

Formal education and Blatant-subtle prejudice: Intercultural education and contact theory in French educational system

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Abstract

According to the intercultural paradigm, prejudice reduction is a way of promoting positive interactions among people and preventing discriminatory behaviours. This paper focuses on the role of teacher interventions in reducing student prejudices. We carried out a quantitative survey, which was administered to middle and high school students in France, to identify the role played by individual, school and sociocultural variables on 'flagrant' and 'subtle' prejudices. The findings show that when students perceive that their teachers are discussing racism and discrimination during formal education, manifestations of both types of prejudice decline. In addition, this perceived engagement creates a multiplicative effect on intergroup contacts among students, and this is an important condition for decreasing prejudice. The study highlights the potential of formal education to deconstruct stereotypes and encourage interculturalism, even in a context which is quite hostile to any reference to cultural identities. It also underlines that intercultural practices can start at the micro level without any formal institutional support.

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THE SCHOOL HAVING TO CONTEND WITH THE ISSUES OF A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The fight against the prejudices that fuel xenophobic discourses and the ensuing discriminatory practices epitomizes one of the mainstays of the intercultural paradigm (Bergamaschi & Santagati, 2019, 2020b; Cantle, 2016; Pica-Smith et al., 2016; Zapata-Barrero, 2017). It often happens that individuals and groups do not interact due to the permeation of prejudices and stereotypes in reciprocal representations and attitudes. The consequence of these prejudices is an increase in discriminatory behaviours. The intercultural paradigm shows the importance of disseminating knowledge, values and attitudes if we want people to interact in a positive way (Palaiologou et al., 2012; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). School education is then invoked as a means for overcoming the obstacles that prejudices represent and for building bridges between individuals and groups, regardless of their cultural belonging.

Nowadays, there is an expectation that educational systems should be helping students develop a critical mindset as a precursor to them becoming enlightened citizens, rather than retaining a narrow focus on the transmission of curricular knowledge (Council of Europe, 2014). Therefore, schools are increasingly seen as key players in building social cohesion. School education contributes to the development of opinions about social phenomena and helps students understand the fundamental vision of the world which lies behind their personal values and principles (Weber, 1915 [2015], 1917-1919 [1959]). In this sense, as 'the need for a thoughtful understanding of our society and our actions is deeper and more widespread than ever' (Williams, 1990, p.177), it is logical that teachers are taking a lead in discussions about complex issues.

Considering that attitudes towards minorities have undergone a profound transformation in the last few decades, we are convinced that teachers (and schools in general) can play a central role in preventing the expression of prejudice among students. Blatant and harsh prejudices now alternate with the kind of subtle and implicit prejudices which are more in line with the 'politically correct' imperatives of democratic societies (Pettigrew & Mertens, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; De Rudder et al., 2000). However, although there is a broad consensus on the principle that formal education can improve the relationship with ethno-cultural otherness, the issue of how schools should reduce prejudices and improve positive intergroup interactions needs to be investigated further.

The specific goal of our study is to understand the effects of intercultural practices on both the prejudices and interactions of young people. This has been studied in a socio-political context—France—which has always been hostile to granting a status to the concept of 'ethnic diversity' (Schapper, 1998) and, by extension, both interculturalism and intercultural education struggle to find their place in public policies.

In the first part of this paper, we describe the characteristics of the French educational system with regard to intercultural pedagogy. Subsequently, we introduce a theoretical framework which considers the relationship between formal education and prejudices towards immigrant minorities on the one hand, and the role of intergroup contact in reducing prejudices on the other. We have identified research hypotheses for both of these aspects. The methodological section, which includes the detail of our study, is followed by the presentation of our results. We conclude by examining the role that schools can play in countering the development among students of stereotypes and prejudices in relation to different cultures by reflecting on how intercultural practices can start at the micro level.

THE FRENCH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Since the Enlightenment, France has developed a particular conception of citizenship which is based on the principle of egalitarianism. This has been interpreted universally, and hence leaves no space for cultural particularities (Bergamaschi & Blaya, 2020a, 2020b). To benefit from the protection of the State, which even today includes a relatively flexible procedure for acquiring nationality as inspired by *jus soli*, a French citizen must abandon their individual differences upon crossing the threshold of institutions—in our case, the school. In this context, the expression 'intercultural education' began to circulate from the end of the 1970s with the objective of helping new students

familiarize themselves with a new environment, learn the host language as quickly as possible, and at the same time, continue to cultivate their mother tongue. The political class of the time did not hide its hope that the myth of a return to the country of origin would become a reality, at least for the first generation of immigrants from the former French colonies (Weil, 2005). This myth was ratified by the 'Stoleru' law in 1977, but the socioeconomic development of immigration in France quickly shattered the illusion that the myth would become reality, and by the beginning of the 1980s, institutions had understood the permanency of immigration. Although the need to think about education programs in relation to the cohabitation of different groups has been raised by scientific research, action on intercultural education has been mainly restricted to language learning (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2018).

