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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss the role that teachers play in preventing the expression of blatant and subtle prejudice among students. Using a self-reported survey conducted in the south of France, we investigated the attitudes of 1,858 middle and high school students. Multivariate analyses show that when students see their teachers addressing issues about racism, discrimination and cultural diversity in the classroom, their attitudes of intolerance decrease. Nevertheless, mediation and moderation models highlight the existence of external factors, such as the parents' educational attainment, that affect the students' capacity to internalise their teachers' discourse. Contrary to our expectations, the students' level of trust in the education system has no significant influence on their perception of the effectiveness of teacher interventions.

Intolerance and prejudice as educational issues

In Europe, public discourse continues to be marked by different expressions of intolerance and xenophobia towards ethnic minorities. One of the most disturbing aspects is the spread of intolerance among the younger generations towards ethnic minorities (ENAR [2015] 2016). Young people are more vulnerable to stereotypes that tend to trap the Other in a negative vision, and fuel conflictual and intolerant attitudes (Sanchez-Mazas and Fernandez-Iglesias 2002).

The role schools can play in preventing young people's prejudices and negative representations of ethnic minorities is a crucial issue in today's world because schools are expected to teach young students to become enlightened citizens (Galichet 2002; Vitiello 2008).

Following terrorist attacks in France, addressing issues related to immigration and ethno-cultural diversity has become progressively difficult in the classroom. Teachers seem afraid of not being up to the task, and actually creating more conflict. Therefore, examining the impact of classroom interventions concerning issues of racism, discrimination and cultural diversity on students' attitudes is

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relevant. It is particularly relevant within French society's unique approach to cultural otherness, as schools are primarily responsible for using the principle of universal egalitarianism to socialise young people to accept the 'republican credo' (Duru-Bellat and Van Zanten 2012; Abdallah-Pretceille 2018; Bergamaschi and Blaya 2020a). It seems thus highly appropriate to examine the role they can play in deconstructing ethnic prejudices and stereotypical ideas about ethnic minorities.

From the criticisms of formal education to a multicultural teaching approach

There is quite a prominent tendency, especially in sociology, to consider schools as institutions maintaining existing hierarchies and social inequality. This has been influenced by the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) on 'social reproduction', and continues the idea that education is simply aligned to society's principles of racist domination (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Thus, by conveying knowledge cloaked in reason and scientific legitimacy, schools impart the principles of a 'racist scientific ideology' (Brown and Mutegi 2010).

Nevertheless, according to studies documenting the positive effects of education on racial prejudice, the educational system is viewed as being the main institution responsible for conveying the democratic and universal values that create enlightened, independent and tolerant young people (Hyman and Wright 1979; Miller, Kohn, and Schooler 1985; Vogt 1997).

These studies have given rise to several 'intercultural' and 'multicultural' educational projects in Europe and North America. Intercultural education normally focuses on the interactions between different cultural identities, while multicultural education focuses more on general knowledge about cultural diversity and the recognition thereof (Ouellet 2002; Portera 2008). As our study aims to consider how education can reduce young people's stereotypes and prejudices, i.e. the cognitive dimension of intergroup attitudes, we will focus on multicultural education.

In a multicultural teaching approach, the relationship between education and ethnic attitudes cannot be reduced to a simple, direct link involving the type of studies undertaken, educational attainment and prejudice towards ethnic minorities. Indeed, the five dimensions of multicultural education (Banks 1995) highlight the complexity of the relationship between formal education and cultural otherness. First, 'content integration' refers to the frequency by which teachers use classroom concepts and examples from different cultures to give more visibility to ethno-racial minorities. Second, 'knowledge construction' occurs when teachers offer reflections on how knowledge is constructed and situated from a political, cultural and individual point of view. Third, 'prejudice reduction' consists of activities used to develop

positive representations of ethnic minorities and reduce prejudices and stereotypes. Fourth, 'equity pedagogy' consists of pedagogical adjustments, for example, cooperative approaches which enable minority students to succeed equally to majority students. Fifth, 'empowering school culture and social structure' comprises an in-depth transformation of school culture, organisation, programmes, and practices to make the education system more syntonic with the plurality of its public. These five dimensions have a significant impact on the educational achievement of minority students and the improvement of interethnic attitudes and relations among minority and majority students (Zirkel 2008).

