



CeMIS

Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies
University of Antwerp

RESL.eu

Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe

The Role of Religiosity in Students' Perceived Student-teacher Relations, School Belonging and Valuing Education

RAN EDU Dropouts and Back to school,
28-29 September 2017, Paris (FR)

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Reducing Early
School Leaving
in Europe

*This project has received funding from the
European Union's Seventh Framework Programme
for research, technological development and demonstration
under grant agreement no 320223.*



Overview

1. An introduction to the Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) Research
2. A theoretical framework for linking dropout research to potential breeding grounds for radicalisation
 - a) The role of student-teacher relations for students' emotional engagement in education
 - b) Educational inequalities as a potential breeding ground for radicalisation/violent extremism? Insights from Anomie Theory
3. Data & methods
4. Findings
5. Discussion

RESL.eu Research

➤ RESL.eu Project

- Comparative study in 9 EU member states (BE, ES, PL, PT, NL, SE, UK, *AU* & *HU*)
- Financed by EU 7th Framework Program
- Period: February 2013 – January 2018



➤ Data used for this paper:

- Data from the Flemish student survey collected in the cities Antwerp and Ghent

RESL.eu Research Plan

WP1: Theoretical en Methodological Framework



WP2: Field Exploration and Policy Analysis



WP3: Quantitative data
collection and analyses



WP4: Qualitative data
collection and analyses



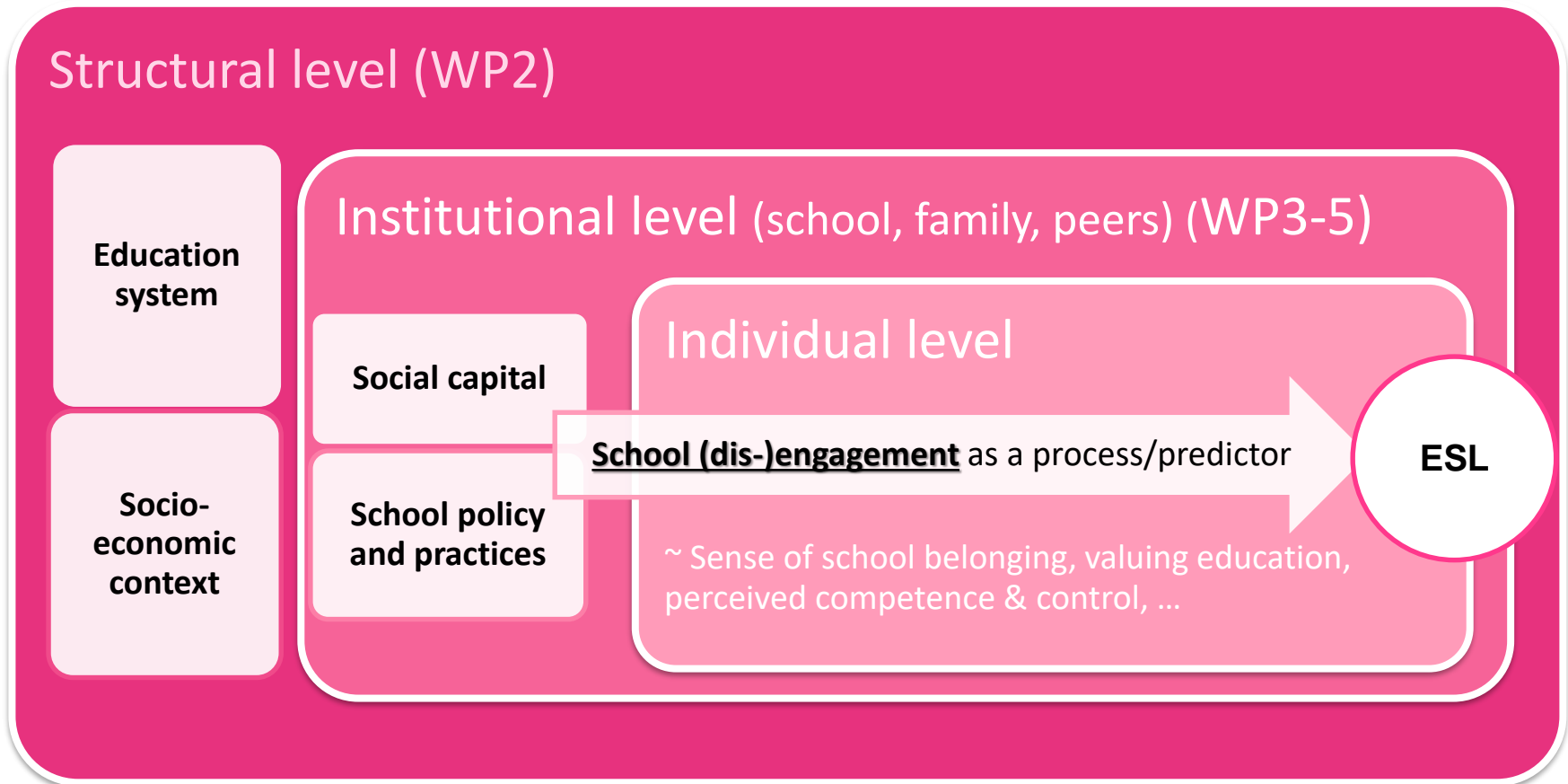
WP5: Development of EWS and Promising Practice Models



