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Acculturation and school engagement: The case of Portuguese students with Roma background

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ABSTRACT

There is well-documented evidence on the relationships between the perceived utility value of school, positive learning outcomes, and intention to pursue education. For students from ethnic marginalized or economically deprived backgrounds, beliefs and values on the utility of education are shaped by acculturation conditions and hassles they are often exposed to. Despite recognizing the value of education, students from the Roma community show disengagement behaviors and interrupted educational trajectories. This might contribute to disadvantaged positions in education, labor markets, healthcare, and political life. Grounded on the acculturation framework, this study investigated how and to what extent micro-level acculturation contexts – family and school – influence school-based outcomes (e.g., utility beliefs; School Engagement [SE]) of students with Roma background. The empirical data draws on a sample of 213 students collected in eleven schools across Portugal. Results are insightful, providing evidence of how different socialization agents bolster school engagement dimensions. Moreover, data provided evidence on the most effective forms of parental and teacher involvement to support the utility value of school and education. Together findings open avenues to challenge further deficit perspectives underscoring policies and educational interventions targeting the achievement gap among students with Roma background.

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Aculturación y participación escolar: el caso de los estudiantes portugueses de la comunidad gitana

Palabras clave:
Aculturación
Comunidad gitana
Participación de las familias
Implicación docente
Compromiso escolar
Utilidad de la escuela

RESUMEN

Existe evidencia bien documentada sobre las relaciones entre el valor de utilidad percibido de la escuela, los resultados de aprendizaje positivos y la intención de continuar la educación. Para el estudiantado de minorías étnicas, o de entornos económicamente desfavorecidos, las creencias y los valores sobre la utilidad de la educación están determinados por las condiciones de aculturación y los problemas a los que a menudo están expuestos. El estudiantado de la comunidad gitana, a pesar de reconocer el valor de la educación, muestra comportamientos de desvinculación y trayectorias educativas interrumpidas. Esto podría contribuir a posiciones desventajosas en la educación, los mercados laborales, la atención médica y la vida política. Basado en el marco de la aculturación, este estudio aporta datos sobre cómo y en qué medida los contextos de aculturación a nivel micro (familia y escuela) influyen en los resultados escolares (p. ej., utilidad percibida, participación escolar) del alumnado de origen gitano. Los datos empíricos

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provienen de una muestra de 213 estudiantes, recopilados en once escuelas de Portugal. Los resultados son esclarecedores y proporcionan evidencia sobre cómo actúan los diferentes agentes de socialización para reforzar las dimensiones del compromiso escolar. Además, los datos proporcionan evidencia sobre las formas más efectivas de participación de familias y profesorado para respaldar el valor de utilidad de la escuela y la educación. Globalmente, los datos obtenidos abren vías para desafiar aún más la perspectiva del déficit que subrayan las actuales políticas y las intervenciones educativas dirigidas a reducir la brecha del rendimiento presentada por el alumnado de origen gitano.

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Introduction

Roma[1] people are among Europe's most multidimensional deprived groups across many generations (Burchardt et al., 2018). Over many centuries, Roma people have faced severe inequalities likely contributing to their disadvantaged positions in education, labor markets, healthcare, and political life (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). Extant research and governmental policies have emphasized formal education as a critical mechanism for intervention, i.e., priority for bridging welfare gaps and promoting Roma groups' social mobility (Helakorpi et al., 2018; Porter, 2016). Ensuring all students develop their full potential is one of the greatest educational challenges in increasing culturally diverse schools. Along with non-formal educational settings, schools are expected to provide Roma groups with opportunities to acquire the cultural capital required to engage in and with mainstream culture (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013). Hopefully, these efforts will increase the range of future life chances (Alexiadou, 2019). However, for students with an ethnic marginalized group, the adjustment to the school environment (including psychological and academic outcomes) encompasses additional challenges and risks related to cultural differences or context-related acculturation hassles (Cutmore et al., 2018; Makarova, 2019; Makarova & Birman, 2016).

Despite the positive attitudes towards education and the increasing number of Roma children enrolled in schools, data on these children's school adjustment (e.g., school engagement [SE], academic achievement) are below expected. For example, about 2/3 of Roma youth and young adults struggle to complete formal education or find work (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2018). Moreover, as indicated by Alexiadou (2019), the number of students from Roma groups progressing to college is limited. Like other European countries, at the national level, figures reflect the overrepresentation of Roma people in the social integration income programs (Hinton-Smith et al., 2018).

The governmental efforts to address the achievement gap among students with Roma background emphasize the relevance of further investigating variables with the potential to mitigate acculturation hassles and reverse the declining trends in SE (Dimitrova et al., 2017). Furthermore, findings are expected to provide useful knowledge to inform the policymakers and stakeholders about ways to foster psychological and school adjustment of children and youth with a Roma background (Reyes et al., 2012).

Despite acknowledging the salience of non-formal education settings and outcomes to social inclusion among ethnic marginalized groups, the current study focuses on formal education in schools. Anchored on previous research targeting ethnic marginalized students (e.g., SE of Latin or Black American groups), this study takes a national sample of students with Roma background to examine the relationships and pathways through which micro-level contexts influence SE. We believe in the merits of analyzing a set of variables contributing to the SE of children and youth from Roma groups. Findings are expected to help us further understand which context-related aspects should be enhanced to address these students' non-adjustment trajectories in formal education systems and provide insights for context-responsive educational practices (e.g., familiar, societal, institutional) likely to improve school outcomes.

National context background

Data on the Roma community in Portugal are limited. Still, official reports indicate that the number of individuals who identify as members of the Roma community ranges between 40.000 and 60.000 (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações [ACM], 2017). Like other European countries, Roma communities in Portugal are among the most welfare-deprived groups across a wide range of social indicators, including education outcomes. For example, despite the lack of disaggregated data by ethnicity and age, the latest national survey estimated that around 25.126 students with Roma background are enrolled in public schools (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência [DGEEC], 2019). Of those, 44.3% are enrolled in elementary school, 24.3% in middle school, and just 2.6% in high school (DGEEC, 2019).

Notwithstanding the favorable enrollment rates, the academic failure and dropout rates of Roma students are higher than those of other ethnic marginalized groups. The latest data indicates that almost 50% of the students from Roma communities surveyed failed at least one school year throughout their pathways (DGEEC, 2019). Besides, children from Roma families are likely to drop out by the end of elementary school after learning basic numeracy and literacy skills (Rosário et al., 2017). In sum, despite the government efforts and positive changes in the attitudes of the Roma community towards education, the high rates of school failure and early school dropouts are still a reason for concern within the school community.

