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Goal orientation, perceived task outcome and task demands in mathematics tasks: effects on students' attitude in actual task settings.

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Background: In earlier studies, it has been found that students' domain-specific cognitions and personal learning goals (goal orientation) influence task-specific appraisals of actual learning tasks. The relations between domain-specific and task-specific variables have been specified in the model of adaptive learning. In this study, additional influences, i.e., perceived task outcome on a former occasion and variations in task demands, were investigated. - Aim: The purpose of this study was to identify personality and situational variables that mediate students' attitude when confronted with a mathematics task. Students worked on a mathematics task in two subsequent sessions. Effects of perceived task outcome at the first session on students' attitude at the second session were investigated. In addition, we investigated how differences in task demands influenced students' attitude. Variations in task demands were provoked by different conditions in task-instruction. In one condition, students were told that the result on the test would add to their mark on mathematics. This outcome orienting condition was contrasted with a task-orienting condition where students were told that the results on the test would not be used to give individual grades. - Sample: Participants were sixth grade students (N=345; aged 11-12 years) from 14 primary schools. - Method: Multivariate and univariate analyses of (co)variance were applied to the data. Independent variables were goal orientation, task demands, and perceived task outcome, with task-specific variables (estimated competence for the task, task attraction, task relevance, and willingness to invest effort) as the dependent variables. Results: The results showed that previous perceived task outcome had a substantial impact on students' attitude. Additional but smaller effects were found for variation in task demands. Furthermore, effects of previous perceived task outcome and task demands were related to goal orientation. - Conclusion: The resulting pattern confirmed that, in general, performance-oriented learning goals emphasised the negative impact of failure experiences, whereas task-oriented learning goals had a strengthening effect on how success experiences influenced students' attitude. (orig.)

Classification: D52

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