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Social Inclusion, Emotional Inclusion and Academic Self-concept of Slovenian Students with Learning Disabilities

Abstract: Students' socio-emotional development (e.g. social inclusion, school well-being and academic self-concept) has gained increasing attention over the past decades. In line with this, the need for economical, reliable and valid instruments for assessing students' perceived inclusion in school has emerged. The present study examined the psychometric properties of the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* (PIQ) using its Slovenian translation. A total of 214 students participated in the survey using the Slovenian PIQ. Of the students, 147 were officially diagnosed as having a learning disability (LD), while the remaining 67 had a LD but were not given an official status. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the three-dimensional factor structure of the version of the PIQ for Slovenian students. In addition, a strong measurement invariance was observed for the students with and those without an official diagnosis of LD and for sex. The internal consistencies were acceptable but slightly low for the academic self-concept subscale. No group differences in social inclusion, emotional inclusion and academic self-concept were observed between the students with and those without an official diagnosis of LD.

Keywords: inclusive education, inclusion, social inclusion, emotional inclusion, academic self-concept, learning disability

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Introduction

One of the main goals of inclusive education worldwide is to provide learning opportunities to students with special educational needs (SENs) that would enable them to fulfil their potential to learn with their peers in regular schools (Forlin and Lian 2008; Pijl et al. 1997). Students with SENs should receive academic education not only in regular classes but also through social interactions that establish personal connections and relationships with their peers and by fully participating in school life (McLeskey and Waldron 2007). The implementation of inclusion in practice requires a curriculum, other educational adaptations and new teaching methods in schools which take into account the individual differences and needs of students while avoiding focusing on their deficiencies and inabilities. The practical implementation of inclusive education varies greatly in different European countries in terms of interpretation of the concepts and implementation strategies for inclusive education and the quality of these strategies (EADSNE 2012). Inclusive education is a key policy objective for children with SENs, but the question remains as to what degree schools are really adapting inclusive education.

In Slovenia, integration of children with SENs in the educational system is governed by the *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act* (2000). The term *inclusion* is not explicitly used in primary-school policies (Basic School Act 1996; Placement of Children with Special Needs Act 2000). Among the specific objectives in the larger field of educating children with SENs is an emphasis on equal opportunities for students with SENs to learn according to their individual capabilities. A companion objective to this is to provide opportunities for professional support consistent with the student's special needs and to use teaching methods that reflect the most effective contemporary methods and approaches (White Paper 2011). Within the Slovenian educational system, parents, teachers and professionals mostly perceive the term *inclusion* as the placement of children with SENs into regular schools together with their peers without SENs, with allocation of the professional support they require.

Inclusive education in Slovenia

Over the past 20 years, schools have gradually accepted the view that inclusion of students with SENs in educational programmes is beneficial. Academic and personal development can be enhanced when SENs are addressed in the teaching methodology and when individual differences among students are recognised (Schmidt et al. 2015). The Slovenian legislation (Placement of Children with Special Needs Act 2000) ensures formal recognition of SENs and guarantees that students with SENs receive additional professional support (APS) and the necessary adaptations within the educational process. The key components of quality implementation of inclusion include the immediate protagonists, that is, the teachers, school counsellors, school management, special educators and parents, to prepare and take responsibility for understanding, implementing and accepting the objectives of inclusive education (Resman 2003; Schmidt et al. 2015). Despite the problems and challenges in implementing inclusion due to the fact that not all the organisational and objective conditions have been met to ensure successful inclusion of children with SENs, we have made steps towards greater educational inclusion in schools (Schmidt and Vrhovnik 2015). An important factor contributing to the increase and empowerment of inclusion in the Slovenian education system is the development of mutual collaboration with experts from special schools to assist and support regular schools in implementing special aid and meeting the different needs of individual students (Štemberger and Riccarda Kiswarday 2018). However, some visible shifts towards enhancing quality in inclusion are worthy of mention, namely the participation of kindergartens, schools and special institutions in national and international projects. One of these projects is a developmental research project that provides considerable support to educational inclusion, which is the Network of Professional Institutions to Support Children with SEN and their Families. This extensive project has provided a professional connection between regular schools, kindergartens and special institutions across most Slovenian regions (Šoln Vrbinc et al. 2016). Many resources, materials and pieces of equipment for children with SENs and innovative teaching approaches have already been developed and applied. Moreover, different non-governmental associations (e.g. Down Syndrome Association and Association for Inclusion Culture) are now implementing the development and promotion of inclusion in Slovenia. They are actively involved in carrying out projects, workshops, education for parents and professionals, programs for social inclusion and other support activities. In addition, Slovenian faculties of education are offering study programmes on inclusive education and inclusive pedagogy for university students who need knowledge, skills and values in the field of inclusive education. Accordingly, everyday educational practice has witnessed increasing numbers of dedicated teachers and professionals who teach, treat and support students with SENs and their parents with trust and confidence and take a holistic view of the development of all students.

