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Research article

## The Role of Interpersonal and Intergroup Attitudes in Interaction Strategies of Russian and Tajik Students in Tajikistan

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**Abstract.** The aim of this paper is to examine the role of interpersonal (liking, disliking and interpersonal trust) and intergroup attitudes (trust towards both Russians and Tajiks, social distance to both Russians and Tajiks) in interaction strategies (cooperation and competition) of students of Tajikistan. To this end, the authors conducted a correlation study in a Russian-language school in Tajikistan with both Russian and Tajik students. Data were collected using self-report measures of trust, social distance and interaction strategies, as well as sociometric indexes of liking and disliking. The sample consisted of Russians ( $N = 51$ , males = 51%) and Tajiks ( $N = 74$ , males = 60%) from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The mean age of the sample was 16.20 ( $SD = 0.86$ ). For the Tajik students, as representatives of the ethnic majority, the intergroup attitudes were identified as important factors in choosing the interaction strategies. High perceived school status and lower cultural distance with Russians facilitated competition. For the Russian students, as representatives of an ethnic minority, the interpersonal attitudes turned out to be significant predictors of the interaction strategies. Thus, a high index of disliking and interpersonal trust, high perceived school status contributed to cooperation with classmates. The results of the study are discussed at the end of the article.

**Key words:** intergroup attitudes, interpersonal attitudes, liking and disliking, interaction strategies, cooperation, competition, school, Tajikistan, Russian students, Tajik students.

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### Introduction

Adolescence is an important stage in the development of intergroup relationships, which, as a rule, continue into adulthood (Wölfer et al., 2016). The aim of our study is to examine the role of intergroup and interpersonal attitudes of Russian and Tajik students in adolescent interaction strategies in schools of Tajikistan. How relations between students of these different ethnic groups will develop in the future is largely determined by the school environment. Therefore, it is

relevant and important to study the factors that promote and/or hinder positive intergroup relations.

Diverse classrooms have become places where students of different ethnic groups display a multifaceted range of attitudes both towards themselves or other group members and on an interpersonal level. Adolescents who have more contacts with their peers from immigrant families may have more positive attitudes towards them and higher levels of trust (Pettigrew, Tropp, 2006; Van der Linden et al., 2017). However, in society, and particularly in schools, building interethnic relationships can be complicated because the ethnic majority usually has more power and opportunities (Rigby, 2004). This imbalance can lead to stereotyping and prejudice against children from immigrant families. In addition, adolescence is characterized not by the search for harmony, but by the formation of the ‘self’ through comparison with others, which sometimes triggers rivalry (Cairns et al., 1988).

Several studies have noted that children’s interaction strategies in diverse classrooms are culturally conditioned (Cooley et al., 2019). Thus, communication among adolescents in a diverse classroom becomes a challenging task for students. Although there is a large body of research on the influence of intergroup contacts and friendship on out-group attitudes and beliefs (Pettigrew, Tropp, 2006), less is known about the role of interpersonal preferences (one-sided likes and dislikes) towards in-group and out-group members in the choice of interaction strategies. In this study, we identify interpersonal and intergroup factors related to the choice of certain interaction strategies in diverse classrooms in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan is one of the CIS countries, where intercultural context has undergone major changes since the collapse of the USSR. According to the latest census, there are 34,838 Russians in Tajikistan, compared to 388,481 in 1989<sup>1</sup>. The mass migration of the Russian-speaking population has triggered an identity crisis among the Russian population of Tajikistan. Galyapina’s (2021) study revealed the mediating role of perceived security in the relationship between acculturation strategies and life satisfaction. When the level of perceived security is low, the preference for assimilation strategies leads to low life satisfaction, and vice versa. Such attitudes of the Russian population in Tajikistan are accompanied by negative attitudes of the host population towards the Russian minority. According to the same survey, 62% of Tajiks have a negative attitude towards Russians in Tajikistan. This is largely due to the fact that, after gaining independence, the Republic of Tajikistan launched a new domestic policy associated with strengthening the national identity of the population. In this regard, the situation of the Russian population in Tajikistan remains difficult.

Despite this, interstate relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan are characterized as friendly. Currently, there are 39 Russian-language general education institutions in the republic with 27,000 students. There are also 160 general education institutions with 70,000 students studying in different languages. There are Tajik and Russian classes (in 144 schools), and Tajik,

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<sup>1</sup> Agency on statistics under the president of the Republic of Tajikistan. (2010). *Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Tajikistan 2010. Volume III. National composition, language proficiency and citizenship of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan*. URL: <https://www.stat.tj/en/electronic-versions-of-publications-archive/> (Accessed 20.12.2023)

Russian, and Uzbek classes<sup>2</sup> (in 16 schools). There are two Russian schools in the capital: No. 6 under the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and No. 14 under Russian Tajik Slavonic University (RTSU)<sup>2</sup>. Since September 1, 2022, five schools with Russian-language education under Russian educational programs have opened in Tajikistan in the cities of Dushanbe, Khujand, Bokhtar, Kulob, and Tursunzoda.

