

## Dimensions of the classroom climate, as perceived by the students, related to their teachers' evaluation approach on their overall performance in a Greek primary school sample

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### Abstract

*Background:* The quality of the classroom environment, as conceptualised and measured through the construct of classroom climate, focuses on the social and psychological interactions among its members which have been found to be related to students' academic achievement and reduced emotional problems.

*Aims:* With regard to the limited data concerning the relevant Greek literature, the present study examined the possible relations between primary students' perceptions of the quality of their classroom psychosocial environment as measured using My Class Inventory and the evaluation of their "overall" performance by their teachers. Factors such as school district, urban and rural and grade level, fifth and sixth, were also taken into account.

*Sample:* 268 students, 142 in the fifth grade and 126 in the sixth grade, from 14 classes in 7 primary schools from three primary geographical regions in Greece and their teachers (N= 14), participated in the study.

*Method:* Questionnaires were completed by students in their classrooms during the lesson hour and teachers recorded their evaluation of each student performance on their questionnaire. Analyses of variance (ANOVA), t-test and Pearson r correlations were conducted.

*Results:* Research findings showed that competitiveness is prevalent in Greek classrooms. Especially in metropolitan urban schools, "excellent" students experience high levels of friction as they strive to succeed academically. Students' satisfaction was positively related to cohesion and negatively to friction and difficulty, in most of the cases.

*Conclusion:* It seems that traditional perspectives in evaluation methods used by teachers and the focus on academic achievement as well as modern life conditions in metropolitan urban settings influence students' sense of competitiveness and friction in the classroom. The application of more refined and systematic evaluation techniques with regard to students' overall performance and the enhancement of cooperative and social learning could boost students' self esteem, cohesion and satisfaction in the classroom.

**Key words:** classroom climate, students' performance, Greek primary education

## 希臘小學生感覺的課堂氣氛與教師對他們評價方法的關係

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### 摘要

*背景:* 課堂環境的質量(通過課堂氣氛營造來概念化和衡量)着重于其成員之間的社交和心理互動,這些互動被發現與學生的學習成績有關,並減少了情緒問題。

*目的:* 關於相關希臘文獻的有限資料,目前的研究調查小學生對其課堂社會心理環境質量(利用 My Class Inventory 衡量)的認識與他們的教師對他們的“總體”成績評估之間的可能關聯。學區(市內和鄉村)以及年級(五年級和六年級)等因素也予以了考慮。

*樣本:* 希臘 7 所小學 14 個班級的 268 名學生(五年級有 142 名,六年級有 126 名)和他們教師(N= 14) 加了此研究。

*方法:* 在上課期間由學生在課堂完成調查問卷,並且教師在他們的問卷上記錄每個學生的成績評估。差異分析(ANOVA),進行 t-test 和皮爾森 r 關聯。

*結果:* 研究結果表明,希臘課堂中的競爭非常普遍。尤其在城市 校中,“優秀”學生感受到了高水平的摩擦,因為他們努力在學習方面獲得成功。在大多數情況下,學生的滿意度與凝聚力正相關,與摩擦和困難負相關。

*結論:* 教師採用的評定方法中的傳統視角和對成績的重視,以及大城市的現代生活條件,仿佛影響了學生對堂中的競爭和摩擦的感知。對學生的總體成績採用更精確且系統的評估方法以及增強合作和社交知識,能夠提升學生在課堂中的自尊、凝聚力和滿意度。

**關鍵字:** 課堂氣氛,學生的成績,希臘小學教育

## Introduction

Over the past 30 years, there has been an increasing interest in the quality of the classroom environment as it has been found to be significantly related to positive student outcomes such as increased academic motivation, engagement and learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2002. Dorman & Adams, 2004). Not surprisingly the great progress that has been made in educational research with regard to conceptualizing, measuring and analyzing classroom environment coincided with major movements towards school reform and improvement in many countries, such as “the effective schools movement” in the US (Evans et al., 2009. Frazer, 1989).