The current Slovenian legislation (Placement of Children with Special Needs Act 2007) classifies children with disabilities within the broader category of children with SENs. Over the last decade, the number of students with SENs in regular

schools has increased in Slovenia. Data from the European Agency for the Development of Education for Children with Special Needs, which includes 32 European countries, show that in the school year 2016–2017, only 1.78% of children who had been identified with SENs were educated in special institutions in Slovenia, and the percentage of children with SENs in regular classes was 5.72% (EASIE 2020). As in most countries, in Slovenia, students with learning disabilities (LDs) comprised the largest single category of students with SENs. The data for primary schools show that from the school years 2015–2016 through 2020–2021, the number of students diagnosed as having a LD was significantly higher than that of students diagnosed as having other types of SEN, namely those with LDs comprising 41.3% of all children with SENs (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2020). Students with more pronounced LDs are entitled to adaptations in the educational process and to APS as proposed by the Committee for the Placement Children with Special Needs (Opara 2015). When implemented, APS is any form of educational and/or special rehabilitation support for overcoming deficiencies, disorders or impairments and counselling support. Students with formal LD status are eligible to adaptations made to their education, such as temporal, spatial or methodological-didactic adaptations; adaptations to the way knowledge is examined and assessed; and adaptations to how they progress to a higher grade. All these adaptations allow for better access to knowledge and a more efficient demonstration of knowledge and skills. Individualised programmes represent an important tool for assisting students with LDs in education and ensuring access to regular classes and curricula. In Slovenian schools, a multi-level support concept called »A Concept of Work with Pupils with Learning Difficulties« (Magajna et al. 2008) is used for the treatment of students with mild and moderate LDs. The aim is to enhance academic skills and optimise learning opportunities in regular classes. The approach involves the introduction of a five-step hierarchical model that addresses support for academic competence. Teachers can initially provide less intensive learning support using individualised and differentiated approaches. When LDs worsen despite teacher support, school counselling services intervene. If the intervention also proves insufficient, support that involves experts for additional individual and group assistance is introduced. At all levels of support, professionals are obligated to assess and monitor the progress of skills, delays and impairments (Magajna et al. 2008). In everyday practice, it is evident that the number of students officially diagnosed as having a LD is higher than that of students who are not officially diagnosed as having a LD. Professionals from the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia revealed some reasons for this situation. The high number of students with LD status, as compared with that of students with other SENs, reflects the consistent implementation of inclusion and adaptations for these students in Slovenia. However, it shows that primary schools respect and implement the support needed for children with LDs but not sufficiently (National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia 2019). Experience from school practice testifies to the fact that the response of teachers to the SENs of children who have problems with learning is insufficient owing to their lack of expertise in working with SEN students. Students with LDs constitute a highly heterogeneous group comprising of children who exhibit developmental

delays in attention, memorisation, cognition, coordination, communication, social abilities and emotional maturation. Significant difficulties were observed in the acquisition and use of reading, writing, orthographic/spelling and mathematical abilities (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 2003). LDs are related to difficulties in acquiring academic competencies that cannot be explained by intellectual or other disabilities. LDs are often attributed to sociocultural and socio-economic deprivations and foreign language environments and sometimes attributed to poor teaching practices (Kavkler 2005; Magajna et al. 2008).

