Transition From Elementary To Secondary School In Greece:Challenges, Threats, School And Motivational Variables

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ABSTRACT: Transition from elementary to secondary school is a significant milestone in student's life. A mixture of challenges and threats in academic and social context is involved. Data from studies examining transition suggested that a general motivational factor, among others (like anxiety, academic achievement, etc.), affects transition (Tilleczek& Ferguson, 2007 for an extended review of selected literature). The present study aimed to examine the relationship between school variables, and specific motivational constructs, like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and test anxiety from one side, and academic and social challenges and threats in the other, as perceived dimensions of transition. Four hundred and thirty-four sixth-graders from elementary schools in Chalkidiki, a Greek agricultural and touristic region, took part in the study. Half of them were boys. Data suggested that there are relationships between schools', and motivational characteristics and transitional variables. The model of relations, which was set up, found to be strong and valid.

KEYWORDS: Transition, elementary school, secondary school, Sirsch, model, performance, motivation

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I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The transition from elementary to secondary school has been a significant topic in educational research and everyday pedagogy as well. It is a critical issue, a milestone in students' life, putting in question their academic and psychological aptitude (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004; Sirsch, 2003; Wassell, Preston & Jones, 2007). Transition refers to a period of educational level change, putting specific challenges and threats to adolescents' well – being, applied to various sectors of students' academic and social life (Botsas, Kotoulas&Botsas, 2012; Valentine, DuBois & Cooper, 2004; Sirsch, 2003). As Tilleczek (2010) proposed, the transition refers to temporal processes crossing social, academic, motivation and procedural contexts. The latter opinion involves the students' perceptions about changing school-level with different educational cultures, programs, and demands, along with social shifts in peer groups. Those perceptions sometimes become difficult to keep up.

Most of the elementary school students will have a smooth and "cloudless" procedure of "moving" to secondary school (Brown, Kendall, Teenman& Ridley, 2004; Jacobson, Williford&Piantra, 2011). However, some of them will encounter various problems, jeopardizing their happiness and well-being (Marks, 2004), along with motivation and academic performance (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm &Splittgerber, 2000; Galton, 2000). Eccles and Midgley (1990) found that adolescents presented a rather negative attitude towards school and a declined self-esteem, right after the transition. "Moving" to secondary school related to negative results, like reduced academic performance (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2004; Otis, Grouzet& Pelletier, 2005; Reid, 2010; Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011).Transition increased vulnerability of motivation (Anderman, Maehr&Midgley, 1999; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Topping, 2011), negative affect, anxiety and depressive symptoms (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Rudolph, Lambert, Clark &Kurlakowsky, 2001) and lower self-esteem (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Topping, 2011). Moreover, the transition to secondary school has been related to behavioral problems (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun & Cochrane, 2008; Theriot&Dupper, 2010) and increased psychological distress (Akos, 2004).

However, the question still stands, "What is the reason for those problems?" Ashton (2008) remarked, "Devil is in the details." Researchers suggested that one of the predictive factors is the mismatch between developmental and school ecology (Akos, 2004, p. 2). That is, the transition from a pedagogical and tolerant context of elementary school, to a more demanding and challenging secondary school environment, could be a road full of surprises and fears of failing (Pratt & George, 2005; Sirsch, 2003; Ward, 2000; Wassell, Preston & Jones, 2007). Students in elementary school rely on teacher's support in academic and affective context (Bru, Stornes, Munthe&Thuen, 2010). In their school life, senior 6th-grade students have an advanced social position,

being the "oldest and strongest" (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), contrary to their upcoming fresh and weak social position in secondary one. Additionally, apart from the different pedagogical paradigm and instructional style, students in transition to secondary school are facing new, more competitive grading procedures, increasing their fear of failure (Chedzoy& Burden, 2005; Pratt & George, 2005).

Elementary and secondary schools are different in various ways, concerning organizational and social factors, along with academic ones. Those differences were outlined by the terms "institution or school discontinuities" (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 2003; Angrist &Rokkanen, 2015), putting obstacles for all students. Nonetheless, students' responses to their transition are different. It is the way of interpreting their social and personal experiences that matters and characterizes transition as a "smooth" or a "difficult" and threatening procedure (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). As Gniewosz, Eccles and Noack (2012) suggested, during transition elementary school students lose the informational value of their self-esteem evaluations, their social status and their web of interactions with known people, due to a changed context of reference.

School discontinuities are apparently the reason that some researchers proposed the term "transition shock", to describe a psychological state of students, experiencing feelings of insecurity, anxiety and even fear, during their transition (Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro& Tremblay, 2005). Those attitudes and fears are students' concerns about their relationships in school, the academic context, their self-efficacy and finally the learning process itself in secondary school (Botsas, Kotoulas&Botsas, 2012).