Westling-Allodi (2002), elaborating on Moos’ work, describes classroom environment as a system that is based on four variables: physical setting, organizational aspects, teacher characteristics and pupil characteristics. The function of these variables, as they interact and form interrelationships among them, constitutes the quality of the classroom environment. Classroom climate, although many scholars use the term interchangeably as a synonym with classroom environment (Wheldall, Beaman & Mok, 1999), is perceived within the quality framework of the setting (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). It is conceptualized as a social psychological construct that is shaped through interactions among all agents in the classroom, the teacher and the students and mediates between these factors. The concept of classroom climate has a positive orientation and was found to be beneficial for both students and teachers. However, it can range from negative, hostile and toxic which is related to bullying, aggression, social and emotional maladjustment, to welcoming and supportive with important educational outcomes such as constructive learning process, enhanced academic

achievement and reduced emotional problems and can fluctuate daily and over the school year (Evans et al., 2009).

There are many different approaches in defining and measuring classroom climate. Some basic distinction has been made with regard to who the informants are, external to the setting (alpha press) or internal (beta press) and the degree of judgment required of those informants (low/high-inference). With regard to these criteria four assessment approaches emerge (Dorman, 2002): i. low-inference systems that observe and count predefined events and behaviors, ii. high-inference systems that are relatively open and require some interpretation from the observer, iii. narrative and ethnographic approaches and iv. high-inference instruments assessing participants’ perceptions. Relying on the so called subjective perceptions of inhabitants has been identified as a reliable and efficient way of measuring classroom climate that has been found to account for more variance in achievement outcomes than directly observed variables have (Fraser, 1989). It should be noted that most of the existing instruments measuring perceptual aspects of classroom psychosocial environment elicit students’ perceptions of the class as a whole, as described in the ‘consensual’ beta press, the shared view that group members hold of the environment, which is distinguished from the ‘private’ beta press, each person’s idiosyncratic view (Fraser, 1989, 1998).

When studies link student perception of the classroom climate to cognitive and affective outcomes, the most common finding is positive correlation (Creemers & Reezigt, 1999). It is evident that different dimensions within the construct of classroom climate are consistent in the direction of their relation to cognitive, affective and learning

outcomes across ages (Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie, 2004. Wilson, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2007). Some researchers have argued for students' perceptions of classroom environment as a source of process criteria in the evaluation of curricula reform and general educational innovations (Fraser, 1998. Goh & Fraser, 1998). The research of classroom climate is also flourishing in the field of intervention studies regarding the effectiveness of schools that deal with students with special needs as it was found that the social context in these classes and the incidence and the degree of segregation are related to specific dimensions of the classroom climate and influence school effectiveness for all students (Westling-Allodi, 2002). Some researchers also provide evidence for applying classroom environment instruments to guide practical improvements in the classroom that are readily accessible from educators and practitioners (Fraser & Fisher, 1986). However, much of the research on learning environments has focused on the secondary school level –it should be noted that most of the instruments measuring classroom climate concern children at high school, with My Class Inventory being one of the few exceptions applied to elementary schools.

Contemporary studies perceive classroom as an ecological system of multiple and complex factors that interact to produce climate dynamics. One of the most prominent among these factors is the teacher, providing an array of variables that relate to his/her role and functioning in the classroom and intersect with classroom environmental and climate dimensions, such as: personality features and leadership style (Fontana, 1996), the way that he/she promotes relationships and cooperative forms of functioning in the classroom (Edwards, 1997) as well as the quality of instruction (context, methods and

techniques).