Theoretical framework

The ecological acculturation model (Ward & Geeraert, 2016) and the body of literature on students' SE (see Fredricks et al., 2004) provides a relevant theoretical framework for this study.

Acculturation

For this research, acculturation is defined as a dynamic process through which continued contact with other cultures is likely to change the individual's behaviors, attitudes, and cultural identity (Ward, 2001; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Berry (2005) proposed four strategies describing how people acculturate to other cultures and how they enculturate (i.e., retain) their own native culture: integration (participation in both native and mainstream cultures), assimilation (rejection of native culture over mainstream participation), separation (retention of native culture over mainstream

[1] According to the European Commission and Council of Europe definitions (2012), the term "Roma is an "umbrella" term widely used to cover a wide diversity of groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, and the Eastern groups), including people who identify themselves as Gypsies (the national used term). It recognises the heterogeneity of lifestyles and cultural backgrounds and the need to be sensitive to framings that problematize the minority (Matras et al., 2015). As a political term of convenience, Roma is used to refer to the national communities while covering the heterogeneity among the Gypsy groups in the national context.

participation), and marginalization (rejection of both cultures). The extent to which ethnic marginalized individuals orientate themselves to adopt the new culture or retain their native culture shapes their sociocultural (e.g., academic achievement, belongingness to mainstream cultural competence in mainstream culture) and psychological (e.g., well-being) adjustment and cultural identity development processes. The latter comprises feelings of belonging, values, and attitudes toward one's own and others' cultural groups (Phinney, 2003; Phinney et al., 2001).

Acculturation and school engagement of students with Roma background

The model of Ward and Geeraert (2016) proposes that the relationship between acculturation orientations and individuals' overall adaptation is shaped by the intersection of micro- and macro-level contexts (e.g., familial, institutional, societal) and the perceived cultural distance. As literature reports (e.g., Juang et al., 2018; Makarova & Birman, 2016; Schachner et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) for children and youth from ethnic marginalized groups, the micro-level contexts – such as school and family– are crucial acculturation contexts.

In the school setting, the acculturation outcomes include students' SE, quality of intergroup relationships, and academic achievement, among other aspects (Makarova & Birman, 2015, 2016). The context-related conditions shape children and youth's acculturative orientations and, therefore, their ability to engage in and with school and the learning process (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019). According to the Rosário et al. (2016), SE grows in the interaction between students and the educational setting and is fueled by their feelings, behaviors, and thoughts about school experiences. SE has been widely associated with positive learning outcomes (e.g., academic achievement; Fredricks et al., 2004; Rosário et al., 2016, 2017; Wong & Liem, 2022) and successful adjustment to school culture (e.g., Preusche & Göbel, 2021). Following Fredricks et al. (2004), SE is defined as a meta-concept encompassing three different but related forms of students' commitment and investment in school and related activities: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Behavioral Engagement (BE) embodies effort and participation in academic and social activities. Cognitive Engagement (CE) reflects the degree to which students invest academically in school, particularly regarding the use of self-regulated learning strategies. Finally, Emotional Engagement (EE) encompasses the student's identification with the school setting, including their sense of belonging, enjoyment of school learning, or appreciation of school success (Wang & Degol, 2014).

Developing the SE of students from marginalized ethnic groups requires the deployment of clear efforts to acquire skills needed to navigate and respond to conflicting pressures between their heritage culture and the culture experienced at school (Berry, 2003; Göbel & Preusche, 2019). However, along this process, these students are often exposed to acculturation hassles (e.g., cultural homogenizing, discrimination, and stereotypes) likely to shape their identity development processes and their families' educational and social mobility experiences (Dunajeva, 2021; Fredricks et al., 2004; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Poteet & Simmons, 2016; Schachner et al., 2018). Moreover, framed by mainstream cultural references and values, school dynamics (e.g., attempts to compel minority groups to assimilate mainstream values and expectations) are likely to prevent the affirmation of students' ethnic orientation, which may lead to marginalization rather than inclusion.

Along with the well-documented relevance of family settings to support ethnic orientation and identity through cultural transmission (e.g., Moreira et al., 2022), families are crucial to buffer the impact of acculturative hassles and obstacles (e.g., perceived discrimination) faced by students with Roma background (Makarova & Birman, 2016; Schachner et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). For example, the positive messages and beliefs conveyed by parents or caregivers regarding the instrumentality of school, aspirations, and expectations were found to impact positively psychological and academic outcomes (Boonk et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2006; Pinquart & Kauser, 2018; Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Wilder, 2014).

The support and quality of school relationships were also found to play a positive and protective role in buffering discrimination experiences and preventing school disengagement along with the risk of early dropout among students with Roma background (Camacho et al., 2018; Horenczyk et al., 2013; Vollet et al., 2017). For example, Engels et al. (2020) document that students perceived support, specifically from teachers, is crucial to foster their psychological and academic adjustment in the school setting (e.g., a sense of belonging and engagement in and with school). On the contrary, those who feel rejected in the school context are likely to experience disengagement and show poor learning outcomes (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

The present study

Data from official reports (e.g., European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2019) on Roma education show an increase in the number of children attending preschool and youth completing upper secondary education. This is consistent with research reporting that Roma people have expanded their perspective on the value of formal education before and beyond elementary school (Makarova, 2019; Sime et al., 2018). However, reducing the large number of students from Roma groups failing a school year, as well as their high rates of truancy and early school leaving, remain top priorities on European governmental agendas.

As Lauritzen and Nodeland (2018) warn, previous educational efforts have been more focused on responding to non-compliance evidence (e.g., low school enrollment and high dropout rates) than on investigating dimensions and processes that may help better explain these data. For example, to the best of our knowledge, the SE of students with a Roma background is yet under-explored. We believe that further understanding the role of proximal contexts (i.e., family and school) in these students' SE is expected to open avenues to set strategies and interventions likely to improve SE and the success of students with Roma background.

