



Bar Ilan University

Motivation in School Environment:

Study or Friends?

Educational Achievement Goals and Social

Achievement Goals among Sixth Grades

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Abstract

Achievements are important factor in human daily life and have been brought to the academic research spotlight in the past four decades (Elliot & Thrash, 2001). People encounter achievements in different contexts on a daily basis; work, sports, academics etc. In those situations, one is required to demonstrate his abilities and be valued by the other, based upon them. In the recent decades, social cognitive approach has been developed towards 'Achievement Goal Theory' (Nicholls, 1984; Dweck, 1986; Ames, 1992; Elliot & Church, 1997). The theory provides a framework intended to explain and study Academic Motivation (Anderman & Patrick, 2012). The Theory emphasizes student's self-perspective, the assignment of which he is facing and his performance (Ames, 1987). At first, researches distinguished between Mastery and Performance Goals (Elliot & Church, 1997; Dweck, 1986; Elliot & Thrash, 2001). Students who pursue mastery goals, are oriented toward challenges, persistence despite failure, develop capability and enjoy tasks (Nicholls, 1989; Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In contrast, students who pursue performance goals are developing anxiety, they become more vulnerable and less satisfied from performing tasks (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Student will pursue mastery or performance goal depending on his social perspective of the educational environment (Ames & Archer, 1988). Continuance, researchers have acknowledged another distinguish between approach and avoidance tendency. Performance-approach refers to students who are trying to gain positive judgment from others and try to achieve high social status.

In contrast, Performance-avoidance refers to students who are trying to avoid negative judgment from others (Rayn & Shim, 2006; Horst et al., 2007). The "Hierarchic Model"

bonds all the different behaviors into one integrative model. The model includes four different orientations; Mastery- approach, performance- approach, performance-avoidance and mastery- avoidance.

At first, achievement goals were engaged in academic context. Subsequently, as they received more recognition, researchers began studying achievement goals in the social domain (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Currently, Social achievement goals are being studied and were found as related to well- being, positive feelings, help seeking ex. (Ryan, Elliot & Wilson, 2012; Shim, Wang & Cassady, 2013; Kiefer & Shim, 2014; Makara & Madjar, 2015; King, 2016). Students approach social achievement situations in different strategies, depending on their social goals (Ryan & Shim, 2008). For example, some of the students are aiming toward developing social skills and deepening social friendships, whereas other students are focusing on gaining social status. Social achievement goals have four parallel orientations to the academic domain. It is acceptable by researchers to focus only on three orientations (Mastery- approach, performance- approach and performance- avoidance) due to the fact that mastery- approach orientation is less common in other research in this domain (Maehr & Zusho, 2009).

The current study examines the correlation between academic and social achievement goals, and the joint changes during a school year, among group of students in sixth grade. The importance of the current study is that these two disciplines have been researched only a few times before, among students across the world in different age groups and not in the Israeli culture contexts. The purpose of this study derives from the assumption that academic and social aspects are intertwined in

school environment. Therefore, it is important to identify the characteristic of these aspects and explore their association.

The current study includes three main assumptions:

1. The theoretical structure of academic achievement goals among six graders will be similar to the theoretical structure of social achievement goals.
2. Throughout the duration of a school year, academic goals will be associated to social goals. Furthermore, social achievement goals will predict academic goals.
3. The goals will remain stable among the school year.

365 students participated in this study, as a part of a larger longitudinal research. The students attended sixth grade in public schools located in middle to high socioeconomic urban area in Israel. Throughout a school year, the participants were asked to complete self-reported questionnaires in two different occasions; the beginning of the year, and the end of the year during school hours. This questionnaire has been used before in previous research (Madjar, 2016). The purpose of these questionnaires was to evaluate the type of orientation toward academic achievement goals (PALS) and toward social achievement goals (Ryan & Shim, 2006). The questionnaire was anonymous and private codes were issued to track the student's data in both surveys. The questionnaires assisted in estimating the type of orientation in the academic and social domain.

Furthermore, the questionnaire examined stability and changes in achievement goals of each student. The questionnaires consisted of a series of statements, each of them referring to a deferent goal.

The students were instructed to rate their agreement with the statement on a scale from 1= completely disagree to 5= completely agree. A *Cross-Lagged Analysis* was conducted in order to examine the results using Equation Modeling Structural. The result present stability in both achievement goals over the school year. Three orientations were found in the analysis:

1. The first model examines the prediction of change in mastery achievement goals in both academic and social domains. It was found that social achievement goals predicted the change in academic achievement goal. This finding is remarkable and may take the focuses out of gaining good grades; instead teachers can highlight and encourage students to develop meaningful friendship that will lead to academic achievements.
2. The second model examines the prediction of change in performance- approach achievement goal. It was also found that the social goal predicted the academic goal.
3. The third model examines the prediction of change in performance- avoidance achievement goal. This model was the exception, academic goals predicted social goals. It is possible that student who possesses this orientation is avoiding negative judgement by his peers in the academic domain (i.e. to be considered as “stupid”) and overtime he will try to avoid negative judgement in the social domain (i.e. to be considered as “geek”).

The results of this study coincide with previous studies and emphasize the importance of social achievement goal. Consequently, mastery achievement goal is the optimal and most adaptive. Social achievement goal play an important role in the context of academic achievement in school environment, adjustment in school and

well- being. Hence, it is possible that teachers should emphasize the social aspect in order to promote the academic achievement.