In Greece, the evaluation of classroom climate in primary education was examined mainly in relation to different variables such as teachers' leadership styles, teachers' attitudes and different forms of communication in the classroom as well as relationships between teachers and students. Results showed that although teachers make attempts to adopt new perspectives, they maintain traditional values and their perceptions about classroom climate do not coincide with those held by students (Evangelopoulos, 1988. Matsagouras, 2006). With reference to students' variables and their perceptions of classroom climate, Zafiropoulou and Sotiriou (2001) found that most of the dimensions within the concept of classroom climate, as measured with My Class Inventory, showed significant correlations with students' self-concept. The authors address the issue of a more systematic and extensive research concerning classroom climate with regard to different factors within the Greek educational reality.

Given the limited data in the Greek literature concerning the possible links between classroom climate measures and student outcomes, the present study focuses on fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of classroom climate with regard to their overall performance as reported by their teachers. This choice meets the need to highlight on students' different skills, abilities and efforts with regard to the general classroom curriculum and not only to relate perceptions of classroom climate with certain domains, mainly highly academic, such as mathematics or science, as reported in the relevant literature (Fraser & Fisher, 1986). Moreover, the school district was taken into account allowing for comparisons between data from urban and rural areas to address the issue of different ecological contexts

and school conditions. Finally, students' grade level, fifth and sixth, was one additional factor that this study focused on, in relation to students' classroom climate perceptions.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the way students in different grades and school districts perceive, according to the level of their performance as it is evaluated by their teachers, their relationships with their classmates and the teacher as well as the different school subjects. More specifically, the aim was to identify a) if students in different areas, rural and urban, in different grades, fifth and sixth, and in different groups according to their performance reported by the teacher, show variance in their perceptions of classroom climate and b) whether there are any relations among the five dimensions of the classroom climate with reference to the performance level, the school district and the grade level of the students.

## Method

### *Participants*

268 students, 142 in the fifth grade and 126 in the sixth grade, from 14 classes in 7 primary schools in Greece and their teachers (N= 14), participated in the study. Two of the schools (4 classes) were situated in rural areas in the prefecture of Euboea, one (two classes, fifth and sixth) in a small, provincial urban area in the city of Alexandroupolis and four (8 classes) in Athens, a big, metropolitan urban area.

### *Measures*

In order to capture students' perceptions of their classroom psychological and social relationships we used My Class Inventory (MCI) as it was translated and adapted for the Greek educational reality by Professor Matsagouras (1987). The MCI was initially developed as a simplified form of

the Learning Environment Inventory (LEI) to use with primary students by Anderson and Walberg in 1976 (Fisher & Fraser, 1981), but it has also been found to be applicable to students in junior high school, 'especially those with limited reading skills' (Fraser, 1998). The original form contained only five of the LEI's original scales including 45 items, nine per each scale. However, the limited instrument employment and its relatively low reliability estimates, met with Fisher and Fraser (1981) attempts to modify MCI scales through the application of item analysis techniques which led to a five scale solution with 38 items altogether. Fraser and Fisher (1986) provided a short form of the MCI containing five 5-item scales. The values of the alpha coefficient ranged from 0.58 to 0.81 for the 5 scales assessing primary students' perceptions of the actual classroom climate (as compared to the preferable one). Matsagouras' translated and adapted form of MCI was used in a sample of 5334 fourth to sixth grade students in primary schools in the city of Athens, Greece and showed values ranging from 0.44 to 0.68. The previous use and ascertained reliability and discriminant validity of the particular instrument with Greek samples guided the authors' decision for its application to the study.

The five scales estimate students' perceptions concerning two dimensions: i. the *relationship dimension* which falls within cohesiveness, friction and satisfaction scales and ii. the *personal development dimension* that is measured using difficulty and competitiveness scales. The Agree-Not Agree response format is easily scored by allocating 3 for Agree and 1 for Not Agree, while omitted or invalidly answered items are scored 2 (items 6, 9, 10, 16 and 24 are scored in the reverse manner).

Students' performance was captured through their

teachers' reports and specifically by focusing on their students' overall performance. Teachers evaluated students using a 4-point scale: "excellent", "good", "fair" and "under fair". This classification could be regarded as capturing both students' academic and social functioning in the classroom as it allows the teacher to assess students' overall performance.