The French educational system continues to remain faithful to the principle of 'indifference to differences' (Bourdieu, 1966) which characterizes the core of republican philosophy. Even though a school is the institution responsible for conveying this principle (Bergamaschi & Blaya, 2020b), France and its educational system advocate an assimilationist vision of society, where the notion of intercultural pedagogy is only understood in its most 'superficial' sense (helping incoming students master the language). Programs that aim to support students on cultural otherness both at the individual level and at institutional level are rare (Bergamaschi & Blaya, 2020a, 2020b; Duru-Bellat & Van Zanten, 2012; Lorcerie, 2004).

Following the terrorist attacks that occurred in France over the last 10 years, teachers have realized how difficult it is to address issues related to immigration and cultural diversity. Some of them have decided to tackle the problem head-on and address the issues of immigration and diversity to help their students become responsible citizens. It now seems appropriate to examine the effects—on student attitudes—of teacher interventions concerning racism, discrimination and cultural diversity. In addition, as this topic has not been sufficiently studied by French educational scientists until quite recently, we consider that the effect of formal education on the manifestation of prejudices towards immigrant minorities should be considered as a major issue for social science researchers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Formal education and ethnic otherness

The relationships between formal education and prejudices towards immigrant groups, which depending on the situation, sometimes includes first-time migrants, and sometimes second and third generations, have been consistently studied. A number of authors have advanced theories which are typical of an institutionalist approach: the educational system is viewed as the main institution for conveying democratic and universal values that should enable people to move beyond preconceived ideas to become enlightened and thoughtful citizens (Hyman & Wright, 1979; Vogt, 1997). Similarly, Aboud (1993) analysed the effect of school programs on reducing prejudice, and found that teacher interventions could help reduce intolerance among students towards immigrant minorities.

Research conducted within this framework is based on Socialization Theory, namely the existence of a positive correlation between the type of studies undertaken by students and the promotion of tolerance towards diversity in the course of the school experience (Coenders & Scheepers, 1998, 2003; Scheepers et al., 2002). Accordingly, the inverse relationship between prejudices towards immigrant minorities and education is linked to the dissemination of democratic values by educational systems (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Kenworthy et al. (2005) state that the cognitive ability to create a body of knowledge on minority groups, such as learning about their traditions and customs, characterizes individuals who have a higher educational attainment. Other studies point out that education allows individuals to develop a more independent mind and more independent ideas which are less influenced by external conditioning. Miller et al. (1985) claim that education enables students to learn principles and values that encourage tolerance.

After conducting a Europe-wide survey on the relationship between education and prejudice, Hagendoorn and Nekuee (1999) asserted that education improves cognitive capacities and reduces the ethnocentrism of individuals.

However, they also recognized that current knowledge of teaching methods and personal engagement is limited. In other words, few studies have examined the mechanisms by which racist attitudes are reduced via school experiences. In an ethnographic study completed in the Paris suburbs, Roussier-Fusco (2003) examined the strategies used by teachers for managing student relationships in classes with a high ethnic and cultural diversity. Not only did the presence of racist conflicts and prejudices remain constant, but their manifestation was variable, and depended on the attitude of the particular teachers. Tensions increased when issues of ethnicity were avoided, or were trivialized when ethnicity was spoken about disparagingly. Moreover, when ethnicity was analysed critically, students tended to focus their contributions on the larger debates that were dominating public discourse.

Several studies have looked at the effects of storytelling on prejudices. Interventions in primary and secondary schools, for example, where teachers read stories in which minorities are presented in positive ways, once per week for several weeks, student representations about minority groups improve (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Cameron et al., 2011; Vezzali et al., 2015). Often inspired by Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992), these studies concentrate on the content of prevention programs in the United States by providing further insights. Grosland (2019) conducted research in a higher education classroom in which the teacher followed a protocol with her students, including storytelling. Students participated in focus groups with the aim of identifying the representations they associated with racism and discrimination, and of reinforcing their feelings of empathy. The results show that the students who participated in storytelling displayed more openness and critical thinking.

We underline an important aspect of this approach, as teacher involvement in this kind of action is based in part on each teacher's personal beliefs and convictions. Although teachers should be able to address ethnocultural otherness, prejudice and discrimination, these themes are influenced by a strong ideological content, despite their inclusion in 'moral and civic education' and 'citizenship education' in the French educational system. For this reason, as Hellgren (2021) discovered in her research on teacher compliance to intercultural principles in Catalonia, teachers sometimes find it difficult to distance themselves from their own worldview when addressing these topics. Finally, some teachers may devote a considerable amount of time to the issue, while others much less, and some may even make intolerant comments in the classroom (Perroton, 2000). As Bekhuis et al. (2012) note: 'The extent to which these multicultural values are translated into daily practice is teacher dependent' (p.231).

