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Pre- and in-service education professionals facing religious diversity and interreligious dialogue in Catalonia

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ABSTRACT

Education professionals, and especially those in secondary education, are key players in enabling intercultural and interreligious dialogue. However, it is worth asking whether educational actors are in fact adequately trained to address the serious responsibilities and challenges represented by the participatory democratisation of public religious life. On the basis of a survey (n = 849), we analysed views on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue among teacher-managers in secondary schools (n = 275; 59% state schools, 40% public-private schools) and future socioeducational actors (n = 574) studying at four Catalan universities. The findings revealed that these pre- and in-service education professionals held varying opinions and attitudes. Their views tended to be favourable towards diversity and dialogue, mostly coinciding with Knitter's mutuality model, but generational differences were observed, and different standpoints emerged with respect to religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue. The survey outcomes yielded a range of different profiles. In-service professionals had a moderate profile with regard to religious beliefs and dialogue, while among students two distinct profiles were identified: one representing a more open-minded, tolerant and progressive attitude towards religious diversity and interreligious dialogue, and another which included belief in absolute truths stemming from one's own beliefs.

Introduction

The legitimisation of the religious sphere in public and private life and the increase in conflicts (Marshall 2018; Zembylas 2014), caused in part by the growing visibility of spiritual, religious and cultural difference in European societies, has meant that the relationships between religion, culture and politics have become increasingly blurred. In addition, new social scenarios have also drawn new religious manifestations that invite

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to establish an interreligious dialogue as a necessary engine to promote coexistence in plural societies. Among other globalising phenomena, the arrival of immigrants and refugees and their mingling with local populations has revealed a lack of social cohesion and the reinforcement of prejudices, mistrust and segregation between beliefs. Religion has become visible as a phenomenon of great importance in people's migratory processes (Buades and Vidal 2007). The presence of different religions requires us to develop new public cultures respecting religious beliefs, combined with training to help us understand each other as members of a more plural society, and to help eradicate the hatred, terrorism and discrimination which have been growing since, for example, the jihadist attacks in Brussels (European Comission 2008, 2016; Ghosh et al. 2017).

People's increasing public use of the virtual media and the effects this has on the dissemination of specific discourses also indicates that religion should be approached from the standpoint of all fields and spheres. Encompassing religion in public life may provoke confusion due to its tensions with the ideology of the secular social sphere. As Elósegui (2009) has remarked, the church-state separation should not be identified with secular or antireligious attitudes in the state; she argues that the state should embrace fully the values of freedom in order to guarantee its neutrality in a better and more appropriate way. Buades and Vidal (2007), for their part, write of the 'phantoms of secularism' and directly advocate the participatory democratisation of the public sphere. They also speak of the diversity of beliefs and call for the political autonomy of and public cooperation between different religions and other expressions of spirituality in the quest for commonalties. Thus, the presence of such diversity in Europe requires a new public culture respecting the phenomenon of spirituality and religion and giving an important place to interreligious and intercultural dialogue for its implications for physical, emotional or affective well-being (Souza 2009) and for citizen coexistence (Watson 2009).

In this context, education professionals are especially vulnerable in facing the challenges of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. They play a key role in promoting dialogue and in designing educational initiatives to deal with the risks of radicalisation, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination on the grounds of religious or spiritual adherence (Jackson 2004; Stoltzfus and Reffel 2009; Zembylas 2014; Zembylas and Papamichael 2017). The Council of Europe's Recommendation 1720 on education and religion (approved 4 October 2005) states that education is crucial in combating lack of understanding between the different expressions of religious feeling, and recommends both pre- and in-service training for teachers in religious education, education for citizenship and human rights and intercultural education in order to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue (Jackson 2010; Papastephanou 2008; Wang 2013; Watson 2004). Studies by Arnesen et al. (2010) clearly show this perspective in approaches to training education professionals. Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 on religion and non-religious beliefs in intercultural education mentions three levels of action: educational politics, the institutions and teachers' professional development (Council of Europe 2008a). It is, therefore, essential to investigate and analyse the various postures, discourses and viewpoints on how to address these challenges in education. In dealing with such a serious responsibility, pre- and in-service training for socioeducational actors is key. Placing the spotlight on how

to respond to the challenge of religious diversity through education requires us to analyse what opinions and attitudes socioeducational actors actually have.