#### *Process*

After having taken the necessary official permission, researchers visited schools and informed the principals and the participating students and teachers about the research purposes and procedure. Participants were given the instructions for the completion of the questionnaires during the lesson hour. The classroom teacher recorded in each student's questionnaire his/her rating of the pupil overall performance. Researchers assured all participants about the anonymity and the confidentiality of their contribution. The questionnaire distribution took place by the end of March.

#### *Analysis*

Because of the small number of classrooms (N = 14) and schools (N = 7) available to study, it was necessary to conduct some of the analyses at individual student level. The first set of analyses examining factors within the construct of the classroom climate were conducted at the school level using ANOVA. These analyses consist of 7 schools in three different rural-urban regions. However, the analyses concerning differences in perceived classroom factors across schools in different rural-urban settings were conducted at the individual student level within the three different types of rural-urban settings, because of the limited number of higher-order units available to study. It is recognized that these analyses possibly ignore higher-order groupings (e.g., classrooms, schools) and can

introduce bias into the conclusions. We therefore consider the results as preliminary and urge caution in interpreting our results.

## **Results**

One of the basic goals of the study was to identify possible differences in students' perceptions of a) the school subjects and their relationships in the classroom as recorded in the *satisfaction* scale, b) the conflicts and disputes as reported in the *friction* scale, c) the *competitiveness* they experience in the classroom, d) the *difficulty* they have in their schoolwork and e) the communication and cooperation among classroom members as depicted in *cohesiveness* scale of MCI when their grade level, the school district and their overall performance reported by their teacher were taken into account.

It should be pointed out that with reference to teachers' evaluation of the students' performance only three groups of students were formed, "excellent" (N=134), "good" (N=104) and "fair" (N=30) as teachers did not evaluate any of their pupils below "fair". It can be assumed that this unexpected overoptimistic view of student performance may stem from: a) the focus on pupils general functioning in the classroom which also employs their social competence, b) teachers' response to the research process and the tendency to gloss over students' actual performance and c) an inner fear of being judged for their students performance, as it is noted that teachers use to project their students' achievement on their own sense of effectiveness and expertise in the classroom (Bikos, 2004). Despite all these assumptions the authors relied on the teachers reports but suggest a further examination of this phenomenon, by applying a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

As far as the school district is concerned analyses of variance (ANOVA) showed that it influenced students' perception of *friction* ( $F_{2,6}=3.65, p=0.027$ ) and the level of their *satisfaction* ( $F_{2,6}=13.01, p=0.000$ ) in the classroom. T-test was additionally used to examine the significant mean differences between factors. It was found that students in the metropolitan urban schools ( $M=10.75, SD=2.92$ ) experience significantly more *friction* ( $t=2.71, DF=207, p=0.07$ ) in their classrooms compared to those in rural schools ( $M=9.08, SD=2.68$ ). Students in rural areas ( $M=9.08, SD=2.68$ ) also perceive lower levels of *friction* ( $t=2.35, DF=87, p=0.021$ ) than those in provincial urban areas ( $M=10.76, SD=3.13$ ). It could be assumed that the different social contexts of the classrooms in urban areas, both provincial and metropolitan, as well as the way children are socialized in these settings influence children's interactions in the classroom which are characterized by more conflict and disagreements compared to those in rural ones. With regard to students' level of *satisfaction* it seemed that those in metropolitan urban schools ( $M=12.35, SD=2.55$ ) are significantly more satisfied with school subjects and relationships in the classroom ( $t=4.09, DF=241, p=0.000$ ) than students in provincial urban classrooms ( $M=10.73, SD=2.96$ ). It is noteworthy that students in provincial urban schools ( $M=10.73, SD=2.96$ ) also experience less *satisfaction* in their classrooms ( $t=-4.28, DF=82, p=0.000$ ) compared to their counterparts in rural areas ( $M=13.64, SD=2.56$ ).

