).¹

¹ It should be noted that an approach valence was used in the formulation of the ISM. In subsequent developments of achievement goal theory focusing solely on mastery and performance goals (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Midgley et al., 2000) leading to the AGQ-R and PALS, an avoidance valence was added to performance and mastery goals (AGQ-R only). Although the ISM does not include an avoidance dimension, we believed it was the most suitable scale available for this study, which focuses on cross-cultural comparisons of achievement goal profiles. Still, we acknowledge that each of these goals may have an avoidance counterpart, which will need to be examined more thoroughly in future research.

Although the mastery-performance distinction is mainly anchored in the internally-driven desire to respectively develop or demonstrate competence, goals with a more external focus may also be involved in the prediction of achievement-related behaviors (Brophy, 2005; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Thus, as social and extrinsic goals are arguably crucial in understanding children and adolescents' motivation, many researchers have underscored the need for future research to more attentively consider these goals which have generally been neglected in previous research not based on PIT (Ali, McInerney, Craven, Yeung, & King, 2014; Brophy, 2005; King & Watkins, 2012). Although a focus on the development of competencies is central to educational success, we argue that critical social and extrinsic drivers of achievement-related behaviors also need to be considered to provide a more complete and holistic perspective of goal-directed behaviors, particularly in cross-cultural contexts.

1.2. Facilitating conditions as predictors of achievement goals

For Maehr and Zusho (2009), a key challenge for achievement goals researchers is to achieve a better understanding of the emergence of these goals as a function of particular life contexts, such as culture. The original formulation of PIT is explicitly cross-cultural and presents a model of motivated action positing that the development and salience of the eight achievement goals should be aligned with individuals' sociocultural contexts. These influences have been referred to as "facilitating conditions" (Maehr & McInerney, 2004; McInerney, Dowson, & Yeung, 2005). These facilitating conditions, which include factors such as the perceived quality of social interactions with teachers, parents, and peers, school valuing and interest, and affect toward school, are assumed to play a role in shaping achievement goals, and particularly goal configurations emerging in various cultures (Ganotice, Bernardo, & King, 2013; McInerney, Dowson, & Yeung, 2008; McInerney et al., 2005).

Also according to PIT, students' levels of investment in an activity depends on the meaning they ascribe to this activity. School valuing is thus seen as a relevant predictor of achievement goals and as critical for the understanding of cross-cultural differences in academic achievement (Maehr, 1984). Previous studies further showed that utility value tended to predict the adoption of mastery and performance approach goals in mathematics (Chouinard, Karsenti, & Roy, 2007) and of mastery goals in English (Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008). In addition, because they play a key role in the terms of ascribing value, promoting, or rewarding participation in certain types of activities, social interactions are also perceived as key facilitators of achievement goals adoption. In this regard, Wentzel (1997, 2003) found that perceived teacher support positively predicted the pursuit of two types of social goals, prosocial and social responsibility goals (Wentzel, 1997), whereas peer rejection negatively predicted the adoption of prosocial goals (Wentzel, 2003). Prosocial goals are similar to social concern goals assessed via the ISM and refer to sharing with peers and helping them with academic problems, whereas social responsibility goals refer to keeping commitment to peers and following the classroom rules – an aspect not directly covered in the ISM (Wentzel, 2003). A key issue that has yet to be more systematically investigated is the extent to which the effects of these facilitating conditions generalize to multiple cultural contexts (King & McInerney, 2014; McInerney et al., 2005) and how these relations will translate to a person-centered representation of a multi-dimensional achievement goals perspective.

1.3. Achievement goals outcomes

Achievement goals are well-documented predictors of a wide variety of educational outcomes (Covington, 2000). In the PIT tradition (Maehr & McInerney, 2004), learning processes like deep and surface learning strategies have commonly been studied as potentially important outcomes of achievement goals. Deep and surface learning strategies describe the inclination of students when engaging in their

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