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The moderating role of socioeconomic status on the relationship between teacher social support and sense of belonging to school

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Introduction

Teacher social support (TSS) has been identified as one of the most important factors of success and well-being for students. Yet, there is a **gap** in the literature regarding the impact of **students' socioeconomic status (SES)** on their **perceptions of TSS**, and whether **SES may impact** the strength of the **relationship between teacher social support and students' sense of belonging to school (SBS)**.

Incongruent findings: While the development of **SBS is mainly ensured by TSS** (Allen et al., 2018), it was found that **SBS is positively associated to SES** (e.g., Jury et al., 2019) and **that TSS is negatively associated to SES** (Atlay et al., 2019).

In this preregistered study, we **aimed** at filling this gap by **testing the moderating role of SES on the TSS-SBS link**. We also aimed to **replicate** the positive association between TSS and SBS and the negative association between SES and TSS.

Additionally, we aimed to better understand **what SES indicators would have the stronger impact** in the perception of TSS: parental education (Lareau, 2011) or family's wealth (Atlay et al., 2019; Chin & Phillips, 2004).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 – TSS is positively linked to SBS.

Hypothesis 2 – SES is positively linked to SBS.

Hypothesis 3 – SES is negatively linked to TSS.

Hypothesis 4 – SES moderates the relation between TSS and SBS: The relation is stronger for high than for low SES students.