The students' concerns about the school type related to "school discontinuities" and "transition shock" states. "Moving" from big elementary to also big high schools was more challenging and less threatening to students (Sirsch, 2003), as those schools look alike in social and organizational aspects. Additionally, the distance from the home place to secondary school found to have an impact on students' transition appraisals (Edwards, Zimmerman, Sitha, Williams & Kitamura, 2014). However, Kvalsund, (2000) failed to confirm those findings in Norwegian schools, as school type and distance did not contribute to students' transition appraisals.

Apart from school variables, research findings attribute problems in the transition to students' academic performance. Hakkarainen, Holopainen, and Savolainen (2013) found that students' mathematical and reading difficulties in elementary school, predicted transition perceptions. Along with the actual achievement in Mathematics and reading, the variable of students' implicit theories of intelligence, had a significant impact on achievement and motivation, predicting transition risks (Blackwell, Trzesniewski&Dweck, 2007). Although there is no consensus (Cantin&Boivin, 2004), factors like behavior, self-efficacy and emotional sensitivity found to be predictive of transition's risks and resilience, related to learning problems and disabilities (Baily & Baines, 2012). Thus, the transition might put challenges for any student, children with disabilities, are at particularly high risk of failing and having transitional problems (Carter, Clark, Cushing &Cennedy, 2005; Lightfoot & Bond, 2013).

Moreover, Gilison, Standage, and Skerington (2008) suggested that students' understanding of their impending transition is a multi-variable procedure. Self-regulatory beliefs about orienting and controlling their academic effort (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark &Kurlakowsky, 2001; Valentine, DuBois & Cooper, 2004), have a significant impact and mediated transition (Lazarus καιFolkman, 1987, p. 386). When the impending transition is studied, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and testing stress are significant predictors of students' perceptions (Sirsch, 2003; Zanobini&Usai, 2002).

"Intrinsic motivation" refers to the degree that students perceive their involvement in a task because of challenge, curiosity or a powerful volition to learn (Botsas&Padeliadu, 2003). During the transition, students motivated intrinsically have a "smooth" "move" to secondary school, expecting to master over complex and demanding learning content. Extrinsically motivated students respectively, tend to participate in learning tasks to compete with their classmates and gain social recognition, higher performance, and better grades, a fact fulfilled in secondary school.

Self-efficacy beliefs described as students' appraisals about their ability to complete a task, including students' certainty about possessing the necessary cognitive sources to overcome all obstacles and improve learning (Schunk, 2005). Those beliefs are subjective, but they constitute a powerful motivational construct, leading in setting advanced learning goals, using suitable strategies and finally succeeding (Botsas, 2013). High self-efficacy beliefs connected to successful transition procedures, as students are prepared motivationally to confront any demanding task in high school.

Finally, two components, a cognitive and an emotional one constitute test anxiety. First, anxiety refers to students' negative thoughts, leading to low academic performance. Second, the emotional component applies to affective and psychological appraisals about the anxiety they experience (Schunk, 2005). Students have to face more difficult, complicated, demanding in processing, testing procedures in secondary school, increasing test anxiety and threatening their transition.

The transition is a phenomenon regarding primarily students, but most of the studies in the field focused on school environment variables (Bates, 2013) and students, have not expressed their opinion (Akos&Galasi, 2004). Last fifteen years, researchers tend to shift their studies' focus to variables of students'

affective, psychological state and academic performance (Sirsch, 2003; Tilleczek& Ferguson, 2007). Most of the students were anxious to have experiences of their new school before they attend it; shaping expectations depended on various variables (Ashton, 2008).

In a new researchparadigm, based on cognitive-motivational transactional stress theory or cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1999), the transition is perceived as a temporary phenomenon that puts students in front of challenges or threats in academic, social and organizational context (new school's procedures) (Akos&Galassi, 2004; Sirsch, 2003). Challenge refers to students' appraisals that a stressful fact could potentially be an opportunity for academic, social and affective gains (Lazarus, 1999). On the contrary, the term "threat", outlines the appraisal of an inescapable fact that will be a bad situation or a loss (Lazarus, 1999). As their correlation is low (*r = -.05*) (Folkman& Lazarus, 1985) challenge and threat appraisals could be covariates and occur both at the very same time, for every student (Emvalotis, Katsis&Sideridis, 2006).

Conclusively, new methodological focus in studies of transition from elementary to secondary school, along with contradictory findings of school, academic and motivational variables that have a significant impact on the procedure of "move", clearly underline the necessity of new studies in the field.

This study aimed to examine the procedure of impending transition, focused in students' appraisals, personal characteristics and some variables concerning school organization.

The research questions were:

1. How elementary school students perceive their impending transition to secondary school?
2. Do school variables have an impact on transition?
3. Do students' academic and motivational variables influence transition?
4. Can a reliable model of relationships among school, academic and motivational students' characteristics and impending transition set up?

