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Doing welfare in German secondary schools—How students' welfare receipt becomes visible in teacher-student interactions and how teachers perceive these students

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Abstract Welfare recipients (e.g., "Bürgergeld") generally are subject to negative stereotyping, but it is unclear whether students' welfare receipt plays a role in teacher-student interactions, and if so, what. We conducted eight focus groups with 27 teachers and analyzed them using grounded theory to investigate how teachers characterize welfare-related teacher-student interactions. In addition, we examined how teachers perceive these students and the role of stereotypes in these perceptions. Welfare receipt becomes apparent mostly in bureaucratic care interactions in which teachers support corresponding students in financing school participation possibilities. The familial financial situation meets the school's participation requirements in these teacher-student interactions. Teachers' feeling of responsibility for this support varies. Most teachers perceive poverty-related shame among students in these interactions, while others do not. Accordingly, the need for a sensitive approach in these interactions is assessed differently. Teachers mentioned hardly any perspectives on the students themselves but on parents receiving welfare (e.g., low educational responsibility) and assumed parents pass on this behavior to their children. In some cases, this leads to negative educational expectations toward corresponding students, which could implicitly influence teaching-related teacher-student interactions. The results provide initial indications for subsequent negative self-perceptions of students on welfare about their social situation at school.

Keywords Teacher · Welfare · Bürgergeld · Poverty · Doing welfare · School

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Doing Welfare in weiterführenden Schulen – Wie der Bürgergeldbezug von Schüler*innen in Interaktionen zwischen Lehrer*innen und Schüler*innen sichtbar wird und wie Lehrer*innen entsprechende Schüler*innen wahrnehmen

Zusammenfassung Transferleistungsbezieher*innen (z. B. „Bürgergeld") sind negativen Stereotypen ausgesetzt, aber es ist unklar, ob und welche Rolle der Bürgergeldbezug von Schüler*innen in den Interaktionen zwischen Lehrer*innen und Schüler*innen spielt. Wir führten acht Fokusgruppen mit 27 Lehrer*innen durch und analysierten sie mithilfe der Grounded Theory, um zu untersuchen, wie Lehrer*innen Interaktionen mit Schüler*innen charakterisieren, in denen der Bürgergeldbezug von Schüler*innen eine Rolle spielt. Außerdem untersuchten wir, wie Lehrer*innen diese Schüler*innen wahrnehmen und welche Rolle Stereotype dabei spielen. Der Bürgergeldbezug zeigt sich überwiegend in bürokratischen Fürsorge-Interaktionen, in denen Lehrer*innen entsprechende Schüler*innen bei der Finanzierung schulischer Partizipationsmöglichkeiten unterstützen. In diesen Interaktionen zwischen Lehrer*innen und Schüler*innen trifft die familiäre finanzielle Situation auf schulische Voraussetzungen zur Partizipation. Das Verantwortungsgefühl für diese Unterstützung variiert zwischen den Lehrer*innen. Die meisten Lehrer*innen nehmen bei diesen Interaktionen eine armutsbedingte Scham der Schüler*innen wahr, andere wiederum nicht. Entsprechend wird die Notwendigkeit eines sensiblen Ansatzes in diesen Interaktionen unterschiedlich eingeschätzt. Die Lehrer*innen formulierten kaum Perspektiven auf die Schüler*innen selbst, sondern auf die Eltern, die Bürgergeld beziehen (z. B. geringe Bildungsverantwortung), und nahmen an, dass die Eltern dieses Verhalten an ihre Kinder weitergeben. Dies führt in einigen Fällen zu negativen Bildungserwartungen gegenüber entsprechenden Schüler*innen, was unterrichtsbezogene Interaktionen zwischen Lehrer*innen und Schüler*innen implizit beeinflussen könnte. Die Ergebnisse geben erste Hinweise auf eine folgende negative Selbstwahrnehmung entsprechender Schüler*innen in Bezug auf ihre soziale Situation in der Schule.

