



APPROPRIATING THE AAQ for the Context of Studying A Pilot Study among Students of Arts

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ABSTRACT

University students' academic emotions, regulation of studying, and their relationships to study success are receiving a renewed interest within the field of educational psychology. Simultaneously, the role of psychological flexibility in interventions designed for college students is being investigated by members of the CBS community. In the present study, the workplace-related version of the AAQ (WAAQ, Bond et al.) was appropriated for the context of studying and, together with existing measures of cognitive and attributional strategies, administered to 274 students of Arts. Students' GPAs were obtained from university records. The internal coherence of the new scale was found to be good. Psychological flexibility correlated positively with Success Expectations, and negatively with Self-Handicapping and Anxiety. Correlations with GPA and credits earned were positive and statistically significant, yet rather low. Validity of the instruments should be further investigated.

INTRODUCTION

Research concerning links between psychological flexibility, regulation of learning and studying, and student well-being is as of yet scarce, although pioneering work is ongoing (Pistorello, 2013). Psychological flexibility may be useful in bridging existing theories of regulation of learning, cognitive and attributional strategies, and student well-being. An easy-to-use quantitative inventory focused on the processes of studying would be a welcome addition to the array of instruments currently used in the field of educational psychology. In this study we sought to create such an instrument and perform a preliminary exploration of its reliability and validity.

APPROPRIATING WAAQ ITEMS

	English Translations of the items
Item1	I can study effectively even if I have (personal) worries
Item2	I can admit mistakes I have made and still be successful in my studies
Item3	I can study effectively even if I am nervous
Item4	My worries do not prevent me from succeeding in my studies
Item5	I can do what is required of me in my studies, despite any emotions I may be having
Item6	I can work effectively even when I have doubts (about myself)
Item7	My thoughts and emotions do not create an obstacle to studying

Table 1. English translations of the Finnish items. Rough translations only, not intended to be used as a valid English language version of the instrument

We used the Work-Related Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (WAAQ) (Bond, Lloyd & Guenole, 2013) as a basis for the new instrument. We translated the items into Finnish and reworded them to explicitly

address the context of studying. First all of the authors wrote their own individual versions, which were then compared and refined for readability and precision.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 279 students from the Faculty of Arts voluntarily participated in this study (231 female). The average age of the participants was 28,6 (SD =8.25). The participants were both undergraduate (158) and graduate (121) students, year of enrolment ranging from 2003 to 2012.

MATERIALS

In addition to the newly translated inventory, a number of other self-report questionnaires were also administered, most of which will be analyzed and reported at a later stage.

Success expectation and self-handicapping
The scales measuring success expectations and a self-handicapping strategy were adapted from The Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire measuring cognitive and attributional strategies (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Haavisto, 1995).

Anxiety was measured with a scale from the Academic Emotion Scale (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002).

Grades were obtained from the university records: GPA and grade accumulation were calculated.

RESULTS

Cronbach's alpha for the entire one-scale instrument was 0.90, indicating a good internal consistency of the scale. However, the analysis also showed that leaving Item 2 out, the alpha would be even higher (0.91). Correlations between Item 2 and other items of the scale were lower than correlations among the other items (Table 2.)

	Item1	Item2	Item3	Item4	Item5	Item6	Item7
Item1	1,000						
Item2	,289	1,000					
Item3	,712	,264	1,000				
Item4	,617	,426	,497	1,000			
Item5	,690	,334	,627	,696	1,000		
Item6	,580	,425	,546	,624	,621	1,000	
Item7	,654	,315	,605	,723	,718	0,640	1,000

Table 2. Pearson correlations among the items. All correlations statistically significant (p < 0.05)

Correlations	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psych. flexibility	1				
2. Success expectation	,506*	1			
3. Self-handicapping	-,322*	-,455*	1		
4. Anxiety	-,454*	,657*	,542*	1	
5. GPA	,162*	,269*	-,170*	-,214*	1
6. Credits earned	,174*	,084	-,065	-,153*	,326*

Table 3. Correlations among Psychological Flexibility, other scales, and grades *p<0,05.

Psychological flexibility correlated positively with Success Expectations, and negatively with Self-Handicapping and Anxiety. Correlations with GPA and credits earned were positive and statistically significant, yet rather low.

CONCLUSIONS

We were able to create an instrument that shows good internal reliability. The wording of Item 2 could possibly be refined to better reflect acceptance of one's mistakes and imperfections in relation to academic tasks in the university environment.

Correlations with success expectations, a self-handicapping strategy, and experiences of anxiety related to studies were in the expected directions and significant, yet at a level which allows them to be treated as distinct constructs. Correlations with grades indicated a positive link between the construct measured and study success, but , being low, leave room for further investigation.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The results obtained by a self-report instrument depend on how respondents understand the items. Could the present items be improved to better reflect psychological flexibility, as opposed to the mere presence of positive or negative thoughts and emotions? Further, aspects of psychological flexibility may be difficult to grasp if one is not familiar with the theory, and indeed, if one does not have very much personal experience of flexible responding to inner experiences. A larger variety of ways to measure psychological flexibility is needed to complement self-report data. The validity of the new instrument remains to be fully investigated; a larger scale investigation with instruments measuring known aspects of studying and well-being is called for. A portion of the students has been interviewed about study-related thoughts, emotions, and the regulation of studying. These data will be analyzed in terms of validity of the instrument.