II. METHOD

Participants

Four hundred and thirty-four 6th graders attending elementary schools in Chalkidiki, a touristic and agricultural region of Northern Greece, took part in the study. Half of them (*N = 217*) were boys, and the rest were girls. Almost one-fourth of students were bilingual (*N = 118*).

Students' overall performance in 5th grade, along with language and mathematics performance in 6th grade presented in table 1.

Table 1: Performance in 5th grade, language and mathematics in 6th grade

	Performance			Total
	Excellent	**Very good**	**Good**	
5th grade	378	56	-	434
Language	331	101	2	434
Mathematics	324	100	10	434

Two hundred and thirty-four students attended 11 big schools, other 197 attended 18 general education schools, and 3 attended two schools with less than four teachers[1]. Thirty-eleven students will attend a secondary school in their hometown; sixty-six will have to go to a school near their home, while fifty-seven will have to travel more than 10 kilometers.

Measures

Following Sirsch's (2003) view of transition as a combination of challenges and threats, a translated and adapted version of the questionnaire *"The impending Transition to Secondary School Perceived as Challenge and Threat"* (ITCT) used, to examine the variables of transition. It consisted of 42 questions – statements. Twenty-one statements assessed whether students perceived their "move" to secondary school as a challenge. Thirteen of them referred to academic challenge (like *"I want to move to high school to show what I have learned"*) and eight to social challenge (like *"I want to move to high school because I can talk and play with good friends"*). In addition, twenty-one questions assessed students' appraisals of the threat of transition procedures. Thus, thirteen statements referred to academic threat (like *"I'm worried that next year in high school I will not be able to keep up with lessons"*) and other eight to social threat (like *"I'm worried that next year in high school my classmates will not like me"*). Students' responses were on a Likert type 4 grade scale.

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[1]In Greek elementary educational system, schools of distant and insular or mountainous regions could have one to three teachers, as students' number is limited. The typical Greek school has four to eight teachers. Nowadays, schools in little towns of more than 1000 habitats have from nine to twenty teachers, apart from foreign language, gymnastics, and other educators.

Cronbach's alphas were used to assess ITCT's reliability, and the questionnaire was internally consistent and reliable. Overall questionnaire alpha was α = .878 and particular scales' were $α_{AC}$ = .717 for academic challenge scale, $α_{SC}$ = .821 for social challenge, $α_{AT}$ = .892 for academic threat one and $α_{ST}$ = .857 for social threat respectively.

School variables were the elementary school type and the distance between student's home and secondary school. As mentioned above, in Greek educational system there are small, typical, and big elementary schools. Moreover, secondary schools settled only in towns and cities. Distance from students' home referred as "local", "near" (up to 10 kilometers from home) and "far" (more than 10 kilometers).

Variables of the "academic performance" factor were 5th grade's performance, 6th-grade language, and mathematics performance. Additionally, whether the student was bilingual, used as an academic variable.

Four translated and adapted subscales of *Motivated Strategies of Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)* (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia &McKeachie, 1991) used to study students' motivational characteristics. As researchers supported, it is possible and valid to use parts of the MSLQ questionnaire standing alone (Dunn, Mulvenon& Sutcliffe, 2012). Thus, translated subscales of intrinsic, extrinsic, self-efficacy ant test anxiety ones used.

All subscales found to be valid and consistent. The intrinsic motivation subscale was found to have $α = .779$, extrinsic motivation $α = .785$, while self-efficacy one had $α = .816$ and test anxiety one $α = .795$ respectively.

Procedures

Transition and motivation questionnaires, along with questions about personal variables like their performance grades, were completed online, in a google-docs mode, with the help and under the supervision of their teachers. Data were collected and transcribed in an IBM SPSS database.

III. RESULTS

Research question 1: How elementary school students perceive their impending transition to secondary school?

Students that took part in the study perceived transition from elementary to secondary school mostly as a high academic (M_{AC} = 3.20, SD_{AC} = 413) and a high social challenge (M_{SC} = 3.21, SD_{SC} = .567). Accordingly, they perceived it as a low academic (M_{AT} = 2.26, SD_{AT} = .671) and a low social threat (M_{ST} = 1.85, SD_{ST} = .657).

Moreover, some students had mixed perceptions of their transfer to secondary school. In order to study the mixed appraisals, means of transition dimensions were rounded to high (≥ *2.5*) and low (< *2.5*) values. Almost one-third of students perceived this environmental change as academic challenge and threat at the very same time. Regarding the social factor, 17% of students presented same mixed appraisals of transition (table 2). The dominance of a positive profile emerged. Sixty percent of students had high academic challenge and low academic threat appraisals, whereas seventy-one percent of them had high social challenge and low social threat ones
.