With regards to the above, we advance the following hypothesis: *The more students feel that their teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities, the weaker their blatant and subtle prejudices are.*

We believe that the relationship between teacher actions and student prejudices does not only take place in a linear way. As most of the studies carried out on this theme have focused on young people, and in a context with clearly defined borders, such as school space, it will be interesting to look at student interactions according to whether the students belong to a majority or minority group.

Intergroup contacts and education

As specified by Allport (1954) when discussing the relations between majority and minority populations, it is likely that hostility will be supplanted by mutually positive and supportive attitudes, provided there are certain conditions in place. These operate when relations are developed (a) between individuals with similar status, (b) in a context characterized by the absence of competition, (c) with the aim of collaborating in view of common goals, and (d) under the institutional control that intervenes to sanction deviant behaviour. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that most of the studies on the effect of intergroup contact have been carried out in the school environment. Allport's theory has been studied by Pettigrew (1997), who focused on a more restricted version of Contact Theory, namely, friendship contacts.

According to Pettigrew (1997), friendly relationships with members of minority groups encourage 'cross-group empathy', the 'desire to know them [the minorities] better' and the 'deprovincialization' of one's own mentality (1997,

p.174). Pettigrew's Intergroup Friendship Theory (IFT) underlines a generalizing and cumulative process: a generalizing process because the birth of relationships favours the development of positive images of the members of a minority group; a cumulative process because these new, positive images motivate individuals to make further friendly contact with members of the minority group, as well as enhancing social movement involved in the fight against discrimination and social exclusion (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

Although IFT mainly looks at the cognitive side of intergroup relations, the implications for formal education are quite evident. In their study of a sample of young Dutch people, Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) found that when teachers stress the importance of respecting cultural diversity, students report less ethnocentrism towards immigrant minorities. Other authors point out that positive effects are not only limited to our representations of social landscapes (Lease & Blake, 2005). For example, adolescents who formed intergroup friendships had more highly developed social skills and greater satisfaction from their schooling. Bekhuis et al. (2012) studied xenophobic attitudes among secondary high school students in the Netherlands via the effect of intergroup contact. Their results show that even though positive intergroup contacts decrease prejudices, the impact of these contacts diminishes when teachers discuss issues related to international immigration during lessons. In this sense, the impact of teacher interventions seems stronger than the impact of positive interactions between majority and minority students. The theoretical model proposed by Turner and Cameron (2016) in relation to the confidence shown towards intergroup contact indicated that students find it easier to develop contacts with minorities when schools promote programs which help them reduce prejudices and develop confidence in the friendship contact.

According to these results, we would expect that teacher interventions, as perceived by students, would also influence student interactions between the majority group and immigrant minorities. The second hypothesis is therefore as follows: *The more students feel that their teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities, the higher the number of positive interactions they will have with immigrant minorities, which will also help reduce their blatant and subtle prejudices.*

METHOD

Recruitment and sample

Our study draws on a corpus of data collected between October and December 2017 from 1858 students (middle school, *collège*—grades 6–9, and high school, *lycée*—grades 10–12) in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region in France. To test the hypotheses, the data analyses were run on majority group 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 et al., 2009). We only included students born in France whose parents were also born in France, in other words, the majority group.¹

With the approval of school district officials, schools were selected in a random and stratified way, as our goal was to survey adolescents with a heterogeneous socioeconomic and sociocultural background, and obtain a sample with a sufficiently high statistical power. This was achieved by selecting three high schools in urban areas and three in suburban areas for each type of *lycée* in France: professional, technological and general.² Three middle schools were chosen in city centres and three others in suburban areas. For high schools (66.5% of the whole sample—mean age 16.2), the social status of students ranged from vocational to general literary/scientific pathways. In different pathways, the density of both first- and second-generation minority students was inversely proportional to the social status. In terms of the middle schools (33.5% of the whole sample—mean age 13.4), social heterogeneity was obtained by location, as the city centre schools have a more affluent population compared to the suburban schools, and the presence of minority students increases in the suburbs.

Study variables

Blatant and subtle prejudice

Our dependent variable was the measure of intolerance towards minority groups, and was studied using the scales of blatant and subtle racial prejudice (Pettigrew & Mertens, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). These scales consist of 10 items each. As an example, one of the items for blatant prejudice is: 'Most immigrants are less competent than French people', and for subtle prejudice: '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. The items had a good internal consistency, as reflected by a Cronbach's α of 0.84 for items testing for blatant prejudice and 0.76 for those testing for subtle prejudice.