Religious belief and interreligious dialogue

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue entails respectful and open exchanges of views between individuals and groups from different ethnic backgrounds and with differing cultural, religious and linguistic heritages, on the basis of mutual respect and understanding (Council of Europe 2008b). Such dialogue is founded on developing the ability to listen, to respect diversity of beliefs, to identify common religious experiences and to be open to difference, in addition to giving priority to ethics over dogmatism, focusing on human rights and democracy and offering solutions to religious problems through critical and participatory citizenship (Torradeflot 2012). Interreligious dialogue implies a willingness to reconsider one's own ideas in the light of those of others and to embrace the potential for mutual enrichment and transformation among participants (Santiago and Corpas 2012). The American Psychology Association (APA) has called for training programmes to lay the ground for cultural and religious diversity (cited in Morgan and Sandage 2016). The UN, UNESCO and European Council convergence directives also urge that education should respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and that all kinds of discrimination should therefore be eradicated on grounds of belief as an offence against human dignity and a threat to peace and coexistence in contravention of the UN Charter. According to Dietz (2008), one way education can eliminate this type of discrimination is by addressing the problem of the perceptions of otherness, deeply rooted in social attitudes.

While religious pluralism is a topic of great interest and debate in fields such as sociology and anthropology (Smith 2007), in education there also exists a growing tradition in the study of religious beliefs and intercultural dialogue (Fernández, García-Romeral, and Fons 2009; Vilà 2006, 2008), although theoretical and empirical achievements in this area are still in their early stages. Despite the existence of studies demonstrating that exposure to a wider variety of religious beliefs results in greater acceptance of religious diversity (Smith 2007), this is not always accompanied by professional willingness to take responsibility for the treatment of religious diversity in schools. Studies such as Pargament's (2011) show that this orientation depends on teachers' self-awareness, authenticity, openness and tolerance. Holm, Nokelainen, and Tirri (2014) also compiled studies on interreligious awareness, with a special interest in its application in secondary education. According to Lähnemann (2005) we should be able to deal with different situations of religious plurality; to identify the structures and contexts of different religions and their relationships with others; to wish to introduce others to our own religious traditions and be capable of doing this; and to seek meetings between religions and be able to learn from them. Losert, Merkt, and Schweitzer (2015) speak of attitudes, rituals, perspectives, openness, communication, self-trust and commitment. Also, Abu-Nimer (2001) and Morgan and Sandage (2016) write of the need to develop intercultural and religious awareness.

Having knowledge of the diversity and depth of the traditions of religious and spiritual wisdom yields personal enrichment and mutual recognition and knowledge, which in turn fosters coexistence and respect and helps avert fundamentalism. Scholars have outlined four

categories classifying people's views on and relationships with religious traditions: inclusive, exclusive, relativist and pluralist (Pieterse, Dreyer, and van der Ven 2002; Knitter 1995). Individuals, institutions and entire societies have conformed to each one of these options continually while at the same time constantly changing their orientation (Smith 2007). Knitter's 1995 scheme specifies four models: replacement, fulfilment, mutuality and acceptance. The replacement model stresses the idea that 'there is only one true religion'; this standpoint, which can be characterised as exclusive, is that of all religious fundamentalism and assumes that all other religions have no value. The fulfilment model represents an advance on this, recognising a certain value in all religions while postulating the absolute superiority of one's own belief. The mutuality model, on the other hand, argues that the ultimate reality is one and the same, but that there are many cultural expressions of this reality. This model is in itself excessively relativistic since it centres on consensus and the common ground between religions without paying due attention to differences, which is precisely where the richness and creativity of interreligious dialogue is to be found. Lastly, the acceptance model addresses the person through the totality of existing religions, and is the most open, tolerant and progressive model of the four. While in the other models difference is seen as something to be overcome, in the acceptance model difference is something we need to learn to live with, and dialogue rather than theology plays the key role.