Thus, Russian children are actively present in the educational environment of Tajikistan. As a result, building favorable intercultural relations in the classroom is a serious challenge that requires study. On the one hand, the Russians in Tajikistan experience difficulties in adaptation due to the predominantly negative attitude of the Tajik population and lack of rights. On the other hand, the Tajiks also view the Russians in Tajikistan as a higher status and more competent group (Nikolaeva, 2015). For this reason, the subject of this study includes the mutual interaction strategies of the Tajik and Russian students. The choice of this country is due to the potentially complex nature of intercultural relations and the little-studied intergroup relations in the Tajik context. The study of interpersonal and intergroup relations in the school environment seems to us an important resource for building a correct interethnic policy.

### *Interaction strategies*

The interaction strategies are often studied within the framework of cooperative and competitive strategies in social psychology (Coleman et al., 2014). Interdependence theory suggests two types of interdependence: (1) positive, where the goals are linked in such a way that the amount or probability of goal attainment by an individual is positively correlated with the amount or probability of goal attainment by others; and (2) negative, where the goals are linked in such a way that the amount or probability of goal attainment by an individual is negatively correlated with the amount or probability of goal attainment by others.

When the social process approach is applied, cooperation and competition are considered as behavioral strategies of interaction in a conflict situation where an individual has to decide whether he or she wants to follow an integrating or a dominating strategy in a situation of common goals, resources and benefits (Coleman et al., 2014; Schellenberg, 1996; Rahim, Magner, 1994).

Although Smith notes that in real life, cooperation and competition are “often intertwined in behavior” (Smith, 1996), we concede that there may be a prevailing strategy in how people behave during social interaction. Cooperation — competition theory makes further predictions about different aspects of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup processes. Cooperation is characterized by effective communication, friendliness and mutual assistance, coordination of joint efforts and focus on the goal, as well as evaluations of the ideas and personalities of others. Competition is characterized by deterioration of communication, lack of assistance, hostility, and escalation of conflict; it struggles to demonstrate one’s own power (Coleman et al., 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Rahimi, S. (2017, May 24). *The Great and Powerful Russian Language in Tajik Realities*. News of Tajikistan ASIA-Plus. Asiaplustj.info. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20170524/velikii-i-moguchii-russkii-yazik-v-tadzhikskih-realiyah> (Accessed 12.12.2023)

The benefits of cooperative behavior have been found in a variety of social contexts, including education (Adams, Wu, 2002; Roseth et al., 2008). Research shows that students who prefer cooperation perform better academically, are more committed to school, and have more positive relationships with their classmates when cooperating with them rather than competing (Johnson et al., 1981; Roseth et al., 2008). Turning to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, cooperation was more common among students than competition (Adams R., Wu M., 2002). In OECD countries, 62% of students reported that their classmates cooperated with another, while only 50% of students reported that their peers competed with another. Reading scores, as an indicator of academic achievement, were higher among the students who were cooperative, while the students who were in competitive environments performed better in non-academic areas, and this was more pronounced among boys and students with more favorable attitudes towards competition than among girls and students with less favorable attitudes.

#### *Interaction strategies and intergroup attitudes*

The school provides a space for students from different ethnic groups to interact, including school projects, joint homework preparation, sports competitions, shared activities, *etc.* At the same time, students take into account their own and their peers' perceived goals (Kelley, Thibaut, 1978). Thus, students both from ethnic majority and minority groups face the problem of how to interact with students of other cultures. We, in turn, are interested in what factors contribute to the choice of a particular interaction strategy.

People's objectives may be interrelated due to various factors. Positive interdependence can arise from liking another, having to collaborate to share a resource or overcome a shared obstacle, having a shared membership or identification with a group whose fate is very important to them, or being influenced by their personality traits and cultural orientation. Similarly, negative interdependence may arise from individuals disliking each other, or from receiving rewards in a biased manner (Coleman et al., 2014).

People tend to exhibit reduced social behavior when their decisions affect individuals who do not share the same identity. This particular behavior is commonly referred to as in-group bias and is observed even when identity is artificially induced (Tajfel et al., 1971). Additionally, it has been shown that when group membership is made salient, individuals are less likely to cooperate or coordinate with out-group members compared to in-group members in strategic environments (Chen, Chen, 2011).

In general, reductions in prejudice towards out-groups are often observed in cooperative contacts. According to Van Oudenhoven et al. (1996), Dutch participants' attitudes towards Turkish individuals become more favorable when the ethnic background of the Turkish participants is made salient, and they engage in cooperative tasks. Similarly, Adachi et al. (2016) show that the attitudes towards out-groups are improved when the participants engage in cooperative gameplay with the out-group players from another university in violent video games. Conversely, negative contacts tend to elicit more hostile attitudes towards out-groups. The experimental results obtained by Xu et al. (2020) show that cooperative interactions with out-group members reduce in-group bias when it comes to charity,

while competitive interactions have a limited effect on in-group bias. This indicates that having a common goal alone can effectively reduce prejudice against out-group individuals.

