PREDICTORS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT SEN IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS

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Abstract: *Classroom placement alone cannot be seen as crucial factor influencing social participation of children in inclusive education. Social inclusion is mainly determined by other factors like social behavior and social competence. In the present study, social inclusion according to self and teacher perception is analyzed in a sample of 179 pupils from integration classes in Graz, Austria. Comparisons between pupils with and without special education needs (SEN) illustrate that pupils with special education needs (SEN) felt less socially integrated. This result was confirmed by the teacher rated status of popularity and the teacher rated status of exclusion, where pupils with SEN were rated less popular and more excluded than pupils without SEN. According to the results of this study, social inclusion is mainly determined by factors like social behavior and social competence. This suggests overall that the the lack of social integration of pupils with SEN is not caused by a stigmatization process, but it is caused by specific difficult social behavior of certain students with SEN.*

Keywords: *special education needs, inclusion, social behaviour, emotional integration, social inclusion;*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a clear international trend towards inclusion can be observed (Boban and Hinz, 2009; Bürli, 2009; Meijer, 2010). However, the integration rate, i.e., the proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream education, varies widely in European countries. In Austria for example this rate is about 51.2 % but there are large fluctuations between several federal states (Buchner et al., 2009; Feyerer, 2009). Due to the fact that Styria follows the one track approach (Feyerer, 2009), 77% of Styrian pupils with SEN are integrated in mainstream schooling (Statistik Austria, 2010). In Austria, the particular role and responsibility of parents have been emphasized in education acts granting them an essential role in deciding on the type of schooling their children will receive (Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2012). In contrast to other German-speaking countries, the choice between inclusive education in a regular school and education in a special school mainly depends on the parents' decision since 1993. This right to parental choice of schooling theoretically exists irrespective of available funding and independent of the pupil's special education needs. Most of the pupils with SEN in integrative settings in Austria have learning disabilities regarding one or more subjects (e.g. german or maths). This type of disability is similar to the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, WHO, 2001) category B, students with Learning Difficulties (WHO, 2001).

The aim of inclusion is not only placing all children in the same classes but also to ameliorate social participation of people with and without disabilities (Avramidis, 2010; Bossaert et al., 2011; Haeberlin et al., 1999; Huber, 2006; Rossmann et al., 2011). Class placement alone cannot be seen as crucial to assure inclusive education. Even though the positive impact of integration on school achievement of pupils with and without disabilities has been proved in several studies (Merz, 1982; Haeberlin et al., 1999; Myklebust, 2002; 2006; Tent et al.,

1991), the current state of research regarding social inclusion is more complex to outline. As the review by Bossaert et al. (2011) showed the linked concepts of social integration, social inclusion and social participation, which can be used as synonyms include several main issues: relationships, interactions, perception of the pupil with SEN and acceptance by classmates. Increasing the social interaction among children with SEN is one of the major aims of social inclusion. Although in integrative settings positive experiences with friendships between disabled and non-disabled children are made (Cole et al., 1988), children with SEN on average have fewer friends and are more often disapproved by their classmates in inclusive classes (Frostad and Pijl, 2007; Huber, 2008; Ochoa and Palmer, 1995; Pijl et al., 2008; Pijl and Frostad, 2010; Ruijs and Peetsma, 2009; Swanson and Malone, 1992) and felt lonelier than children without SEN (Pijl et al., 2010). All in all, research suggests that children with SEN are less accepted and more often segregated than children without SEN.

