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Immigrant students' educational expectations: the role of religious affiliation and practice

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ABSTRACT

A body of scholarly work has emerged on educational expectations. More recently, the relationship between educational expectations and immigrant background in Western Europe has been investigated. Although the results of this type of inquiry show that students with an immigrant background tend to have higher educational expectations, potential explanations of this relationship remain unarticulated. In this article, we investigate whether religious affiliation and practice help explain the relationship between immigrant background and educational expectations. We use the Flemish survey data from the 2009 wave of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). In comparison with students who claimed to have no religious affiliation, students with a Muslim and other religious affiliation were more likely to have these expectations. This relation does not hold for the students with a Christian religious affiliation. However, the effect of religious affiliation disappears when the effects of religious participation were included. We also found that the more religiously active, the higher the educational expectations are for the students. This effect diminished when we controlled for talking with parents about political or social issues. The relationship between immigrant background and educational expectations is partially explained by the level of religious practice and religious affiliation of students.

KEYWORDS

Religious affiliation; religious practice; educational expectations

Introduction

Since the early studies of Sewell et al. on status attainment and the educational plans of students (Sewell, Haller and Portes 1969), a body of scholarly work has emerged on educational expectations, or what students expect to achieve in education (Buchmann and Dalton 2002). A number of these studies focused on white students and minorities in North-American settings (e.g. Mello 2008). More recently, the relationship between educational expectations and immigrant background of students in European contexts has also been investigated (e.g. Jerrim 2014). The results of a number of inquiries along these lines show that students with an immigrant background tend to have higher educational expectations than native students, after controlling for variables such as the socio-economic background.

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The high level of educational expectations contrasts with scholarly literature, which shows that educational inequality tends to persist for students with an immigrant background. Immigrants and their children tend to have lower educational attainment than natives, as shown for example in a review of research conducted in Western European countries focused on second-generation minorities (Heath, Rothon, and Kilpi 2008).

In the literature, two main perspectives try to explain immigrants' educational expectations with: (1) the influence of previous academic achievement, successes and failures; and (2) the influences of family, peers and teachers (Haller and Portes 1973). The first perspective focuses on the characteristics of students, while the second perspective focuses on the characteristics of the networks of students. These approaches, however, largely ignore the role of religiosity (affiliation and practices) in explaining immigrant students' educational expectations. This is unfortunate because religion is an important element in the lives of specific immigrant groups (e.g. Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011).

In this article, we hypothesise that religious affiliation and practices are important to take into account in an analysis of students' educational expectations. This is because the cultural repertoire of a religion includes ideas that can have a positive effect on pro-social attitudes and life improvement. This has been shown by previous studies in the US in the domain of the sociology of religion and education, including adolescent health attitudes and health behaviours (Cotton et al. 2006; Rew and Wong 2006; Van Praag et al. 2016), educational outcomes (Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernández 2008; Jeynes 2003), well-being (Van Cappellen et al. 2014), and adolescent risk behaviours (such as drugs and alcohol use) (Regnerus and Elder 2003; Sinha, Cnaan, and Gelles 2007). Trying to meet educational goals and performing well at school is also a positive attitude towards life improvement. Many religions and their literary sources also show that a pursuit of worldly knowledge is recommended and valued. During religious practice, these values and their validity are reinforced. We therefore expect a positive effect of religious affiliation and practice on educational expectations.

With this literature in mind, we suggest that a study on the relationship between educational expectations and students' immigrant background in Europe should also include an investigation of the possible role of religious affiliation and practices. More specifically, we will investigate whether it helps explain why immigrant students have a higher level of educational expectations.

Theory and hypotheses

Immigrant background and educational expectations

Adolescent students have to make decisions that have important ramifications for their further life course. They have to create 'an extended future orientation in which they are able to think, dream, and plan for their futures' (Beal and Crockett 2010, 258). Evidently, they have to make educational plans that include dreams, hopes but also more concrete expectations on future educational attainment.

In early status attainment research, with the classic example of the so-called Wisconsin model, educational plans are positively related with future educational attainment (Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman 2006; Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969).

Later researchers refined the concept of the 'educational plan' and made the distinction between students' educational *aspirations* and *expectations*. The former concept indicates

what students *hope* to attain in education and 'reflects some degree of hopefulness' (Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman 2006, 208) or even dreams (Khattab 2015), or abstract attitudes towards schooling (Mickelson 1990); while the latter concept defines a more realistic or concrete assessment what students ultimately *expect* to achieve in education (Boxer et al. 2011; Hanson 1994; Mickelson 1990). Although students' educational expectations still entail overly optimistic assessments of the future – e.g. when children are around 14-years-old (Jerrim 2014) – research considers educational expectations as more rational than educational aspirations (Morgan 1998). The distinction between educational aspirations and expectations is crucial because researchers claim that educational expectations have a stronger positive relation with later educational success (Jerrim 2014). In what follows, we will therefore focus on educational expectations.

