

School Well-Being in Diverse Classrooms

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National Research Institute

School Well-Being

in Diverse Classrooms



Information about the project

The aim of the 'Accessible School for All' project is to strengthen the ability of specialist teachers to provide appropriate support to children and students with diverse developmental and educational needs, including refugee children and students from Ukraine, and to promote diversity in the classroom and school environment. The project has developed a number of tools to assist with educational and specialist classes, including integration classes. These tools help to foster a sense of community among children and students, and contribute to developing a friendly atmosphere in the classroom/school, which is important for protecting the mental health of children and students.

This publication was prepared by the Educational Research Institute – National Research Institute in partnership with the UNICEF Refugee Response Office in Poland and the Ministry of National Education. The materials, content and views contained in this publication are those of the experts involved in the project and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNICEF or the donor. This publication has not been prepared in accordance with UNICEF's official publication standards, and therefore neither UNICEF nor the donor is responsible for any potential errors.

The Educational Research Institute – National Research Institute (IBE PIB), the UNICEF Refugee Response Office in Poland, and the Ministry of National Education (MEN) have been working together since 2022 on the ‘Accessible School for All’ project to create educational conditions that address the challenges facing Polish schools today. The common aim of these activities is to ensure that all students, especially those with special educational needs and children who have experienced migration and refugee status, have the opportunity to participate fully in the learning process and develop their potential. Strengthening teachers’ and specialists’ ability to provide adequate support to all members of the school community is key to achieving this goal.

Joint work on the project, conducted in close cooperation with school and preschool principals, teachers and specialists, has shown that students’ well-being—their peer relationships, sense of security, and emotional engagement—is one of the key components of high-quality education. As a fundamental element of child development, well-being shapes motivation to learn, the ability to build mental resilience, and the capacity to design one’s own life path; it should therefore be treated on an equal basis with subject learning.

In this context, the cooperation between IBE PIB, UNICEF, and the Ministry of National Education shows that combining scientific and practical perspectives can bring tangible results. The student well-being study presented in this report is particularly important as it provides reliable data on the situation of all students, including children with refugee experience. Evidence-based educational change enables the design of effective, inclusive, and sustainable solutions that respond to real challenges and support every student, regardless of their background or life situation. At the same time, the study results remind us that improving the quality of the education system requires consistency, openness to change, and a willingness to regularly review the effectiveness of the measures being implemented. This is a never-ending process—children’s needs are constantly evolving, and schools must continuously improve their methods in order to respond effectively.

The Project Team of “Accessible School for All”
and UNICEF Refugee Response Office Team in Poland

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Introduction

Accessible education, as a synonym or narrower definition of inclusive education, means adopting an educational process that takes into account the diverse needs of all students¹, regardless of background, life situation, educational experience, or cognitive and socio-emotional functioning. Accessible education is free from barriers to learning and involvement in school life, so that every participant has an equal opportunity to develop their potential. In the face of growing diversity of educational needs in Polish classrooms and deepening educational inequalities, the accessibility of education is becoming not only a pedagogical postulate, but above all a condition for ensuring a good quality of school life for students. Experiences of tailored, high-quality teaching, harmonious peer relationships, positive emotions, and a school climate conducive to development contribute to a generalised and subjective sense of well-being.

Are such experiences common and typical for all students in Polish classes and schools? Do they also apply to students from disadvantaged groups, e.g., students who have experienced migration or refugee status, students with special educational needs? These were the questions we asked when embarking on the research that forms the basis of this publication. While conducting numerous methodological and implementation activities as part of the ‘Accessible School for All’² project, we concluded that diagnosing school well-being across its various dimensions—linked to both the educational and social-emotional spheres—would provide guidance for designing solutions, programmes, and activities to support schools. We are convinced that the results of this research can be useful not only in the process of designing psychological and pedagogical support, but also in reflecting on the organisation of school life so that it is an experience conducive to the development, safety, and engagement of all students, without exception.