Identification with these differing perspectives is also linked to the processes of development and evolution of identities (as in the theories of invented traditions: Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), the rules of identity group classification, attribution and evaluation (Holz 2001), and the interpretation of the different unspoken symbolic codes with regard to other groups (Butler 1990). Aarøe (2012) warns that these development and identification processes are often value-loaded, that this can give rise to stereotypical representations of other groups, evaluating everything that is seen as 'other' as negative, and that this tendency can create religious intolerance.

In the light of these theories we should ask ourselves whether education professionals are truly equipped to take on the responsibilities and challenges presented by religious and cultural diversity, following the example of professionals in the field of religion (Everington et al. 2011).

Materials and method

Research problem

The research question orienting this study is: Are educational actors equipped to respond to the responsibilities and challenges presented by religious and cultural diversity?

The educational actors included in this study are, on the one hand, future education professionals (currently students): educators, teachers, social educators and social workers; and on the other, in-service secondary education teachers, since at this stage they work with adolescents, a particularly vulnerable group due to their lack of competences for dealing with the challenge of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the religious radicalisation which can take place at this age (Ghosh et al. 2017; Ross 2003). These two groups, degree students and in-service teachers, are relevant to this study because they should be allies in promoting intercultural and interreligious

dialogue in a society which is constantly becoming more plural such as our own. Understanding their views on the religious dimension and on interreligious dialogue requires us to make an analysis of their willingness to foster interreligious dialogue in the workplace.

This research question yields the following objectives: (1) to analyse the opinions of secondary school teacher-managers and trainee educators on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue; (2) to determine whether there are generational differences in terms of religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue between experienced professionals (school directors) and students finishing their degree studies; and (3) to identify different profiles among their opinions on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue, also taking into account other demographic variables.

Measures and sample

The method adopted was a survey using a questionnaire which included the following features:

- The sample's socio-demographic and contextual makeup: the group (students or teachers); sex and age of each group; the names of the teachers' schools; the students' universities and degree courses; the students' perceptions of the importance of education in religious diversity.
- The perception of interreligious dialogue (ID) was measured by an ordinal item with four answer options: (1) ID is impossible because each religion has its own values; (2) ID should be a tool for promoting the coexistence and social cohesion of different religious traditions, all of which basically have their roots in the same reality; (3) ID should be a tool for respecting differences and overcoming them through the search for consensus; (4) ID should be a tool for continually reconsidering one's own ideas in the light of those of others.
- Religious belief was measured by an ordinal item with three answer options: (1) there is only one true religion; (2) there are many religious expressions of the same reality; (3) there are many religious beliefs, corresponding to many visions of the world.
- The religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue scale, a variable scale created by combining the two previous ones, and not directly answered by participants. The scale was based on Knitters' 1995 text on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue, which put forward four postures or models (Table 1). The scale goes from one to four, with 1 being the most exclusive posture (replacement) and 4 the most pluralist (acceptance). The models are: replacement, fulfilment, mutuality and acceptance.

The non-probabilistic sample comprised 849 participants arranged in two groups: (1) final-year students on education degree courses (Education, Teacher Training, Social Education and Social Work (n = 574)); and (2) secondary-school teacher-managers (n = 275). The sample was formed in 2016 from various secondary schools (the teachers' group) and universities (the students'). Each school or university belonged to one of the four provinces of Catalonia (Barcelona, Gerona, Lerida and Tarragona). 59% of the secondary schools were state schools and 40% public-private. The students' universities were: the University of Barcelona (UB), the

Table 1. Religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue scale, based on Knitter's models (1995). Source: created by the authors.

