Output-driven citizenship education

A focus on learning outcomes to improve the quality of citizenship education

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Chapter 3

Understanding Effective Citizenship Education in Special Needs Education: Comparing Regular Primary Education with Special Needs Primary Education

Abstract

Research conducted in regular primary education (RPE) identified aspects of effective citizenship education, such as the teacher-student relationship and an open classroom climate for discussion. In schools for special needs primary education (SNPE), such insight is missing.

This study examined differences in citizenship competences between students attending SNPE versus RPE and the moderating role of several characteristics of citizenship education. To do so, we conducted multilevel analyses based on 3782 students in 179 schools.

Students in SNPE obtained lower scores on civic knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude. Whereas the role of some characteristics was not as expected and ask for further research, this study shed light on several important factors, such as the attention for specific learning goals in citizenship education, that form an important basis for further research into characteristics of effective citizenship education in SNPE.

Keywords: Citizenship education; Citizenship competences; School effectiveness; Special needs education; Primary education.

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Introduction

Many countries have formalised the importance of strengthening social cohesion via citizenship education in schools in policy, national curricula or legislation (Eurydice, 2017). Citizenship education is an educational domain that prepares students to participate in a democratic and pluriform society (Ten Dam et al., 2011), for example, by promoting fundamental democratic values and fostering mutual respect. The learning outcomes of citizenship education are often referred to as citizenship competences and are usually operationalised as knowledge, skills, and attitude (e.g. Schulz et al., 2016; Ten Dam et al., 2011). Following the increased attention to citizenship education in policy and educational practice, a considerable amount of research has focused on the learning outcomes of citizenship education (Geboers et al., 2013) and on factors that influence the effectiveness of citizenship education (Coopmans et al., 2020; Dijkstra et al., 2015). It is, for example, often asserted that various aspects of the school climate (Sampermans et al., 2018; Thapa et al., 2013; Vieno et al., 2005) contribute to the effectiveness of citizenship education. These aspects include a classroom climate that fosters dialogue and critical debate on political and societal issues (Geboers et al., 2013; Knowles et al., 2018) and inclusive and mutually respectful teacher-student and student-student relationships (Isac et al., 2014; Wanders, Van der Veen, et al., 2020; Wanders, Dijkstra, et al., 2020).

The increased scientific attention to the effective aspects and outcomes of citizenship education, however, is predominantly focused on schools for regular education. In special needs primary education (SNPE), research into the effectiveness of citizenship education is largely missing. Only recently, a descriptive study among Dutch students in SNPE demonstrated that students in SNPE generally obtained lower scores on citizenship competences than students in regular primary education (RPE) (Slijkhuis et al., 2023). This finding was an important starting point for the present study, as more insight into the outcomes and characteristics of citizenship education in SNPE helps tailoring the contents of citizenship education to what students in SNPE need. For example, research in regular education demonstrates that positive teacher-student and student-student relationships promote students' citizenship competences (Sampermans et al., 2018; Wanders, Dijkstra et al., 2020; Wanders, Van der Veen et al., 2020). At the same time, students with behavioural difficulties are more at risk of developing negative relationships with the teacher (Roorda et al., 2021) and peers (Pinto et al., 2019). As such, it is unclear whether the fact that students in SNPE obtained lower scores on citizenship competences (cf. Slijkhuis et al., 2023) is influenced by characteristics of

citizenship education, such as whether students perceive positive relationships with the teacher and peers.

Hence, the aim of the present study is twofold. First, the aim is to examine whether characteristics of citizenship education are different in SNPE versus RPE and to give insight into the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. The second aim is to investigate whether the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude changes under the influence of the characteristics of citizenship education in SNPE and RPE. Following these aims, the insights of this study provide a basis for developing and improving SNPE citizenship education, based on empirical knowledge resulting from research conducted among their specific student population. We do so by investigating the following research questions:

1. To what extent are characteristics of citizenship education different in SNPE versus RPE?
2. To what extent is attending SNPE associated with citizenship competences in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude?
3. To what extent do characteristics of citizenship education moderate the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude?

This study used data from two related studies conducted in SNPE and RPE in the Netherlands. In both studies, skills are operationalised in two components: applied skills and self-estimated skills. Primary analyses using these data already demonstrated that the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences is generally negative (cf. Slijkhuis et al., 2023), but, to provide a complete picture, the second research question was also included in the present study.

Like in many other European countries (Schwab, 2021), policy in the Netherlands is steered towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular education. Still, it explicitly promotes finding education that fits students' capacities regardless of whether this is in regular education (Van der Veen et al., 2010). In the Netherlands, students with SEN may attend RPE, SNPE or special primary education when they are between 4 and 12 years old (Van der Veen et al., 2010). Students without learning or behavioural difficulties usually attend RPE; students with moderate learning or behavioural difficulties usually attend special primary education; students with more severe learning or behavioural difficulties usually participate in

SNPE[5]. This study is focused on a comparison between, on the one hand, students attending RPE and, on the other hand, students with moderate to severe learning or behavioural difficulties attending either special primary education or SNPE.

Theoretical Framework

This section starts with characterising students who attend SNPE by elaborating on their experienced challenges in educational settings. Next, based on empirical knowledge of 'what works' in citizenship education among students in RPE and research on students' learning and behavioural difficulties in SNPE, we discerned four characteristics of effective citizenship education that could alter the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. They are: experienced unsafety in the school environment, the teacher-student and student-student relationship, and an open classroom climate for discussion. We close each paragraph by providing a hypothesis on the moderating role of these characteristics in the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. Previous research indicated that more variance could be attributed to the school in knowledge and applied skills as opposed to self-estimated skills and attitude (De Schaepmeester et al., 2022b; Isac et al., 2011; Janmaat, 2011). Hence, in these hypotheses, the moderation effects are expected to be stronger for knowledge and applied skills than self-estimated skills and attitude.