Taking teachers' evaluation of student performance into account, significant variances in students' perceptions of classroom *cohesiveness* ( $F_{2,6}=3.65, p=0.027$ ) and subject *difficulty* ( $F_{2,6}=3.65, p=0.027$ ) were found. More specifically, students with "excellent" performance ( $M=11.46, SD=3.36$ ) seemed to feel that they communicate and cooperate better ( $t=2.28, DF=236, p=0.023$ ) as well as they experience ( $M=12.40, SD=2.67$ ) more *satisfaction* ( $t=1.98, DF=236, p=0.049$ ) in their classrooms than students with "good" performance ( $M=10.44, SD=3.44$ ) ( $M=11.67, SD=2.96$ ). In addition students that were evaluated as having a "good" performance ( $M=8.24, SD=2.29$ ) reported greater difficulty with schoolwork ( $t=-2.55, DF=236, p=0.001$ ) than those with "excellent" performance ( $M=7.47, SD=2.33$ ). These findings may suggest that students that are regarded highly by their teachers develop some kind of self-esteem that is reflected positively in their relationships in the classroom with both their teacher and classmates. Teachers' quality of evaluation methods and attitudes towards students according to performance are highly implied here.

It should be noted that between students of fifth grade and those of sixth grade, there was found no significant variance among the different dimensions of the classroom climate.

Table 1. Correlations among all classroom climate dimensions according to students' performance ("excellent" N=134, "good" N=104, "fair" N=30)

Climate scales	Performance	Friction	Competitiveness	Difficulty	Cohesiveness
Satisfaction	"Excellent"	<b>-.328**</b> .000	-.127 .168	<b>-.215*</b> .019	<b>.395**</b> .000
	"Good"	<b>-.305**</b> .002	-.119 .229	-.101 .305	<b>.540**</b> .000
	"Fair"	-.250 .191	-.117 .546	<b>-.375*</b> .045	<b>.402*</b> .030
Friction	"Excellent"	-	<b>.344**</b> .000	<b>.340**</b> .000	<b>-.389**</b> .000
	"Good"	-	<b>.332**</b> .001	-.001 .985	<b>-.476**</b> .000
	"Fair"	-	.111 .556	.207 .280	<b>-.611**</b> .000
Competitiveness	"Excellent"	-	-	.082 .373	-.113 .217
	"Good"	-	-	<b>-.242*</b> .014	-.032 .748
	"Fair"	-	-	.106 .208	-.122 .148
Difficulty	"Excellent"	-	-	-	<b>-.224*</b> .014
	"Good"	-	-	-	-.073 .465
	"Fair"	-	-	-	-.156 .064

Correlation coefficients for the 5 dimensions within the classroom climate construction according to students' performance provide a deeper understanding of the role the teacher assessment perspectives may have in students' experiences of the psychosocial dimensions in their classroom (Table 1). More specifically, for students with "excellent" and "good" performance it seems that there is a negative relation between *satisfaction* and *friction* whereas for students with "fair" performance no such correlation was found. There are two possible explanations for these findings: a) it is possible that students evaluated by their teachers as showing a high progress are those who do not cause tensions and conflicts at school and b) students with high academic achievement also show high levels of social skills, which is supported

by the significant positive correlation between *satisfaction* and *cohesion*. The fact that no correlation was found between satisfaction and competitiveness, regardless students' performance level, is in line with the view that students have negative attitudes towards competition. "Excellent" and "good" students' perceptions of *friction* showed positive correlation with *competitiveness*. On the other hand *friction* was negatively related to *cohesiveness* in the classroom regardless their performance evaluation. It seems that the more students feel satisfied with their teacher, the school subjects and their relationships with their classmates the better they communicate and cooperate with each other.