Schlüsselwörter Lehrer*innen · Transferleistungen · Bürgergeld · Armut · Doing Welfare · Schule

1 Introduction

In line with a broad understanding of inclusion, it is crucial to ensure that not only students with disabilities but also students with different genders, migration backgrounds, or low socio-economic status (SES[1]) have full opportunities to participate in school (Bešić 2020; Juvonen et al. 2019). For Germany and internationally, it has been shown that students with low SES feel less integrated in schools than students with a higher SES (OECD 2023). Teachers have a unique role here, as positive teacher-student interactions are related positively to students' satisfaction at school,

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[1] We understand SES as a construct of income, education, and occupation (Hunt and Seiver 2018).

feeling of a secure environment, and feeling of belonging to the school (Bloem et al. 2023; Manrique Tisnés 2023; Wanders et al. 2020). Teacher-student interactions are, therefore, related to student's perceptions of their social situation at school, which is an essential aspect of students' social participation in school (Bossaert et al. 2013).

Looking at teacher-student interactions, low-SES students report less emotional support from teachers, and teachers report less involvement in interactions with low-SES students (Bloem et al. 2023). One explanation for teachers' shaping of interactions can be stereotypes, understood as generalized beliefs about low-SES students, in that negative performance stereotypes against low-SES students favor lower autonomy support, for example (Bloem et al. 2023; Glock and Kleen 2020; Imhoff 2021; Tobisch and Dresel 2020). A recent study (Yendell et al. 2024) additionally showed that preservice teachers distinguish between different low SES and stereotype welfare recipients even more negatively than the working poor in terms of commitment, sense of responsibility, and social behavior, which is in line with extracurricular studies (Henry et al. 2004; Suomi et al. 2022).

As welfare, in this case, we refer to German "Bürgergeld," which provides support for different status groups, such as the unemployed or people on top-up payments (Knoche 2023). Around two million children under 18 benefit from "Bürgergeld," and their families can apply for additional financial support through "Bildung und Teilhabe" (Education and Participation), which is a federal government funding program aimed at children and young people (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2023; Kaps and Marquardsen 2017). This assistance ensures that children receiving "Bürgergeld" can finance further school participation demands (e.g., class trips), which parents normally must cover in Germany. Local authorities (jobcenters) handle applications and payments.

To date, the role of welfare in teacher-student interactions has not been investigated. Although preservice teachers have predominantly negative perspectives on welfare recipients (Yendell et al. 2024), the perspectives of practicing teachers have not yet been investigated, which is why the existing results lack ecological validity (Burkart 2020).

In this study, we therefore investigate the precise role students' welfare receipt plays in teacher-student interactions from practicing teachers' perspectives and how it becomes visible to them. In the second step, we examine teachers' views of corresponding students. To this end, we conducted focus groups with teachers (Barbour 2018). We followed the principles of grounded theory in sampling participants and analyzing the transcripts (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Welfare-related teacher-Student interactions from a theoretical view

We align ourselves theoretically with the concept that categories (e.g., welfare recipients) are not merely structurally given but are also "done" in interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). A category is an "ongoing situated accomplishment" (West and Fenstermaker 2002, p. 541) embedded in social norms and interactively (re-)pro-

duced. Interactive processes create differences between categories,[2] subsequently perceived as natural and legitimate (West and Fenstermaker 2002). This focus offers a micro-perspective on the (re-)production of social structures without denying surrounding social structures (West and Fenstermaker 1995).

Based on the concept of "doing gender," which West and Fenstermaker (1995) founded on the above considerations, we introduce the concept of "doing welfare." Although they subsequently introduced the concept of "doing class," a focus on the "doing" of welfare seems useful, as welfare recipients are perceived more negatively than other low-class origins (Suomi et al. 2022; Yendell et al. 2024). These perceptions can be framed as accountability, which is the central aspect of the doing approach, by formulating expectations towards the members of social groups (Hollander 2018). This broadens the focus to include language as "doing," as it is through utterances that categorizations are made and accountability is ascribed (Hollander and Ableson 2014). Stereotypes can influence the ascription of accountability (Imhoff 2021).

"Doing welfare" can be combined with a relational understanding of poverty which means that poverty is measured by social ascriptions (Ceresola 2015; Fritsch and Verwiebe 2018). Receiving welfare leads to a classification as "poor" and a receiving relationship with a "giving" society (Fritsch and Verwiebe 2018). Coping with this social inequality within schools leads to (possible) care-related interactions that go beyond traditional teaching interactions (e.g., financing of school materials) (Budde and Blasse 2016; Dietrich 2024). Dietrich had described care-related interactions with reference to Joan Tronto as follows: 1. the perception of a need for care, 2. the assumption of responsibility for care, 3. concrete care interactions, 4. the reaction of the cared-for person (2024). Our focus is therefore not limited to teaching-related interactions but includes non-teaching-related interactions (e.g., care) that enable or disable student participation and allow conclusions to be drawn about (non-)inclusive interactions (Bešić 2020; Juvonen et al. 2019).