One of the factors that can affect intergroup interaction is social distance. Social distance in this paper is considered within the framework of Bogardus' theory, which he substantiated as an individual's willingness to interact with group members at different levels of closeness (Bogardus, 1958). The degree of social distance towards a group demonstrates the desired level of closeness in relationships with group members as an indicator of attitudes towards this group (Crandall, Warner, 2005). A greater social distance towards a group indicates stronger prejudices against the group and less positive attitudes towards it (Crandall, Warner, 2005). Social distance among adolescents from different ethnic groups (cultural distance) can have various consequences. Some of them include feelings of isolation and alienation, conflict and prejudice, as well as reduced and impaired intercultural communication (Galchenko, Van de Vijver, 2007).

Social distance measures the degree of closeness in strategic interactions and has a profound impact on individual choices (Akerlof, 1997). People's willingness to cooperate with others often differs substantially depending on social distances. Laboratory experimental evidence suggests that team members behave more altruistically when they perceive a closer social distance from other members of their team (Gee et al., 2020). This difference is due to the difficulty of maintaining long-term interactions between groups with different social distances and the possibility of obtaining long-term benefits from them (Van Lange et al., 2011). The relationships between individuals and their friends or strangers can be regarded as different levels of social distance. In laboratory studies and field experiments, Binzel & Fehr (2013) have found that individuals trust friends more than strangers. Engelmann's research has also found that individuals are more concerned with their in-group rather than out-group reputation (Engelmann et al., 2013). In other words, the lower the social distance, the higher the degree of reciprocity and the more cooperation.

#### *Interaction strategies and interpersonal attitudes*

Interpersonal likes and dislikes from peers, in other words, social acceptance or ostracization, play an important role in the social life of adolescents (Veenstra et al., 2010). Adolescence is characterized by the mainstreaming of the importance of social connections (Gielsing et al., 2010), and peer acceptance is a significant factor in self-esteem. In one of the classic studies by Sherif et al. (1955), it was found that 11- to 12-year-old boys would exhibit more negative social behaviors in competitive settings, while these negative behaviors would decrease in cooperative settings. Thus, we can conclude that competition and cooperation affect the interpersonal relationships of adolescents.

There is evidence for the influence of sociometric status and children's social behavior. Gelb & Jacobson (1988) as well as Tryon & Keane (1991) conducted a study where they observed 9-year-old boys, both popular and unpopular, attempting to join ongoing competitive or cooperative game with two other children. Gelb & Jacobson (1988) found that the unpopular children were more inclined to break the rules during the competitive game, whereas such behavior was

less frequent in the cooperative game. In Tryon and Keane's study (1991), the popular children were more accepted than aggressive children during the competitive game. In addition, the popular children demonstrated greater use of socially oriented behavioral strategies (*e.g.*, expressing agreement with one group member) than the aggressive children when approaching the playing dyad.

Although friends are more cooperative and less competitive than enemies, some competitive children may have many friends. In a study by Steinkamp (1990), preschoolers who were rated as highly competent by their teachers were named friends by their classmates more often than were children rated as low in competence.

Tassi & Schneider (1997), likewise, assessed the competitive mindsets of 8-year-old children using sociometric methods. The popular children achieved significantly higher performance on task-oriented competition than the average-status children who, in turn, achieved significantly higher performance than the rejected children. Conversely, the unpopular rejected children achieved significantly higher performance on task-oriented competition than the average-status or popular children.

These results are confirmed by a sample of Russian students. For example, a study by Titkova et al. (2017) considered the factors of popularity and found that popularity or sociometric status is defined by the most students as inequality and/or superiority over others. Moreover, the popular students tended to demonstrate more prosocial behavior and help their peers.

#### *Interaction strategies and interpersonal and intergroup trust*

Trust is part of social capital, which is understood as a certain resource into which the relationships between participants in social interaction are converted, characterized by mutual responsibility, as well as trustworthiness and trust (Lebedeva, 2020; Putnam, 2009).

Research on collaborative behavior has revealed that trust among individuals plays a crucial role in developing cooperation (Acedo-Carmona, Gomila, 2019). Trust minimizes the costs associated with collaboration and serves as the foundation on which cooperative relationships are built. Interpersonal trust serves as a measure of the strength of individual connections. When trust among peers is high, relationships become closer and the inclination towards cooperation increases. Conversely, when trust among peers is low, relationships become more distant, resulting in diminished cooperative tendencies (Wang, Chen, 2011).