Our research focuses primarily on 'prejudice reduction', i.e. do teacher interventions on discrimination and racism towards minority populations help reduce student prejudice?

The relationship between formal education and student prejudice

Many studies on ethnic prejudice among young people focus on socio-demographic explanatory variables (Vervaet, Van Houtte, and Stevens 2018). This helps us understand that social determinants, such as the parents' educational attainment, the family's socio-economic status, gender normativity and educational 'baggage' accumulated over time, can have the same effect as they have on adults (Coenders and Scheepers 1998, 2003; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Hello 2002; Hello, Scheepers, and Sleegers 2006).

In formal education it is recognised that school exerts an important influence on the development of personal ideology and civic mindset. As part of an experimental study on the effect of school programmes in reducing prejudice, Aboud (1993) found that teacher interventions on ethnic issues reduce student intolerance towards immigrant minorities. Within the multicultural teaching paradigm, Hagendoorn and Nekuee (1999) concluded from their extensive Europe-wide survey on the relationship between formal education and prejudice that school education improves cognitive skills and reduces the ethno-centrism of individuals. School education also enables students to become more sensitive to cultural differences (Houlette et al. 2004) and leads to the development of more positive, cooperative interethnic attitudes between majority and minority populations (Pettigrew 1998). Moreover, increasing knowledge on social inclusion deconstructs prejudice and populist discourse (Koopmans and Olzak 2004).

Finding the most effective way of conveying the principles of multiculturalism to students remains a complex challenge. Vervaet, Van Houtte, and Stevens (2018) examined the level of investment of teaching staff in multicultural education practices and found that student prejudice is more influenced by the type of relationship students have with their teachers than school

leadership priorities on multiculturalism. Indeed, when teachers use multiculturalism-based concepts, themes and arguments, there is a subsequent reduction in student prejudice.

In an ethnographic study completed in the Paris suburbs, Roussier-Fusco (2003) found that the manifestation of ethnic conflicts and prejudices varies according to teachers' attitudes. Studies on the content of prevention programmes in the United States, which have been inspired by 'critical race theory' (Bell 1992), provide further insights. For example, when teachers follow a protocol, including storytelling, to reinforce students' feelings of empathy in situations of racism and discrimination (Grosland 2019), participants display more openness and critical thinking.

In this regard, Verkuyten and Thijs (2013) indicate that multicultural education programmes lead to a lower level of ignorance and a deeper understanding of minority populations; their effectiveness is strengthened when schools provide a normative framework for controlling attitudes and behaviours towards cultural diversity.

This type of research is intended to support the development of increasingly democratic attitudes among students (Banks 2009; Agirdag, Van Houtte, and Van Avermaet 2012). Teachers (and schools, in general) can play a central role in preventing prejudice among students, especially bearing in mind that blatant and harsh prejudice alternates with subtle and implicit prejudice, which is more in line with the 'politically correct' imperatives of democratic societies (De Rudder, Poiret, and Vourc'h 2000; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995, 1997). In the present study, we focus on students' perceptions of how teachers address issues of racism, discrimination and diversity in the classroom. We then examine the effects of these perceptions on subtle and blatant prejudice.

To achieve our aim, we tested the following first and main hypothesis: *the more students feel that their teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and diversity, the weaker their blatant and subtle prejudice becomes*.

Moderating factors

The cultural 'baggage' accumulated by students from their formal education and the level of prejudice shown towards ethnic minorities should not be directly correlated. Other factors come into play, particularly the role of family socialisation. In a study completed in the Netherlands on the interaction effects produced by education and family socialisation on the level of ethnic distance expressed by adolescents, Hello et al. (2004) found that, despite the predominance of the direct effects of education on adolescents (the more educated adolescents, the more open-minded towards minorities they are), other factors, such as the values and representations of immigrant minorities which have been nurtured by parents, are important. Haegel (1999) conducted a longitudinal study in France and showed that the effects of a high educational

attainment are reinforced when students have parents with a high educational attainment. On the contrary, the effects diminish when parents have a low educational attainment. Based on these findings, we formulated a second hypothesis: *when parents have a high educational attainment, teacher interventions, as perceived by students, are more effective in reducing students' blatant and subtle prejudice.*

As our study takes place in the school environment, it is possible that the perception students have of their teachers also has an influence. Research completed in the Paris area shows that when students feel confidence in their teachers, ethnic-related violence between peers eases off slightly (Debarbieux, Blaya, and Vidal 2003; Blaya 2016). Verkuyten and Thijs (2003) found that in the Netherlands, teacher interventions increase the feelings of discrimination among majority and minority students on occasion. In this case, multicultural education can raise student awareness of ethnic-related violence, thereby making it easier to recognise and condemn it. In other cases, the authors found that ethnic violence against minority students decreases subsequent to intercultural educational activities.

