The many faces of competence in achievement contexts

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Abstract
In this paper we examine the importance of context-specific competence beliefs, conceptualised in various forms (e.g. self-efficacy and expectancy), in attaining achievement-related outcomes in diverse situations. In so doing, our focus is on how competence beliefs function in conjunction with other motivational constructs, paying particular attention to task values and their interaction with competence beliefs within the modern expectancy-value framework. We argue that holding high value but low competence could result in negative outcomes and that self-processes provide the mechanism through which competence beliefs and task values interact to affect achievement-related outcomes. We further elaborate how self-processes could explain the phenomenon by focusing on two theoretical perspectives: self-worth theory (Covington, 1984) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). Lastly, we discuss several ways to promote student motivation effectively in the classroom.

Keywords: self-efficacy; expectancy-value theory; self-processes; self-worth threat; self-worth theory; self-discrepancy theory

Introduction
Competence beliefs are the pivots on which individuals’ motivations, emotions, behaviours, and outcomes hinge in achievement contexts. Regardless of how they are conceptualised and operationalised through various theoretical frameworks, researchers have given constant attention to the unique role played by competence beliefs and the sources from which they are developed (see Bandura, 1977; Eccles, 1983). We thus understand the extent to which competence beliefs determine important outcomes independently or in conjunction with other relevant constructs, including other motivational predictors such as task values and interests (e.g. Bong, 2001; W. Lee, Lee & Bong, 2014) as well as trait-like personality dispositions such as conscientiousness (e.g. Trautwein, Lüdtke, Roberts, Schnyder & Niggli, 2009).

The major purpose of this monograph is to complement this literature by introducing theoretical and phenomenological accounts for the non-additive effects of competence beliefs and task values. We argue that holding high task values when lacking necessary competence can result in negative outcomes and that self-processes provide the mechanism through which competence beliefs and task values interact to affect achievement-related outcomes. We first introduce the
unique predictive role played by context-specific competence beliefs, conceptualised in various forms (e.g. self-efficacy and expectancy), in achievement outcomes. We then describe the joint function of competence beliefs and task values, highlighting the central role of competence beliefs. Finally, we suggest several strategies for improving student motivation in the classroom.

**Joint function of competence beliefs and task values in achievement contexts**

Recently, several researchers have begun to pay closer attention to the joint operations of competence beliefs with other motivational constructs in achievement contexts. A strong sense of competence unaccompanied by high value or perceptions of high value not supported by strong confidence have received particular attention because of the unexpected adverse consequences (e.g. J. Lee, Lee & Bong, 2013; Selkirk, Bouchey & Eccles, 2011; Symes & Putwain, 2016). The core idea underlying this literature is that competence beliefs not only contribute the most to achievement outcomes but also give rise to qualitatively different motivational processes when combined with certain constructs. This movement seems sensible for the following two reasons: (a) disparities in the strengths of various motivational beliefs, including competence beliefs, likely exist within an individual in any given contexts; and (b) these beliefs almost always interact with one another. We start by presenting evidence that competence beliefs are a more important determinant of achievement outcomes than stable personality characteristics or other motivational constructs.

**Strong predictive power of competence beliefs**

Competence beliefs have been conceptualised as expectations in the possibility of success concerning one’s future performance (i.e. expectancy) or confidence that one can perform given tasks well (i.e. self-efficacy). Holding strong competence in given tasks leads individuals to engage, be interested, expend effort, and persist in the tasks, all of which help them perform the tasks better. By contrast, feeling lack of competence makes individuals become vulnerable, anxious, indifferent, or bored, leading them to experience declines in task performance. The predictive role of competence beliefs in achievement contexts has been well documented in the literature (Jiang, Song, Lee & Bong, 2014; Putwain, Sander & Larkin, 2013; see also Bandura, 1977; Eccles et al., 1983; Pajares, 1996).

More recently, researchers have studied the role of competence beliefs in situations where these beliefs are forced to compete with individual traits pertinent to the situation. Compelling evidence has accumulated that competence beliefs function as a mediator between personality dispositions and outcome variables and, more frequently, an independent and the strongest predictor of achievement (Bong, 2001; Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino & Barbaranelli, 2011; Hoffman & Spatariu, 2008).

