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**The influence of religiosity and Muslim peers on the school
performance of adolescents in the Netherlands, Germany,
and England**

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical arguments of the context-dependent role of religion as a “bridge” or “barrier” for immigrant outcomes, this study examines the relationship between religiosity and school performance in three European countries. Using data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU 2016), this study analyzes the influence of religion and presence of religious peers on students' school performance through multilevel modeling. Results cast doubt on the premise of religion as a barrier in Europe, with some individual religiosity indicators having positive implications for school grades, as in the case of the Netherlands and England, or having no relevant consequences for students, such as in the case of Germany. Moreover, through distinguishing practicing and non-practicing Muslim students, results in the Netherlands show that religious peers are positively associated for the school performance of religiously devout students, indicating the possibility of resources or advantages in religious communities that are accessed by active engagement. Findings suggest that the theorized context-dependent dichotomy of religion as a “bridge” versus “barrier” may be over-simplistic for such diverse contexts as the United States and Europe.

Key words: children and youth, sociology of education, sociology of religion, racial and ethnic minorities

Introduction

The religion of immigrants has been an oft-discussed topic in both public and academic spheres, and in recent years, the role of religion in immigrant integration has been identified as context-dependent. Religiosity has been framed as either a potential medium for resources and capital that facilitates integration (*bridge*) in the United States, or as a mechanism of social closure that hinders integration (*barrier*) in Europe (Foner and Alba 2008; Connor and Koenig 2013). The general perspective of immigrant religiosity in Europe is that minority religions outside of the historical Judeo-Christian heritage are not conducive to successful integration, through keeping migrants as outsiders with ideologies fundamentally at odds with Western secular culture.

Despite this public perception, few studies have examined whether religion has implications for the adaptation¹ of adolescents with migration backgrounds in Europe, who are growing up and being educated in the host country. The central aim of this study is to examine the theorized role of religion as a barrier in Europe by exploring its relationship with the school outcomes of minority youth in three countries: the Netherlands, Germany, and England. Results of this study do not find a minority religious penalty among Muslim school children once sociodemographic variables are taken into account, and findings cast doubt on the premise of religion as a barrier in Europe, with some individual religiosity indicators having positive implications for school grades, as in the case of the Netherlands and England, or having no relevant consequences for students, such as in the case of Germany. Moreover, through distinguishing between religiously active versus nominal Muslim students, results suggest a positive effect of Muslim peers for the school performance of religiously devout students, indicating the possibility of resources in religious communities that are accessed by active

engagement. Findings suggest that the theorized context-dependent dichotomy of religion as a “bridge” versus “barrier” may be over-simplistic for such diverse contexts as the United States and Europe.

Theoretical Considerations and Previous Research

In contrast to the United States, where religion is viewed as a bridge in aiding the integration of immigrants, religion has often been framed as a barrier in Western Europe (Koenig 2007; Alba 2005). The general arguments for the context-dependent, “America= bridge, Europe= barrier,” concept are that America is generally more religious in its social fabric and offers more of a “free market” for various religions and cultures, while Europe, with its high secularism and restrictive religious rights, institutionally and socially defines minority religions as religious “others” (Connor and Koenig 2013; Foner and Alba 2008; Alba 2005). Connor and Koenig (2013) constructed a more nuanced theoretical framework in understanding the impact of religion on immigrant integration, identifying two potential context-dependent mechanisms of religion: as an “ethnic marker prompting exclusion and discrimination, or as social organization providing access to tangible resources” (31).

Several studies on religiosity and academic achievement in the United States have confirmed this conception of religion as a bridge, finding a positive association between education and church attendance (Brown and Taylor 2007), as well as a positive influence of religion on grades, which is explained through higher educational expectations through church participation (Regnerus 2000). Religious attendance was found to be particularly advantageous for the achievement of Black and Hispanic children, who had higher academic performance than their less religious counterparts, net of socioeconomic background (Jeynes 1999). Further support for the concept of religion as a bridge could be found in evidence of the presence of

positive role models in religious communities (Erickson and Phillips 2012) or through resources such as language classes or counseling in places of worship (Bankston and Zhou 2002). The religious attendance of both parents and students was also found to be associated with higher odds of high school completion (Stokes 2008).