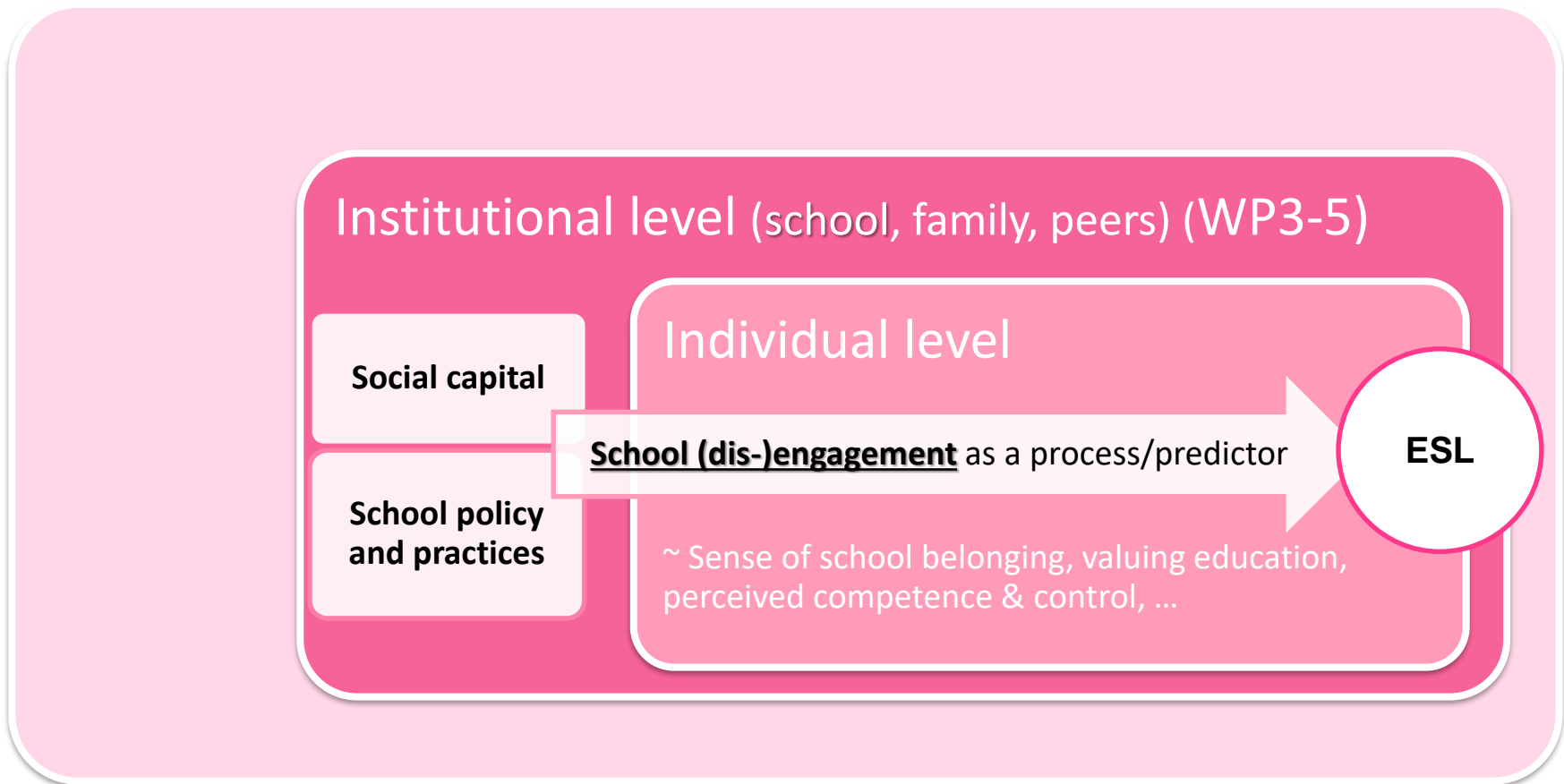
WP6: Policy Recommendations

[All RESL.eu Publications](#)

RESL.eu Conceptual model

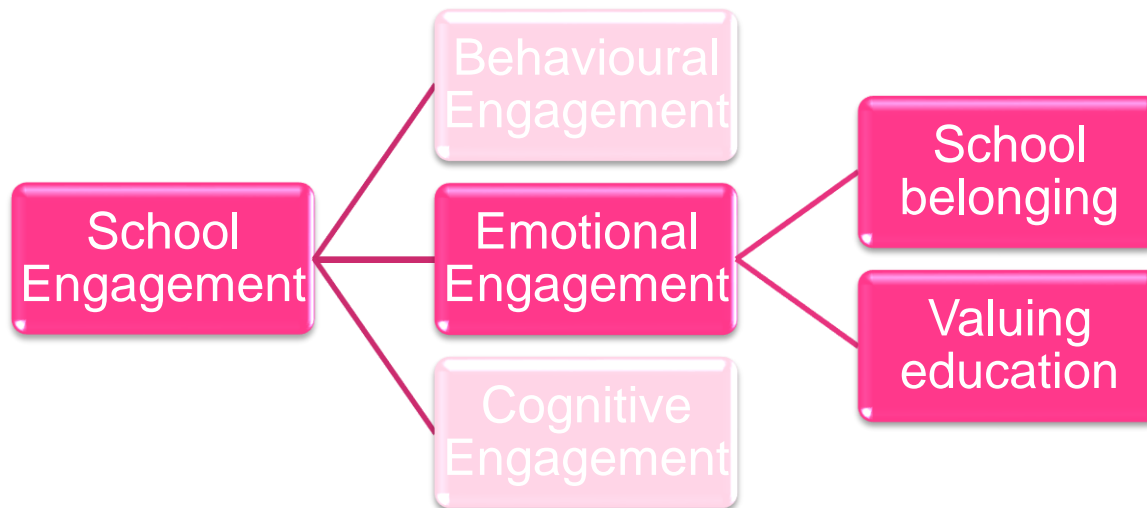


The Role of Student-Teacher Relations in School Engagement and Early School Leaving



Emotional School Engagement

- **School engagement** as a multidimensional concept
 - **Emotional component:** identification with ‘the school’/‘education’
 - **School belonging** “I really feel to be a part of this school.”
 - **Valuing education** “Getting a good diploma will help me to get ahead in life.”
 - Cognitive component: self-regulated/strategic learning approach
 - Behavioural component: participation in school-related activities



The Role of Student-Teacher Relations in School Engagement and Early School Leaving

- **Self-System Model of Motivational Development**
(e.g. Connell & Welborn, 1991; Skinner et al., 2009)
- Key to develop motivation is satisfying the basic human needs of **feeling related (=emotional engagement)**, perceived competence and autonomy
 - Feeling supported by your context can facilitate satisfying basic human needs (e.g. parental, peer and **teacher support**)
 - Perceptions on relatedness, perceived competence and control are externalised through behavioural engagement
 - Behavioural engagement (e.g. study behaviour, attention in class, ...) predicts educational outcomes such as ESL
- +++ RESL.eu survey analysis shows that in fact, perceived teacher support and valuing education are among the strongest predictors for ESL +++**

Structural inequalities in education

Structural level (WP2)

Education
system

Socio-
economic
context

Institutional level (school, family, peers) (WP3-5)

Social capital

School policy
and practices

Individual level

School (dis-)engagement as a process/predictor

~ Sense of school belonging, valuing education,
perceived competence & control, ...

