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**Perceptions of inclusion in upper secondary schools'  
students in the province of Vicenza: a study through  
the Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire.**

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### **Abstract**

Perceptions of inclusion is a relatively young research field, which has been widely investigated by scholars in the last decade. It is widely known that Italian education policies are conducting a great effort to ensure each student to feel included. However, students happen to not feel involved at different levels. This research investigates perceptions of inclusion in two different types of Italian high school, a technical and vocational agricultural institute, and a linguistic lyceum. In fact, this study aims to investigate whether the type of school, biological gender, and presence special educational needs impact on students' perception of inclusion. Various previous European studies (DeVries et al., 2018; Trygger, M., 2019; Kyttälä, M. et al., 2023) confirm the validity of a specific tool to investigate this aspect, the Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ; Venetz, Zurbriggen, Schwab, Eckhart, & Hessels, 2015). For this research, the student version (PIQ-S) of this questionnaire has been employed to investigate emotional well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept of high school students. The sample (N=111) consists of students belonging to a linguistic lyceum (n=45) and to a technical and vocational agricultural institute (n=66), all the students involved attended the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (*1° anno di scuola secondaria di secondo grado*). The results of the study partially confirmed expectations. The school in which students perceive themselves as more included is the Linguistic Lyceum, mainly for what concerns emotional well-being and academic self-concept. However, students attending the Agricultural Institute feel more included at a social level. Students with special educational needs appeared to feel generally less included than other students but with higher scores than expected. Opposed to expectations, females generally feel less included than males, even though they achieved slightly higher scores in the emotional well-being and the academic self-concept spheres.

**Keywords:** Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ) , Inclusive Education, Italian School System, Students' Perspective, Special Educational Needs (SEN)

## **I. Introduction**

Inclusion research field has been thriving in the last decades in many countries. In fact, European policies concerning education are more and more evolving with attention to inclusive practices. However, there is the necessity to evaluate the effects of such policies on students' perceptions of inclusion. Indeed, Italian research field on education still displays the necessity to implement empiric research on students' opinion on how they perceive inclusion. Previous research conducted with the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* (PIQ; Venetz, Zurbriggen, Schwab, Eckhart, & Hessels, 2015) has obtained data in some European and worldwide countries. Indeed, this instrument appeared to be valid and suitable for assessment of students' emotional well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept. At the moment, no data were retrieved in Italy with such instrument. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide an overview of students' perceptions of inclusion in the Italian province of Vicenza. Moreover, one of the objectives of the present study is to promote the use of the PIQ instrument in order to allow teachers to exploit it to conduct action research. The overview of Italian situation in terms of students' perceptions of inclusion will be addressed by considering two types of institutes present in Italian education system. Moreover, differences among male and female students will be addressed along with differences according to the presence of special educational needs. The present chapter will be structured as follows. First of all, some introductory premises were made. In the next paragraphs, a little background to the study will be displayed. Next, research aims and research problems will be briefly introduced. Then, significance and potential limitations of the study will be briefly anticipated. Finally, the overall structure of the dissertation will be displayed.

First of all, a brief mention of the background of this study is necessary. In fact, Italian education system is peculiar to this country only. Indeed, Italy was the first country to recognise the importance of 'integration' in the school context and it has been internationally recognised as a milestone (Canevaro et al., 2009; D'Alessio, 2018). However, even nowadays, many weaknesses emerge in the Italian school system, especially concerning inclusion of students with special educational needs. Moreover, it has been debated that Italian pedagogical tradition lacks in empirical research (Ianes et al., 2013). In that sense, research related to outcomes of inclusion on students' psycho-social wellness, academic results and social participation has not been investigated, especially concerning students with special educational needs (Canevaro et

al., 2009; Ianes et al., 2020). Indeed, to measure similar constructs, the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* was redacted (PIQ; Venetz, Zurbriggen, Schwab, Eckhart, & Hessels, 2015). In fact, this brief questionnaire has been employed in several studies to evaluate scales concerning the three spheres of inclusion – emotional well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept. Indeed, it has been validated in different languages in many previous studies. For instance, it has already been validated in languages such as German (De Vries et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2018; Knickenberg et al., 2022), Swedish (Trygger, 2019; De Vries et al. 2022), French (Guillemot, 2022), Finnish (Kyttälä et al., 2023), Spanish (Pozas et al., 2023) and Arabic (Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021).

As it possible to notice, Italian research utilizing the PIQ instrument is still missing. In fact, the questionnaire has not been validated in Italian studies before. Moreover, scholars attested a lack of empirical research in the Italian field (Ianes et al., 2013). Indeed, despite the strong pedagogical tradition, Italian research field still needs to implement empirical research and promote evidence-based interventions. Furthermore, previous research highlighted the growing necessity to consider students' opinions and perceptions on how they live in the school environment (Ianes et al., 2017; Schwab et al. 2018). Summing the just mentioned instances, it is possible to individuate a gap in the literature. In fact, Italian research field apparently lacks empiric research investigating students' perceptions of inclusion through the PIQ instrument. Consequently, the present study aims at assessing students' perceptions of inclusion in the Italian school context. Of course , an overall panoramic on students' perceptions of inclusion in the Italian schools might be helpful in making a point of the situation concerning efficacy of European inclusive policies and teaching practices.

The aim of the present study is to retrieve data concerning Italian perceptions of inclusion. This aim will be pursued by supplying information on perceptions of inclusion based on the school type, gender and presence of special educational needs. Indeed, two different types of school will be involved in the study – a Linguistic Lyceum and a Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute both set in the province of Vicenza. Specifically, students belonging to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade will be considered in the study. The first objective of the study is to compare results of these two institutes in order to assess perceptions of inclusion in the two kinds of school. Moreover, previous studies involving the PIQ instrument considered variables such as gender and presence of special educational needs. Indeed, the second objective of the present study is to assess perception of inclusion in male and female students. Finally, the third objective of the present

study is to assess perceptions of inclusion of students with special educational needs to verify whether they perceive higher or lower levels of inclusion compared to other students. Indeed, these objectives should achieve the main aim of the present research. In addition, a second aim of the present research is to promote the PIQ instrument to implement action research in schools. Indeed, this could be a suitable instrument to evaluate perceptions of inclusion in order to improve and have feedback from students concerning teaching practices. This latter aim leads to the possible practical applications of the present study.

The present research contributes to the present research field in supplying missing data concerning Italy on perceptions of inclusion. In fact, no previous study was carried out with the PIQ instrument before in Italian language. By presenting this study, hopefully the use of PIQ in Italian research field will be implemented also by future research. For instance, validation of the Italian linguistic version might be carried out in the future. Moreover, the present study aims at promoting the use of this instrument in action research in schools. In fact, previous international research attested its suitability as a monitoring instrument. Indeed, it proved to be an economical and user-friendly tool as all the instructions for the use are carefully suggested the PIQ's website. These characteristics might permit its diffusion as monitoring tool in schools in order to improve teaching methods in relation to perceptions of inclusion.

Indeed, the present study might encounter some limitations. First of all, it is necessary to point out that the questionnaire has not been validated yet in its Italian linguistic version. Indeed, it is not the objective of the present study. However, it might be a recommendation for future research. Moreover, sampling issues might emerge due to feasibility constraints of the study. In fact, it is possible that the administration of the questionnaire might have limitations concerning the time and space granted by schools. Further issues that might emerge could be related to the sample, as participation will be voluntary. Indeed, this will allow students to remain anonymous and be sincere in their answers. Moreover, the study only entails one quantitative instrument - the PIQ - which might lead to simplistic results. However, it is necessary to consider that the study needs to be feasible and the time implied for administration of both quantitative and qualitative instruments is time subtracted to school schedule. For this reason the administration of a simple questionnaire might appear as the best choice in terms of time constraints. Moreover, the study involved only schools situated in the province of Vicenza. This might represent a limitation since results might not be generalizable to the whole Italian territory. Of course, these possible limitations will be considered in the discussion of results.



In this last paragraph, a short summary of the structure of the present study will be displayed. The present chapter briefly introduced the study by making some premises about previous research, briefly indicating the problem and research aims, and presenting few possible limitations that the study might encounter. The second chapter will resume the state of the arts in order to present the foundations of the present research. For instance, it will address a brief panoramic of the Italian school system and how it works, followed by inclusion in Italian school context. Moreover, it will present issues concerning special educational needs in the Italian school context along with previous research conducted with the PIQ. The third chapter will address the study itself. It will outline the objectives of the present research and describe the sample. Indeed, the same chapter will closely describe the instrument and report the method of analysis of the data. The fourth chapter concerns the analysis of the data. It will provide results by presenting tables of overall results and specific results related to the different variables involved. For instance, it will report results according to the three spheres of inclusion investigated by the questionnaire and provide scale scores. The fifth chapter will present the discussion of results. Indeed, this chapter will start with discussing general results in relation to previous research conducted with the PIQ. In addition, it will discuss the results according to school type, gender, and presence of special educational needs. Finally, the last chapter will conclude the present research by summarising results in relation to the research questions. Furthermore, implications, limitations and recommendations for further research will be displayed.

## **II. State of the art**

The following chapter will display an overview of previous studies that have been conducted in recent years on the topics related to this research. First, the Italian school system will be briefly introduced. This first part aims to make few clarifications, since it is a peculiar school system which is unique to Italy only. Then, a deepening on inclusion in Italian school system will be displayed. This part includes both some history of inclusion and the current legislation present in Italy. The following section will present few research on special educational needs in Italian schools and the relative issues. Finally, previous research on the Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ; Venetz, Zurbriggen, Schwab, Eckhart, & Hessels, 2015) will be resumed to display how the tool was validated in similar European and worldwide studies. This section is necessary to highlight the gap in the research that this study aims to address.

### **2.1 Italian school system and statistics**

Italian education system (from now on, IES) differs from many other countries. It adheres to European guidelines, recommendations and projects, but it also has its own peculiarities. For the sake of this study, it is necessary to make a brief summary of how its structured and how it functions.

IES entails both mandatory and non-mandatory education, which can be undertaken both in public and private schools. This research will address only public schools, which are managed by the Italian state and follows the guidelines of the Ministry of education, university and research (MIUR). IES begins with infant school which is non-mandatory, and it is divided into kindergarten (0 to 3 years-old) and preschool (3 to 6 y.o.). After that, the actual three cycles of education begin. The first cycle of education in Italy is compulsory and it consists in primary or elementary school (6 to 11 y.o.) and lower secondary school (11 to 14 y.o.). The second cycle of education is only compulsory until the age of 16, then students can decide whether to continue their education process or not (MIUR, 2018).

Italy offers two different paths which a student can undertake for what concerns the second education cycle: upper secondary education (14 to 19 y.o.) and the regional vocational training. Upper secondary school consists in three types of schools: general lyceums (*liceo*), technical (*istituto tecnico*) and vocational (*istituto professionale*). On the other hand, regional vocational training (*IFP*) consists of three to four years of professional training. Finally, the tertiary cycle

is non-mandatory and may consist in universities or equivalent institutions. At the end of each education cycle, students need to successfully pass a final exam to be allowed to have access to the next cycle. (European Commission, 2023a)

The present research focusses on upper secondary schools, both a linguistic lyceum and a technical-vocational institute. For this reason, it might be helpful to describe their categorization and to look at some recent statistics on student's preferences.

Generally, lyceums implement many compulsory hours of the so called 'cultural areas', such as science, languages, mathematics, history and social studies. The distribution of these hours can vary depending on the specific lyceum, as their aim is mainly to prepare students for the tertiary education cycle (European Commission, 2023b). They are divided into these main specializing areas: classical studies, languages, sciences, music and dance, arts and human sciences. However, these hours are fewer in technical and vocational institutes, where they are compensated by specific knowledge based on their branch of specialization. In fact, technical formation regards economics and technological sectors. On the other hand, vocational institutes can offer service sector and industries and crafts formation. In the case of technical institutes, there is the addition of technical specific subjects and in professional institutes there is the implementation of many practical hours (European Commission, 2023b).

The enrollment to Italian public schools is monitored each year by both MIUR and ISTAT, the Italian national institute for statistics. The Italian data published by MIUR (2022) regarding scholastic years 2022-2023 maintain the same trend of the last decade, with subtle changes. In fact, 56.6% of students choose to continue their learning process in a lyceum. On the other hand, technical and vocational schools enrolled respectively 30.7% and 12.7% of students. Each Italian region has different percentages. It is noticeable that the Veneto region obtained the highest national scores regarding enrollment in technical institutes, accordingly, 38.3% and 14% for vocational institutes. In opposition to 47.7% of students who choose lyceums.