In the European context, much of the dialogue has focused on the role of religion as a barrier to immigrant assimilation in European contexts, through exacerbating social closure from host societies, posing “religious penalties,” and creating parallel societies with little room or opportunity for the upward mobility that can only be obtained through engagement with mainstream society (Fleischmann et al. 2012; Alba 2005).

Although religious penalties have been observed for first generation immigrants in Western Europe, one study observed that these disadvantages diminished with the second generation (Connor and Koenig 2013). These findings do not necessarily suggest that religion offers advantages in second generation occupational achievement, in contrast with findings in the United States, but they bring into question the notion of religion as an obstacle for immigrant integration. Furthermore, recent research has also found conditional positive effects of religion, such as prayer or religious attendance, for the school performance of adolescents in Germany (Carol and Schulz 2018).

Presence of Coethnics and Religious Peers

Along with religiosity, this study draws from previous work on coethnics in order to explore the relationship between minority religious peers and school performance. Studies on minority concentration have produced mixed findings; high ethnic minority density was often related to lower school and health outcomes, perpetuated by high segregation (Albrecht et al. 2005). However, several studies have found positive effects of ethnic neighborhood composition

or coethnic presence on educational outcomes, which might be explained by increased well-being and feelings of solidarity and reduced feelings of alienation and problem behavior (Brandén et al. 2019; Fleischmann et al. 2012; Georgiades et al. 2007; Peetsma et al. 2006; Geven et al. 2016). Positive outcomes have also been conditionally found for second generation ethnic communities, when there were existing resources, capital, networks, and community characteristics that were beneficial (Kroneberg 2008).

Similar to the theoretical mechanisms underlying the influence of coethnics, this study focuses on religious peers and the possible influences of minority religious peers on school outcomes. What difference does it make for a Muslim student to be in a school with a high share of Muslim peers? Although Muslim religion affiliation and ethnicity are often collinear, it can be argued that for the most religiously devout, religious values and beliefs may in some ways supplant ethnic identity and be a major point of reference in determining friendships and relationships. In the high school context, friendship networks of religious peers could theoretically influence grades through tighter intergenerational closure and the maintenance of social control through parents who see each other at the mosque, or through norms, studying behavior, aspirations, and even competition. Behavior normalized through religion and religious communities, such as adherence to rules and authorities or avoidance of truant or delinquent behavior, might transfer over to other contexts such as school. On the other hand, high concentrations of minority peers could isolate minority students from their majority peers, while extensive religious activities throughout the week could take time away from studying or from engaging in school activities that could be beneficial to their adaptation.

Research Questions

The central question of this research article is, what is the relationship between religiosity and school performance of adolescents in Europe? For the purposes of this study, the specific tenets of Muslim ideology and doctrine are not examined; rather, the central aim of this study is to examine the functional role of religious communities, where networks and relationships are bound by the same belief systems and may trigger mechanisms of support and solidarity that could potentially counter minority disadvantage and feelings of alienation. In addition, since religion has been described as a potential source of refuge, respectability, and resources for immigrants (Hirschman 2004), it can be argued that these mechanisms for adaptation could also be accessed by high religious attendance. Because Muslim groups tend to be much more religious, the communities will most likely be characterized by more committed members and possibly more tight-knit social networks than other, less active organizations.