In the light of these studies, it seems that confidence in teachers is an important factor in understanding manifestations of intolerance in the school environment towards ethnic minorities. Accordingly, a third hypothesis was formulated: *the more students demonstrate confidence in teachers and school, the more teacher interventions are effective in reducing their blatant and subtle prejudice.*

Method

Participants

Data were collected between October and December 2017, involving 2,906 middle school (*collège*: grades 6 to 9) and high school students (*lycée*: grades 10 to 12) in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region (France). Schools were selected in a random and stratified way after the approval of the school district's officials. Since we aimed to survey adolescents with a heterogeneous socio-economic and socio-cultural background, we selected 9 high schools – professional/technological and general – and 5 middle schools, in urban and suburban areas. Our sample of majority participants (N = 1,858) comprised 536 middle school students (33.5%) and 1,316 high school students (66.5%). The average age was 13.4 for middle school students and 16.2 for high school students. The gender ratio was balanced for both middle school students (girls 46.5%) and high school students (girls 47.0%).

To test the hypotheses, data analyses were run on majority students only. As per the existing literature on intergroup attitudes, we defined this subsample on the basis of the birthplace of the students and their parents (Baerveldt et al. 2004; Vermeij, Duijn, and Baerveldt 2009). Students born in France with both

parents also born in France represent the majority group; students born in France with at least one parent born abroad and students born abroad represent the minority group. These criteria were established according to the constraint that French authorities are opposed to any form of ethnic-based statistics, such as mother tongue, religion and skin colour. Consequently, only information on birthplace can be collected, as is the case for existing national studies (Beauchemin, Hamel, and Simon 2016).

Variables

Blatant and subtle prejudice

The dependent variable was the level of intolerance shown towards minority groups, measured by using the blatant and subtle racial prejudice scales (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995, 1997). These scales consist of ten items. An example of an item from the blatant prejudice scale is the following: 'Most immigrants are less competent than French people'. For subtle prejudice, the following item is an example: 'Immigrants teach different values to their children than French people'. We used four-point Likert-type scales in which the value 1 refers to positive attitudes and the value 4 to negative attitudes. Items have a good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .84 for blatant prejudice, and = .76 for subtle prejudice).

Teacher interventions

The main explanatory variable is represented by teacher interventions related to issues raised by the presence of ethnic minority groups. To measure this variable, we asked students whether their teachers spoke about racism, discrimination and diversity. The main reason to focus on students' perceptions, as emphasised by Vervaet, Van Houtte, and Stevens (2018), is that teachers' multicultural practices might be mediated by students' perceptions: students' prejudices are more correlated with their perceptions of their teachers' multicultural practices than teachers' statements about multicultural teaching. To avoid the pitfalls associated with teacher subjectivity and the risk of teachers giving normative answers, we asked students directly by using the items listed in the study by Bekhuis, Ruiter, and Coenders (2012): 'Do your teachers sometimes … a) talk about racism and discrimination in class? b) talk about the customs and habits of people from foreign countries in class?' These items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The value of Cronbach's alpha (= .69) was acceptable.

Moderating variables

To understand the explanatory mechanisms that connect teacher interventions to blatant and subtle prejudice, we selected a number of variables likely to moderate this relationship.

Firstly, we coded the educational attainment of both parents into three classes: 1 = low (middle school certificate or vocational qualification at most), 2 = intermediate (French baccalaureate or two-year professional diploma at most), 3 = high (bachelor's degree, master's degree or Ph.D.). This first coding method was used during the descriptive analysis. Then we referred to the literature which focuses on the differences in the results obtained by students from high educational attainment families and those whose parents leave school at an early age (Janmaat et al. 2013). Students from high attainment families have cognitive skills and attitudes that better match academic expectations, which has a positive impact on attainment (Froiland and Davison 2014). This is why we created a dummy variable using 'parent's high educational attainment' (post-baccalaureate degree) as a baseline: dummy 1 (parent's low educational attainment *versus* high), and dummy 2 (parent's intermediate educational attainment *versus* high).