2.2 State of research concerning students' welfare in teacher-Student interactions and teachers' accountability

No studies to date have examined welfare-related teacher-student interactions. Studies that directly investigate interactions usually have an ethnographic approach and focus primarily on other categories of low SES in teaching-related interactions. For those, it has been shown that the SES of students does not have a direct impact because schools have a universal claim to prevent the effect of low SES on school success (Kalthoff 2006; Ricken 2014; Weitkämper and Weidenfelder 2018). Instead, student performance is done interactively, creating differences between students (Budde et al. 2022). However, studies have shown that teachers can subsequently justify (poor) school performance and authority violations in the classroom by a family's low SES (Weitkämper 2019, 2022). Similar results have been arrived at

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[2] The result that preservice teachers distinguish between working poor and welfare recipients (Yendell et al. 2024) shows that differences are also introduced within the "low SES" category. How differentiations are reconstructed also depends on how researchers bring categories to the study of interactions.

international ethnographic studies (Bettie, 2000; Hatt, 2012; Morris, 2005), which is why the relationship between teachers and families and also teachers' accountability vis-a-vis those students and their families becomes more critical (Budde 2023; Hollander 2018).

Language-based studies (e.g., focus groups) can be related to our understanding of accountability unless they do not use this term. Lange-Vester (2015) showed that teachers predominantly have deficit perceptions of low SES families. This refers to supposedly low school competencies and disinterested parents. Another study showed that teachers individualize poverty, especially when accompanied by unemployment (Koevel et al. 2021). Poverty is then primarily deemed to consist of a lack of individual commitment and responsibility. This concerns students and their parents. Similar accountability of (preservice) teachers towards low SES students (Ellis et al. 2016; Hunt and Seiver 2018) and their families (Dunne and Gazeley 2008; Gazeley 2012; Stanforth and Rose 2020) has been shown in international studies. In another recent German study, preservice teachers described welfare recipients as more individually responsible for their situation than the working poor. Their situation would thus be more likely related to individual failure (e.g., low commitment). This association extends to parents receiving welfare, and it is assumed they are deficient role models for their children (Yendell et al. 2024).

2.3 This research

Teacher-student interactions could very well be influenced by how in-school teachers ascribe accountability to students and their families receiving welfare, as students are the ones who must react to this ascription in direct interactions (Hollander 2018). For example, students associate their poverty with shame, and parents are aware of negative stereotypes by teachers (Hannon and O'Donnell 2022; Kaluza and Schimnek 2023). Nevertheless, as previous studies have shown, SES does not play a role in teacher-student interactions directly related to teaching; it must first be analyzed whether and how students' welfare receipt plays any role in teacher-student interactions. For this, we first investigate whether and how teachers identify relevant teacher-student interactions in which students' welfare receipt is done and reproduced (West and Fenstermaker 1995):

RQ1 How do teachers characterize interactions in which the students' welfare receipt is interactively (re-)produced in school?

Only when the students' welfare receipt becomes visible and perceptible to teachers through corresponding interactions is it relevant what kind of accountability (Hollander 2018) teachers ascribe and the role of stereotypes in this accountability:

RQ2 (How) do teachers do welfare through their ascription of accountability?

3 Methodology and methods

We conducted focus groups with practicing teachers, which provided a space for the interactive "doing welfare" through language (Barbour 2018; Hollander and Ableson 2014). The methodological assumption is that teachers rely on a broad culturally shared understanding of "welfare" conditioned by their profession at the same school, which is why teachers from the same school were in every focus group (Morgan 2019). Simultaneously, the social interaction in the focus group led participants to bring their perspectives to the focus group to collectivize them. Hence, focus groups allowed each participant to "do welfare," depending on perceived and expected similarities and differences between the participants (Morgan 2019). At the same time, the focus groups provided indirect access to welfare-related interactions through the teachers' characterizations of relevant interactions.

We mainly asked how teachers perceive students and their parents receiving welfare and about relevant interactions with these students and their parents in the context of welfare.[3] The discussion process did not rigidly follow the interview guide; instead, priority was given to the teachers' contributions, which is why the discussion process differed between the focus groups. Teachers mainly discussed non-teaching related interactions and formulated perceptions towards students' parents during the focus groups rather than the students themselves.