This study focuses on the school context, because as an institution where adolescents spend a substantial part of their day, schools provide an environment where norms, values, attitudes, and aspirations are learned and transmitted through friends and classmates (Bygren and Szulkin 2010). These relationships are also compared across three European countries: the Netherlands, Germany, and England. In studies that have compared immigrant religiosity across various national contexts (such as in comparisons with the United States and Canada), Western Europe has often been analyzed as one monolithic unit in exploring the role and utility of religion in integration, despite the fact that European countries can be quite varied in their context of reception and accommodation of religious rights (Carol and Verkuyten 2016; Carol and Koopmans 2013; Torrekens and Jacobs 2016). Using political claims analysis of news media, Carol and Koopmans (2013) developed a typology of several European countries based

on the accommodation of religious rights for Muslims. Results found considerable differences in how the countries incorporate Islam, with the Netherlands and England having the highest accommodation of Islam rights and Germany located in an intermediate position among countries. In light of these differences, this study distinguishes between the Netherlands, Germany, and England in its analyses in order to see whether the mechanisms of religiosity work in different ways in these contexts.

Method

In order to test the hypotheses and explain school performance gaps between Muslims and their non-Muslim peers, average school grades are predicted with a two-level multilevel model of students nested within schools. Multilevel analysis is used to analyze the relationships between individual-level variables, school characteristics, and student outcomes, which could be otherwise biased in ordinary regression modeling due to underestimated standard errors (Snijders and Bosker 2012). In addition, multilevel modeling is an appropriate method in analyzing students in school contexts and is frequently employed in education literature, as it accounts for heterogeneity across schools and allows the effects of both individual and school-level variables to be tested in one model as well as for the testing for interactions between the two levels. A comparison of a two-level fixed intercept model and a two-level random intercept model show that inclusion of random intercepts provides a significantly better fit in analyzing student school performance.

Data and Measures

This study uses secondary data from Wave 2 of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU 2016), which is a unique longitudinal study of immigrant parents, children, and teachers and the first comprehensive and standardized panel

study on children with immigrant backgrounds in Europe. The research questions are explored through the Dutch, German, and British samples of the second wave, which interviewed children of immigrants and native peers between 2011 and 2012 and utilized a three-stage stratified sampling design in order to oversample schools with higher shares of immigrant students (Dollmann et al. 2014). Two classes were randomly selected from each school, and all students in the classes were surveyed. Wave 2 data was used due to complete information on the grades of students from all four countries, which is not yet available in other waves.

The analysis includes both immigrant and native high school students. The dependent variable *school performance* was measured using the mean of the combined self-reported math, English, and survey country language grades.² Grades were all coded so that higher numbers mean better grades; in the cases of England and Germany, grades were reversed coded for more intuitive interpretation, where 1 is recoded to either 4 (for England) or 6 (for Germany) as the highest possible grade. Only math and English grades were reported for England. Grades in the Netherlands remained on a scale from 0-10, with 10 being the best grade. The range of grades for each country can be seen in Table 1.

The explanatory variables include religiosity and presence of religious coethnics. Religiosity was measured by *religious affiliation*, *frequency of religious attendance*, and *religious salience*. Religious affiliation was categorized as No Religion (reference group), Muslim, Christian, and Other. Religious attendance ('How often do you visit religious meeting places?') was recoded into a 4-point scale: 0 "Never" (reference group) 1 "Occasionally" (less than once a month) 2 "At least once a month" and 3 "Regularly" (every week or daily).³ Religious salience ('How important is religion to you?') was recoded into a binary variable: 0 "not important" and 1 "important." Prayer referred to respondents' frequency of prayer, 0

“Never,” 1 “Occasionally,” 2 “At least once a month,” 3 “At least once a week,” 4 “One to four times a day,” and 5 “Five times a day or more.” The variance inflation factor was calculated for the variables of each country in order to test for multicollinearity, with a VIF score of around 3.

The contextual variable *presence of religious peers* was measured calculating the proportion of Muslims in the school sample and categorized as low (less than 10 percent Muslim students), medium (10 to 30 percent Muslim students) and high (over 30 percent Muslim students).

