The Assessment of Emotional and Behavioural Characteristics of 8–11 Year-Old Children with Special Education Needs from Children, Parents and Teachers Viewpoint

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Abstract
The article analyses emotional and behavioural characteristics of 8–11 year-old children with special education needs integrated into general education schools in Raseiniai region from their own, their parents and teachers viewpoint. The survey involved 112 pupils with special education needs aged 8–11, their parents and teachers. Emotional and behavioural characteristics of the subjects were evaluated using Parent Rating Scales, Teacher Rating Scales and Self-Report of Personality for Ages 8–11 of Behaviour Assessment System for Children BASC-2 (Reynolds, R. Kamphaus, W., 2004). The following scales were scored: School problems, Internalizing problems, Inattention/Hyperactivity, and Personal Adjustment. The study results revealed that self-reporting scores of emotional and behavioural characteristics of surveyed children with special needs were within the limits of the average, i.e. they correspond with the typical condition specific to the majority of children of this age group. Parent and teacher rating scores in all assessed areas were far more negative than the scores of children.

Key words: children with special education needs, emotional and behavioural characteristics, emotions and behaviour assessment system.

Introduction
Before the end of 1990s most of the children with special education needs were educated in special schools (Kavale & Forness, 2000). With the changes in education system and approach to education, more opportunities for children with special needs to learn with their normal peers occurred (Burstein et al., 2004; Snyderis & Dillow, 2010). Now children with special education needs are more often included into the education process with their peers irrespective of
their special needs, without giving as much attention as it is given to learning
disability, intellectual disorders, hearing or vision disorders (S. Bullock & Gable,
2006; Hardman, et al., 2008; Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Therefore, in many cases
children with special education needs have fewer opportunities to succeed and
achieve academic excellence. Besides, children with special education needs
tend to spend most of the time with other children who have similar problems
(Wagner et al., 2006), and thus develop the feeling of helplessness and behaviour
problems. Negative experience leads to poor academic and social achievements
at school and after finishing school. According to Wagner and Cameto (2004),
even 20 per cent of children with special education needs are sent to segregated
schools due to their inability to “adapt” to general education school community
or inappropriate behaviour – arguing with school staff, inability to control
own behaviour in different situations at school, frequent fighting, maladaptive
behaviour (Jolivette et al., 2014).

Children with special education needs often have delayed development of
language, its use and cognition, typical development of intellectual, sensory and
cognitive skills (Schwartz, 2009). Researchers (Schwartz, 2009; Goh Kok Yew
& O’Kearney, 2013) claim that 7–8 per cent of pre-school children with special
education needs in later age have long-term communication problems that have
a negative effect on their cognition, learning and psycho-social development.
Besides, for different reasons children with special education needs may
have behavioural and emotional development problems, such as detachment,
depression, anxiety etc. (Zadeh, Im-Bolter, & Cohen, 2007; Durkin & Conti-
Ramsden, 2010). Communication problems, misunderstandings in interpersonal
relationships increase the incidence of conflicts and at the same time disturb
relationships with family members, teachers and peers. Special education needs
combined with language and speech difficulties may affect the child’s ability to
understand more complex and ambiguous social relations and emotions of the
external world (Zadeh et al., 2007). These difficulties may be related with poor
reading skills and other learning skills, and subsequently lead to higher self-
criticism and lower self-esteem (Harrison, McLeod, Berthelsen, & Walker, 2009).

Researchers, who studied the problems of integrating children with special
education needs in Lithuanian schools, found that parents are happy that their
children with special needs go to general education schools; however teachers
working children who have behaviour and emotional problems explicitly stated
that such children cause problems during lessons because classes are too big,
teachers have no assistants and subject teachers are exhausted as these children
require special attention (Bagdonas, Brazauskaitė, Gevorgianienė et al., 2003). Recent studies in Lithuania revealed that the situation in general education schools has worsened: the number of children with special education needs in classes is increasing, their age is younger, their behaviour is more aggressive, and the attitudes regarding their teaching in general education schools are becoming more negative (Gudonis, Mockevičiūtė, 2008). According to A. Ališauskas et al. (2010), 39.5 per cent of teachers believe that such children should be taught in special schools. Researchers found that this opinion prevails among teachers with insufficient competence and lack of motivation.