Therefore, the present study aims to advance our understanding of relationship patterns between proximal acculturation contexts (i.e., family and school) and SE of students with Roma background (i.e., *cognitive, behavioral,* and *emotional engagement*). In particular, using structural equation models (SEM), this study examines the extent to which the perceived *utility value of school* mediates the relationship between context-related variables (*parental involvement, academic socialization,* and *teacher involvement*) and SE of students with Roma background. The variables gender and familiar ethnic socialization were controlled in the model as covariates due to their possible interference in the model parameters estimation. Drawing on prior studies, gendered-based expectations are likely to impact female students' SE over the prioritization of traditional life trajectories (Schachner et al., 2016). Moreover, parents' efforts to socialize children with and preserve Roma cultural traditions (acculturative practices) are expected to hamper SE while blurring the perception of the *utility value of school* (Dimitrova et al., 2017). Literature has been investigating the relationships of some of these variables, but to the best of our knowledge, no study has analyzed their relationships with SEM. Therefore, data were analyzed considering all the relationships simultaneously rather than following a dyadic fashion and are expected to expand our understanding of the complex acculturation processes and outcomes of Roma students in the school context.

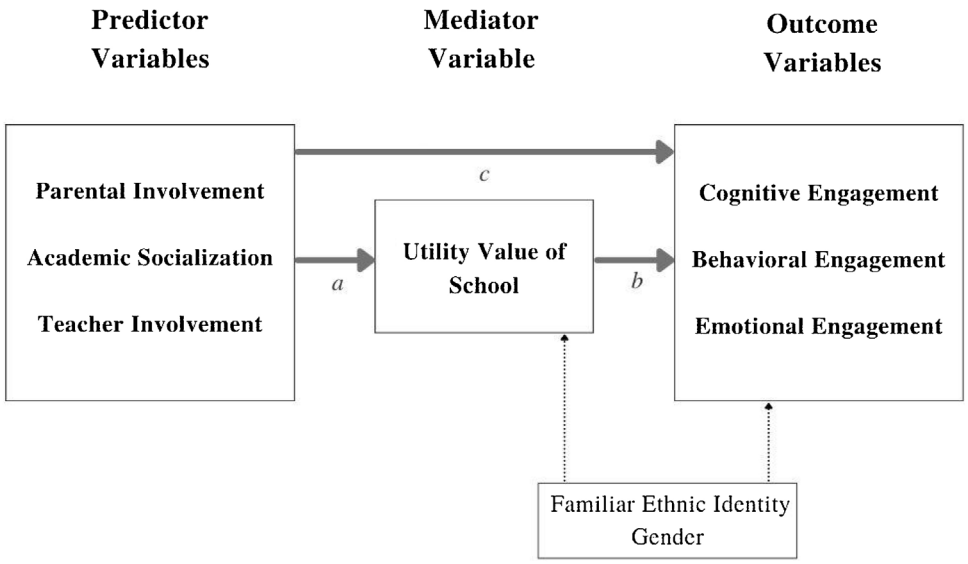

Figure 1. Prediction model of Roma children's SE. Ethnic cultural socialization and gender are covariates.

Acknowledging prior data (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), to examine the potential mediating role of the perceived *utility value of school*, two SEM models were fit: a Total Mediation Model (TMM) and a Partial Mediation Model (PMM; see Figure 1). The TMM model assumes that the context-related variables (i.e., *parental involvement, academic socialization,* and *teacher involvement*) influence the student's perceived *utility value of school* (*a* in Figure 1) which, in turn, affects the *SE* of Roma students (*b* in Figure 1). This model stands that students' perceived *utility value of school* fully mediates the relationship between context-related variables and SE. On the other hand, the PMM model assumes that the perceived *utility value of school* does not fully mediate the relationship between family variables and SE; this relationship also occurs through other variables (*c* in Figure 1) not included in this model.

Method

Participants

Official data regarding Roma communities' distribution across the country was used to gather a representative sample likely to capture the Roma community's heterogeneity. Finally, 28 schools throughout the country, each enrolling a large population of children and youth with Roma backgrounds, were invited to enroll. Of those, eleven schools (located in ten cities) accepted to participate (response rate of 39%). These schools are geographically dispersed, and participants live in urban and rural areas. The sample includes 213 students with Roma background, 56% male, from the 5th to 10th grade. (5th grade – 31%, 6th grade – 20.5%, 7th grade – 11.4%, 8th grade – 4.3%, 9th grade – 3.8%, and 10th grade: academic path - 1%; professional courses – 28%). Student ages ranged from 10 to 19 years old, with a mean of 14 years old (*SD* = 2).

Measures

The measures were translated by two authors of the present study, native speakers of Portuguese and fluent in English. First, the research team identified and discussed the differences between the independent translations. Then, the Portuguese version was translated backward by a native speaker of English who was knowledgeable in Portuguese. A pilot was conducted with 120 students, other than those enrolled in this study, from different ethnic backgrounds attending elementary and middle school levels. The participants were requested to indicate their understanding of the items or difficulties with wording through rating scales. Difficult words or vocabulary were changed following students' suggestions to improve the item's comprehensibility. Slight changes in the wording were included in the adaptation of the scales. All the scales were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The perceived *academic socialization* was assessed through 3 items adapted from the *Educational Socialization Scale* (ESS; Bempechat et al., 1999; see Table 1 in Appendix A). In this study, the scale's reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .83$, $\omega = .83$, AVE = .76, CR = .91). Construct validity was supported by the good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(8)} = 14.05$, $p = .08$, SRMR = .03, GFI = .98, TLI = .97, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, 90% CI (.00, .11).

Perceptions about *parental involvement* (parents/caregivers) in school (i.e., parents' participation in home and school-related activities) were assessed through 3 items adapted from the *Parental Involvement Scale* (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999; see Table 1 in Appendix A). In this study, the scale's reliability was close to the acceptable ($\alpha = .69$, $\omega = .69$, AVE = .69, CR = .87). Construct validity was supported by the good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(8)} = 14.05$, $p = .08$, SRMR = .03, GFI = .98, TLI = .97, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, 90% CI (.00, .11).

The student's perceptions of the *utility value of school and education* for their future and the future of the Roma community were assessed through 3 items adapted from the *Student Survey: Learning-Gardens Educational Assessment Package* (LEAP; Skinner et al., 2012; see Table 1 in Appendix A). In this study, the scale's reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .80$, $\omega = .80$, AVE = .62, CR = .83). Construct validity was supported by the overall good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(2)} = 7.61$, $p = .02$, SRMR = .04, GFI = .98, TLI = .94, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .11, 90% CI (.04, .21).