ESL

Education as part of the '*breeding ground*' of radicalisation?

- Idea of '***breeding ground***' often central in research on radicalisation
 - ➔ Broader socio-political and institutional context leading to frustration, alienation, polarisation
- **Inequality of educational opportunities** in '*democratic*' and '*meritocratic*' educational institutions as a 'breeding ground'?

Ethnic and religious minorities in Flemish (and Western European) education

- Reproduction of **social and ethnic inequality** via education
 - Ethnic minority students highly overrepresented in (lower-esteemed) vocational tracks, experience more grade retention, more likely to leave school early
- Despite importance of systemic features (e.g. early tracking, ethnic school segregation) **dominant discourses ascribe causes of 'ethnic achievement gap' predominantly to minorities themselves** (e.g. language 'deficiencies', lack of parental involvement)
 - Negative stigmatisation processes may influence school belonging and valuing of education
- Current climate with religiously inspired terrorist attacks and increased polarisation → increased salience of negative stigmatization towards **Muslim students' religious identity**

Insights from Anomie Theory

Merton (1938): anomie is caused by **discrepancies** between culturally dominant goals and the availability of legitimate means or opportunities to achieve those goals

→ Inequalities of educational opportunities in which certain social groups experience more difficulties could lead to a strained relationship between pursuit of upward social mobility (*culturally dominant goal*) via education (*legitimate mean*)

→ As one possible coping mechanism for this strain, anomie theory states that individuals in these groups can **reject and rebel against** both the dominant goal (*social mobility*) and the legitimate mean (*education*), by trying to **gain status in alternative value systems using illegitimate – potentially violent – means**

Research Questions

- **RQ 1:** How does students' religiosity relate to student-teacher relations, their sense of school belonging and valuing of education?
 - ➔ Do students from ethnic/religious minorities – who experience more blocked opportunity structures – renounce the value of education as a means for social mobility?
- **RQ 2:** What is the relation between students' perceived student-teacher relations and their sense of school belonging and valuing of education?
- **RQ 3:** Is the relation between students' religiosity and their sense school belonging/valuing of education mediated by student-teacher relations?

Data & methods

➤ Data

- RESL.eu student survey (spring 2014)
- 1976 students in the 4th and 6th year of primarily vocationally oriented secondary schools in Antwerp and Ghent participated
- 70% of the schools have a majority of students from ethnic minority groups
- > 50% of the schools have a Muslim majority

Data & methods

➤ Students' religiosity:

- Religious identity (self-identification)
- Religious commitment

“How important is your religion for the way you life?”