The assessment of emotional and behavioural characteristics is very important for children with special education needs who go to general education schools. Children who have special education needs due to disabilities or other disorders often experience behaviour and emotional problems; they become withdrawn, feel anxiety, have fears, and low self-esteem. Behaviour and emotional problems cause the delay in the development of their academic, cognitive, interpersonal and social skills; disrupt the education process and lead to more serious disorders (Goh Kok Yew, O’Kearney, 2013).

**Relevance of the research** is justified by the fact that school and home are the most common environments of children with special education needs. These environments have an important effect on emotional and behavioural development of children as well as on the development of their social skills and they must be studied in order to identify problems at the earliest stage and to choose the most effective response measures. Social/emotional development can be predicted and changed when the child’s future problems are foreseen at the early age (Dunlap et al. 2006). The assessment of the child’s problems from parents and teachers viewpoint is very important in order to create a learning environment favourable for and meeting the needs of all: children with special education needs, teachers and parents.

The novelty of the study and research article relates to the use of *Behaviour Assessment System for Children Second Edition, BASC-2* developed for the assessment of emotional and behavioural characteristics using data from three different sources – the child, teacher and parent/guardian. We did not find any studies based on this methodology in Lithuania.

**Research object:** Emotional and behavioural characteristics of 8–11 year-old children with special education needs in Raseiniai region.
**Research goal**: assess emotional and behavioural characteristics of 8–11 year-old children with special education needs integrated in general education schools in Raseiniai region and compare the assessment data obtained from children, their parents and teachers.

**Research subjects.** The research was conducted in general education schools of Raseiniai region in 2014. 259 pupils with special education needs learn in in these schools in full integration form. The survey involved 112 children with special education needs (8–11 year-old girls (n=39) and boys (n=73)), their parents and teachers. Distribution of the surveyed children according to the type of disorder: dyslalia – 67 per cent, dysgraphia –17 per cent, conceptual thinking disorder – 1 per cent, general learning disabilities – 4 per cent, specific learning disabilities – 2 per cent, complex disorders – 7 per cent, mild intellectual disability – 2 per cent.

**Research methods.** Emotional and behavioural characteristics of the subjects were assessed using the instruments of the *Assessment System for Children BASC-2* (Reynolds, R. Kamphaus, W., 2004). BASC-2 system is a multidimensional system that enables to collect information from the child (*Self-Report of Personality*), parents (*Parent Rating Scales*) and teachers (*Teacher Rating Scales*). Lithuanian Sports University purchased the research methodology with copyright permission from AGS publishing and had the components of the system translated into Lithuanian in 2013. The translation was done by two translators independently. Both translations were compared by a linguistically savvy psychologist-psychotherapist certified in Facet5 for personality and competence measurement. 80 per cent of the texts translated by different translators were identical. Translation differences were discussed by the two translators and the psychologist-psychotherapist. The final version of translation was approved upon the collegiate decision of both translators and the psychologist. Pilot studies were conducted in 2013 and presented in the International Conference on Adapted Physical Activity (Ostasevičienė, Gaižauskienė, Réklaityienė, Požėrienė, Adomaitienė, 2013). The results of subsequent studies were presented in the European Conference on Adapted Physical Activity (Ostasevičienė et al., 2014, Požėrienė et al., 2014).

*BASC-2 Self-Report of Personality* SRP-C form for ages 8 through 11 (139 statements) includes statements about emotions, thoughts and cognition and enable to assess the characteristics of the child’s positive (adaptive) and negative (clinical) behaviour. The interpretation of the scores reveals not only weaknesses
but also strengths of the child’s behaviour and emotions. Statements 1 to 51 are evaluated as binomial variables requiring the answer Yes or No. Statements 52 to 139 are evaluated as ranking scale variables with the meanings Never, Sometimes, Often, and Almost always. The collected information helps to identify problematic areas covering certain adaptation spheres: 1) Problems at school (attitude to school, attitude to teachers), 2) Internal problems (atypicality, locus of control, social stress, anxiety, depression, feeling of inferiority); 3) Attention/Hyperactivity problems (attention problems, hyperactivity); 4) personal adaptability (relations with parents, interpersonal relations, self-esteem, self-confidence) (14 scales in total). Administration of one questionnaire takes about 30 minutes.

