

The role of family orientation in predicting Korean boys' and girls' achievement motivation to learn mathematics

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ABSTRACT

Informed by achievement goal orientation and self-determination theories, we explored the role of cultural/contextual factors on Korean students' achievement motivation. Specifically, we examined the role of the Korean middle school students' family orientation as a mediator between their perceptions of parent goals or motivating styles and their achievement motivations in learning math, when their perceptions of classroom goal structures were controlled. We also investigated gender differences in the role of the students' family orientation and of their perceptions of their parents and classroom variables in predicting their own achievement motivations. Multi-sample path analyses indicated that both Korean boys' and girls' family orientation mediated between their perceptions of parent variables and their own achievement motivations. Korean students' family orientation predicted mainly controlled forms of motivation and ego-focused goals. In addition, the relationships between students' perceptions of parent variables and their achievement motivations statistically varied across gender.

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1. Introduction

Acknowledging that students' motivation to succeed academically is a product of their experiences within different sociocultural contexts (Kaplan & Maehr, 2002), researchers have investigated the contextual or culturally specific predictors of achievement motivation for students from various ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Following this line of research, the current study examined Korean middle school students' achievement motivation to learn mathematics related to their perceptions of their learning contexts or to their culturally specific value of family orientation.

1.1. Purpose 1: relationships between students' family orientation and achievement motivation

In investigating culturally distinct values and behaviors of immigrant adolescents in the United States and of adolescents in Asia, such as China, researchers have reported that adolescents had a stronger sense of obligation or orientation toward their families than did native-born American students with European backgrounds (Fuligni & Tseng, 1999; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Urda, 2004). Family obligation was defined as "a collection of values and behaviors related to children's assistance and support to

and respect for their parents, siblings, and extended family" (Fuligni, 2007, p. 97). According to Kagitcibasi (1990), the cultural traditions of Asian, Latin American, and African societies share an emphasis on family obligation. Fuligni and Zhang (2004) also assumed that Chinese students' sense of family obligation seems to derive from the Confucian emphasis on familial duties.

What the researchers found interesting is that the emphasis on family obligation was positively associated with those adolescents' family and peer relationships and higher academic motivation (Fuligni et al., 1999), their educational utility and values of learning mathematics and Chinese (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004), and their motivational orientations and self-handicapping (Urda, 2004). Citing the earlier work of Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995), Fuligni (2007) argued that the afore-mentioned association could result from students becoming aware of their parents' sacrifices in providing better lives for them, and their consequent desire to repay their parents through educational success.

These studies may indicate that students' family orientation is a meaningful construct in predicting achievement motivation of students from other Asian countries, such as Korea, in which familial relationships are similarly emphasized. However, few studies (except for Urda, 2004) have investigated how students' family obligation or orientation is related to different kinds or qualities of achievement motivation. Would students' obligation or orientation toward their family predict adaptive or less adaptive forms of motivation?

The theoretical frameworks that guided our investigation of student achievement motivation were the theory of achievement goal orientation (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Midgley et al., 2000), as well as

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self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002); each of these theories has different roots. Achievement goal orientation theory envisages individual students as engaging in academic tasks for different purposes or goals – mastery (to develop competence), performance-approach (to demonstrate competence by outperforming others), and performance-avoidance (to avoid appearing more incompetent than others). Results favored mastery goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001) or both mastery and performance-approach goals (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002) for students' engagement in learning and achievement (refer to Elliot & McGregor, 2001, for more current 2×2 achievement goal model). Whereas self-determination theory argues, in addition to intrinsic motivation (motivated as inherently interesting or enjoyable), students can have various types of extrinsic forms of self-regulated motivation – identified (motivated by the underlying value of an activity), introjected (motivated by internal prods and pressures), and external (motivated by contingencies) regulations – by degree of internalization of external values (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

However, both highlight the importance of contextual influences in developing students' different qualities of motivation (Urduan, 2000). In general, research found that parents' or teacher's support of mastery goals or autonomy supportive motivating styles foster more optimal kinds and autonomous forms of motivations (i.e., mastery goals, intrinsic motivation, identified regulation) for students from various ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Whereas parents' or teacher's support of performance goals or controlling motivating styles were found to support less adaptive and controlled forms of motivations (i.e., performance-avoidance goals, introjected, external regulations) (e.g., Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007, 2010; Gonida, Voulala, & Kiosseoglou, 2009; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005).