Educational expectations are influenced by the experiences and the (socio-economic and ethnic) backgrounds of students. This includes their family upbringing and relations with parents, friends and teachers (called 'significant others'), but also their academic achievement (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Haller and Portes 1973; Woelfel and Haller 1971). Educational expectations are namely also influenced by previous educational successes or failures. They also tend to be rather stable, socially stratified and formed early on in the lives of students (see Andrew and Hauser 2011; Bozick et al. 2010).

A number of studies conducted in the US have found that certain ethnic groups have higher educational expectations than white students (on Asian and Latino students: Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman 2006). Similarly, a number of studies on the relationship between an immigrant background and educational expectations have shown that students with an immigrant background in Europe tend to have significantly higher educational expectations than students with a native background (Jerrim 2014). This is remarkable because immigrants and their children tend to have lower educational attainment than natives, as shown for example in a review of research conducted in Western European countries focused on second-generation minorities (Heath, Rothon, and Kilpi 2008). In this article, we hypothesise that:

> H1: Students with an immigrant background are more likely to have high educational expectations than students with a native background.

Religiosity and educational expectations

Introduction

In the literature, two main perspectives try to explain immigrants' educational expectations (Haller and Portes 1973). The first perspective theorises that a student will self-reflexively change his or her educational expectations in reaction to his or her academic achievement (Andrew and Hauser 2011; Bozick et al. 2010). Educational expectations increase or decrease when academic achievement is high or low. More generally, the first perspective focuses on the characteristics of the student.

The second perspective considers the role of 'significant others' such as parents, peers and teachers. It focuses on the networks of the students. Parents transmit values and educational expectations to their children in a family socialisation process. They achieve this with parent—child interactions (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Powell, Steelman, and Carini 2006). Similarly, the expectations of teachers that a child will achieve a certain level of educational attainment can be decisive for students' own educational expectations (and

later educational attainment) (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2013). Peers also have an influence on educational expectations. During interaction, peers transmit values, preferences and attitudes to their friends. They act as 'significant others' (Buchmann and Dalton 2002). Increased contact with peers can result in a higher similarity in values, preferences and attitudes (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). When a student has more contact with highly achieving or ambitious students, there is an influence towards better achievement and higher ambitions.

In this article, we contribute to both perspectives and investigate a student characteristic and a form of network that has been relatively neglected in the literature on educational expectations (with the exception of Rhodes and Nam 1970): the religious affiliation and practice of students. This neglect is unfortunate because religious practice and affiliation can be important elements early on in the lives of students and especially for certain immigrant groups in Europe. Previous studies have found that specific immigrant groups in Europe – more specifically, from developing countries and places with a relatively large Muslim population – tend to be more religious than native groups (e.g. Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011). The effect of religiosity (affiliation and practices) on dispositions such as educational expectations should therefore be more closely investigated.

In Western Europe, however, religion and more specifically Islam carries a negative connotation (Güngör, Fleischmann, and Phalet 2011). In contrast to these views in predominantly secular Western Europe, the American perspective highlights and documents the positive aspects of religiosity. According to the American perspective, religiosity can be positive in supporting and incorporating people with an immigrant background in society (see for example, Hirschman 2004).

Research in Western Europe has, however, neglected to investigate whether religion has positive effects on the lives of immigrants (Güngör, Fleischmann, and Phalet 2011). Most public attention to the religion of immigrants focuses on negative aspects such as radicalisation.

In the next section, we will develop a rationale and argumentation for the effect of religious affiliation and practice of students on educational expectations.

Religious affiliation and educational expectations

Religious people are knowledgeable about religious teachings and maxims and come into contact with particular ideas on what is good and bad or right and wrong (Barro and McCleary 2003; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Stokes 2008). These religious ideas provide guidelines for deciding which actions in life should be taken (Keister 2003) and can be translated into meaningful behaviour. For example, Max Weber pointed towards the relevance of studying the influence of religious ideas on people's lives and the material consequences of certain ideas (Beyerlein 2004; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Weber [1920] 2010). More generally, religion offers a tool kit or cultural repertoire that can be used to devise 'strategies of action'. This cultural repertoire includes 'symbols, stories, rituals, and world views' available to a person or group (Edgell 2012; Swidler 1986, 273).

This cultural repertoire includes religious ideas that promote pro-social attitudes and life improvement. This has been shown in research mainly conducted in the US on for example adolescent health attitudes and health behaviours, well-being and adolescent risk behaviours (e.g. Cotton et al. 2006; Sinha, Cnaan, and Gelles 2007; Van Cappellen et al. 2014); but also

educational outcomes (Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernández 2008; Jeynes 2003; Regnerus and Elder 2003). However, there is not much research on the relationship between educational expectations and religious identification (an early exception is Rhodes and Nam 1970 on college plans of US youth).