A study examining trust by analyzing ties in football teams showed that a trust-inhibiting structure was absent in the most successful team but present in the two less successful teams (Lusher et al., 2013). It was also found that accepted trust-generating mechanisms (*e.g.*, reciprocity) were highly present in the most successful team but less pronounced so in the less successful teams.

Therefore, at the individual level, interpersonal trust regulates people's everyday communication and actions towards one another, helping to overcome uncertainty and environmental risks. At the group level, it helps to reduce tensions, form group identities, contributes positively to cooperation, solidarity and tolerance, maintain resilience, and integrate society by supporting government institutions and their policies. By distributing additional rewards to members of more

effective groups, researchers have found that intergroup competition improves cooperation among group members (Burton-Chellew et al., 2010). In these studies, members of the same group have the same interests and suffer the same consequences of their actions. To win against other groups, the group members must cooperate with one another; therefore, intergroup competition improves cooperation among the members of the same group. According to group selection theory, groups with more altruistic intergroup behavior have a better chance of surviving the competition with other groups (Bowles, 2006); therefore, the group members exhibit more intragroup cooperative behavior than they usually do when facing intergroup competition. Research also suggests that there is some degree of in-group bias in the manifestation of trust. For example, people have been found to show bias towards members of their ethnic group in terms of both trust and cooperation. Moreover, the level of intergroup trust was higher in multicultural environments than in the homogeneous ones (Zhang et al., 2019).

*The present study of the role of interpersonal and intergroup attitudes in interaction strategies of Russian and Tajik students in Tajikistan*

Cooperative and competitive strategies, which are the focus of this paper, are studied within the framework of social interaction. These strategies are understood as a type of joint action or a way in which individuals or groups achieve a common goal and cooperate with one another (Coleman et al., 2014; Schellenberg, 1996). Peer relationships are interpersonal ones that are established and developed through social interaction between peers or individuals with similar levels of psychological development (La Greca, Harrison, 2005). Most studies point to the positive effects of cooperative behavior, which leads to better relationships within the group, effective communication and more harmonious relationships.

There is a large body of research in the field of cooperative and competitive behavior that examines these interaction strategies in relation to students' socio-metric status and peer acceptance and rejection. Generally, more popular and socially accepted students exhibit more cooperative behavior, while the opposite is true for unpopular students (Gelb, Jacobson, 1988; Tassi, Schneider, 1997; Titkova et al., 2017; Tryon, Keane, 1991). At the same time, peer relationships in a diverse school environment are fraught with some peculiarities. First of all, there is an in-group bias, which can lead to different types of behavior towards peers in the same group and those in another group. This is evidenced by numerous studies indicating more prosocial behavior towards peers from the same group (Chen, Chen, 2011; Tajfel et al., 1971; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1996). The available research results indicate that social distance with representatives of other cultures, as one of the indicators of intergroup attitudes, is significantly associated with cooperation and competition strategies. The smaller the distance, the greater the manifestation of cooperative behavior (Engelmann et al., 2013; Gee et al., 2020; Van Lange et al., 2011). The same is true for intergroup trust (Bowles, 2006; Burton-Chellew et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2019).

These findings lead us to our hypotheses. First of all, we assume that positive intergroup attitudes are positively related to cooperation strategy, whereas

negative ones are related to competition. Thus, we put forward the following hypotheses:

**H1a** — Social distance towards an out-group member is positively related to competition among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H1b** — Social distance towards an out-group member is negatively related to cooperation among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H2a** — Intergroup trust towards out-group members is positively related to cooperation among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H2b** — Intergroup trust towards out-group members is negatively related to competition among both the Tajik and Russian students.

We further hypothesize that positive interpersonal attitudes are positively related to cooperation, whereas negative ones are related to competition. Thus, we put forward the following hypotheses:

**H3a** — Sociometric likes are positively related to cooperation strategy among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H3b** — Sociometric dislikes are positively related to competition strategy among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H4a** — Interpersonal trust is positively related to cooperation strategy among both the Tajik and Russian students;

**H4b** — Interpersonal trust is negatively related to competition strategy among both the Tajik and Russian students.

Moreover, existing research suggests, on the one hand, a relationship between children's sociometric status and cooperation and competition strategies (Gelb, Jacobson, 1988; Tassi, Schneider, 1997; Titkova et al., 2017; Tryon, Keane, 1991). On the other hand, there is evidence that adolescents' sociometric likes and dislikes in diverse classrooms are associated with more positive intergroup attitudes (Bell et al., 2021). However, the role of these attitudes together has not been examined in the existing literature. Therefore, we state the question whether interpersonal or intergroup strategies are more predictive of cooperative and competitive interaction strategies and whether there are group differences.