Teacher interventions

Our first hypothesis is represented by teacher interventions with respect to the issues raised by the presence of minority groups. To avoid the pitfalls associated with each teacher's subjectivity, in particular, the risk of having them give normative answers, we followed the suggestion put forward by Thijs et al. (2012), which was to interview the students directly. More specifically, we asked students whether their teachers spoke about racism and discrimination, as well as the habits and customs of people from foreign countries, during lessons. To do so, we used the items provided by Bekhuis et al. (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). Cronbach's α for these items was acceptable with a score of 0.69.

Intergroup friendship

The expectation of the second hypothesis is that teacher interventions on issues related to racism, discrimination, and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities will decrease the manifestations of prejudices by increasing intergroup friendships between majority and minority students. To verify this hypothesis, we used Pettigrew's intergroup friendship scale adapted to the French context: 'Today in France there are people with different nationalities, cultures and religions. If you think about your personal situation, are there many such people, a few, or none among: (a) your friends, (b) people that work with you, e.g. at home, (c) people that live in your neighbourhood?'. We implemented a three-point scale from 1 'many' to 3 'none', and the scores were reversed for the data analysis. Although the three items focus on different spheres of social life, the inter-item reliability is sufficiently strong ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Control variables

In accordance with the main studies that examine the relationship between education and intolerance (Hagendoorn & Nekuee, 1999; Hello et al., 2002; Hooghe et al., 2012), we selected several control variables. Our models included gender (male student = 0, female student = 1) and the school level (middle school = 0, high school = 1). We also considered the effects of certain factors that contextualize the quality of the school experience, such as the number of foreign students enrolled in each school (metric variable ranging from 5 to 295). As for the family's socioeconomic status (SES), we asked for the educational attainment of both parents. This was coded into three classes: 1 = low (middle school certificate or vocational qualification at most), 2 = intermediate (French baccalaureate or

2-year professional diploma at most) and 3 = high (bachelor's degree, master's degree or PhD). For the data analyses, we created a dummy variable which corresponds to a high educational attainment (post-baccalaureate degree).

Procedure

Students responded individually to a questionnaire on computers located in the IT room of their school, under the supervision of a research assistant whose task was to answer any questions the students might have about the questionnaire. To minimize the effects of pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes, school staff presented the research as a study on how adolescents understand diversity and citizenship. The families were notified by a letter offering them the possibility of their children not participating. No family withdrew from the study. Depending on their speed, students completed the questionnaire in 25–40 min. All the students were able to answer the questions on the questionnaire.

On an ethical level, the questionnaire was approved by the National Computing and Liberties Committee. During the survey, students were allowed to leave questions unanswered and to stop their participation at any time without consequences; none of the students refused to participate and they all completed the entire questionnaire.

Data analyses

We analysed the data in several stages. First, we checked the consistency of the factor structure of the scales measuring blatant and subtle prejudices. The descriptive measures for the dependent and independent variables are presented below. We also checked the effect of teacher interventions on manifestations of intolerance using two multiple linear regression analyses, which were organized and tested on two sets of variables. Finally, in accordance with the hypotheses proposed, we studied the mechanisms that could reinforce teacher interventions. We used structural equation modelling (SEM) for this purpose. Data analyses were conducted using SPSS 24, and SEM was performed in R.

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

RESULTS

To make sure that the students understood the difference between the two types of prejudice—blatant and subtle—and more particularly, their sub-dimensions, we first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis—varimax rotation). The results confirm that the factor structure of the two scales of blatant and subtle racism is identical to that identified by Pettigrew and Mertens (1995, 1997a, 1997b). 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'. As regards attitudes of subtle racism, three components explain 66% of the total variance and correspond to the 'traditional values', 'cultural differences' and 'positive emotions' subscales. These results confirm the relevance and usefulness of the measurement tools, particularly for a population of adolescents, such as our participants, and considering their origin. Few studies until now have used these scales on a population of adolescents (see, e.g. Sarafidou et al., 2013).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for blatant and subtle racism, and for our main explanatory variables, namely teacher interventions related to the issues of racism, discrimination, habits and customs of minority groups, and intergroup friendships. The mean score for the blatant scale, whose items present immigrant minorities in an explicitly negative and overcritical light, is lower than the mean score for the subtle scale, whose items question

TABLE 1 Dependent and independent variables—descriptive statistics

Dependent variables				Independent variables			
Blatant racism		Subtle racism		Teacher interventions		Intergroup friendships	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
18.0	5.9	24.9	5.8	4.5	1.5	6.8	0.03

TABLE 2 Correlations between dependent and independent variables (Pearson)