The distribution of students with certified SEN has noticeably increased in Italy during recent years, especially because of a general increment of certifications. In a report by ISTAT (2022), the percentage of students with disabilities in upper secondary schools in Italy is around 3.1%. Excluding ones with disabilities, other students with special educational needs represent 10.2% of the students in upper secondary schools. The distribution of students with SEN appears to be lower in lyceums, where they reach a mean 5% of the total of students. However, their

enrollment rate is considerably higher in vocational and arts institutes where the percentage is respectively 17.5 % and 16.6%.

Further data is provided by the Ministry of Instruction and Merit (2022) regarding biological gender and distribution in school year 2021-22 among lyceums, vocational and technical institutes. The data highlight that 53% of the students in lyceums are female. The highest rate of female students in lyceums is in the linguistic branch, where their number is almost four times that of males. However, there's a prevalence of males both in technical and vocational institutes. Technical institutes obtained about 85 thousand male students and 19 thousand females. On the other hand, vocational institutes enrolled about 43 thousand male students and 31 thousand females.

## **2.2 Inclusion in the Italian education system**

Both the term and the concept of inclusion have been introduced relatively recently in IES. In fact, the first time this term was included in the pedagogical debate was during the '90s. Before that decade, European and Italian policies evolved from a perspective of 'integration' to one of 'inclusion'. As stated by Canevaro (2009, p. 417), "history of people with special needs has also passed, and still passes, through words"<sup>1</sup>. In fact, these terms had often been mistaken for synonyms because of their common use, but their meanings entails different semantics. In fact, 'integration' recalls the concept of adaptation, as a subject needs to adapt to a certain system in a context of necessity. On the other hand, 'inclusion' has a wider meaning, as it involves equality between the system and the individual in a structural manner (Canevaro, 2009; Dell'Isola, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the term 'inclusion' has been introduced relatively recently in Italian education policies. However, the concept of 'integration' in Italian schools (*integrazione scolastica*) has a longer history and it is internationally recognized as a milestone (Canevaro et al., 2009; D'Alessio, 2018). In fact, the strong pedagogical tradition in Italy has had a relevant impact on debate about integration, for instance, great contribution was given by pedagogues such as Montessori, Don Milani and Canevaro (Zanazzi, 2018, p. 73-74).

The path of integration in Italian schools started during the 1960s. Before that decade the approach towards children with disabilities was mainly a medical approach. It was common

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<sup>1</sup> Canevaro (2009, p. 417). Original in Italian: "La storia delle persone con bisogni speciali è anche passata, e passa, attraverso le parole."

belief that children with disabilities or intellectual deficits could better learn in classes composed of individuals with the same characteristics. For that reason, children with deficits were sent to special schools (*scuole speciali*) or differential classes accordingly (Cottini, 2018, p. 30). A small step towards integration was brought by the Law 118/1971, as it allowed students with mild disabilities to attend mainstream classes in schools by request of their parents. However, special schools and differential classes were maintained for students with severe disabilities (MIUR, 2009, p. 6; Zanazzi, 2018, p.66).

The clear turning point on Italian legislation happened with the Law 517/1977 which comported the abolition of special schools and differential classes. This law guaranteed students with disabilities to attend compulsory education in mainstream classes (MIUR, 2009, p.6 ; D’Alessio, 2014; Cottini, 2018, p. 32). But since there was a need to involve the different aspects of students’ lives in policies, the Framework Law 104/1992 was redacted. It concerned the assistance, integration and rights of people with disabilities, and it involved different aspects of their life. In fact, Italian government declared its commitment to abolish invalidating conditions which could possibly prevent people with disabilities to grow both in a social and an educational environment (MIUR, 2009, p. 6). Specifically, one of the themes treated by this law is school integration. It states that desires, ambitions and - most of all - the potential of the person should be considered, other than disability. In that sense, the family of the subject is more involved in the projecting of the dynamic-functional profile (*profilo dinamico-funzionale*; PDF) and the redaction of an individual educative plan, also known as IEP (*piano educativo individualizzato*; PEI) (Cottini, 2018, p.34). Contextually, the same law granted medically certified pupils to obtain assistance of a support teacher, which collaborated with regular teachers for a determined number of hours depending on the disability (Ianes, et al., 2020). Later, a further document published by the government, the Guidelines for school integration of pupils with disability (2009), strengthened Italian government’s vow of commitment towards integration in schools (Zanazzi, 2018, p. 68). However, as suggested by Ianes, Demo, & Dell’Anna (2020, p. 251), “the way entitlement and provision were designed was strongly rooted in an individual-medical model of disability that still remains visible”.

A closer step towards inclusion was made with the introduction of the concept of special educational needs, and the recognition of learning impairments and “cultural disadvantages”. Learning impairments, in Italian *disturbi specifici dell’apprendimento* or DSA, such as

dyscalculia, dyslexia, dysorthography and dysgraphia were finally recognized by Law 170/2010. By doing so, a voice was given to a wide population of students which were possibly encountering difficulties in their educational career (Cottini, 2018, p. 42). In 2013, socio-economic or “cultural disadvantage” due to language issues was recognized. Finally, among disabilities, these two new categories of disadvantage in learning were gathered as ‘special educational needs’ (SEN), in Italian, *bisogni educativi speciali* or BES (D’Alessio, 2014 p. 228; Zanazzi, 2018, p. 69). In addition, all the students with SEN are granted an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). In this manner, “the concept of inclusion is expanded to include not only students with disabilities and functional disorders but also those facing difficulties due to differences resulting from their linguistic, cultural or social conditions” (Galkienė & Monkevičienė, 2021, p.4).

However, it has been widely debated that this legislation may produce the opposite effect instead of producing inclusion. As Ianes, Demo, & Dell’Anna (2020, p. 253) affirm, it “is likely to produce social labeling and stigmatization of some pupils”. In fact, researchers suggest that the concept of ‘special needs’ might be regarded as a sign of inequality, which risks widening the gap between deviations and norm. Consequently, it is widely agreed among scholars that inclusive educational practices should involve not only persons with disabilities but everybody regardless their different characteristics otherwise they might create stigmatization (D’Alessio, 2014; Galkienė & Monkevičienė, 2021, p.5-8). Indeed, the debate over *full inclusion* and SEN is still vivid and different perspectives about these two interpretations of inclusive education are present in Europe (Canevaro et al., 2009; D’Alessio et al., 2014). As previously mentioned, the SEN perspective adopted by Italy and some other European countries consists in the integration of students with SEN to the mainstream class with all the supports and aids needed (UNESCO, 2009). However, the newer full inclusion perspective comports a structural change towards a school which is accessible to everyone, with or without SEN (D’Alessio et al., 2014, p. 12; Cottini, 2018, p. 81). In this context, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education published a position paper in 2022, in which supports European Union statement of priorities. It confirms what had been stated in the previous edition (2015) and claimed that “education systems must aim towards the provision of opportunities for *all* learners to fully participate and learn” (2022, p. 5). This provides a wider perspective on inclusive education which ideally entails all the students with or without disabilities, acknowledging diversity of each learner (Galkienė & Monkevičienė, 2021).

However, when these policies and documents need to be applied in a practical context the situation is more complicated and some critical aspects emerge (D'Alessio, 2014; Schwab et al., 2018). In fact, as stated by Hornby (2015), the full inclusion policy is almost impossible to achieve completely since it cannot not actually guarantee the success of each student in practice. Even though empirical research has evidenced that the presence of students with disabilities in Italian schools seem to have led to some positive developments for all students in terms of teaching methods, social and emotional inclusion of students with SEN is still difficult to implement on a daily basis. In fact, Italian policies on integration are not fully applied in schools (Ianes et al., 2014). In the following chapter, the diverse issues detected by empirical research on SEN will be resumed.

### **2.3 Research on Special Educational Needs in Italy**

As previously mentioned, pedagogical debate on integration has a long history and inclusion is a relatively young concept. However, as Ianes, Zambotti & Demo (2013; p. 58) affirm “Italian pedagogical culture has no tradition of empirical research, and it is only very recently that evidence-based interventions have begun to be discussed”. Italian scholars highlighted a lack of research on the outcomes of integration and inclusion on psycho-social wellness of person with disabilities, and on academic results and social participation (Canevaro et al., 2009; Ianes et al., 2020). In fact, a document issued by the MIUR (2009, p. 14) states that both socialization and academic learning should be promoted in class. However, only some educational practices have highlighted benefits in terms of inclusion of students.

One of the most common educational practices in Italian schools which regards students with SEN is ‘push and pull out’. It consists in the separation of students with SEN from the rest of the class to spend some hours alone with their support teacher. Indeed, this practice has some positive developments in terms of academic success of the pupils as it allows teachers to work individually on their program. However, it has negative consequences in terms of social inclusion of pupils in the class social context and can create the previously mentioned labelling issues (Ianes et al., 2013). An empirical study conducted by Ianes, Demo & Zambotti in 2014 investigated how much time students with disabilities spent in and outside the classroom. The data were collected in northern, central and southern Italy to better represent the territory and the sample entailed students which belonged to all grades. It revealed that 39.5% of students with disabilities spend all their time in class, 54.9% of them adheres to partial participation and

the remaining 5.7% are always with the support teacher outside the class. Of these percentages, the majority of the pupils which attend lessons inside the classroom has mild disabilities. On the contrary, the majority of those who are always out of the classroom are students with severe disabilities. The same study also retrieved data about social interactions of students with disabilities with their classmates. The 44.2% of students with disabilities declared to have good relationships with all their classmates and the 36.6% just with several of them. However, the 16% stated that they had a good relationship just with few classmates and the residue 3.6% with none of them. This study highlights the impact that different types of integration approaches can have on social relationships of students. In fact, basing on the results of the study, Ianes et al. (2014, p. 644) claims that “there is an association between the full participation integration group and more positive results for levels of social interaction for the students with disabilities”.

Another research by Battisti et al. (2015) reports that time alone with the support teacher can have good results in academic terms. However, it can implement a process of exclusion of the student with SEN. In fact, the study reports data from ISTAT regarding primary and lower secondary schools, sustaining that the majority of students with SEN in those schools stayed in class the majority of the time. Moreover, the time spent outside the class increased from primary to lower secondary schools. The pattern of progressive increase of time spent outside the classroom from primary to secondary schools has been detected by previous research too. In fact, some studies found evidence that in many instances the support teacher takes responsibility for the individualized lesson planning of students with SEN, even though Italian legislation would also entail main teachers to share this responsibility (Ianes et al., 2014; Battisti et al. 2015). On this regard, Cottini (2018) claims that the link between students with disabilities and the figure of the support teacher could comport “delegation mechanisms, lacking responsibility of the curricular teaching staff with frequent and not always justified pull-outs from class<sup>2</sup>”.

The charging of support teachers with all the responsibilities regarding students’ learning processes, brings light to another common issue that concerns their teaching role. In fact, a continuous learning path with students with SEN is not always guaranteed. This is due to the fact that these professional figures are often employed with fixed-term contracts which lead them to change classes and schools yearly. In this manner, students with SEN or disabilities risk

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<sup>2</sup> Cottini (2018, p. 124). Original in Italian: “[...] meccanismi di delega, deresponsabilizzazione del resto del corpo docente curricolare con frequenti, e non sempre giustificate, uscite dalla classe.”



to start each year a new learning path with a different support teacher and as consequence continuity and stability are compromised (Canevaro, 2007). In addition, being a support teacher is mistakenly considered as a second-choice role, as for decades many of them at the first occasion shifted to curricular teaching. Of course, this implied that former support teachers were more prepared to implement inclusive education than other curricular teachers (Cottini, 2018). In this regard, ISTAT (2022) reports that the offer of specialized figures as support teachers is improving in school year 2021-2022, as the number of support teachers in public schools was about 200 thousand. The positive aspect of these data is that for each support teacher there is 1.5 student with SEN, when law prescribes at least one support teacher every 2 students. However, there is also a negative side of these data. In fact, 32% of support teachers are non-specialized figures, selected just to compensate the lack of professionals. Therefore, not only these figures are employed with fixed-term contracts but also too many times they are not even prepared to handle SEN scenarios. This compensation phenomenon is more common in northern Italy, where the un-specialized teachers rate is 42%, almost the double compared to southern Italy. Another negative statistic report consists in the fact that the assignation of support teachers happens very late each year. In fact, one month before the beginning of school, there is still 14% of support teachers still unassigned (in northern Italy the mean percentage reaches 17%). These problematics are still affecting the education of many students with SEN, and researchers have found a possible solution in teacher formation (Cottini, 2018). However, not only the students with SEN are involved in these issues but also their families often express their dissatisfaction about the management of support.