Special Educational Needs

Whereas there seems to be no clear and universal definition of SEN among students (Schwab, 2021), it generally refers to 'pupils with various (combinations of) impairments and/or difficulties in participating in education' (Pijl et al., 2008, p. 389). These impairments or difficulties include physical and mental impairments and learning and behavioural difficulties. The present study pertains to the latter two. Examples of learning and behavioural difficulties include, but are not limited to: externalising problem behaviour, internalising problem behaviour, a problematic attitude to work (i.e., lack of motivation, effort and concentration; slow pace of work), having a speech, language or numeracy disorder (i.e., speech or language disorder, dyslexia, dyscalculia), being gifted, autism spectrum disorder, or being behind in literacy and or numeracy (Van der Veen et al., 2010). Some scholars pose that citizenship competences among students with SEN are best learnt through experience and interactions with others (Alevriadou & Lang, 2011). According to others, active citizenship of

[5] In the Netherlands, special education is divided in four domains: (1) for blind and visually impaired students; (2) for deaf and hearing impaired students and students with a language development disorder; (3) for students who are physically and mentally impaired and students who are long-term sick; and (4) for students with severe learning and behavioural difficulties. This study did not include students in SNPE who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hearing impaired, physically and mentally impaired, and long-term sick students.

students with SEN is ideally oriented towards abilities rather than disabilities and should focus on autonomy, self-awareness and self-direction (Reiter & Schalock, 2008). This prudently points to the assumption that citizenship education in SNPE is focused on the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of citizenship education and less towards the societal aspect (cf. Ten Dam & Volman, 2007).

Unsafety in the School Environment

Unsafety in the school environment is commonly understood as the presence of unsafe social situations in the school environment and is seen as an aspect of the school climate (cf. Thapa et al., 2013). Perceptions of the school environment (measured by safety and inclusion in the school, bullying experiences, and clear expectations for behaviour) were significantly related to students' academic success (Gietz & McIntosh, 2014) and promoted student learning (Devine & Cohen, 2007). In addition, the school climate was linked to students' future voting intentions (Sampermans et al., 2018), which is considered an important part of citizenship competence.

Students who attend SNPE, particularly those experiencing behavioural difficulties, generally have less developed socio-emotional competences than their peers who attend RPE (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). In addition, students with internalising and externalising behavioural difficulties (Farmer et al., 2015; Ledwell & King, 2015; Rose & Espelage, 2012) and learning disabilities (Mishna, 2003) are at risk of involvement in bullying behaviour. The presence of bullying behaviour is an important indicator of unsafety in the school environment (Gietz & McIntosh, 2014).

In line with research demonstrating that (a) perception of safety in the school environment promotes learning outcomes in general (Devine & Cohen, 2007; Gietz & McIntosh, 2014) and in the context of citizenship education (Sampermans et al., 2018), and (b) research demonstrating that students who have learning or behavioural difficulties are more at risk to experience unsafety in the school environment (Farmer et al., 2015; Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Ledwell & King, 2015; Mishna, 2003; Rose & Espelage, 2012), it is hypothesised that the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences is more negative for students who experience more unsafety in the school environment (Hypothesis 1).

Teacher-student and Student-student Relationship

Interpersonal relationships between students and teachers and among students, also referred to as the teacher-student relationship and the student-student relationship, have been extensively studied. There is consistent and robust empirical evidence demonstrating that affective teacher-student relationships are related to students' behavioural, emotional and

academic development (Hamre & Pianta, 2001) and school engagement (Roorda et al., 2021). In addition, various scholars have demonstrated the relationship between the quality of student-student relationships and academic achievement (Wentzel, 2017) and feelings of safety and motivation to participate in the classroom (Baker et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The teacher-student and student-student relationships were also studied in the context of citizenship education, where positive relationships promoted students' intention to go voting in the future (Sampermans et al., 2018) and were related to students' societal involvement (Wanders, Dijkstra, et al., 2020; Wanders, Van der Veen, et al., 2020).

Students with internalising behaviours (e.g., shyness, social withdrawal, anxiety, and depression) and externalising behaviours (e.g., overactivity, impulsiveness, and aggression) are considered at risk for experiencing difficulties in forming affective relationships with their teachers (Baker et al., 2008; Freire et al., 2020; Zee & Roorda, 2018) and with students (Carter et al., 2014; Pinto et al., 2019; Schwab, 2019). For example, in a study examining differences in teacher-student relationship quality and school engagement between boys from RPE and boys attending special education for students with autism spectrum disorders, the authors found that the boys from special education reported more conflict in the teacher-student relationship and less school engagement as compared to the boys in RPE (Roorda et al., 2021). In addition, in a study comparing peer relations of students who attend SNPE versus RPE, students attending SNPE had lower levels of peer acceptance, fewer reciprocated friendships and were less integrated into peer groups (Pinto et al., 2019). This was also confirmed in a literature review, where students with special needs in secondary education were often found to have fewer social interactions with their peers, to be less popular than their classmates and to be more often neglected or rejected (Bossaert et al., 2013).

In line with research demonstrating that (a) positive teacher-student and student-student relationships promote learning outcomes in general (Baker et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roorda et al., 2021; Wentzel, 2017) and in the context of citizenship education (Sampermans et al., 2018; Wanders, Dijkstra, et al., 2020; Wanders, Van der Veen, et al., 2020), and (b) research demonstrating that students with learning and behavioural difficulties are more at risk for experiencing negative relationships with the teacher and fellow students (Freire et al., 2020; Pinto et al., 2019; Zee & Roorda, 2018), it is hypothesised that the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences is more positive for students who experience more positive teacher-student (Hypothesis 2) and student-student (Hypothesis 3) relationships.

Open Classroom Climate for Discussion

An open classroom climate can be defined as a classroom climate that 'fosters discussion of controversial issues, encourages students to present diverse opinions, and emphasises respect of those opinions from teachers and students' (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014, p. 1802). It is seen as a requirement for citizenship education to be effective (Knowles et al., 2018; Maurissen, 2018), and it is one of the most constant factors positively influencing students' citizenship competences (Geboers et al., 2013; Maurissen, 2018). Previous research, for example, shows a positive effect on citizenship knowledge (Alivernini & Manganelli, 2011; Campbell, 2008; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Maurissen et al., 2018; Persson, 2015), citizenship skills (Claes et al., 2017; Kuang et al., 2018; Manganelli et al., 2015), and citizenship attitude (Coopmans et al., 2020).