Students rated the student-teacher relationship quality using 3 items adapted from the *Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire* (TASQ; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; see Table 1 in Appendix A). In this study, the scale's reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .84$, $\omega = .85$, AVE = .94, CR = .98). Construct validity was supported by the overall good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(2)} = 5.56$, $p = .06$, SRMR = .02, GFI = .99, TLI = .97, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .09, 90% CI (.00, .19).

SE was assessed through 9 items (i.e., 3-item *behavioral engagement*, 3-item *cognitive engagement*, and 3-item *emotional engagement*) adapted from *School Engagement Scale* (SES; Fredricks et al., 2005; see Table 1 in Appendix A). Higher scores indicate greater SE. In the present study, the reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .76$, $\omega = .76$, AVE = .59, CR = .81 [BE]; $\alpha = .77$, $\omega = .77$, AVE = .94, CR = .98 [EE] and $\alpha = .76$, $\omega = .76$, AVE = .87, CR = .95 [CE]). Construct validity was supported by the good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(23)} = 33.35$, $p = .07$, SRMR = .04, GFI = .97, TLI = .98, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, 90% CI (.00, .08).

The degree to which students perceived their families' efforts to socialize them in Roma culture was assessed using 12 items adapted from the *Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure* (FESM; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). In this study, the reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .90$, $\omega = .90$, AVE = .63, CR = .94). Construct validity was supported by the good model fit on confirmatory factor analysis $\chi^2_{(44)} = 139.27$, $p < .001$, SRMR = .03, GFI = .99, TLI = .97, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, 90% CI (.039, .056).

Gender was dummy-coded (boy = 0 and girl = 1). Students were asked to choose ethnicity according to their sense of belonging. Just those who identified themselves as Roma people were enrolled in this study. Age (in years) was calculated based on the date of birth. The school level was collected for descriptive statistics reasons.

Procedure

Information provided by the Ministry of Education helped identify schools with enrolled students from Roma groups. Schools in that pool were invited to participate after the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Education and the Ethics committee of the University. A brief description of the research (e.g., informed consent, data collection schedule) was sent to all the schools. Schools that agreed to participate were asked to provide information on the distribution of students from Roma groups across each school level. To better reach the target population, the social assistants and social mediators in the schools helped to clarify any parental doubts. The authors ensured the visits and the survey's application to every school. The 3-day visits to every school occurred on different days of the week (both morning and afternoon) to increase the possibility of gathering as much data as possible. Festive seasons and peak workload periods in the term (e.g., assessment moments) were avoided. However, just 204 (53%) students with Roma background were attending schools effectively during data collection sessions.

Schools and students were not rewarded. To avoid segregation and discriminatory attitudes, the survey was filled in by the whole class in regular classes, and students without informed consent were enrolled in academic activities (e.g., class assignments). Each data collection session lasted approximately 45 minutes. To help students' comprehension and to prevent drop-offs, items were read aloud, and researchers clarified all doubts.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed in two stages using IBM SPSS 20 and SPSS AMOS 22 (Arbuckle, 2013). First, we examined the statistical properties of the variables included in the path model (means, standard deviations, asymmetry, kurtosis), as well as the correlation matrix and the missing values. The percentage of missing values was low, approximately 1.02%; therefore, missing values were treated through the multiple imputation procedure. Secondly, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to examine the reliability and validity of the constructs. Cronbach's alpha (α), McDonald's omega (ω), and Composite Reliability (CR) were used as key indexes for reliability. Overall, values greater than or equal to .70 indicate good reliability (Hair et al., 2010). The convergent validity was examined with the help of CR and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al. (2010), AVE values equal to or greater than .50 and lower than CR indicate an adequate convergent validity. Then, the model was fit, and the results were evaluated according to the following criteria: Chi-square, SRMR, GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, ECVI, and AIC. While the first seven provide us with information on the goodness of fit of the theoretical model to data (ECVI informs us of the extent to which these results could be replicated in an independent sample), AIC and BIC help to select the best model. According to Hu and Bentler's (1999) cut-off criteria, there is evidence of a good fit when χ^2 has a $p > .05$, SRMR < .05, GFI, AGFI and TLI $\geq .90$, CFI $\geq .95$, and RMSEA $\leq .06$. On the other hand, smaller AIC values indicate better fit. Finally, data is robust when the ECVI of the selected model is lower than that of the saturated model. The software provided by Lenhard and Lenhard (2016) was used to estimate the size of the observed effects. In our case, the effect size *d* was calculated from the CR test provided by AMOS (CR shows a distribution similar to that of the *z-test* statistic). According to Cohen's *d* statistic (1988) the magnitude of effect size can be interpreted as follows: $d = 0.20$, small; $d = 0.50$, medium; and $d = 0.80$, large.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the model are provided in Table 1. The variables included in the SEM model are sufficiently intercorrelated to perform these multivariate analyses (Bartlett's sphericity test was statistically significant at $p < .001$). Although the Mardia multivariate coefficient was statistically significant ($M = 52.61$, $t = 11.32$, $p > .001$), variables presented univariate normality (asymmetry and kurtosis show values considered acceptable to prove normal univariate distribution).

Selection of the best model

The TMM and PMM have been fit. Results showed that TMM had a poor fit to the data $\chi^2_{(205)} = 315.53$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.54$, GFI = .89, AGFI = .85, SRMR = .09, TLI = .92, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .050 (.039–.061); whilst the PMM had an acceptable fit to data $\chi^2_{(196)} = 276.80$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.41$, GFI = .90, AGFI = .87, SRMR = .07, TLI = .94, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04 (.03–.06). Also, the smaller AIC values indicate a better model fit for the PMM model (TMM: AIC = 457.53; PMM: AIC = 436.80). Moreover, current data suggest that the model cross-validates across similar-sized samples from the same population, as the Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI) value was lower for the default model than for the saturated model (ECVI = 2.06 and ECVI = 2.60, respectively).

Assessment of the Partial Mediation Model (PMM)

All the factorial weights of the measurement model are statistically significant at $p < .0001$.The unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients of the structural model and their statistical significance and effect size regarding the PMM model are provided in Table 2.

Figure 2 shows the statistically significant direct effects. Also, the marginally significant ($p < .10$) direct effects are represented by dashed arrows. For parsimony reasons, those corresponding to the covariates are not represented. The indirect effects are presented in Table 3.