Items	Models
There is only one true religion.	Replacement model
Interreligious dialogue is impossible because every religion is convinced that its own values are superior to those of the rest of society and of other beliefs and convictions.	
There are many religious expressions of a single reality.	Fulfilment model
Interreligious dialogue should be a tool for promoting the coexistence and social cohesion of religious traditions and non-religious beliefs because all of them have their roots in a single reality.	
The multiplicity of religious beliefs corresponds to the multiplicity of visions of the world.	Mutuality model
Interreligious dialogue should be a tool for promoting respect for differences and overcoming them on the basis of the search for consensus among the common features of religions and non-religious beliefs (shared values, similarities, etc.)	
The multiplicity of religious beliefs corresponds to the multiplicity of visions of the world.	Acceptance model
Interreligious dialogue should be a tool for continually reconsidering one's own ideas in the light of those of others, giving value to differences and living with them.	

University of Gerona (UG), the University of Lerida (UL) and Rovira i Virgili University (RVU).

The sample of teachers was divided more or less equally on the basis of sex (131 women and 144 men), while that of students was overwhelmingly feminine (487 women and 87 men), as is typical on education degrees. The mean age of the student group was 24, while that of the teachers was 50.

Data analysis

The data analysis was carried out using the statistical program SPSS. Central tendency and dispersion measures and percentages were obtained for the description of the data, and a two-step cluster analysis was applied to identify profiles.

Results

Religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue

The opinions of participants on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue in general tended to be favourable. In the dimension of religious beliefs the majority in both groups thought that the multiplicity of religious beliefs corresponded to multiple visions of reality (84.8% of students and 66.8% of teachers), a posture representing the widest degree of tolerance and plurality (Table 2).

In the interreligious dialogue dimension participants showed a wider diversity of positions, with the majority thinking that interreligious dialogue should respect differences and contribute to overcoming them through the search for common features (44.4% of teachers and 46.9% of students) (Table 3).

The outcome of combining beliefs and views on interreligious dialogue situated participants mainly within the mutuality model or posture (58.5% of teachers and 64.6% of students) (Table 4). This perspective sees the existence of multiple religious beliefs as corresponding to multiple ways of seeing the world and considers that

Table 2. Religious beliefs by group. Source: created by the authors.

			Religious beliefs			
			There is only one true religion.	There are many religious expressions of a single reality.	The multiplicity of religious beliefs corresponds to the multiplicity of visions of reality.	Total
Group	School management staff	Number	4	74	157	235
		% within the group	1.7%	31.5%	66.8%	100.0%
		% within religious beliefs	30.8%	48.7%	24.4%	29.1%
		% of total	.5%	9.2%	19.4%	29.1%
	Students	Number	9	78	486	573
		% within group	1.6%	13.6%	84.8%	100.0%
		% within religious beliefs	69.2%	51.3%	75.6%	70.9%
		% of total	1.1%	9.7%	60.1%	70.9%
Total		Number	13	152	643	808
		% within group	1.6%	18.8%	79.6%	100.0%
		% within religious beliefs	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	1.6%	18.8%	79.6%	100.0%

Table 3. Interreligious dialogue by group. Source: created by the authors.

			Interreligious Dialogue				
			It is impossible because every religion is convinced that its own values are superior to those of the rest of society and of other beliefs and convictions.	It should be a tool for promoting the coexistence and social cohesion of religious traditions and non-religious beliefs because all have their roots in a single reality.	It should be a tool for overcoming differences on the basis of the common features of religions and non-religious beliefs	It should be a tool for continually reconsidering your own ideas in the light of others'.	Total
Group	School management staff	Number	8	65	122	80	275
		% within group	2.9%	23.6%	44.4%	29.1%	100.0%
		% within interreligious dialogue	17.4%	38.9%	31.2%	32.8%	32.4%
		% of total	.9%	7.7%	14.4%	9.4%	32.4%
	Students	Number	38	102	269	164	573
		% within group	6.6%	17.8%	46.9%	28.6%	100.0%
		% within interreligious dialogue	82.6%	61.1%	68.8%	67.2%	67.6%
		% of total	4.5%	12.0%	31.7%	19.3%	67.6%
Total		Number	46	167	391	244	848
		% within group	5.4%	19.7%	46.1%	28.8%	100.0%
		% within interreligious dialogue	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	5.4%	19.7%	46.1%	28.8%	100.0%

Table 4. Models of interreligious dialogue by group. Source: created by the authors.

