



“Dodging potholes on the academic road”:

A LONGITUDINAL INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL REQUIREMENTS
AMONG THE FIRST YEAR AT THE UNIVERSITY

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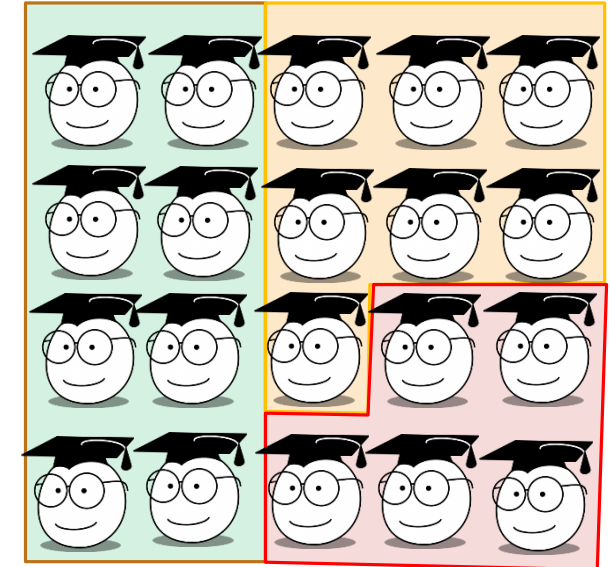
Transition to Higher Education

Challenging transition

- In Belgium:
 - Fail the year (+/-35 %)
 - Leave university (+/-25 %) (Droesbeke et al., 2008)

Important number of adjustment challenges (Trautwein & Bosse, 2014)

- Facing heightened academic requirements
- Conciliating various aspects of daily-life
- Developing an autonomous learning
- Managing the competition
- Dealing with new administrative rules
- Building a new social network



Social adjustment: a crucial challenge of the transition

Theoretical importance:

Tinto's model of student departure (1997)

Social integration = important determinant of intention to persist and involvement

Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017)

Belonging = direct predictor of student's motivation and engagement

Empirical evidences:

Significant direct impact on motivation, engagement and persistence (Kahu, 2013, Krause & Coates, 2008)

More challenging for students with from humble background (Harackiewicz et al., 2014)

Weak effect ($p=.03$ to $.09$) on academic achievement (Richardson et al., 2012)

A positive effect to nuance (Rientes et al., 2012)

Quantitative evidence of an ambivalent effect (De Clercq, Galand & Frenay, submitted)

The effect of social integration is not the same for every students

Strong + effect for students coming from an humble SES background

0 to - effect for other students (overconfident)

Qualitative evidence of an ambivalent effect (De Clercq, Roland, Brunelle, Galand & Frenay, 2018)

Important lever for motivation and engagement for some students

I042: « We were on the same wavelenght, we have to do it well! We were constantly helping each other and their is no doubt that it was thank to them that I passed the year »

Impede student's adjustment of other students

I102: « We were all in the same situation. It was a mass effect. Somebody said 'let's have a drink' and everyone followed. We pulled each other down and we all failed the year.»

A need for further investigation

The impact does not lie in the level of integration but in the quality of the social group (Tinto, 2006)

- Further investigation of the integration process is needed → Network analysis (De Clercq & Roland, 2018)

The social layer of academic adjustment does not only lie in the contact with peers (Davidson & Wilson, 2013)

- Better clarification of the dimensions of social challenges to the transition

The taxonomy of critical requirements (Trautwein & Bosse, 2017)

- Four dimensions of institutional requirements: Social, Personal, Content-related & Organisational
- Four subdimensions of social requirements (De Clercq, Van Meenen & Frenay, submitted)
 1. Relationships with students and teamwork
 2. Relationships with teachers
 3. Social climate
 4. Study choice justification

Purpose of the study

- Provide a more detailed investigation of social challenges of the transition to Higher Education
 - Four subdimensions of social requirements
 - With traditional achievement correlates
 - Background factors
 - Motivational factors
- Examine the impact of social challenges at different moments of the first-year at the university

Sample and measures

1,298 freshmen from 12 study programs

Mean age= 19 years old

56% of girls

Self-reported questionnaires at two moments:

At the end of the first semester (early adjustment – T1) and at the end of the second semester (T2)

1. Background variables

Past performance = Highschool grade at the end of secondary education

Socioeconomic status = Parent's education

Informed choice = Number of sources consulted to proceed to the study choice

Sample and measures

2. Motivational factors

Courses Value (12 items T1: $\alpha=.82$, T2: $\alpha=.84$)