Many studies deal with the popularity of pupils with and without SEN, but these studies rarely control conspicuous social behaviour, especially aggressive behaviour (Rossmann et al., 2011). In German speaking countries, the question about which behavioral attributes lead to segregation from the peer group has been neglected so far (Huber, 2006; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2001). Nevertheless, clear evidence that this plays a prominent role can be found in the results by Mand (2007). In this study, children with emotional disorders were not liked and socially included, neither in special education classes nor in integrative classes. It is well known that popular children are more helpful and cooperative, whereas socially rejected children show significantly more aggression than the group of the socio-metric average children (Newcomb et al., 1993; Rubin et al., 1998; Gürtler, 2005; Hobi-Ragaz, 2008). Along these lines, Nabuzoka and Smith (1993) pointed out that the outsider status of children with learning disabilities especially results from withdrawn and little cooperative behaviour. Moreover, Huber (2006) summarizes for international studies (generally and for pupils with SEN) that social competence, social withdrawal, aggression and cognitive abilities are important factors for the social integration in school classes. For children with SEN, too, studies could verify that aggressive behaviour leads to social rejection (Gasteiger-Klicpera et. al., 2001; Haeberlin et al., 1999), whereas positive social behaviour correlates strongly with popularity (Haeberlin et al., 1999; Randoll, 1991).

According to Gasteiger-Klicpera (2003), children with SEN are more often victims of classmates' aggressive acts. However, popular pupils with learning disabilities applied more pro-social behaviour than less popular pupils with learning disabilities (Haeberlin et al., 1999; Randoll, 1991).

OBJECTIVES

According to the current state of research, students with SEN in inclusive classes rather fell less socially integrated, more often belong to the group of disliked students and often show challenging social behaviour.

1. The first question focuses on social integration and acceptance in student and teacher perception: Do children with SEN rate themselves less socially integrated than pupils without SEN? Are the teacher ratings about the popularity of children with SEN lower than those of children without SEN?
2. The second question deals with the interdependence of social behaviour and self-rated social inclusion. Which aspects of social behaviour are significant predictors for self-perceived social inclusion? Is the student's own social behaviour important or is it the social behaviour of the peers, which is connected to social inclusion? Do the teacher ratings about the student's own social behaviour, the social competence and the social behaviour of the peers play a significant role for the pupils self-estimated social inclusion or are the teachers ratings completely independent from pupils' self-estimated social inclusion? Is the labeling SEN itself independent from social inclusion?
3. The last question specifies the teacher rates of the social integration. Which factors play an important role for the teachers' estimations of social inclusion? Does the labeling SEN play an important role for the teachers? Can social behaviour or the lack of certain social competencies explain the lower social inclusion of children with SEN?

For the last two questions it is assumed that social inclusion is the result of many influences within the class and it is formed over a longer period. Therefore, they are examined using regression analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The data set for this study is taken from the first survey of the longitudinal study "Schulische Integration im Längsschnitt – KompetenzEntwicklung bei SchülerInnen mit und ohne SPF in der Sekundarstufe I – SILKE" (Academic integration in a longitudinal study – development of competencies in students with and without SEN in secondary schools). At the end of the academic year, students of eight integrative classes in the 5th grade were surveyed in terms of their academic performance, social behaviour, social competence and social integration. The tests were done with all students in integrative settings, including students with and without SEN. The testing was conducted during the first two periods of two consecutive school days. Depending on the class, the test took 70-100 minutes per day. When it deemed necessary, assistants supported SEN students on a one-on-one basis in reading and writing. In addition, two teachers for each class agreed to fill out a questionnaire about every student taking part in the study. The teachers were asked to complete the rating questionnaire together.

Sample

Students:

In the course of the study a total of 179 students (116 boys, 63 girls) from eight different classes in Graz were tested. The average number of students in a class was 22. In each class, four to six children with SEN were integrated. While the 95 male and the 49 female students without SEN were on average 11.52 years old (SD=0.74), the students with SEN (21 male and 14 female students) were slightly older with 11.84 years (SD=0.84). The majority of SEN students (28) were diagnosed with a learning disability, two students had Asperger Autism and five students were diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. 85.7% of the students with SEN were identified as students with learning disabilities (those pupils had serious problems with reading, writing or numeracy and needed more time to process new information; they are diagnosed with a developmental disorder of school achievement). 50.7% of the students without SEN were from Austria, the other 49.3% had a migration background. 60% of the students with SEN were not from Austria. It is important to mention that inclusion in Austria does not depend on the severity of the disability of the students but mainly on the school organization. There are regions where almost all students, also those with severe intellectual and multiple disabilities, learn in inclusive classes, whereas in other districts many students with learning disabilities learn in special classes. Inclusive education in Austria is essentially characterized by joint classes taught by a special needs teacher and a regular classroom teacher. The special needs teacher is mainly responsible for supporting the children with disabilities and ensures that special needs students are adequately served within the inclusive classroom.