As already shown, there exists evidence that religious phenomena promote attitudes that motivate people to improve their own life situation. Studying to meet educational goals and achieving performing at school is also a positive attitude towards life improvement. Religions in Western Europe and their literary sources also show that a pursuit of worldly knowledge is recommended and valued: in the Old and New Testament, Deuteronomy 4:10; Luke 2:40; and in the Qur'an, Q. 17:36 and 39:9 (see Halstead 2004). Eastern religions in Western Europe are not negative towards worldly knowledge and education: Buddhism has even been called a complementary form of science that is focused on self-investigation. In Buddhism, knowledge is the path to enlightenment: knowledge should eliminate ignorance coupled with altruism and less egoism (Thuan 2008; Wallace 2007). Hinduist thought is not necessarily incompatible with 'experiential' knowledge acquisition (Ganeri 2005; McDaniel 2008).

We can thus explore whether there is a positive effect of religious affiliation on educational expectations. There is a lack of theoretical and empirical research into possible differences in effect of religious affiliations on educational expectations. We therefore do not hypothesise different effects for different religions on educational expectations. In this article, we will instead *explore* the relationship between different religious affiliations and educational expectations. We put forward the following hypothesis.

H2: Students with a religious affiliation are more likely to have high educational expectations than students with no religious affiliation.

Religious practice and educational expectations

Religious networks constitute groups/associations or congregations that are essentially voluntaristic, connected with other social networks and maintained and produced by religious practice (see van Oorschot, Arts, and Gelissen 2006; Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernández 2008; Norris and Inglehart 2011). Members of a religious network embed and integrate themselves in a network by being more involved in religious practices. When religious people are more involved in religious practices (e.g. attending religious services or gatherings), they are more integrated in the religious network (Durkheim, [1897] 2006).

The membership in such a network has its benefits: members of religious networks can access the available resources of the network and other connected networks of the other members. Like networks such as the parent—child or teacher—child relation, religious networks can thus function as a form of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) and exert a socialising influence on its members. In these networks, values can be practiced that are positive towards life improvement and pro-social behaviour.

In their work, Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) identified religious membership (including the attendance of religious services) as a possible form of social capital (Kaasa 2015). The role of this form of social capital in educational outcomes has been documented. For example, the functioning of religious involvement as social capital is shown by studies of Coleman and Hoffer (1987): they compared the performance of high school students in Catholic private, public and other private schools in the US. In these studies, the school

performance of high school students was better and dropout rates lower in Catholic private schools. Coleman emphasised that students' relationship with adult networks may provide 'intergenerational closure'. The students were part of a broader network or functional community where parents knew each other and which surrounded the school. This had a beneficial influence on school performance (Coleman 1988, 113–116). Other studies separately investigated intergenerational closure of networks (often present in religious networks) and found positive effects on educational outcomes (e.g. Thorlindsson, Bjarnason, and Sigfusdottir 2007).

The literature thus accumulated evidence that religious networks can have a positive relation with educational outcomes. However, research has given less attention to whether religious networks also have a positive effect on educational expectations. Religious networks give students access to different resources that can have beneficial outcomes on educational outcomes. They also have a socialising function: religious networks can practice values that are positive towards life improvement and pro-social behaviour. We thus put forward the following hypothesis.

H3: Students who practice religion are more likely to have high educational expectations than students who do not practice religion.

Religiosity and the relationship between students' immigrant background and educational expectations

The argumentation so far points towards religiosity (affiliation and practice) as an important phenomenon in studies on the relationship between students' immigrant background and educational expectations.

This is because specific immigrant groups in Europe tend to be more religious in comparison with natives and other immigrant groups (e.g. Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011). Thus, more than is the case for natives, religion is a key element in the lives of immigrant families. Therefore, it is more likely to have an influence on the educational expectations of students with an immigrant background than students with a native background. Although students with a native background might still identify themselves as Christian or practice a Christian religion (the main cultural heritage in Europe), this is likely to be with less vitality than the first group (see also Norris and Inglehart 2011). We hypothesise that religiosity (affiliation and practices) might explain the effect of immigrant background on educational expectations:

H4: Religiosity explains the relationship between immigrant background and educational expectations.

Methods

The sample

In this article, we use survey data from the 2009 wave of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). This cross-sectional data contains information on civic and citizen education of young people in 38 countries (De Groof et al. 2010; Schulz, Ainley, and Fraillon 2011). This survey also includes questions on the religious affiliation and practices of students. Other cross-national surveys of students do not include such questions (for example, the Program for International Student Assessment surveys).

In this article, we specifically focus on the Flemish school system in Flanders and Brussels. This is relevant if we consider the mentioned contrast between high educational expectations and the educational inequality of students with an immigrant background. The Flemish school system exhibits relatively high educational inequality compared with school systems in other European countries (on the mathematics and reading achievement between 15-year-old children with and without an immigrant background in Flanders see Jacobs and Rea 2011).