To our knowledge, no empirical research is available on the open classroom climate for discussion fostering citizenship competences in SNPE. However, it is not inconceivable that some of the skills necessary for an open classroom climate (e.g., being able to listen to others, being able to present one's own opinion on a subject matter, being able to 'agree to disagree', and so on) may be extra challenging for students facing learning or behavioural difficulties. In that respect, internalising behaviour such as shyness, anxiety, lack of self-confidence or fear of failure may make it hard for students to present their own opinion, whereas externalising behaviour such as having a disruptive effect on others or aggressive behaviour towards classmates may make it hard for students to experience the classroom climate as sufficiently open and safe for having a discussion (Van der Veen et al., 2010).

In line with research demonstrating that (a) an open classroom climate fosters the acquisition of citizenship knowledge (Alivernini & Manganelli, 2011; Campbell, 2008; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Maurissen et al., 2018; Persson, 2015), skills (Claes et al., 2017; Kuang et al., 2018; Manganelli et al., 2015), and attitude (Coopmans et al., 2020) and (b) research characterising the behavioural and learning difficulties students in SNPE may experience (Van der Veen et al., 2010), possibly also in establishing and contributing to an open classroom climate for discussion, it is hypothesised that the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences is more positive for students who perceive the classroom climate to be more open for discussion (Hypothesis 4).

Other Characteristics of Effective Citizenship Education in Regular Education

We also included nine additional characteristics of citizenship education in our analyses based on their demonstrated effectiveness in studies among students attending (predominantly secondary) regular education, but not necessarily on research on the learning and behavioural

difficulties of students in SNPE. Therefore, we chose to omit hypotheses here, and this study can be considered exploratory concerning these additional characteristics.

First, more attention paid to citizenship education in school staff meetings was positively related to citizenship attitudes and skills of students (Coopmans et al., 2020). The authors also found that more agreement among teachers on the delivered content of citizenship education was positively related to citizenship attitudes and that monitoring the development of citizenship competences was negatively (Coopmans et al., 2020) and positively (Keating et al., 2010) associated with citizenship knowledge, skills, and attitude. The effectiveness of citizenship education was also linked to the ability of schools to develop policies and take concrete actions to improve their teaching practice and learning environment (Kyriakides et al., 2010). In addition, having a clear vision of citizenship education as a school positively influenced students' citizenship skills (Dijkstra et al., 2015).

Methodology

Participants

We used data from two separately conducted but content-related studies initiated by the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands in spring 2020 (RPE study) and spring 2021 (SNPE study). In both cases, the main sample was drawn from the total population of schools. Students in selected schools were excluded from participation if they were diagnosed with a language development disorder, if they resided in the Netherlands for less than two years at the time of the study and could not sufficiently master the Dutch language, and if they had an estimated IQ below 75 (the latter only in the RPE study). Eventually, in the RPE study, we used data from 2237 students (52% girls, mean age is 11,54) and 117 teachers (70% women) from 94 schools. In the SNPE study, we used data from 1545 students (28% girl, mean age is 11,94) and 162 teachers (77% woman) from 85 schools. Based on the total number of participating students, teachers and schools, as well as the considered criteria such as school region and estimated future educational paths of students, both samples can be regarded as representative of the SNPE and RPE populations. The descriptive statistics of the sample can be found in Appendix 3.1.

Procedure

After schools agreed upon participation, parents received an information letter and were allowed to deny their children's involvement. Before students filled in the questionnaire, they were ensured anonymity and allowed to quit participation at all times. After the instructions were given, students took approximately one hour to complete the questionnaire.

For students in RPE, a set of 208 items was divided into eight questionnaires, with each

52 items asking about students' citizenship knowledge, applied skills, self-estimated skills, and attitude. Each student received one out of eight questionnaires. The incomplete research design was chosen because it enabled receiving results on a larger set of items than a complete design could provide. Scaling was based on item calibration using Rasch models. The technical report extensively describes this procedure (Slijkhuis et al., 2021). The SNPE study used a complete research design because the item load per student was more limited here, and the risk of insufficient observations per item in an incomplete research design was estimated to be too big due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, students in SNPE received a subset of 60 carefully selected items based on their coverage of the intended topics and competences.

Measures

Knowledge, applied skills, self-estimated skills and attitude are derived from the conceptual framework of Ten Dam et al. (2011). The dependent variables cover the so-called social tasks 'acting democratically', 'acting in a socially responsible way', 'dealing with conflicts', and 'dealing with differences'. An overview of the dependent and independent variables is provided in Table 1. Following previous research showing that sex, age, ethnical background and socioeconomic position are related to differences in citizenship competences (Geboers et al., 2013; Hoskins et al., 2017; Isac et al., 2014), we used the following control variables: sex, age, language spoken at home (not (only) Dutch or only Dutch) and advised educational level (education for students with severe learning difficulty; work/daytime activities; practical job-oriented education; practical pre-vocational secondary education; theoretical pre-vocational secondary education; senior general secondary education; pre-university secondary education). In addition, we controlled for IQ (below 75 or not) because, for 23% of the students in the SNPE study, the IQ was below 75.

Analytic Plan

We performed univariate multilevel modelling using the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015) in R version 4.0.5 (R Core Team, 2021). By doing so, we could control for the fact that students were nested within schools. We first constructed an empty model with attending SNPE as the predictor of citizenship knowledge, applied skills, self-estimated skills and attitude. Next, we added the control variables to the model. In the third model, we added unsafety in the school environment, the teacher-student and student-student relationship, and students' perceived openness of classroom climate as predictors. In the fourth model, we separately added the interaction effects between these predictors and attending SNPE. In the fifth model, we built upon the second model by adding the following predictors: attention to personal development and social competence, attention to promoting social involvement and

participation, attention to the promotion of dealing with differences and fostering of an open attitude towards differences, open classroom climate (teachers' perception), monitoring of learning outcomes, formulation of a vision, formulation of learning goals, agreement on the curriculum of citizenship education, and the importance of citizenship education. In the last model, we separately added the interaction effects between each predictor and attending SNPE.

