Turning Achievement Around: Predictors of Academic Resilience of Academically At-risk Students in Singapore

Research Insights

The factors that are key to the development of academic resilience:
- Emotional regulation
- Goal-setting skills (particularly in the context of failure)
- Student-to-teacher communication
- Teacher competence support

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Academically at-risk students are those who are likely to follow a trajectory of poor academic performance due to adverse conditions or risk factors (e.g., low initial achievement). There is currently a dearth of research on the profiles of these students in Singapore and on the nature of protective factors that can help them develop academic resilience, which can be defined as the achievement of positive school outcomes despite the presence of risk factors in their lives.

The study hypothesises that students’ socio-emotional strengths and social factors supporting students’ psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness are resources that students could draw upon to develop academic resilience.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The study aimed to:
- explore protective factors related to the development of students’ academic resilience
- generate profiles of students facing different levels of academic risk
- compare profiles of academically high-risk students who developed low and substantial level of academic resilience.

Academic resilience refers to “the capacity to strive towards competence when faced with stressors that threaten academic performance” (Alva, 1991, p.19).

Theoretical Model

Two Approaches in Framing Academic Resilience

Potential Protective Factors
- Student’s socio-emotional strengths
- Social competence
- Emotional awareness
- Empathy
- Emotional regulation
- Goal setting

Social Support Influence
- Teacher support (autonomy and competence)
- Teacher-student relationship (student-to-teacher communication, teacher trust, & teacher affection)

Control variables: SES, gender, family structure, PSE, cognitive ability

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RESEARCH DESIGN

Utilising the Explanatory Design with Follow-up Explanations Model (Creswell & Clark, 2006), which is a form of mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were collected in three waves using questionnaires and standardized achievement tests. Qualitative data were collected via open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.

Research participants:
Secondary school students (N=1035) from 22 government schools participated in the study.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Students facing high academic risk reported lower levels of socio-emotional strengths and perceived teacher support, and higher levels of teacher alienation and amotivation as compared to their lower risk peers.

2. Emotional regulation, goal-setting skills, student-to-teacher communication, and teacher competence support were found to be the most consistent factors that were positively associated with the students’ academic resilience.

3. Academically at-risk students who developed resilience differed from their peers in the way they set and pursued their goals, how they viewed and dealt with failures, and in the level of perceived competence and relatedness support received from key social partners, such as parents, peers and teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. As students enter secondary school, their risk for continued low achievement or academic failure can be significantly mitigated by enhancing their emotional awareness, goal-setting skills, and perceived teacher support and reducing their amotivation and alienation.

2. Enhancing students’ emotional regulation and goal-setting skills, and improving student-to-teacher communication and teacher competence support need to be among the key targets of initiatives and efforts to support students facing high academic risk to develop academic resilience.

References:

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