A number of background variables are included as controls in the analysis. *Socio-demographic variables* include gender, age, age at migration, and immigrant background, and because children's school performance is known to be correlated with parents' education and socioeconomic status (employment status and occupation), parent background variables are also included. Age was calculated by subtracting the birth year from the year the survey was administered (either 2011 or 2012). Parents' socioeconomic status (SES) was measured using variables of highest parental education and highest occupational status (ISEI). The variable immigrant background is broken into four categories: 1) born outside of survey country (first generation), 2) born in survey country with two foreign-born parents (second generation), and 3) child of transnational marriage (where grandparents are foreign-born), and 4) child of intermarriage (where one grandparent is native-born) (Dollmann et al. 2014).

Age of migration indicates the age when respondent arrived in the survey country, and native respondents were recoded as 0. In order to focus on the effects of religious affiliation and religiosity separately from possible effects related to national or ethnic origin indicators, a country origins variable is also used as a control, which was collapsed into larger categories of

seven regions: North/South/West Europe, Eastern Europe, Caribbean and Africa, Arabic, Asian, and Other/Unknown.

School type was also controlled for in the analyses for countries that have a tracking system. German schools were categorized into lower secondary school (*Hauptschule*), intermediate secondary school (*Realschule*), comprehensive school/Rudolf-Steiner schools, schools with special needs, upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*). For the Netherlands, separate categories were created for the school types: first year high school (*Brugklas*), the most basic vocational track (*VMBOB-B*), follow-up vocational tracks (*VMBOB-G*), the senior secondary education track (*HAVO*), and for the pre-university track (*VWO*). Listwise deletion of cases were used for missing values which resulted in a final sample of 2193 students nested in 96 schools in the Netherlands, 2747 students in 130 schools in Germany, and 1905 students in 92 schools in England.

Results

Descriptive Results

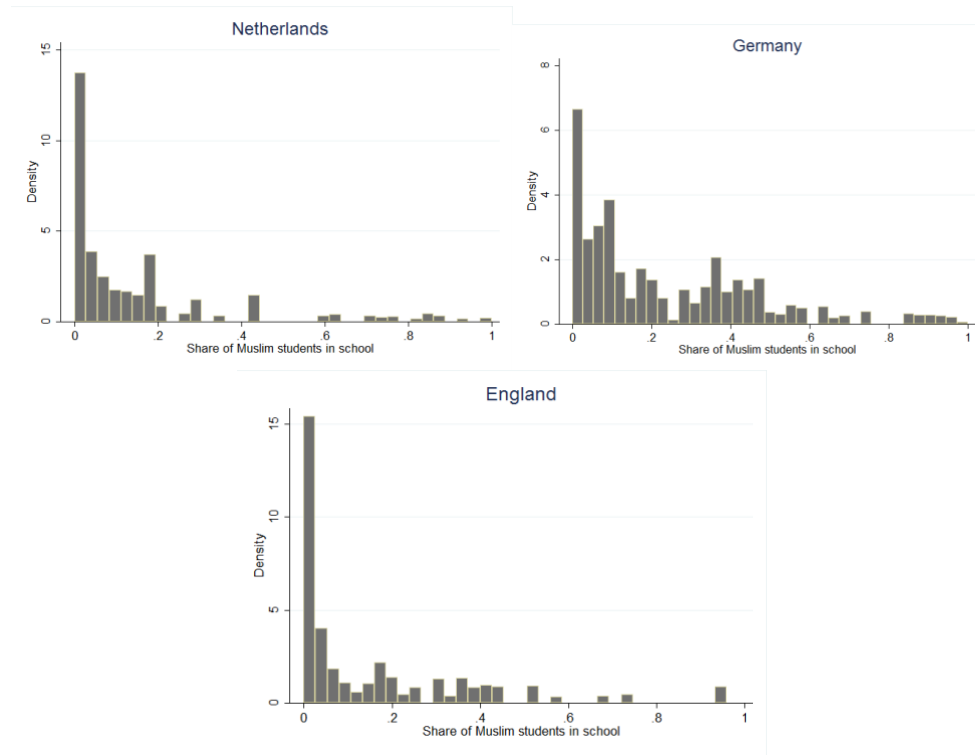
About 40.39 per cent of the sample have an immigrant background, and approximately 11.26 per cent were not born in the survey country. Muslim students comprise about 17.5 per cent of the sample, and the average proportion of Muslims in each school sample is 0.18, with Germany having the highest average proportion of Muslims (0.24). An overview of the unweighted distribution of additional variables for each respective country is presented in Table 1. Figure 2 displays the distribution of the share of Muslim students in each of the three countries.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	Description	Min	Max	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev
Outcome variable						
Average Grades (EN)	Math, English grades	1	4	3113	3.05	0.61
Average Grades (GE)	German, Math, English grades (reverse coded for interpretation)	1	6	4120	4.11	0.71
Average Grades (NL)	Dutch, Math, English grades	0	10	3210	6.66	1.01