In addition to pragmatic considerations, we also see a profound need to assess students’ social and emotional functioning in Polish schools. An important impetus for undertaking research work in this area is the paucity of current studies on the issue of school well-being—both in Poland and worldwide. In a recently published analysis, Norwich et al. (2022), concluded that few attempts have been made thus far to empirically examine the goals of education in terms of student well-being. It may seem surprising that so few studies address the quality of school life, given that it is increasingly recognised as a key element of high-quality education. However, the shortage

¹ The English language translation of this publication uses a simplified method of writing personal nouns based on using plural forms referring to both women and men. This solution was adopted solely for the sake of clarity and consistency of the text, and not with the intention of excluding any representatives of a given group. In cases where gender differentiation was relevant to the interpretation of the research results, this was indicated accordingly in the text.

² The ‘Accessible School for All’ project is implemented by the Educational Research Institute – National Research Institute in partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of National Education in 2023–2025.

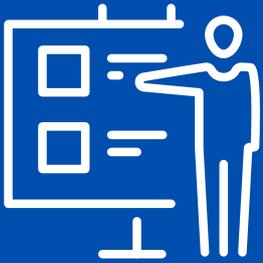


of research is not the only problem. The results obtained so far are also a cause for concern, as they indicate, on the one hand, that supporting students' well-being is treated as a peripheral goal of the school rather than its primary objective, and, on the other hand, that well-being is trivialised. This thesis is confirmed by the latest PISA survey results, which show that in terms of such competences as empathy, cooperation, curiosity, self-confidence, resistance to stress, emotional control, and perseverance, Polish 15-year-olds rank well below the OECD average, with Poland at the bottom of the ranking (Każmierczak & Bulkowski, 2024). The situation was further complicated in 2022, when more than 152,000 children with migration experience and refugee status from Ukraine joined the Polish education system, and their educational needs went beyond the standard requirements of Polish schools (Świdrowska & Stano, 2024). To date, research on the adaptation processes of Ukrainian students in Polish schools and on the challenges faced by teachers working with increasingly diverse classes has been scarce and primarily qualitative. The study presented in this report presents a different, more quantitative perspective. We are keen to accurately measure the intensity of the characteristics constituting student well-being. This measurement will allow us to determine how many students are struggling with problems that require a response, as well as who these students are and how they differ from their peers who are better-adapted to school conditions.

We present you with a publication that is not only a diagnosis, but also an invitation to jointly design education that is accessible to all, in which the well-being of students is one of its fundamental conditions and goals.

Authors

01.



Theoretical foundations of the research on school well-being

01.

Theoretical foundations of the research on school well-being

1.1 Rationale for investigating the school well-being of diverse student groups

In addition to its educational function, the school also plays an important social and care role, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It provides an environment for interpersonal contact, encourages physical activity, and is a place where students can receive support tailored to their individual needs. The pandemic crisis has highlighted the importance of accessible education as a key factor in the well-being of children and youth, regardless of their social, cultural, or health status. It has also emphasised the need to build schools that are resilient to disruption and ready to support students in crisis situations (Tso et al., 2023).

The condition of Polish schools in terms of student well-being has been weakened by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of remote learning in 2020–2023, as well as by the challenges arising from the war in Ukraine. After the escalation of the war in 2022, there was a significant influx of refugee students into the Polish education system (Świdrowska & Stano, 2024). Changes in the student population's structure have introduced new educational and social challenges that may negatively affect the subjective satisfaction with learning among children and youth. The newly arrived students are children whose overall level of life satisfaction may already have been reduced at the time of starting in their new environment due to the forced nature of migration due to the crisis situation and the experience of trauma.

Although the situation of students with refugee experience is exceptional, certain minority groups may be more generally and systematically exposed to lower school well-being. In this study, we focus on two groups of students who may be at risk: children of Ukrainian origin with experience of migration and children with special educational needs, with greater attention paid to the former due to the substantive context of the 'Accessible School for All' project.