If we consider the relatively high educational inequality of students in this school system (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2013), it would be interesting to investigate the educational expectations of students with an immigrant background. In Belgium, children are obligated to follow education from the age of six until the age of 18 (Baysu and de Valk 2012). The Belgian school system uses a hierarchical tracking system of students (Phalet, Deboosere, and Bastiaenssen 2007). Primary education normally lasts six years with a transition to secondary education at the theoretical age of 12. Mainstream secondary education in Belgium includes three stages that normally take two years each (De Groof and Franck 2013). For the first two years of secondary education (lower secondary school), students can choose between a so-called A stream that includes mainstream education and a B stream that prepares them for a vocational educational track. After the first stage of secondary education in Belgium (the first and second grade, at the theoretical age of 14), students can choose among four tracks (upper secondary school): a general secondary education (ASO), technical secondary education (TSO), secondary education in the arts (KSO) or vocational secondary education (BSO). In the ICCS 2009 data, only students in the second year of the first grade of schools in Flanders and Brussels were sampled.

The ICCS survey used a stratified cluster design that included two stages. Firstly, the research areas in Flanders and Brussels in Belgium were stratified according to four dimensions: school size, province, school type and educational stream (an A and B stream). Secondly, schools were selected with a probability proportional to size (PPS) (except in the stratum of large schools). In each selected school, one or more classes in the second year of the first grade of secondary school in Flanders and Brussels were selected at random with an equal selection probability. Two classes were selected in the 10 largest schools.

Of the 160 schools initially sampled, 151 schools eventually decided to participate. In total, 2968 students in 175 classes in these schools participated in the survey, all being on average 14-years-old. No schools that educate children with special needs were included in the sample.

Design

We use multilevel model specifications to account for the variation of high educational expectations of students within the second year of the first grade (the first level of analysis) and between classes in schools (the second level of analysis) (Table 2). In this way, we account for the nested structure of our data.

We model the likelihood of having high educational expectations of students around the age of 14 in the Flemish school system in Flanders and Belgium with random intercept binary logistic regression and maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. The general structure of the random intercept binary logistic regression models with 2968 students nested in 175 classes is (Gelman and Hill 2007):

$$Pr(y_i = 1) = logit^{-1}\left(\alpha_{j[i]} + \beta_{xi}\right), \text{ for i} = 1, ..., 2968 \quad (1)$$

$$\alpha_j = \gamma_0^{\alpha} + \gamma_1^{\alpha} u_j + \eta_j^{\alpha}, \text{ for j} = 1, ..., 175 \quad (2)$$

As recommended by the creators of the ICCS 2009 data set, the data was weighted to account for the school and within school sample design. We calculated a normalised within-school student (level one) and a level two weight for the multilevel analyses (see Brese et al. 2011, 31–32). All weights address the selection probability of students in schools and adjust for school, class and student non-response. The sum of the final weights corresponds to the sample size on the first and second level of analysis (see also Schulz, Ainley, and Fraillon 2011, 69–75). The data were analysed with Mplus 7.4 (for multilevel modelling) and SPSS 21 (for data description/preparation).

In total, 2723 of 2968 students (91.7%) in our sample have no missing values on any of the independent variables. This means that 8.3% of the respondents have at least one missing value on one of the independent variables. Sixty-one of 2968 students (2.1%) have a missing value on the dependent variable. We use multiple imputation to deal with missing values. We entered all variables described in the next section into the imputation phase (gender, age, highest level of parental education, immigrant background, family structure, religious affiliation, religious practice, parental involvement and the distinction between classes, public or private schools and A or B educational stream). We calculated 10 imputed data sets. The advantage of multiple imputation is that the available information of cases can be used to fill in missing data. It produces several data sets with the use of Bayesian statistics and analyses with these data are pooled in order to produce an estimate (Enders 2010). The total sample after multiple imputation is 2968 on level 1 and 175 classrooms on level 2.

Variables

Our outcome variable measures educational expectations. Respondents were asked the following question: 'in which of the following levels of education do you expect to gain a diploma or degree?' (Brese et al. 2011, 107). Only the highest category indicated university master level and doctoral qualifications. In the second category, a vocational qualification was already among the possibilities. In Belgium, there is, however, a negative perception of vocational and technical tracks (Van Houtte and Stevens 2010). To clearly contrast people with the highest and relatively lower expectations, we therefore dichotomised this variable. Students who answered the highest category, namely master level or a higher category ('higher education of the long type') were coded as 1 (35.17% in our data). All the other categories were coded as 0 (see Table 1).