	Blatant racism	Subtle racism	Teacher interventions	Intergroup friendships
Blatant racism				
Pearson's correlation	1	0.628**	-0.166**	-0.386**
<i>p</i>		0.000	0.001	0.001
Subtle racism				
Pearson's correlation	0.628**	1	-0.114**	-0.354**
<i>p</i>	0.000		0.081	0.001
Teacher interventions				
Pearson's correlation	-0.166**	-0.114**	1	0.116**
<i>p</i>	0.001	0.081		0.001
Intergroup friendships				
Pearson's correlation	-0.386**	-0.354**	0.116**	1
<i>p</i>	0.001	0.001	0.001	

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

the relationship between the host society and immigrant populations in an intellectually more sophisticated way. As demonstrated in Table 2, the presence of significant correlations between the two types of prejudice and the two independent variables means that our theoretical model can be used for further analyses. Moreover, we checked if the perception of teacher interventions was influenced by strong socio-educative factors, such as the parents' level of education. Pearson's correlation showed no significant effect.

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

The results for blatant prejudice are presented in Table 3. Blatant prejudice was more pronounced among male students than female students ($p \leq 0.001$), and among students whose parents had a low ($p \leq 0.001$) or intermediate ($p \leq 0.001$) level of educational attainment, compared to those whose parents had a higher level. As regards the school level, middle school students stand out as having more blatant racist attitudes compared to high school students ($p \leq 0.05$), and the higher the number of foreign students enrolled in the school, the higher the level of blatant intolerance ($p \leq 0.001$). Adding this variable to teacher interventions significantly improves the predictability of the model ($R^2 = 0.21$; $p \leq 0.001$). The more students claim that teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, habits and customs of minorities, the more the level of blatant prejudice decreases ($p \leq 0.01$). The school level (middle school vs. high school) shows no significant effect.

Table 4 presents the results for subtle prejudice, which was more salient among male students than female students ($p \leq 0.001$), and among students whose parents had a low ($p \leq 0.001$) or intermediate ($p \leq 0.001$) educational attainment compared to students whose parents had a higher educational attainment. In addition, the higher the number of foreign students enrolled in the school, the more attitudes of subtle intolerance were pronounced ($p \leq 0.01$). The predictability of the model increases when the teacher intervention variable is added ($R^2 = 0.19$; $p \leq 0.05$). The more students feel that teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, habits and customs of

TABLE 3 Multiple linear regressions ('enter' method)—blatant prejudice

	Standard error	Beta	Sig.
Model 1			
N 2226			
(Constant)	0.767		
Gender	0.305	-0.122	0.000
Parents' educational attainment			
Low vs. high	0.363	0.113	0.000
Intermediate vs. high	0.380	0.134	0.000
School level	0.391	-0.058	0.036
Total number of foreign students	0.003	0.083	0.002
Model 2			
N 2225			
(Constant)	0.876		
Gender	0.307	-0.114	0.000
Parents' educational attainment			
Low vs. high	0.363	0.113	0.000
Intermediate vs. high	0.379	0.135	0.000
School level	0.390	-0.055	0.045
Total number of foreign students	0.003	0.086	0.001
Teacher interventions	0.100	-0.065	0.010
$\Delta R^2; p \leq 0.001$			

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

minorities, the more the level of subtle prejudice decreases ($p \leq 0.05$). The school level (middle school vs. high school) shows no significant effect.

According to these results, the first hypothesis is confirmed: *The more students feel that their teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities, the weaker their blatant and subtle prejudices are.*

We then tried to verify if the relationships between teacher interventions and prejudice towards immigrant minorities is influenced by intergroup friendships. This corresponds to the second hypothesis that the negative effects of teacher interventions on prejudice as perceived by the students from the previous section are mediated by the increase in intergroup friendships between majority and minority students.

To test this hypothesis, we performed SEM. Since we were dealing with ordinal data, the DWLS estimator was used (Míndrilă, 2010). The original model was just-identified, that is, we had zero degrees of freedom, which means that we did not have fit indices to evaluate the model. Therefore, a constraint was introduced to add one degree of freedom and enable us to build a chi-squared test and investigate goodness of fit. For this purpose, the covariance between blatant and subtle prejudices was made to equal 0.8: we added one degree of freedom to the model so that we could evaluate fit indices.

To evaluate the model's goodness of fit, we considered both relative and absolute fit indices. An absolute measure of fit presumes that the best fitting model has a fit index of zero. These measures of fit determine the 'badness' of fit, so the bigger the index, the worse the fit is. Examples of this family of fit indexes are χ^2 , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). A relative fit index is analogous to R^2 , where a value of zero indicates the worst possible model, and a value of one indicates the best. Examples are comparative fit index (CFI) and normed fit index (NFI).