In studies that examined the predictive utility of personality traits for achievement-related outcomes, competence beliefs are predicted partly by these individual characteristics and subsequently predict achievement variables. For example, Bong, Hwang, Noh and Kim (2014) examined the distinctive motivational processes and outcomes associated with two types of perfectionism, self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism refers to a tendency to set extremely high standards and evaluate one’s own performance against these standards, which is not always maladaptive; socially prescribed perfectionism is an inclination to strive to meet high standards imposed on one’s performance by other individuals, which often proves detrimental. When the predictive utility of these two types of perfectionism was examined simultaneously, self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic achievement in both mathematics and English.

Seo (2008) obtained similar results on the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic procrastination among college students. After comparing two models, one with
self-efficacy as a partial mediator and the other as a full mediator between perfectionism and procrastination, the researcher concluded that the full mediation model fit the data better with greater parsimony. In other words, self-oriented perfectionism negatively predicted academic procrastination through heightened self-efficacy. These studies indicate that, even though a stable individual difference variable such as perfectionism affects competence beliefs, it is competence beliefs that directly predict academic outcomes.

Competence beliefs also explain outcome variables independent of personality characteristics. For instance, in studies that compared the relative utility of competence beliefs with that of conscientiousness, a helpful personality disposition in achievement contexts, competence beliefs emerged as an independent positive predictor of academic effort even after the explanatory power of conscientiousness was statistically controlled for (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder & Niggli, 2006). This finding was replicated in another study where both competence beliefs and conscientiousness independently predicted academic effort, regardless of domains or measures of academic effort (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Not surprisingly, competence beliefs are also a strong predictor of task choice and performance in the presence of other motivational variables. Bong (2001) found that self-efficacy was a strong direct predictor of both course performance and enrollment intentions even when task values, a well-known predictor of achievement-related choices and behavioural intentions, entered the same prediction equation. When the relative strengths of individual interest and self-efficacy in predicting academic self-regulation and achievement were investigated by W. Lee et al. (2014), it was self-efficacy but not interest that directly predicted achievement. Identical results were obtained across the four academic domains examined in the study: Korean, English, mathematics, and science.

Possible disparities between competence beliefs and task values

Value beliefs are at least as equally important as competence beliefs as a determinant of achievement behaviour, making it one of the two key motivational constructs in achievement settings (Eccles, 1983). While competence beliefs represent the subjective conviction about one’s ability to complete the task successfully, values address the beliefs about one’s reasons for engaging in the task. In the modern expectancy-value theory (EVT; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002), multiple facets of task value beliefs are distinguished: intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value, and cost. Intrinsic value refers to the enjoyment and interest individuals experience in performing a certain task; attainment value refers to the perceived importance of being good at certain tasks to individuals’ self-identity; utility value refers to the perceived usefulness of performing certain tasks well for accomplishing individuals’ desired goals; and cost refers to the negative aspects of engaging in a certain task or a subject. Studies have documented the strong predictive utility of both competence beliefs and task values for task performance and choice behaviours (Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Generating predictions is, therefore, straightforward when individuals hold strong competence beliefs coupled with high task value perceptions, or weak competence beliefs accompanied by low task values. High competence with high task values have consistently created ‘synergetic effects’ such that outcomes jointly determined by both constructs are more positive than outcomes predicted by either construct alone (e.g. J. Lee et al., 2013; Trautwein, Marsh, Nagengast & Lüdtke, 2012). Predicting what will happen is not as simple, however, when the two constructs contradict each other. Combinations of low value–high competence and high value–low competence present situations that are complex but all too familiar. Students sometimes enter achievement situations where they do not find the learning materials to be enjoyable, important to their self-concept as a student, or useful for achieving their desired goals, although they feel quite confident for
successfully mastering them; at other times, they believe performing well at certain tasks to be interesting, important, or useful, but do not possess strong enough competence for doing so.

According to EVT, when students feel competent but perceive low values toward certain tasks or domains, it is highly likely that they would not actively engage in the tasks or domains (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). When college students’ motivational patterns for taking low-stake tests were examined, students who perceived low values in the tests tended to put less effort even though they possessed strong competence beliefs (Cole, Bergin, & Whittaker, 2008). What will happen in the opposite situation, where students perceive high values but lack competence? EVT predicts that these students will gradually lower the values they attach to the tasks or domains to maintain positive self-regard, because valuing tasks that one is not good at is damaging to one’s self-views (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Supporting this argument, considerable research has demonstrated that individuals do tend to value the tasks and domains which they are good at and also become good at the tasks and domains which they deem worth pursuing (e.g. Berndt & Miller, 1990; Chouinard, Karsenti & Roy, 2007; Greene, DeBacker, Ravindran & Krows, 1999).