Due to the intensification of global migration and growing cultural diversity in schools, the well-being of students with migration experience is becoming one of the most important areas of educational concern. As international and national studies show, students with a migration background often face a range of difficulties that affect their well-being at school. Most of the available field research and systemic data analyses indicate that both the general and school well-being of migrant children is lower than that of their peers without a migrant background (Ambrosetti et al., 2023; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2017). Moreover, these disadvantages for migrants persist when controlling for factors such as the socio-economic status of the parents. However, researchers also note a lack of differences between the well-being of students with and without a migrant background (Céspedes et al., 2021). These results allow us to understand, at least in part, the factors and mechanisms that increase the risk of reduced school well-being of students with a migrant background.

The first such factor is whether the student is a first-generation migrant, i.e., born in a country other than the one in which they live and attend school, or a second-generation migrant, that is, their parents changed their country of residence before they were born. The vast majority of studies indicate that the school well-being of students with a migrant background is clearly higher in second-generation migrants, and sometimes does not differ from the well-being of students without migrant experience (Hjern et al., 2013; Matikka et al., 2015). What does matter is the length of stay in the new country. Studies show that the lowest well-being is experienced among newly arrived students, whose adaptation difficulties are particularly acute. These students experience acculturation stress, caused by difficulties in understanding and adapting to the new culture (Berry, 2005). After just a few months of residence, a clear improvement in adaptation and higher well-being of migrant students can be observed (Matikka et al., 2015).

A second factor that differentiates students' school well-being is the cultural distance between the individual's ethnic group and the host society and its institutionalised education system. Migrants or their children differ considerably in terms of their cultural backgrounds. Some are very similar to the host society, such as Finnish students in Sweden, Irish students in England, or Belgian students in the Netherlands. The situation is different for Afghan students in Sweden, Syrian students in Germany, or Pakistani students in England. A greater cultural distance can hinder children's adaptation at school and, as a consequence, can reduce their school well-being. This finding was confirmed in studies of a large sample of students in Sweden, which showed that the well-being of students from Africa and Asia is significantly lower than that of native Swedes in many dimensions (e.g., peer relationships, social acceptance, satisfaction with school). However, comparisons of the well-being of Swedish children and migrant children from other parts of the world (mainly European countries) generally do not indicate the existence of differences, and sometimes even show that migrant children are in a more favourable position than their peers without migration experience (Hjern et al., 2013). Similar findings were reported in another

international study, which showed that as the cultural distance between migrants and the native population of the host country decreases, differences in students' school well-being disappear (Nauck & Genoni, 2019). In addition to cultural distance, understood as a different system of norms and values, distinct rules for shaping social relationships and behaviours or a different understanding of the essence and value of school, the 'visibility' of migrants' ethnic origin may also be important for adaptation (Hjern et al., 2013). A different skin colour and appearance can exacerbate stigmatisation and discrimination by school peers and teachers.

The third factor is the level of proficiency in the language used in the host country. According to the model of developmental competences of minority students, language proficiency is considered a significant factor contributing to the development and school adaptation of students (Coll et al., 1996). Of particular importance here is cognitive-academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1979), rather than just knowledge of the language of everyday communication. Mastering the language of everyday communication, based on high-frequency words and simple, repetitive syntactic constructions, takes much less time than mastering the language of school education. In the latter case, achieving proficiency in speaking and writing (which is essential in the context of school learning) takes five to seven years of study. Despite the effort made in learning, poor language skills can limit participation in school activities and lead to poor academic performance. Furthermore, it increases susceptibility to peer rejection and victimisation (Grünigen et al., 2010) and the risk of increased negative attitudes on the part of teachers (Chiofalo et al., 2019). In turn, social isolation at school and the lack of educational success significantly reduce students' well-being (Osman et al., 2020).

A fourth factor affecting the well-being of students with a migrant background is the trauma they experienced before leaving their home country. Refugee children who may have experienced violence, the loss of loved ones, prolonged feelings of insecurity and threats to safety are particularly vulnerable. On the one hand, high levels of stress and psychological insecurity can reduce children's adaptive abilities, which negatively affect their ability to concentrate, motivation to learn, and relationships with peers. On the other hand, however, concepts of post-traumatic growth suggest that difficult experiences of war and natural disasters in the home country may trigger additional adaptive capacities in children. Previous research on the significance of traumatic experiences prior to migration has yielded mixed results, indicating that such trauma does not always lead to a reduction in students' school well-being (Atalan Ergin & Akgül, 2023). Further research should contribute to explaining the differences in observed outcomes, which is important given the increase in armed conflicts in recent years and the resulting increase in the number of refugee students.