Social inclusion, emotional well-being and academic self-concept as central dimensions of inclusion

In implementing quality and effective inclusion in actual practice, in addition to teachers' perspectives, the opinions and educational experiences of LD students themselves must be considered. Students' own perspectives in general have received relatively little attention in special needs research (Schwab 2020); literature pertaining particularly to the self-perceptions of students with LD with respect to inclusion is lacking. Students with LDs represent the hidden voices. Giving students with LD opportunities to have a meaningful and influential voice at school should lead to improvement in teacher-student relationships, enhance their participation in school activities and contribute to a more positive academic and socio-emotional inclusion. Paying attention to the self-perceptions of students with LDs should also facilitate focus on good teaching practices in regular classes and preventing students from feeling excluded (Cefai and Cooper 2010). It might also help educators and researchers discover and understand the deficits and barriers in regular classes (Westlig Allodi 2002).

The proponents of full inclusion espouse the view that students with LDs can benefit socially and emotionally from more inclusive education placements owing to the opportunities to make friends with typically achieving students, to feel less stigmatised, to be better liked and accepted and have more positive self-perceptions. Furthermore, these students have more favourable learning opportunities and make greater gains in terms of academic achievement and self-concept measures in regular classes (Gartner and Lipsky 1987; Stainback and Stainback 1996).

International research on social and emotional inclusion conveys a mixed picture. Herein, we present the results of some international studies on how students with SENs/LDs perceived their own social and emotional inclusion as compared with students without SENs/LDs. One of these studies (Schwab et al. 2013) included 179 fifth graders (with and without SENs) from regular classes who made self-estimations of their social and emotional inclusion. The results showed that the students with SENs felt less socially included, but regarding emotional inclusion, they felt equally positively included as the students without SENs. The study by Krull et al. (2014) which focused on children's perspectives regarding their social and emotional situations showed that first graders with behaviour and learning difficulties

perceived less acceptance and felt less comfortable with the classroom climate as compared with their peers in regular classes. Similar results were presented in the study by McCoy and Banks (2012) where self-reports of 9-year-old students with LDs and other disabilities indicated that they had a significantly greater tendency not to like school than their peers. The analysis in this study also revealed that boys with SENs had a greater tendency not to like school than girls. In a more recent study (Skrzypiec et al. 2016), students with SENs (mean age, 13.7 years) were less likely to report feeling satisfied with school and to experience well-being and had lower resilience scores than students without SENs.

International studies have frequently examined the academic self-concept of students with LDs. Academic self-concept pertains to the degree to which students perceive themselves to be academically competent, motivated and able to meet the standards schools demand in terms of achievement. Some studies have maintained that despite their LD status, these students retain a positive self-concept regarding their academic skills. For example, in a study by Meltzer et al. (1998) that included fourth- through ninth-grade students, students with LDs considered themselves as using appropriate strategies in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, math and organisation and as being competent in those domains. However, other studies have found that children with LDs had lower self-concept with respect to their academic achievement. Harter et al. (1998), using the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents,* found that ninth- through 12th-grade students with LDs felt worse about their general intellectual ability than did typically achieving students. In a study by Gans et al. (2003), students with LDs (sixth, seventh and eighth graders) scored themselves significantly lower in the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale subscale of Intellectual and School Status and had a negative self-concept of their abilities and academic skills as compared with their peers without LDs. Similar studies (Cambra and Silvestre 2004; Kucuker and Tekinarslan 2015) indicated that compared with students without SENs, students with SENs in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades of primary school assessed themselves significantly lower in the academic concept scale. In line with this, a Slovenian study (Schmidt et al. 2014) showed that students with LDs from the seventh to the ninth grades of primary school expressed a lower academic (and social and general) self-concept than did their peers without LD. In the last decade, no research was conducted in Slovenia on the self-perception of social and emotional inclusion and academic self-perception of students with officially diagnosed LD in comparison with those without officially diagnosed LD who exhibit mild to moderate developmental delays, for whom schools are responsible and identification and assessment of needs from teachers, school counsellors and other professionals should be provided. Hence, the aim of the empirical part of the present paper was to obtain insight into the existence of possible differences between the two groups of students. The conceptual framework of the five-step model of support (from steps 1 to 5) enables early identification of students and defines learning assistance. It also adequately documents and evaluates students' progress and the efficacy of the support provided to them (Kavkler et al. 2015). However, urgent prevention of further deepening of LDs and learning failure is needed, while identification of students with deficits

in individual learning areas by the Committee for the Placement Children with Special Needs should not be excessive (Magajna et al. 2008).