3.1 Sample

We conducted eight focus groups with three to four teachers ($n = 27$). Participating schools were contacted through the initiative "Schule macht stark" in which the schools participated (Maaz and Marx 2024). The focus groups took place at two comprehensive schools and one high school between June and November 2023 and were part of a following workshop on school improvement. Schools varied in type, location, and students' economic background. The composition of the focus groups and the characteristics of the individual teachers and schools can be seen in Table 1. The study's comprehensive schools (5th–10th grade; German: Gemeinschaftsschule) offer different levels of competence within the curriculum, allowing students to decide on their school-leaving qualification in the 8th or 9th grade. These schools provide non-academic secondary school diplomas and collaborate with other schools to offer high school diplomas after grade 10. The high school (5th–12th grade; German: Gymnasium) in the study leads directly to a high school diploma and does not offer different competence levels.

The focus groups lasted an average of 52:49 min (SD=12:17). Each teacher completed a questionnaire regarding their socio-demographic data. On average, they had been teaching for 12.5 years ($SD = 9.7$). 44.4% identified themselves as male and 55.6% as female. 14.8% reported having a migrant background in that they or one of their parents was born abroad. 14.8% reported having received welfare.

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[3] The translated interview guide can be found in Table 2 in Online Resource 1.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the participating schools and teachers

School type	Population of the city	Percentage of students receiving welfare	Percentage of students with low SES	Focus Group	Teacher	Age	Teaching experience in years	Gender (W = female, M = male)	Migration background	Former receipt of welfare
High School (HS)	100,000–250,000	30	40	1	1	50	25	M	No	No
					2	36	6	W	No	Yes
					3	60	34	M	No	No
				2	1	35	10	W	No	Yes
					2	57	35	W	No	No
					3	51	25	W	No	No
				3	1	38	10	W	No	No
					2	34	7	M	No	No
					3	35	9	W	No	No
Comprehensive School (CS1)	100,000–250,000	85	95	1	1	42	1	M	No	No
					2	43	7	M	No	No
					3	40	1.5	M	Yes	No
				2	1	44	8	W	No	No
					2	40	10	W	Yes	No
					3	55	–	M	Yes	–

Table 1 (Continued)

School type	Population of the city	Percentage of students receiving welfare	Percentage of students with low SES	Focus Group	Teacher	Age	Teaching experience in years	Gender (W = female, M = male)	Migration background	Former receipt of welfare
Comprehensive School (CS2)	250,000–500,000	50	80	1	1	40	13	M	No	–
					2	50	24	M	No	No
					3	32	6.5	M	Yes	No
					4	38	10	M	No	No
				2	1	33	6.5	W	No	No
					2	41	15	W	No	No
					3	32	2	W	No	No
					4	30	4.5	W	No	No
				3	1	43	17	M	No	No
					2	42	12	W	No	Yes
					3	30	2	W	No	Yes
					4	50	25	W	No	No

3.2 Analysis

In line with our orientation towards the interactive production of welfare, we based our analysis on grounded theory, as it also has its theoretical foundations in symbolic interactionism (Corbin and Strauss 1990). We followed a thematic analysis to determine overarching themes and patterns (Barbour 2018). The sampling strategy was based on theoretical sampling, intended to capture as many different perspectives on the phenomenon of "doing welfare" as possible until theoretical saturation was reached (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

The first three authors analyzed the transcribed focus groups by open, axial, and selective coding using MAXQDA2020 (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In open coding, the authors read relevant passages from the individual focus groups in preparation. Possible concepts and categories were discussed. In axial coding, the first author created and discussed overarching categories with the first two co-authors. The process repeatedly switched to open coding, in which further passages were discussed, and further categories were formed. In selective coding, the first author created abstract categories from the discussed categories of axial coding. Following discussions, there was a partial switch back to open and axial coding processes. Finally, common core categories were discussed between all authors and will be presented below. In the presentation of methods and results, we follow the recommendations of Levitt et al. (2018).

4 Results

We will present the results in the order of the research questions, beginning with the core category for RQ1 and then showing the core categories for RQ2.

4.1 Public administration of family (RQ1)

Concerning the research question of how teachers characterize teacher-student interactions in which students' welfare receipt is interactively reproduced (RQ1), the core category of *public administration of family* was identified. These interactions refer to bureaucratic extracurricular interactions that are not teaching-related. In these teacher-student interactions, the teachers mediate between the school's financial requirements for participation (e.g., tutoring, or school trips) and the student families' welfare receipt by assisting with the application for "Bildung und Teilhabe." One teacher reported:

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[4] The quotations have been translated from German into English. The original quotations are in Table 3 in Online Resource 2.