While we believe this pattern holds true in many circumstances, we note that task values are developed from diverse sources, some of which are not completely under individuals’ control. Among the three positive value components, intrinsic value and utility value are most dissimilar in this sense because the former stems out of internal sources, while the latter reflects strong external influences (Eccles, 2005). Specifically, intrinsic value is determined largely by one’s own pleasure experiences in the task, whereas utility value is affected heavily by others’ attitudes toward the task or the importance the task carries in one’s surroundings. Such information on the utility value of a task is often communicated by significant others such as parents and teachers (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Students may thus find it difficult to lower the values attached to certain tasks or domains even when they lack competence toward successfully performing them. When it is difficult for students to disregard the task as unimportant, they may attempt to find other ways to protect their self-worth (Covington, 1992).

**What happens when students lack competence in the task that they value?**

Recently, several researchers have examined these potential discrepancies between competence beliefs and task values, along with associated consequences, within EVT and reported some noticeable findings. Trautwein et al. (2012) observed that the more strongly students believed in the values of achieving well in a domain, they tended to accomplish at higher levels. However, this was true only for students who also held high competence beliefs in the domain. For students who had low competence beliefs, perceiving high importance and usefulness in the domain tended to lower their achievement.

Likewise, Selkirk et al. (2011) examined antecedents of adolescent test anxiety within EVT. Expectancies for success, academic values, and test anxiety in mathematics and English were assessed during Grades 6 and 7. Only expectancies for success, but not academic values, in the domain demonstrated significant negative associations with both concurrent and subsequent test anxiety. More important, test anxiety was the highest in both domains among students with low expectancies but high values. Similar findings have been obtained in J. Lee et al. (2013, 2014). Students with weak self-efficacy reported greater self-handicapping, test stress, cheating on tests and schoolwork, and procrastination, as they perceived greater values in the domain.

When perceived competence is low, therefore, high task values can lead to outcomes that are more negative than those resulting from the low competence–low value combination. Unlike competence beliefs, perceiving high task values does not serve as a buffer against the risks posed by low competence beliefs. High values, when unaccompanied by high competence beliefs,
instead produce detrimental effects on academic outcomes. Further, among different task value dimensions, those that are more heavily swayed by external sources such as utility value appear to require competence beliefs more than the one representing internalised beliefs such as intrinsic value. In Trautwein et al.’s (2012) study described above, utility value led to greater negative consequences than other task value dimensions, when coupled with low competence.

The motivational drawback of the high value–low competence combination is more conspicuous in experimental studies. In a laboratory study where students learned about the utility of a mental mathematics technique through direct communication, effects of the utility value information were positive on situational interest and performance of students with high perceived competence in mathematics but non-significant or negative on those of students with low perceived competence (Durik, Shechter, Noh, Rozek & Harackiewicz, 2015).

In short, holding high values, particularly utility value, without concomitantly high competence beliefs can give rise to inimical consequences. What is noticeable in the experiment by Durick et al. (2015) is that utility value information did not hamper student interest when students’ competence beliefs were boosted beforehand. Augmented competence beliefs functioned as a buffer against potential detrimental effects of the high value–low competence combination. Together, empirical finding suggest that competence beliefs play a more pivotal role than task values in achievement situations.

Why should the high value-low competence combination lead to undesirable outcomes?

While the low value-high competence combination may result in reduced engagement and effort investment (Cole, Bergin & Whittaker, 2008; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994), it does not necessarily lead to active avoidance or impairment. In comparison, the high value-low competence combination often results in numerous negative consequences such as heightened anxiety and stress, academic procrastination, self-handicapping, and deteriorated performance (Durik et al., 2015; J. Lee et al., 2013, 2014; Selkirk et al., 2011; Trautwein et al., 2012).

Value beliefs are positive predictors of many adaptive outcomes in achievement contexts (see Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). A substantial amount of research has indicated that task values predict willingness to engage in the task (Durik, Vida & Eccles, 2006), domain interest (Hulleman, Godes, Hendricks & Harackiewicz, 2010), cognitive engagement (Liem et al., 2008), quality of task performance (Trautwein et al., 2006), career-related choices (Perez, Cromley & Kaplan, 2014), and academic achievement (J. Lee et al., 2014). Then, why would high values function in a negative way when combined with low competence beliefs?