Data Preparation

We observed 5.36% missing observations that showed no clear pattern of missingness. We performed multivariate imputation by chained equations on our missing observations using the mice package in R (Van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The correlation coefficients of the relevant variables are displayed in Appendix 3.2. To check for multicollinearity, we assessed the variation inflation factors (VIFs) (Mansfield & Helms, 1982). All independent variables had VIFs between 1 and 2. We also constructed null models for each outcome variable to inspect the intraclass correlations (ICCs). We found ICCs of respectively 0.18, 0.13, 0.08 and 0.10. This means that 18% of the variance between students' scores in knowledge can be attributed to the school. Likewise, 13% of students' applied skills, 8% of their self-estimated skills and 10% of their attitude can be attributed to their school. Via a subset of the data, we looked at the difference in ICCs between the students attending SNPE and RPE. The results show 4% (RPE) versus 15% (SNPE) of knowledge, 3% (RPE) versus 13% (SNPE) of applied skills, 6% (RPE) versus 3% (SNPE) of estimated skills, and 8% (RPE) versus 7% (SNPE) of attitude can be attributed to the school. This shows that the school attributes more to estimated skills and attitude of students attending RPE. In contrast, for students attending SNPE, the school attributes more to their knowledge and applied skills.

Table 1

Overview of Dependent and Independent Variables

Construct	N items	Answer options	Cronbach's α	Example item
Knowledge	15 (SNPE) or a set of 20 out of 78 items (RPE)	Multiple choice with one correct answer	α = 0.62 in SNPE	Which of the following is true? (a) During Ramadan, Muslims are allowed to eat extra food; (b) The cow is a sacred animal for Hinduists in India; (c) Catholic priests are allowed to marry their partners.
Applied skills	10 (SNPE) or a set of 9-13 out of 44 items (RPE)	Multiple choice with one correct answer	α = 0.60 in SNPE	A group of children want a playground in their street. How can they achieve this by using a democratic procedure? (a) Gather signatures and hand these over to the municipality; (b) Find a place themselves and play over there; (c) Have a seat in the mayor's garden and wait until he or she concedes.
Self-estimated skills	14 (SNPE) or a set of 2-8 out of 20 items (RPE)	Likert scale ranging from 1 (not good at all) to 4 (very good)	α = 0.74 in SNPE	How good are you at… respecting the opinion of others?
Attitude	21 (SNPE) or a set of 15-17 out of 64 items (RPE)	Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not apply at all to me) to 4 (applies completely to me)	α = 0.86 in SNPE	If I have a picnic with my friends at the park, it is normal that we clean up after ourselves.
Unsafety in the school environment[a]	6 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often)	α = 0.83 in SNPE; α = 0.73 in RPE	A student called you names.
Teacher-student relationship[b]	7 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely incorrect) to 5 (completely correct)	α = 0.87 in SNPE; α = 0.87 in RPE	The teacher usually knows how I feel.
Student-student relationship[b]	6 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely incorrect) to 5 (completely correct)	α = 0.83 in SNPE; α = 0.73 in RPE	I would rather be in another class.
Open classroom climate for discussion (student perception)[a]	6 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often)	α = 0.80 in SNPE; α = 0.73 in RPE	The teacher helps the students in our class to form their own opinion.
Attention to personal development and social competence	9 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)	α = 0.86 in SNPE; α = 0.88 in RPE	To what extent do you pay attention to <<learning to cooperate>> in citizenship education?
Attention to promoting social involvement and participation	8 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)	α = 0.86 in SNPE; α = 0.70 in RPE	To what extent do you pay attention to <<taking different perspectives of a matter>> in citizenship education?
Attention to the promotion of dealing with differences and	6 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)	α = 0.86 in SNPE; α = 0.78 in RPE	To what extent do you pay attention to <<countering of discrimination and prejudice>> in citizenship education?

fostering an open attitude towards differences				
Open classroom climate for discussion (teacher perception)[1]	6 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost none) to 4 (almost all)	α = 0.71 in SNPE; α = 0.72 in RPE	How many students in grade 6 propose topics to discuss in class?
Monitoring of learning outcomes of citizenship education	5 items	1 (almost) never), 2 (sometimes) and 3 (often)	NA	To what extent do you monitor outcomes in the domain of << attitudes (for example, sense of responsibility, taking others into account)>>?
Formulation of a vision in citizenship education	1 item	1 (everyone does this on their own, 2 (there are global ideas but no concretised vision), 3 (there is a shared vision, but it is not documented) and 4 (there is a documented vision)	NA	To what extent is citizenship education concretised into a vision?
Learning goals for citizenship education	5 items	1 (yes) or 2 (no)	α = 0.77 in SNPE; α = 0.75 in RPE	In our school, we have concrete agreement on the planning and activities in citizenship education.
Agreement on the curriculum of citizenship education	9 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree)	α = 0.76 in SNPE; α = 0.87 in RPE	In our school, the school board has insight into how teachers implement citizenship education.
Importance of citizenship education	2 items	Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree)	NA	I find citizenship education to be a task for the school.

Note. The subscript 'a' refers to scales derived from Schulz et al. (2016); 'b' refers to scales derived from Peetsma et al. (2001). The RPE study used eight booklets with 52 items each. Each item was asked in two different booklets, leaving a response of approximately 484 observations per item (not considering missing observations). Hence, we opted not to provide values for Cronbach's α for the outcome variables of the RPE study.

