



Social dimensions of inclusion in education of 4th and 7th grade pupils in inclusive and regular classes: Outcomes from Austria



Susanne Schwab

University of Bielefeld, Faculty of Educational Science, Universitätsstraße 25, Q1-108, 33615 Bielefeld, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 December 2014
Received in revised form 29 May 2015
Accepted 14 June 2015
Available online

Keywords:

Inclusion
Special needs
Social participation
Friendships
Interactions
Peer acceptance and self-perception

ABSTRACT

Positive peer relationships play a significant role in the development of students. They are beneficial for learning and psychological outcomes. This article draws upon an important distinction between the four main themes of social participation (friendships, interactions, peer acceptance and self-perception of social participation) and examines these aspects in inclusive and regular classes. Especially, differences in social participation of students with and without special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive classes and between students without SEN in inclusive and regular classes are examined. In this study, data from 1115 pupils in primary and secondary schools in Austria were analysed, of which 129 were diagnosed as having SEN. The results showed that in inclusive classes, students with SEN had lower scores on all four subthemes of social participation (friendships, interactions, peer acceptance and self-perception of social integration) than students without SEN. Regarding students without SEN, friendships and peer acceptance were significantly higher in inclusive classes than in regular classes. Differences were neither found for gender, nor between primary and secondary school students.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Relationships with peers, also called horizontal relationships (Hartup, 1989), are highly important during school time and influence, for instance, achievement development (Bukowski & Adams, 2005). The influence of students' peer relations increases during the school years, e.g., regarding moral and behaviour (Parritz & Troy, 2013) and early school dropout (Frostad, Pijl, & Mjaavatn, 2015) whereas vertical relationships, e.g., with parents or teachers, are becoming less important. As social inclusion is one of the most important motives for inclusive education, especially the social participation of students with SEN has become the focus of research over the past decades.

Overall, the research literature shows that the social participation of students with special educational needs (SEN) is quite challenging. Next to the term social participation, the terms social inclusion and social integration are often used in a similar way. Koster, Nakken, Pijl, and van Houten (2009) tried to clarify these concepts in a literature review, including 62 articles focusing on the social dimension of inclusion in education. The authors identified social participation as the most suitable concept and showed that four key themes exist: friendships/relationships, interactions/contacts, acceptance by classmates and perception of the pupil with SEN (p. 117). While Koster et al. (2009) focused on studies including elementary

E-mail address: susanne.schwab@uni-bielefeld.de.

school pupils or pre-schoolers, [Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, and Petry \(2013\)](#) clarified the social dimension of inclusion in education in secondary school. They reported that fewer studies exist at the secondary school level (19), but their results coincided with those of [Koster et al. \(2009\)](#), presenting the same four main themes.

Regarding the main theme friendships, most research focused on children's best friendships and operationalised this using self-indicated best friend nominations or reciprocal nominations. [Vaquera and Kao \(2008, p. 56\)](#) stated that '*friendships that are reciprocated are likely to be more emotionally supportive as well as a superior resource compared to friendships that are not reciprocal*'. These best friendships are mostly restricted to the participant's three ([Jiang & Cillessen, 2005](#); [Mamas, 2012](#)) or five closest friends (e.g., [Pijl, Koster, Hannink, & Stratingh, 2011](#)). Regarding friendships, the literature shows that students with SEN have fewer friends in their class than their peers without SEN. For example, [Frostad, Mjaavatn, and Pijl \(2011\)](#) showed that in ninth grade about 10.9% of students without SEN and 13.6% of students with SEN had not one single reciprocal friend. [Schwab \(2015a\)](#) reported that about 6.3% of the students without SEN in fourth grade and 2.6% in seventh grade indicated to have no one to talk to in class, and that this percentage was much higher in the sample of students with SEN (17.1% for fourth graders and 16.5% for seventh graders). Furthermore, different types of friendships (e.g., regarding its quality or stability) have been distinguished (see, e.g., [Poulin & Chan, 2010](#)). Studies on this topic showed that the quality of friendships among students with SEN is equal or lower compared with those of students without SEN. [Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, and Petry \(2015\)](#) on the one hand showed that students with autism spectrum disorders reported less intimacy regarding their friendships than students without disabilities, but on the other hand, they did not find differences in students' perceptions of shared friendship quality between students with disabilities and their peers. Results from a study by [Locke, Ishijima, Kasari, and London \(2010\)](#) indicated that friendship quality is lower among students with disabilities than among their peers. With regard to the stability of friendships, [Frostad et al. \(2011\)](#) showed that students with SEN have fewer stable friendships than their peers.

The next main theme of social participation, social interactions, can be defined as verbal or non-verbal communication ([Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, & Kurkowski, 2007](#)). Interactions can be operationalised as the time spent together, the time working together on tasks, or as social isolation (see [Bossaert et al., 2013](#)). The literature clearly shows that students with SEN have fewer interactions with classmates than their non-disabled peers ([Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & van Houten, 2010](#); [Schwab, 2014](#)).

Regarding the third key issue, social acceptance by classmates, research mostly focused on social preference, social rejection, social support, and bullying ([Bossaert et al., 2013](#)). [Ruijs and Peetsma \(2009\)](#) concluded in their review that students with SEN have a less favourable social position than their peers. [Pijl and Frostad \(2010\)](#), too, showed that students with SEN are less accepted by their peers. Furthermore, [Humphrey and Symes \(2010\)](#) showed that students with SEN report more often that they are the victim of bullying and [Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, and Gasteiger-Klicpera \(2015\)](#) showed that students with SEN are more often victimised.

The literature seems fairly clear about the first three key themes of social participation, but much less is known about the fourth, how pupils with SEN are perceived by their peers. Focusing on feelings of loneliness, it is quite clear that students with SEN report more loneliness (e.g., [Bossaert et al., 2012](#); [Schwab, 2015a](#)). Concentrating on the self-perceptions of social integration, it can be concluded that students with SEN rate it lower than students without SEN ([Schwab, 2014](#)) or equally high (e.g., [Koster et al., 2010](#); [Schwab, 2014](#)).

2. Research questions

Although Austria started including students with SEN in regular classes about 20 years ago¹ and a trend towards more inclusive education can be observed, it is quite unclear if this means that students with SEN are also socially included in their classes. Previous research mostly focused on students self-perceptions of social participation (e.g. [Schwab et al., 2015](#)) within small samples. Furthermore, little is known about possible differences in the social participation of Austrian students in inclusive classes compared to those in regular classes. Research findings from other countries cannot be directly transferred to the Austrian situation, because SEN is often defined very differently, the labelling processes are dissimilar and, additionally, the percentage of students with SEN included varies widely (e.g., [EADSNE, 2012](#)). Nevertheless, taking into account the results from the international literature, the following hypothesis are posed:

1. Students with SEN have fewer friendships in their class than students without SEN;
2. Students with SEN have fewer interactions with classmates than students without SEN;
3. Students with SEN are less socially accepted than students without SEN;
4. Students with SEN generally feel socially integrated and rate their social integration as high as students without SEN.

Additionally, it could be assumed that teachers in inclusive classes show a stronger focus on creating an inclusive social climate in their class, as well as on fostering good peer relationships. Therefore, it could be assumed that students in inclusive classes show a greater social participation than students in regular classes (which comprise students without SEN only).

Finally, gender will also be controlled for in the analyses to avoid an effect of this variable on peer acceptance and friendships (c.f., [De Boer, Pijl, Post, & Minnaert, 2013](#)).

¹ In 1993 the law for inclusion in primary school was introduced followed by secondary school in 1996.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6848553>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6848553>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)