It should be noted that the review of the existing literature allowed us to identify a number of confounding variables controlled for in our study, namely gender, age, socio-economic status (SES), and school status. Some studies have suggested that the negative aspects of competition decrease in high school, while the positive aspects increase (Johnson, Ahlgren, 1976). Boys in the higher forms gradually stop seeing competition as having the negative effects they had in the lower forms, whereas girls' tendency to compete continues into high school. In high school, competition among the girls contributes to positive self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, while there is virtually no relationship between cooperation and self-esteem among the boys.

Studies show that children from low-SES families learn school material more slowly than children from high-SES families (Morgan et al., 2008). Low



SES in childhood is associated with poor cognitive development, speech, memory, and social-emotional processing.

Finally, subjective school status is defined as a student's sense of place in the school hierarchy. Research shows that high school status is associated with higher academic achievement, popularity among peers, and less likelihood of engaging in aggressive behavior and school adjustment problems. Low school status may be associated with low self-esteem, behavioral problems, social isolation, and lower academic achievement (Evans, Eder, 1993). Thus, these variables were included and controlled in our study.

## Methods

**Sample.** The study was conducted in Tajikistan in April 2023 at a Russian-language school with both Russian and Tajik students. The sample consisted of Russians ( $N = 51$ , males = 51%) and Tajiks ( $N = 74$ , males = 60%) from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The mean age of the sample was 16.20 ( $SD = 0.86$ ). Students who indicated another ethnicity were excluded from the study.

**Procedure.** The survey was conducted face-to-face at a Russian-language school situated on the territory of Tajikistan. An online link to participate in the survey was distributed to the classes by the class teachers who had previously provided class lists to fill out the sociometry. The students filled out the online questionnaire on the Anketolog platform for approximately 40 minutes. The class teacher monitored the progress of filling out and provided explanations. The students were familiarized with the instructions, which stipulated their voluntary participation. Participation in the survey was free of charge. The Ethics Committee of the National Research University Higher School of Economics issued a conclusion of the compliance of the study to all ethical standards. Parental consent for the students' participation in the survey was obtained before the study began.

**Measures. *Interpersonal attitudes.*** *Interpersonal trust towards classmates* (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for Tajik students = 0.84, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for Russian students = 0.84, Russian students = 0.84) was studied using the modified Yamagishi scale (Yamagishi et al., 1999) as translated by Tatarko, Lepshokova and Dubrov (Tatarko et al., 2019). The scale consists of 11 questions on a 6-point Likert scale with options from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). Here are some examples of the statements "Most of my classmates are mostly kind and good", "There are a lot of hypocritical people in our class".

*Sympathy/antipathy* was studied using the sociometric status of students and adolescents by J. Moreno (Moreno, 1951). Each student was asked to choose up to five classmates from the class list, with whom he or she would or would not like to attend the same class in case their class was disbanded, with whom he or she would or would not like to prepare a joint school project, with whom he or she would or would not like to spend free time and summer holidays. The sociometric index was calculated according to the formula:  $SI = \text{Sum of the respondent's choices by others} / \text{Number of students in the class} - 1$ .

**Intergroup attitudes. Perceived cultural distance.** We used the scale from the MIRIPS project (Lebedeva, Tatarko, 2009), which included eight items to assess the distance with representatives of one's own culture and another culture (Tajiks and Russians). A number of statements were adapted to the student sample. Examples of the statements included as follows: "I have nothing against Russians/Tajiks: Living in the same city with me/Walking in my favorite parks/Being my neighbors/Studying in the same class with me/Being my friends/Going to extra clubs/studies together with me/Being members of my family/Being my boyfriend/girlfriend". The answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale with the following answer options from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). All the respondents were asked to assess the cultural distance with both Tajiks and Russians.

*Trust towards Tajiks/Russians* was studied with the following questions: "I trust my Russian classmates more than my Tajik classmates", "I trust my Tajik classmates more than my Russian classmates". The questions were assessed on a 5-point scale, from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

**Control variables.** *Socio-economic status* was assessed using the projective question: "Imagine a ladder with 10 steps. This ladder reflects how our Russian society is organized. At the top of the ladder are the people who are in the best position — they have the most money, are highly educated, and their work is most respected. At the bottom are the people who are in the worst position — they have the least money, little or no education, no job, or have a job that no one wants or respects. Now think about your family. Please indicate where you think your family would be on this ladder. Tick the step that corresponds to your family's position on this ladder (on a scale of 1 to 10)".

*School status* was assessed using another projective question: "Imagine a ladder with 10 steps. This ladder schematically represents your school. At the top of the ladder are the students who are most respected, having the highest grades and highest social status. At the bottom are the students who are not respected, who no one wants to communicate with, and who have the worst grades. Where would you place yourself on this ladder? Tick the step that would best match your position on this ladder (on a scale of 1 to 10)" (Marcinkovskaya, 1997).

The socio-demographic question concerned ethnic group, class, gender and age.

