THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSES IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

One of the main challenges of the modern school is the implementation of comprehensive education. Knowing that students are different among themselves, and have different personalities, traits, and even special needs, it is very important to know how to manage this diversity within the classroom and accept all students without distinction. The factors that affect the academic achievements of students are numerous and it is impossible to control them, therefore through this research, we aimed to ascertain the correlation of one of these factors, in this case, social acceptability with the academic achievements of students. Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between social acceptability and academic achievements of elementary school students in Kosovo.

The sample was random, while according to the nature of the research, it is judgmental or intentional, which was chosen without probability. The sample includes 4 schools in two municipalities of Kosovo, Istog and Mitrovica.

The results of the research showed that there are different social relations in terms of social acceptability among the students of a class. Starting from popular students, rejected students, neglected students, and opposed students. These social relations among students affect the students' performance. There is also a reciprocal relationship between social acceptability and academic achievement, i.e. with an increase in social acceptability, the level of academic achievement of students increases and vice versa, with a decrease in the level of social acceptability, the level of academic achievement also decreases.

Keywords: social acceptability, academic achievement, students with special needs, teachers.

1. Introduction

The connection between social acceptance and academic achievement is a very important topic in inclusive classrooms. Academic achievement is the general term for performance in the various intellectual areas learned in school, college, and university. Among other things, academic achievement shows the level of intellectual education of a person, a group, or an entire nation (Spinath, 2012). Academic achievements are necessarily influenced by various factors, therefore social acceptability is one of them. Acceptance is not a topic that is only occasionally discussed in the classroom, but it is an everyday value, it is an important characteristic of who we are, and it is a core value. (Brown & Steinberg, 1990). Social acceptance is vital to student development. Rejection by classmates can result in negative socio-emotional and academic outcomes. Finding the relevant factors to be able to effectively support students' social acceptance is particularly challenging in inclusive classrooms due to the high heterogeneity of the student group. (Ariana Garrote1, 2020) Social acceptability among students is influenced by teacher-student relationships (Hubber, 2011). Social acceptance among peers is significantly and positively related to academic achievement (Wentzel, Jablansky, & Scalise, 2021). Based on this, the main purpose of this research is to identify the relationship that exists between social acceptability and academic achievement among students in inclusive classes in Kosovo.

Research questions
What are the relationships between students in terms of social acceptability?
What is the relationship between academic achievement and social acceptability of students in inclusive classes in Kosovo?
Hypotheses
H1. There are different social relationships among students in terms of social acceptability.
H2. There is a positive correlation between academic achievement and the social acceptability of students in inclusive classes in Kosovo.

1. Literature review

Social acceptance and academic achievement

Acceptance is not just a topic that is discussed from time to time in class, it is an everyday value, it is an important characteristic of who we are, and it is a core value. (Brown & Steinberg, 1990). Acceptance of others and learning to accept children begins in the family because as a parent it is the most influential human being in a child's life (Brown N., 2013). According to Schëab, Huber, and Gebhart (2015), there is a significant influence between teacher-student interactions on students' social acceptance, and improving teacher-student interactions can lead to greater acceptance of students by their peers. their class. Also according to Huber (2011), social acceptability among students is influenced by teacher-student relationships. According to Richardson (2011), Diversity in the classroom should be considered an asset; variety is the spice of life! Students need to understand that all people are equal, can learn, and deserve an equal opportunity to learn. In summary, we understand that warm, encouraging, and supportive educational experiences are thought to constitute the basic conditions for the development of a positive self-esteem that reflects the acceptance of yourself as you are (Alves-Martins, Peixoto, Gouveia, & Pereira, 2010). Research shows that acceptance level and self-esteem are moderately related. Students with disabilities who are not accepted by their peers in regular classes are at risk of developing low self-esteem. It is assumed that this does not apply to students with moderate to severe learning disabilities because they are unable to fully understand their level of acceptance by typical peers. Therefore, they do not experience negative feelings associated with an eventual position of isolation and are less likely to develop low self-esteem (Pijl & Frostad, 2014, p. 94).
The research (Eguavoen, 2016) has found correlations of variables even among students with visual impairments, which means that their self-esteem is affected by the way society interacts with them and vice versa, thus also affecting their academic achievements. (Guay, Marsh & Bolvin, 2003; Mucherah, 2010) as cited (Eguavoen, 2016) has documented a significant relationship between variables such as academic achievement and school acceptance.
Regarding this topic, various research has been done in Kosovo with a focus on children with special needs. According to (Doli-Blyta, 2018) children with special needs are helped by their peers when they encounter difficulties in solving a task, they sit with each other without hesitation and create friendships together. Also, the study by Blerta Perolli-Shehu (2019) has revealed that positive relationships with classmates have increased engagement in school activities, motivation, and positive attitudes toward school. She also concluded that acceptance among classmates and friendships enables easier involvement in school, adjustment, and higher results in academic achievement.