Measures

Self-assessment

The student´s questionnaire consisted of Haeberlin´s, Moser´s, Bless´ and Klaghofer´s (1989) questionnaire to assess the dimensions of integration of students (FDI 4-6). Subscales from the questionnaire "Leben in der Klasse" (Live in the class – LiK) from Gasteiger-Klicpera (2001), too, were used.

- The FDI contains three scales. For the following study, only two of them, the scales social and emotional inclusion were used. Both scales comprise 15 items with satisfactory intern consistencies (α =.89/α =.93).
- Gasteiger-Klicpera´s questionnaire (2001) consisted of six scales with a five-point rating scale. The first part of the questionnaire deals with the student's own behaviour of students towards the classmates. The questionnaire was developed based on the Children's Self-Experience Questionnaire (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). The first part of the questionnaire refers to the classmates´ behaviour towards oneself and with four items, respectively,

requests direct aggression (e. g. "Some students start brawls. How often do you do that?" α =.79), indirect aggression (e. g. "Some students do not talk to their classmates, when they are angry. How often do you do that?" α =.71) and pro-social behaviour (e. g. "Some people tell others nice things. How often do you do that?" α =.82).

Peer assessments

The second part (peer rating) of the test measures with five items per scale direct victimization (e. g. "How often do classmates kick you or pull your hair?"; α =.77), indirect victimization (e. g. "How often are you excluded from games or joint adventures?"; α =.57) and pro-social behaviour of classmates (e. g. "How often does a classmate do something you are pleased about?"; α =.76).

Teacher assessments

The teacher´s questionnaire is composed of two parts. It has a similar format to the student´s questionnaire and requests the student´s behaviour towards his or her classmates. In this questionnaire, too, the scales direct aggressions" (3 items), "indirect aggressions" (2 items), "pro-social behaviour" (3 items), and "victimization" (3 items) are integrated. The intern consistency 'Cronbach´s alpha' ranges between .79 and .93 for the several subscales. In the second part, teachers´ rate their students´ social competence on the basis of the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire by Buhrmester et al. (1988). The scales "Emotional Support and Conflict Management" (6 items), "Getting to know and influencing others" (6 items) and "Confiding in others" all offer satisfying reliabilities (α =.89-.95; Gasteiger-Klicpera and Klicpera, 1999). In addition, teachers appraised the level of popularity (state of popularity) and social exclusion among classmates (state of exclusion) with one item each on a five-point rating scale.

Results

To analyze the differences between students with and without SEN in terms of social integration, a t-test was conducted. The t-test for independent samples showed that children with SEN felt significantly less socially integrated than students without SEN. Two more t-tests with the teacher rated state of popularity and the t-tests with the teacher rated state of exclusion confirmed these results. As perceived by the teachers, pupils with SEN are less popular and more excluded than children without SEN (table 1).

Table 1. *Means, standard deviation and t-statistics for student ratings (self-assessed) and teachers ratings (teacher-assessed)*

	Students without SEN M (SD)	**Students with SEN M (SD)**	**t (df)**
social integration (SA)	2.72 (0.70)	2.39 (0.71)	2.44* (161)
state of popularity (TA)	2.57 (1.12)	1.97 (0.97)	3.12* (56.59)
state of exclusion (TA)	0.75 (1.08)	1.30 (1.19)	-2.60* (171)

**p<.01, *p<.05;

Predictors of social inclusion

To examine the aspects that contribute to the forecast of social inclusion, three regression analyses were conducted. While the first regression aimed at predicting social inclusion with respect to the self-assessed (SA) data, the other two analyse the teacher ratings (TA) of the state of popularity and the state of exclusion. In three analyses the following predictors were included: the status of SEN (yes or no), the self-assessed social behavior (direct aggressive behaviour (SA), indirect aggressive behaviour (SA), prosocial behaviour (SA)), the peer-assessed social behavior (direct victimization (PA), indirect victimization (PA), prosocial behaviour of peers PA)), the teacher assessed social behavior of the pupils themselves (direct aggressive behaviour (TA), indirect aggressive behaviour (TA), prosocial behaviour (TA)) the teacher assessed social behavior of the peers (victimization (TA)) and also the teacher rated social competencies (Emotional Support and Conflict Management (TA), Getting to know and influencing others (TA), Confiding in others (TA)).