Background	Description	England		Germany		Netherlands			
		Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
Gender	Gender of respondent (1=Female)	0	1	0.48	0.50	0.51	0.50	0.51	0.50
Age	Age of respondent	13	25	15.95	0.69	16.00	0.86	15.77	0.81
Age of migration	Age first moved to country	0	18	1.17	3.32	0.58	2.26	0.47	2.27
Parent's Education	Highest parent's education	0	3	2.27	0.80	2.11	0.60	2.15	0.62
Parent's ISEI	Highest parent's ISEI	11	88.96	53.81	20.28	45.92	18.74	51.09	19.00
Individual Variables									
Muslim	Muslim Religious Affiliation	0	1	0.15	0.36	0.23	0.42	0.14	0.34
Christian	Christian Religious Affiliation	0	1	0.37	0.48	0.58	0.49	0.24	0.43
Other	Other Religious Affiliation	0	1	0.09	0.28	0.05	0.22	0.07	0.25
No Religion	No Religion	0	1	0.40	0.49	0.13	0.34	0.55	0.50
Religious Salience	How important religion is to respondent	0	3	1.03	1.15	1.07	1.01	0.66	0.99
Religious Attendance	How frequently respondent visits religious services	0	3	1.46	1.15	1.52	1.04	1.17	1.02
Contextual Variables									
Share of Muslims	Share of Muslim students by school	0	1	0.16	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.15	0.22

Figure 1. Share of Muslim students in schools, distributions in the Netherlands, Germany, and England



Descriptive statistics also illustrate the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim respondents⁴ across variables of interest (Table 2). As expected, there seems to be a minority religious penalty associated with Muslim religious affiliation and school grades; average grades are significantly lower for Muslim students compared with non-Muslim students in Germany and in England, while there are no significant differences in grades between these two groups in the Netherlands. The data also highlights significant differences in religiosity, indicating consistently higher religiosity among Muslims, who are much more likely to view religion as important and to attend religious services significantly more frequently than their non-Muslim counterparts.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY MUSLIM RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Variable	England		Germany		Netherlands	
	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim
Outcome variable						
School Performance	3.071	2.933*	4.16	3.943*	6.676	6.617
Background						
Gender	0.492	.417*	0.507	0.503	0.52	0.482
Age	15.97	15.84*	15.956	16.155*	15.96	16.156*
Age of migration	1.034	1.847*	0.478	.887*	0.315	1.458*
Parent's education	2.328	2.134*	2.195	1.86*	2.202	1.769*
Parent's ISEI	55.676	48.062*	49	38.87*	52.53	42.9*
Individual Variables						
Religious Attendance	0.858	1.988*	0.874	1.707*	0.494	1.701*
Religious Salience	1.225	2.792*	1.205	2.56*	0.926	2.702*
Contextual Variables						
Proportion of Muslims	0.099	.456*	0.158	.461*	0.091	.441*
School SES	0.447	.358*	0.551	0.551	0.276	0.262

Note: Descriptive statistics are unweighted

Source: CILS4EU Data

*t-test difference of $p < 0.05$

between Muslim and non-Muslim students

Multivariate Results

In light of these descriptive findings, the effects of religiosity and religious peers on school performance are analyzed in order to explain religious penalties, after controlling for other relevant factors. Table 3 presents the results of multilevel estimates of predictors of average school grades. Sampling weights were added due to the stratified nature of the data, which oversampled schools with high shares of immigrants.