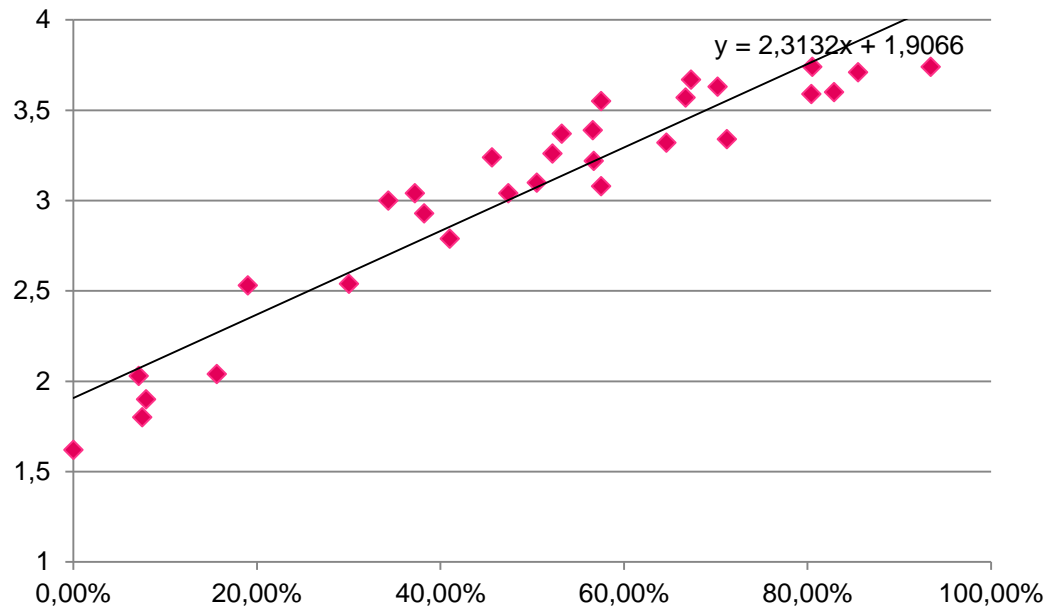


Figure: The proportion of Muslim students in the school (x-axis) and the school mean religious commitment (y-axis)

Findings

- **RQ1: Students' religiosity → student-teacher relations/ school belonging/ valuing of education**
- Strictly identifying as Christian or Muslim does not relate to student-teacher relations/school belonging/valuing of education
 - Students who report higher levels of religious commitment, report higher levels of teacher discrimination
 - Christian students who are more religiously committed feel more supported by teachers, the same is not true for Muslims
- Since Muslim students are more religiously committed, they are also more vulnerable for experiencing teacher discrimination and feel less supported by their teachers**
- Students who report higher religious commitment report higher(!) levels of valuing education
- More religious (Muslim) students, in general, conform more to the dominant cultural goal of social mobility through the legitimate means of education**