With focus on inclusive education and the effectiveness of inclusion in several settings (e.g. special and regular classes), appropriate research instruments which can be used by students with and those without LDs are needed to examine students' voices within a large sample. Alongside academic outcomes and students' academic self-concept, students' school well-being and social inclusion can also be considered crucial key issues of inclusive education (Zurbriggen et al. 2019). Currently, only one screening instrument for these three key aspects, the Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (Venetz et al. 2015) is available and can be used free of charge in several language versions, including Slovenian. The questionnaire has demonstrated high psychometric quality for students with and those without LDs (Knickenberg et al. 2019). In the study by De Vries et al. (2018) which used the PIQ, students with SENs felt lower levels of emotional and social inclusion than their typically developing peers. These differences shrank dramatically between the sixth and seventh graders, and sex showed no significant effects on the PIQ subscales. Furthermore, the self-perceived level of academic self-concept of students in the sixth grade was confirmed to be lower than that of students without SENs; again, no significant sex-related difference was found.

Research questions

The aim of the present study was to collect the opinions of Slovenian LD students included in regular classes regarding their social inclusion, emotional inclusion and academic self-concept. For this purpose, the psychometric properties of the version of the PIQ for Slovenian students (PIQ-S-SLO) were examined. First, the possibility of confirming the hypothesised three-dimensional factor structure of the PIQ in the Slovenian version was investigated. Second, the reliability (internal consistency) of the PIQ was examined. Third, possible group differences between students with and those without an official diagnosis of LD and across the sexes were investigated.

1. Do students with and those without an officially diagnosed LD differ in their emotional school well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept?
2. Do girls and boys differ in their emotional school well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept?

Methods

Procedure

In the participant recruitment procedure, 12 primary schools in Slovenia were contacted by mail or phone. The research was conducted in spring in the school year 2018–2019. Permission was obtained from 7 primary schools (58.3% response

rate), which were then included in the research. Informed consent for the students with LDs to participate in the survey was obtained from their parents. The survey questionnaire was administered by school counsellors (special pedagogues) who had direct contact with students with LDs. The researcher visited all the primary schools included in the survey and provided the school counsellors with clear instructions regarding survey completion and student selection. All the participating students were informed that their participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary.

Sample

The sample of participants included 214 students with LDs from the fourth to the ninth grades of primary school (second and third triads of primary school). From these students, 147 were officially recognised (i.e. with official status) as having LDs, more precisely defined as students with deficits in individual learning areas, while 67 had LDs but were not given official status. Students with official LD status attended regular classes and were included in a programme with adapted implementation and APS. The students with LDs but were not given official status attended regular classes and were provided support in the framework of Concept of Work with Pupils with Learning Difficulties.

Measures

The students' self-perception of their emotional well-being in school and social inclusion in class and academic self-concept were assessed with the PIQ-S-SLO (Venetz et al. 2015). The PIQ is a reliable, valid and cost-effective instrument designed to capture the following three central dimensions of subjectively perceived inclusion in school: emotional well-being in school, social inclusion in class and the academic self-concept (e.g. »School is fun«, »I get along very well with my classmates« and »I do well in my schoolwork«). The instrument consists of 12 items and four items per subscale. It is generally recommended for students in the third to ninth grades of primary school. Each item is designed to elicit answers on a 4-point Likert scale. The Likert-type response categories are as follows: 1 = »not at all true«, 2 = »somewhat not true«, 3 = »somewhat true« and 4 = »certainly true«.

Several studies have confirmed the psychometric properties (e.g. factor structure and internal consistency of the three scales) for the German version of PIQ (DeVries et al. 2018; Schwab et al. 2020; Venetz et al. 2014; Venetz et al. 2019; Zurbriggen et al. 2019).