Three variables figure prominently in our hypotheses and are therefore our main variables of interest: religious affiliation, religious practice and immigrant background. In the survey, the religious affiliation of students was measured ('how would you describe yourself in the field of religion?') with six answer modalities ('no religion, liberal thinker, Catholic, Christian but not Catholic, Muslim, other religion') (Brese et al. 2011, 169). We distinguish between no religion (including the explicit mention of a worldview by the student as 'a liberal thinker') (36.22%), Christian or Catholic (52.73%), Muslim (7.95%) and other religion (3.10%).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Range	Mean or % (SD)	% imputed
*Level 1: Student**			
1. High educational expectations	0–1	35.17	2.05
2. Female student	0–1	49.61	0.57
3. Age	12.25–17.17	13.95(0.56)	1.04
4. *Highest level of parental education*			3.07
High educational level[a]	0–1	31.41	
Medium educational level[b]	0–1	39.66	
Low educational level[c]	0–1	28.93	
5. *Religious affiliation*			1.41
No religion	0–1	36.22	
Christian	0–1	52.73	
Muslim	0–1	7.95	
Other religion	0–1	3.10	
6. *Religious practice*			1.11
Never	0–1	40.80	
Less than once a year	0–1	17.99	
At least once a year	0–1	28.61	
At least once a month	0–1	7.19	
At least once a week	0–1	5.41	
7. *Immigrant background*			1.89
Native	0–1	88.54	
Second generation	0–1	6.31	
First generation	0–1	5.14	
8. *Family structure*			1.14
Single parent	0–1	11.65	
Nuclear family	0–1	76.29	
Mixed	0–1	7.56	
Other	0–1	4.49	
9. *Talking with parents about political or social issues*			0.34
Never or hardly ever	0–1	69.66	
Monthly (at least once a month)	0–1	16.26	
Weekly (at least once a week)	0–1	10.35	
Daily or almost daily	0–1	3.74	
*Level 2: Classroom***			
10. Educational B stream	0–1	17.71	0
11. Immigrant composition	0–83	12.63(17.78)	0
12. Low parental educational composition	0–82.5	31.20(17.57)	0
13. Public school	0–1	28.57	0

Note: unweighted data; imputed values.
[a]Higher education of the long type (at least four years).
[b]Higher education of the short type (three years)/7th year of vocational education/4th grade of vocational education.
[c]Secondary education or lower.
*$N = 2968$ (Variables 1–9); **$J = 175$ (Variables 10–13).

The religious practice of students was inquired by the following question: 'how often do you attend religious services or gatherings outside your home with a group of other people?' (Brese et al. 2011, 172). This item was coded as never (40.80%), less than once a year (17.99%), at least once a year (28.61%), at least once a month (7.19%) and at least once a week (5.41%). People with no religious affiliation were also allowed to answer the question on religious practices. They may also occasionally attend a religious service or gathering (for example on weddings or funerals). We use this variable as a categorical variable.

Students had to indicate their own country of birth as well as that of their parents. With the use of these questions, the ICCS team distinguished between native students (88.54% in our data), second-generation students (6.31%) and first-generation students (5.14%).

The inclusion of other variables in our analysis was guided by the discussed literature and the variables that are available in the ICCS 2009 data set. The reviewed literature indicated that the parental educational level of students is likely to influence educational expectations.

Table 2. Multilevel logistic regression of educational expectations: log odds with standard errors in parentheses.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Level 1: Student						
1. Female student [a]	0.052(0.101)		0.047(0.103)		0.045(0.103)	0.048(0.103)
2. Age [b]	−0.110(0.060)+		−0.127(0.061)*		−0.133(0.060)*	−0.144(0.060)*
3. *Highest level of parental education* [c]						
Medium educational level	0.343(0.119)**		0.363(0.118)**		0.368(0.119)**	0.358(0.119)**
High educational level	1.061(0.121)***		1.086(0.120)***		1.084(0.122)***	1.070(0.122)***
4. *Immigrant background* [d]						
First generation	1.017(0.229)***		0.850(0.233)***		0.837(0.236)***	0.823(0.238)**
Second generation	0.865(0.253)**		0.596(0.273)*		0.522(0.279)+	0.517(0.279)+
5. *Family structure* [e]						
Single parent	−0.161(0.127)		−0.137(0.131)		−0.111(0.130)	−0.118(0.131)
Mixed	−0.020(0.225)		0.016(0.228)		0.030(0.229)	0.039(0.230)
Other	0.081(0.235)		0.092(0.236)		0.096(0.237)	0.095(0.239)
6. *Religious affiliation* [f]						
Christian		0.090(0.115)	0.061(0.122)		−0.047(0.132)	−0.038(0.133)
Muslim		0.751(0.230)**	0.632(0.271)*		0.462(0.287)	0.447(0.290)
Other religion		0.649(0.272)*	0.608(0.291)*		0.530(0.297)+	0.530(0.296)+
7. *Religious practice* [g]						
Less than once a year				0.102(0.143)	0.095(0.157)	0.076(0.156)
At least once a year				0.251(0.115)*	0.245(0.117)*	0.208(0.118)+
At least once a month				0.395(0.188)*	0.329(0.204)	0.252(0.206)
At least once a week				0.733(0.193)***	0.506(0.231)*	0.435(0.235)+
8. *Talking with parents about political or social issues* [j]						
Monthly (at least once a month)						0.205(0.116)+
Weekly (at least once a week)						0.351(0.144)*
Daily or almost daily						0.371(0.226)