Findings indicate that the *utility value of school* does not mediate the relationship between *parental involvement* and children's

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations

	BE_1	BE_2	BE_3	EE_1	EE_2	EE_3	CE_1	CE_2	CE_3	SU_1	SU_2	SU_3	TI_1	TI_2	TI_3	PI_1	PI_2	PI_3	AS_1	AS_2	AS_3	GEN	FEI
BE_1	–																						
BE_2	.54**	–																					
BE_3	.52**	.49**	–																				
EE_1	.29**	.23**	.35**	–																			
EE_2	.34**	.20**	.49**	.47**	–																		
EE_3	.23**	.24**	.46**	.56**	.56**	–																	
CE_1	.24**	.19**	.34**	.24**	.47**	.42**	–																
CE_2	.17*	.16*	.31**	.27**	.43**	.43**	.48**	–															
CE_3	.21**	.20**	.35**	.20**	.39**	.40**	.55**	.52**	–														
SU_1	.22**	.25**	.26**	.28**	.26**	.26**	.24**	.36**	.25**	–													
SU_2	.30**	.24**	.40**	.29**	.23**	.30**	.24**	.26**	.17*	.54**	–												
SU_3	.30**	.25**	.37**	.21**	.24**	.28**	.20**	.27**	.18**	.51**	.67**	–											
TI_1	.17*	.12	.19**	.18*	.26**	.17*	.06	.16*	.09	.37**	.32**	.32**	–										
TI_2	.19**	.18**	.30**	.28**	.33**	.38**	.22**	.25**	.18**	.28**	.29**	.31**	.66**	–									
TI_3	.16*	.12	.16*	.14*	.19**	.14*	−.03	.11	.01	.20**	.23**	.27**	.60**	.69**	–								
PI_1	.21**	.11	.17*	.16*	.23**	.21**	.17*	.21**	.26**	.22**	.17*	.21**	.01	.08	−.03	–							
PI_2	.06	.11	.23**	.19**	.18**	.17*	.27**	.35**	.32**	.26**	.17*	.14*	−.07	.04	−.07	.42**	–						
PI_3	.16*	.12	.29**	.12	.27**	.18**	.22**	.25**	.21**	.18**	.18**	.17*	−.03	.01	−.11	.41**	.45**	–					
AS_1	.20**	.17*	.28**	.15*	.21**	.16*	.16*	.17*	.14*	.28**	.33**	.39**	.07	.08	.07	.28**	.19**	.39**	–				
AS_2	.23**	.16	.27**	.14*	.19**	.14*	.19**	.27**	.21**	.22**	.26**	.36**	.12	.09	.11	.32**	.30**	.38**	.63**	–			
AS_3	.15*	.10	.22**	.12	.18**	.17*	.18**	.28**	.26**	.18**	.23**	.31**	.06	.05	.04	.35**	.31**	.31**	.56**	.65**	–		
GEN	−.00	−.01	.09	.11	.12	.11	.01	.23**	.06	.08	.12	.18**	.04	.16*	.10	−.01	.13	.07	.19**	.17*	.11	–	
FEI	−.00	.09	.11	.14	.13	.14*	.04	.13*	.12	.03	−.09	−.01	−.03	.05	.07	−.07	−.00	−.05	.03	−.04	−.00	.08	–
M	3.28	3.53	3.39	3.53	3.01	2.97	2.91	2.36	2.23	4.08	4.20	4.31	3.50	3.49	3.82	2.92	2.36	2.85	4.12	4.00	3.89	1.50	3.88
SD	.99	1.18	1.27	1.34	1.30	1.38	1.36	1.28	1.23	1.11	1.06	.94	1.34	1.19	1.08	1.12	1.23	1.45	1.06	1.11	1.18	.50	.90
Skw	−.18	−.27	−.28	−.66	−.07	−.05	.03	.61	.73	−1.39	−1.50	−1.60	−.63	−.39	−.76	.09	.75	.13	−1.20	−.91	−.85	.01	−.88
Kur	−.206	−.852	−.950	−.715	−1.019	−1.234	−1.178	−.745	−.420	1.328	1.679	2.391	−.882	−.912	−.284	−.465	−.346	−1.303	.878	.018	−.27	−2.02	.47

Note. Behavioral Engagement (BE), Emotional Engagement (EE), Cognitive Engagement (CE), Utility Value of School (SU), Teacher Involvement (TI), Parental Involvement (PI), Academic Socialization (AS), Gender (GEN: 1 male, 2 female), Familiar Ethnic Identity (FEI). Scale measure: 1 minimum, 5 maximum. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Table 2
Regression coefficients of the partial mediation model

	RW	SE	SRW	*t*	*p*	*d*
Structural direct effects						
PI → SU	.11	.08	.15	1.31	ns	—
AS → SU	.27	.09	.33	2.98	= .003	0.44
TI → SU	.35	.07	.40	4.94	< .001	0.74
PI → CE	.50	.14	.51	3.70	< .001	0.54
AS → CE	−.06	.13	−.06	−.47	ns	—
TI → CE	.18	.11	.16	1.71	= .088	0.24
PI → BE	.16	.08	.24	1.97	= .049	0.28
AS → BE	.03	.09	.04	.32	ns	—
TI → BE	.13	.07	.17	1.87	= .062	0.26
PI → EE	.36	.11	.41	3.14	= .002	0.45
AS →EE	−.12	.11	−.12	−1.02	ns	—
TI → EE	.35	.10	.34	3.58	< .001	0.52
SU → CE	.25	.15	.19	1.69	= .090	0.24
SU → BE	.36	.11	.39	3.39	< .001	0.49
SU → EE	.25	.13	.21	1.97	= .05	0.28
Covariates effects						
GE → SU	−.08	.09	−.05	−.82	ns	—
FEI → SU	.03	.05	.04	.65	ns	—
GE → EE	.33	.12	.20	2.78	= .005	0.40
GE → CE	.33	.14	.17	2.36	= .018	0.34
GE → BE	.18	.09	.14	1.98	= .048	0.28
FEI → EE	.04	.07	.04	.52	ns	—
FEI → CE	.04	.08	.03	.46	ns	—
FEI → BE	−.05	.05	−.07	−1.00	ns	—

Note. RW (regression weights), SE (standardized errors), SRW (standardized regression weights), TI (Teacher Involvement), AS (Academic Socialization), PI (Parental Involvement), SU (Utility Value of School), EE (Emotional Engagement), BE (Behavioral Engagement), CE (Cognitive Engagement), FEI (Familiar Ethnic Identity), GE (Gender = 1 Male, 2 = Female). ns (not significant at $p < .1$).