Main Analyses

Research Question 1: The Difference in Characteristics of Citizenship Education between Students in RPE versus SNPE

Two sample T-tests were conducted to compare the characteristics of citizenship education between students in SNPE versus RPE. The results in Table 2 display that, whereas students in SNPE experienced the classroom climate to be more open to discussion, they also experienced more unsafety in the school environment and perceived lower teacher-student and student-student relationships as compared to students attending RPE. Contrary to students' perception, teachers in SNPE experienced the classroom climate to be less open to discussion than teachers in RPE. We also observed lower mean scores in SNPE for teachers' attention to promoting social involvement and participation in citizenship education (albeit a very small difference in means), for monitoring learning outcomes, for the formulation of a vision, for the formulation of concrete learning goals, and the agreement on the curriculum throughout different educational levels. We observed higher mean scores in SNPE for teachers' attention to personal development and social competence in citizenship education, teachers' promotion of dealing with differences and fostering an open attitude towards differences in citizenship education (albeit a very small difference in means), and the importance of citizenship education (also a very small difference in means).

Research Question 2: The Difference in Citizenship Competences between Students in RPE versus SNPE

Controlling for sex, age, language spoken at home, advised educational level and having an IQ below 75, attending SNPE was negatively related to knowledge (b = -0.04, p = 0.03), self-estimated skills (b = -0.09, $p < 0.01$), and attitude (b = -0.06, p = 0.01). For applied skills, it did not matter whether students attended SNPE or RPE. The results of these models are provided in Table 3.

Table 2

Two Sample T-tests Dependent Variables

	RPE *M(sd)*	SNPE *M(sd)*
Student-level characteristics of citizenship education		
Students' perceived unsafety at school [1-4]	**1.37(0.43)**	**1.86(0.70)**
Students' perceived teacher-student relationship [1-5]	**3.85(0.67)**	**3.70(0.82)**
Students' perceived student-student relationship [1-5]	**4.27(0.62)**	**3.98(0.75)**
Students' perceived openness of classroom climate for discussion [1-4]	**2.41(0.54)**	**2.72(0.67)**
Teacher-level characteristics of citizenship education		
Teachers' attention to personal development and social competence in citizenship education [1-5]	**4.57(0.41)**	**4.69(0.36)**
Teachers' attention to promoting social involvement and participation in citizenship education [1-5]	**3.69(0.47)**	**3.64(0.57)**
Teachers' promotion of dealing with differences and fostering of an open attitude towards differences in citizenship education [1-5]	**4.17(0.43)**	**4.21(0.45)**
Teachers' perceived openness of classroom climate for discussion [1-4]	**2.54(0.45)**	**2.31(0.47)**
The extent to which learning outcomes of citizenship education are monitored according to teachers [0-2]	**0.64(0.78)**	**0.45(0.75)**
The extent to which a vision on citizenship education is formulated according to teachers [1-4]	**2.19(0.98)**	**1.95(1.09)**
The extent to which citizenship education is translated to concrete learning goals according to teachers [1-2]	**1.29(0.32)**	**1.21(0.29)**
The extent to which the curriculum of citizenship education is agreed upon throughout different educational levels according to teachers [1-5]	**3.31(0.62)**	**3.07(0.53)**
The importance of citizenship education according to teachers [1-5]	***4.15(0.50)***	***4.19(0.54)***

Note. **p Δ < 0.01 (bold)**; ***p Δ < 0.05 (bold and italic).*** Brackets indicate the answer option range.

Table 3

Empty Model, Single Predictor and Control Variables with Knowledge, Applied Skills, Self-estimated Skills and Knowledge as Dependent Variables

	Knowledge			Applied skills			Self-estimated skills			Attitude		
	Model 0 *B(SE)*	Model 1 *B(SE)*	Model 2 *B(SE)*	Model 0 *B(SE)*	Model 1 *B(SE)*	Model 2 *B(SE)*	Model 0 *B(SE)*	Model 1 *B(SE)*	Model 2 *B(SE)*	Model 0 *B(SE)*	Model 1 *B(SE)*	Model 2 *B(SE)*
Fixed part												
(Intercept)	**.25(.01)**	**.35(.01)**	.11(.10)	**.29(.01)**	**.38(.01)**	.01(.13)	**.24(.01)**	**.30(.01)**	.14(.12)	**.26(.01)**	**.30(.01)**	.10(.09)
SNPE		**-.19(.02)**	***-.04(.02)***		**-.19(.02)**	.00(.02)		**-.12(.01)**	**-.09(.02)**		**-.08(.01)**	**-.06(.01)**
Control variables												
Girl			***.02(.01)***			**.08(.01)**			**.04(.01)**			**.08(.01)**
Age			***-.02(.01)***			-.02(.01)			.01(.01)			.01(.01)
Language spoken at home			**.03(.01)**			**.04(.01)**			***-.03(.01)***			-.01(.01)
Advised educational level			**.08(.00)**			**.09(.00)**			**.01(.00)**			***.01(.00)***
IQ < 75			**-.06(.02)**			-.02(.02)			-.03(.02)			.00(.02)
Random part												
School-level variance	.13	.08	.08	.14	.10	.09	.09	.07	.07	.08	.07	.07
Residual variance	.27	.27	.25	.35	.35	.33	.30	.30	.30	.24	.24	.23
Total variance	.40	.35	.33	.49	.45	.42	.39	.37	.37	.32	.31	.30
ICC	.18	.08	.08	.13	.07	.07	.08	.05	.05	.10	.08	.08

Note. **p < 0.01 (bold)**; ***p < 0.05 (bold and italic)***.

Research Question 3: The Moderating Role of Characteristics of Citizenship Education in the Relationship between Attending SNPE and Citizenship Competences

Tables 4 and 5 provide information on the role of student-level characteristics of citizenship education in the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. The results show that for knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude, the main negative effect of attending SNPE was not significantly influenced by either students' experienced unsafety in the school environment, the teacher-student relationship or the student-student relationship, or students' perceived openness of classroom climate.

For applied skills, however, the findings show that three interaction effects are significant. This means that the teacher-student and student-student relationships and students' perceived openness of classroom climate mitigated the relationship between attending SNPE and applied skills. That is, the negative main effect of attending SNPE is weaker when students experience more positive relationships with the teacher and fellow students and experience more openness in the classroom climate.

Table 6 provides information on the role of teacher-level characteristics of citizenship education in the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship. The full models can be found in Appendices 3.3-3.6.