**Statistical analyses.** The data obtained from the results of this study were processed in the RStudio environment. The data were prepared for the analysis: missing values were identified and analyzed, the data were tested for normal distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and the internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. To assess the (direct) relationship between interaction strategies and interpersonal and intergroup attitudes, four hierarchical regression models were constructed, where the first block of regressors was represented by the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and social status, and the second block of regressors was represented by intergroup and interpersonal attitudes.

Results

Results of the relationship between interpersonal, intergroup attitudes and interaction strategies

Descriptive statistics showing the division of the Russian and Tajik students into two groups are presented in Table 1. The table also shows Pearson’s preliminary correlations between interpersonal and intergroup attitudes and interaction strategies as well as control variables. For the Russian students, the cooperation strategy was positively correlated with interpersonal trust ( $r = 0.29, p < 0.01$ ) and social distance towards the Tajiks ( $r = 0.24, p < 0.05$ ); and the competition strategy was positively correlated with trust towards the Russians ( $r = 0.21, p < 0.05$ ) and school status ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.05$ ), and negatively correlated with social distance towards the Russians ( $r = -0.26, p < 0.05$ ). For the Tajik students, the cooperation strategy was positively correlated with interpersonal trust ( $r = 0.53, p < 0.001$ ), social distance towards Tajiks ( $r = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ) and school status ( $r = 0.38, p < 0.01$ ); the competition strategy was positively correlated with school status ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ). In addition, universal correlations of trust towards the Russians and Tajiks as well as school status and SES were found. The remaining coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix of Interpersonal and Intergroup Attitudes and Interaction Strategies in the Russian and Tajik Students in Tajikistan

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Cooperation	3.98(1.12)/ 4.11(1.02)	—										
2. Competition	3.38(1.05)/ 3.78(1.04)	.173/ .558***	—									
3. Disliking	.55(0.59)/ .53(0.43)	-.180/ .000	.174/ -.090	—								
4. Liking	0.62(0.33)/ 0.71(0.40)	.062/ .142	-.146/ .134	-.288*/ -.280	—							
5. Interpersonal trust	3.50(0.53)/ 3.57(0.64)	.295**/ .534***	-.115/ .176	-.116/ -.220	-.174/ .261	—						
6. Trust towards the Russians	2.57(1.10)/ 2.30(1.02)	.147/ -.041	.210*/ .054	-.081/ .350*	.045/ -.037	.365***/ -.231	—					
7. Trust towards the Tajiks	2.30(0.92)/ .91(1.88)	.019/ .051	.192/ -.048	.146/ .023	.252/ .026	.018/ .111	.258*/ .338**	—				
8. Social distance towards the Russians	.28(1.01)/ 2.06(2.61)	.123/ .162	-.269*/ -.094	-.099/ -.005	.134/ .303*	.077/ -.041	-.212/ .209	-.431***/ .080	—			
9. Social distance towards the Tajiks	2.04(2.40)/ .91(1.88)	.244*/ .286*	.102/ .121	.042/ -.264	-.146/ .116	.025/ .440***	-.124/ -.401**	-.099/ .148	.034/ .093	—		
10. SES	6.97(1.89)/ 7.45(2.10)	.290**/ -.083	.173/ .001	.200/ -.147	-.165/ -.143	.217*/ -.029	.145/ -.169	.102/ -.147	-.064/ -.221	.207*/ .159	—	
11. School status	6.59(2.26)/ 7.50(2.20)	.207/ .389**	.262*/ .468***	.096/ -.380**	-.110/ .104	.210*/ .260*	.088/ -.267*	.099/ -.061	-.045/ -.156	-.035/ .314*	.552***/ .496***	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; the correlation coefficients for the Russian and Tajik students are given through slash, respectively.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions among the Tajik and Russian students for the cooperation and competition strategies. In these regression models, we controlled for the socio-demographic varia-

bles such as age, gender, SES, and school status. These variables were included in the regression in the first step. The second step included interpersonal attitudes (liking, disliking, and interpersonal trust) and intergroup variables (social distance towards the Russians and Tajiks and trust towards the Russians and Tajiks). Visual graphs showed no violation of homoscedasticity and normality of residuals, nor did the predictor variables show significant multicollinearity with VIFs ranging from 1.04 to 1.47 ( $M = 1.17$ ).

Thus, no significant effects were found for the cooperation strategy among the Tajik students (Table 3). For the competition strategy, we found a positive significant effect of school status ( $b = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) in Model 1. This effect was also appeared in Model 2 and explained, together with social distance towards the Russians ( $b = -0.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), 23% of the variance in the competition strategy. Consequently, we rejected the hypotheses **H1a-H2b**.