In this regard, a whole branch of research on inclusion investigates satisfaction with inclusive educational practices, both from teachers and families' perspectives. For instance, a study conducted by Ianes et al. (2013) investigates teachers and parents levels of satisfaction regarding inclusive education in schools, considering both students with disabilities and learning disabilities. This research reported that 27.2% of teachers are 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfied with learning management of students with learning disabilities and 14.7% is not satisfied with those with disabilities. The data are more reassuring in terms of teachers' dissatisfaction with socialization processes, which scored 13.6% for students with learning disabilities and 17% for those with disabilities. Another relevant data detected in this research is dissatisfaction of families of students with learning disabilities. In fact, parents of students

with learning disabilities are more disappointed than those with disabilities in terms of school effort for inclusion.

Another study conducted by Zanobini et al. (2018) highlights the different variables impacting on parent satisfaction of inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The study was conducted considering a large sample of participants representing different types of disabilities and all school levels. This research reported that parental satisfaction regarding classmates' acceptance visibly decreases from preschool and primary schools to secondary schools. The researchers hypothesized that this result could be due to the guiding role of teachers in primary schools in the promotion of social and emotional skills in all the pupils. These results were confirmed also by another study conducted by Schwab et al. (2018) which investigated perception of inclusion among school grades. Indeed, researchers suggest that promotion of social interaction should be implemented as well in secondary schools (Zanobini et al., 2018).

This section reported some statistics, resumed research on SEN, and pointed out issues that still concern management of inclusion in schools nowadays. Italian research in terms of integration and inclusion has been thriving in recent years, but there is still a lack regarding the empirical effects of inclusion. As previously seen, there is some research about satisfaction of inclusive education especially regarding teachers' perspective but there is way less research regarding students' opinions and perceptions (Ianes et al., 2017; Schwab et al. 2018). Ianes et al. (2017) conducted a study which considered the discrepancy of perception of integration in students and teachers. The sample was composed of volunteers from classes of primary and lower secondary schools, each of them included at least one student with SEN or disabilities. The data were collected through a paper questionnaire and were compared with an observation. Indeed, the study detected that the perception of integration was different from students' and teachers' perspective. For instance, socialization outcomes of students with SEN were perceived differently. In fact, in both primary and upper secondary schools, teachers assessed socialization higher than students. Moreover, "the majority of the students indicated that some students left the classroom, while the majority of the teachers stated the opposite" (Ianes et al., 2017, p. 308). The sample of this study was limited and non-generalizable, but triangulation highlighted how the perspective can be more or less close to reality depending on one's perception. In this regard, the author suggests that discrepancy might be due to the fact that students actually spend more time in class social environment than teachers. Moreover, it is suggested that teachers may have biased perspectives because of the consideration they have

for their work, and students might not feel completely free to express their opinions. These remarks about this study allows researchers to explore new instruments that allow for a deeper investigation of students' opinions. One of the latest validated instruments to collect instances of perceptions of inclusion is the Perceptions of inclusion questionnaire (PIQ; Venetz, Zurbriggen, Schwab, Eckhart, & Hessels, 2015).

#### **2.4 Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire: history and research**

Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ<sup>3</sup>) is an instrument developed by Venetz, M., Zurbriggen, C. L. A., Eckhart, M., Schwab, S., & Hessels, M. G. P. in 2015. It is a shortened version of the previous German Questionnaire for Assessing Dimensions of Integration of Students (FDI) by Haeberlin, Moser, Bless and Klaghofer (1989). Specifically, the PIQ investigates three main spheres of inclusion: emotional well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept. It is composed by three parts that can be administered to different stakeholders: students (PIQ-S), teachers (PIQ-T) and parents or caregivers (PIQ-P). These instruments can be employed both singularly and combined altogether to obtain a multiple perspective. Moreover, the PIQ has been translated in 25 languages. These different linguistic versions are freely available on the website to teachers and researchers, in order to allow and promote international use for comparison.

In fact, several recent studies have been employing this questionnaire in order to assess perceptions of inclusion in different countries and considering different variables. Moreover, the questionnaire has been statistically validated in different languages, for instance German (De Vries et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2018; Knickenberg et al., 2022), Swedish (Trygger, 2019; De Vries et al. 2022), French (Guillemot, 2022), Finnish (Kyttälä et al., 2023), Spanish (Pozas et al., 2023) and Arabic (Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021). All these linguistic versions of the PIQ confirmed its adherence to high psychometric standards, however the Italian version of the questionnaire has not been validated in other studies before. It is reasonable to suppose that the Italian version of the questionnaire will have high psychometric properties too, however more research is needed to assess its validity.

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<sup>3</sup> For further information visit the website: <https://piqinfo.ch/>

In this section, previous research conducted using PIQ as tool will be displayed. The first studies available were carried out by the designers of the questionnaire themselves. These reports aimed at the assessment of the structure of the PIQ using confirmatory factor analysis and evaluation of the construct validity. This process was conducted by analyzing correlations between variables that aim to measure the same construct and detect convergence to prove validity. The first validation was conducted by Venetz et al. (2014) during the process of creation of the questionnaire. The sample exploited for the validation consisted of N=782 Swiss students belonging to different grades. Further evidence for PIQ's validity was conducted by DeVries et al. (2018) with the support of the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; Goodman et al., 1998), a tool which assess for individual personal qualities. The self-report version of the German PIQ was used, the PIQ-S, and its results were compared to SDQ's ones to detect discrepancies. In this case, the sample consisted of N=407 students belonging to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade of which N=48 with SEN. Grade, gender and presence of SEN were considered for the factor analysis and in research questions. The study confirmed that the PIQ-S and its structure owns good fit metrics, and that it is valid for comparisons considering gender, grade and presence of SEN. The results of the PIQ-S displayed that students with SEN scored generally lower than those without SEN in all sub-categories (academic self-concept, social inclusion and emotional inclusion). Moreover, females scored higher than males in social and emotional inclusion, but they scored lower in academic self-concept where males obtained higher scores. Another study that exploited the German version of the PIQ-S, is the one conducted by Schwab et al. (2018). The aim of this research was to assess psychometric qualities of the Inclusion Climate Scale (ICS) with the support of the PIQ-S as a means of comparison. The study included N=699 German students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, of which 52,8% were male and N=92 had SEN. The general results of this study supported previous research in stating that female students perceived slightly more positively inclusion climate. However, in this study there were no significant differences of perception of inclusion climate among students with and without SEN. In addition, students with SEN or linguistic difficulties might have encountered struggles with negatively worded items. Moreover, results appeared to be significantly higher in lower grades. In fact, perceptions of inclusion appeared to decrease through school grades. The first research with PIQ including a Scandinavian sample was carried out by Trygger (2019) and it aimed at the validation of the Swedish version of the PIQ-S. The sample consisted of N=195 pupils from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to the 8<sup>th</sup> and the distribution among gender was very even.

This study entailed both diagnosed and suspected SEN. This data about suspected presence of SEN was retrieved through a non-compulsory additional part and highlighted that 41.5% of the sample belonged to SEN or suspected SEN categories. The results of this study displayed that gender does not affect perception of inclusion in any of the sub-categories investigated (academic self-concept, social inclusion and emotional inclusion). These results slightly differ from previous studies. On the other hand, the presence of SEN had a significant impact on all the sub-categories. In fact, students with SEN scored lower than those without, meaning that students with SEN perceive themselves as less included under different aspects. Moreover, statistical validation of the Swedish PIQ-S obtained the expected results as factor structure analyses were similar to previous versions. The previously mentioned study was a dissertation which was later officially published with some deepening by De Vries et al. (2022).

In 2021, the first and the only study comparing two different countries was published by Alnahdi & Schwab. It compared results obtained by German speaking students and Saudi Arabian students. Here, the novelty is that culture and presence of SEN were considered in this study. The results demonstrated a major perception of inclusion in Saudi Arabian students. However, these results must be read considering that Saudi Arabia has a different school system in which classes are divided by gender. Students with SEN appeared to have lower scores in academic self-concept, compared to students without SEN. In this case too, both German and Saudi Arabian students obtained generally high scores, which means above the 2.5 midpoint threshold.

Another study conducted by Guillemot & Hessels (2022) aimed at the validation of the PIQ-S in French language. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of N=288 students from one school in Loire Atlantique aged 9 to 12, 46.5% were girls and 53.5% were boys. 6.6% of the sample was considered to have SEN based on internal school evaluations but only 1% was formally recognized by national laws. The PIQ-S was integrated by the administration of different other questionnaires such as MMLS (Scott et al., 2012), SPPC (Harter, 1982) and other questions related to peer acceptance and perception of bullying. Indeed, this allowed for both factorial validation and convergence validity, and a test re-test reliability was conducted too with positive results. The means obtained by the three sections of the PIQ were generally high (M=3.17, 3.38, 2.94) and were in line with previous German validation studies. Findings confirmed that there is little difference in answers by gender and students with SEN have lower academic self-concept than others. Differently to previous studies, students with SEN did not

have significantly lower scores for emotional inclusion. However, social inclusion of students with and without SEN were reported to be similar.

The same year, a study conducted by Knickenberg et al. (2022) validated the German version of the PIQ-S on a sample of Austrian students belonging to primary and secondary schools. The sample of primary schools consisted of N=721 students belonging to inclusive schools in the fourth grade, 50.5% of them were male and there were at least 10 students with attested SEN. The secondary school sample consisted in N=393 students from the seventh grade, 49.1% males and 8.4% of students had diagnosed SEN (N=34). The research attested validity of the questionnaire and its adherence to high psychometric standards. The reliability indices of academic self-concept and social inclusion appeared to not be acceptable for questionnaires administered to primary school students. However, reliability was acceptable in secondary school students' questionnaires. The general means of scores by seventh graders are emotional well-being M=2.66, social inclusion M=3.49 and academic self-concept M=2.92. The results of the study for what concerns seventh graders detected higher values of emotional inclusion scored by females. On the other hand, seventh grade males obtained higher scores in academic self-concept, but no differences were detected among girls and boys concerning social inclusion. The study also confirmed that emotional well-being decreases throughout the years. The PIQ-S received attention also overseas, where Pozas et al. (2023) recently administered the questionnaire to Spanish-speaking Mexican students. The sample consisted in N= 673 students from lower secondary schools, of which 52% were females. In this case, researchers retrieved the data both in special schools and in inclusive environments to compare results. As in previous studies, gender and presence of SEN were considered too. PIQ results were compared to the Spanish version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1999) and with Quit scale by Pijl et al. (2014). The means which were obtained for the PIQ were generally high, specifically, M=3.10 for emotional well-being, M= 3.16 for social inclusion and M=2.89 for academic self-concept. Moreover, opposed to expectations, boys obtained significantly higher scores than girls both in social inclusion and academic self-concept. Regarding students with SEN, the results displayed lower means in emotional well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept. The difference between data retrieved in special schools and those retrieved in inclusive classrooms demonstrate that there is only a little difference in the academic self-concept section, which as expected was lower in inclusive environments. Once again, the PIQ proved to be an economical and valid tool.

Finally, the last research was redacted by Kyttälä et al. (2023), and aims at the validation of the Finnish version of the PIQ-S. The data were collected on a sample composed of N=469 students from grade 6 to 9 (aged 13-16), of which N=276 were females (60.1%). The study considers grades and the type of support, as it divides the sample in general support and special support - as in Finland each student has the right to have school support. The study displays high means, especially regarding students with general support (M=3.12, 3.52, 3.17) if compared to those with special support (M=3.14, 3.26, 2.87). As expected, students with intensified support scored lower in social inclusion and academic self-concept sections.

Concluding, it is possible to extract some common results from previous research. For instance, difference in perceptions of inclusion among gender variates from none to females having higher social and emotional inclusion scores, and males having higher academic self-concept. Regarding students with SEN, it is possible to notice that various research detected lower scores obtained by students with SEN. However, these common findings are in conflict with some other studies which detected small differences among students with and without SEN (Guillemot & Hessels, 2022). The only common point is that students with SEN in inclusive environments obtained lower scores in academic self-concept in all comparisons to students without SEN. Indeed, all these studies highlight the necessity to investigate students' opinions in order to promote inclusiveness and create a comfortable climate in the classroom.