After controlling for sociodemographic variables, religiosity variables are inserted in order to estimate effects of religious affiliation, religious attendance, and religious salience on school grades. The variable proportion of Muslims in the school is also introduced in the first model to examine the effect of Muslim concentration for the whole sample, while the subsequent two models for each set test the hypotheses for Muslim students regarding presence of religious peers by interacting Muslim religious affiliation with the variables religious attendance and proportion of Muslim students.

TABLE 3. RESULTS OF MULTILEVEL REGRESSION OF AVERAGE GRADES IN THE NETHERLANDS, ENGLAND, GERMANY

Grades	Netherlands			Germany			England		
	(1a)	(2a)	(3a)	(1b)	(2b)	(3b)	(1c)	(2c)	(3c)
<i>Religiosity</i> (ref. no religion)									
Muslim	-0.05 (0.22)	0.04 (0.22)	0.19 (0.37)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.13)	-0.13 (0.21)	-0.24* (0.11)	-0.26 (0.17)	-0.07 (0.24)
Christian	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Other	0.30* (0.13)	0.30* (0.13)	0.31* (0.13)	0.01 (0.11)	0.02 (0.11)	0 (0.11)	-0.14+ (0.08)	-0.14+ (0.08)	-0.15+ (0.08)
Religious attendance (ref. Never)	0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.05)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)
Religious salience	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Prayer	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)	0.03+ (0.02)	0.03+ (0.02)	0.04+ (0.02)	0.04* (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)
Proportion of Muslims									
10%> (Ref.)									
10-30%	-0.14 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.11 (0.10)	0.03 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	0.02 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)
30%<	0.10 (0.13)	0.22 (0.18)	0.40 (0.26)	0.03 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.11)	0.03 (0.08)	0.02 (0.09)	0.13 (0.10)
Interactions									
Muslim x Share of Muslims		-0.13 (0.14)	-0.53* (0.27)		0.03 (0.07)	0.18 (0.12)		0.02 (0.10)	0 (0.15)
Muslim x Religious attendance			-0.10 (0.13)			0.01 (0.10)			-0.17 (0.15)
Religious attendance x Share of Muslims			-0.38 (0.28)			0.15 (0.17)			-0.20* (0.10)
Muslim x Religious attendance x Share of Muslims			0.30* (0.13)			-0.1 (0.07)			0.06 (0.10)
Constant	8.24** (1.12)	8.24** (1.12)	8.23** (1.11)	5.62** (0.41)	5.61** (0.41)	5.60** (0.41)	2.66** (0.49)	2.66** (0.49)	2.74** (0.48)
Ins1_1_1 Constant	-1.11** (0.12)	-1.11** (0.12)	-1.09** (0.11)	-1.21** (0.08)	-1.21** (0.08)	-1.19** (0.08)	-1.39** (0.12)	-1.39** (0.12)	-1.38** (0.11)
lnsig_6 Constant	-0.37** (0.05)	-0.37** (0.05)	-0.37** (0.05)	-0.50** (0.03)	-0.50** (0.03)	-0.51** (0.03)	-0.77** (0.03)	-0.77** (0.03)	-0.77** (0.03)
N	2193.00	2193.00	2193.00	2747	2747	2747	1905	1905	1905
sig	271085.68	271041.19	270687.34	746790.85	746755.05	745939.76	289926.59	289916.38	288384
bic	271245.08	271206.29	270869.52	746968.4	746938.51	746140.98	290070.95	290066.29	288550.57
chi2	198.91	198.37	224.95	227	234.86	246.15	167.89	172.14	179.09

Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Controlled for age, age of migration, country of origin, parents' SES, school SES
see appendix for full tables