			Replacement model	Fulfilment model	Mutuality model	Acceptance model	Total
					Scale		
Group	School management staff	Number	2	49	161	63	275
		% within group	.7%	17.8%	58.5%	22.9%	100.0%
		% within scale	66.7%	44.1%	30.3%	31.0%	32.4%
		% of total	.2%	5.8%	19.0%	7.4%	32.4%
	Students	Number	1	62	370	140	573
		% within group	.2%	10.8%	64.6%	24.4%	100.0%
		% within scale	33.3%	55.9%	69.7%	69.0%	67.6%
		% of total	.1%	7.3%	43.6%	16.5%	67.6%
Total		Number	3	111	531	203	848
		% within group	.4%	13.1%	62.6%	23.9%	100.0%
		% within scale	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	.4%	13.1%	62.6%	23.9%	100.0%

Table 5. Statistics and comparisons by groups.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Religious beliefs	School management staff	235	2.6511	.51219	−4.822	.000
	Students	573	2.8325	.41374		
Interreligious Dialogue	School management staff	275	2.9964	.80372	.338	.735
	Students	573	2.9756	.85450		
Scale	School management staff	275	3.0364	.66078	−2.149	.032
	Students	573	3.1326	.58525		

interreligious dialogue is a tool for respecting differences and overcoming them through the search for consensus among the common features of different religions.

Statistical comparison between the two groups, students and teachers, showed significant differences in the beliefs dimension and in the scale (Table 5), with the students scoring higher and therefore having more progressive views.

Profiles with regard to religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue

The exploratory two-step cluster analysis yielded a model with three clusters, grouping participants according to their opinions on religious beliefs and interreligious dialogue. As Figure 1 shows, this model represents a more than sufficient quality. The size of each cluster is also identified.