A separate group of factors that differentiate students' school well-being are the characteristics of school systems in countries receiving migrants. Both the general characteristics of these systems



and their educational policies regarding the inclusion of children with a migration background are relevant here. Horizon 2020 conducted a study of approximately 700 students with a migrant background in six European countries between 2019 and 2022: Austria, Denmark, Spain, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (Dežan & Sedmak, 2023). Although the results indicate a relatively high level of perceived school well-being among these students, significant differences were observed between individual countries. The lowest well-being was reported by students in Poland and Slovenia, which may indicate the importance of (limited) experience among teachers in working with students with a migrant background (Dežan & Sedmak, 2023). The survey also provided information on the importance of teachers' didactic and child development practices for the level of students' school well-being. Above all, positive correlations were found between the frequency with which teachers included intercultural content in the curriculum and students' well-being. Discussing the customs of different cultures as well as linguistic, cultural, and religious differences seems to foster the better integration of students with a migrant background and thus their better well-being at school.

A more ambiguous picture emerges from an analysis of the relationship between promoting the use of students' mother tongues at school and their perceived well-being. A positive relationship between these variables was only reported in Austria and Slovenia (Dežan & Sedmak, 2023). However, it is worth noting that a positive relationship between the possibility of using one's mother tongue at school and students' well-being has already been noted in earlier studies (Fang, 2020; Van Caudenberg et al., 2020). Knowledge about the importance of socio-political and school system characteristics for the school well-being of students with a migrant background is deepened by an international comparative analysis of four countries: England, the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden (Nauck & Genoni, 2019). It showed that students with a migrant background enjoy the highest well-being in a social democratic welfare state with an inclusive school system (Sweden), whereas students in a liberal welfare state with a selective school system (England) have the lowest well-being. Moreover, these countries also differ the most in terms of the well-being of migrant and native students, with the difference being highest in England and lowest in Sweden (Nauck & Genoni, 2019). It can therefore be argued that countries whose schools are less focused on supporting student well-being and more on academic achievement and competition create conditions that are particularly unfavourable for the integration of students with a migrant background.

An important group of factors relevant to the relationship between students' migrant background and their school well-being are the characteristics of the students themselves and their families. The academic literature on students with a migrant background very often points out that many migrant families make efforts to support their children's school learning and to stimulate their educational aspirations, as they realise that school success is the basis for social advancement in the countries of settlement. Therefore, it can be said that many migrant families support

the formation of qualities in their children that are the basis for the development of well-being, understood as flourishing, and therefore self-fulfilment through the development of one's own potential. For this reason, high educational aspirations, motivation to learn, and general self-efficacy are observed among some groups of students with a migrant background (Céspedes et al., 2021). These qualities help students to function well despite adaptation challenges. A different relationship between well-being and school prestige was observed among students with a migrant background than among those without a migrant background. Educational advancement for migrants (moving to a more demanding educational pathway) was associated with improved well-being, whereas for students without migration experience, it was associated with a deterioration in well-being (Nauck & Genoni, 2019). Such results lead to the conclusion that students with a migrant background perceive educational advancement as their success and a source of satisfaction, while their peers mainly focus on the greater demands of the new school and comparisons with their classmates. In the first case, school well-being seems to be shaped by the effect of 'basking in someone else's glory', while in the second case, it is shaped by the so-called 'big fish in a small pond' effect (Alivernini et al., 2020).