[5] The characters before the underscore stand for the schools (see Table 1). The first digit after the underscore stands for the number of the focus group. The two following characters stand for the gender (W = female, M = male) and the speaker number.

"Well, we are obliged [...] to fill in the school part of the documents so that the parents can go to the authorities and apply for it [money]. So we have to confirm [...] that [the family's] information is true, and then the family can apply for the money."[4] (HS_2W3[5])

Similar statements were found in all the focus groups conducted; thus, students hand over relevant forms to the teachers at school, and the teachers are responsible for completing the forms. However, those interactions differ between schools. While some teachers reported that they work with school social workers or the school office to fill out the forms, other teachers reported that there is no fixed contact person for this, and that responsibility often changes. The materials vary from school to school, with some schools using digital forms that are centrally available to teachers. In contrast, students at other schools must bring printed forms themselves. Overall, teachers perceive who and how many students receive welfare through these interactions, as a teacher concludes: "Well, when I look at the number of forms that go out for Bildung und Teilhabe [...], I think it's very high for a [...] classic bourgeois high school" (HS_1M1).

The individual assumption of responsibility for those interactions varies. For example, some teachers stated that it was their task to support students in financing school trips: "If I want the trip or the event to take place, then [...] I have to take it into my own hands, because otherwise eighty, ninety percent of the students will not go" (CS1_1M2). Teachers who see this responsibility as theirs reported being more involved in interactions. This poses challenges; cooperation with the authorities appears complex. One teacher reported, "Yes, I have had one or two cases where I had to call the jobcenter [authorities] myself and had to spend half an hour on the phone" (HS_2W1). In addition, teachers themselves and school structures, sometimes act as donors. As an example, one teacher reported:

"But the last time we went on a school trip [...] the city paid for it for everyone with welfare, but we've been waiting for payment until since, [...] which means that the school had to advance the money via the support association [...] and we had to take care of it privately to make it possible." (CS2_2W3)

Contrary to this, some teachers fill out forms but do not see additional activities as part of their job. One teacher, for example, argued that this should rather be the task of school social workers or the authorities. Another teacher agreed with her and added: "Yes, there must be someone who feels responsible for this" (HS_2W3).

Although teachers are involved in different ways in such interactions, all the teachers studied here had this facilitating role, simply by being the ones to fill out the forms. As a result, the family's welfare receipt is carried into teacher-student interactions. From the teachers' perspective, this puts students in an *unavoidable (shameful) publicity*, a subcategory of the *public administration of family* explained below.

Concerning the need to fill in forms, one teacher reported: "[Students] do that a bit when half the class is already out, right? And then I cover it up straight away, yes exactly, then I take it straight away, put it somewhere underneath" (HS_3M2). One teacher additionally reported about a student when it comes to situations of paying

for a school trip: "Or he is already bursting into tears, I know by now, ok, that is a problem [...], but he now has the confidence to tell me, 'I cannot afford it right now'" (CS2_3M1). Overall, it can be seen here that the corresponding teachers see the need to interact sensitively in those interactions. The shame is also sometimes attributed to parents, so teachers assume several families do not apply for "Bildung und Teilhabe".

Interestingly, however, few teachers from the same schools do not perceive students' shame and refer to the fact that receiving welfare is more of a normality at their school: "Because it applies to almost everyone. And that is why it is SO normal that it is part of everyday life here" (CS1_1M2). Although all the teachers were aware of the need to publicize the welfare receipt, not all saw it as shameful and stated that a sensitive approach is unnecessary. Those statements varied even within the schools, so we conclude that individual teachers perceive similar interactions quite differently.

Overall, teachers take on a facilitating role between students, families, and authorities, which they limit or extend to filling out welfare-related forms, depending on the responsibility they take on. In this way, students must publicize their receipt of welfare. Most teachers perceive students' shame in such interactions, which is why they consider a sensitive approach for these interactions. In contrast, some teachers deny students' shame and the need to act sensitively.

4.2 Addressees of accountability (RQ2)

Since teachers gain unique insight into which students and families receive welfare, we became further interested in whether and how teachers ascribe accountability to these students (RQ2). The ascription of accountability differed primarily concerning the addressees: Accountability, according to the teachers, lies mainly with the students' families or the welfare system.