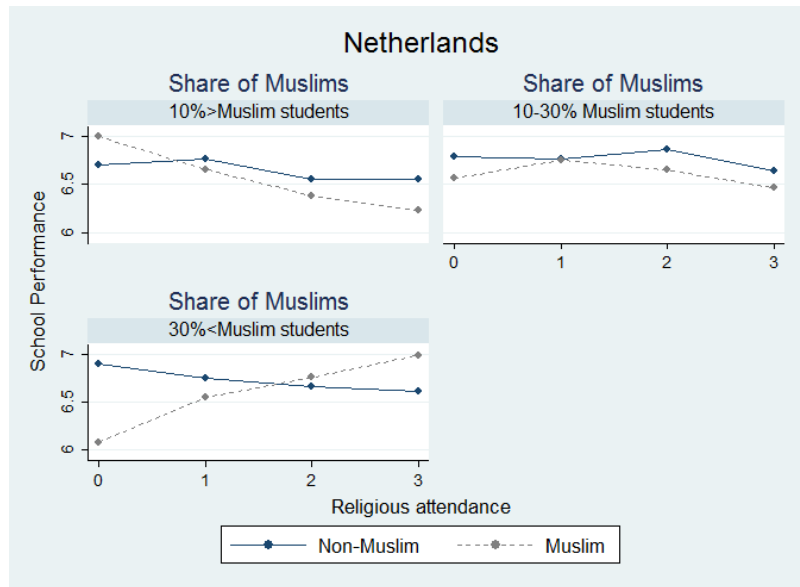
In the case of the Netherlands, religious attendance is positively associated with school grades for the whole sample, which persists across all specifications. When introducing the three-way interaction of Muslim affiliation, religious attendance, and share of Muslims in Model 3, two interesting results emerge. The three-way interaction shows a positive coefficient, indicating a positive association of religious peers on school grades for Muslim students who attend religious services. However, for nominal Muslim students who have zero religious attendance, as observed in the lower-order two-way interaction, there is a negative effect of religious peers for school

performance (Model 3), suggesting that religious peers are only beneficial for those who are actively engaged in the religious community (Figure 2).

Surprisingly, in the case of Germany, both individual religiosity and religious peers are non-significant for school performance for the whole sample, indicating that the positive or negative mechanisms of religiosity are not as consequential for academic achievement in the German context. In England, prayer is positively related to academic achievement and persists across all specifications. Interestingly, the lower-order term of the three-way interaction in Model 3c, which indicates the net effect of the share of Muslims for religiously devout, non-Muslim students is negatively related to school performance for England. This unexpected result raises the question of whether this is a reflection of religious tensions or hostilities between students of faith that has implications for school performance.

In the Dutch sample, results suggest that Dutch students who participate in religious services more frequently also perform slightly better in school. Among Muslim students, however, a negative association is observed among Muslim students in higher-share Muslim schools, albeit for nominal Muslim students who do not attend religious services. In contrast, a positive link is found between Muslim peers and grades for religiously devout Muslim students. Figure 2 illustrates the conditional nature of these effects; for Muslim students in schools with a low proportion of Muslim religious peers, students seem to do better when they are not religiously active.

Figure 2. The relationship between religious attendance and school performance for non-Muslim and Muslim students in Dutch schools with low-, medium-, and high-share Muslim schools. Predicted values from Model 3 (Table 3)



However, in schools with a high share of Muslim students (30 percent or more), there is a significant difference between mosque-attending and non-mosque attending Muslim students. Those who do not attend religious services seem to do worse in school than their non-Muslim peers, while Muslim students who regularly attend religious services do significantly better. Results indicate that high religious attendance is beneficial for Muslim students who are in high-share Muslim schools but conversely not beneficial for students in low-share Muslim schools. This suggests that the advantages of religiosity are only available to actively religious Muslim students, rather than those who only identify but do not attend religious services.