The theoretical and empirical findings presented above on the school well-being of students with a migrant background may provide grounds for drawing cautious conclusions about the school well-being of Ukrainian students in Poland. We currently have a small number of national studies and analyses on this topic. Significantly, none of them included a multidimensional measurement of well-being, referring to contemporary understandings of the concept. The most comprehensive qualitative research report to date, however, provides some information on the school well-being of Ukrainian children and its determinants in the Polish school system (Tędziągolska et al., 2024). First and foremost, it shows that the situation of Ukrainian children varies, and that these differences can be observed both within and between schools. Some students experience overload, a decrease in motivation, and an aversion to school. Some Ukrainian students do not establish lasting relationships with their Polish peers, resulting in superficial social integration. Moreover, they refrain from displaying their national identity, leading to a more assimilative than integrative social adaptation. Such practices are often reinforced by the expectations of the Polish majority and certain in-school practices, such as restrictions on the use of the Ukrainian language on school premises. In addition, teachers' competence in intercultural education, which improves migrants' well-being at school, is relatively low (cf. Dežan & Sedmak, 2023). Also noted is a lack of Ukrainian-speaking specialists in school psychological support, which can limit students' well-being. The authors also report on positive phenomena indicating the potential to improve the school well-being of students of Ukrainian origin in Poland, including increased agency and integration.

In conclusion, despite systemic limitations due to the lack of experience of Polish schools in integrating children of migrant origin, international research shows that there are many reasons to



believe that the school well-being of Ukrainian children is quite high. This is primarily supported by the relatively small cultural distance between Poland and Ukraine, which facilitates integration in Polish schools. Another favourable factor is the dispersion of Ukrainian families, who do not form compact enclaves in cities. Consequently, these children generally do not make up a very high proportion of students in individual schools. A report by the Educational Research Institute rightly points out that opportunities to integrate Polish and Ukrainian children should be instituted already at the first stage of placing students in preparatory classes (Papuda-Dolińska et al., 2024). The school well-being of Ukrainian students should also be enhanced by the motivation of many students and their desire to improve their position in the social structure.

1.2 Conceptualising school well-being

The interest in students' school well-being is part of a broader movement concerned with children's well-being (Camfield et al., 2010). This movement has many branches, which, while using a common term, pursue slightly different aims. Without doubt, the impetus for the development of public debate and research in this area was the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. The preamble of the Convention indicates the desire to "improve the living conditions of children", which include: economic, legal, environmental, safety, health, and many other issues. Because of this complexity and multidimensionality, specialists from various scientific disciplines have become involved in research on child well-being, contributing their theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, this has resulted in the inability to establish a universally accepted definition of child well-being (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2014; Camfield et al., 2010). Moreover, the numerous published definitions are difficult to organise logically, which would be useful for understanding the essence of the phenomenon and determining ways to measure it, and, consequently, ensuring the accumulation of knowledge on the subject. These shortcomings have also affected the term "school well-being of students", although it is by its nature embedded in a smaller number of scientific disciplines, primarily pedagogy and developmental psychology.

Among the dimensions of the definition of well-being and school well-being identified so far, some seem useful for at least partially organising these diverse approaches. The first is the distinction between state and process, referring to two philosophical sources of conceptualising well-being: hedonism and eudaemonism (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2014). The first position reduces student well-being to the pleasure derived from current sensations and experiences at school. Thus, well-being is treated as a subjective psychological phenomenon, which has clear implications for its measurement. The well-being of individual students can be ascertained by asking them primarily about the emotions they feel at school and in relation to school. Many researchers treat students' cognitive judgements expressing their satisfaction with school as complementary measures (Hossain et al., 2023). Some tools for measuring student well-being in school, in addition to self-



report questionnaires for students, offer parallel versions for teachers and parents, which use adults to assess students' feelings and judgements (*Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire – PIQ*; see Schwab et al., 2020). Such solutions are methodologically questionable if their aim is to increase the objectivity of student well-being assessments. In a hedonistic approach, well-being is an intrinsically subjective state, and it is the experiencing subject who is most competent to report on it.