Analyses

Confirmatory factor analyses were performed using the statistical program M*plus* Version 8.4 (Muthén 1998–2017) by applying the weighted least square means

and variance (WLSMV) estimator to confirm the hypothesised three-dimensional factor structure of the PIQ-S-SLO. The chi-square statistics and goodness-of-fit indices, namely the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), were used to interpret the model fit, following the cutoff criteria for fit indices of Hu and Bentler (1999). Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω were calculated to evaluate reliability, that is, the internal consistency of the three scales. Group differences were investigated within the scope of multiple group analyses (Brown 2006). In this context, measurement invariance between the groups (configural, metric and scalar measurement invariances) was tested by considering the χ^2 and CFI difference tests (ΔCFI $\geq$ .01; Chen 2007).

Results

Factor structure of the PIQ-S-SLO and internal consistencies of the subscales

All twelve items of the PIQ-S-SLO showed significant factor loading within the corresponding subscales ($\lambda_{min}/\lambda_{max}$ = .348/.861). Even though the loading of item 12 proved to be small (l = .348), the fit indices still indicated that the three-dimensional factor of the hypotheses had an acceptable model fit (χ^2_{MLR} [51, N = 214] = 56.065, p = .291; CFI = .991, RMSEA = .022 [.000, .050], p_{RMSEA} = .949, SRMR = .046).[1] Moreover, the reliabilities for both emotional inclusion (α = .85, w = .890 [.871, .909]) and social inclusion (α = .75, w = .843 [.814, .872]) ranged from appropriate to high. The reliability was low (α = .60, w = .659 [.600, .719][2]) merely for the academic self-concept subscale.

Measurement invariance analyses

The results of the multiple-group comparisons confirmed the metric and scalar measurement invariances of the PIQ-S-SLO across the students with or without an official diagnosis of LD, as indicated by the non-significant c^2 difference test and marginal CFI differences of $\leq$.01 (Table 1). The same holds for the group comparison between the boys and girls (Table 2). The strong measurement invariance for the student version of the PIQ-SLO can thus be confirmed in our sample for both LD diagnosis and sex. Strong measurement invariance is crucial to ensure that constructs are measured in the same way across groups and to allow for unambiguous interpretation of mean differences.

[1] By removing item 12 from the analyses, the model fit changed only marginally (χ^2_{MLR} [41, N = 214] = 39.478, p = .538; CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000 [.000, .044], p_{RMSEA} = .977, SRMR = .035; $\lambda_{min}/\lambda_{max}$ = .410/.862); therefore, item 12 was excluded.

[2] Without item 12, w = .657 (.593, .721)

Model	MLRχ^2	df	p	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA [90% CI]	MLRχ^2	df	p
Without LD diagnosis (n = 67)	64.766	51	.093	.917	.074	.063 [.000, .106]			
With LD diagnosis (n = 147)	58.742	51	.213	.983	.057	.032 [.000, .064]			
Configural	123.264	102	.075	.966	.063	.044 [.000, .070]			
Metric	141.045	114	.044	.956	.102	.047 [.009, .071]	17.80	12	.122
Scalar	148.524	123	.048	.959	.106	.044 [.000, .068]	7.43	9	.593

Table 1: Fit indices of the multiple-group comparison between students with and those without an official diagnosis of learning difficulties (LDs)

Model	MLRχ^2	df	p	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA [90% CI]	DMLRχ^2	Δdf	p
Boys (n = 139)	50.422	51	.500	1.000	.056	.000 [.000, .053]			
Girls (n = 75)	66.742	51	.076	.928	.076	.063 [.000, .103]			
Configural	116.024	102	.162	.977	.064	.036 [.000, .064]			
Metric	126.061	114	.207	.980	.081	.031 [.000, .060]	10.05	12	.612
Scalar	133.380	123	.246	.983	.083	.028 [.000, .057]	7.26	9	.610

Table 2: Fit indices of the multiple-group comparison between boys and girls

Descriptive statistics, mean differences between groups and correlations

Table 3 shows that in the total sample and all the subgroups, the students perceived a relatively high level of social inclusion. While the emotional school well-being was rated as slightly positive (above the theoretical mean of the scale), the academic self-concept was rated as slightly negative. Furthermore, the results indicated that the students with and those without an officially diagnosed LD did not significantly differ in their emotional school well-being ($\beta = -0.151$, p = .333), social inclusion ($\beta = -0.073$, p = .637) and academic self-concept ($\beta = 0.237$, p = .183). In addition, no significant group differences were found between the boys and girls in terms of social inclusion ($\beta = -0.297$, p = .115) and academic self-concept ($\beta = -0.297$, p = .107). The girls, however, perceived a significantly higher level of emotional school well-being than the boys ($\beta = 0.351$, p = .018).