Self-efficacy beliefs (14 items, T1: $\alpha=.86$, T2: $\alpha=.87$)

Behavioral engagement (4 items, T1: $\alpha=.72$, T2: $\alpha=.69$)

3. Social requirements = Perceived difficulty for the student to manage social requirements

Students relationship: “I have difficulties to have contact with other students” (3 items T1: $\alpha=.78$, T2: $\alpha=.76$)

Teachers relationship: “I have difficulties to ask teachers for feedback on my work” (3 items T1: $\alpha=.85$, T2: $\alpha=.85$)

Social climate: “I have difficulties to handle the competition I my study program” (3 items T1: $\alpha=.73$, T2: $\alpha=.71$)

Choice justification: “I have difficulties to justify my study choice in front of my friends and relatives” (2 items: T1: $\alpha=.89$, T2: $\alpha=.83$)

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Three models investigated using Amos 20.0

Model 1: Background variables → Social requirements in T1

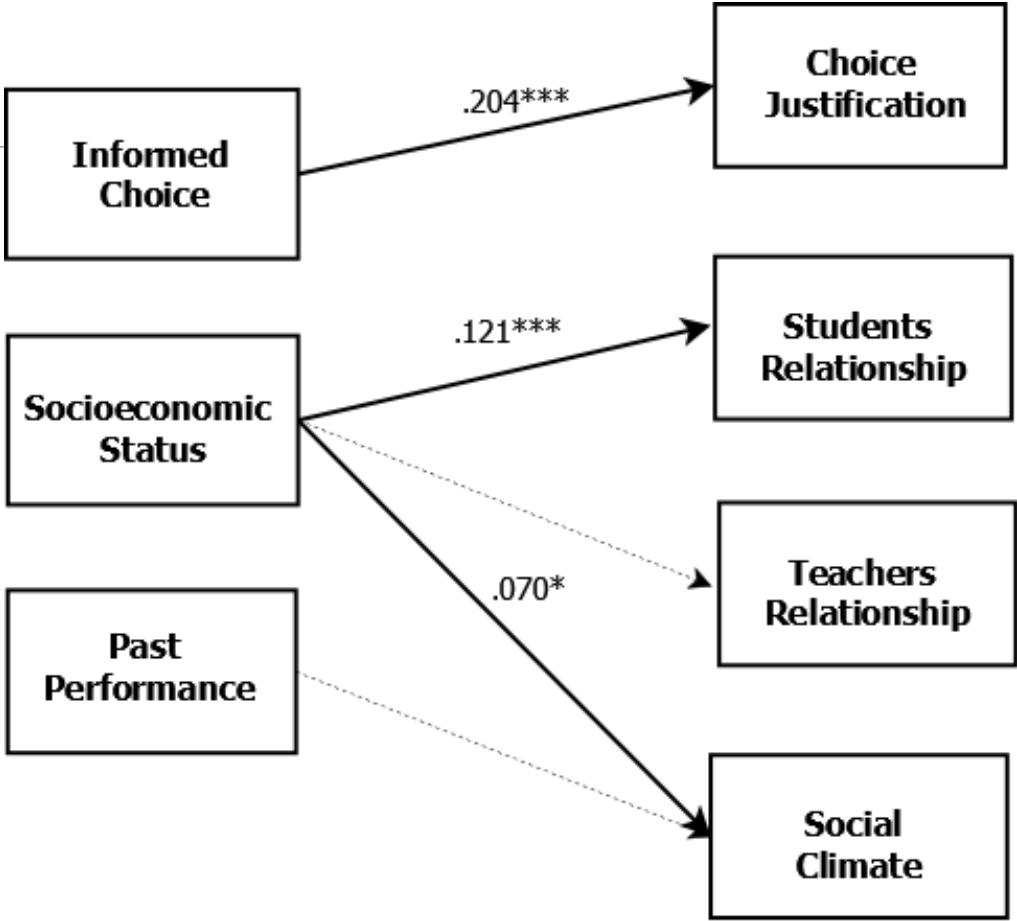
Model 2: Social requirements and motivational factors T1 → Academic achievement in T1

Model 3: Social requirements and motivational factors T2 → Academic achievement in T2

Fit indices:

- χ^2
- Pclose (>.05 → OK)
- RMSEA (<.08 → OK)
- CFI (>.90 → OK)
- PCFI (<.60 → OK)
- AIC (The lowest)

