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The Role of Peer Group in the Relationship Between Peer Motivational Climate, Classroom Goal Structure and Social and Academic Achievement Goals Orientation, Mediated by Social Self-Efficacy

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Summary

The present study is based on Achievement Goal Orientations theory (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 2005), and examines the level and quality of classroom influences on students motivation and behavior within the educational framework, through the connections between environmental factors (Social Motivational Climate and Classroom Goal Structure) and internal factors (Academic and Social Achievement Goals Orientation), mediated by the student's Social Self-Efficacy. In addition, this study examined these correlations at two levels, both at the individual and peer group levels.

The term **"Academic Achievement Goals Orientation"** refers to the specific objectives that the individual aspires to achieve under certain academic performance contexts, such as when performing a school assignment. This study uses Midgley and colleagues (2000) approach, which purpose is to measure students' attitude regarding their specific goals in the academic context; the first, *mastery goal*, that is defined as the students' intention to develop their personal academic abilities and to expand their control and understanding of the studied materials. The second, *performance-approach goal*, that is defined as the students' intention to demonstrate their abilities in the classroom. The third, *performance-avoid goal*, that is defined as the students' intention to avoid demonstrating their lack of abilities in the classroom.

Respectively with previous theories and research in the field of academic achievement goal orientation (Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 2005), the term **"Social Achievement Goals Orientation"** refers to how individuals' approach, engage, function, and evaluate themselves in the social domain (Ryan & Shim, 2006). The present study uses Ryan & Shim (2006) approach which goal is to measure three social achievement goals; the first, *A social development goal* concerns a focus on developing social competence, learning new things, growth, and improvement. The second, *A social demonstration-approach goal* concerns a focus on demonstrating social competence and gaining from others positive judgments that one is socially desirable. The third, *A social demonstration-avoid goal* concerns a focus on demonstrating that one does not lack social competence.

The term **"Classroom Goal Structure"** refers to the way in which students perceive their teacher's goals to engage in academic work (Midgley et al., 2000); the first goal *Mastery Approach*, involves the teacher's perception that student's success is

based on interest, learning and understanding of the material rather than on the need to memorize it. The second goal, *Performance-Approach*, emphasizes the importance of grades in assignments and tests, public presentation of student's grades for comparison, and creates high competition among students.The term **"Social Motivational Climate"** refers to the way in which group members encourage or suppress the motivation of the individual within it (Ntoumanis, Vazou & Duda, 2007). Peers are generally defined as students in the class, as they are the group that accompanies the individual student during most school hours. The present study uses Ntoumanis and Vazou (2005) approach to measure this variable by two main factors. The first factor is a positive, *task-oriented* climate, that relates to the way in which peers in the group are pro-social and encourage the individual's motivation by supporting growth and effort and increasing the sense of belonging to the group. The second factor is a negative, *self-oriented* climate, that relates to the way in which group members suppress the individual's motivation through negative behaviors and create conflicts and competition among all members of the group.

The term **"Social Self-Efficacy"** refers to the individual's belief in his or her ability to develop supportive social skills and relationships, that increase the sense of self satisfaction and serve as a buffer against stressful life events (Caprara, Alessandri, Di-Giunta, Panerai & Eisenberg, 2010). The present study uses Muris (2001) approach, which seeks to assess adolescent's belief in their ability to communicate well with each other, create relationships with peers or cope with social challenges. this approach was adapted to the school context by Zulig and his colleagues (2011).

Based on previous research findings, the main hypotheses of this research were: [1]social motivational climate correlates with Social and academic achievement goals orientation. [2]Classroom goal structure correlates with Social and academic achievement goals orientation. [3]social self-efficacy will intermediate the correlations between social motivational climate, Classroom goal structure and Social and academic achievement goals orientation. In order to answer the main research hypotheses, a path analysis was conducted using hierarchical linear modeling; this analysis examines the correlations between the research variables on different hierarchical levels of the data on both the singular and group levels.

The questionnaire was completed by 855 Israeli students from 36 standard 7th-9th classes, residing in various locations across the country of Israel. The research was conducted with the approval of the chief scientist of the department of education. The

questionnaire was handed out manually during school classes, anonymously and voluntarily.

As for "**classroom goal structure**", the findings of this study support previous findings and has found positive correlations between a performance-approach goal structure and a social self-efficacy, and academic performance-approach and performance-avoid goals orientations. Positive correlations were also found between a mastery-approach goal structure and a mastery and development goals orientations.

As for "**motivational social climate**", the findings of this study support previous findings and has found positive correlations between a negative self-oriented social climate and social demonstration approach and avoidance goals orientations, and academic performance approach and avoidance goals orientations. Positive correlations were also found between a positive task-oriented climate and academic mastery goal orientation and social self-efficacy.

As for "**social self-efficacy**", the findings of this study support previous findings and has found positive correlations between this variable and social development goal orientation, social demonstration-approach and academic performance-approach.

These findings match previous findings (Ben-Eliyahu, Linnenbrink-Garcia & Putallaz, 2017; Dunbar, Dingel, Dame, Winchip & Petzold, 2018; Makara & Madjar, 2015; Patrick, Kaplan & Ryan 2011; Reindl et al., 2015; Shim, Cho & Wang, 2013; Warburton, 2017; Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish & Russell, 2017) and teach us that during the process of building social and academic achievement goals, the students make extensive use of the group context and the class social climate (beyond close friendships). We can also see that class' social climate and the positive relationships the students have with their peers, has a significant role in their social self-efficacy. These correlations may also hold back the negative effects associated with lack of support from their teacher in the classroom.

The innovation of the current study is in understanding the pivotal role of social class climate in general and the student's peer group specifically, in the building and nurturing the student's social self-efficacy and their personal, social and academic achievement goals. In light of this understanding, we can claim that a successful intervention of the school to improve the positive social motivational climate, must include: encouragement of positive and effective social communication among students, having consultation services available for students, exercising and supporting students social skills, designing academic content to encourage pro-social behavior,

cooperation between students and peer support. Furthermore, when planning and building educational pedagogy, the teacher must account for the class's social climate and the student's social self-efficacy in order to maximize the students' motivation both socially and academically.

In accordance with previous similar research, results with an adequate model on the student level and an inadequate model on the group level is not uncommon (Lam, Ruzek, Schenke, Conley & Karabenick, 2015). However, there were some limitations that may affect the strength of the findings. The first, a lack of long-term effects, this study did not monitor students throughout all their school year (including the influence of new teachers and joining new peers' groups). A longer time period with several measurement points during the year will be more beneficial in measuring long term effects. The second, the existence of a weak positive relationship between mastery-approach and performance-approach goal structure. Following research should attempt to sample the same students several times during the school year, thus reaching a more accurate understanding of the processes through which the connection between the environmental variables and the student's achievement goals orientations are formed.