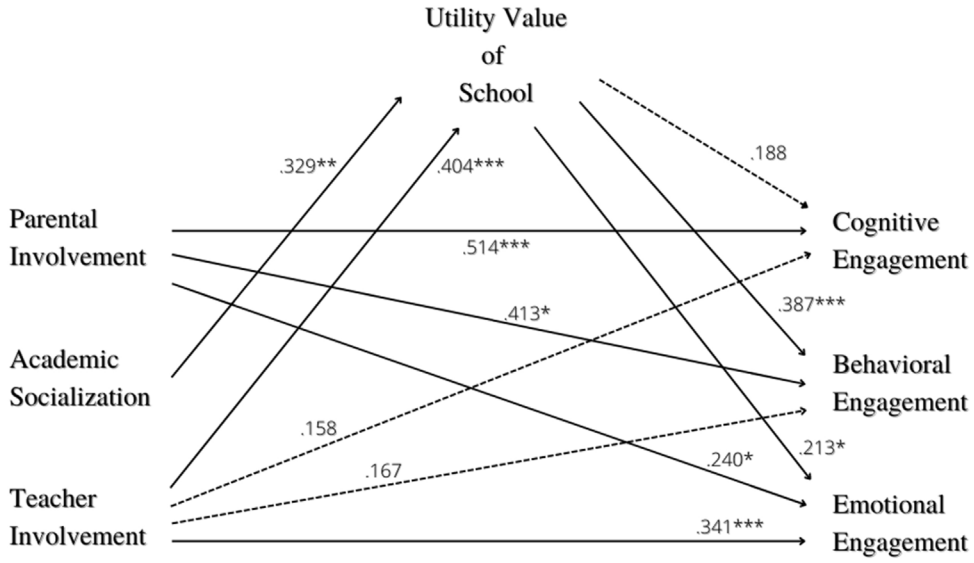

Figure 2. Direct effects in the PMM (standardized regression weights).

Table 3
Standardized indirect effects

	Estimate	SE	*p*
Parental Involvement → Utility value of school → Cognitive Engagement	.03	.03	.13
Parental Involvement → Utility value of school → Emotional Engagement	.03	.03	.12
Parental Involvement → Utility value of school → Behavioral Engagement	.06	.06	.14
Academic Socialization → Utility value of school → Cognitive Engagement	.06	.05	.05
Academic Socialization → Utility value of school → Emotional Engagement	.07	.05	.02
Academic Socialization → Utility value of school → Behavioral Engagement	.13	.07	.01
Teacher Involvement → Utility value of school → Cognitive Engagement	.08	.05	.05
Teacher Involvement → Utility value of school → Emotional Engagement	.09	.05	.02
Teacher Involvement → Utility value of school → Behavioral Engagement	.16	.07	.00

SE, as the indirect effects are not statistically significant. However, data show statistically significant evidence that *parental involvement* directly impacts children's SE, with a larger magnitude for *emotional* and *cognitive engagement*. Overall, for the other context-related variables, the *utility value of school* totally mediates the impact of *academic socialization* and *teacher involvement* on the stu-

dent's SE. A granular analysis reveals that the perceived *utility value of school* totally mediates the relationship between *academic socialization* efforts and each dimension of SE (i.e., cognitive, emotional, behavioral). However, for *teacher involvement*, the total mediation effects exist for *cognitive engagement* and *behavioral engagement*. For *emotional engagement,* the mediation effect is partial. Regarding the perceived *utility value of school*, findings provided statistically significant evidence of its impact on student SE; the more the students perceived school and education to be relevant, the more they engaged in school. However, for *cognitive engagement,* this relationship is marginally significant ($p = .09$).

Analysing the effects of control variables, no statistically significant relationships were found between *familial ethnic socialization* and the *utility value of school* or SE *dimensions*. Moreover, no statistically significant relationship was found between gender and the *utility value of school.* However, the relationships between gender and SE *dimensions* were statistically significant. Accordingly, female students have reported higher SE than their male counterparts. Finally, the amount of variance explained for the *utility value of school* was 40% and for the three dimensions of SE was as follows: 42% (*emotional engagement*), 39% (*behavioral engagement*), and 40% (*cognitive engagement*).

Discussion

Through an ecological lens, this study investigates the mediator role of the perceived utility value of school on the relationship between context-related variables (i.e., academic socialization, parental involvement, and teacher involvement) and SE of students with Roma background. Gender and ethnic cultural socialization were controlled due to their potential impact on the relationships.

Overall, according to previous literature (e.g., Boyle et al., 2018; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Sime et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2014), our data support the significant influences of family and school-related variables (either direct or indirect) on *SE* of students with Roma background. However, the hypothesized mediation role played by the utility value of school was only partially supported by the current data. In line with previous findings (e.g., Veas et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2018), data reveal that different forms of parental involvement (e.g., home or school-based) might operate through different pathways and be associated with different learning outcomes. For example, the traditional home and school-based forms of parental involvement (i.e., parent-teacher meetings; help with homework) were found to directly impact students' SE, whereas parents' academic socialization efforts influenced students' SE dimensions through the perceived utility value of school. Data suggest that overt parental involvement strategies (e.g., participating in school meetings and monitoring homework) may be instrumental in improving school behavior and fostering compliance with rules, therefore sustaining SE among students with Roma background (Hill, 2015; Jeynes, 2003, 2010, 2018; Jung & Zhang, 2016; Wang & Fredricks, 2014; Wang & Huguley, 2012). In line with previous findings (e.g., Fan & Williams, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014), this relationship is stronger for cognitive and emotional engagement than for behavioral engagement. A possible explanation for this result is that while attending parent-teacher meetings, parents may convey that they care about and support their children in school; these covert messages may foster children and youth's sense of belonging and engagement in school.

When parents participate in home- and school-based activities, children are more likely to reduce problem behaviors and comply with school rules, increasing the positive experiences and interactions in school and the quality of their learning outcomes. Notwithstanding, contrary to the expected (e.g., Dotterer & Lowe, 2015), the perceived utility value of school did not mediate the relationship between home- and school-based parental involvement and SE. Notably, the traditional forms of parental involvement expected by the schools and extensively addressed in the literature were not understood by children with Roma background as a 'reinforcement message' of the value of school and education. Moreover, potential barriers to traditional forms of parental involvement (e.g., such as unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge of the inner workings of the school system, low self-efficacy, and time and displacement constraints) are likely to affect the quantity and quality of parental involvement efforts in their child's education and, therefore, the final outcomes (Jeynes, 2018). Thus, traditional forms of parental involvement seem to act more as an external control than a way of instilling children's sources of motivation (e.g., the perceived utility value of school).