The level of confidence in the teaching staff and the school was measured by items taken from the European Values Study (2008). Two items summarise this level of confidence: 'Tell me how much confidence you have, a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all in . . .: a) teachers, b) school'. The four-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (a great deal) to 4 (none at all), and in the data analyses the scores were reversed (Cronbach's alpha was robust = .82).

Control variables

In line with previous studies (Hagendoorn and Nekuee 1999; Hooghe, Meeusen, and Quintelier 2012), we selected a number of control variables on socio-demographic determinants of ethnic prejudice. Then we introduced other variables to determine the relative value of the major instances of socialisation for a young person, such as gender socialisation (boy = 0, girl = 1) and school socialisation (middle school = 0, high school = 1).

Procedure

Students completed a questionnaire available on computers located in the IT room of their school. Research assistants presented the general aspects of the project and guaranteed its confidentiality. Students completed the questionnaire in 25 to 40 minutes. Nobody refused to participate.

As for the ethical requirements, the questionnaire was approved by the National Computing and Liberties Committee. In line with their recommendations, the questionnaire consisted entirely of closed questions to avoid the possibility that students might indicate elements related to their identity.

Data analyses

We analysed the data in several stages. First, we checked the consistency of the factor structure for the scales measuring blatant and subtle prejudice; then, we checked the effect of teacher interventions on the manifestations of intolerance by using two multiple linear regression analyses which were applied to two sets of variables. Finally, we used moderation analyses to identify the mechanisms that could reinforce teacher interventions, such as the parental educational attainment and the confidence shown towards the teaching staff and the school.

Since the independent variables were dichotomous, categorical or continuous, we followed Cohen's (1968) coding recommendations and centred the variables around the mean (see also Tabachnick and Fidell 2012).

Data analyses were conducted using SPSS 24 with the Process 3.0 extension (Hayes 2018) for mediation and moderation analyses.

Results

The findings of the exploratory factor analysis (PCA – varimax rotation) confirm that the factor structure for the two scales of blatant and subtle racism is identical to that identified by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995, 1997). On the blatant attitudes scale, two components explain 69% of the total variance and correspond to the two subscales of 'threat and rejection' and 'anti-intimacy'. Concerning the attitudes of subtle racism, three components explain 66% of the total variance and correspond to the 'traditional values', 'cultural differences' and 'positive emotions' subscales. The results confirm the relevance and usefulness of these measurement tools, which have been used in previous studies on adolescents (see, for example, Sarafidou, Govaris, and Loumakou 2013).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for blatant and subtle prejudice, and for our main explanatory variable, namely teacher interventions related to the issues of racism, discrimination, and diversity. The presence of significant correlations between the two types of prejudice and teacher interventions (see Table 2) indicates that our theoretical model can be used for further analyses.

Table 3 presents a number of measures for the correlation between teacher interventions and student profiles, such as gender, school level (middle or high school) and parental educational attainment. With the exception of gender, where girls perceive the presence of teacher interventions more than boys ($p \leq .001$ – F 36.5), school level (p .239) and parental educational attainment (p .376) show no significant effect.

Table 1. Dependent and independent variables – descriptive statistics.

Dependent variables				Independent variable	
Blatant racism		Subtle racism		Teacher interventions	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
18.0	5.9	24.9	5.8	4.5	1.5

Table 2. Correlations between dependent and independent variables (Pearson).

		Blatant racism	Subtle racism	Teacher interventions
Blatant racism	Pearson's correlation	1	.628**	−.166**
	p.		.000	.001
Subtle racism	Pearson's correlation	.628**	1	−.114**
	p.	.000		.081
Teacher interventions	Pearson's correlation	−.166**	−.114**	1
	p.	.001	.081	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral)

Table 3. Teacher interventions, descriptive statistics (ANOVA).

		M	SD
Gender***	Boys	4.43	1.53
	Girls	4.87	1.54
School level	Middle school	4.56	1.61
	High school	4.67	1.51
Parents' educational attainment[1]	Low	4.63	1.52
	Intermediate	4.66	1.58
	High	4.64	1.51

*** $p \leq .001$, ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$
[1]For the 'parents' educational attainment' the post-hoc test has been performed.