The results show that for knowledge, applied skills, and attitude, the negative main effect of attending SNPE is weaker if teachers pay more attention to promoting social involvement and participation. Furthermore, the negative main effect of attending SNPE on knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude is mitigated if teachers pay more attention to, respectively, fostering an open attitude towards differences, personal development and social competence, and indicating citizenship education to be more important.

Table 4

Student-level Characteristics with Knowledge and Applied Skills as Dependent Variables

	Knowledge					Applied skills				
	Model 3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.1 *B(SE)*	Model 4.2 *B(SE)*	Model 4.3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.4 *B(SE)*	Model 3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.1 *B(SE)*	Model 4.2 *B(SE)*	Model 4.3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.4 *B(SE)*
Fixed part										
(Intercept)	.00(.11)	.01(.11)	.01(.11)	.02(.11)	.01(.11)	-.05(.14)	-.02(.14)	.05(.15)	.04(.15)	.01(.14)
SNPE	***-.04(.02)***	***-.06(.03)***	-.06(.05)	-.06(.05)	-.06(.04)	.01(.02)	-.05(.04)	***-.14(.06)***	***-.14(.07)***	***-.11(.05)***
Control variables										
Girl	***.02(.01)***	***.02(.01)***	***.02(.01)***	***.02(.01)***	***.02(.01)***	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**
Age	***-.02(.01)***	***-.02(.01)***	***-.02(.01)***	***-.02(.01)***	***-.02(.01)***	-.02(.01)	-.02(.01)	***-.02(.01)***	***-.02(.01)***	-.02(.01)
Language spoken at home	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	***.04(.01)***	***.04(.01)***	**.04(.01)**
Advised educational level	**.08(.00)**	**.08(.00)**	**.08(.00)**	**.08(.00)**	**.08(.00)**	**.09(.00)**	**.09(.00)**	**.09(.00)**	**.09(.00)**	**.09(.00)**
IQ < 75	**-.06(.02)**	**-.06(.02)**	**-.06(.02)**	**-.06(.02)**	**-.06(.02)**	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)
Student-level characteristics of cit. ed.										
Unsafe school environment	-.01(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	**-.04(.01)**	**-.06(.02)**	**-.04(.01)**	**-.04(.01)**	**-.04(.01)**
Teacher-student relationship	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	***.02(.01)***	***.02(.01)***	-.00(.01)	.02(.01)	***.02(.01)***
Student-student relationship	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.01(.01)
Open classroom climate	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	***.03(.01)***	**.05(.01)**	**.05(.01)**	**.05(.01)**	**.05(.01)**	.03(.01)
Interaction effects										
SNPE * Unsafe school environment		.01(.02)					.04(.02)			
SNPE * Teacher-student relationship			.00(.01)					***.04(.02)***		
SNPE * Student-student relationship				.01(.01)					***.04(.02)***	
SNPE * Open classroom climate					.01(.01)					***.05(.02)***
Random part										
School-level variance	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08
Residual variance	.25	.25	.25	.25	.25	.33	.33	.33	.33	.33
Total variance	.32	.32	.32	.32	.32	.41	.41	.41	.41	.41
ICC	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06

Note. **p < 0.01 (bold)**; ***p < 0.05 (bold and italic)***.

Table 5

Student-level Characteristics with Self-estimated Skills and Attitude as Dependent Variables

	Self-estimated skills					Attitude				
	Model 3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.1 *B(SE)*	Model 4.2 *B(SE)*	Model 4.3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.4 *B(SE)*	Model 3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.1 *B(SE)*	Model 4.2 *B(SE)*	Model 4.3 *B(SE)*	Model 4.4 *B(SE)*
Fixed part										
(Intercept)	**-.45(.12)**	**-.45(.12)**	**-.51(.13)**	**-.45(.13)**	**-.48(.12)**	**-.51(.09)**	**-.52(.09)**	**-.48(.10)**	**-.53(.10)**	**-.52(.09)**
SNPE	**-.12(.02)**	**-.12(.03)**	-.03(.05)	-.11(.06	-.06(.04)	**-.07(.01)**	***-.07(.03)***	**-.12(.04)**	**-.05(.05)**	-.06(.03)
Control variables										
Girl	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**
Age	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)
Language spoken at home	-.02(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.02(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)
Advised educational level	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**	**.01(.00)**
IQ < 75	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	-.03(.02)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)
Student-level characteristics of cit. ed.										
Unsafe school environment	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.05(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	.01(.01)	.02(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)
Teacher-student relationship	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.06(.01)**	**.07(.01)**	**.07(.01)**
Student-student relationship	**.04(.01)**	***.04(.01)***	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.03(.01)**	**.04(.01)**	**.03(.01)**
Open classroom climate	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.11(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**	**.10(.01)**
Interaction effects										
SNPE * Unsafe school environment		-.00(.02)					-.00 (0.01)			
SNPE * Teacher-student relationship			-.02(.01)					.01(.01)		
SNPE * Student-student relationship				-.00(.01)					-.01(.01)	
SNPE * Open classroom climate					-.02(.02)					-.01(.01)
Random part										
School-level variance	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05
Residual variance	.29	.29	.29	.29	.29	.21	.21	.21	.21	.21
Total variance	.35	.35	.35	.35	.35	.26	.26	.26	.26	.26
ICC	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06

Note. **p < 0.01 (bold)**; ***p < 0.05 (bold and italic)***.