**BASC-2 Parent Rating Scale** consists of 160 statements. Parents assess the characteristics of their child’s emotions and behaviour during the last months by using the ranking scale with the meanings Never, Sometimes, Often, and Almost always. **BASC-2 Teacher Rating Scale** consists of 139 statements also evaluated by means of the ranking scale with the meanings Never, Sometimes, Often, and Almost always. Some areas are evaluated only by children, some by parents and/or teachers, however six areas of emotions and behaviour – **School problems, Attention problems, Hyperactivity, Atypicality, Anxiety, and Depression** by children, parents and teachers (except for the **Attitude to school**, which is evaluated only by children and teachers).

**Research procedure.** The sample of 8–11 year-old children with special education needs from Raseiniai region was taken from five general education schools of Raseiniai region with the biggest number of pupils with special education needs. The subjects were asked to fill in the **BASC-2 SRP-C** form individually. The administration of the survey was assisted by social educators from schools, who received the guidelines and were instructed by the researchers in writing and orally. Social educators helped the researchers to select children with special education needs, to encode the questionnaires (to ensure the anonymity of the subjects), organize the survey among teachers and parents of children. Children brought home the **Parent Rating Scale** for one of their parents to fill in and then returned it to the researchers. Teachers filled in the **Teacher Rating Scales** about the child/children whom they had known for at least six months. In total 336 filled in BASC-2 forms were received (112 of children, 112 of parents and 112 of teachers).

**Analysis of research data**

Information obtained from the questionnaires was processed by the **Behaviour Assessment System for Children Data Processing Software BASC-2 ASSIST™ Plus** (2004). Every component – **Attitude to School, Attention to teachers, Attention problems** etc. were rated by using T-scores (see Table 1) (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004).
### Relationship between scales and T-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptability result (scale)</th>
<th>Clinical result (scale)</th>
<th>T-score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very high (unproblematic behaviour at all)</td>
<td>Clinically significant</td>
<td>70 or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (unproblematic behaviour)</td>
<td>Risk group</td>
<td>60–69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (typical behaviour)</td>
<td>Average (typical behaviour)</td>
<td>41–59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk group</td>
<td>Low (unproblematic behaviour)</td>
<td>31–40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinically significant</td>
<td>Very low (unproblematic behaviour at all)</td>
<td>30 or lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The standard T-score average is 50, and the standard deviation is 10. The T-score of emotions and behaviour from 41 to 59 is considered average (indicates typical levels of adaptability displayed by the average child of this age). If the T-score in the clinical scale is higher than 70 (30 or lower in adaptability scale), i.e. 3 standard deviations below or above the average, a certain behavioural or emotional disorder in the certain adaptability sphere is identified. The risk group is not considered a disorder; however it requires observation and deeper studies.

Statistical methods were applied for the generalization of results obtained by using the BASC-2 system. Data were generalized by medians. Mann-Whitney U test (T-scoring analogue for ranking scales) was used to compare the T-scores of children, parents and teachers. The obtained results were regarded to be statistically reliable in the case of not more than 5 per cent error (p<0.05). Calculations were done using SPSS 19.0 (*Statistical Package of Social Sciences*) software.
Research results

Self-assessment emotional and behavioural characteristics by children with special education needs

*BASC-2* methodology was used to find out how 8–11 year-old children learning in general education schools feel. The obtained results show that children with special education needs do not have a negative attitude to school (T-score 47) and teachers (T-score 49). According to the survey results, they have typical levels of adaptability displayed by the average 8–11 year-old child. The generalized T-score 48 of *Problems at school* is very close to the average (see Fig. 1).