Predictors of self-assessed social inclusion

In the first regression analysis the criterion was the self-assessed social inclusion. The results show that the predictor variables can explain 39% of the

variance. In contrast to the student's own social behaviour, the social behaviour of classmates plays a significant role. The prosocial behaviour of classmates (from the student's own point of view) contributes with the highest beta-weight the strongest to the forecast. The more prosocial the classmates were rated by the students, the more socially integrated they felt. The less students were victimized the more socially integrated they felt. Also the teacher ratings of victimization contribute significantly. The more victimized they are (teacher assessed) the less pupils felt socially integrated. The status SEN itself does not contribute significantly to the prediction.

Predictors of teacher-rated status of popularity

A second regression analyses the teacher ratings of students' popularity (status of popularity) with the same predictors (linear regression with all predictors) was conducted. The teacher rated popularity could be predicted to 63 %. The prosocial behaviour (teacher assessed) played a decisive role with a beta-weight of .33. Pupils who showed more positive social behaviour from the teachers' point of view were assessed more popular than others. The less pupils were victimized (teacher assessed) the more they were popular. Furthermore, social competence plays a role. The more competent pupils are with regard to the scale "getting to know and influencing others (TA)" the more popular they are assessed. The pupils' own assessment or the assessment about their classmates did not contribute significantly to the prediction. Also the SEN-status had no significant influence on the teacher ratings of popularity.

Predictors of teacher-rated status of popularity

Finally, a third regression analysis was conducted to predict the teacher ratings of students' exclusion (status of exclusion). With regression analysis 52 % of the variance could be cleared up for the teachers' assessment with regard to the status of exclusion. Only the teachers' assessment of social

Table 2. *Regression analysis with the social integration (self-ratings) as criterion and the social behaviour (self-, peer- and teacher ratings) and the social competence as predictors;*

predictors	SEN	direct aggressive behaviour (SA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (SA)	prosocial behaviour (SA)	direct victimization (PA)	indirect victimization (PA)	prosocial behaviour of peers PA)	direct aggressive behaviour (TA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (TA)	prosocial behaviour (TA)	victimization (TA)	Emotional Support and Conflict Management(TA)	Getting to know and influencing others (TA)	Confiding in others (TA)
Beta	-.09	.03	-.01	.05	-.36**	-.00	.37**	.22	-.06	.06	-.22*	-.04	-.06	.01
R^2	.39													
$F_{(14; 121)}$	5.54**													

*p<.05; ** p < .01; SA = self-assessed, PA = peer- assessed, TA= teacher ratings;

Table 3. *Regression analysis with the status of popularity as criteria and the social behaviour (self-, peer- and teacher assed) and the social competencies as predicors*

predictors	SEN	direct aggressive behaviour (SA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (SA)	prosocial behaviour (SA)	direct victimization (PA)	indirect victimization (PA)	prosocial behaviour of peers PA)	direct aggressive behaviour (TA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (TA)	prosocial behaviour (TA)	victimization (TA)	Emotional Support and Conflict Management(TA)	Getting to know and influencing others (TA)	Confiding in others (TA)
Beta	.00	.04	-.04	.04	-.10	.00	.01	.06	-.03	.33**	-.29**	.00	.25*	.10
R^2	.63													
$F_{(14; 130)}$	15.54**													

*p<.05; ** p < .01; SA = self-assessed, PA = peer- assessed, TA= teacher ratings;

behaviour and social expertise were significant. The more pupils are victimized, the more excluded the teacher noticed them. Furthermore, indirect behaviour for exclusion plays a role. People who show less social expertise (getting to know and influencing others) were more excluded.