To test the first and main hypothesis of our study, we conducted multiple linear regression analyses ('enter' method).

The results for blatant prejudice are presented in Table 4. Blatant prejudice is more pronounced among boys than girls ($p \leq .001$) when their parents have a low ($p \leq .001$) and intermediate ($p \leq .001$) level of educational attainment. Concerning the school level, middle school students stand out with more blatant racist attitudes compared to high school students ($p \leq .01$). These attitudes intensify as confidence in education decreases ($p \leq .001$). Adding this variable to teacher interventions significantly improves the predictability of the model (R^2 .21 $p \leq .01$). The more students claim that teachers address issues related to racism,

Table 4. Multiple linear regressions ('enter' method) – Blatant prejudice.

		Standard Error	Beta	Sig
Model 1	(Constant)	.645		
N 1678	Gender***	.284	−.116	.000
	Parents' educational attainment			
	Low *vs* high***	.343	.118	.000
	Intermediate *vs* high***	.355	.140	.000
	School level**	.353	−.075	.002
	Confidence in education***	.088	−.096	.000
Model 2	(Constant)	.748		
N 1677	Gender***	.286	-,109	.000
	Parents' educational attainment			
	Low *vs* high***	.342	.117	.000
	Intermediate *vs* high***	.354	.139	.000
	School level**	.353	−.075	.002
	Confidence in education***	.088	−.094	.000
	*Teacher interventions***	*.165*	*−.071*	*.009*
	Δ R^2 $p \leq .01$			

***$p \leq .001$, **$p \leq .01$, *$p \leq .05$

Table 5. Multiple linear regression ('enter' method) – Subtle prejudice.

		Standard Error	Beta	Sig.
Model 1	(Constant)	.652		.000
N 1610	Gender***	.288	−.081	.001
	Parents' educational attainment			
	Low *vs* high***	.346	.117	.000
	Intermediate *vs* high***	.361	,103	.000
	School level	.353	−.017	.494
	Confidence in education***	.089	−.080	.000
Model 2	(Constant)	.754		.000
N 1609	Gender***	.290	−.075	.002
	Parents' educational attainment			
	Low *vs* high***	.346	.116	.000
	Intermediate *vs* high***	.361	.102	.000
	School level	.353	−.017	.496
	Confidence in education***	.089	−.088	.001
	*Teacher interventions**	*.169*	*−.058*	*.031*
		Δ R² p ≤ .05		

***p ≤ .001, **p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05

discrimination, and diversity, the more blatant prejudice decreases (p ≤ .01). The students' choice of subject specialism in high school shows no significant effect.

Subtle prejudice (see Table 5) is more salient among boys than girls (p ≤ .01), and among students whose parents have a low (p ≤ .001) or intermediate (p ≤ .001) educational attainment. It also appears that the strength of subtle prejudice is inversely proportional to the confidence placed in education (p ≤ .001). The model's predictability increases when the teacher intervention variable is added (R^2 18 p ≤ .05). The more students feel that teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and diversity, the more subtle prejudice decreases (p ≤ .05). The students' level of attainment and choice of subject specialism in high school show no significant effect.

Explanatory mechanisms

We also tried to identify the mechanisms underpinning the initial linear relationships between teacher interventions and prejudice. The direct effects of teacher interventions, as perceived by students, on blatant and subtle prejudice were examined using other factors which are likely to reinforce or weaken the initial effects, such as the parental educational attainment and trust in the teaching staff and the school.

Our second hypothesis proposed that teacher interventions are more effective when the students' parents have a higher level of education. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a moderation analysis, where the moderating variable (W) was the parental educational attainment.

As far as blatant prejudice is concerned, the model is statistically valid because the moderating effect lies within the confidence interval (int. −.0706). The variable (W) interacts with the variable (X) ($α3 = ≤0.05$) to influence (Y)

(α2 = 0.005 ≠ 0). The effects of teacher interventions are reinforced when the students' parents have a higher educational attainment (α − .49) compared with parents who have an intermediate (short −.42) or low educational attainment (α − .34).