	Without LD diagnosis (n = 67)	With LD diagnosis (n = 147)	Boys (n = 139)	Girls (n = 75)	Total
Emotional well-being in school Mean (SD)	2.87 (0.80)	2.76 (0.84)	2.70 (0.85)	2.96 (0.75)	2.79 (0.83)
Social inclusion Mean (SD)	3.35 (0.49)	3.28 (0.63)	3.25 (0.61)	3.38 (0.56)	3.30 (0.59)
Academic self-concept Mean (SD)	2.24 (0.46)	2.33 (0.57)	2,34 (0.55)	2.22 (0.53)	2.30 (0.54)

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the students' emotional well-being in school, social inclusion in class and academic self-concept

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to collect the opinions of Slovenian students with and those without LD who were attending regular classes regarding their social inclusion, emotional inclusion and academic self-concept. As a first step, the psychometric qualities of the PIQ-S-SLO were investigated. As a follow-up, possible group differences between the students with and those without an official diagnosis of LD and between the sexes were examined.

With respect to the results regarding psychometric qualities, we generally confirmed that the PIQ-S-SLO is a reliable instrument for assessing students' social inclusion, emotional well-being in school and academic self-concept. The results of the present study also confirm the expected three-dimensional factor structure (Venetz et al. 2014; Zurbriggen et al. 2019). Moreover, as in the case of the version of the PIQ for German students (DeVries et al. 2018; Knickenberg et al. 2020; Zurbriggen et al. 2019), the instrument can be used both for students with and those without (diagnosed) LD. In addition, a strong measurement invariance was found between the boys and girls. Strong measurement invariance is crucial to ensure that constructs are measured in the same way across groups and to allow for unambiguous interpretation of mean differences.

While the reliability of the emotional well-being in school subscale was high and acceptable for social inclusion, that of the academic self-concept subscale was low. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed low factor loadings for item 12 (»Many things in school are too difficult for me«). However, when item 12 was removed from the analyses, the model fit changed only marginally. This indicates the possibility that students had difficulties with item 12 because it is worded in the negative form. Another possibility is that students do not automatically reveal their academic difficulties. Therefore, the item might need to be revised (e.g. »Many *learning assignments* in school are too difficult for me«). In the subsample of South African students (Hoffmann et al. 2019), this subscale also showed low internal consistency. According to the results of the studies of Knickenberg et al. (2020) and Alnahdi and Schwab (2020), the negatively worded items in the student version of the PIQ might be problematic.

Generally, the results of the study indicate that Slovenian students have a high level of social inclusion. This is consistent with the results of other studies (e.g. Knickenberg et al. 2020) that indicated that the social inclusion subscale was rated most positive from among the PIQ subscales. The high level of self-perceived social inclusion in this study is probably linked to the students' own feeling of belongingness and being highly appreciated by their peers in the inclusive classroom. In addition, emotional school well-being was rated rather positively. This reflects that students with LD generally feel comfortable with school life. A more detailed analysis of the study results even indicated that the girls rated their emotional inclusion significantly higher than the boys, which is confirmed also by some other studies (McCoy and Banks 2012). One explanation for this could be that girls with LD perceive emotional experiences more positively when participating in school activities and feel more satisfaction in everyday school life. As regards to the students' academic self-concept, however, those with (officially and not officially diagnosed) LD rated it lower, which is consistent with the results of several studies (Cambra and Silvestre 2004; Kucuker and Tekinarslan 2015; Schmidt et al. 2014). In the educational process, students with LD encounter difficulties with particular school subjects and are continuously confronted with high requirements and academic standards, resulting in their feeling of incompetence and poor performance. This finding from the present study is also supported by the results of the analysis of data from the national testing of knowledge at the end of the third educational period in primary school in Slovenia, which confirmed that students with SENs (the largest group of whom included students with LD) achieved lower learning outcomes than their peers. Moreover, in terms of acquired knowledge, the differences between the students with and those without SENs become greater as the students progressed to higher grades. This means that with every passing year, students with SENs increasingly lag behind their peers (State Examination Center 2019).