The variables featuring in the analysis were: Knitter (1995) scale, the dimension of religious beliefs, the dimension of interreligious dialogue, the group (teachers or students) and age. In Figure 2 the importance of each of these variables is shown,
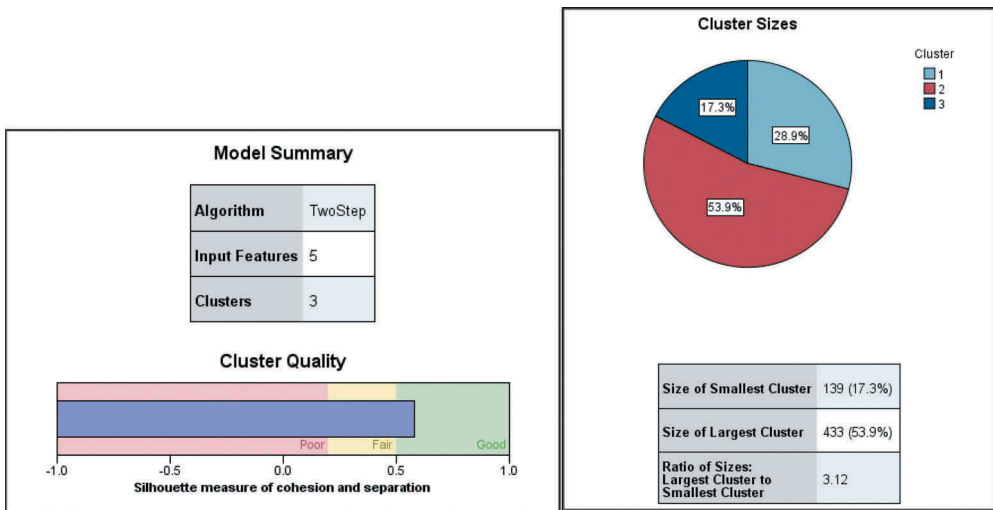
Figure 1. Quality of the 3-cluster model and their sizes, using a two-step cluster analysis.
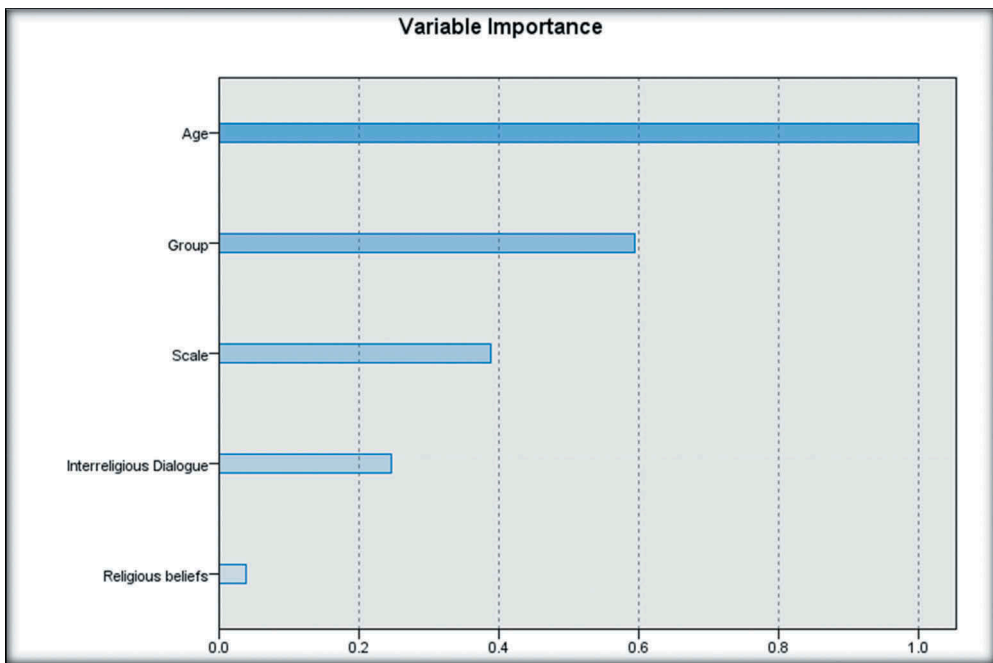

Figure 2. Importance of each of the five variables in the cluster model, using a two-step cluster analysis.

once more revealing the importance of the group and their ages for the cluster grouping.

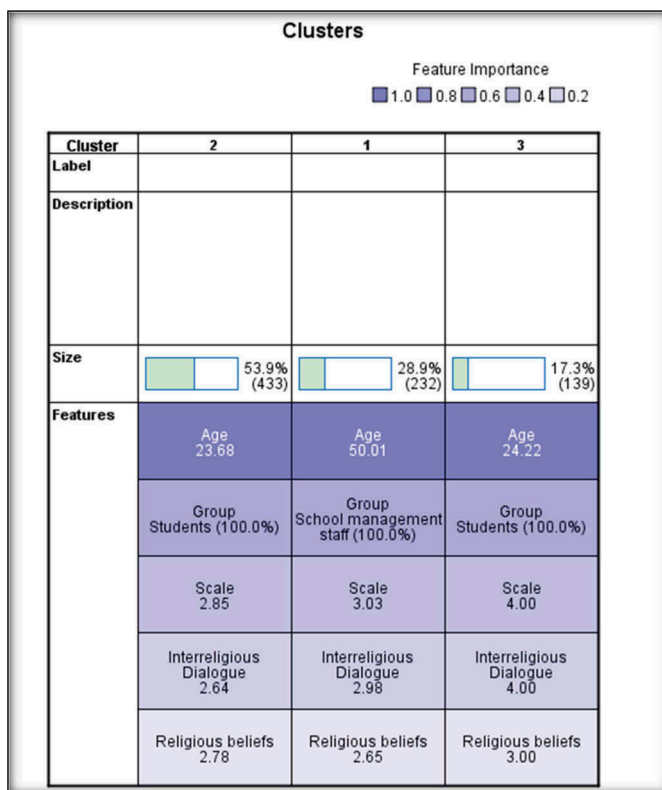The three clusters yielded by the model can be summarised with the following data (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Identification of the three clusters resulting from the two-step cluster analysis.

