

Abstract

The direct and indirect influence of three variables reflecting the teacher's personality on students' educational outcomes was examined. Personality variables examined were: attachment style, sense of efficacy and well-being. Educational outcomes investigated according to student self reports were: academic and social self concept, academic achievement and well-being. The socio-emotional climate in the classroom measured by students' feelings of relatedness, competence and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1991) was established as a mediator between the teacher's personality and educational outcomes.

The aim of this study was to answer two interrelated questions: 1. To what extent do the teacher personality variables predict the variance of the educational outcomes among the students? 2. Can the variance in the educational outcomes among students be explained by means of teachers' influence on the quality of the socio-emotional climate in the classroom? The strategy of this study was to conduct a simultaneous examination of direct and indirect relationships between the teacher's personality and educational outcomes among students. This approach is novel in educational research.

We examined 3509 fifth- and sixth-graders from 151 classes and their homeroom teachers. All participants attended public general or religious schools in the center of Israel. The research unit examined in the present study is the classroom. Individual scores aggregated to the class level were calculated for all student variables. Thus, for each class we established a representative grade for each aspect of the socio-emotional climate as well as a representative grade for each of the educational outcomes.

In order to investigate the climate in the classroom we developed a questionnaire based on the Self Determination Theory (SDT) of Deci & Ryan (1991). This tool demonstrated good psychometric characteristics and seems appropriate for other studies as well.

According to the model presented in the study, the climate in the classroom mediates between the teacher personality variables and student educational outcomes, in addition to the direct link between teacher personality and student outcomes. This approach is different from most earlier research in which classroom climate was examined as an independent variable only. To test the model, we conducted three series of analyses: First, we examined the direct relationship between the teacher variables and student outcomes. Second, we examined the relationship between the teacher variables and the socio-emotional climate in the classroom, and finally, the relationship between the climate in the classroom and the educational outcomes. We expected that the direct relationship between the teacher variables and student educational outcomes would be moderated as a result of the relationship between the classroom climate and the educational outcomes.

The research model was only partially confirmed. We found that the socio-emotional climate in the classroom mediated between the teacher's attachment style of attachment and all three educational outcomes: social and academic self concept, academic achievements and well-being. Hence, the teacher's avoidance style is indeed a significant factor that influences the quality of the socio-emotional climate in the classroom, which in turn, influences the quality of the educational outcomes. As expected, we found that attachment avoidance was negatively correlated to feelings of relatedness, competence and autonomy. This finding contributes to the extension the attachment theory which was initially limited to intimate relationships and is now extended to include teacher-student relations.

In addition, we found that students' sense of autonomy mediates between teaching efficacy beliefs and all the educational outcomes. However, in contrast to our hypothesis, we found that the relationship between teaching efficacy beliefs and student sense of autonomy was negative. In other words, the more teachers believe that the educational system can contribute to the students, the weaker is the sense of autonomy among students. The research also confirmed the hypothesis of a positive relationship between sense of autonomy, self concept and well-being among students.. Furthermore, we found a negative relationship between the students' sense of autonomy and their academic achievements. Possible explanations for these unexpected findings are discussed extensively.

Findings that dealt with the direct links between the teacher personality variables and student educational outcomes showed that the avoidance style of attachment predicts academic self concept and the anxiety attachment style predicts academic achievements. Both of these relationships have negative coefficients. These findings are unique since the influence of the teacher's attachment style on student educational outcomes has not been studied.

Finally, we found that the teacher's well-being predicts only the variance of students' social self concept. Contrary to our expectations, it was evident that the teacher's self efficacy did not predict any of the educational outcomes, even academic achievement. Rationales for these findings are also discussed.

When examining the relationship between the components of the socio-emotional climate and the educational outcomes, we found that sense of relatedness, competence and autonomy, all predicted the examined educational outcomes. The more supportive the classroom climate was to students' sense of relatedness, competence and autonomy, the more the students reported higher achievement, higher academic and social self concept and a higher well-being. An exception to

these findings was the negative relationship between autonomy and academic achievement. In general these findings support the theoretical approach of Deci & Ryan (1991).

These findings led to the conclusion of non-significant influence of teacher personality, as reflected in most of the variables examined here on student outcome variables and on classroom climate. It is possible that a major reason for this lack of relationship is the demanding classroom conditions which prevent the teacher's personality traits which were examined in the study to manifest themselves.

In contrast, results of the present study provide support to SDT since the variance in student educational outcomes was influenced strongly by the socio-emotional climate in the classroom.

To conclude, this study suggests that additional research is needed on the role of teachers' attachment style in the educational setting, and on the influence of the socio-emotional climate in the classroom on a variety of student educational outcomes.