Level 2: Classroom						
9. Immigrant composition [b]	0.048(0.096)	0.092(0.092)	0.000(0.096)	0.159(0.090)+	−0.008(0.097)	−0.009(0.095)
10. Low parental educational composition [b]	−0.457(0.104)***	−0.622(0.105)***	−0.451(0.104)***	−0.607(0.104)***	−0.438(0.103)***	−0.428(0.102)***
11. Public school [h]	0.198(0.197)	0.150(0.196)	0.199(0.196)	0.189(0.195)	0.209(0.195)	0.218(0.192)
12. Educational B stream [i]	−1.798(0.271)***	−1.880(0.279)***	−1.831(0.274)***	−1.809(0.274)***	−1.802(0.274)***	−1.775(0.270)***
Intercept	−1.330(0.135)***	−0.850(0.127)***	−1.428(0.161)***	−0.887(0.117)***	−1.499(0.160)***	−1.558(0.160)***
Variance at the second level	0.432(0.119)***	0.457(0.114)***	0.428(0.120)***	0.439(0.111)***	0.413(0.118)***	0.390(0.112)***
N	2968	2968	2968	2968	2968	2968
J	175	175	175	175	175	175

Note: weighted data;
$^{+}p < .10$
$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$, two tailed significance test; Reference category is:
[a]male student.
[b]standardised variable.
[c]low educational level.
[d]native background.
[e]nuclear family.
[f]no religious affiliation.
[g]no religious practice.
[h]subsidised private school.
[i]educational A stream.
[j]never or hardly ever.

We therefore decided to include the highest level of parental education based on two questions that measure the highest completed educational level of the mother and the father (in case of a single parent: the highest educational level of the single parent): 'higher education of the long type (at least four years)' (31.41%, a high education level), 'higher education of the short type (three years)/7th year of vocational education/4th grade of vocational education' (39.66%, a medium education level), 'secondary education' or lower (28.93%, a low education level) (Brese et al. 2011, 121, 128).

Parental involvement can also have an effect on educational expectations. As an available proxy for parental involvement at home in the ICCS 2009 data, we included a variable that measures the frequency of interaction with parents about political or social issues (Brese et al. 2011, 137). Students were asked to indicate how often they talked with their parents about political or social issues outside of school: 'never or hardly ever' (69.66%), 'monthly (at least once a month)' (16.26%), 'weekly (at least once a week)' (10.35%) or 'daily or almost daily' (3.74%).

We also added three other background variables: gender, age and family structure. We standardised age. The mean age is 13.95 (SD = 0.56). Students had to indicate who lives at home with them 'most or all of the time' (Brese et al. 2011, 134). With the use of this question, the ICCS team distinguished between single parent families (only a mother, father, female or male guardian) (11.65%), nuclear families (a father and a mother) (76.29%), mixed families (a mother and a female guardian or a mother and a male guardian or a father and a female guardian or a female and male guardian) (7.56%) and other families[1] (4.49%). Lastly, we also include gender. The variable gender is coded as 0 (male) and 1 (female), and 49.61% of the students are female.

At the second level, we calculated two composition variables: (1) the percentage of students with a low parental educational level; and (2) immigrant background in the class. The first composition variable is the percentage of students with a low parental educational level in a class. We calculated this variable with the percentage of students in a class who have parents with an educational level that resembles secondary education, lower secondary education, primary education or less than primary education. A higher score on this variable indicates a lower parental educational composition in the class (minimum is 0%, maximum is 82.5%). The mean of this variable at the second level is 31.20 (SD = 17.57). The immigrant composition variable is the percentage of non-native students in a class. A higher score on this variable indicates more students with an immigrant background in the class (minimum is 0%, maximum is 83%). The mean of this variable at the second level is 12.63 (SD = 17.78). We standardised both variables on the class level.

We also included the type of school (public [1] or subsidised private [0]) and the educational stream (A [0] or B [1]) on the second level of the analysis; 28.57% of the classes are in public schools, 17.71% of the classes are in the B stream.

Results

The data is analysed with random intercept binary logistic regressions. The residual variance at the second level (classes in a null model [no independent variables in the model]) is 1.15. The intraclass correlation is therefore 0.26.[2] We conclude that in a randomly drawn class in our sample, the correlation in high educational expectations between two randomly chosen individuals is 0.26.

In model 1, we entered immigrant background to test whether students with immigrant background are more likely to have high educational expectations than students with a native background (hypothesis 1), controlling for gender, age, family structure, highest level of parental education at the first level and parental educational level composition, immigrant composition, educational stream and school type at the second level. Results show that students with a second or first generation background have significantly higher educational expectations compared to students with a native background. Compared to the native students, we also see that the odds of first-generation and second-generation students having high educational expectations are higher (the odds ratio for second generation students is 2.37 ($e^{0.865}$)) and for first-generation students, 2.76 ($e^{1.017}$)). This effect is maintained in all models that we report in table two. This effect is maintained after controlling for gender, age, family structure, highest level of parental education, talking with parents about political or social issues, religious affiliation and religious practices at the first level and parental educational level composition, immigrant composition, educational stream and school type at the second level.