Equating school well-being with the intensity of students' positive feelings about school and their well-being at school is difficult to accept from a pedagogical perspective, even if it is relevant to students' acquisition of competences, e.g., academic achievement (see, for example, Kiuru et al., 2020). According to the tradition of pedagogical sociology and progressivism, the primary function of schools is to support the development of students so that they can fulfil their potential and function effectively in communities (Kaya & Erdem, 2021; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1993). From this perspective, school well-being is processual in nature and includes factors important for the effective functioning of students at school, both as learners and as peers, as well as the manifestations of such functioning (Hossain et al., 2023). Since there are many factors that determine good functioning, eudaemonistic concepts are generally multidimensional. These include students' psychological characteristics (e.g., their academic self-concept or ability to self-regulate), their relationships with peers and teachers, and features of the school environment (e.g., access to learning aids or the opportunity to express their own views at school; see, for example, Anderson & Graham, 2016). Although questionnaires addressed to students, which are inevitably imbued with subjective assessments, are still the dominant research tool in this approach, it is possible to use more objective measurement methods, such as sociometric methods to study peer relationships, or observation to learn about student–teacher relationships or the teaching strategies used by teachers. The use of parallel versions of questionnaires addressed to students, teachers, and parents, such as the *Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire* or the aforementioned PIQ (Tobia et al., 2019; Venetz et al., 2015), is also more justified than in the case of the hedonistic understanding of student well-being.

Another dimension that differentiates concepts of school well-being, which has already been partially discussed above, is whether this phenomenon is treated as unidimensional or multidimensional. The one-dimensional approach is more typical of the hedonistic orientation than the eudaemonistic one, but is not determined by it. According to the concise definition of a group of Belgian researchers, school well-being is the degree to which students like school, and well-being is a one-dimensional phenomenon (cf. Belfi et al., 2012). Certainly, this approach is also ontologically homogeneous, as it boils down to emotional experiences relating to school. Liking can, of course, be defined in terms of dimensions of the school environment, for example, liking teachers, peers, the emotional climate, and infrastructure (Engels et al., 2004). Proponents of multidimensional concepts emphasise that they allow for a more complete understanding



of the complex nature of school well-being than unidimensional concepts (Danker et al., 2019; Hossain et al., 2023). The main advantage of this approach is that it allows the intensity of students' various mental states and the different aspects of the school environment in which they function to be examined. Such a detailed picture is, in turn, helpful in taking practical measures to implement multidirectional activities in schools aimed at improving living and learning conditions. This makes the concept of the quality of life at school functional for educational policy at various levels, as well as for building internal school development programmes and improving institutions. Despite this undeniable advantage, the multidimensional approach also carries serious risks. First, the concept of the quality of life at school is often constructed from factors of varying ontological status, that lack clear mutual dependencies with an established theoretical foundation. This makes it impossible to develop standard, generalised measures of the intensity of this feature. Second, this approach means that the concept of quality of life at school has low heuristic potential, and does not provide the impetus to develop and test original models of relationships between different aspects of students' functioning and the characteristics of their educational environment.

The third dimension that differentiates definitions and strategies for measuring students' well-being at school is subjectivity vs. objectivity. Treating well-being as a subjective phenomenon identifies well-being with students' feelings, experiences, and judgements about themselves and their relationships with their environment. This approach has been quite popular in recent years and is often used in research. Many questionnaires have been developed to investigate school well-being understood in this way (Hossain et al., 2023). Its undoubted advantage is that it maintains the homogeneity of the examined areas of well-being, as they always concern the subject's feelings. This approach also facilitates the construction and testing of models of relationships between individual areas of well-being and external factors (e.g., its environmental conditions, such as the characteristics of the curriculum, class composition, or teachers' qualifications) and/or their consequences (e.g., academic achievement). At the same time, this approach does not augment knowledge about the quality of the school environment in which this well-being is experienced by students. For this reason, many research projects also take into account objective dimensions of children's well-being. This approach is more useful in research having practical objectives, such as monitoring the broadly understood quality of schools and initiating and implementing measures to improve it (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2014).

Proponents of the concept of the multidimensional nature of students' well-being at school distinguish different areas of well-being that are difficult to organise. The influential Finnish model proposes four categories: conditions prevailing at school (e.g., school organisation, class size, punishments), social relations (teacher–student relations, peer relations, bullying), conditions for students' self-fulfilment (e.g., appreciation of students' work, opportunities to participate in decision-making) and health (e.g., psychosomatic symptoms, illness) (Konu et al., 2002).