### **III. The study**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

The aim of the present study is to supply data regarding students' perceptions of inclusion in the Italian school system and to detect eventual discrepancies with previous research conducted in other states. In fact, a chance of improvement in European and worldwide school systems could be provided by international comparisons of empirical data. Former international studies suggest the necessity to consider students' opinions about how they live and how they feel in the school environment. However, it is still necessary to retrieve more empirical data regarding students' perspectives especially in the Italian context. As previously mentioned, IES has a long history regarding integration. In particular, the Italian inclusive school system presents different reasons for pride and many difficulties at the same time. In that sense, a second objective of this research is to promote the use of PIQ to monitor wellness of students in schools. In fact, the use of this instrument is still not spread nor in Italian academic research nor in Italian school monitoring by teachers. In fact, there is a lack of empirical research considering students' opinions about their own inclusion in the Italian school context. Moreover, by guaranteeing a comfortable environment to students, wellness and effective learning are promoted. In that sense, feedback from students is essential to teachers and institutions to direct the schools towards the aims stated by policies. In addition, the occasion allowed to compare two different types of school in Italy - lyceums that prepare for universities and vocational professional institutes which prepare students to join a specific job market. Consequently, these two realities have different approaches to teaching, so it could be useful to have feedback on perceptions of inclusion in these two different school environments. Another issue that this study aims to investigate, is that of how perceptions of inclusion might change depending on gender or presence of SEN. The contribution of this research to knowledge aims to investigate the following research questions:

- 1) Do Italian students feel more included in a linguistic lyceum or in a technical-vocational institute?
- 2) Do students with SEN feel more or less included than those without?
- 3) Do female students feel more or less included than males?



Starting from the last research question, we can assume that (H3) female students feel generally more included in Italian schools. This hypothesis is supported by other studies which detected slightly higher mean scores in female students' perceptions of inclusion (De Vries et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, some other studies detected from no difference to a subtle difference in answers based on gender. Regarding the second research question, we can hypothesize that (H2) students with SEN perceive themselves as less included than other students. In fact, evidence obtained by previous studies reports that students with SEN perceive themselves as less included compared to students without, especially in the academic self-concept sphere. The same results are expected by the present study. However, it is possible to consider that Italian long history of integration in schools might have promoted higher general scores of perceptions of inclusion in students with SEN compared to previous studies. Finally, the hypothesis for the first research question considers both results from previous studies and statistics related to the distribution of gender among Italian schools. In fact, data retrieved by the Ministry of Instruction and Merit (2022) reports that in linguistic lyceums the majority of the students enrolled are females, and in technical-vocational institutes the majority of the students are males. These data, crossed with previous PIQ results related to gender, allow to assume that (H1) linguistic lyceums will have higher scores of perceptions of inclusion compared to technical-vocational institutes.

### **3.2 Subjects involved**

The sample of the present study is composed of students attending two schools set in the province of Vicenza. The schooling language is Italian and, in both schools, inclusive education is implemented. Specifically, the classes involved consist in 9<sup>th</sup> grade of a linguistic lyceum and of a technical-vocational agricultural institute. The age of students involved ranges between 14 and 16 years old. Indeed, the grade level was chosen in order to compare the two types of schools since in Italy the 9<sup>th</sup> grade is the first year of specific formation. Moreover, these two different types of schools were chosen to allow heterogeneity in the sample for the general results.

The sample is composed of a total of N=111 students, n=55 were females and n=56 males. The total sample is sub-divided into n=45 students belonging to the linguistic lyceum and n=66 belonging to the technical-vocational agricultural institute. Specifically, the sample of the

linguistic lyceum consist in n=10 males and n=34 females and just one female student with SEN. On the other hand, the technical-vocational institute entails n=33 male students and n=19 females. Here, the number of students with diagnosed SEN is higher, n=14 total of which just one female. For reasons of privacy, it was not possible to check that students with SEN declared the truth about belonging to this group. However, the data about distribution of students is compatible with information supplied by the school. The participation to the study was voluntary.

### **3.3 The instrument**

As previously mentioned, the PIQ is a recent instrument. It is composed by 12 items which investigate the three spheres of inclusion. The questionnaire has been developed on purpose using simple and straightforward language to allow the questionnaire to be administered both to students with and without SEN and to cover a wider age range. Specifically, the questionnaire is composed of 11 positive formulated items and 1 negative formulated item. Due to these features, the questionnaire results to be suitable for administration to children from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade (approximately 8 to 16 years old).

In this study, the Italian version of the questionnaire was used. Specifically, for motives of economy and because of the aim of the research, only the student version of the PIQ was administered (see Appendix A). Moreover, this decision allowed students to maintain full anonymity in the compilation process. The answers to the 12 items can be given through a 4-point Likert-scale: 1 (=not at all true), 2 (=rather not true), 3 (=somewhat true) and 4 (=certainly true). Each of the 12 items is related to one sphere of inclusion. In fact, 4 items investigate emotional inclusion, 4 items investigate social inclusion and finally the last 4 investigate academic self-concept. Moreover, these items appear in a mixed order throughout the questionnaire. Here in the table, the English translation of the items re-ordered by sphere of inclusion is reported.

Table 1: PIQ's items divided by sphere of inclusion. English translation.

<b>Number of item</b>	<b>English translation</b>
	<u>Emotional Inclusion</u>
1	I like going to school.
4	I have no desire to go to school.
7	I like it in school.
10	School is fun.
	<u>Social Inclusion</u>
2	I have a lot of friends in my class.
5	I get along very well with my classmates.
8	I feel alone in my class.
11	I have very good relationships with my classmates.
	<u>Academic self-concept</u>
3	I am a fast learner.
6	I am able to solve very difficult exercises.
9	I do well in my school.
12	Many things at school are too difficult for me.

Along with the questionnaire, a preset Microsoft Excel file is available too on PIQ's website to facilitate the process of tabulation of the data. The scoring tool is already divided into three sheets dedicated each one to PIQ-S, PIQ-T and PIQ-P. In the case of this research, only the sheet dedicated to PIQ-S has been filled. The scoring tool reports in columns the number of items and in rows the number or the code of each questionnaire. Moreover, information about each questionnaire have been added in the first columns. In this manner, it results easier to sort questionnaires according to determined features, for instance school, gender or presence of SEN. Moreover, on the right side of the sheet, three columns are dedicated to the scale score section. This part is dedicated to sum up the scores for each questionnaire regarding the 3 spheres of inclusion (emotional, social and academic).

### **3.4 Method of analysis**

In order to retrieve the data in schools, a specific procedure was conducted. First of all, schools were contacted by e-mail and the project was presented to headmasters. In a second moment, agreements were made in person between professors and the researcher. Collaboratively, it was decided that the administration of the questionnaire would have been proposed to students by professors and not directly by the researcher. The motivation to that decision was to allow students to feel comfortable during the process of administration and to limit the impact on didactics.

At an early stage of the study, the sample of students was smaller. Later, by request of schools, the study was enlarged and involved more students in order to allow the institutes to have valuable feedback on the results of the study. For this motive, the administration of the questionnaires was divided into two moments. In a first stage, the questionnaires were administered printed on paper, and in a second moment, the questionnaires were administered by link to Google Forms because of the greater number of students involved. Before the administration, an agreement for privacy was signed by parents or caregivers of students. Indeed, students themselves were informed that the questionnaire would have been completely anonymous and voluntary participation was encouraged. Moreover, they had as much time as they needed to fill in the questionnaire, but no empty item was allowed. Of course, no personal data was asked in the questionnaire except for biological gender, eventual presence of SEN and the school grade for confirmation. Students were allowed to ask questions during the compilation. However, in order to not influence their answers, the aim of the study was revealed only after the filling of the questionnaires.

The process of collection of the data was conducted between the end of April and early May 2023, near the end of Italian school-year. This choice guaranteed that students had at least 8 months to know each other and create meaningful relationships with other students. Moreover, in school-year 2022-2023 the presence of online didactics due to Covid-19 pandemics was marginal so it could not directly influence the quality of interactions between students.

The process of tabulation of the data was firstly conducted on the Microsoft Excel ready-to-fill scoring tool. The tabulation process was checked twice in order to report each answer correctly. As previously mentioned, a first elaboration of these data was calculated automatically by the preset formulas inserted by the developers of the questionnaire to obtain the three scale scores.

Indeed, these calculations allowed to have an overview of the three spheres of inclusion with summed averages for each questionnaire in the scale scores section. Specifically, these results could range from 4 to 16. Moreover, the data were further elaborated by the researcher by calculating averages and standard deviations of these results based on school, gender, and presence of SEN. In fact, it was decided that descriptive statistics could be sufficient for the sake of this study. Later, another Excel file was redacted in order to obtain results comparable with previous studies. Indeed, the same process of calculation described by previous research was conducted (Guillemot, 2022). So, negatively worded items were recoded manually to obtain new raw scores. In this manner, it was possible to check whether the averages of the results were above the midpoint of the 1-to-4 Likert scale and were finally comparable to previous studies' results. In fact, previous research also contained averages of raw results from 1 to 4. Finally, averages and standard deviations were transformed into graphics in order to allow for an easier reading of the results.

#### IV. Analysis of results

This chapter will report results considering the different variables entailed in the study. The first section regards the analysis of the three questionnaire's spheres of perception of inclusion. In fact, results concerning «emotional well-being», «social inclusion» and «academic self-concept» will be displayed. The second part of the chapter entails the scale scores results suggested by developers of the questionnaire and the ones related to recoded scores as suggested by previous studies.

##### 4.1 Analysis of PIQ's results

In this introductory paragraph, percentages of answers were calculated for each item in the questionnaire. This report about the questionnaire is useful to notice to which items students agreed the most and which of them achieved highest scores. Table 2 presents percentages of overall answers to the questionnaire. Items left in white are the ones which relate to the emotional well-being scale and consist in items 1,4,7, and 10. The items in light grey are the ones related to the social inclusion scale and consists in items 2,5,8, and 11. Finally, items in dark grey are the ones related to the academic self-concept scale and consist in items 3,6,9, and 12. These percentages allow to have an overall picture of distributions of scores related to each item. However, specific results according to the spheres of inclusions are to be reported later in the chapter.

*Table 2: Percentages table of answers to each item of the questionnaire of the whole sample (N=111). The percentages were rounded.*

Item number	Item content	Not at all true (1)	Somewhat not true (2)	Somewhat true(3)	Certainly true(4)
1	I like going to school.	14,4%	27,0%	<b>41,4%</b>	17,1%
2	I have a lot of friends in my class.	2,7%	10,8%	39,6%	<b>46,8%</b>
3	I am a fast learner.	5,4%	27,9%	<b>45,9%</b>	20,7%
4	I have no desire to go to school.	13,5%	28,8%	<b>35,1%</b>	22,5%
5	I get along very well with my classmates.	4,5%	10,8%	<b>49,5%</b>	35,1%
6	I am able to solve very difficult exercises.	15,3%	<b>47,7%</b>	27,9%	9,0%

7	I like it in school.	2,7%	9,0%	<b>48,6%</b>	39,6%
8	I feel alone in my class.	<b>72,1%</b>	18,9%	3,6%	5,4%
9	I do well in my schoolwork.	5,4%	14,4%	<b>47,7%</b>	32,4%
10	School is fun.	19,8%	28,8%	<b>36,0%</b>	15,3%
11	I have very good relationships with my classmates.	2,7%	18,0%	37,8%	<b>41,4%</b>
12	Many things in school are too difficult for me.	23,4%	<b>47,7%</b>	18,0%	10,8%

By presenting the Table 2, results are integrated with further information about the distribution of scores. Of course, standard deviation is higher in items in which percentages are more evenly distributed. For instance, Items 4 and 10 are characterized by an even distribution. Moreover, it is possible to notice that only Items 2 and 11 obtained the highest percentages of answer “4” in the majority of questionnaires. In fact, both these items belong to the social inclusion section of the questionnaire. In addition, the highest percentage of answer “1” is available in Item 8, a negatively worded item (72,1%). Indeed, this percentage is the highest obtained by all items of the questionnaire. Moreover, all the items which obtained a high percentage in scores “1” or “2” are negatively worded items except for Item 6 which belongs to the academic self-concept section.

#### 4.1.1 Emotional well-being

The aim of this paragraph is to report specific results achieved by the emotional well-being scale score. It involves 4 of the 12 items of the questionnaire, specifically, Items 1,4,7, and 10. In this section, the negatively worded Item4 was not recoded.

*Table 3: Descriptive statistics of Emotional well-being. Results according to the school type are reported too.*

<b>Emotional well-being – school type</b>					
	Item	Linguistic Lyceum (45)	Agricultural Institute (66)	Overall mean (111)	SD
1	I like going to school.	2.82	2.47	2.61	0.94
4	I have no desire to go to school.	2.42	2.83	2.67	0.98
7	I like it in school.	3.31	3.21	3.25	0.73
10	School is fun.	2.31	2.58	2.47	0.98
<b>Tot. Emotional well-being</b>		2.72	2.77	2.75	0.91

As it is possible to notice from Table 3, overall results for the emotional well-being section were higher in the Agricultural Institute (2.77). However, the difference between the two types of school is subtle as the results obtained by the Linguistic Lyceum were slightly lower (2.72). In fact, the difference between these averages results to be 0.05.