As far as the school district is concerned (Table 2), students from all areas perceive significantly

more *cohesiveness* in the classroom when they are more satisfied with the school subjects and the relationships with the teacher and their classmates but less when they experience high levels of *friction*. The same correlations, both with regard to their level of significance and their direction (negative or positive), between *cohesiveness* and *satisfaction* and between *cohesiveness* and *friction* were found with regard to students' grade level (fifth and sixth) (Table 3). Taking into account that the same pattern of correlations exists among these three dimensions of the classroom climate with regard to all factors examined in the present study may highlight the importance of enhancing students' social skills and cooperative learning in the classroom and call for further study including more individual/personal

variables and classroom factors. *Friction* was positively related to *competitiveness* for both urban areas, provincial and metropolitan, but not for the rural ones, which is not unexpected as results showed that schools in rural areas had the lowest level of *friction* compared to those in the urban areas. The same results were found for both fifth and sixth grade students. It seems that academic achievement is highly regarded in the Greek late primary grades, which causes much stress to students and results in conflicting relationships among them. This finding may have significant implications with regard to teachers' use of evaluation methods that focus on students overall performance and not only to their academic success.

Table 2. Correlations among all classroom climate dimensions according to school district (provincial urban N= 59, metropolitan urban N= 184, rural N= 25)

Climate subscales	School district	Friction	Competitiveness	Difficulty	Cohesiveness
Satisfaction	Provincial urban	-253	-.122	-.032	<b>.404**</b>
		.053	.355	812	<b>.002</b>
	Metropolitan urban	<b>-282**</b>	-.143	<b>-.255**</b>	<b>.433**</b>
		<b>.000</b>	.054	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>
	Rural	<b>-.664**</b>	-.138	.026	<b>.912**</b>
		<b>.000</b>	.512	.903	<b>.000</b>
Friction	Provincial urban	-	<b>.280*</b>	171	<b>-.419**</b>
			<b>.032</b>	.195	<b>.001</b>
	Metropolitan urban	-	<b>.322**</b>	<b>.185*</b>	<b>-.431***</b>
			<b>.000</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>.000</b>
	Rural	-	.324	.118	<b>-.630**</b>
			115	.395	<b>.001</b>
Competitiveness	Provincial urban	-	-	134	-120
				.312	.365
	Metropolitan urban	-	-	.096	<b>-203**</b>
				.197	<b>.006</b>
	Rural	-	-	.175	-.077
				.404	.714
Difficulty	Provincial urban	-	-	-	-.067
					613
	Metropolitan urban	-	-	-	<b>-210**</b>
					<b>.004</b>
	Rural	-	-	-	.034
					871

*Friction* was also positively related to *difficulty* in the classroom for students in metropolitan urban schools and in both grades. Especially for the sixth graders, *cohesiveness* showed negative correlation with *competitiveness* and *difficulty*. Firstly, it seems that classrooms in metropolitan urban areas are characterized by a more difficult social and academic context for all the students than in provincial urban and rural ones. The higher number of students, the greater heterogeneity in the social structure of the classrooms, the fewer opportunities for socializing

with classmates out of the school setting may consist some of the factors that enhance *friction* and *difficulty* in metropolitan schools. On the other hand findings suggest that providing the right circumstances that would enhance *cohesiveness* in the classroom such as cooperative and social learning could actually empower students to cope with restrictions and difficulties that are found especially in big metropolitan cities, at least with regard to children's school related experiences.

Table 3. Correlations among all classroom climate dimensions according to students' grade level (fifth N=142, sixth N=126)

Climate subscales	Grade level	Friction	Competitiveness	Difficulty	Cohesiveness
Satisfaction	Fifth	-.230** .006	-.085 .317	-.156 .064	.417** .000
	Sixth	-.413** .000	-.161 .072	-.175* .050	.538** .000
Friction	Fifth	-	.243** .004	.168* .045	-.360** .000
	Sixth	-	.349** .000	.180* .044	-.565** .000
Competitiveness	Fifth	-	-	.106 .208	-.122 .148
	Sixth	-	-	.017 .849	-.202* .023
Difficulty	Fifth	-	-	-	-.156 .064
	Sixth	-	-	-	-.125 .164