As evidenced by our data, parents' academic socialization efforts positively affect the SE of students with Roma background by bolstering their perceived utility value of school. Findings are consistent with previous studies on marginalized ethnic groups (e.g., Day & Dotterer, 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Sonnenschein et al., 2012) discussing academic socialization as a necessary form of parental influence on students' school-related outcomes. Thus, by conveying messages about the value of education and communicating future aspirations and expectations for their children, parents are likely to stimulate positive attitudes towards schools and bolster motivation for learning. Moreover, these positive encouragements are expected to help children and youth to deal with acculturation hassles and challenges (e.g., ethnic discrimination; language barriers) and better understand the usefulness of school to help overcome present and future life challenges (internalized motivation; e.g., Andriessen et al., 2012; Benner et al., 2016; Bryan et al., 2012). This finding reinforces the claims in literature to incorporate behaviors and strategies in the research designs beyond the traditional indicators forms of parental involvement, particularly for families from racial and ethnic marginalized or low-SES backgrounds (Ceballo et al., 2017; Clifford & Humphries, 2018; Jeynes, 2018).

In addition to the role played by the families, current findings emphasize the notable influences of teachers' involvement on the SE of students with Roma backgrounds while helping them to deal with school-related challenges and barriers (e.g., lack of cultural capital and tacit knowledge of the school system). Findings support previous works (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2017; Fredricks et al., 2018; Makarova, 2019; Makarova & Herzog, 2013; Mengisto & Horenczyk, 2019; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018) documenting the positive and strong influence of the quality relationships at school, mostly with teachers, on students school acculturation processes and outcomes (e.g., building beliefs on the utility value of education; SE). Interestingly, current data provide evidence for the different pathways through which teachers may influence students' SE directly and indirectly. As Stroet et al. (2013) summarized, one possible reason for this result is that the various components of teachers' involvement have different effects on students' school-related outcomes. For example, prior research shows that teachers' involvement encompassing caring and affective behaviors were found to predict students' sense of belongingness and relatedness (emotional engagement; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Furrer et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000); whereas teacher involvement forms including guidance, feedback, and instruction are likely to protect students from acculturation hassles (e.g., lack of knowledge on school values and expectations, discrimination) and learning motivational costs (Hentges et al., 2019; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). The latter teacher involvement form helps students with a Roma background to develop and internalize behavioral patterns and interpersonal skills needed to navigate between cultures (Camacho et al., 2018; Horenczyk et al., 2013).

Regarding the control variables, present data did not support our hypothesis that ethnic socialization efforts displayed within a familiar context could hamper the perceived utility value of school and SE among students with Roma background. The work of Juang and Syed (2010) may help explain this finding. These authors claim that parents' ethnic and cultural socialization practices are more related to exploring ethnic backgrounds than their commitment to ethnic values and expectations. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Moreira et al., 2022; Rosário et al., 2017; Wang & Eccles, 2012), findings indicate that male and female students differ significantly in their self-reported SE (girls reported higher SE).

Taking it all together, the current findings support the contribution of the perceived utility value of the school to students' SE while a malleable mechanism through which agents of socialization (i.e., parents and teachers) influence students' school-related outcomes. In previous studies, the perceived usefulness of school tasks and activities was found to positively affect students' engagement and intention to continue in school (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Rakoczy et al., 2019). However, like other ethnic marginalized or deprived groups, students with Roma background are often exposed to acculturation challenges and hassles (e.g., poverty, discrimination in the school setting, lower access to resources) likely to influence school-related beliefs and values (i.e., the perceived utility value of school, interest in learning) and the perceived cost-benefits of educational pathways. Data provide promising evidence on how families from Roma communities and teachers influence students' SE while supporting students' beliefs about the utility value of school for future life opportunities. However, it is worth noting the high percentage (47%) of students with Roma backgrounds who were absent from school on the data collection days, along with the low number of students currently attending the upper high school (2.6%). This information raises concerns over what might be 'clipping their academic wings'. Previous findings (e.g., Moreira et al., 2022) have reported that families from Roma communities are interested in and recognize the utility value of school and education for their children's life success. However, low school attendance and high dropout rates among the Roma community might be explained by the 'future-blind perspective' followed to make educational choices. Previous literature (Hentges et al., 2019; Kaplan & Gangestad, 2005) suggests that given the deprived context-related conditions and the uncertain nature of the Roma groups' families' future, their choices are likely to be driven by immediate needs and short-term goals.

Hill et al. (2016) suggest that families' lack of cultural capital may prevent them from supporting and guiding their children in their educational trajectories and effectively connecting engagement in school with long-term benefits (e.g., upper high school-going). For example, during the informed consent meetings with the families, some parents declared expectations for their children inconsistent with their school path (e.g., *"my son will leave school in the 8*th *grade when turning 18* [end of compulsory education] *and then, later, I think he will become an engineer"*). Moreover, it is important to monitor how school efforts, particularly teachers, are successful in cultivating positive academic identities in families with Roma background, including beliefs and values regarding the school (Gummadam et al., 2016; Matthews, 2014). As Hamilton (2018) warned, schools set educational practices consistent with a cultural deficit approach (e.g., addressing the low academic abilities of students with a Roma background by setting exclusive practices for them). Deficit-rooted perceptions may translate into low-academic expectations for students with a Roma background, delivered to families through various direct or indirect messages (Makarova et al., 2019).

Importantly, and as a take-home message, current data stress the important role played by teacher involvement in students' SE directly or through the utility value of the school. This result is important because the school may play either a positive or a detrimental role in students' SE (Dunajeva, 2021; Göbel & Preusche, 2019; Poteet & Simmons, 2016; Schachner et al., 2018). Therefore, educators and school administrators are expected to reflect on efforts made to provide families from Roma backgrounds with learning opportunities likely to expand their sense of long-term educational worth (e.g., benefits of pursuing education).