Below, the same calculations culminate in Table 4 which displays means of emotional well-being answers according to gender and presence of SEN.



Table 4: Descriptive statistics of Emotional Well-being. Results according to gender and presence of SEN are reported too.

Emotional well-being – gender and SEN						
	Item	Males (43)	Females (53)	SEN (15)	Overall mean (111)	SD
1	I like going to school.	2.42	2.77	2.60	2.61	0.94
4	I have no desire to go to school.	2.80	2.57	2.60	2.67	0.98
7	I like it in school.	3.28	3.28	3.07	3.25	0.73
10	School is fun.	2.47	2.49	2.40	2.47	0.98
<b>Tot. Emotional well-being</b>		2.74	2.78	2.67	2.75	0.91

Table 4 reports that students with SEN obtained a total lower average (2.67) if compared to male and female students. Indeed, the total scores of female students (2.78) is slightly higher than those of male students (2.74) for the emotional well-being section.

In conclusion, Tables 3 and 4 evidenced that Item7 was the one which achieved the highest overall mean (3.25) and the smaller standard deviation (0.73) in the emotional well-being section. Indeed, this high result attests that all students strongly agree with the statement “I like it in school”. However, the smallest overall mean was achieved by the statement “School is fun” (2.47), which is slightly under the 2.5 midpoint of the scale.

#### 4.1.2 Social inclusion

This paragraph deals with social inclusion and presents the results of the 4 items of the questionnaire related to it – it is the case of Items 2, 5, 8, 11. As it is possible to notice, only Item 8 is a negatively worded item and it was not recoded. Below, Table 5 presents a complete overview with overall means and standard deviation calculated from raw answers to this section of the questionnaire.

*Table 5: Descriptive statistics of Social Inclusion. Results according to the school type are reported too.*

<b>Social inclusion – school type</b>					
	Item	Linguistic Lyceum (45)	Agricultural Institute (66)	Overall mean (111)	SD
2	I have a lot of friends in my class.	3.09	3.45	3.31	0.77
5	I get along very well with my classmates.	3.00	3.26	3.15	0.79
8	I feel alone in my class.	1.51	1.36	1.42	0.80
11	I have very good relationships with my classmates.	2.93	3.35	3.18	0.82
<b>Tot. Social Inclusion</b>		2.63	2.86	2.77	0.80

As it is possible to retrieve from Table 5, overall results of the Agricultural Institute (2.86) are higher than those of the Linguistic Lyceum (2.63). In fact, the difference between the two averages is more consistent than the previous section as for social inclusion results to be 0.23.

Below, Table 6 presents means of items related to social inclusion based on gender and presence of SEN.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of Social Inclusion. Results according to gender and presence of SEN are reported too.

<b>Social inclusion – gender and SEN</b>						
	Item	Males (43)	Females (53)	SEN (15)	Overall mean (111)	SD
2	I have a lot of friends in my class.	3.53	3.13	3.27	3.31	0.77
5	I get along very well with my classmates.	3.44	2.96	3.00	3.15	0.79
8	I feel alone in my class.	1.26	1.47	1.73	1.42	0.80
11	I have very good relationships with my classmates.	3.49	2.94	3.13	3.18	0.82
<b>Tot. Social Inclusion</b>		2.93	2.63	2.78	2.77	0.80

As it is displayed on Table 6, male students obtained the highest total average in the social inclusion sphere (2.93), followed by the mean achieved by students with SEN (2.78). However, it is possible to notice that female students obtained the lowest average score in this section (2.63).

In conclusion, in Tables 5 and 6, social inclusion achieved a smaller standard deviation if compared to the emotional well-being section. Moreover, Item 2 is the one which obtained highest means (3.31) and the smallest standard deviation (0.77) in all questionnaires related to social inclusion. Indeed, this indicates that the majority of students widely agreed with the statement “I have a lot of friends in my class”. Conversely, Item 8 was the one which obtained the lowest mean score (1.42). Since it is a negatively worded item, it appears to be a positive outcome for the social inclusion scale as students generally disagreed with the statement “I feel alone in my class”.

### 4.1.3 Academic self-concept

This paragraph deals with Academic Self-Concept, the last of the three spheres of perceptions of inclusion investigated by the PIQ. Specifically, this section entails Items 3, 6, 9, and 12 with the latter being the only negatively worded item for this section. As the others, Item 12 was not recoded. Below, Table 7 displays averages according to the school type.

*Table 7: Descriptive statistics of Academic Self-Concept. Results according to the school type are reported too.*

<b>Academic self-concept – school type</b>					
	Item	Linguistic Lyceum (45)	Agricultural Institute (66)	Overall mean (111)	SD
3	I am a fast learner.	3.00	2.70	2.82	0.82
6	I am able to solve very difficult exercises.	2.60	2.11	2.31	0.84
9	I do well in my schoolwork.	3.24	2.95	3.07	0.83
12	Many things in school are too difficult for me.	1.89	2.35	2.16	0.91
<b>Tot. Academic self-concept</b>		2.68	2.53	2.59	0.85

Table 7 reports higher results for academic self-concept in the Linguistic Lyceum (2.68). Indeed, mean results appear to be lower for the Agricultural Institute (2.54). The difference between these two mean results appears to be 0.15.

In Table 8, results concerning academic self-concept are reported according to gender and presence of SEN.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics of Academic Self-Concept. Results according to gender and presence of SEN are reported too.

Academic self-concept – gender and SEN						
	Item	Males (43)	Females (53)	SEN (15)	Overall mean (111)	SD
3	I am a fast learner.	2.95	2.85	2.33	2.82	0.82
6	I am able to solve very difficult exercises.	2.35	2.38	1.93	2.31	0.84
9	I do well in my schoolwork.	3.00	3.11	3.13	3.07	0.83
12	Many things in school are too difficult for me.	2.09	1.98	2.73	2.16	0.91
<b>Tot. Academic self-concept</b>		2.60	2.58	2.53	2.59	0.85

Table 8 displays that academic self-concept is higher in male students (2.60). However, female students achieved a slightly lower average (2.58), immediately followed by results obtained by students with SEN (2.53).

In conclusion, as it is possible to notice from Tables 7 and 8, the lowest mean score among the spheres of inclusion was obtained by academic self-concept (2.59). In this section the highest mean score was achieved by Item 9 (3.07). Indeed, this result displays a wide agreement among students with the statement “I do well in my schoolwork”. Moreover, the lowest score was obtained by Item 12 (2.16). However, since it is the negatively worded item in this section, this result indicates that students generally disagreed with the statement “Many things in school are too difficult for me”. In addition, this item was also the one which obtained the highest standard deviation in this section (0.91).

## **4. 2 Scale scores and recoded results**

In order to retrieve scale scores and display recoded results, there was the necessity to recode negatively worded items as suggested by previous research. In fact, the following calculations were conducted in line with other previous studies involving the PIQ instrument. Since results for each item could range from 1 to 4, negatively worded Items 4,8 and 12 were recalculated with the formula “5-ItemN”.

Indeed, overall means and standard deviations retrieved with recoded calculations are reported as follows. Firstly, the highest mean was obtained by Item8. Since it is a negatively worded item, it implies that most of the students disagreed with the statement “I feel alone in my class” (M= 3.58). However, items that obtained the lowest mean scores were two and they both scored lower than 2.5 which is the mid-point of the scale. In particular, Item6 obtained a mean of 2.31 and consisted in “I am able to solve very difficult exercises”. Furthermore, Item4 scored 2.33 and it consisted in “I have no desire to go to school”- again a negatively worded item. Regarding standard deviations, Item2 is the one with the smallest standard deviation (SD= 0.77) which suggests that it is the item on which students agreed the most (M= 3.31). In fact, it stated “I have a lot of friends in my class”. Moreover, two items achieved the highest standard deviation (both SD= 0.98) which indicates less agreement in the distribution of answers. It is the case again of the previously mentioned Item4 and Item10. The latter mentioned, consisted in “School is fun” and obtained a low average of 2.47 – once again below the 2.5 mid-point of the scale. Concluding, the above-mentioned statistics summarizes the situation presented in the previous part of this chapter. However, these recoded results supply further data to be compared to previous research. In the following pages, scale scores and recoded results will be supplied according to the variables investigated in this study.

### **4.2.1 Results according to gender and presence of SEN**

First of all, the scale scores averages and standard deviation of general results according to gender and presence of SEN are reported. These calculations allowed to have an overview regarding the different spheres of perceptions of inclusion in the two schools in the province of Vicenza involved in the present study. The scale scores were calculated as suggested by the developers of the questionnaire in the PIQ Scoring tool (Venetz & Zurbriggen, 2016-2019). For each questionnaire, a sum of all scores related to each of the three spheres of inclusion was elaborated. For instance, calculations supplying results concerning the emotional well-being scale were obtained by summing for each questionnaire  $Item1 + (5 - Item4) + Item7 + Item10$ .

The same procedure was conducted to obtain a sum for the social inclusion scale by summing Item2 + Item5 + (5 – Item8) + Item11. Finally, Item3 + Item6 + Item9 + (5 – Item12) was the formula that allowed to obtain the academic self-concept scale. As it is possible to notice, the recoding of negatively worded items is already part of the function to retrieve the scales. All these results for each questionnaire were elaborated by creating averages and standard deviations depending on gender and presence of SEN. In Table 9, in fact, scale scores means are reported as suggested by the developers of the questionnaire.

*Table 9: Scale score results according to gender and presence of SEN . Partial means according to the three spheres of inclusions are presented, accompanied by an overall mean and standard deviation.*

<b>General scale scores means</b>					
	Emotional	Social	Academic	Overall mean	SD
All (111)	10.69	13.25	11.04	11.66	2.87
Males (43)	10.35	14.21	11.21	11.92	3.04
Females (53)	10.98	12.57	11.28	11.61	2.61
SEN (15)	10.67	12.67	9.67	11.00	3.17

In Table 9, it is possible to see that male students achieved the highest overall scale score mean (11.92), immediately followed by female students (11.61) and finally by students with SEN (11.00). Moreover, the highest standard deviation was achieved by students with SEN (3.17), followed by, male students (3.04) and in the end by female students (2.61).

In addition, for the sake of this study it was necessary to calculate means and standard deviations of single scores unsummed obtained from each item. This procedure allowed to obtain results which are possibly comparable to the ones retrieved by previous studies. Indeed, overall results mirror the same situation depicted by scale scores, as negatively worded items were recoded too for these calculations. For instance, overall results obtained by the whole sample (N=111) reveal an overall mean of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 0.94. Specifically, means resulted in each sphere of inclusion are 2.67 for emotional well-being, 3.30 for social inclusion and finally 2.76 for academic self-concept. Regarding male students (n=43), the overall mean achieved was 2.98 with a standard deviation of 0.97. In this case, the three spheres of inclusion scored a mean of 2.59 for emotional well-being, 3.55 for social inclusion, and 2.80 for academic self-concept. Female students (n=53), however, scored an overall mean

of 2.90 with a 0.87 standard deviation. Specifically, emotional well-being obtained an average of 2.75, social inclusion scored 3.14 and academic self-concept obtained a mean score of 2.82. Finally, students with SEN obtained an overall mean of 2.73 with a standard deviation of 1.07. Regarding specific scores related to the three spheres of inclusion, emotional well-being obtained a mean of 2.62, social inclusion scored 3.17 and academic self-concept obtained a mean of 2.42.

#### 4.2.2 Results according to the type of school

Finally, results according to the school variable are included in this part of the chapter. First of all, results related to the developers' scale score are presented. The modalities of calculation were the same of results according to gender and presence of SEN except for the fact that the variable related to the school was selected. Indeed, general means and standard deviations were calculated for each institute. However, these results were integrated with means regarding males, females, and students with SEN for each institute. Consequently, two separate tables will follow. The first one related to results obtained by the Linguistic Lyceum (Table 10) and the second one reporting mean results obtained by the Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute (Table 11).

*Table 10: Developers' scale score averages and standard deviations in Linguistic Lyceum.*

<b>Linguistic Lyceum's scale scores means</b>					
	Emotional	Social	Academic	Mean	SD
All (45)	11.02	12.51	11.96	11.83	2.86
Males (10)	12.00	13.70	11.80	12.50	3.28
Females (34)	10.74	12.17	12.00	11.64	2.71
SEN (1)	10.00	7.00	11.00	9.33	2.08

Table 10 displays the scale scores results achieved by the Linguistic Lyceum. The highest overall mean was achieved by male students attending this school (12.50). However, males also obtained the highest overall standard deviation (3.28), indicating that answers were not homogeneous in all their questionnaires. Male students also obtained high results concerning the social inclusion sphere (13.70) and lower results regarding academic self-concept (11.80). Furthermore, the second higher overall mean was obtained by female students' scale score overall mean (11.64). Moreover, standard deviation achieved by female students in this school



appears to be lower (2.71). Female students attending the Linguistic Lyceum obtained the highest score in the academic self-concept section (12.00). However, the only questionnaire available for students with SEN has been reported in Table 10, but it will not be considered in this part of the study.