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Self-assessment of emotional and behavioural characteristics in children with special education needs by T-score medians

*Inattentiveness/Hyperactivity* composite was also evaluated within the average limits. The results show that attention disorders and the level of activity of the surveyed children are typical to the majority of 8–11 year-old children. The generalized T-score of this component 50 does not go beyond the limits of typical behaviour.

The analysis of *Internal problems* composite also showed the scores of the average level. The survey results show that behaviour and thoughts, sense of control, social stress, anxiety and depression in 8–11 year-old children with special education needs are at the typical level displayed by an average child of
this age. The generalized T-score 48 of this composite is within the limits of the average (the level of typical behaviour).

The scores of Adaptive Scales consisting of relations with parents, interpersonal relations, self-esteem and self-reliance also show the average level, i.e. typical condition displayed by an average 8–11 year-old child. The generalized T-score 48 of this composite is close to the average.

The average T-score (51) of Emotional Symptoms Index (composed of Anxiety, Depression, Social Stress and Sense of Inadequacy scales) shows that emotional problems of the subjects are also at the average level.

Comparison of emotional and behavioural characteristics of children with special education needs from children, parents and teachers viewpoints.

Parents assessed emotional and behaviour characteristics of their children within the limits of the average level (T-score ranges from 53 to 56). Nevertheless the obtained results show that parents rated lower their children's attention problems (U=4994,5; p<0,01), hyperactivity (U=4724,0; p<0,001), atypicality (U=2813,0, p<0,001), anxiety (U=3533,5; p<0,001) and depression (U=4473,0; p<0,001) (see Fig. 2).

The same characteristics rated by teachers were also within the limits of the average level (T-score ranged from 53 to 58). However, teachers' scores in depression scale were the highest. It shows that teachers ask to pay attention to this composite.

The scores given by teachers and children were also different. According to the results we may state that teachers rated hyperactivity (U=4713,5; p<0,01), anxiety (U=3262,5; p<0,001), depression (U=3254,0; p<0,000), atypicality (U=2658,5, p<0,001) and attention (U=5100,0 p<0,01) lower than children.

Figure 2. Comparison of emotional and behavioural characteristics from children, parents and teachers viewpoints (T-score medians)
The comparison of parent and teacher scoring showed that the results were almost identical, however teachers evaluated the statistically important depression level worse than parents (U=4728.0; p<0.01).

**Interpretation of results**

These days the benefit of integrated and inclusive education is not doubted any more, and the communities of general education schools are more or less ready to admit children with special education needs. However, research results show that serious problems are still faced while teaching such children in general education schools (Ustilaitė, Kuginytė-Arlauskiene, Valanciūtė, 2011. p.243).

Our survey aimed to find out how 8–11 year-old children with special education needs feel while learning in general education schools and how their parents and teachers evaluate certain areas of their adaptability. First of all we attempted to study the emotional and behavioural characteristics of children with special education needs, in their own viewpoint. BASC-2 *Attitude to school* scale analyses the child’s general opinion about school (Reynolds C.R., Kamphaus R.W. (2004). The generalized attitude of the surveyed children to school and teachers revealed that children to not see any problems in this area. The obtained results show the typical level attitude displayed by the average child aged 8–11. Such attitude to school may have been built by sincere efforts of teachers and the school community working with children who have special needs and attempts to help them. The same is confirmed by the comprehensive study done by the researchers Ališauskas, A., Ališauskienė, S., Gerulaitis, D., Melienė, R., Miltenienė, L. (2010) who found that “teachers of general education schools feel responsible for every pupil, tailor the instruction; school administration is aware of the problems that children with special education needs and their teachers face; and teachers find social integration and inclusion to be the benefit of fully integrated education” (p. 99). Nevertheless, our study showed that statistically significant scores given by teachers assessing the same composite are much lower than the scores given by children. Teachers see bigger problems than children in children’s attitude to school and teachers. Our study did not reveal the deeper causes of such differences and they have to be investigated further. On the other hand, E. Cancio and J. Johnson (2013) found that teacher’s attitude to children with special education needs mostly depend on the stress or tension experienced while teaching such children. It is widely acknowledged that teachers who work with children having a wide range of social and academic problems are constantly under stress, which manifests in the outbreak of negative attitudes, emotions and evaluations.
Our study revealed that the rating of Internalizing problems composite – atypicality (behaving or thinking in ways that are considered odd or strange), locus of control, social stress, anxiety, depression, sense of inadequacy – of the surveyed children with special education needs is within the limits of average scores. The results show that the level of the aforementioned behaviours is typical to children aged 8–11. Parents rated their children's anxiety, depression, and atypicality much lower than the children; however parent scores are also within the average limits. Teacher scoring on children’s anxiety, depression, and atypicality scale is much lower than the scoring done by the children and the difference is statistically significant. It means that teachers are specifically conscious of these behaviours although the children do not see the problem. We may hypothesize that the problems from the first person (child) or the second person (family member) perspective the problems are seen as internal. Meanwhile the teachers are external observers and identify the problem that can be overlooked by the internal observer(-s).