4.2.1 (Dysfunctional) families on welfare

At all the schools, the teachers did not refer directly to the students but first to their families who receive welfare. Only in the second step do the teachers use this (predominantly negative) accountability to justify (predominantly negative) educational expectations concerning the students. Negative Assumptions were often made about family educational behavior. For example, one teacher assumed: "So I also have students where I think 'they can do it,' but [...] their parents just communicate a mood of 'don't go to work, I am not doing anything' at home." (HS_3M2).

In addition, education-related spending by parents is rated negatively in some cases. One teacher, for example, said about parents on welfare who cannot afford tutoring: "Exactly, but I would still say that many people simply have the wrong priorities, in my eyes, because they all have sneakers anyway" (CS2_2W3). Some teachers also suspect a lack of family care, such as parents passing on their responsibilities to their children.

Overall, we were able to reconstruct ascriptions that describe a low sense of educational responsibility in the family and a low commitment to the school. Most teachers anticipated that parents would pass on such behavior to their children:

"The key, of course, is that [...] something happens in the families [...]. And [...] if parents do not participate and, as it were, convey to their children, 'We do not have a chance, but we will get through life just fine, um, and that will be true for you too' then it is always difficult, yes." (HS_1M1)

Although all teachers mention that students' welfare has no direct influence on teaching (RQ1), this ascription of accountability seems to offer the potential to address negative expectations in teaching:

"I am sometimes very provocative in class when [...] we are confronted with [...] career and transition [...]. And I [...] sometimes like to put my finger in the wound, but I have to be careful about that. [...] So that a process is initiated [...]. Reflecting on my personal situation, my current family, and perhaps the next two or three years [...]. I then really discuss the classic images of sitting on the couch, private TV, potato chips, cola, gaming." (CS2_1M2)

Interestingly, however, there were a few teachers at each school who disagreed with this ascription. Although they also ascribed accountability to families, they described families receiving welfare as interested in school activities. One teacher summarized: "I perceive them all as very generous to their children and benevolent in making everything possible [...]" (CS2_3W3).

Overall, accountability is not ascribed directly to the students but primarily to their families, where negative perceptions dominate, but positive ones are also expressed. Only in the second step, negative educational expectations are formulated toward students by assuming parents pass on negative educational behavior to their children. Furthermore, as negative and positive ascriptions were expressed in the same schools, we conclude that teachers hold the same families to different accountability.

4.2.2 (Dysfunctional) welfare state

The welfare state often also becomes the target of their ascription of accountability in that teachers describe a dysfunction in education-related support. Bureaucratic hurdles were frequently cited: "So it is like this in my class [...], they don't even go to the canteen, [...] I think it is more the bureaucratic hurdle" (CS2_2W3). Teachers stated that such hurdles end up being restrictions on students' participation. On the one hand, this refers to school, as one teacher described it for school excursions: "They can try themselves out there, away from home. And that has an effect on those who cannot take part regularly, who do not have this experience." (HS_2W1).

On the other hand, this refers to extracurricular activities. For example, one teacher mentioned insufficient financial support from the welfare state: "If the child goes to soccer, for example, you can pay the membership fee. But the new soccer boots, that is not enough, is it?" (CS1_2W1).

The teachers' overall conclusion is that these students are at the mercy of social exclusion, which mostly occurs independently of the school and rather due to the

welfare state. This social exclusion also occurs in students' socio-spatial conditions. One teacher argued: "Due to the fact that [...] authorities only pay a certain amount of rent [...], parents are forced to move to these [low SES] districts" (CS1_1M2). In this context, it was often reported that their schools are too poorly equipped financially and structurally to compensate for the dysfunctional welfare state: "So I think [...] we need [...] an infrastructure here at the school and in the immediate environment that simply works." (CS2_3M1).

Overall, the described mechanisms were characterized as leading to exclusion exacerbated by welfare-state measures, as the support to help students in their educational careers is limited. Like accountability ascribed to families, students who receive welfare were only addressed in a second step. The support of corresponding students is hardly addressed as a challenge that can be solved in school through teacher practices—but rather outside.