Table 2

**Regression Models Predicting Cooperation and Competition  
in the Sample of Tajik Students**

Predictors	Cooperation		Competition	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender: female	0.43	0.25	-0.31	-0.14
Age	-0.17	-0.23	0.16	0.13
SES	0.17	0.20	-0.02	-0.11
School Status	0.13	0.19	0.34*	0.35*
Liking	-	-0.01	-	-0.09
Disliking	-	-0.16	-	0.14
Interpersonal trust	-	0.01	-	-0.14
Social distance towards the Russians	-	0.12	-	-0.24*
Trust towards the Russians	-	0.14	-	0.17
Adjusted R2	0.09*	0.06	0.11*	0.23**
F	2,86	1.47	3.35	2.95

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

The cooperation strategy of the Russian students was positively related to school status in Model 1 ( $b = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and school status ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), disliking ( $b = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and interpersonal trust ( $b = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in Model 2. These variables explained 43% of the variance in the cooperation strategy. These results reject **H3b** and support **H4a**. The competition strategies of the Russian students were related negatively to SES ( $b = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and positively to school status ( $b = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Both of these social-demographic variables explained 24% of the variance in the competition strategy Model 1. Similar effects were also found in Model 2, thus explaining 27% of the variance in the competition strategy. It showed neither significant results nor support for our hypotheses.

Table 3

**Regression Models Predicting Cooperation and Competition  
in the Sample of Russian Students**

Predictors	Cooperation		Competition	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender: female	0.42	0.34	−0.38	−0.02
Age	−0.12	0.03	−0.04	−0.10
SES	−0.29	−0.11	−0.31*	−0.36*
School Status	0.45**	0.33*	0.63***	0.62***
Liking	–	−0.03	–	0.03
Disliking	–	0.37*	–	0.01
Interpersonal trust	–	0.59***	–	0.21
Social distance towards the Tajiks	–	0.07	–	−0.13
Trust towards the Tajiks	–	−0.08	–	−0.11
Adjusted R2	0.15*	0.43***	0.24**	0.23*
F	3.28	4.46	5.12	2.39

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Discussion**

In this article, we conducted a theoretical analysis of studies on the interaction strategies and factors that different publications consider important in choosing certain modes of communication. To this end, four pairs of research hypotheses and one research question were formulated. The research question concerned whether the interpersonal or intergroup strategies are more predictive of cooperative and competitive interaction strategies and whether there are group differences.

Let us now consider the results of our empirical study. Subsequently, testing our hypotheses, we found that in the Tajiks (the ethnic majority in Tajikistan), the competition strategy is determined by the higher perceived school status and lower social distance towards the Russians. Thus, we see the absence of the role of interpersonal attitudes in the choice of the competition strategy. Applying a socio-cultural approach to the study of intergroup relations at school, we can conclude that the Tajiks have more power and higher social status in the school hierarchy (Rigby, 2004). The relationship found between the perceived school status and competition is valid for this judgment. Students with higher status tend to be leaders and may have sufficient resources to compete. Moreover, we have examined the competitive strategy within the framework of interdependence theory, which postulates that ‘a participant in social interaction finds enough strength and power to pursue his or her goals independently, without considering the interests of peers (Kelley, Thibaut, 1978). Interdependence theory suggests that the presence of power has an impact on the level of vulnerability and dependence between individuals. In particular, those who experience a sense of powerlessness are more vulnerable and dependent on others, as they actively strive for a sense of safety and protection (Kelley, Thibaut, 1978). People with low power tend to seek closer social relationships, whereas people with high power can afford to remain relatively independent of others and need to rely less on others for resources and support. Some research results suggest that individuals with high power are more

likely, than those with low power, to prefer to play and work alone (Lammers et al., 2012). In addition, power reduces the need for affiliation, i.e., high-status individuals indicate that maintaining close contact with others is less important to them (Waytz et al., 2015), whereas low-status individuals report greater interest in establishing new friendships (Case et al., 2015).

Our results obtained are inconsistent with existing evidence on this issue. Several studies show that both high social status and competitive orientation are correlated with greater social distance (Engelmann et al., 2013; Evans, Eder, 1993; Gee et al., 2020; Van Lange et al., 2011). However, rivalry can be beneficial for children and adolescents, helping them develop their self-esteem and identity among their friends at school, sports and other social events. Later in life, rivalry between friends may take the form of competition for business partners, job promotions, or even friendly competition during leisure time.

Research on the effects of competition on friendship also suggests that competition is an inevitable part of being human and that social comparisons between significant others are necessary for an individual to compare his or her achievements with those of others in order to gain insight into his or her level of mastery (Tassi, Schneider, 1997). Some studies show that during adolescence, men are more likely to be aggressive and competitive. Similar results obtained by Johnson and Ahlgren suggest that boys in high school no longer consider competition to be a bad thing (Johnson, Ahlgren, 1976). Furthermore, it has been found that competition as a form of interaction is certainly associated with the need to prove one's own superiority over others but does not always lead to conflicts between friends or the end of friendships (Schneider et al., 2005).