TABLE 4 Multiple linear regression ('enter' method)—subtle prejudice

	Standard error	Beta	Sig.
Model 1			
N 2143			
(Constant)	0.781		0.000
Gender	0.311	-0.082	0.000
Parents' educational attainment			
Low vs. high	0.369	0.115	0.000
Intermediate vs. high	0.386	0.095	0.000
Confidence in education	0.094	-0.080	0.001
Total number of foreign students	0.003	0.083	0.002
Model 2			
N 2143			
(Constant)	0.844		0.000
Gender	0.312	-0.076	0.000
Parents' educational attainment			
Low vs. high	0.368	0.114	0.000
Intermediate vs. high	0.386	0.094	0.000
School level	0.390	0.007	0.045
Total number of foreign students	0.003	0.083	0.001
Teacher interventions	0.177	-0.065	0.05
$\Delta R^2; p \leq 0.01$			

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

TABLE 5 Regression weights

	Standard error	Beta	Sig.
Flagrant prejudice			
Contact	0.036	-0.264	0.000
Teacher interventions	0.016	-0.042	0.009
Subtle prejudice			
Contact	0.031	-0.245	0.000
Teacher interventions	0.016	-0.017	0.293
Contact			
Teacher interventions	0.016	0.047	0.004

The chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 1.228, p = 0.268$) assesses the null hypothesis that the predicted model and observed data are equal. The CFI = 0.999, NFI = 0.992, RMSEA = 0.011 (90% CI = [0.000, 0.065], p -value RMSEA $\leq 0.05 = 0.844$) and SRMR = 0.051 all confirm an excellent fit of the theoretical model.

The regression results are presented in Table 5. They show that teacher interventions have a direct effect on both kind of prejudices and an indirect effect through intergroup contact.

The model in Figure 1 shows two kinds of effects of teacher interventions on the prejudices as perceived by students. First, we found a negative direct linear effect as seen previously. Teacher interventions also exert a direct effect on intergroup friendships, and the more students feel that their teachers discuss issues related to racism, discrimination and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities during lessons, the more they

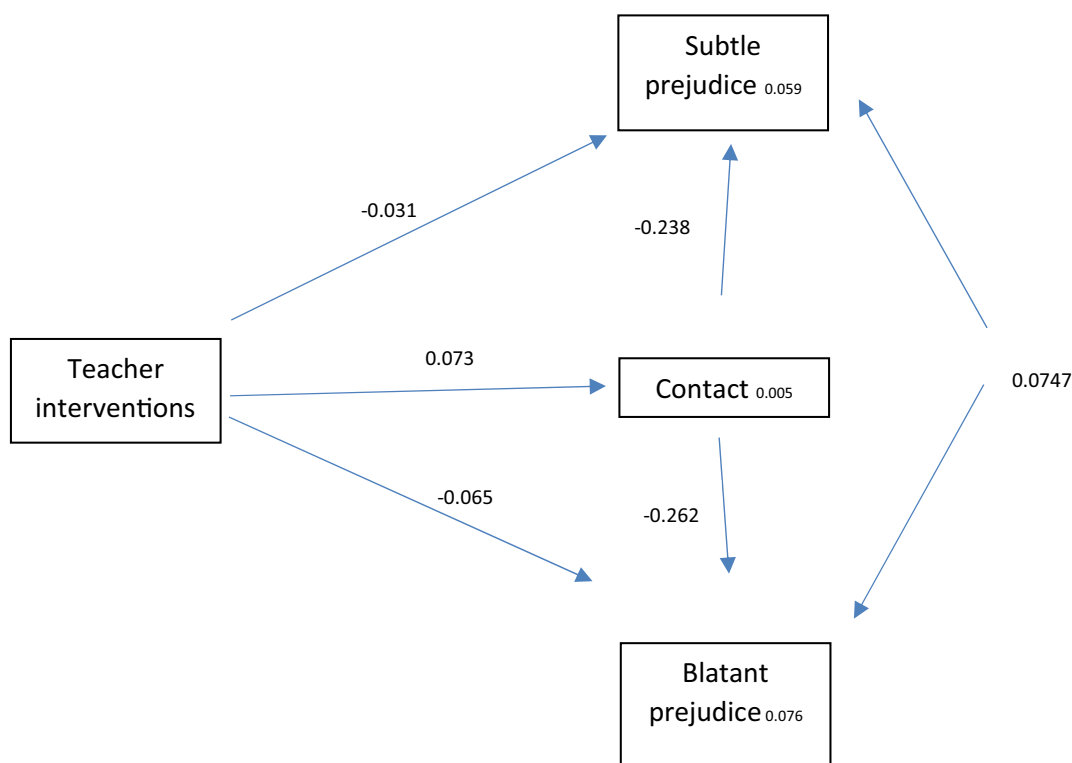


FIGURE 1 Effect of teacher interventions on prejudice mediated by intergroup contact (structural equation model).

increase intergroup friendships with immigrant minorities. The increase in these interactions generates a negative effect on both kinds of prejudice. The effect of intergroup friendships on both kinds of prejudice is stronger than the effect of teacher interventions.