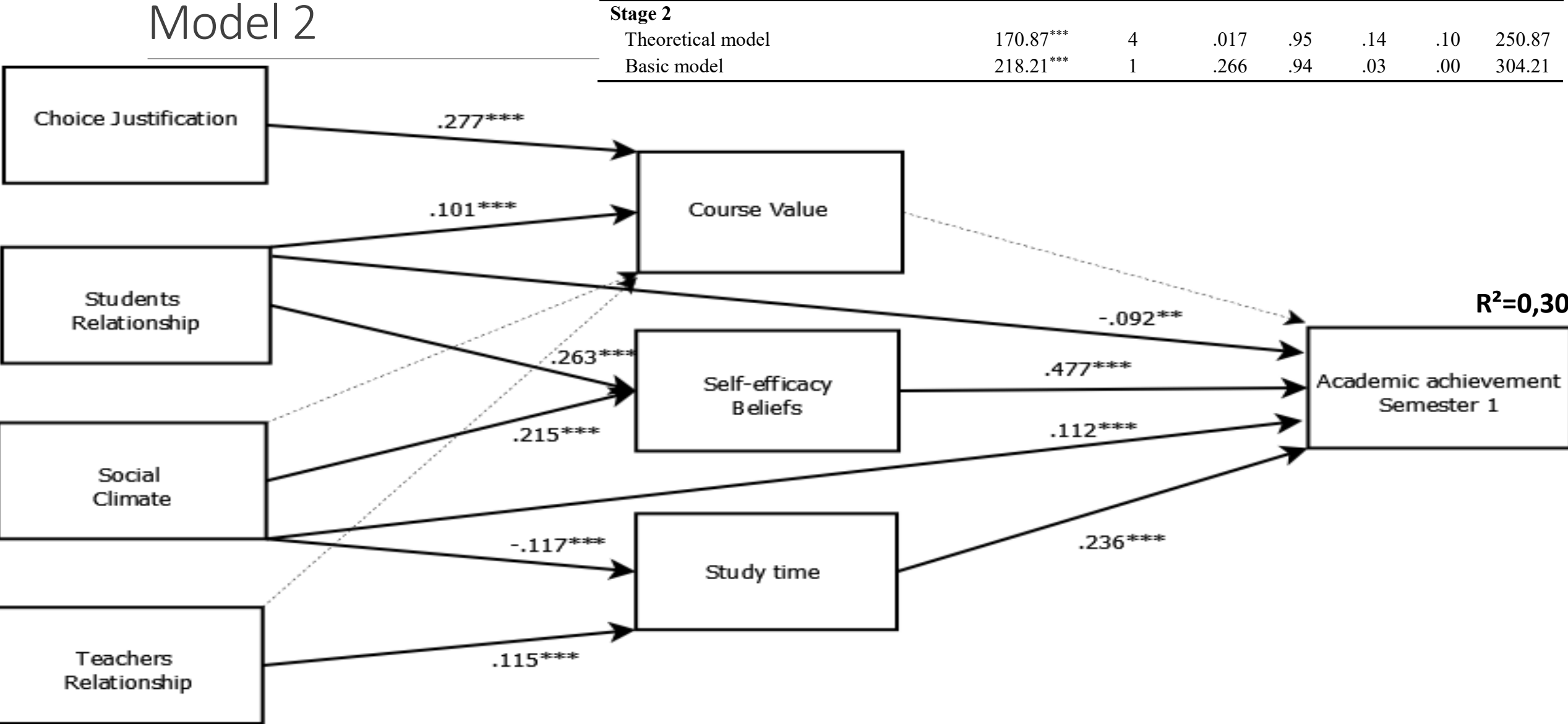
Model 1



	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>PCFI</i>	<i>P-Close</i>	<i>AIC</i>
Stage 1							
Theoretical model	38.7***	7	.038	.92	.23	.94	94.73
Basic model	69.4***	1	.149	.83	.03	.00	137.44

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	χ^2	df	$RMSEA$	CFI	$PCFI$	P - <i>Close</i>	AIC
Stage 2							
Theoretical model	170.87***	4	.017	.95	.14	.10	250.87
Basic model	218.21***	1	.266	.94	.03	.00	304.21