Hypothesis 2 states that students who are religiously affiliated are more likely to have high educational expectations than students who are not. In model 2, we entered religious affiliation (under control for immigrant composition, parental educational level composition, educational stream and school type at the second level). There are only controls for class level variables in model 2. Odds ratio for Islam is 2.12. Odds ratio for other religion is 1.91. Both are significant. In model 3, the effect of Muslim and other religious background is also significantly and positively related with educational expectations (with other control variables included: gender, age, highest level of parental education, immigrant background and family structure). Odds ratio for Islam is 1.88. Odds ratio for other religion is 1.84. Students with a Christian or Catholic affiliation do not have significantly higher educational expectations compared to students with no religious affiliation. We therefore partially support hypothesis 2.

In model 4 and 5, we include the different levels of religious practices as variables in the analysis. In model 4, there are only controls for class level variables. In model 5, we also include student level variables. High educational expectations are more likely with an increasing level of religious participation of students, independent of the affiliative dimension of religion. When religious practices occur at least once a year, we notice significantly higher log odds of having high educational expectations compared to no religious involvement. The odds of having high educational expectations for students who attend a religious meeting *at least once a year* in model 4 and 5 is 1.28 higher than the odds of students who do not attend religious meetings ($e^{0.251}$ & $e^{0.245}$). Similarly, the odds of having high educational expectations for students who attend a religious meeting *at least once a month* in model 4 and 5 are 1.48 and 1.39 higher than the odds of students who do not attend religious meetings ($e^{0.395}$ & $e^{0.329}$). The odds of having high educational expectations for students who attend a religious meeting *at least once a week* in model 4 and 5 are 2.08 and 1.66 higher than the odds of students who do not attend religious meetings ($e^{0.733}$ & $e^{0.506}$). Compared to model 3, the effects of an affiliation to Islam or other religious affiliation lower and become less significant after the inclusion of the variables that measure religious practice. This leads us to the claim that the participatory dimension is more important than the affiliative dimension of religion in explaining high educational expectations. We also notice that the effects

Table 3. Multilevel logistic regression of educational expectations: log odds with standard errors in parentheses.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Level 1: Student		
1. Female student[a]	0.050(0.103)	0.040(0.102)
2. Age[b]	−0.122(0.059)*	−0.125(0.059)*
3. *Highest level of parental education*[c]		
Medium educational level	0.367(0.118)**	0.368(0.118)**
High educational level	1.092(0.120)***	1.099(0.122)***
4. *Native background*[d]	−0.774(0.382)*	−0.316(0.315)
5. *Family structure*[e]		
Single parent	−0.135(0.130)	−0.115(0.130)
Mixed	0.016(0.228)	0.033(0.229)
Other	0.096(0.236)	0.095(0.235)
6. *Religious affiliation*[f]		
Christian	0.189(0.437)	−0.009(0.134)
Muslim	0.470(0.452)	0.476(0.275)+
Other religion	0.444(0.653)	0.576(0.298)+
7. *Religious practice*[g]		0.723(0.354)*
8. *Interaction effects*		
Native background*Christian	−0.137(0.456)	
Native background*Muslim	0.437(0.636)	
Native background*Other religion	0.201(0.759)	
Native background*Religious practice		−0.566(0.368)
Level 2: Classroom		
9. Immigrant composition[b]	−0.010(0.096)	−0.003(0.096)
10. Low parental educational composition[b]	−0.451(0.105)***	−0.435(0.103)***
11. Public school[h]	0.202(0.197)	0.211(0.195)
12. Educational B stream[i]	−1.842(0.273)***	−1.802(0.275)***
Intercept	−0.664(0.375)+	−1.169(0.333)***
Variance at the second level	0.430(0.121)***	0.420(0.119)***
N	2968	2968
J	175	175

Note: weighted data;
+$p < .10$
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two tailed significance test; Reference category is:
[a]male student.
[b]standardised variable.
[c]low educational level.
[d]non-native background.
[e]nuclear family.
[f]no religious affiliation.
[g]no religious practice.
[h]subsidised private school.
[i]educational A stream.

of religious affiliation and practice lower and become less significant after the inclusion of student level variables (see model 3 and 5).

In model 6, we include the frequency of interaction with parents about political or social issues to test whether the effects of religion diminish. We notice that the inclusion of this variable lowers the effects of religious practice and affiliation.

We postulated in hypothesis 4 that the relationship between immigrant background and educational expectations is explained by the religious affiliation and practice of students. We partially support this hypothesis. When we compare model 1, 3, 5 and 6 in Table 2, we notice that part of the effect of immigrant background diminishes, however, a part of the effect of immigrant background still holds.