According to these results, the second hypothesis is confirmed: *The more students feel that their teachers address issues related to racism, discrimination, and the habits and customs of populations considered as minorities, the higher the number of positive interactions they will have with immigrant minorities, which will also help reduce their blatant and subtle prejudices.*

DISCUSSION

Our results raise several considerations. In accordance with the first hypothesis of the study, we have demonstrated that the more students feel that teachers address issues related to international immigration, such as racism, discrimination and ethno-cultural diversity, the more blatant and subtle prejudices decrease. This result is particularly important in the light of the specific target population we studied, that is, adolescents who are starting to forge their principles of equality, justice and social relationships within society. As suggested by Bekhuis et al. (2012), the more an educational system seeks to convey values of tolerance and respect for the other, the more the role of teaching staff becomes important. In line with the suggestions put forward by Verkuyten and Kinket (2000) and Verkuyten and Thijs (2000, 2003), we are of the opinion that the effects of students participating in discussions with teachers may extend beyond the sphere of intergroup attitudes and the simple act of talking about issues related to immigrant minorities, by helping to shatter certain taboos. For example, in the French case, Debarbieux (1998) came to

the realization that students find it easier to report manifestations of racism and discrimination encountered within the school environment. This means that the classroom is a context in which there is the potential for preventing ethno-racial intolerance.

It is also important to emphasize that our young participants showed a certain sensitivity to the scales used. Their level of adherence to the aggressive tones, which are typical of blatant prejudices, was lower than the adherence shown to the more elaborate questioning in relation to subtle prejudices. This indicates that despite their young age, their representations are in line with the transformations of European public discourses on international immigration, where the grim tones of the 1980s/1990s have given way to a greater subtlety which mainly concerns identity and culture.

Our results highlight that the relationship between teacher interventions as perceived by students and the reduction of prejudices is not only direct, but produced by an interaction mechanism by which those in the majority increase their friendship relations with those in the minority. It is possible that the formation of inter-ethnic friendships is subject to the influence of several factors, especially for an adolescent population, for example, school environment, neighbourhood characteristics and family SES. Nevertheless, among these factors, the low/high level of prejudice must have an important role to play. According to our study, there is a positive interaction between the perception of teacher involvement and the construction of friendly intergroup relations. This consideration reflects previous work which shows that addressing the issues during lessons potentially helps students develop positive interactions that transcend the boundaries of the group to which they belong (Bekhuis et al., 2012). As suggested by Pettigrew et al. (2011), it is likely that spending positive moments with friends from different cultural backgrounds allows people to distance themselves from the most common *clichés* about immigration. As Boland's study also demonstrates in the same [special issue](#), it appears that interactions between young people can modify their perceptions about Muslim minorities, which supports our results with regards to the importance of focusing on prejudices to build positive intergroup relationships. In this sense, we think it would be useful to generalize intercultural education programs in school, because their impact on prejudices also occurs through the construction of positive intergroup relations. We believe that discussing issues related to international immigration during lessons, such as cultural differences, racism and discrimination, could yield positive effects both at a cognitive (prejudice reduction) level and a conative (intergroup friendship) level. According to our results, the effects of intergroup friendships on prejudices are stronger than the effects of teacher interventions as perceived by students, while the work of Bekhuis et al. (2012) emphasizes the importance of classroom interventions compared to the importance of intergroup friendships. The social maturity of the adolescents in our study also emerges at the level of the relationship between their position in the social hierarchy and the level of intergroup hostility shown. Indeed, the prejudices expressed are influenced by the parents' cultural resources, which constitutes an important tool for the deconstruction of public representations of the immigrant phenomenon. Given that parental educational capital is a proxy variable for family SES, this also means that the level of prejudice intensifies with the reduction in the social distance of young people from immigrant populations. Despite their young age, the adolescents involved in our study report a political socialization that is well under way, and greatly justifies using school education as a basis for teaching about the relationship to otherness.

Our findings may also provide a contribution to the debate about the relationship between intergroup friendship and prejudices (Turner & Cameron, 2016). Most of the literature is based on cross-sectional studies where the intergroup friendships are the starting point for reducing prejudices. However, this choice does not help explain the contextual and individual origins of this important predictor (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Page-Gould et al., 2008). As far as our study is concerned, we do not exclude the fact that teacher interventions are important 'devices' for the reduction of prejudices due to the friendly intergroup experiences that students have been able to build beforehand under the impulse of debates developed during lessons.