Competence and value beliefs constitute core components in self-processes in achievement contexts (see Covington, 1984). Given this importance, we argue that individuals’ self-processes serve as a fundamental mechanism through which competence and task values affect various outcomes. Feeling lack of competence in certain tasks or domains threatens individuals’ self-regard, which exacerbates when the tasks of domains are deemed important (i.e. high attainment and utility values; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; see also Covington, 1984, 2009).

Rotter (1954), in his social learning theory, had proposed that discrepancy between competence and value could lead to deleterious consequences, consistent with the proposition advanced in this monograph. However, his argument was confined to social-relational outcomes and fell short of explaining the intervening psychological mechanism. In the following sections, we elaborate how self-processes could explain the link between the low competence–high value combination and negative achievement-related outcomes. In doing so, we focus on two theoretical perspectives that offer insights into the phenomenon: self-worth theory (Covington, 1984) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987).
**High value-low competence as a source of self-worth threat**

Beliefs of competence and values are essential factors in explaining the self in achievement contexts (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). The importance of feeling competent in a valued domain to the self-system has been emphasised in the self-esteem literature, although differences exist in how the constructs are conceptualised across theories. Self-esteem and self-worth are often used interchangeably, defined as having competence beliefs in domains where one aspires to succeed (Harter, 1993). Self-worth theory assumes that individuals have the motive to maintain positive self-worth (Covington, 1984). Crocker and her colleagues (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper & Bouvrette, 2003) propose that competence beliefs are a critical source of self-worth especially for students because their self-worth is contingent upon having high academic competence.

Self-worth theory (Covington, 1984, 1992) is grounded on Beery's (1975) conceptual equation that individuals' ability is equivalent to their performance in any kind of achievement contexts. According to Beery (1975), this belief *per se* seems to cause no harm. However, the crux of the problem is the ‘hidden assumption’ that one's ability is equivalent to her or his personal worth. Individuals consciously or unconsciously believe that their worthiness is dependent upon their possession of certain ‘socially valued’ abilities and that the level of their performance is an indicator of these abilities (Beery, 1975). An academic context is no exception. Academic ability is highly valued in general and, therefore, often equated with personal worth among students. To be respected by parents, teachers, and peers as well as themselves, students need to prove their worthiness by performing well academically (see Covington, 1992).

Given the pervasive belief that individuals' ability is exposed by their performance, feeling lack of competence in certain tasks alone could pose threats to one's self-worth. These threats are likely to become stronger when performing well at the tasks is regarded valuable by oneself and others. Low competence with high value could thus act as an amplifier of self-worth threat (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Self-Worth Threat by Value x Competence (J. Lee et al., 2013, p.217).](image)

Self-worth theory proposes that individuals are likely to use defensive strategies in threatening situations in an attempt to protect their self-worth (Covington, 1984, 1992; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). This is particularly true in academic contexts where students frequently engage in evaluative achievement tasks. In the face of potential failure, students may use certain strategies so as to divert the attributional focus of others from their inability to other factors such as low effort (Covington & Omelich, 1981).

Supporting evidence for the role of self-worth threat as a potential mechanism underlying the interaction between competence and value beliefs has been reported in J. Lee et al. (2013). By analysing a large-scale longitudinal dataset, the researchers have demonstrated that the predictive relationship of task values with outcome variables differed significantly by students' competence.
beliefs. While students with high competence reported lower levels of test stress and less self-handicapping strategy use with increases in task values, those with low competence reported higher test stress and greater use of self-handicapping strategies as they perceived greater task values.

J. Lee and her colleagues (2014) have further demonstrated that this finding generalises across different types of defensive strategies. Students’ competence beliefs again moderated the relationship between task values and strategy use in the domain of English. While task values predicted students’ cheating behaviours and procrastination negatively among students with high competence beliefs, they predicted the same variables positively among students with low competence beliefs. This pattern remained significant even after fear of failure, a strong dispositional antecedent of maladaptive strategy use, was statistically controlled for. The authors concluded that low-competence students engaged in greater cheating and procrastination as they attached greater value to doing well in English to save them from low ability implications in the face of potential failure and to maintain positive self-regard as a learner.