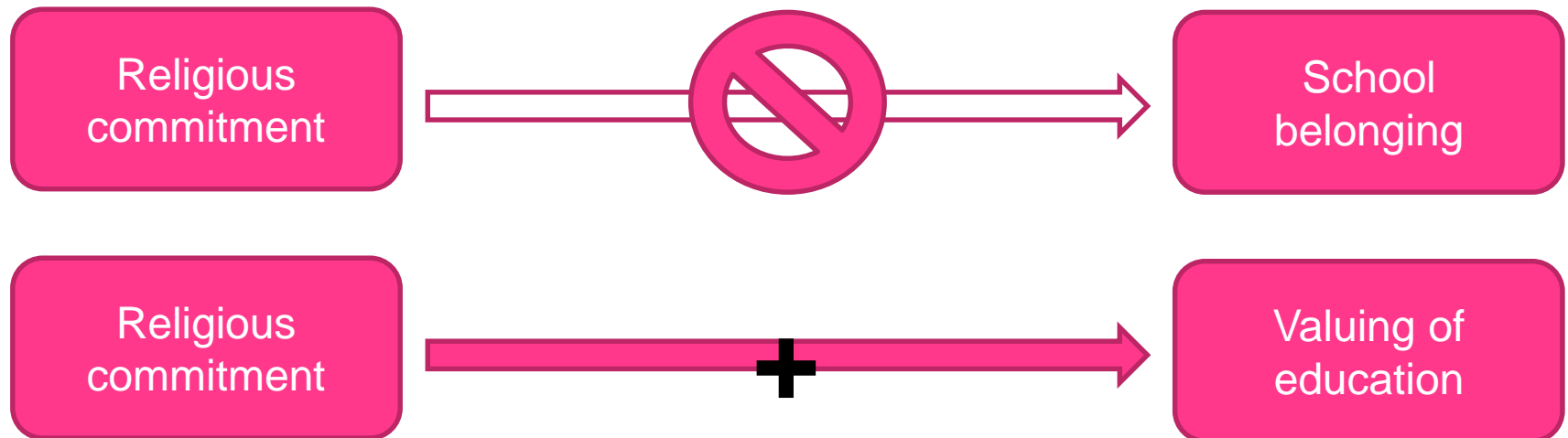
Findings

➤ **RQ2: Student-teacher relations → school belonging/valuing education**

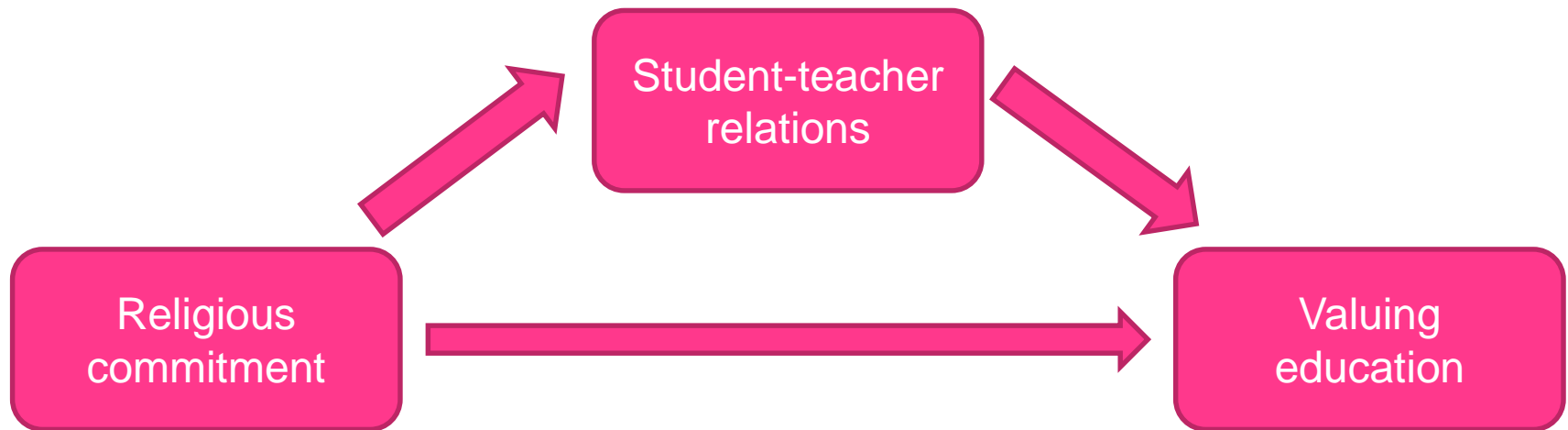
- Overall, better student-teacher relations → higher school belonging and more valuing of education as a means for social mobility
- ➔ Hypothesis based on Motivational Development Theory confirmed
- For Muslim students, these student-teacher relations play an even bigger role in their sense of belonging and valuing of education

Findings

- **RQ 3:** Is the relation between students' religiosity and their sense of school belonging/valuing education mediated by student-teacher relations?



What is mediation?



Total effect of religious commitment on valuing education =
Direct effect of religious commitment on valuing education
+ indirect effects that run through the perceived student-teacher relations

Findings

RQ3: Is the relation between students' religiosity and their sense school belonging/valuing school education mediated by student-teacher relations?

- For Christian students: total effect $>$ direct effect, which means that the positive relation between religious commitment on valuing education is strengthened by the positive student-teacher relations
- For Muslim students, however, total effect $<$ direct effect, which means that the overall positive relation between religious commitment on valuing education is threatened by experiencing more negative student-teacher relations

Conclusion

➤ Concerning Merton's Anomie Theory:

- Being committed to being a Muslim – a religious group that experiences more educational inequalities and stigmatisation – does not lead Muslim students to reject or rebel against the culturally dominant goal of gaining social status through the means of education, on the contrary, they are more conforming than less religiously committed students...

However: the more negative student-teacher relations experienced by religiously committed Muslim students threaten this overall positive relation between religious commitment and valuing education

➔ More positive feedback from teaching staff on Muslims' religious commitment can support their sense of belonging in school and their valuing of education as an important institution in society

Thank you for your attention!



Questions for discussion...

- Ethnic (and religious) minority students generally value education as a means of upward social mobility - even more so than their ethnic (and religious) majority peers -, so where does it go wrong?
 - How can we turn this valuing of education into more educational success?
- Is the idea of meritocracy put into question? By whom and why?
- Can schools as social institutions be considered sufficiently 'identity safe', also for religious minorities?
- Is the role of the teacher as a trustee for students threatened when s/he is expected to be involved in the prevention of radicalisation?