Table 2: Co-occurrence of perceived challenge and threat (N = 434)

Type of perception	%
AC+/AT-	59.45
AC+/AT+	34.10
AC-/AT+	2.30
AC-/AT-	4.15
Total	100.00
SC+/ST-	71.00
SC+/ST+	17.00
SC-/ST+	1.60
SC-/ST-	10.40
Total	100.00

AC+, AT+, SC+ or ST+   mean scores ≥ 2.5 (high academic/social challenge or threat)
AC-, AT-, SC- or ST-   mean scores from 1 to <2.5 (low academic/social challenge or threat)

Research question 2: Do school variables have an impact on transition?

Analyses of variance were conducted to examine the impact that school type and distance of the secondary school, had an on their transition appraisals. Data presented in table 3, supported the notion that students attending big schools had a more positive view of their "move" to secondary school. They perceived transition more as an academically and socially challenging endeavor. On the contrary, students from small schools have less positive appraisals as they perceived transition as an academic and social threat than a

challenging procedure, while students attending general education schools had rather fair appraisals, more positive compared to "small" schools students but more negative than their siblings of big schools.

Moreover, students that live more than ten kilometers away from school have more positive transition appraisals. Students that live near but not in the same town of high school considered the "move" to secondary school as an academic and social threat.

Effect sizes computed for every analysis of variance. As their values varied from $f = .110$ to $f = .221$ (all were < .250) we concluded that there was a small effect of school variables to transition appraisals (Cohen, 1988, pp. 285 – 287).

Table 3: Analyses of Variance and effects of school type and distance on transition appraisals

Challenge and Threat		Type of school				Distance		
		Small	Typical	Big		In town	Near	Far
AC	N	3	197	234		311	66	57
	M	3.08	3.14	3.27		3.16	3.25	3.33
	SD	.204	.354	.452		.429	.374	.332
	F	5.488				4.579		
	p	.004				.011		
	f*	.152				.149		
SC	N	3	197	234		311	66	57
	M	3.10	3.33	3.45		3.16	3.21	3.49
	SD	.083	.438	.639		.603	.446	.395
	F	10.726				8.094		
	p	.000				.000		

		1						
	f*	.221				.193		
AT	N	3	197	234		311	66	57
	M	2.64	2.33	2.19		2.23	2.47	2.19
	SD	.235	.673	.665		.674	.635	.653
	F	2.724				4.156		
	p	.067				.016		
	f*	.110				.139		
ST	N	3	197	234		311	66	57
	M	1.99	1.74	1.63		1.78	2.12	1.93
	SD	.217	.705	.595		.627	.644	.749
	F	8.323				8.032		
	p	.0001				.000		
	f*	.195				.193		

Research question 3: Do students' academic and motivational characteristics influence transition?

Respectively, analyses of variance conducted to study academic and motivational variables influence on transition appraisals. The variables of 5th-grade overall performance, performance in language and mathematics, whether the student was bilingual, consisted the academic variable group. Significant differences in transition perceptions were found among native speaking and bilingual students only in academic and social threat appraisals, with the latter having ones that are more negative. Accordingly, students with very good overall performance in 5th grade perceived their transition significantly as an academic and social threat compared to those with excellent performance (table 4).

The very same pattern of appraisals was found for language and mathematics performance in 6th grade. Lower performance students were significantly more negatively perceived their "move" to the secondary school as an academic and social threat than those with good performance (table 4).

Table 4: Analyses of Variance and effects of L1/L2, performance on transition appraisals

Challenge and threat		Greek language		5th grade overall performance			Language grade				Mathematics grade		
		L1	L2	Excellent	Very good		Excellent	Very good	Good		Excellent	Very good	Good
AC	N	316	118	378	56		331	101	2		324	100	10
	M	3.22	3.14	3.20	3.16		3.21	3.19	2.85		3.21	3.18	2.98
	SD	.427	.371	.420	.369		.419	.392	.633		.413	.362	.575
	F	2.913		.452			.879				1.534		
	p	.089		.502			.416				.217		
	f	.084		.032			.063				.084		
SC	N	316	118	378	56		331	101	2		324	100	10
	M	3.21	3.21	3.23	3.13		3.23	3.18	2.93		3.23	3.18	3.20
	SD	.582	.530	.560	.614		.568	.570	.101		.572	.552	.622
	F	.001		1.373			.497				.289		
	p	.976		.502			.609				.749		
	f	.010		.032			.045				.032		
AT	N	316	118	378	56		331	101	2		324	100	10
	M	2.	2	2.19	2		2.17	2.5	3.3		2.15	2.5	2.7