5 Discussion

Our study revealed that from teachers' perspectives, teachers facilitate bureaucratic teacher-student interactions (RQ1), which can be understood as care interactions in which teachers take action in welfare procuration (Budde and Blasse 2016; Dietrich 2024). At the same time, teachers denied a direct influence of students' welfare receipt on teaching-related interactions, which is in line with previous findings (Budde et al. 2022; Weitkämper 2022). The care-related teacher-student interactions represent an intersection in which families' welfare receipt meets school requirements for school participation (Budde 2023). Although all teachers see the need for those care-related interactions, they do not all take on the same responsibility, and the interactions vary in widely (Dietrich 2024). Additionally, the interactions vary between schools because different professions are involved, and different processes exist.

Due to these interactions, students are publicly marked as poor and relegated to a receiving position (Fritsch and Verwiebe 2018). From the perspective of most teachers, this is associated with shame for students—a finding that replicates other poverty-related studies (Kaluza and Schimnek 2023). Some teachers contradict this perception and describe the welfare receipt as normality at their school. Depending on whether teachers perceive these interactions as shameful or not, they describe whether a sensitive approach regarding the interactions is necessary or not. However, the in/sensitive shaping by teachers of the care-related interactions seems relevant against the background that students' shame can be associated with less satisfaction at school, a feeling of insecurity, and, in total, a negative self-perception of the social situation in school (Bloem et al. 2023; Bossaert et al. 2013; Manrique Tisnés 2023; Wanders et al. 2020).

Regarding RQ2, teachers ascribe accountability mainly to the families of corresponding students. A low sense of educational responsibility is often attested. Only a few teachers contradict these deficit perceptions and emphasize that parents on welfare are interested in their children's education. Although similar results were found regarding preservice teachers' negative perspectives on welfare recipients in

general (Yendell et al. 2024), this study shows that practicing teachers formulate negative accountability and stereotypes primarily toward families on welfare and not the students. Only in the second step do most teachers justify poor educational expectations with their formulated accountability towards the family. This is why the relationship between teachers and families becomes more critical in this context (Budde 2023). The negative individualizing accountability could implicitly influence further teaching-related interactions, where the welfare receipt is not central but looms in the background (Budde et al. 2022; Weitkämper 2022). However, further research is required to determine such effects.

Another form of accountability is ascribed to the welfare state, which is often considered dysfunctional due to bureaucratic hurdles for example. Whether accountability is ascribed to families or the welfare state, the relation to students themselves is secondary. Both forms of accountability see either families or the welfare state as responsible for student success rather than teacher practices.

5.1 Limitations

We mainly reconstructed non-teaching-related interactions from the transcripts, although there were indications that teaching-related interactions might also be affected by students' welfare receipt (e.g., passage CS2_1M2 in Chap. 4.2.1.). This lack could be due to the choice of methods, as we had only indirect access to teaching-related interactions through the teachers' reports. Follow-up studies could address this limitation by directly observing teaching-related interactions. However, it should be noted that the direct influence of students' SES on those interactions could not be observed in previous observational studies (Ricken 2014; Weitkämper and Weidenfelder 2018).

Furthermore, we didn't focus on students' perceptions regarding the interactions. Instead, we intentionally focused on teachers' perspectives to understand if students' welfare receipt is perceptible and meaningful for them. Future studies should focus on students' perspectives on those interactions to comprehensively reconstruct the one-sided teacher-student interactions described in this study. The same applies to parents mentioned by teachers in RQ1 and RQ2.

In addition, we found that the teachers characterized interactions differently and ascribed different accountability to families. Due to the thematic analysis, our focus was not on what leads to these differences, so these should be the focus of follow-up studies (Barbour 2018).

5.2 Conclusion and implications

From the teachers' point of view, students' welfare receipt play a role in care-related teacher-student interactions in which school participation requirements meet familial welfare receipt (RQ1). Teachers take varying degrees of responsibility and see different needs for sensitivity depending on their perception of students' shame in these interactions. Teachers' (predominantly negative) accountability is mainly formulated toward families receiving welfare (RQ2). In the next step, most teachers

formulate negative educational expectations toward corresponding students, referring to their parents.

The results show the need for a sensitive and inclusive approach in welfare-related teacher-student interactions (Dietrich 2024; Juvonen et al. 2019). In addition, corresponding teachers should be made aware of their negative perspectives on families on welfare to minimize the possible influence on teaching-related interactions (Yendell et al. 2024).

Further welfare-related studies should focus on the perspectives of students and parents on the reconstructed interactions. It should also be investigated whether teachers' mostly negative accountability may (implicitly) impact teaching-related interactions.

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