**Self-discrepancy as a source of psychological discomfort**

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Bond, Klein & Strauman, 1986) also provides partial answers to the mechanism linking the high value–low competence combination to undesirable outcomes. The theory proposes that each self-state representation is defined by ‘one domain of the self (actual; ideal; ought) and one standpoint on the self (own; significant other)’ (Higgins, 1987, p.319). Combining the three self-domains and two self-standpoints produces six self-state representations, some of which embody individuals’ own self-concepts while others represent individuals’ ideal or ought self-states. Gaps between these self-representations, or self-discrepancies, make individuals experience negative emotional reactions.

Among different types of gaps created by different self-representational components, emotional discomfort is posited to ensue from discrepancies between: (a) one’s actual self-states and ideal self-states; and (b) one’s actual self-states and ought self-states (Higgins, et al., 1987). Ideal self-states are guided by one’s own goals and hopes (i.e. representations of what individuals wish to become) or those of others (i.e. representations of what individuals believe others wish for them to become). Discrepancies arise between one’s actual self and ideal self when individuals are not likely to obtain their desired goals or the goals assigned by significant others. In this case, they experience ‘dejection–related emotions’ such as disappointment and shame. Ought self-states are guided by one’s own duties and obligations (i.e. representations of what individuals believe they ought to do) or those of others (i.e. representations of what individuals think others believe their duties and obligations should be). Again, discrepancies occur between one’s actual self and ought self when individuals cannot fulfill what they are obliged to. With such discrepancies, they experience ‘agitation–related emotions’ such as feeling guilty and anxious (Higgins, 1987).

Considering that the actual self refers to individuals’ perceptions of their attributes, holding low competence but high value in a certain domain would be tantamount to experiencing high discrepancies between one’s actual self and ideal or ought self in the domain. Although the focus of the theory is on distinct emotional reactions resulting from different types of discrepancies (i.e. own–ideal and own–ought), its basic tenet that discordance between individuals’ real and valued self-states creates psychological discomfort can explain the heightened anxiety and stress associated with the high value–low competence combination.

Abundant evidence supports the presumed relationship between self-discrepancies and psychological discomfort. Higgins, Klein and Strauman (1985) found that, among college students, self-discrepancy between their actual and ideal or ought self-states positively and significantly correlated with general discomforts such as depression, anxiety, hostility, and the
sum of negative emotions. These self-discrepancies related not only positively to students’ negative emotions such as dissatisfaction, shame, blameworthy, and feelings of helplessness but also negatively to positive emotions such as pride. The greater the gap is between one’s actual and desired self-states, the more strongly does one suffer psychologically. This may partly explain why learners, who value a domain yet lack competence for doing well in it, become particularly vulnerable in relevant achievement situations.

**Improving competence beliefs in the classroom**

In the preceding sections, we have underscored the central role played by competence beliefs both alone and in conjunction with other crucial variables in achievement contexts. In particular, we have delineated the potential negative consequences of having low competence beliefs in valued domains on one’s self-processes via experiencing self-worth threats and self-discrepancies. Given that low competence is the epicenter of maladaptive consequences, we now pay attention to ways for enhancing students’ competence beliefs.

According to Bandura (1977, 1997), there are four major sources from which individuals garner information to form their self-efficacy or context-specific competence beliefs: enactive mastery experience (i.e. direct experience on relevant tasks); vicarious experience (i.e. indirect task-relevant experience based on modeling and observation); social persuasion (i.e. performance-related feedback from significant others); and physiological states (i.e. bodily arousal such as sweating and anxiety). Accumulating evidence attests to the effectiveness of these sources for improving student self-efficacy in the classroom (see Usher & Pajares, 2008, for a review), although their relative significance might vary depending on the culture (Klassen, 2004).

In a recent study by Ahn, Usher, Butz and Bong (2016) that compared the utility of modeling and feedback for student’s self-efficacy in three different countries (i.e. the Philippines, Korea, and the US), the authors found that, regardless of culture, vicarious experience provided by teacher and social persuasion from family were significant sources of students’ mathematics self-efficacy. The role of teachers was particularly important for the US sample compared to the Korean or the Filipino students, while that of family members was most important for the Korean than the US or the Filipino students. This study thus demonstrates that both teachers and parents can help enhance student self-efficacy by providing modeling and verbal feedback, respectively.