		18	.48			.70			4	5		8	8
	SD	.67	.62	.656	.602		.674	.563	.598	.667	.547	.697
	F	18.391		29.535		15.405			20.544		
	p	.0001		.001		.001			.0001		
	f	.207		.261		.268			.309		
ST	N	316	118	378	56	331	101	2	324	100	10
	M	1.78	2.05	1.81	2.08	1.81	1.97	2.56	1.78	2.06	2.18
	SD	.61	.73	.654	.635	.657	.642	.442	.641	.661	.638
	F	15.207		7.821		3.428			8.762		
	p	.0001		.005		.033			.0001		
	f	.188		.135		.128			.201		

Table 4: (continued):

		Brothers in high school	
Challenge and threat		Yes	No
AC	N	316	118
	M	3.22	3.14
	SD	.427	.371
	F	2.913	
	P	.089	
	f	.084	
SC	N	316	118
	M	3.21	3.21
	SD	.582	.530
	F	.001	
	P	.976	
	f	.0001	
AT	N	316	118
	M	2.18	2.48
	SD	.670	.623
	F	18.391	
	P	.0001	
	f	.063	
ST	N	316	118
	M	1.78	2.05

SD	.670	.623
F	15.027	
P	.0001	
f	.187	

Regarding students' motivation, analyses of variance were also conducted (table 5). Students with high intrinsic motivation significantly perceived their transition to secondary school as an academic challenge and threat at the same time. As for extrinsic motivation, a different pattern revealed. Students with high extrinsic motivation significantly perceived their transition not only as an academic and social challenge but as a threat as well.

A more predictable and expected pattern of appraisals towards transition was found for students' self-efficacy and test anxiety beliefs. Highly self-efficacious students tend to consider their "move" to secondary school as an academic and social challenge, while low self-efficacy ones perceived it as an academic threat. Accordingly, high-test anxiety believers tend to consider transition as an academic and social threat.

Effect sizes of self-efficacy to academic challenge ($f = .404$) and test anxiety to academic and social threat ($f = .573$ and $f = .550$ respectively) were very large (> .400). Apart from those strong effects found, all other effect size values presented very small to medium effect (from $f = .0001$ to $f = .380$).

Table 5: Analyses of Variance and effects of intrinsic, extrinsic, self-efficacy and test anxiety on transition appraisals

Challenge and threat		Intrinsic motivation		Extrinsic motivation		Self-efficacy		Test anxiety	
		Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
AC	N	18	416	81	353	87	347	227	207
	M	3.01	3.21	2.89	3.27	2.89	3.27	3.20	3.20
	SD	.326	.412	.443	.372	.444	.367	.419	.408
	F	3.921		62.325		70.177		.010	
	p	.048		.0001		.0001		.921	
	f	.095		.380		.404		-	
SC	N	18	416	81	353	87	347	227	207
	M	3.22	3.21	2.83	3.30	2.83	3.31	3.15	3.18
	SD	.478	.571	.622	.516	.665	.497	.618	.498
	F	.005		50.897		55.585		5.734	
	p	.944		.0001		.0001		.170	
	f	-		.343		.359		.085	
AT	N	18	416	81	353	87	347	227	207
	M	2.58	2.25	2.01	2.32	2.46	2.21	1.94	2.61
	SD	.536	.673	.513	.689	.665	.664	.563	.604
	F	4.370		14.538		9.605		141.334	
	p	.037		.0001		.002		.0001	
	f	.318		.185		.148		.573	
ST	N	18	416	81	353	87	347	227	207
	M	2.13	1.84	1.58	1.91	1.94	1.83	1.55	2.18
	SD	.768	.650	.535	.667	.757	.629	.472	.672
	F	3.289		17.959		1.995		130.508	
	p	.070		.0001		.159		.0001	
	f	.090		.204		.071		.550	

Research question 4: Can a reliable model of relationships among school, academic and motivational characteristics and impending transition set up?

Two path models were tested, one for academic and social challenge appraisals of students' transition to secondary school and one for threat ones. IBM Amos used to test two models. The first one, the path model of perceptions of transition as an academic and/or social challenge (figure 3) was valid and indicated a very good fit [$\chi^2(1) = .305$, $p = .581$, GFI = 1.000, NFI = .999, RFI = .989, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000].

Furthermore, the ratio of chi-square by degrees of freedom was lower than 2 [$\chi^2/df = .988 < 2$], indicating that the model is acceptable.