No significant group differences in all three PIQ subscales were found between the students with and those without an officially diagnosed LD. On the basis of these results, we could argue that the officially assigned forms of support (APS; five-step hierarchical model of LD) offered to students with LD to prevent and overcome impairments and remove barriers in learning lack efficiency and quality despite all the adaptations and additional support the students received (Vršnik Perše et al. 2016).

Generally, the opinions of students with LD in this study led to the assumption that educational needs were not addressed efficiently. It is important, however, to know that later, as students reach adolescence in higher grades of schooling in heterogeneous classes with different SEN students, the low academic self-concept of students with LDs may have a dramatic effect on emotional and social inclusion and the students' future lives (Bender 2008). To reach the next step to responsible inclusion and implement quality and effective APS while giving impetus to the five-step hierarchical model for students with LDs, primary schools should conduct flexible, reasonable and personalised adaptations which are carefully and concisely planned, implemented and constantly assessed (see Kavkler 2005; Kavkler et al. 2015; Schmidt et al. 2015). Alongside a clearly defined legislation, APS must be

systematically regulated and verified, as defined in the national study (Vršnik Perše et al. 2016). However, professionals (special educators, psychologists and pedagogues) and teachers must be well trained and provided with adequate skills and competencies to convey support and recommendations into inclusive practice and to truly respond appropriately to the needs of students already in their early stages of schooling. It remains vital to include student opinions when implementing and evaluating inclusion, as students are the key figures in the inclusion process (Westling Allodi 2002).

As the PIQ in the Slovenian language is available in three forms, namely for students, parents or primary caregivers, and teachers, additional comparisons can be made across different perspectives (e.g. students' vs. teachers' and/or parents' perceptions of inclusion) in future research (for the German version of the PIQ, see Schwab et al. 2020). For future practice, we recommend that schools take a closer look into students' social inclusion, emotional school well-being and especially into students' academic self-concept to ensure their positive academic and socio-emotional development.

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SOCIALNA IN EMOCIONALNA VKLJUČENOST TER AKADEMSKA SAMOPODOBA SLOVENSKIH UČENCEV Z UČNIMI TEŽAVAMI

Povzetek: V zadnjih desetletjih postaja socialno-emocionalni razvoj učencev (tj. socialna vključenost, dobro počutje v šoli in akademska samopodoba) vse pomembnejši. Za oceno zaznavanja vključenosti v šoli pri učencih potrebujemo ekonomične, zanesljive in veljavne instrumente. V okviru pričujoče študije smo v slovenščino prevedli *Vprašalnik o percepciji vključenosti* (PIQ) in raziskali njegove psihometrične lastnosti. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 214 učencev: 147 učencev s formalno opredelitvijo učenci z učnimi težavami (UT) in 67 učencev z UT, a brez formalne opredelitve. Rezultati konfirmatorne faktorske analize so potrdili tridimenzionalno strukturo vprašalnika PIQ za slovensko različico (PIQ-S-SLO). Ugotovili smo močno mersko invarianco, ki se je pokazala tako pri učencih s formalno opredelitvijo UT kot pri tistih brez formalne opredelitve UT in glede na spol. Notranja konsistentnost je bila sprejemljiva, vendar nekoliko nižja za lestvico akademska samopodoba. Med skupino učencev s formalno opredeljenimi UT in skupino učencev brez formalne opredelitve UT se niso pokazale razlike v socialni vključenosti, emocionalni vključenosti ter akademski samopodobi.

Ključne besede: inkluzivno izobraževanje, zaznavanje vključenosti, socialna vključenost, emocionalna vključenost ter akademska samopodoba, učenci z učnimi težavami

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