Below, Table 11 reports results obtained by the Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute.

*Table 11: Developers' scale score averages and standard deviations in Vocational and Technical Agricultural School.*

<b>Vocational and Technical Agricultural Institute's scale scores means</b>					
	Emotional	Social	Academic	Mean	SD
All (66)	10.47	13.70	10.41	11.53	2.88
Males (33)	9.85	14.36	11.03	11.75	2.96
Females (19)	11.37	13.00	9.95	11.44	2.43
SEN (14)	10.71	13.07	9.57	11.12	3.22

Overall results reported in Table 11 present an overview concerning the three spheres of inclusion in the Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute. Here, male students obtained the highest overall mean in the three spheres of inclusion (11.75) and a high standard deviation (2.96). Moreover, males scored higher than others in the social inclusion scale (14.36) and scored lower than all the others in the emotional well-being scale (9.85). However, female students scored lower than males in the academic self-concept scale (9.95) but obtained their best result in the social inclusion scale (13.00). Furthermore, students with SEN obtained the lowest overall mean score (11.12) but their standard deviation is higher than all the others (3.22).

Finally, single score means and standard deviation are reported in Table 12. Here too, negatively worded items were recoded before proceeding with the calculation of means and standard deviations. Specifically, an overall picture of the results concerning each institute is presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Recoded results' averages and standard deviations according to the school type.

<b>School type results using previous research's calculation method</b>					
	Emotional	Social	Academic	Overall mean	SD
All (111)	2.67	3.30	2.76	2.91	0.94
Agricultural Institute (66)	2.61	3.42	2.60	2.88	0.96
Linguistic Lyceum (45)	2.76	3.13	2.99	2.96	0.90

Of course, results reported in Table 12 reflect scale scores results. However, Table 12 supplies an immediate comparison between the two schools. The overall mean achieved by the Linguistic Lyceum (2.96) is higher than the one achieved in the Agricultural institute (2.88). Furthermore, standard deviation is slightly higher in the Agricultural Institute (0.96). Concerning the spheres of inclusion, Linguistic Lyceum scored higher in the emotional well-being scale (2.76) and in the academic self-concept scale (2.96), However, the Agricultural institute obtained higher results in the social inclusion scale (3.42).

## **V. Discussion**

The present chapter will discuss results and supply suggestions for future research. Before proceeding with an overview of the structure of this chapter, it is necessary to briefly resume the aims of this study and the hypotheses that have been previously postulated. Specifically, the aim of this research is to supply an overview of the situation regarding perceptions of inclusion among students attending Italian schools through the use of the PIQ instrument. Indeed, the present study also compares two types of schools and investigates whether students attending the Linguistic Lyceum perceive themselves as more or less included than students attending the Agricultural Institute. The hypothesis related to previous research is that students might feel more included in the Linguistic Lyceum. Moreover, considerations regarding perceptions of inclusion concerning students with SEN will be made. In fact, the hypothesis supported by previous research is that students with SEN might feel less included than those without. Finally, biological gender was considered too in the research questions, as previous research suggest that female students might perceive themselves as more included than males.

The discussion chapter will be structured as follows. The first section of the chapter will regard data interpretation and it is divided into three sections. The first one concerns overall results retrieved by the PIQ and it will also compare Italian results with previous research. Section two concerns the type of school and will entail considerations related to each institute. Finally, the last section will discuss the results relative to gender and presence of SEN. Finally, limitations, suggestions for future research and implications of this study will be presented.

### **5.1 Data interpretation**

#### **5.1.1 PIQ**

The previous chapter supplied an overall analysis of results. In this chapter, relevant findings related to the overall results of the questionnaire will be discussed. For instance, prevalence of the social inclusion sphere will be discussed along with overall results achieved by the other spheres of inclusion. Moreover, overall results concerning previous international research in secondary schools will be compared to findings retrieved by the present study.

As reported in the previous chapter, the social inclusion section of the questionnaire obtained the highest mean scores. In fact, the highest percentages of answer “4” belonged to this sphere of inclusion. Moreover, the highest percentage of answer “1” of the whole questionnaire

belonged to a negatively worded item in the social inclusion section- namely, Item8. This result clearly outlines that social inclusion appears to be the highest scoring sphere of inclusion present in the questionnaire. Indeed, this finding has been confirmed later by the means retrieved through the recodification of negatively worded items. In fact, the social inclusion section scored an overall result of 3.30. Academic self-concept appears to be the second highest result, followed by emotional well-being. Of course, there were no precise expectations concerning the overall spheres results. However, historical Italian positive attitude towards integration and adhesion to European initiatives for inclusion might suggest a favourable disposition towards care of students' feelings. However, as Hornby (2015) affirmed, daily school practice is different from policies. Indeed, overall results obtained by the present study were all above the 2.5 midpoint of the scale, but somehow the expectations were higher. Indeed, if Italian results retrieved in the province of Vicenza are compared to those obtained by other countries, they appear to be consistently lower. In order to allow reflections on results achieved by previous studies, Table 13 will be presented. Indeed, only means obtained by studies involving secondary schools will be here reported.

*Table 13: Comparative table of results of PIQ in the different countries. \* Results reported for Finland are those of students with regular support, not intensified support.*

Information				Spheres of Inclusion			
Reference	Country	Sample Nr.	Grades	Emotional well-being	Social Inclusion	Academic Self-Concept	Overall mean
Guillemot & Hessels (2022)	France	288	5th -8th	3.17	3.38	2.94	3.16
Knickenberg et al. (2022)	Austria	393	7th	2.66	3.49	2.92	3.02
Pozas et al. (2023)	Mexico	673	Lower Secondary	3.10	3.16	2.89	3.05
Kyttälä et al. (2023)	Finland	469	6th-9th	3.12*	3.52*	3.17*	3.27
Present study (2024)	Italy	111	9th	2.67	3.30	2.76	2.91

Of course, previous research has been conducted in different environments and with different sample features. For instance, different grades have been involved in previous studies. However, it is possible to outline some similarities among different countries. For example, the social inclusion sphere appears to be neatly predominant in all instances. However, the emotional well-being and academic self-concept spheres are more variable depending on the considered country. In fact, academic self-concept results to be higher than emotional well-being in Austria and Finland. The present study is in line with these results as in Italy the academic self-concept scale is higher than that of emotional well-being. Indeed, France and Mexico obtained better results concerning emotional well-being and lower in the academic self-concept scale. Of course, these results are not generalizable but are useful as guidelines. In fact, results might also depend on culture, methods of teaching but also from personal factors such as features belonging to the personality of the student.

Overall means displayed on Table 13 report that Italy achieved the lowest mean. However, it is necessary to consider that the present research focusses on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. In fact, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the Italian school system is the first year of upper secondary school and students might need more time to feel comfortable in the new school environment. Moreover, previous research (Schwab et al., 2018) attested a diminishment of perceptions of inclusion throughout school grades. In that sense, it is possible that since Italian data were retrieved exclusively in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the possibility of achieving lower results increases. Moreover, all the previous research mentioned in the table are dated after the Covid-19 pandemics. In this sense, the gathering of data of the present research was carried out when online didactics was no more massively implemented in Italian schools, so it is assumable that these negative results were not particularly affected by that.

These results might be concerning because of Italian inclusion policies. In fact, Italy has a strong pedagogical tradition concerning integration (Zanazzi, 2018) and adheres to all the European guidelines regarding inclusion and education for all. It is worrying that the efforts that are being made by institutions do not have visible positive implications perceived by students. Indeed, it is of vital importance that schools retrieve data on students' perceptions of inclusion in schools. In fact, Ianes et al. (2017) underlines the necessity to implement empiric research on students' opinions. This statement appears to be still valid, as improvement must be guaranteed through periodical monitoring of students' opinion about the school environment. These monitoring procedures might allow schools and institutions to adjust teaching practices

and promote awareness on how different practices influence students' perceptions. Indeed, the PIQ instrument appeared to be a valid tool in different previous occasions. Even if validation of the questionnaire in Italian language has not yet been conducted, it might reveal itself to be an essential monitoring tool for schools. In fact, it has proven to be a user-friendly, economical, simple, and straightforward tool which allows for periodical feedback on students' wellness in the school environment.

### **5.1.2 Type of school**

As mentioned in Chapter II, in Italy there are two main types of school. For instance, those which prepare for university (lyceums) and those who prepare for the job market (technical and vocational institutes). The present research investigates whether students in the province of Vicenza perceive themselves as more included in lyceums or in technical and vocational institutes. Specifically, the research involved a Linguistic Lyceum and a Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute. Previous research conducted by Schwab et al. (2018) detected no difference among these two types of institutions. However, national statistics reveal that in recent years the majority of students which enrolled to linguistic lyceums were females (Ministry of Instruction and Merit, 2022). And other previous studies conducted with the PIQ instrument detected a slightly predominance of perception of inclusion in female students (De Vries et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2018). Summing previously mentioned instances, the present study was expecting to find evidence for a major perception of inclusion among students attending the Linguistic Lyceum.

Starting from the overall scores, recoded results concerning the three spheres of inclusion together were neatly higher in the Linguistic Lyceum. In fact, recoded mean scores retrieved were 2.96 against 2.88. Moreover, the fact that standard deviation was 0.6 points higher in the Agricultural institute signals that students had more discording opinions in that specific institute. Indeed, these overall results meet the expectations. Moreover, tables presented in Chapter IV depicted different situations depending on the sphere of inclusion considered. In fact, it is possible to notice that higher scores in terms of emotional well-being and academic self-concept were achieved in the Linguistic Lyceum. However, much higher social inclusion was detected in the Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute. It is not possible to surely individuate a possible motivation for these results but assumptions can be made. Of course, perceptions of inclusion can be linked to different variables, trying to individuate whether it

might depend on teaching methods could supply material for future research. For the moment, results will be deepened in the following part of the chapter.

Firstly, results met the expectations regarding the emotional well-being scale. In fact, the overall mean results concerning this section of the questionnaire were 2.76 against 2.61 in recoded results. The fact that the emotional well-being scale score achieved higher scores in the Linguistic Lyceum can be translated into more enjoyment by students into approaching to school. In fact, this hypothesis might be confirmed by the fact that Item 7 was the one which achieved an overall lower standard deviation. Indeed, “I like it in school” was the item on which students agreed the most in both schools. However, the negatively worded item “I have no desire to go to school” obtained a relatively high score in both schools. In fact, this item scored higher in the Agricultural Institute (2.83) than the Linguistic Lyceum (2.42). These results are not recoded, meaning that this question still confirms results achieved by Item7. However, according to Item7, results of the negatively worded item should have been lower. Based on this result, it is possible to assume that this section might be the most confusing according to students. This assumption is supported by the fact that standard deviation of the negatively worded Item4 was higher (0.98) than that of Item7. In fact, this result marks higher dispersion of and more discordant opinions among students.

The situation appears to be different for what concerns the social inclusion scale. In fact, in both the institutes it appeared to be the highest scoring category. Indeed, since technical and vocational institutes’ curricula have many compulsory hours of practical and collaborative activities, highest scores concerning social inclusion might have been expected. In fact, scores relative to social inclusion appeared to be much higher in the Agricultural Institute (3.42). Indeed, results concerning the Linguistic Lyceum in this case were lower (3.13). The item that obtained the highest scores concerning social inclusion was Item 2 in both schools. Specifically, it stated “I have a lot of friends in my class” and scored 3.49 in the Agricultural Institute and 3.09 in the Linguistic Lyceum. As consequence, it might be reasonable to assume that students perceive social status as an important part of dynamics in the classroom environment. On the contrary, the item which obtained lowest scores is “I feel alone in my class”, in both schools. These negatively worded items were inserted in the questionnaire to function as confirmation to the scale. Indeed, in this case, Item8 confirmed the scales results. Indeed, overall standard deviation is 0.80, which indicates a reasonable rate of agreement among students. Some assumptions can be made based on those results. The first one is that students attending the

Agricultural Institute participate in many collaborative activities during practice hours. In that sense, students might have more possibilities than students attending the Linguistic Lyceums to interact with each other. Specifically, as mentioned in Chapter II, technical and vocational institutes entail many hours of practical activities (European Commission, 2023b), and in agricultural institutes those hours often consist in outdoor activities. However, lyceums prepare for universities where there might be a more competitive approach. A suggestion for future research might be to consider how specific types of curricula interact with perception of social inclusion in secondary schools.