Figure 1: Predictive model for academic and social challenge appraisals of transition
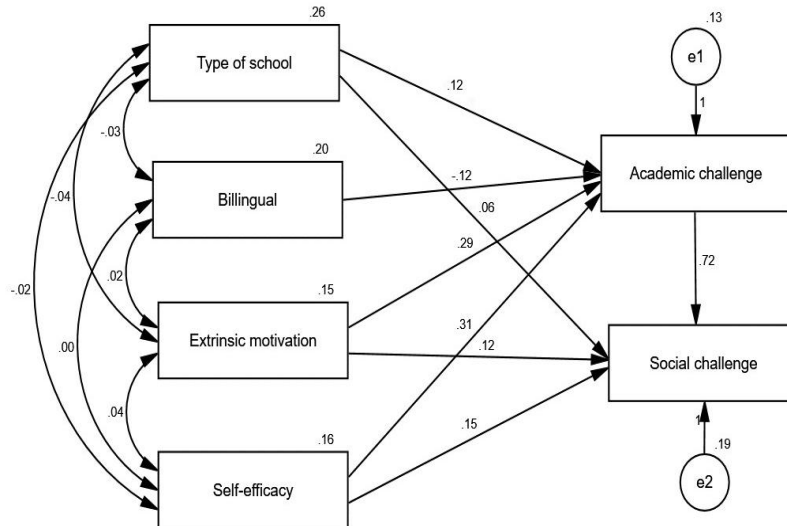
Accordingly, the path model for social (challenge and threat) appraisals of students was also valid and indicated a very good fit [$\chi^2(3) = 2.829, p = .419, GFI = .998, NFI = .995, RFI = .964, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000$]. Moreover the ratio of chi square by degrees of freedom were also lower than 2 [$\chi^2/df = .943< 2$] indicating that the path model is acceptable also.

Figure 2: Predictive model for academic and social threat appraisals transition
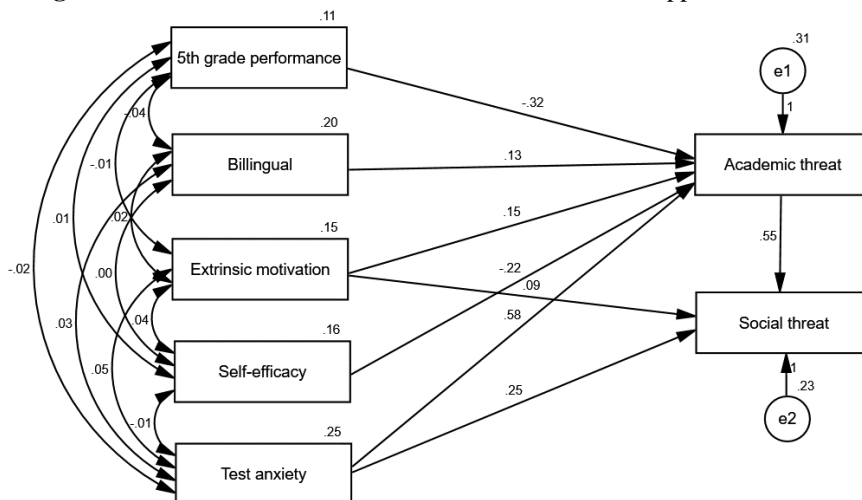
IV. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the impending transition of students from Greek elementary to secondary school and the impact that school, academic and motivational characteristics have in their transition appraisals. The methodological paradigm of Sirsch's (2003) study followed, based on a developmental and psychological view of life events.

This study's findings implied that the majority of elementary school senior students perceived impending transition to secondary school as an academic and social challenging process. "School" variables like school type and distance from secondary school found to have a rather positive impact on students' appraisals. Moreover, students' academic characteristics had also an impact on transition appraisals. Native language speaking students, with a very good overall performance in 5th grade, in 6th grade's language and mathematics, perceived their "move" to high school, more positively. As for motivational beliefs, high self-efficacious

students with low-test anxiety had more positive appraisals, while intrinsically and extrinsically motivated ones had mixed responses.

Studying students' transition from elementary to secondary school, as an academic and social challenge or threat is a valid appraisal context for senior elementary school students. Sirsch (2003) in her study in Wien schools found that students perceive their impending transition from elementary school to secondary school as a challenge or threat in academic and social context. Only some of them fear their "move" to a more demanding school, in the academic and administrative field, corresponding to our study findings. The present study's data implied that Sirsch (2003) was right. Senior elementary education students in Chalkidiki, perceived their transition more or less as Wien students did. Their appraisals were positive, as they viewed thetransition as a challenging endeavor, underlining their passage from childhood to adolescence.

The present study suggested two path models (one for challenge appraisals and one for threat ones) that outline the impact of school, personal and psychological characteristics of students to their transition perceptions. Those two models were found to be adaptive, applicable and describing sufficiently the relationships among variables.

