The importance of EFL self-concept for general EFL proficiency: A model-based evaluation of quantitative data from German secondary schools

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In German secondary school contexts, academic self-concept (ASC) has often emerged as the most significant affective-motivational predictor of scholastic achievement across all subjects in general and in EFL classes in particular (Helmke et al., 2008). Still, research on ASC in the domain of foreign language learning in Germany (and beyond) is scarce and its role among the multitude of factors influencing language proficiency has not been sufficiently clarified (Rumlich, exp. 2016).

Questionnaire data from secondary year-six students at German Gymnasiums (N=1,000; M age=11.9 years) was evaluated on the basis of a predefined structural equation model (calculated in Mplus). In line with expectancy-value models (e.g., Eccles [Parsons], 1983), the results suggest that ASC constitutes a significant predictor of EFL interest (beta=.59, SE=.03, p<.001). Furthermore, it exerts large influence on general EFL proficiency (beta=.32, SE=.04, p<.001) and was more relevant than EFL interest for EFL proficiency (beta=.00, SE=.05, p=.91; overall model fit: X2(207)=453.99, p<.001; TLI=.95; RMSEA=.04, .04<90% CI<.05; SRMR=.04). These results could be largely replicated for the same cohort of students in year eight.

The findings underline the pivotal importance of EFL self-concept as it represents a major influence on cognitive as well as affective-motivational facets of language learning. They make a strong claim for the inclusion of ASC in studies on EFL learning and teaching.

References


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