- **Group 1: Mutuality model**. This corresponds to the teaching staff on the secondary schools' management teams. It makes up 28.9% of the sample and is characterised by a mean age of 50 and moderate scores on the scale (in relation to the other two groups), although with much lower scores in the dimension of religious beliefs. In general this group represents the view that there is one single reality but many cultural expressions of this reality. Commonalties are stressed, leaving aside differences. Other religious figures are accepted as true, with the idea that many true religions call for dialogue. Despite this advance on previous models, there is the danger of relativism, as consensus on common features is sought to the detriment of differences, which is where the richness and creativity of dialogue lies.
- **Group 2: Fulfilment model**. This corresponds to the students with the lowest scores on the scale. This cluster comprises 53.9% of the sample, and is thus the most numerous group. Their scores on the scale show that this group recognises the value of other religions, although it implies the belief in absolute truths stemming from one's own faith, truths which both legitimise diversity and at the same time postulate that all religions are rooted in one's own religious reality.
- **Group 3: Acceptance model**. This corresponds to the students who scored the highest on the scale and represents 17.3% of the sample. It is particular interesting for its high scores in the interreligious dialogue dimension. This group has the most open,

Table 6. Clusters 2 and 3 (students) according to university and degree.

		Two-Step Cluster Number	
		2. Students with lower scores	3. Students with higher scores
		Column N %	Column N %
University	RVU	20.8%	16.5%
	UL	14.1%	12.2%
	UG	4.8%	3.6%
	UB	60.3%	67.6%
Studies	Education	21.5%	21.6%
	Teaching training in primary education	44.1%	41.0%
	Teaching training in early childhood	16.6%	15.1%
	Social Education	8.3%	8.6%
	Social work	9.5%	13.7%
Need for training in religion	Yes	30.5%	80.6%
	No	69.5%	19.4%

tolerant and progressive standpoint towards religious diversity and interreligious dialogue. In this model differences are not there to be overcome, but constitute the basis of coexistence (not temporarily but permanently). In this model dialogue prevails over theology.

In order to further nuance the characterisation of groups 2 and 3, both comprised of students, in Table 6 the data relating to their universities and degrees is shown. While these differences are not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that the group of students with the lowest scores on the scale, conforming to the fulfilment model, were less frequently from the University of Barcelona, and more frequently from the other universities. In contrast, the group with the highest scores on the scale, belonging to the acceptance model, were more often from the University of Barcelona or studying on a social work degree.

Lastly, the group with the highest scores was also that which tended to believe that more university training in religious diversity was needed to promote interreligious dialogue. These differences are statistically significant ($X^2_{(1)}$ = 6.414; p = .011).

Discussion

Our findings show that future socio-educational actors and secondary-school teaching staff tended to have progressive religious beliefs. They had a wide range of religious beliefs, reflecting a similarly wide range of views of the world. Although there are no similar studies with which to compare these figures, in the European project titled *Religion in Education*, carried out at ten European universities (Dietz, Rosón, and Garzón 2011), students acknowledged religious diversity while they also holding various prejudices towards it. Further, as a general trend, this study shows that they saw interreligious dialogue as a tool for promoting respect for difference and for overcoming this through the quest for consensus on the common ground of varying religions.

The combination of these viewpoints placed most of the participants in the model that Knitter terms mutuality (Knitter 1995). These findings converge with those of other studies (McCreery 2005), which have found that teachers believe that religious

education is extremely important for social harmony and necessary for understanding their students.