Limitations and future research

The analysis of these findings should consider some methodological and theoretical limitations. First, despite the good model fit, a high percentage of variability in educational utility and students' SE was not explained. Several new variables (e.g., acculturation orientations, educational aspirations, and other dimensions of school climate) could be explored in future studies. Second, the data does not represent a significant percentage of the expected sample (47%). To further conclude on the effects' robustness, researchers may consider surveying students who did not participate to learn whether the results would be invariant. Moreover, given the great heterogeneity of the Roma groups, larger sample (a) would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the relationships found, (b) while considering group membership (e.g., communities living). Finally, we did not explore the effect of age and school level as control variables. The reasons are related to the fact the age of the majority of the children enrolled in this research does not match the expected school level. Prior research is grounded on the premise of age-based grade level. Therefore, we would be unable to compare current data against the literature and make inferences accordingly.

The literature supports the directionality of the model fitted. The relationships between family and school-related variables and SE are totally and partially mediated by beliefs about the utility of education. However, little is known about these processes over time. Future work could consider exploring these processes using a longitudinal design to further understand, for example, how parents' and teachers' involvement may vary in response to children and youth's SE levels or how teachers and schools tackle students with Roma background SE over time. Moreover, despite the crucial role played by family and school in the children and youth acculturation processes, this is a limitation of the study. Future research will benefit from exploring the role of non-formal education settings and agents of socialization along with their influence on acculturation processes and outcomes of children and youth with Roma background.

Lastly, the use of self-assessment scales prevents learning actual student behaviors. Therefore, future research could consider using on-task measures to assess the variables taken (e.g., diaries for evaluating students' SE or ethnic cultural socialization messages and practices) and interviews to deepen and explore the complex acculturation processes undergone by students with Roma background.

Conclusion and practical implications

There is vast evidence on the utility value of school on students' motivation, learning, and long-term investment documented in the literature (e.g., Appleton et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2016). However, no studies examined the utility value of school as a mediating pathway between context-related acculturation conditions and SE of students with Roma backgrounds. The current findings provide a glimpse into how both crucial agents of socialization – parents and teachers – can instill, through intentional efforts, different aspects of students' motivational and engagement-related outcomes. Results highlight the salience of non-traditional forms of parental involvement in beliefs and values about the utility

of school and SE of students with Roma background (Clifford & Humphries, 2018). Parents of Roma children, due to multiple barriers, might not comply with traditional forms of parental involvement (e.g., helping children with homework); still, their involvement in education plays a significant role in students' SE trajectories. Moreover, it is worth noting the role teachers play in students' SE, either directly supporting emotional engagement or indirectly bolstering behavioral and cognitive forms of engagement while helping families build beliefs on the utility of school for overcoming future challenges (Praag et al., 2016). However, the large percentage of students with random school attendance and the residual number of students attending high-school levels still raise questions on the quality of parents' and teachers' involvement in the education of students from Roma groups.

The current findings have important implications for education programs and policies while highlighting the need for school-based prevention and intervention directed at school climate, focusing on the identity development processes of students with Roma background. For example, as the perceived value of the school is potentially strengthened by parental academic socialization efforts, one potential avenue to spread the effects on students' SE is to expand parents' tacit knowledge of the "a, b, c" of the school system and enhance their expectancy values, such as the perceived utility value of school (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Moreover, acknowledging the effect of teacher involvement as an important variable to student SE, both direct and indirectly through the perceived value of education, school administrators could consider setting evidence-based training and interventions aiming to provide information on effective ways of teacher involvement related to students learning outcomes. Moreover, teachers can help students' expectancy building by adopting practices (e.g., communicating expectations for all students; providing quality feedback; promoting students' cultural capital) or implementing brief interventions to reduce the motivational cost of education (e.g., low hope of succeeding; Harackiewicz et al., 2016). Another avenue likely to impact students' motivational beliefs and SE addresses intentional educational efforts to set culturally responsive academic and behavioral support for all students. For example, schools could consider setting catch-up opportunities for students struggling to write or mentoring activities to help those in need of academic support (e.g., help students set academic goals, expand beliefs on the utility value of school and its connection with future goals). Teachers can also foster students' perceived usefulness of school by engaging with parents in partnerships, supporting non-traditional forms of parental involvement in children's education (e.g., providing knowledge on the inner workings of the school system; involving parents in decision-making), and helping them to set positive expectations and future goals. To facilitate the role of the teacher, schools may consider providing training on multicultural approaches and acculturation processes (Hoti et al., 2019) and professional development for teachers. Training would be centered on acknowledging potential implicit bias, thus preventing the reproduction of societal prejudice against ethnic marginalized groups, such as Roma.

Overall, current findings warn researchers and educators, including administrators, teachers, and school psychologists, about the need to better address issues related to the achievement gap among students with Roma backgrounds. A culturally sensitive perspective would allow us to mitigate the effects of implicit biases and improve the school climate, facilitating the acculturation processes and outcomes. We believe this paper presents important arguments supporting a shift in the mainstream attitudes and educational policies toward education that will likely improve SE of students with Roma background.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Items included within each construct

Construct	Measure	Source
Academic Socialization (AS)	M̈y parents say I could do better in school if I worked harder.¨ M̈y parents say you can get smarter and smarter as long as you try hard.¨ M̈y parents say I can get good grades in school as long as I always try hard.¨	Bempechat & Williams (1995)
Parental Involvement (PI)	Ättended a PTA or other school meeting.¨ Ättended a school play, concert, sporting event, or other school activity.¨ Ḧelped me with my homework.¨	Voydanoff & Donnelly (1999)
Teacher Involvement (TI)	M̈y teachers really care about me.¨ Ï can't really count on my teachers.¨ M̈y teachers are good at explaining things so I can understand them.¨	Skinner et al. (2012)
School Utility (SU)	Ï need to learn a lot in school so I can take charge of my future.¨ Ïf I do well in school now, I'll have a better future.¨ Ï need to go to college so that my family can have a better life.¨	Skinner et al. (2012)
School Engagement (SE)		
Behavioral Engagement (BE)	Ï pay attention in class.¨ Ẅhen I am in class, I just act as if I am working.¨ Ï follow the rules at school.¨	
Emotional Engagement (EE)	Ï feel happy in school.¨ Ï like being at school.¨	Fredricks et al. (2005)

Cognitive Engagement (CE)	Ï am interested in the work at school.¨ Ï study at home even when I don't have a test.¨ Ï try to watch videos/TV shows about things we are doing in school.¨ Ï read extra books to learn more about things we do in school.¨

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