

Being and Becoming: A Qualitative Study of How Low-Progress Students' Motivate Themselves to Work Harder

Phey Ling KIT, Jerrine Z.N. KHONG, May Li LIM, & Gregory Arief D. LIEM

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract

Although placement in lower-ability education tracks was known to have an adverse impact on low-progress students' beliefs in their ability to learn, quality of aspirations and level of motivation to stay in school, there were also low-progress students who achieved academic and career success. This qualitative study sought to understand how ten low-progress secondary school students from the low-ability education track (Normal stream) in Singapore motivated themselves to work towards their future goals. Analysis of three focus group discussions using Corbin's and Strauss's (2014) grounded theory approach produced nine themes and 10 sub-themes in five categories. Findings indicated that the contextual condition of the low-ability education track resulted in participants' *self-awareness of their academic weaknesses*. However, participants experienced the causal conditions of *influences* from family and other significant people in their lives and had *hopes for the future*. In addition, they also experienced intervening conditions such as their awareness of the *pre-requisites to achieve desired futures*, beliefs in the *relevance of their current education to achieving hopes*, encountered *obstacles* and received *supports* that they could leverage on. These three conditions motivated them to engage in the strategic actions of *academic goal setting*, which resulted in the consequence of increased *willingness to make sacrifices and work harder*. These findings implied that apart from providing students

with academic support, schools also need to engage students' families in cultivating students' hopes for the future and encourage them to work hard in school.

Keywords: Self-motivation, Hope, Self-awareness, Influences, Academic Goal Setting