Our study found that there were differences between the two groups of professionals taking part, since the students had higher scores than the teachers in the range of the mutuality model and in the dimension of beliefs on religious diversity. This finding may be interpreted as a generational difference, as it was the younger group (the students) who saw religion from a more pluralist perspective, more in line with today's society. These outcomes may stem from prejudices lingering from the Spanish historical heritage in the area of religion and religious beliefs (Diez de Velasco 2012), which has resulted in a lack of secularity in the legal framework of relationships between the Spanish state and the religions. To be more specific, the forcible imposition of Catholicism during the Franco era gave rise to a certain number of prejudices. Thus, although the state defines itself as non-confessional, there still exists a strong Catholic tradition which impregnates people's daily lives, embedded in the national culture through strong Catholic roots which have had a structuring influence on Spanish society. The clearest example of this is to be found in the education system.

We were able to further nuance these findings by identifying different profiles. Three of Knitter's models (1995) were found: one was mostly composed of teachers and fell into the relativist model, which pays too little attention to differences, which is precisely where the richness and creativity of interreligious dialogue lie; and there were two profiles among the group of students, the first falling into the most advanced and progressive model (with scant representation) and the second, much more numerous, identifying with the model that gives absolute predominance to one's own beliefs.

The teachers were the most homogeneous group, while the students presented differential characteristics according to their scores on the scale, defining clearly different postures. In conclusion, the secondary school teachers had a view of the religious phenomenon which is compatible with the promotion of religious dialogue among adolescents by means of different interventions in their schools. This finding, however, remains to be confirmed by further studies aimed at determining the real possibilities of setting such initiatives in motion.

Among the students, on the one hand a minority scored highly and therefore showed more open, tolerant and progressive views in the religious dimension, especially those studying Social Work degrees and those from the University of Barcelona. This group also thought that it is important to have training on the topic of religious diversity. The keys to the interpretation of these differences may be found in the daily life of the city of Barcelona, which has an extremely diverse population and significant cultural and interreligious variation; and also in students' experience on the Social Work degree, which is oriented towards working with groups with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, groups with whom students have face-to-face contact when they are immersed in a real working situation in their External Practice module. On the other hand, there was a majority of students whose standpoint was less compatible with the promotion of interreligious dialogue among the groups they are to work with. This posture, while it recognises the value of other religions, at the same time harbours absolute truths stemming from one's own beliefs. One conclusion deriving from these findings is that this particular student profile group needs training in the topic of religious diversity, as this may be able to influence their views, fostering more tolerant

attitudes and more openness towards interreligious dialogue. This need contrasts, however, with the scant importance given to the topic on Education degrees, whose syllabuses have a mere 10% of related contents, as shown in a previous study (Freixa et al. 2017).

In the light of the above, therefore, some basic training in religious diversity and non-religious beliefs (including atheism, agnosticism and simple indifference) should be offered, especially in university education, and particularly if we take into account that helping students learn to think critically on religious matters is essential to reinforcing religious freedoms (Wang 2013). Morgan and Sandage (2016) show that mental rigidity goes hand-in-hand with stereotypes, prejudices and even discrimination on cultural and/or religious grounds. Thus, on the one hand, there is a need of a greater awareness of cultural and religious diversity in order to start the work of overcoming discrimination; and, on the other, we need judicious management of the differing religious models and postures in order to progress towards dialogue, since the different visions of religion are still a necessary part of the puzzle of tackling the challenges of growing religious diversity in society in general, and schools in particular.

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributors

Ruth Vilà Baños has been a professor in the Department of Methods of Research and Diagnosis in Education at the University of Barcelona since 1999. She holds a PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Barcelona, specialised in intercultural communication competences. She is part of the Research Group in Intercultural Education, GREDI, and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Research in Education (IRE). Her research interests concern topics such as intercultural education, intercultural competences, and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

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