According to Willcutt et al., (2007), Breslau et al., (2009), Tymms and Merrell, (2011), inattentiveness/hyperactivity symptoms are the key factors that influence academic achievements; therefore it is very important to identify these problems and solve them. The results of our survey showed that children score these behaviours within the limits of the average. That means that their attention problems and activeness are typical to the average child aged 8–11. Parents and teachers also scored the level of children's inattentiveness/hyperactivity within the limits of the average, however their scores are lower compared to those of children and the difference is statistically significant. It should be noted that among the surveyed children there were no children with diagnosed attention or hyperactivity disorders. We may question thus whether the “labelling” of children with hyperactivity without knowing the real symptoms of this disorder does not show our overindulgence and irresponsibility when we regard the natural childish behaviour typical of this age group as hyperactive.

Fabes, Gaertner, and Popp (2005), Parke and Buriel, (2006) highlight the importance of studying the relations between parents and children because socializations and comprehensive development of children starts in the family. The analysis of Adaptive Scales scoring by children (the scales includes the composites of relations with parents, interpersonal relations, self-esteem and self-reliance) also indicates the level typical to children aged 8–11. Teachers and parents did not score this scale.
The summary of research results raises several questions that need deeper analysis: Are the self-reported emotional and behavioural characteristics of our children typical because the subjects did not have serious special needs that would cause difficulties for their integration in general education school? Do problems of educating children with disabilities in general education schools depend more on the moral values of teachers than on objective reasons (lack of teacher assistants etc.)? This question is supported by the study of Ustilaitė et al. (2011) arguing that "teachers' attitude is the major factor for the success of inclusive education" (p. 246). Shouldn't we consider whether the currently used teaching methods, the values and attitudes of older generation teachers and the education system by itself is appropriate to the present generation, irrespective of the kind of children we educate – with special needs or without? Perhaps the saying "there are no children with learning difficulties, there are only adults with teaching difficulties" (Sherrill, 1998) is still valid nowadays.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of the attitude to school and teachers in 8–11 year-old children with special education needs showed that children see no problems in this area. The results show the typical level of attitude displayed by the average child of this age. The scoring of teachers is lower and the difference is statistically significant.

2. The scores rating odd or strange behaviour or thinking, sense of control, social stress, anxiety and depression in children's Self-Reports of Personality show the typical level of behaviour displayed by the average child aged 8–11. The rating of children's anxiety, depression and atypicality by teachers and parents was lower than the rating by the children; however the scores were within the limits of the average. The scores of Depression given by teachers were much more negative than the scores of children and parents.

3. Children reported their attention and hyperactivity problems at the typical level of behaviour displayed by the average child aged 8-11. Teachers and parents rated inattentiveness / hyperactivity at the level within the limits of the average, although their rating is more negative than the rating of children.

4. The scores of Adaptability Scales including the composites of relations with parents, interpersonal relations, self-esteem and self-reliance also indicate the level typical to children aged 8–11.
References


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