Table 6

Overview of Interaction Effects of Teacher-level Characteristics and Attending SNPE on Dependent Variables

		Knowledge	Applied skills	Self-estimated skills	Attitude
		B(SE)	*B(SE)*	*B(SE)*	*B(SE)*
Attention to personal development and social competence	SNPE	-.23(.14)	.05(.18)	***-.40(.15)****	-.15(.13)*
	Main effect	-.02(.02)	-.00(.03)	***-.06(.02)***	***-.04(.02)****
	Interaction	.05(.03)	-.01(.04)	***.07(.03)***	.02(.03)
Attention to promoting social involvement and participation	SNPE	**-.23(.08)**	***-.25(.10)***	-.10(.09)*	***-.21(.08)****
	Main effect	-.02(.02)	-.04(.02)	.00(.02)	-.03(.02)
	Interaction	***.06(.02)***	***.07(.03)***	.01(.02)	***.04(.02)***
Fostering an open attitude towards differences	SNPE	***-.26(.11)***	-.19(.14)	-.00(.12)*	.02(.10)*
	Main effect	***-.06(.02)***	-.03(.03)	.04(.02)	***.05(.02)****
	Interaction	***.06(.03)***	.05(.03)	-.02(.03)	-.02(.02)
Open classroom climate as perceived by teachers	SNPE	-.08(.06)	-.11(.08)	-.06(.07)*	-.05(.06)*
	Main effect	.03(.02)*	-.00(.02)	.03(.02)	.03(.02)*
	Interaction	.02(.02)	.05(.03)	-.01(.03)	.00(.02)
Monitoring of learning outcomes of citizenship education	SNPE	-.03(.02)	.00(.02)	**-.06(.02)***	**-.05(.02)***
	Main effect	-.01(.01)	-.00(.01)	.01(.01)	-.00(.01)
	Interaction	.01(.01)	.02(.02)	-.02(.02)	.00(.01)
Formulation of a vision in citizenship education	SNPE	-.00(.03)	.04(.04)	**-.12(.03)***	***-.06(.03)****
	Main effect	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.01(.01)*	.01(.01)
	Interaction	-.01(.01)	-.01(.01)	.02(.01)	.01(.01)
Translation of citizenship education into learning goals	SNPE	.03(.05)	.03(.06)	-.11(.05)*	-.08(.05)*
	Main effect	.02(.03)	.03(.04)	-.04(.03)	-.01(.03)
	Interaction	-.04(.04)	-.02(.05)	.02(.04)	.02(.03)
Agreement upon the curriculum of citizenship education	SNPE	.03(.07)	-.00(.09)	-.14(.07)*	-.02(.06)*
	Main effect	.02(.01)	.02(.02)	-.02(.01)	-.01(.01)
	Interaction	-.01(.02)	.00(.03)	.02(.02)	-.01(.02)
Importance of citizenship education according to teachers	SNPE	-.12(.09)	-.01(.12)	-.13(.10)*	**-.28(.08)***
	Main effect	-.00(.02)	.02(.02)	-.00(.02)	-.03(.01)
	Interaction	.02(.02)	.00(.03)	.01(.02)	**.06(.02)**

Note. **p < 0.01 (bold)**; ***p < 0.05 (bold and italic)***. An asterisk (*) indicates that an effect was significant in the previous model with only the predictors (and no interaction effects).

In sum, the answer to the third research question consists of four parts. First, experienced unsafety in the school environment did not moderate the relationship between attending SNPE and knowledge, applied skills, self-estimated skills, or attitude. This means that the first hypothesis is falsified. Second, the teacher-student relationship moderated the relationship between attending SNPE and applied skills but not the relationships between attending SNPE and knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude. The same holds for the student-student relationship and students' perceived openness of classroom climate. This means that the second, third, and fourth hypotheses are confirmed only for applied skills. At last, we expected that the hypothesized interaction effects were stronger for knowledge and applied skills than self-estimated skills and attitude. This is true in that we found significant interaction effects for applied skills. Still, it does not comply with the results for knowledge – which, like applied-skills, also consists of a cognitive component but showed no significant and stronger effects than self-estimated skills and attitude

Alternative Interpretation of the Interaction Effects with Student-level Characteristics

Because some hypotheses including student-level characteristics of citizenship education could not be confirmed by the findings of the third research question, we explored an alternative interpretation of the interaction effects. As the modelled interaction effects can also be interpretated with SNPE as the moderator instead of the student-level characteristics of citizenship education, this was also considered. When interpreting the interaction effects like this, the insignificant interaction effects indicate that the relations between the characteristics of citizenship education (i.e., unsafe school environment, teacher-student relationship, student-student relationship, and open classroom climate) and civic knowledge, attitude, and self-estimated skills do not differ between students who attend SNPE versus students who attend RPE. The same holds for the relationship between unsafe school environment and applied skills. In most of these non-significant interaction effects, the main effects of unsafety in the school environment, the teacher-student relationship, the student-student relationship and an open classroom climate were significant. In this respect, regardless of whether students attended SNPE or RPE, it can be concluded that:

(i) an open classroom climate was positively related to citizenship knowledge (b = 0.03, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.01$);

(ii) experienced unsafety in the school environment was negatively related to applied skills (b = -0.04, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.01$);

(iii) experienced unsafety in the school environment ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$), the teacher-student relationship ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$), the student-student relationship ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$) and an open classroom climate ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$) were positively related to self-estimated skills;

(iv) the teacher-student relationship ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$), student-student relationship ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$) and an open classroom climate ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$) were positively related to citizenship attitude.

In contrast, for applied skills, the interaction effects between the teacher-student relationship, student-student relationship and open classroom climate and attending SNPE were significant. A post-hoc analysis of the simple slopes indicated that:

(i) the simple slope of the teacher-student relationship was $b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.97$ when students attended RPE, and $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$ when students attended SNPE;

(ii) the simple slope of the student-student relationship was $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.05$ when students attended RPE, and $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.28$ when students attended SNPE;

(iii) the simple slope of an open classroom climate was $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.07$ when students attended RPE, and $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$ when students attended SNPE.

In sum, when attending SNPE is seen as the moderator, it can be concluded that the relationships between the teacher-student relationship and applied skills, and between an open classroom climate and applied skills, are positive and significant when students attended SNPE. However, in most cases, the relationship between characteristics of citizenship education and citizenship competences of students did not change based on whether students attended SNPE.

Discussion

Several recent studies focused on characteristics of effective citizenship education in primary and secondary education (Coopmans et al., 2020; Dijkstra et al., 2015; Wanders, Van der Veen et al., 2020). Identified aspects are the teacher-student and student-student relationship and students' perceived openness of classroom climate (Geboers et al., 2013; Wanders, Dijkstra et al., 2020). In SNPE, insight into the learning outcomes and characteristics

of citizenship education is largely missing. Hence, this study examined differences in citizenship competences between students attending SNPE versus RPE and the role of characteristics of citizenship education.