DISCUSSION

The first question analyzed in this study concerned the question whether pupils, with or without SEN are socially integrated. The results showed that students with SEN felt less socially integrated than their classmates without SEN. Pupils with SEN assessed themselves as less socially integrated than pupils without SEN. This result is in accordance with past research (Haeberlin et al., 1999; Huber, 2006; Klicpera and Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2003; Pijl and Frostad, 2010). Furthermore, teachers rated pupils with SEN as less popular and more excluded than those without SEN. A study by Huber (2008) showed that pupils with SEN's risk of being outsiders is three times higher than for pupils without SEN.

Nevertheless, the interrelation between social exclusion and SEN could be contaminated by confounding effects of the social behavior of the students with SEN. It is widely known that aggressive behavior is one of the strongest predictors of social exclusion (e.g. Haeberlin et al., 1999; Huber, 2006; Randoll, 1991). Therefore, it is important to analyse which components of social behavior and social competencies can be seen as significant predictors for self-perceived as well as teacher rated social inclusion.

Hence, three regression analyses were calculated; one to predict the social inclusion with respect to the self-assessed data, another one to predict the teachers' ratings of the pupils' status of popularity and a third one to examine the teachers' ratings of the pupils' status of exclusion.

Regarding the self-rated social inclusion, results showed that the student's own social behavior plays no significant role. The most important factor seems to be the perceived pro-social behavior by the peers (peer-assessed). The experience of direct victimization (peer-assessed) and the teacher rating of victimization are significant predictors for the students' perception of social inclusion.

As far as the teachers' foreign-assessment with regard to the teacher rated status of popularity is concerned only a part of the teacher rated variables are significant predictors. The own pro-social behavior (teacher rated), the victimization (teacher rated) and the social expertise (only the scale: getting to know and influencing others; teacher rated) played a significant role.

Concerning the teacher rated status of popularity and status of exclusion, it can be observed that the teacher assessed indirect aggression, victimization as well as the social competence (only the scale: getting to know and influencing others) are playing a significant role.

One variable, which did not play a significant role regarding social inclusion (in all three analyses), was the label of SEN; this suggests that the poor social integration of pupils with SEN is not

Table 4. *Regression analysis with the status of exclusion as criteria and the social behaviour (self-, peer- and teacher assed) and the social competencies as predictors;*

predictors	SEN	direct aggressive behaviour (SA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (SA)	prosocial behaviour (SA)	direct victimization (PA)	indirect victimization (PA)	prosocial behaviour of peers PA)	direct aggressive behaviour (TA)	indirect aggressive behaviour (TA)	prosocial behaviour (TA)	victimization (TA)	Emotional Support and Conflict Management(TA)	Getting to know and influencing others (TA)	Confiding in others (TA)
Beta	.10	-.07	.08	.04	.05	-.01	-.05	.05	.21*	-.00	.35**	-.04	-.22*	-.06
R^2	.52													
$F_{(14; 128)}$	9.83**													

*p<.05; ** p < .01; SA = self-assessed, PA = peer- assessed, TA= teacher ratings;

caused by a stigmatization process, but it is caused by specific difficult social behavior of certain students with SEN.

CONCLUSION

Regarding social integration, students with SEN show, at least, lower values. To sum up, the social behavior of students in integrative classes is very important for effective integration. These results suggest that in inclusive classes, the social behavior of all students should gain in importance. For that reason, didactical concepts should not only be controlled in terms of their school achievement, but also in relation to their social integration. For future research it will be necessary to accompany students in inclusive classes longitudinally to be able to observe their development in academic and social concerns (social behavior, social integration, emotional integration) and to conceive arrangements for efficient inclusive education. Good inclusive education includes many social learning interactions which focus on the participation of all pupils. One opportunity to improve social inclusion could be focusing on teacher feedback to the students. Huber (2011) has already shown that the opinion of the teachers (in his case the teacher sympathy for students) exerts effects on social inclusion. All involved partners in school and school administration are aware of this problem; however, it is often seen as a problem that can be neglected. In that respect, the evidence of this study provides an important contribution to the inclusive debate, which has taken place in Austria, as well, since the UN convention.

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