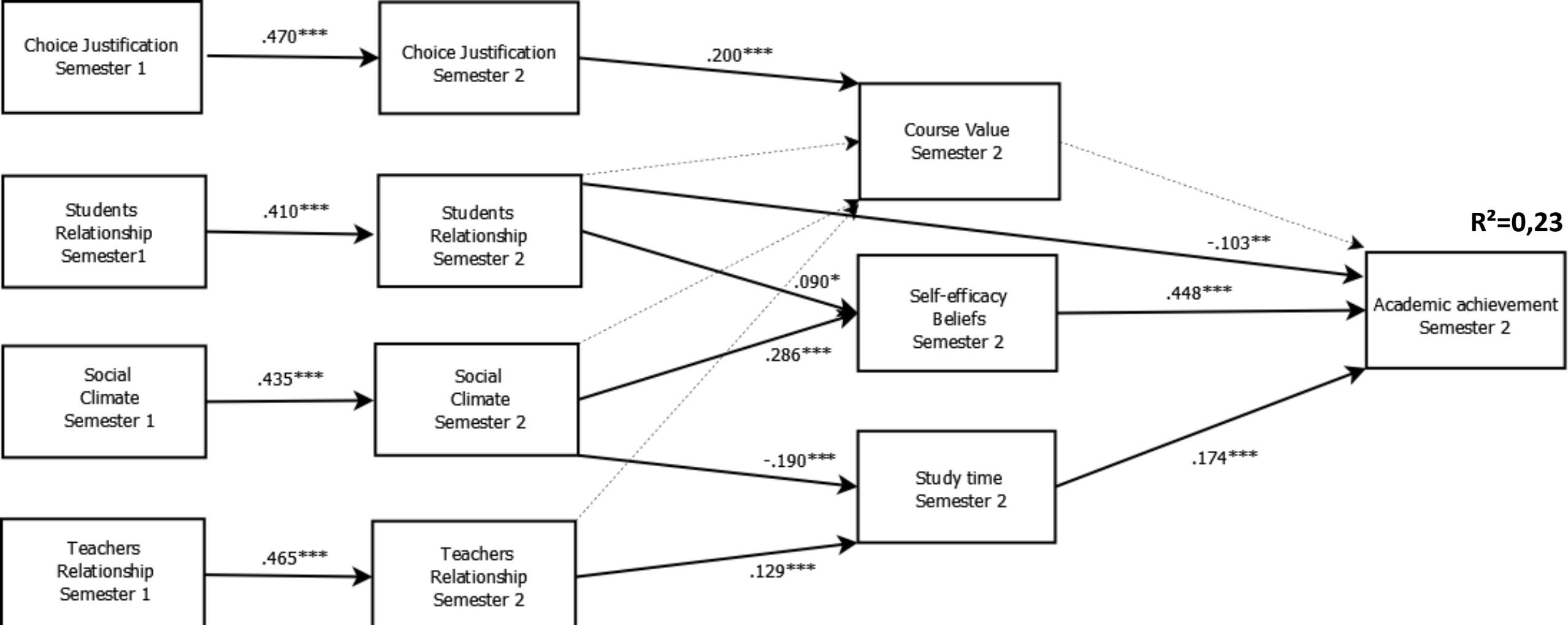


	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>PCFI</i>	<i>P- Close</i>	<i>AIC</i>
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Stage 3

Theoretical model	92.99***	33	.024	.93	.40	1	206.99
Basic model	138.31***	30	.034	.88	.34	1	258.31

Model 3

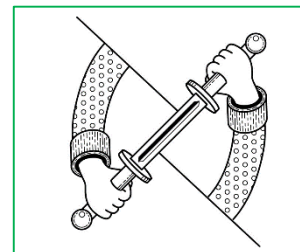


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From first results to future perspective

Results summary:

1. Socioeconomic status → Students relationship and social climate challenges
 - A specific weakness to bear in mind
2. Choice justification → Courses value
3. Students relationship and social climate → Self-efficacy beliefs
4. Social climate and teachers relationship → Behavioral engagement
5. Students relationship → consistent negative effect on achievement
 - Social integration **as a double edge sword**



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From first results to future perspectives

Students relationship and social climate seem to have stronger impact in the first semester

- Social dimensions of the transition can be particularly important at the beginning of the university (De Clercq, Michel, Remy & Galand, 2019)
- Unstable beliefs and attitudes → rely on social context to understand the academic context

A primary future perspective: endorse longitudinal analysis

- Investigate the evolution of social requirements from 1st to 2nd semester

Further investigation of critical requirements taxonomy → Toward an adapted and validated version in several languages and several countries



Thank you for you attention!

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