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the role of religiosity and Muslim peers on academic achievement, and the empirical findings partially challenge the notion of religion as a barrier to adaptation in Europe. Moreover, using the first and largest comprehensive standardized

dataset of children with migration backgrounds in Europe, this study distinguishes between the Netherlands, Germany, and England and finds that religion works in different ways in each of these contexts. Findings indicate that religiosity is either inconsequential for school performance, as in the case of Germany, or positive, as seen through religious attendance in the Netherlands and through prayer in England. Although the general perception of religiosity in Europe is of posing minority penalties, the models demonstrate that lower academic achievement is more likely to be explained by sociodemographic characteristics, such as parents' occupation (full models with controls available upon request). In this case, religion is either advantageous for students, or its role is irrelevant for grades and neither a "bridge" nor a "barrier," thus disputing the widely held notion that higher religious participation is linked with negative outcomes in contexts with "bright" boundaries, such as in Europe.

This study also presents a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of religiosity and immigrant outcomes by comparing the effects for religious and nonreligious Muslim students. By examining the differential effects of religious peers on Muslims and disentangling religious affiliation and religious attendance, the results indicate that religiosity is advantageous for practicing Muslim students who are actively participating in the religious community, rather than nominal Muslim students, as observed in the Netherlands. One possible explanation for this is that the emotional benefits or resources of being with Muslim peers might only be accessed through active engagement with the religious community, in contrast to Muslim students who are not active at all and whose school performance is negatively related to share of Muslim peers, suggesting an isolation from this community. These findings support recent literature on the presence of minority peers and imply the possibility of advantages or resources in religious communities that positively influence school outcomes, such as social sanctions from a tighter-knit community or solidarity with students with the same religious affiliation.

This study encountered several limitations. Since grades are self-reported, they may be subject to bias or error, and as noted by previous researchers, over-reporting of grades is most common among students with lower average grades, so the results may be upwardly biased for students with lower grades (Pong and Hao 2007). Moreover, because this study only examines one wave of the CILS4EU, as other available waves did not include all country grades at the time of the analysis, we cannot make any causal inferences on the relationship between religiosity and school outcomes. It is also possible that the positive effect of religious activity for some students might also be explained by unobserved factors that could be contributing to differences in school performance, such as family cohesiveness, higher social engagement, or individual characteristics associated with church attendance, such as self-discipline or conscientiousness. Moreover, the varying results across the three countries in this study raise the question of whether differences in context, such as accommodation of religious rights, influences whether religion can be advantageous to immigrant outcomes. It would be worthwhile to compare findings across more European countries in the future and see how contextual variation on a larger scale, such as in religious rights accommodation and openness towards Islam, might be reflected in the results.

Despite its limitations, findings from this study partially cast doubt on the context-dependent theoretical framework that religion is a “bridge” or a “barrier” and suggest that this perspective may be over-simplistic for such diverse contexts as the United States and Europe. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to study the effects of religiosity longitudinally on a large-scale for various measures of immigrant integration. Since Muslim immigrants remain a growing part of Europe's population and since the religiosity of Muslim immigrants does not appear to be diminishing anytime soon (Jacob and Kalter 2013; Diehl et al. 2009), the study of religiosity and minority religious peers will continue to be a relevant research area in migration research. When one considers the practical implications regarding the future of immigrants in Europe,

cooperation with religious communities might be one solution in allowing religion to “bridge” the gap between migrants and natives and facilitate integration.

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Endnotes

¹Immigrant adaptation is defined as the process of “fitting in” host society and successfully functioning in the new environment (Ward et al. 2001; Maydell-Stevens et al. 2007). When referring to adaptation, this paper draws on the definition of *sociocultural adaptation*, which describes the abilities and knowledge to successfully navigate an environment, such as through school performance and in social relationships (Abu-Rayya 2013).

²Although the use of average grades rather than the grades of one subject is debatable, I include all three grades in order to have a more comprehensive measure of students’ overall performance in the school and not just performance in one particular subject, which could be influenced by individual skills or interests.

³Religious attendance and prayer were analyzed as quasi-continuous variables.

⁴For the sake of brevity and because of the study’s focus on Muslim students, descriptive statistics only focus on comparisons between Muslims and non-Muslims.