2. Methodology

The research method is quantitative because to test the hypotheses, quantitative data is required where the correlation between two or more variables is measured. For data collection was used the approach with first-hand data, which were obtained from primary sources to identify the students' attitudes regarding their social acceptability. The research design is non-experimental correlational. We say non-experimental because it does not involve the manipulation of independent variables, like social acceptability. We say correlative because it focuses on statistical relationships between two variables, in this case, academic achievement and social acceptability.

The instrument with which the data was collected is the questionnaire (taken from: https://ashleyraerichardson.wordpress.com/2011/10/16/promoting-equity-and-social-acceptance-in-the-classroom/ (Richardson, A. R., 2021)), and the sociogram from (Doli-Blyta, 2018).

The sample is random because the number of contacts with the participants is only once, and according to the nature of the research, it is judgmental or intentional, where the schools from the municipalities of Istog and Mitrovica will be selected. The sample includes a total of 122 students, because taking as an average the number of students in a class which can be 30, then two classes in each of the two schools form the sample for the questionnaires, while for the sociogram the sample includes a total of 60 students in 2 schools in the municipality of Mitrovica. Data collection is done in physical form. The questionnaires were completed in 4 schools, in 2 schools in the municipality of Mitrovica and 2 schools in the municipality of Istog with a total of 122 students. The sociogram was part of these questionnaires, but it was only carried out in the municipality of Mitrovica. The data analysis for the questions of social acceptability and academic success was done through the SPSS program, while for the social relations among the students, it was done through Walsh's Classroom Sociometrics.

3. Results

The results of the research show that both of the raised research hypotheses have been proven. From the sociogram data analysis, we answered the research question "What are the relationships between students in terms of social acceptability?"

According to two sociometric analyses in schools X and Y, we can see different social relations among the students of a class. Starting from popular students, rejected students, neglected students, and opposed students. According to the analysis of the data, some students were not chosen by their friends at all, these students are considered rejected or isolated, but fortunately, it is not a large number of students. Rejected children may be particularly unrealistic in their self-esteem and have unrealistic views of the number of friends in their peer group (Schaffer, 1996). These social relations according to the analysis of the questionnaire data were seen to affect the performance of the students. Worrying is the fact that there is a division between girls and boys in the class because they have made choices only within the same gender, rejecting the opposite gender to play among themselves, but in rare cases, we also come across names of the opposite gender. This according to Changa (2004) occurs in classes where both sexes show a different range of behavior and number of students. In addition, according to the data analysis, we understand that in the class there are students who have created small groups or cliques consisting of 3 students who have mutually chosen each other. There are so-called "class stars" students who have been selected many times in the sociogram, and there is a considerable number of them. Important and worrying is the fact that it is the same students who have been chosen several times in the negative nominations. Opposed or neglected students are students with learning difficulties, students with special needs as well as students from the RAE (Rome-Ashkali-Egypt) communities.

In the next research question "What is the correlation between academic achievement and social acceptability of students of inclusive classes in Kosovo?", the data in Table 1 show that there is a low and significant positive correlation between the level of social acceptability and academic success of students.