The results showed that, compared to students attending RPE, students attending SNPE experienced more unsafety in the school environment and lower quality of the teacher-student and student-student relationships. This seems to match previous research demonstrating that students in SNPE generally were more likely to engage in bullying behaviour (De Sousa et al., 2021), were more at risk of encountering difficulties in forming affective relationships with teachers (Baker et al., 2008; Freire et al., 2020; Zee & Roorda, 2018) and students (Carter et al., 2014; Pinto et al., 2019; Schwab, 2019), and experienced more difficulty with their socio-emotional competences as compared to students in RPE (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that, whereas teachers in SNPE experienced the classroom climate to be less open as opposed to teachers in RPE, students in SNPE experienced more openness in the classroom climate than students in RPE. Students' experience seems to be in contrast with the results we have found for experienced unsafety in the school environment and the teacher-student and student-student relationship, which, at least based on empirical findings regarding regular primary and secondary education, can be considered important prerequisites for an open classroom climate.

Concerning other aspects of citizenship education, teachers in SNPE indicated less attention to promoting social involvement and participation, less monitoring of outcomes, less formulation of a vision, less concrete learning goals, and less agreement in the school team on the curriculum. In contrast, they indicated more attention to personal development and social competences, more promotion of dealing with differences and promoting an open attitude towards differences; and more importance attributed to citizenship education. These findings suggest that citizenship education in SNPE is not very systematic and results-oriented (cf. Hoek et al., 2022) but, rather, focuses on the challenges regarding social competence and interpersonal relationships that students in SNPE may daily encounter.

Concerning the difference in citizenship competences of students, our findings showed that students in SNPE generally obtained lower scores on knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude than students in RPE. For applied skills, it did not matter whether students attended SNPE or RPE. A possible explanation for lower scores on self-estimated skills and attitude may be the difficulty that students in SNPE encounter with social skills, such as self-confidence in estimating one's skills (Douma et al., 2022; Van der Veen et al., 2010) or the ability to see things from different perspectives (Conson et al., 2015; O'Kearney et al., 2017). In addition,

students in SNPE may have encountered more difficulty with knowledge questions because they require knowledge of general and distal situations. In contrast, applied skills require students to use existing knowledge to solve questions about everyday situations close to their living world. These findings align with a previous study that measured knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude among Dutch students in RPE and SNPE (Ledoux et al., 2012). These authors found that students with severe learning or behavioural difficulties attending SNPE also obtained lower scores on knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude. The design of this study differentiated between students with severe and moderate learning or behavioural difficulties, and students with moderate learning or behavioural difficulties obtained higher scores on self-estimated skills and attitude than students attending RPE. While we could not make this difference, this underscores that in future research, it is important to distinguish between the characteristics of learning and behavioural difficulties.

Contrary to our hypotheses, we found no evidence that the teacher-student and student-student relationship and students' perceived openness of the classroom climate altered the negative relationship between attending SNPE and knowledge, self-estimated skills, and attitude. While there seems to be no probable explanation for these results, it must be noted that students in SNPE do not form a clearly defined group (Pijl et al., 2008) and cope with very different educational challenges (Van der Veen et al., 2010). Moreover, the RPE and SNPE studies occurred during the COVID pandemic. School closure, social distancing and increased stress and anxiety may have affected citizenship competences of students in RPE and SNPE, with possibly stronger effects for students in SNPE as they rely more on care, support and structure that the school environment usually offers them (Hurwitz et al., 2022; Yakut, 2021). Also contrary to our hypothesis was the fact that experienced unsafety in the school environment did not change any of the relationships between attending SNPE and knowledge, applied skills, self-estimated skills, and attitude. A possible explanation may be that disruptive behaviour causing unsafety in the school environment is more prevalent among students in SNPE (Farmer et al., 2015; Ledwell & King, 2015; Rose & Espelage, 2012). As a result, unsafety in the school environment may be considered more 'normal' than in RPE and, therefore, 'numb out' the possible effect on the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. At last, in line with our hypothesis, a positive teacher-student and student-student relationship, as well as an open classroom climate as perceived by students, mitigated the negative relationship between attending SNPE and applied skills.

As some of the hypotheses could not be confirmed by the findings of the moderation analyses, alternative interpretations of the interaction effects (i.e., with SNPE treated as

moderator, instead of characteristics of citizenship education) were exploratorily examined. When SNPE is seen as the moderator, the significant interaction effects indicate that the relationship between three characteristics of citizenship education (the teacher-student relationship, the student-student relationship and an open classroom climate) and applied skills is different based on whether students attend SNPE. More specific, probing the interactions pointed out that the relationship between two characteristics (i.e., the teacher-student relationship and an open classroom climate) and applied skills is positive and significant when students attended SNPE. However, in most cases, the relationship between characteristics of citizenship education and citizenship competences (predominantly citizenship knowledge, attitude, and self-estimated skills) of students did not change based on whether students attended SNPE.

We also performed exploratory analyses on the role of additional characteristics of effective citizenship education in the relationship between attending SNPE and citizenship competences. The results show that attention to promoting social involvement and participation weakened the negative relationship between attending SNPE and knowledge, applied skills, and attitude. Attention to two other specific learning goals (i.e., attention to personal development and social competence and fostering an open attitude towards differences) improved the relationship between attending SNPE and, respectively, self-estimated skills and knowledge. The fact that attention to these specific learning goals mitigated the negative effects of attending SNPE on various citizenship competences suggests that the attention and effort of the teacher are important conditions in the acquisition of citizenship competences in SNPE.

To conclude, this study contributes to insight into the role of characteristics of effective citizenship education in SNPE versus RPE. Whereas the role of some characteristics was not as expected and ask for further research, this study shed light on several important factors, such as the attention for specific learning goals in citizenship education, that form an important basis for further research into characteristics of effective citizenship education in SNPE.