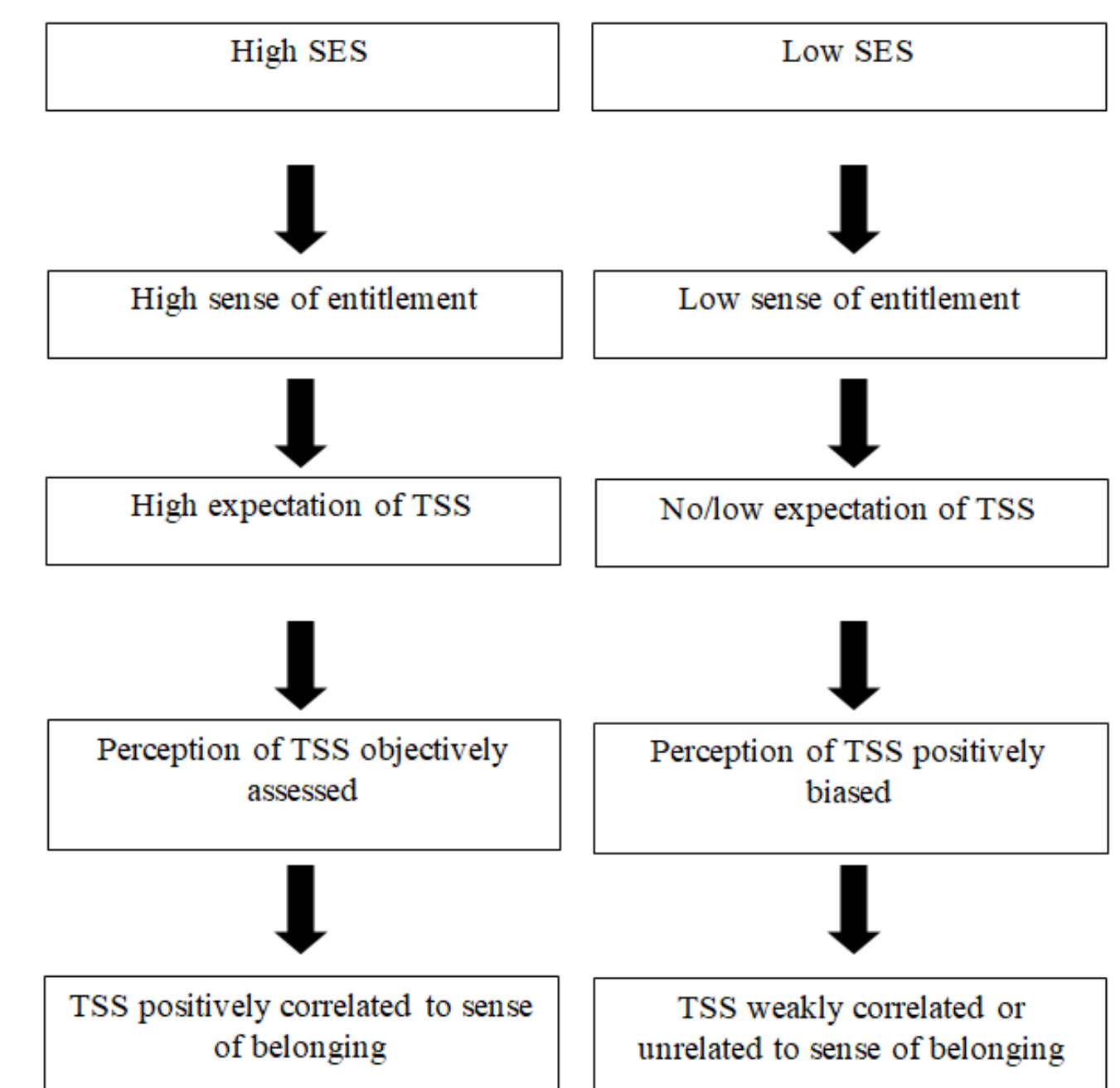
Methods

Participants – Data from the French sample of the Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 (PISA; $N = 6308$)

Measures

- Teacher social support (latent variable):** Teacher support (TS; $M_{index} = -0.20$, $SD_{index} = 1.05$); Teacher emotional support (TES; $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.82$); Teacher feedback (TF; $M_{index} = -0.19$, $SD_{index} = 0.99$).
- SES:** Family wealth possessions (WEALTH; $M_{index} = -0.15$, $SD_{index} = 1.01$); parents' highest level of education (PARED; $M = 13.57$, $SD = 2.11$); cultural possessions (CULTPOS; $M_{index} = -0.49$, $SD_{index} = 1.03$); highest parental occupation (HISEI; $M = 50.60$, $SD = 22.21$).
- Sense of belonging to school:** PISA's index derived from the six-item measure of sense of belonging to school (e.g., "I feel like I belong at school", from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree; $M_{index} = -0.09$, $SD_{index} = 0.78$, $Cronbach's \alpha = .68$).

Figure 1. Theoretical model of social-class induced perception differences and their consequence on the development of factors related to teacher social support.



Results

We used R statistical software (R Core Team, 2021) to conduct structural equation modelling.

Hypotheses 1/2/3 – TSS and SBS were significantly positively associated ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .001$). SES and SBS were significantly positively associated ($\beta_s > 0.18$, $ps < .050$). Relation between TSS and SES was non-significant, but it was negatively significant with the teacher support indicator ($\beta_s < -0.13$, $ps < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 – The moderation effect of SES (i.e., WEALTH) on the TSS-SBS link was positively significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = .027$)

Supplementary analyses (preregistered)