The framework for analysing the manifestations of subtle prejudice is similar to that used for blatant intolerance. The model's results are significant, and demonstrate a moderating effect that lies within the confidence interval (int. −.0357). The variable (W) interacts with the variable (X) (α3 = ≤.0.05) to influence (Y) (α2 = 0.005 ≠ 0). Teacher interventions help reduce subtle prejudice when the parents have a higher level of educational attainment (α − .41) compared to students whose parents have an intermediate (α − .37) or (α − .33) low level. Table 6 shows the coefficients for both moderation models.

Our second hypothesis is therefore confirmed: when parents have high educational attainment, teacher interventions have a more significant effect on blatant and subtle prejudice. The second mechanism that mediates the direct effect of teacher interventions on intolerance is the students' level of confidence shown towards teachers and school in general. To test this 'confidence in education', we conducted a mediation analysis, as the mediating variable significantly correlates with X and Y. The results of the model are not significant for blatant (p. 212) or subtle (p. 189) prejudice. For both types of prejudice, the indirect effects of confidence in education are not significant (blatant: −.0802/.0052; subtle: −.0763/.0091). Even though the effects of the mediator (confidence) and the direct effects of teacher interventions on student prejudice are significant (see Table 7), the former are not as strong (blatant: −.3218; subtle: −3021) as the latter (blatant: −.3481; subtle: −.3352). This indicates that the confidence shown in school makes no additional contribution in relation to the preliminary effects of teacher interventions on student prejudice. This result does not corroborate the third hypothesis which proposes that the more students demonstrate confidence in education, the more teacher interventions are effective in reducing students' blatant and subtle prejudice.

Table 6. Moderation analysis between teachers interventions and parent's educational attainment on both types of prejudice – macro Hayes 2013 (model 1).

	Variables	Coeff	SE	t	Sig.	LLCI	ULCI
Mod. 1	(Constant)	18.0693	.1434	126.0406	.0000	17.7581	18.3505
Blatant prejudice	Parents educational attainment	−.9338	.1648	−5.667.	.0000	−1.2570	−.6106
N 1714	Teachers interventions	−.6048	.1749	−3.4575	.0006	−.9480	−.2617
	Int_1	*−.7061*	*.2002*	*−.8537*	*.0706*	*−.8635*	*−.1117*
Mod. 2	(Constant)	24.9702	.1438	173.6551	.0000	24.6882	25.2522
Subtle prejudice	Parents educational attainment	−.8421	.1681	−5.0094	.0000	−1.1718	−.5124
N 1667							
	Teachers interventions	−.4243	.1744	−2.4332	.0151	−.7664	−.0823
	Int_1	*−.3574*	*.2030*	*−.1673*	*−.0357*	*−.4321*	*−.2642*

Table 7. Mediation analysis between teachers interventions and confidence in education on both types of prejudice – macro Hayes 2013 (model 4).

		Effect	SE	t	sig	LLCI	ULCI
Mod. 1	*Total effect*	−.3218	.1663	−3.2893	.0010	−.8734	−.2209
Flagrant prejudice	*Direct effect*	−.3481	.1671	−3.4405	.0006	−.9025	−.2471
Mod. 2	*Total effect*	−.3021	.1671	−2.4920	.0128	−.7441	−.0887
Subtle prejudice	*Direct effect*	−.3352	.1676	−2.6618	.0078	−.7750	−.1174

Discussion

As the main hypothesis of the study has been confirmed, tackling issues of racism, discrimination, and diversity in class are important aspects in reducing prejudice. When students feel that their teachers are engaged in dealing with these topics, their blatant and subtle prejudice shows signs of weakening. Our study does not indicate how this teaching should be delivered and what content should be proposed. This is certainly one of the limits of our research, as has been the case for other studies, including more experimental research (Grosland 2019). We cannot confirm the presence of a directly proportional correlation between teacher interventions and the level of prejudice, as this will be only possible by using a pre-test/post-test design. However, we have highlighted the importance of tackling these issues with students in order to raise their awareness of the challenges posed by ethnocultural diversity in societies which have been profoundly marked by this phenomenon. These findings are important for the specific context in which the research was completed. Despite international immigration that has changed the social landscape in France, the country has always struggled to embrace the idea of multiculturalism and endeavoured to present itself as a culturally homogenous society (Schnapper 1998). Moreover, European studies on multicultural education are still uncommon, barring several exceptions in the Netherlands and Belgium, (e.g. Verkuyten and Thijs 2013; Vervaet, Van Houtte, and Stevens 2018), and they are almost non-existent in France (Bergamaschi and Blaya 2020b). In this regard, the present study may encourage future research on the role of formal education in transmitting principles that foster multicultural cohabitation, and more particularly, to specify the role that teachers have in this process. As suggested by Bekhuis, Ruiter, and Coenders (2012), the more the educational system seeks to convey values of tolerance and respect for the Other, the more the role of teachers is important. According to previous studies (Verkuyten and Kinket 2000; Verkuyten and Thijs 2000, 2003), the simple act of talking about issues related to immigrant minorities can help break certain taboos. For example, when students find it easier to report manifestations of racism and discrimination suffered within the school environment, teacher interventions not only have an impact on student prejudice, but also contribute to breaking the law of silence imposed on many victims (Debarbieux 1998).