The school variable found to have a significant impact in perceiving transition as an academic and social challenge was the type of school senior elementary students attended. Students attending big schools, perceived their transition to secondary school more positively than others did, as academic and organizational procedures in two schools are similar. They attend a rich, reformed curriculum with great resemblance to the secondary school program, as big elementary and secondary schools look alike in organizational aspects, having more teachers, practicing more educational programs and academic projects. This finding supported Greek government's decision to adopt big school's program for all elementary schools in Greece. Additionally, big elementary schools' social conditions seem to prepare students for their "move" to secondary school's different social web. Although Sirsch (2003) examined only secondary schools' type variables, she suggested the same pattern of students' appraisals. Students attending small schools had the most negative appraisal of all. Those schools placed in small villages that are remote, practicing an everyday program and instructional strategies that serve convenient but not so "rich" educational aims and contexts. Consequently, students attending small schools had negative appraisals about their transition.

Academic school variables like 5th-grade overall performance and bilingualism found to have a significant impact on students' appraisals of their transition to secondary school. Overall performance in 5th grade had a significant impact on how elementary school seniors perceived their transition, while lower performance in 5th grade connected with negative transition perceptions. Especially learning difficulties, affect students' academic self-concept and that in turn affects transition appraisals respectively (Gniewosz, Ecles&Noack, 2013). As high academic performance in secondary school is one of the primary social success indicators in adolescence, the transition to a more difficult and academically demanding school environment perceived as a severe social threat for students with learning problems and low performance.

A remark that has to be done is about the impact of academic appraisal had to social ones either in "challenge" or in "threat" model. A plausible conclusion could be the dominant role of academic knowledge and performance in the Greek secondary school. Senior elementary school students perceived their academic performance as a "vehicle" to their social recognition, as it is presented in the "challenge" model. Moreover, they think that academic difficulties would predict problematic social status (bad grades lead to isolation from peer groups). Of course, successful students have more opportunities to pose an advanced social status, but academic success is not expected to be the only counting variable. Methodologically, this finding could be the result of not considering students' self-esteem, as adolescents usually find their social position in peer groups processing much more personal characteristics, than only academic performance.

Along with students with difficulties, others that are bilingual also had negative transition appraisals. Students that had not Greek language as their L1 perceived their "move" to secondary school as an academic threat. Being, most of them, students with academic problems, are worried that they will fail in high school. As their teachers in the elementary school have the same view about their strengths and weaknesses, their academic failure perspective grows and strengthens their negative transition appraisals. Some researchers suggested that bilingualism may intensify negative transition outcomes, as environmental conditions, like low socioeconomic status and language problems potentially lead to negative transition appraisals (Akos&Galassi, 2004; Hughes, Im, Kwok, Cham & West, 2015). Moreover, Botsas and Sandravelis (2013) found that there was a disproportionality of bilingual students in the learning-disabled group, concerning teachers' evaluations. Thus, the presence of such teachers' biases could influence students' self-efficacy and transition academic appraisals.

Another interesting finding was that having the Greek language as L2 did not have an impact on their social challenge or threat appraisals of transition. This result supported Graham and Hill's (2003) findings regarding the variation of ethnicity groups in transition perception, as they proposed that bilingualism had a significant impact only on academic appraisals. However, Sirsch (2003) suggested that different "mother tongue" influenced the social challenge and threat appraisals. Bilingual students were concerned about their

academic performance in secondary school. Contrary to Sirsch (2003), bilingual students in Chalkidiki seem be better integrated into the elementary school environment, than urban children in Wien, having no concerns about their social status in high school.

Apart from school and academic performance variables, the findings of the impact of motivational characteristics on how senior elementary school students perceive their transition to secondary school were interesting too. Sirsch (2003), along with Zanobini and Usai (2002) proposed that motivational variables, like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and test anxiety, are significant predictors of students' perceptions of their transition. Our findings were in the same line, supporting the high importance of motivational variables.

Only intrinsic motivation's impact on impending transition appraisals did not reach significant levels. As Zanobini and Usai (2002) supported, students, become more and more negative about their schools and themselves during their transition (p. 206). Following self-determination theory's explanation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991) students become more anxious, only interested in their performance and consequently their social recognition. This specific view could be a plausible explanation of the insignificant role of intrinsic motivation and significant one of extrinsic motivation. As they become less intrinsically motivated, students in transition expect to compete with their classmates, getting better grades in a new competitive school environment. Our findings supported Zanobini and Usai's suggestions of the impact that intrinsic motivation has not and extrinsic has to transition appraisals.

Extrinsic motivation influenced the academic and social challenge and threat appraisals. The contemporary theory of goal orientation could be a plausible explanation for this finding. Elliott and his colleagues (Elliott & Thrash, 2002; Botsas&Padeliadu, 2003) proposed that "performance orientation" which corresponded to extrinsic motivation forms two distinct groups of students. The first, "performance approach", connected to high performance, high grades, and social recognition. Students with "performance approach" orientation, perceived transition as an academic and social challenge. Others, in the second orientation group, "performance avoidance" one, are oriented to avoid effort and consequent failure, but related to social isolation. The so-called "avoidance" group included students that having difficulties, perceived their transition as an academic and social threat.