Our study also has its limitations. It does not allow us to confirm how appropriate teacher interventions should be delivered and the nature of their content. We do not know the pedagogical and didactical methods adopted by teachers when discussing topics related to international immigration with their students. This subject deserves more attention and it would be interesting to explore it using a qualitative study. We think it would be relevant to enter

the 'black box' of the classroom and propose specific methods to deal with the social construction of otherness, while leaving teachers free to adapt these methods to the needs of the students. The methods are inspired by the principles of an intercultural pedagogy that emphasize the individual and the institutional dynamics which underly the construction of intergroup boundaries (Pica et al., 2020). In addition, our study was unable to explain the effect of the unequal power relations between the students and their teachers during teacher interventions. Indeed, if power relations within the classroom are built on interactions, it remains in the hands of the teacher to share that power, or on the contrary, to maintain complete responsibility (Manke, 1997). In terms of prejudice and racism, although students can decide to adhere to what is taught and the way the topic is approached or not, the issue itself cannot leave them indifferent, as it is embedded in our societies, and sometimes in their own lives, if they are or have been witnesses, victims or aggressors. As a consequence, teaching about the various issues should generate reactions and reflection, and hence we hypothesize that any teacher intervention will have a positive effect. Finally, despite the interpretations of our results as proposed above, we underline again that we do not know exactly where students form the new friendly relations with immigrant minorities that will help reduce prejudices. Perhaps they are able to form these relations within the school space, and this would once again confirm the importance of teacher interventions in improving the 'relational school climate' for students.

CONCLUSION

The results of our study emphasize the complex nature of the effects that education can have on prejudice towards immigrant populations, whether it is blatant prejudice or subtle prejudice. Our findings show the importance of addressing issues related to ethnic diversity during lessons so as to deconstruct prejudices. This helps improve representations of otherness, both directly and indirectly, as it seems to exert a positive effect on the construction of intergroup friendships. Interventions in school are highly relevant because the reduction, even the prevention, of prejudices, and the construction of positive intergroup friendships are key pillars in the relationship between interculturalism and discrimination. This study shows that teachers have an influence, and in particular, a role to play in reducing the dissemination of intolerant ideas. This is crucial, as we have seen that adolescents are already aware of the transformations that have taken place in terms of the representations of otherness. When it comes to reflecting on the place of otherness in their society, questions about identity prevail over the aggressive comments which marked previous decades. Despite certain criticisms of Pettigrew and Meertens's scales (Coenders et al., 2001), our study shows that the distinction between blatant and subtle prejudices also applies to adolescents.

In the face of the political and institutional constraints typical of a republican philosophy, which is well known around the word for preaching 'indifference to differences' within its school system, we have found exceptions which produce interesting results. There is a genuine need to offer robust training to teaching staff on the issues raised by international migration and ethno-cultural diversity. This could mitigate the risks related to individual variability in teacher involvement with intercultural programs, as highlighted by Bekhuis et al. (2012). It also means that tackling discrimination can be carried out, even at an individual level, and through bottom-up strategies, starting from cognitive actions that expand into conative actions. In this sense, the fight against prejudice and the development of positive intergroup interactions are two keystones of the intercultural approach. Our contribution emphasizes the importance of starting to work on the cognitive side, because once the change in representations has begun, the effects that spread out at the conative level remain more effective in reducing prejudices compared to teacher interventions.

We believe that further studies can be developed, especially in an era where educational systems are increasingly called upon to enable the youngest generations to acquire a sense of civic responsibility which is essential to social cohesion. In our view, it is important that schools emphasize intercultural and inter-ethnic issues. Interculturalism has proved to be a pragmatic response to concerns of multicultural cities by concentrating on a 'contact-based approach' and echoing, in theoretical terms, the development of Contact Theory (Zapata-Barrero, 2015). School then

represents an interesting environment where young people can gain positive, inclusive images of ethnic minorities and seek out interactions. The school environment meets all the structural criteria put forward in the literature to ensure that contact between majority and minority groups is effective, but this will depend on whether or not these criteria are supported by the views of others within the institution, for example, the teachers. Moreover, we need to identify mechanisms which support positive interactions and improve intergroup relations so that young people understand that 'they are more likely to *take up* any opportunities that arise to engage in positive, sustained, intergroup relationships'. This is why we advocate the need to understand the dynamics within the 'black box' of the classroom. This undoubtedly implies a change of register, and a move towards more qualitative approaches which are better able to inform us about the pedagogical and didactical methods implemented. In consequence, school can be a key player in ensuring the social cohesion of tomorrow, where diversity is a constitutive part of 'us', and helping young people become aware of their standpoints in reducing social tensions where otherness is the habitual scapegoat.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In our sample, students born outside of France with at least one parent born outside of France equates with 1048 participants, which according to the literature, represents the so-called minority group.
- ² In the French school system, a 'general' high school offers a scientific or literary pathway that prepares students for further studies in higher education. 'Professional' and 'technological' high schools provide two professional pathways. The difference between a 'professional' and a 'technological' high school is that the latter allows easier access to certain higher education degrees, while this option is more difficult for students with a professional high school baccalaureate.

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