More recently, there have been attempts to examine both theoretical frameworks simultaneously to examine more holistic contextual influences on students' motivation (Kim, Schallert, & Kim, 2010; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003). In particular, we (Kim et al., 2010) tested a path model in which Korean

students' goal orientations were predicted (a) by their perceptions of parental goal orientations for them or motivating styles and (b) by their perceptions of classroom goal structures, mediated by their self-regulated motivations (see Fig. 1 without the bold lines).

1.1.1. Hypotheses

Thus, we examined with which kinds of achievement motivations Korean students' family orientation is associated. Building on our previous study (2010), the new path model was proposed including students' family orientation, embodying the hypotheses that students' adoption of achievement motivations (i.e., goal orientations in Column 3 and self-regulated motivations in Column 2) will be predicted by their perceptions of their parents (Column 1), mediated by their family orientation (see Fig. 1). Additionally, classroom variables were included and controlled.

We hypothesized that Korean middle school students would form their family orientation through their interaction with parents based on their perceptions of parents' values, goals, or motivating styles. Aligned with Urduan (2004), we assumed that Korean students' willingness to support their families would be primarily related to controlled forms of motivations (introjected, external regulations) and ego-involved performance goal orientations, regarding their orientation to support family as an internal pressure on their academic achievement. Importantly, the students' family orientation was also hypothesized to predict autonomous motivations (identified regulation) and more adaptive mastery goal orientations, as they could consider it an important reason for academic achievement being socialized in a cultural milieu where filial piety and family recognition through achievement are valued (Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999).

1.2. Purpose 2: gender differences in achievement motivations

The second purpose of the present study was to examine possible gender differences among the relationships in the proposed path model, particularly whether Korean boys' family orientation or their

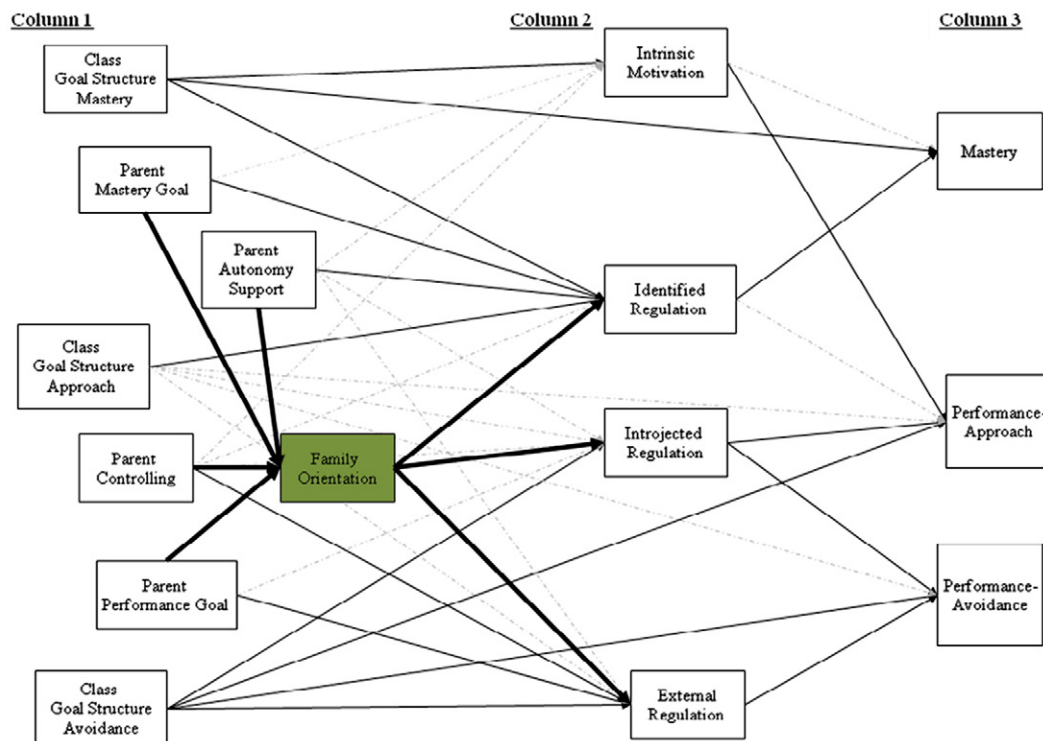


Fig. 1. A hypothesized path model of the parental influence and children's family obligation on children's goal orientations. Bold lines represent new paths that were added to the original path model that had been proposed by the Kim et al. (2010).

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