Finally, results concerning the academic self-concept sphere of inclusion will be discussed. The expectations concerning this section were due to the nature of the two types of school. In fact, it might be possible to assume that scores pertaining academic self-concept are higher in the Linguistic Lyceum as they prepare for university studies. Of course, results met the expectations as the Linguistic Lyceum scored higher (2.96) than the Agricultural Institute (2.88) in this section. However, the gap between the two results is not as wide as expected. For instance, both institutes scored their highest results of the section in the item “I do well in my schoolwork”, even if results were neatly higher in the Linguistic Lyceum (3.24) than in the Agricultural Institute (2.95). Indeed, this result is supported by the negatively worded item “Many things in school are too difficult for me” which scored considerably lower in the Linguistic Lyceum (1.89) than in the Agricultural Institute (2.35). Of course, some assumptions can be made concerning the academic self-concept sphere of inclusion. In fact, it is necessary to consider the nature of the two kinds of school. The fact that lyceums prepare for universities might suggest that students attending those schools are more prone to invest their time in studying. On the other hand, students attending technical and vocational institutes might be already projected into their future job.

Concluding, according to data retrieved by the present research, it is possible to affirm that students in the Linguistic Lyceum perceive themselves as more included for what concerns emotional well-being and academic self-concept. Indeed, according to results, social inclusion is perceived as higher in the Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute. Of course, these results must be considered as an instance and might not be generalisable. Indeed, results obtained in this section suggest that further research concerning curricula and teaching methods in relation to perceptions of inclusion might be implemented. In fact, the use of the PIQ might be crossed with other information supplied by school.



### 5.1.3 Gender and SEN

The current part of the chapter will deal with the last two research questions involved in the present study. These were inspired by previous research concerning the PIQ instrument. In fact, research previously conducted in other countries entailed gender and presence of SEN as variables. These variables will be discussed in this sub-chapter. First, results concerning gender will be discussed along with results obtained by previous research. On the second part of this section, results according to the presence of SEN will be discussed and compared to previous research both in worldwide and Italian research field.

Results concerning perceptions of inclusion in relation to biological gender will be discussed in the following paragraph. Indeed, previous research created expectations concerning gender. For instance, Schwab et al. (2018) reports that in German sample from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, female students perceived more positively inclusion climate. Similar results were obtained by DeVries et al. (2018) which attested slightly higher emotional well-being and social inclusion in female students. Indeed, other studies revealed a neutral situation concerning gender, for instance Trygger (2019). On the contrary, Pozas et al. (2023) attested higher values of social inclusion and academic self-concept in male students. The overall situation attests a slightly preponderance of female students' perception of inclusion. However, results retrieved by the present study depicts a contrasting situation. In fact, the overall higher mean score was obtained by male students, but two out of three scores of spheres of inclusion were higher in female students. Specifically, male students obtained the highest overall score scale (2.98). Moreover, male students also obtained a higher standard deviation attesting a bigger difference among distribution of results (0.97) if compared to female students' standard deviation (0.87). Female students obtained a slightly lower overall score (2.90). As expected, the social inclusion scale score still appears to be the highest scoring among the spheres of inclusion in all samples. Indeed, specific results concerning each sphere of inclusion will now be deepened.

Concerning the emotional well-being scale, expectations were on predominance of scores achieved by female students. In the present study, these expectations were met. In fact, female students obtained higher scores (2.75) than male students (2.59) in the emotional well-being section. Specifically, Item 7 consisted in "I like it in school" and it was the highest scoring item for the section. In fact, in both male and female students it scored 3.28. The difference between the two groups stands especially in answers given to Items 1 and 4 – the latter being the negatively worded one in the section. In fact, male students scored lower in Item 1 which

consisted in “I like going to school”, whereas they scored higher in the negatively worded Item 4 “I have no desire to go to school”. These results determine the prevalence of a positive scale concerning emotional well-being in female students. Indeed, this result is in line with previous studies which often obtained higher scores in emotional well-being in female students. For instance, research conducted by DeVries et al. (2018), Knickenberg et al. (2022), and Pozas et al. (2023) all retrieved higher perceptions of emotional well-being in female students.

As previously mentioned, social inclusion is the best scoring section for both male and female students. Indeed, these results reflected expectations built after the of the analysis of the results according to the school type. However, results concerning social inclusion were neatly higher in male students (3.55). On the other hand, female students obtained only 3.14 in the social inclusion section. Indeed, it is crucial to consider that social inclusion is the only sphere of inclusion in which male students obtained higher overall scores than females. However, this great gap between the two results is sufficient to allow male students to obtain a higher overall score of inclusion. To better understand the situation, a closer analysis of answers to the questionnaire might be helpful. In fact, scores obtained by female students in all the items related to social inclusion are much lower than those retrieved by male students. The only exception appears to be Item 8, which is the negatively worded item and consists in “I feel alone in my class”. Here, by scoring 0.21 higher than males, females students confirm the overall results of the social inclusion scale. In fact, Item 2 consisted in “I have a lot of friends in my class” and male students scored 3.53 against 3.13 scored by females. Item 5 consisted in “I get along very well with my classmates” and male students scored 3.44 against 2.96 scored by females. Finally, Item 11 consisted in “I have very good relationships with my classmates” and males scored 3.49 against 2.94 scored by females. Consequently, this consistent difference between results supplies evidence for the overall higher results concerning male students. As previously mentioned, higher results achieved by males in social inclusion are found also on previous research, such as Pozas et al. (2023). On the contrary, DeVries et al. (2018) obtained higher results for social inclusion perceived by female students. However, studies such as Trygger (2019) and Knickenberg et al. (2022) noticed no difference in social inclusion according to gender.

Finally, the academic self-concept section will be discussed in the following paragraph. The results concerning this sphere of inclusion were almost identical in the two groups . Indeed, female students obtained a 2.82 score for academic self-concept whereas male students

achieved 2.80. Similar results were expected based on school type results. In fact, even there the academic self-concept section obtained a small gap between the two institutes. Specifically, a deepening about distribution of answers might be useful to better understand the results. In both male and female students, Item 9 was the one which obtained a highest mean. In fact, the item consisted in the statement “I do well in my schoolwork”, which obtained a higher score in female students (3.11) than in male students (3.00). All the other items obtained lower scores, all below 3.00. Indeed, the negatively worded item of this section confirmed the statistics for the academic self-concept scale. In fact, Item 12 which stated “Many things in school are too difficult for me” obtained quite high means, respectively 2.09 for males and 1.98 for females. This result appears to reinforce a slightly prevalence of female higher results for the section. The real difference is made by Item 3 that obtained higher scores in male students (2.95) compared to females (2.85). In fact, it stated “I am a fast learner”. It is curious since it might be assumed that male students perceive themselves as fast learners but not in the school environment. In fact, it is the only item that does not make a clear reference to school or exercises. Finally, these results appear to be in line with the previous study conducted by Trygger (2019). In fact, the present study did not reveal a particular difference among the two genders. On the contrary, previous research attested for the majority of the cases prevalence of high academic self-concept in male students (DeVries et al., 2018; Knickenberg et al., 2022; Pozas et al., 2023).

Concluding, a summary of results achieved for the gender section will be now summed up. First of all, in overall score means, male students obtained higher results. However, female students obtained a higher partial score in the emotional well-being section and slightly higher partial score in the academic self-concept section. Furthermore, results appear to be in line with previous research. In fact, results of emotional well-being and academic self-concept tend to variate in results belonging to each country. Indeed, a common point is found in social inclusion being the highest scoring category in both males and females.

The latter variable investigated in the present study is presence of SEN. Of course, the PIQ instrument has been widely employed in previous research in order to assess perceptions of inclusion in students with SEN. The following section will discuss results obtained by students with SEN in the present study. Foremost, a disclaimer is necessary. The aim of the study was to retrieve data about SEN in both schools in order to compare the two institutes. However, during the process of gathering of the data, the Linguistic Lyceum supplied only one voluntary with

SEN. On the contrary, 14 students with SEN participated to the study in the Agricultural Institute. For this reason, it has been decided to not consider the comparison between the two institutes. Indeed, overall results of students with SEN will be compared to those of students without SEN. Previous research which considered perceptions of inclusion of students with SEN obtained homogeneous results. In fact, it has been assessed that students with SEN perceived generally lower scores of inclusion in all the three spheres (DeVries et al., 2018; Trygger, 2019; Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021; Pozas et al., 2023). However, studies conducted by Guillemot & Hessels (2022) and Kyttälä et al. (2023) revealed that students with SEN obtained higher scores in the emotional well-being section than the expectations. In addition, another common finding was that students with SEN obtained lower scores in the academic self-concept section. In the present research, overall mean results obtained by student with SEN were 2.73. As scores presented by other students, it is a high overall score as it is over the 2.5 midpoint of the scale. However, it is possible to notice that standard deviation is much higher (1.07) than that of previously discussed groups. It can be assumed that it might be related to the different types of impairments that can concern a student with SEN. In fact, no distinction was made between learning impairments or disabilities in the present study. Of course, having more information on the matter could supply a deeper understanding of the results. However, it was not the main aim of the present research but further research on the topic could be implemented in future research. Finally, results concerning each sphere of inclusion will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

First of all, emotional well-being results will be discussed. In fact, the expectations concerning this sphere of inclusion were that students with SEN might perceive lower inclusion or results could be similar to those retrieved by students without SEN. The present study retrieved an overall mean score of 2.62 for this section. Of course, it is a high score as it is above the 2.5 midpoint of the scale. However, males and females scored respectively 2.59 and 2.75. Indeed, the results achieved by students with SEN were slightly higher than those of males but lower than those of females. It is interesting to observe that students with SEN scored overall lower than the other students in the three positively worded items. For instance, Item 1 consisted in “I like going to school” and here students with SEN achieved 2.60 against 2.41 and 2.77 scored respectively by males and females. Moreover, Item 7 consisted in “I like it in school” and here students with SEN achieved a 3.07 score, which compared to 3.28 obtained by both male and female students appears to be lower. Finally, Item 10 consisted in “School is fun” and obtained

2.40 for students with SEN and 2.74 and 2.78 for male and female students. Indeed, the crucial difference was made in the negatively worded Item 4 which stated “I have no desire to go to school” where male students scored much higher results (2.80). The overall effect achieved with that was that male students obtained a slightly lower overall scale. Indeed, it is possible to affirm that the emotional well-being sphere is partially in line with previous studies, especially with Guillemot & Hessels (2022) and Kyttälä et al. (2023). In fact, overall results for emotional well-being might be slightly lower for students with SEN if an average of male and female students is made. However, students with SEN appeared to perceive slightly higher emotional well-being than male students.

The social inclusion section will be discussed in the following paragraph. As expected, the social inclusion section is the highest scoring section also in students with SEN (3.17). Indeed, here too, the average score of male and female students together is higher than that of students with SEN. However, it is possible to notice that students with SEN achieved slightly higher scores than that obtained by female students (3.14). On the contrary, evidence for lower perception of inclusion in students with SEN has been found considering male students’ results (3.55). The situation is similar to that achieved in the previous mentioned sphere of inclusion. In fact, overall scores obtained by students with SEN are lower than the overall mean obtained by others. However, they scored slightly higher or almost in line with perception of social inclusion of one of the other two groups. These results are visible in the analysis of answers of each item. Indeed, students with SEN obtained higher scores compared to female students in all positively worded items in the social inclusion section. Specifically, in Item 2 which consisted in “I have a lot of friends in my class”, students with SEN scored higher (3.27) than females (3.13) but lower than males (3.53). The same pattern is visible in Item 5 which states “I get along very well with my classmates” where students with SEN scored 3.00, females scored slightly lower (2.96) and males scored much higher (3.44). Finally, students with SEN scored 3.13 in Item 11 which states “I have very good relationships with my classmates”. Here too, female students scored lower (2.94) and male students scored higher (3.49). Furthermore, the negatively worded Item 8 consisted in “I feel alone in my class” and did not confirm previous expectations. In fact, students with SEN scored higher than anyone in that item, 1.73 compared to 1.26 and 1.47 scored respectively by males and females. A possible interpretation for that results is that some students with SEN might have struggled with the negatively worded item. In fact, previous research conducted by Schwab et al. (2018) attested the presence of the

same phenomena. It is possible to notice that results concerning the social inclusion sphere were in line with previous research. In fact, even if students with SEN tend to have an overall lower perception of social inclusion, they still obtained overall higher scores than female students.