Table 1. The relationship between the level of social acceptability and academic achievement

		Academic achievement
	Spearman Correlation	186*
Social acceptance	Sig (2-tailed)	.042
	N	120

Research shows that acceptance level and self-esteem are moderately related (Pijl & Frostad, 2014). With the increase in social acceptability, the level of academic achievements of students increases and vice versa, as well as with the decrease in the level of social acceptability, the level of academic achievements also decreases. Similarly, according to French (2003) among elementary school children, children with friends tend to perform academically at higher levels than their peers without friends. This is also confirmed by the statement "Bullying from classmates does not affect my results in lessons", less than half of the students, 44.5% of students reported that bullying does not affect their results in lessons, while more than 50% reported that bullying affects their results in lessons. Also in the statement "Harassment by classmates prevents me from studying", only 27.7% of students reported that harassment does not affect them at all, while 73.3% of students reported one of the affirmative forms, thus showing that harassment from friends, i.e. social unacceptability hinders them in lessons, consequently it also affects their academic achievements, thus proving the third hypothesis. If we make a connection with the data of the sociogram, the rejected or neglected students have an unstable emotional state and the opposite happens for the popular students. This is proven by various international studies. Peer acceptance has been positively associated with socially competent behaviors and academic achievement and negatively with loneliness and social anxiety (Bowker, Adams, Fredstrom, & Gilman, 2014). According to the research conducted by Chang (2004), it was found that emotional regulation is also related to children's social skills, and that their social competence makes them better in lessons. Peer pressure on so-called "head" students to set the standards that a good student should have, has negatively affected those who are less successful by making them look bad in front of society (Brown & Stainberg, 1990).

4. Discussions and conclusions

The summary of conclusions refers to the research questions guiding this study. From the analysis, comparison, and discussion of the data we can come to the following conclusions:
The level of social acceptability of students coming from the countryside is higher than that of students coming from the city.
Students in elementary schools in Kosovo mainly have an average level of social acceptability M=2.7, while the average grade for academic success is M=4.4 (Very good).
There are different social ratios in terms of social acceptability among the students of a class. Starting from popular students, rejected students, neglected students, and opposed students.
Opposed or neglected students are mainly students with learning difficulties, students with special needs as well as students from the RAE (Rome-Ashkali-Egypt) communities.
Social relationships among students are influenced by teacher-student attitudes and relationships.

Social relationships among students affect their performance.

As with the increase in social acceptability, the level of academic achievements of students also increases, and conversely, with the decrease in the level of social acceptability, the level of academic achievements also decreases.

5. Recommendation

The scientific contribution of this study is the identification of social relationships among students and the connection between social acceptability and academic achievements. The findings of the research will serve to improve the current situation in schools by giving recommendations.

Parents must deeply instill education in their children's culture and help them from early childhood to socialize and interact with other children.

Teachers must create a positive environment in the classroom so that students feel accepted and valued for their individuality and interact with each other without differences. They should also use different teaching methods, techniques, and forms that promote inclusiveness and social acceptance within the classroom.

Teachers should also use the sociogram to see the relationships between students and find the reasons for these relationships to break the barriers that students have created among themselves.

The community should create a family counseling center to support parents in developing parenting skills so that they can better understand their children's needs, recognize the child's emotional state, and know how to approach them. , how to manage their expectations towards the child, and how to deal with the child's disappointment when he/she has not reached the set goal.

The Ministry of Education should take concrete steps regarding the training of teachers to create a more positive, happy environment, where students come willingly and feel an inseparable part of the class, namely the school.

6. Limitations of the study

Research carried out depending on the angle of view or depending on the reader, obviously needs changes. What I changed is to increase the number of the sample and the inclusive schools so that the sample represents the study population as well as possible and the resulting data can be generalized to all elementary school students in Kosovo. Also, the measurement of the variable for academic success (average grade) reported by the students themselves cannot be taken for granted because we are dealing with subjectivity and they may not have been real.

7. Practical implications from the study

The scientific contribution of this study is the identification of social relationships among students, social acceptability and self-esteem levels of students within the classroom, as well as the relationships these variables have with academic achievements. The findings of the research will serve to improve the current situation in schools by giving recommendations.

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