In order to test whether the effects of the different religious affiliations and practices are moderated by immigrant background, we calculated interaction effects between immigrant background, religious affiliation and practice (Table 3). Specific combinations of these variables have low frequencies (for example: other religious background and at least once a week religiously practicing or second generation and other religion have low frequencies). We have therefore decided to recode immigrant background and religious practice as dichotomous variables (native versus immigrant and religiously practicing versus not religiously practicing). In model 1, we see that the effects of religious affiliation are not moderated by immigrant background (insignificant effects). The effect of religious affiliation is not different for immigrant and non-immigrant students. In model 2, we notice that the effect of religious practice is not moderated by immigrant background. The interaction term is not significant.

In all models, parental educational level composition of classes and the fact that a class is in the B stream is significantly related to high educational expectations. A class with a lower parental educational level composition or a class in an educational B stream is related with low educational expectations. Another result is that students with parents who are relatively highly educated have high educational expectations.

Discussion and conclusion

This article offered a view on the relations between immigrant background, religious phenomena and educational expectations. This study investigated whether there is a relationship between educational expectations and students' immigrant background. Although much research has found a positive relationship between the two phenomena, it ignored two possible explanations of this relationship. It did not include religious phenomena as variables into its analyses. This is unfortunate because religion is an important element for many people and especially migrants. Firstly, this article wanted to contribute to the literature on educational expectations by executing analyses with background variables such as parental background, immigrant background, age, family structure and gender. Secondly, we used measures for religious practices and religious affiliation and probed whether these variables are important additional explanations for high educational expectations.

Hypothesis 1 claimed that students with an immigrant background are more likely to have high educational expectations than students with a native background. We found empirical support for hypothesis 1, which stated an often-found research outcome. We thus hereby corroborate previous research: like other research conducted on European data sets, we found that immigrant students in Flanders (Belgium) have exceptionally high educational expectations. This is important to emphasise. Although previous research has shown that educational expectations are a predictor of educational success, this is in contrast with the educational expectations of immigrant children and their educational achievements as a group. Previous research thus gives evidence for an expectation-achievement gap for immigrant children. In this article, we gave support for the fact that this gap is equally present for immigrant students in Dutch-speaking schools in Belgium.

Hypothesis 2 claimed that students with a religious affiliation are more likely to have high educational expectations. In the theory section, we did not differentiate effects by religious background. This is because there is a complete lack of studies that theorise the relation between religious affiliation and educational expectations. In this article, we explored for the first time the effects of religious affiliation on educational expectations. Religious

phenomena were found to be positively related to educational expectations. In comparison with students who claimed to have no religious affiliation, students with a Muslim and other religious affiliation were more likely to have these expectations. This relation does not hold for the students with a Christian affiliation. Although pupils might still identify themselves as Christian or practice a Christian religion, this seems to have less effect on educational expectations. However, the effect of religious affiliation diminishes when the effects of religious participation were included.

In hypothesis 3, we claimed and also found that the more religiously active, the higher the educational expectations are for the students. This finding is also supported in more general research on social capital. Social networks such as those created and maintained during extracurricular activities can have a positive effect on students. We thus corroborate research conducted on the topic of social capital. We also found that the students' level of religious practice explained the effects of religious affiliation. We therefore claim that the intensity of religious practice is more important than the affiliative dimension of religion in the explanation of high educational expectations. The effect of religious practice diminished when we controlled for a specific type of parental involvement: talking with parents about political or social issues. This might indicate that families with more religious practice also tend to spend more time with each other.

The final hypothesis stated that religious phenomena explain the relationship between high educational expectations and immigrant background (hypothesis 4). The empirical results show that the relationship between immigrant background and educational expectations is partially explained by the level of religious practice and religious affiliation of students. We saw that the former effect diminished after including variables that measure religion. There are therefore other variables that are important in explaining this relationship.

A number of limitations of this research can be identified. Although the ICCS 2009 data offers a particular advantage with its measurement of religious phenomena of European students, future research should also use a more differentiated measure of immigrant background and other (more differentiated) dimensions of religion. A further limitation is that the data is restricted to a particular group of migrants: those who are secondary school students. The data was also limited to students' responses to questionnaires. This article showed that further research on educational expectations should include variables that measure religious affiliation and its practice.

Notes

1. There are different types of families in this category: (1) a father, mother, female and male guardian; (2) a mother, a female guardian and a male guardian; (3) a mother, a father and a male guardian; (4) a female guardian, father and a male guardian; and (5) a mother, a father and a female guardian.
2. If we assume that the level 1 variance term is constrained to 3.29 ($\pi^2/3$), we can calculate the intraclass correlation as follows: (1.15/(1.15 + 3.29)): 0.26, $N = 2968$ and $J = 175$ (Hox 2010, 128; Ruiter and Van Tubergen 2009, 878).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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