Concerning the second hypothesis, the importance of the family's educational attainment on student ethnic prejudice is evident. First, we observed that the level of prejudice among young people is connected to the educational attainment of their parents. Students from families with a low level of educational attainment show greater intolerance than students whose parents have a high level of educational attainment. It is possible that those with a low educational attainment may experience a stronger feeling of competition with respect to ethnic minorities, since these minorities are overrepresented in lower income occupational categories (Coenders and Scheepers 1998, 2003; Bergamaschi and Santagati 2019). Then, we observed that the family's educational attainment can help to explain the mechanisms by which teacher interventions influence student prejudice. A high level of parental educational attainment has an indirect positive effect on the effectiveness of teacher interventions (as perceived by students), by reducing the intensity of student prejudice. In this regard, if a high level of parental educational attainment enables young people to more easily create a distance between themselves and xenophobic/intolerant discourse (Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Hello 2002), it is possible that teacher interventions promoting multiculturalism will be strengthened by discussions within the family. Caution must nevertheless be exercised in this respect. As highlighted by Hagendoorn and Nekuee (1999), if students whose parents have a higher educational attainment are able to deconstruct stereotypes more easily, they might also show greater ability to find the resources to disguise racist, intolerant and xenophobic attitudes or opinions to preserve their social image.

Concerning the level of student confidence in education, the results only demonstrate a direct effect on lowering blatant and subtle prejudice, despite being strengthened by the effectiveness of teacher interventions. We cannot exclude the possibility that the expected relationship between teacher interventions, confidence and prejudice is a reverse one where confidence in education reflects the success of teacher interventions in improving student attitudes. Enhancing the perception of the Other may increase the value students grant to teachers and education, especially if the school intake is ethnically heterogeneous. This is another avenue of research that deserves consideration, particularly if a qualitative approach is used.

Finding mechanisms that will enable multicultural education to reduce stereotypes and prejudice towards ethnic minorities remains open. In fact, classroom activities and concepts/arguments used to deconstruct prejudice may be delivered differently depending on the individual teaching approach and context. This makes it necessary to develop studies that determine the relative importance of these factors and to identify the methods used by teachers to convey multiculturalism. It is likely that these mechanisms are partially rooted in teachers' personal beliefs and convictions.

We also recognise that some issues, such as cultural diversity, racism and discrimination have a strong ideological content. This is why teachers sometimes find it challenging to address these topics. Bekhuis, Ruiter, and Coenders (2012) point out that 'the extent to which these multicultural values are translated into daily practice is teacher dependent' (231). Some teachers may devote much time to deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes, while others may devote much less, and some may even make intolerant comments in the classroom (Perroton 2000).

It is also possible that the effects of teacher interventions regarding multi-culturalism could apply in a normative way only. This means that in specific contexts, students could have an open-mind view of cultural diversity, whereas in others their prejudice might be manifest. The effects of this normative influence in different contexts – school, friendships, leisure, family – and the interactions with the discourses that characterise these contexts, should be further investigated.

In conclusion, we have emphasised the complex nature of the effects that education can have on prejudice towards ethnic minorities. As suggested by Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007), there is a need to be cautious when claim-ing that prejudice is reduced by education: we believe that this topic clearly deserves further investigation, especially in an era when educational systems are increasingly called upon to train the youngest generation to become the good citizens society needs to strengthen social cohesion.

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