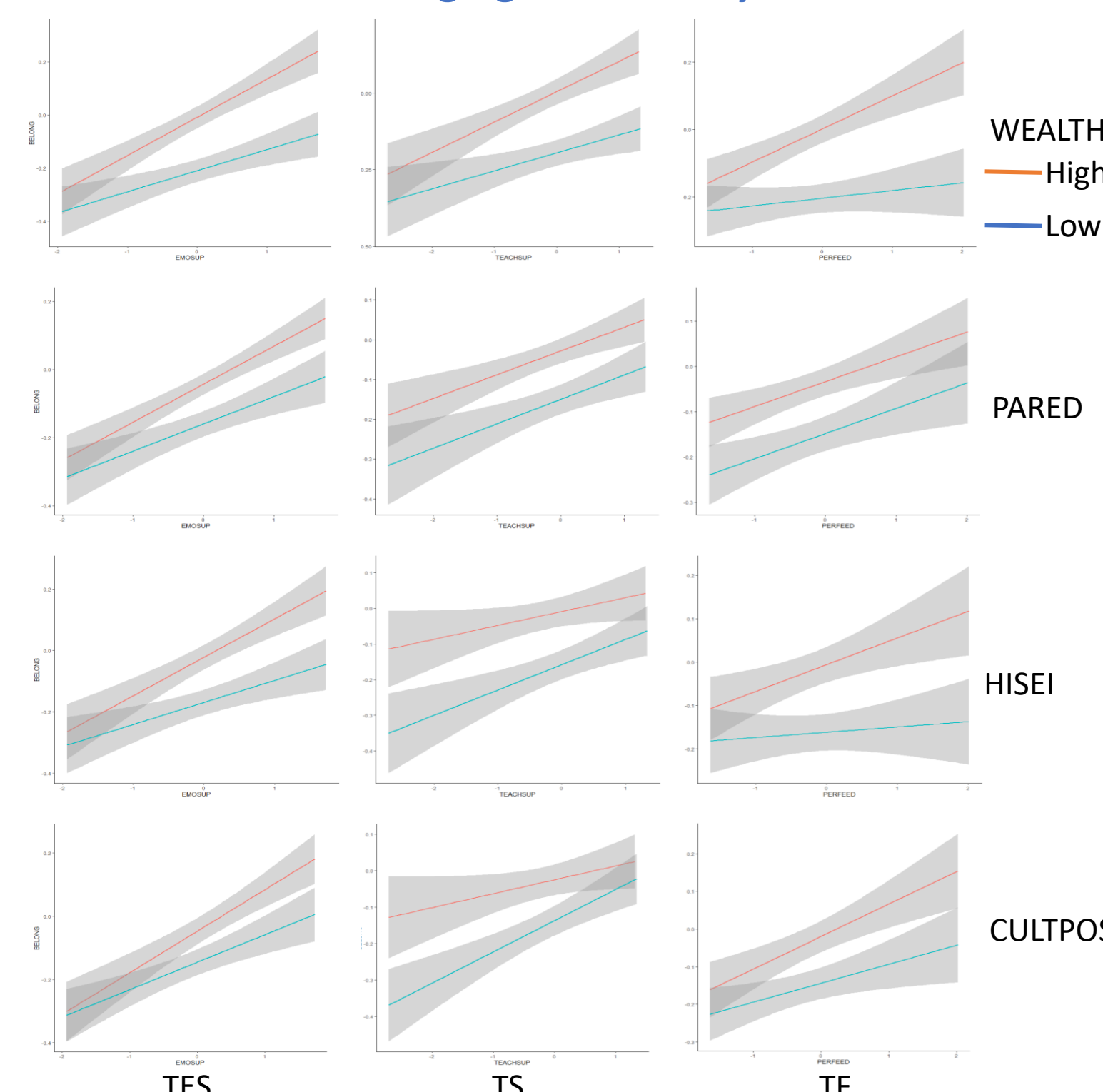
Same analyses with CULTPOS, HISEI, and the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS; $M_{index} = -0.11$, $SD_{index} = 0.97$).

Associations between SES indicators and SBS were positive and significant ($\beta_s > 0.10$, $ps < .010$; except for CULTPOS).

None effect with TSS.

TES-SBS link, all moderation effects were positive ($\beta_s > 0.10$, $ps < .050$) and inversely with TS ($\beta_s < -0.11$, $ps < .020$).

Figure 2 – Relationship between TSS indicators and sense of belonging to school by SES indicators



Discussion

Consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2, we found that **the greater the TSS and SES, the greater the SBS**. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, the link between TSS and SES was non significant. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, we found that **SES (only WEALTH) moderates** the TSS-SBS link: This link is stronger for high than for low SES students.

Results obtained with TSS indicators separately, showed that **teacher support is negatively linked with SES** and **conversely with teacher emotional support**. The moderator role of SES followed the same trends. Results indicated the relevance to examine both TSS and SES with several indicators and in a separate way.

Results suggest that low SES students could be positively biased in their perception of TSS, which in turn would lead them to less develop the underlying benefits of TSS, such as SBS. In a future study, we will examine this difference of perception of TSS by comparing TSS observed with TSS perceived (Bakchich et al., in preparation).

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