## Discussion

One of the most striking results of the present study concerns teachers' perception of the students' overall performance. As it was depicted in the data, none of the teachers that participated in the study evaluated their students below "fair". This particular finding, apart from the general aforementioned interpretation, delineates a complex issue in the Greek educational reality. This complexity consists in a set of multilevel factors, which could be the

subject of another study, that lead teachers to evaluate their students mainly intuitively and using traditional methods. It should be noted that the evaluation approach used in this study may have limitations as it focused only on teachers' perceptions and took place within the research procedure and not in the context of the school processes. On the other hand, the results of this atypical evaluation approach may have some value in a future, large scale research plan.

Between "good" and "excellent" students

there was significant difference in *satisfaction* and *difficulty*. “Excellent” students seemed to experience more *satisfaction* and reported facing fewer *difficulties* compared to the “good” ones. This seemed expected as students with very good performance, through the typical or atypical forms of evaluation, experience success and acceptance with positive effects in their self-concept and self-esteem (Gotovos, 2002). Moreover, these students reported that they perceive higher level of cooperation and communication in the classroom. This finding is congruent with other researchers views about the enhanced possibilities of communication in the classroom held by “high achievers” compared to the “lower” ones (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). With reference to the fact that academic achievement is mostly evaluated in Greek schools neglecting other facets of the students’ personality, “excellent” students’ ascendancy in the classroom group and their sense of satisfaction are quite easier to be understood.

With regard to the group of students that were evaluated as “fair”, a negative correlation was found between *satisfaction* in the classroom and the *difficulties* they face dealing with school subjects. Combined with the negative relation found between these *difficulties* and students’ perception of classroom *cohesiveness*, this finding provides information about the atypical functioning of the classroom institutional context. More specifically, it seems that “low achievers” do not have support from the classroom group when they face difficulties in school work, a fact that is probably reflective of the traditional character of the classroom functioning. Although it was not expected, significant differences between “fair” and “excellent” students were not found with regard to the aforementioned dimensions

of classroom climate. This is probably due to the effect of other factors that relate to the instructional methods and practices used by the teacher in the classroom.

Students in urban schools experience higher levels of *friction* as compared to their counterparts in rural areas. This finding is in line with a number of scholars’ conclusion that relationships in large urban centers are impersonal, characterized by cautiousness and reserve, influencing students’ social relations in the school. The presence of the “other” is often perceived as a threat causing aggressive behavior and conflict (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 1994).

Focusing on correlation data there was always a negative relation, between *friction* and *cohesiveness*, while the direction was positive for relations between *satisfaction* and *cohesiveness*. This finding is consistent with Makri-Botsari’s (1999) conclusion that the more students are satisfied in their classrooms the easier it is for them to establish relationships with classmates and their teachers. *Competition* was found prevalent in the classrooms and was mainly related to *difficulty* and *friction* in a positive way. It is evident that the Greek educational system favors and fosters competition although some reforms have been recently made, given the fact that the competitive atmosphere is evident even in the primary grades although there are studies arguing that students prefer instructive methods based on cooperative learning and group work that foster communication and cooperation (Matsagouras, 2003). This reform seems necessary to provide an educational context that promotes both personal and social development for all the students to meet the needs of a modern society.

It should be noted that results provide limited empirical evidence as the exploratory design of research accounted for a small sample. Research

findings suggest further examination of the classroom climate in a large scale sampling that could allow generalization in a level of structures and politics. A combination of methods, such as questionnaires and observations, to shed light on issues considered important for the quality and effectiveness of the modern school is highly recommended, especially with regard to the evaluation approach of the students' performance. Moreover, a more ecological scope that could study relations between parents' perceptions and school valence and their experience of their children's classroom climate, especially in multicultural classrooms, would shed light in the effectiveness of different instructional models and the intersection of a variety of variables with regard to their effectiveness in different groups of students.

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