Self-efficacy also found to be a crucial variable for students' transition appraisals. As self-efficacy shares a significant portion of variance with other motivational constructs, like goal orientation and self-regulation processes (Botsas, 2013) it is natural to have an impact either in academic or in social appraisals. Additionally, self-efficacy, being the students' appraisals of what they could achieve regarding ability and strategy use (Linnenbrink&Pintrich, 2003) significantly related to academic success expectancies, either mastering knowledge or getting better grades (Bandura, 1986; Buttler, 1998). The latter considered a manifestation of self-efficacy relationship to extrinsic motivation, referring to the students' effort of getting better grades and social recognition (Linnenbrink&Pintrich, 2003; Tollefson, 2000).

Schunk and Pajares (2001) suggested that self-efficacy was associated with school transition appraisals. Additionally, Eccles and her colleagues supported the emergence of several changes in students' self-efficacy beliefs during "moving" to another school environment (Schunk, 2012). They found a decline in self-efficacy of students transited to secondary school. However, Schunk (2012) supported that, self-appraisals, including self-efficacy, improved as a developmental outcome of adolescence. High self-efficacious students believe that they can accomplish difficult and demanding tasks in high school, having positive academic and social perceptions and less negative ones of their transition to secondary school. This view supported by our findings as high self-efficacious students perceived their transition highly as an academic and social challenge.

Self-efficacy had a direct and significant impact on social challenge appraisals too. This finding implied that self-efficacy and its relationship to academic performance were very strong. Students guided by positive self-beliefs of their abilities were motivated either to master knowledge or to get better grades. They know that in a more demanding school environment like high school, they must demonstrate their abilities in a strict testing context, to be successful in academic and social context. However, they also are convinced that they can succeed, regarding their self-efficacy beliefs and their actual abilities. Contrary to challenging appraisals, self-efficacy had a rather indirect impact through extrinsic motivation on social threat perceptions. As Botsas, Kotoulas and Botsas (2012) suggested, low self-efficacious students, face academic difficulties and worry about getting low grades and doing worse in tests. They have a lot of concerns and doubts about their ability to be successful students and popular in adolescents' groups.

Likewise, self-efficacy beliefs had an indirect impact on social threat appraisal through test anxiety beliefs. Students with low self-efficacy believe that they will face problems in high school, as they have to be continually tested, in a more difficult and strict, resulting in lower grades, along with little social recognition and approval. As students with difficulties are motivationally vulnerable, they feel high-test anxiety. Possibly, those students managed to "survive" of failure in a more pedagogically driven context, such as elementary school, but fail to do so in the strict and full of demanding test procedures high school. Students with difficulties are aware

of this fact, and consequently, they perceive their transition to secondary school as a threatening procedure, academically and socially (Schunk, 2005). Also, Sirsch (2003) presenting her model of relationships underlined that test anxiety had a significant impact not only in academic but in social threat appraisals respectively.

As school and personal variables could not be, improved dramatically, motivational ones could be the target of pedagogical interventions that would support senior elementary students before, during and right after their transition to secondary school. Sirsch (2003) supported a combination of instructional programs that would inform students about instructional, organizational and social aspects of high school along with supportive interventions of their academic performance, self-esteem, motivation and affective states (Bates, 2013; Graham & Hill, 2003; Hanewald, 2013). This pedagogical context of intervention has to be particularly targeted students "at risk" of transitional problems, like those with difficulties, caused either by special educational needs or bilingualism. As their performance is usually low and their transition appraisals are negative, they would supported by the interventions of their self-esteem, motivation and academic performance, strengthening (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Carter, Clark, Cushing &Kennedy, 2005; Choi, 2012).

Another concern and priority could be the pedagogical context and practice of high school. Teachers and education policymakers have to focus their actions to make high school procedures less threatening and causing transitional problems to students. Differentiated instruction and more adapted way of assessment could be helpful for students' "smooth" and without problems transition from elementary to secondary school (Botsas&Sandravelis, 2013; Tomlinson, 2001).

To sum up, Sirsch (2003) was right. The studying transition from elementary to secondary school, as an academic and social challenge or threat is a valid appraisal context for senior elementary school students (Ashton, 2008). Variables like school type, academic performance, along with factors like extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and test anxiety had a significant impact on students' transition perception.

V. LIMITATIONS

Other psychological and personal variables like self-esteem and its dimensions along with family involvement in school could be examined. Those variables and their interrelations could be inserted in the models presented in this study, to become more adaptable. Although, there are a significant number of interacting variables that influence everyday instruction and consequently the transition to high school, some of them are noticeable significant.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could examine the impact of instructional interventions, measuring students' appraisals before and after interventions. Those studies could have a significant pedagogical and prevent failure and rough transition value.

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