A series of studies aiming at enhancing the arithmetic self-efficacy of low-achieving students conducted by Schunk and his colleagues also provide useful guidelines that can be easily implemented in the classroom. For example, having students work under proximal goals rather than distal or no goals led them experience not only heightened interest and self-efficacy but also mastery of the particular mathematical operations with which they had been struggling (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). When teaching students about particular arithmetic skills through modeling, it is better to have students watch peer models than teacher models (Schunk & Hanson, 1985). For students having trouble in mathematics, models that exhibited coping behaviours were more powerful in helping them improve their self-efficacy, compared to models that demonstrated easy mastery, because the students judged the coping models to be more similar to themselves (Schunk, Hanson & Cox, 1987). Students were also more responsive to teachers’ feedback when it recognised their effort (Schunk, 1982) and when they possessed the required competence to do well on the task (Schunk, 1983).

Bong, Hwang and Song (2010) also interviewed a group of Korean high school girls to investigate the everyday comments and behaviours of teachers that made students feel competent or incompetent. About half the students reported that teachers’ verbal encouragement such as directly telling them that they could do it and sharing their own or others’ past success experiences...
helped them boost their confidence. In contrast, teachers’ strong emphasis on grades, preferential treatment of students by their grades, and making social comparisons among students weakened their competence beliefs.

Emphasising effort in the classroom is also stressed in self-worth theory (Covington, 1984). Because of the hidden equation that equates individuals’ achievement to their ability and their worthiness in the domain, students feel threats to their self-worth when high achievement is unlikely. These threats are stronger in classrooms where the importance of getting high grades is underlined. In classrooms where effort and progress are appreciated, students are less likely to experience self-worth threats in the face of potential failures. It requires conscious monitoring on the part of teachers to make effort, rather than ability per se, as a source of achievement, hence, their worthiness in the domain (Covington & Omelich, 1981).

The type of values and the way they are transmitted to students also make a difference. As discussed previously, the undesirable effect associated with the high value–low competence combination most frequently involves utility value. Compared to other types of task values, utility value is under relatively heavier influence of others’ views and attitudes (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). To combat the undesirable effect of the high value-low competence combination, teachers may help students internalise the utility value (Canning & Harackiewicz, 2015; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, Matos & Lacante, 2004). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains that when individuals engage in introjected regulation such that they are motivated to validate their ability and get approval from others to maintain their self-worth, they feel pressured and cannot experience a complete sense of ownership of their behaviour. When they achieve identification by gradually perceiving the social utility of the outcomes and the importance of the consequences, they feel less pressured and more self-determined about their actions.

Existing research supports this idea. In a study by Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2009), high school students with low competence beliefs in science showed improved interest and grades after they self-generated the utility value of science schoolwork. Students with high competence beliefs did not benefit from this utility value manipulation. Unlike utility value that was directly communicated or imposed on students from outside, an internalised form of utility value helped students avoid detrimental behaviours frequently accompanying low competence.

Together, studies introduced above indicate that there are many simple ways to foster students’ competence beliefs in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to: provide students with verbal encouragement; help them experience task mastery by setting individual goals based on their prior achievement history and assigning tasks that they can handle independently; and share own learning experiences and strategies with them. At the same time, teachers should avoid: comparing students by grades; and putting too much emphasis on grades. Instead, highlighting importance of effort and progress in the classroom will produce learners who are feeling competent.

**Conclusion**

In this monograph, we have examined the crucial importance of competence beliefs in attaining achievement-related outcomes in various situations. Beliefs of competence not only play an essential role as an independent predictor but also wield strong influence on learning processes and outcomes. This pattern emerged even when they compete with other important personality and motivational variables. We have also looked at how competence beliefs work in conjunction with other important motivational constructs, paying special attention to task values and their interaction with competence within the modern expectancy-value framework.

In particular, we have argued that holding high value but low competence could place individuals’ self-processes in predicament. Perceptions of weak competence in valued domains,
or discrepancies between actual self-states and valued self-states, could leave individuals with self-worth threats and emotional discomfort. When this happens, individuals may attempt to resort to maladaptive achievement strategies to protect their self-worth and reduce psychological distress.

Agendas for future research should include finding out when and for whom high values protect, rather than threaten, one's motivational processes even when combined with low competence beliefs. For instance, the negative effects of high value with low competence beliefs will be less likely to occur for students whose socialisers view achievement as the product of effort and persistence, compared to those whose socialisers view achievement as the sole product of ability. Investigating factors that reinforce or diminish the competence-value interaction will be able to guard students against unnecessary self-worth threats in the classroom.

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