We can observe a different situation in the example of the Russian students in Tajikistan. For them, as an ethnic minority, interpersonal attitudes play an important role in choosing cooperative behavior to a greater extent, namely a high index of disliking and interpersonal trust, as well as a perceived high status at school support the choice of cooperation in interaction with classmates. The preference for cooperation with a high disliking index indicates that, if classmates reject a member of their class, it is possible to build relationships and restore reputation only by offering cooperation. It should be noted that this coping strategy works provided that the Russian students feel a high level of interpersonal trust towards the class and perceive their school status as high. The last two indicators may lead us to the idea that the Russian minority is oriented towards successful adaptation to the new context. Coping strategies are defined as specific voluntary actions that an individual takes to successfully adapt and mobilize personal resources when faced with the demands of a stressful situation (Compas et al., 2001).

Adolescents utilize a wide range of coping strategies to deal with stress in their everyday lives. Ayers et al. (1996) identified four subtypes of coping in adolescents using confirmatory factor analysis: active coping strategies (*e.g.*, problem solving and decision making), distraction coping strategies (*e.g.*, exercise and oth-

er distracting activities), support-seeking coping strategies, and avoidant coping strategies. Few studies have examined peer selection and socialization processes related to coping and association with peers who exhibit positive social and academic behaviors. However, it is clear that positive coping such as collaborating with peers and making joint decisions lead to more favorable outcomes in terms of adaptation. Given that minority adolescents can feel trusted in the classroom, it is likely that positive coping can be used to reduce disliking among peers.

### Conclusion

We conducted a study on the role of interpersonal and intergroup attitudes in choosing interaction strategies among the Tajik and Russian students in diverse classrooms in Tajikistan. We found that the competitive strategy of the Tajiks predicted a smaller social distance towards the Russians. In contrast, the cooperative distance of the Russians was predicted by interpersonal attitudes, *i.e.*, the sociometric status of disliking and the high level of interpersonal trust. Notably, the school social status was positively related to both the cooperative and competition strategy in both groups. Thus, we found that the Russian students, as an ethnic minority, tend to rely more on the personal level, whereas the Tajik students rely on the intergroup level.

This study falls into the current topic of intergroup relations in diverse classrooms. Since school is an important platform for socialization, growth and relationship building, such research remains relevant.

Based on the results of our study, the following *recommendations* can be formulated:

Sociometric data can be valuable for class teachers in diagnosing socially rejected students, assessing the classroom atmosphere, and monitoring changes in interpersonal relationships of students at different stages of their education. The results of interaction diagnostics can serve as a basis for organizing effective group work, taking into account the ethnocultural aspect. In addition, the data obtained can be used to develop policies aimed at improving the school climate, identifying informal leaders, and reducing the level of conflicts in the classroom.

The study has its *limitations*: it was conducted only in one Russian-language school in Tajikistan; not all high school classes were studied due to exam preparation; teachers, as experts well acquainted with the students' relationships in the classroom, were not involved; and the ethnic composition of the classes was not considered as an additional variable explaining students' strategy choices.

*Further research directions* include studying other cultural contexts in the post-Soviet space, increasing the sample by involving students from different grades of middle and high school (from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade) and schools with different status (public schools, schools where the number of immigrants exceeds the ethnic majority, specialized schools, schools with different ratings), as well as expanding the range of participants in the educational process, including parents and teachers in the research.

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Исследовательская статья

## Роль межличностных и межгрупповых установок в выборе стратегий взаимодействия в поликультурных классах в Таджикистане

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**Аннотация.** Данное исследование направлено на изучение роли межличностных и межгрупповых установок в выборе стратегий взаимодействия школьников в поликультурных классах Таджикистана. Стратегии взаимодействия рассматриваются с точки зрения поведенческих стратегий сотрудничества, соперничества, используемых школьниками русской и таджикской групп. Исследование проводилось в русскоязычной школе Таджикистана с участием как русских, так и таджикских школьников. Выборка состояла из русских ( $N = 51$ , мужчин — 51 %) и таджиков ( $N = 74$ , мужчин — 60 %) с 9 по 11 класс. Средний возраст выборки составил 16,20 лет ( $SD = 0,86$ ). Для таджикских школьников, как представителей этнического большинства, межгрупповые установки были выявлены как важные факторы выбора стратегий взаимодействия. Высокий воспринимаемый школьный статус и меньшая культурная дистанция с русскими способствовали конкуренции. Для русских студентов, как представителей этнического меньшинства, в свою очередь, межличностные установки оказались значимыми предикторами стратегий взаимодействия. Так, высокий индекс антипатии и межличностного доверия, высокий воспринимаемый школьный статус способствовали сотрудничеству с одноклассниками. Результаты исследования обсуждаются.

**Ключевые слова:** межгрупповые установки, межличностные установки, симпатия и антипатия, стратегии взаимодействия, сотрудничество, конкуренция, школа, образовательная психология

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