Finally, the academic self-concept section of the questionnaire concerning students with SEN will be discussed. Indeed, expectations concerning this sphere of inclusion were clearer than others. Of course, the fact that students with SEN in Italy attend inclusive classrooms allow to make some hypotheses based on previous research. The expectation is that students with SEN might perceive lower levels of academic self-concept compared to other students. The findings of the present study suggest that results obtained by students with SEN are in line with expectations. In fact, the overall score for the academic self-concept section results to be lower (2.42) than that of male (2.80) and female (2.82) students. Indeed, even by calculating an average between result obtained by males and females, results of students with SEN are neatly lower. In fact, the situation is clearly outlined in each item of the questionnaire. Specifically, Item 3 consisted in “I am a fast learner” and here students with SEN scored 2.33, neatly lower than males (2.95) and females (2.85). However, more worrying results were achieved in Item 6 which stated “I am able to solve very difficult exercises”. In fact, even if all mean answers to this item were all below the 2.5 mid-point of the scale, students with SEN achieved much lower results (1.93) than male (2.35) and female students (2.38). Results concerning this specific items might be due to the fact that students with SEN belong to inclusive classrooms and because of that they might compare themselves to other students in class. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by Pozas et al. (2023), which previously attested lower academic self-concept in students with SEN attending inclusive classrooms. However, Item 9 which consists in “I do well in my schoolwork” obtained higher scores in students with SEN (3.13). On the contrary, male and female students obtained slightly lower scores (3.00; 3.11). This result might be explained by the presence of personalised didactic interventions and presence of support teachers with students with SEN. Finally, Item 12 consisted in “Many things in school are too difficult for me”, here students with SEN scored 2.73. This result is the highest since males and females scored 2.09 and 1.98 respectively. Indeed, this high result in the negatively worded item causes a lowering of the overall academic self-concept scale score. These results appear to be in line with previous studies. In fact, academic self-concept appeared to be the most concerning sphere of inclusion involving students with SEN. For instance, the majority of previous studies conducted utilising the PIQ instrument appeared to retrieve a lower academic

self-concept in all students with SEN (DeVries et al., 2018; Trygger, 2019; Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021; Guillemot & Hessels, 2022; Pozas et al., 2023; Kyttälä et al., 2023).

Concluding, the overall picture concerning students with SEN will be now summarised. Of course, the outlined situation highlights a prevalence of lower scores obtained by students with SEN as expected. However, in the emotional well-being section, results were lower and closer to those of male students. On the contrary, in the social inclusion section, results of students with SEN were lower and closer to results obtained by female students. Finally, the academic self-concept section was the worst scoring one. Results were in line with previous studies. Indeed, it is possible to make some assumptions based on these results. The fact that students with SEN obtained lower mean scores compared to those of other students might suggest that inclusion should be further promoted. Fortunately, these results do not reflect a particularly critical situation for students with SEN. However, these lower results might be the product of the issues that afflict students with SEN in the Italian school environment. In fact, frequent phenomena such as “push and pull out” might contribute to undermine social inclusion of students with SEN (Ianes et al., 2013). Moreover, discontinuity of students with SEN’s learning path might have bad implications on their perception of academic inclusion. In fact, it is really common in Italy to change support teacher yearly and often they are not even specialized figures (ISTAT, 2022). In this manner, continuity might be compromised. These considerations allow to make suggestions for future research. In fact, it could be suggested to implement action research concerning students with SEN involving different school practices. Indeed, such procedure might allow to detect teaching practices with more positive outcomes in terms of perception of inclusion.

#### **5.1.4 Discussion summary**

The present section will summarize results of perceptions of inclusion according to each variable. According to overall results achieved by PIQ, Italian scores are the lowest when compared to previous research. Indeed, these results might be affected by the fact that only 9<sup>th</sup> grade was considered in the present study. Concerning the type of school, overall mean scores retrieved higher inclusion in students attending the Linguistic Lyceum. Specifically, students attending the Linguistic Lyceum retrieved higher emotional well-being and academic self-concept. Conversely, students attending the Agricultural Institute obtained much higher social inclusion scores. Relatively to gender, male students obtained higher overall scores of inclusion. However, emotional well-being and academic self-concept were slightly higher in female

students. Results were changed because of male students' much higher perception of social inclusion. Finally, mean results of students with SEN were lower than those of others in all the spheres of inclusion. However, the only section in which results were dramatically lower was the academic self-concept section.

## **5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Of course, this study presents some limitations that must be considered. First of all, adhesion of students to the study was voluntary. In fact, due to feasibility constraints, it was not possible to administer questionnaires to all students attending the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of each school. In fact, the study would have been too invasive during school hours in that case. For the same reason, the online version of the questionnaire was redacted and it allowed students to complete the questionnaire outside school hours. This possibility also comported that questionnaires completed at home might not reflect students' real feelings towards inclusion. However, personal details supplied by students in the PIQ were compatible to data retrieved by the school office. Regarding the modality of administration of the questionnaire, students with SEN had the opportunity to be assisted by adults in the process of answering the questionnaire. In this sense, it is possible that the presence of an adult figure might have prevented students from being completely sincere.

Another issue that might have affected the study is that the sample was unbalanced among the schools. Indeed, in the Linguistic Lyceum the sample consisted mostly of female students, and in the Agricultural Institute it consisted mostly of male students. Indeed, the overall sample was balanced since number of female and male students compensated. Moreover, the presence of students with SEN was not balanced in the two institutes, as only one student with SEN belonged to the sample of the Linguistic Lyceum. In fact, this issue determined the impossibility to make comparisons among the two schools. Moreover, the study considered only students' perspectives. As previously mentioned, the PIQ is suitable to investigate perceptions of inclusion from different stakeholders. In this case, by exploiting only students' perspectives, it was possible for them to maintain anonymity. Indeed, involving different stakeholders such as teachers and caregivers would possibly supply a deeper understanding of perceptions of inclusion in schools.

These considerations lead to the first suggestion for future research. In fact, it would be a considerable contribute to the Italian research field related to inclusion to conduct a study also



involving teachers' and caregivers' perspectives. In fact, the involvement of plural points of view could allow for a more complete overview on the matter. Indeed, the addition of a qualitative instrument might enrich the overview supplied by the bare quantitative instrument. Moreover, another reflection about future research regards the integration of PIQ with information regarding the teaching methods exploited in the school. In fact, PIQ instrument could supply crucial information to schools to improve their teaching methods in order to implement emotional, social, and academic inclusion.

Finally, the present study aimed at the promotion of the use of PIQ instrument in both the Italian research field and in school monitoring. In fact, even if the Italian version of the questionnaire still needs to be validated, the PIQ appeared to be a user-friendly tool. In fact, it is possible for schools to implement action research and utilise this instrument for school monitoring. This practice would allow for a more precise feedback on students' perceptions of inclusion under specific aspects. Especially, social inclusion and academic self-concept could be particularly useful to address changes in teaching methods or teaching practices. In fact, action research might be the most suitable practice to be implemented with the PIQ by teachers themselves. As previously mentioned, empiric research still needs to be promoted in the Italian research field (Ianes, Zambotti & Demo, 2013). Indeed, the Italian version of the PIQ could be suitable tool to conduct research that culminates in evidence-based interventions.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The present chapter will summarise the findings and resume considerations concerning the present research. First of all, research questions and aims will be briefly summarized in relation to results of the present study. Then, contributes of the present research will be addressed. Finally, limitations and suggestions for future research will be repropose briefly in conclusion to the chapter.

First of all, the aim of the present research was to retrieve an overview on perceptions of inclusion in Italian schools. Of course, schools considered by the study belong to a specific territory, the province of Vicenza, so results are not generalizable. However, results obtained by the present study were the lowest if compared to those retrieved by previous studies conducted in other countries. Indeed, Italy has a long history of integration and participates to European inclusion initiatives and because of that highest scores of inclusion were expected. Furthermore, the study involved two different types of schools present in Italy in order to compare perceptions of inclusion in the two institutes – namely a Linguistic Lyceum and a Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institute. In addition to school type, it has been decided to also investigate variables entailed in previous research on the matter - such as perceptions of inclusion in relation to gender and to presence of SEN. In fact, the instrument chosen to retrieve these information was the PIQ. Indeed, it has proven to be an economical and a user-friendly tool. Thanks to previous research that has been conducted worldwide with the PIQ, there were expectations concerning these results. In fact, the expectations were that higher perception of inclusion was to be found in the Linguistic Lyceum. Moreover, expectations concerning gender were that females would score higher overall perceptions of inclusion. Finally, the latter expectation was that students with SEN would perceive themselves as less included.

Results of the present study partially attended the expectations. In fact, the Linguistic Lyceum appeared to have the highest overall mean of perceptions of inclusion. However, Linguistic Lyceum scored higher in emotional well-being and academic self-concept. On the contrary, the Agricultural Institute scored a much higher result in the social inclusion scale. Moreover, results concerning gender retrieved that male students achieved an overall higher score due to outstanding high results in the social inclusion section. In fact, the social inclusion section was the only one in which males scored better than females. Furthermore, results obtained by students with SEN were lower than those retrieved by other students. In fact, even if results were lower in each sphere of inclusion, it is possible to notice that in emotional well-being

results were close to those of males and that results in social inclusion were closer to those of females. Indeed, the academic self-concept was the overall lowest scoring category.

The present research contributes to the field in supplying an overview on the Italian situation regarding perceptions of inclusion. In fact, at today the PIQ instrument has not been validated yet in its Italian language version. The aim of this research was also to promote the use of PIQ in the Italian research field and to raise interest also in action research in schools with this instrument. In fact, this questionnaire resulted to be an economical and user-friendly tool to assess the different dimensions of perceptions of inclusion. For this motive, it appeared to be a suitable instrument to be administered in action research by teachers in order to improve their teaching methods and practices. The results of this research indicate the need for constant monitoring of students' well-being in schools under different aspects. Indeed, the necessity of monitoring appears to be crucial in all students, and not only those with SEN. In fact, female students obtained lower scores than the expectations, and this might underline the necessity of periodical monitoring processes in all students in all schools.

As previously mentioned, the study also had some limitations. In fact, sampling issues were detected as the sample might have been unbalanced among each school. However, the overall sample appeared to be balanced. Moreover, due to feasibility issues, participation to the study was voluntary which might have affected the answers. Indeed, the study entailed only students' perception of inclusion. In fact, the PIQ allows to triangulate the points of view adding teachers' and caregivers' answers to the questionnaire. However, this study opted to involve only students' perspective so that they could fill in the questionnaire maintaining complete anonymity. Moreover, during the process of writing of the discussion section, few suggestions of practical applications of the PIQ were proposed. For instance, evaluation of efficacy of inclusive practices and in general monitoring the outcomes of didactical practices. Indeed, there is still the need to implement empirical research in order to obtain data that allows for evaluation of different teaching practices both concerning specifically students with SEN and also those without. Finally, the most urgent suggestion for future research is the validation of the Italian version of the PIQ. In fact, the present study did not evaluate the psychometric proprieties of the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* in its Italian version. Specifically, it aimed at its promotion as it could improve teachers' opportunities for conducting action research.

Of course, this conclusive chapter has reported a brief summary of the present study. However, it is important to notice that much research still needs to be implemented from the students' perspective. In fact, not all results retrieved by the present research coincided with expectations. This issue underlines the importance of conducting such research in different school environments in order to understand what works and what can be improved. Indeed, the PIQ appeared to be an easy-to-use tool, with clear indications on how it is structured and different linguistic versions available. For this motive, its diffusion in research and action research field is desirable.

## Appendix

**Appendix A:** Venetz, M., Zurbriggen, C. L. A., Eckhart, M., Schwab, S., & Hessels, M. G. P. (2015). *The Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ)*. Student – Italian Version. Available from [www.piqinfo.ch](http://www.piqinfo.ch)

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# PIQ

## Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire

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### Versione italiana - Allievo

Il mio nome : ..... Data di nascita : .....  
Sono :  un ragazzo  una ragazza Grado  
scolastico : .....

Come va a scuola ? Leggi bene ognuna delle frasi qui sotto e metti una crocetta sulla risposta che ti sembra più adatta. Non ci sono risposte giuste o sbagliate, quindi rispondi a tutte le domande !

	Falso	Piuttosto falso	Piuttosto vero	Vero
1. Mi piace andare a scuola.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. In classe ho molti amici.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Imparo velocemente.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Non ho voglia di andare a scuola.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Vado molto d'accordo con i miei compagni di classe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Sono in grado di risolvere degli esercizi molto difficili.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Mi trovo bene a scuola.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. In classe mi sento solo/a.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Vado bene a scuola.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. La scuola è divertente.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Con i miei compagni di classe mi trovo molto bene.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Molte cose sono troppo difficili per me a scuola.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



© Venetz, Zurbriggen, Eckhart, Schwab & Hessels (2015); [www.piqinfo.ch](http://www.piqinfo.ch)

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