Hascher (2008) proposed a seven-factor model, which includes: positive attitudes towards school, enjoyment of school, positive academic self-concept, problems at school, adverse somatic symptoms at school, depressive mood at school, and academic anxiety. Pollard and Lee (2003), based on a review of the literature, identified five more broadly defined domains of school well-being: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic. Another attempt of a similar nature, using a systematic review of empirical studies from 1989 to 2020, resulted in the identification of eight dimensions: positive emotions, absence of negative emotions, social relationships, engagement, achievement, students' goals at school, intrapersonal factors, and contextual factors (Hossain et al., 2023). Each of these dimensions takes into account different specific factors, which may be similar in nature and function, but sometimes differ significantly from one another. Contextual factors are an example of a relatively coherent category, as they include material and non-material features of the school environment that create conditions for students to learn and develop (e.g., school library, computers, teacher qualifications, programmes, extracurricular activities, etc.). Most categories, however, are more internally diverse. Even a seemingly unambiguous category, such as achievement, includes both academic achievement and motivational factors (self-efficacy and academic self-concept). Nor are the individual categories clearly separable. For example, students' goals at school, understood as educational goals and aspirations that motivate students to learn, functionally belong to the same category as self-efficacy and academic self-concept. Negative emotions, such as anxiety or worry, are very strongly associated with mental health or depression, which the authors classified as intrapersonal factors. In summary, it should be emphasised that, due to the fact that previous attempts to classify the factors that make up students' school well-being do not meet the formal requirements of this form of knowledge, they have limited cognitive value. Nevertheless, they are useful for mapping this construct, as they outline a panorama of dimensions that can be taken into account in studies of students' well-being at school.

Conceptualisations of research into students' school well-being can simultaneously build on existing research findings and research objectives. In line with the currently dominant view, we adopted an integrative model of well-being that combines hedonistic and eudaemonistic approaches (Hossain et al., 2023). This is consistent with influential theoretical concepts, including the PERMA model (Seligman et al., 2009). This model assumes that human flourishing in the context of school is determined by five factors. The first of these—positive emotions at school (P)—draws on a hedonistic understanding of well-being, while the other four draw on the eudaemonistic tradition. An inclusive orientation implies a multidimensional view of well-being, which we also used in the 'Accessible School for All' (ASA) project study. Although the theoretical starting point for the conceptualisation adopted in the ASA study was the PERMA concept, we could not limit ourselves to its identified dimensions. This is because the concept strongly focuses on the individual student, their emotions, experiences, and characteristics. The ASA project study was diagnostic in nature, and its practical implications should be recommendations

for improving the well-being of students, especially those from minority groups (students with a migrant background and students with special educational needs). Therefore, it was also necessary to gain an understanding of the contextual factors not included in the PERMA model. In particular, we wanted to answer the question of whether the school well-being of students with a migrant background, including Ukrainian children and children with special educational needs, differs from that of their typically developing peers of Polish origin. As we have already pointed out, there are several arguments supporting the thesis that the well-being of children with a migrant background and special educational needs is lower than that of the majority of their peers. First, these children experience barriers to the proper fulfilment of school roles due to their limited knowledge of the language of instruction or cognitive limitations. Second, many students with a migrant background already have ideas about school and the role of a student, which, however, do not correspond to Polish reality and do not help them to adapt to it. Third, many students with a migrant background have experienced traumas resulting from the armed conflict in their home countries before arriving. Fourth, teachers sometimes are prejudiced towards students with a migrant background and special educational needs, which can lead to a decline in their academic performance and other indicators of adaptation (Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2018). The probable risk of reducing the chances of success in school and actualising one's potential prompted us to include a component in the study, which we termed *teachers' didactic and child development practices*. It is an adapted variant of a broader component in our study, which is included in influential theoretical concepts and classifications of dimensions of student well-being at school (Hossain et al., 2023; Konu et al., 2002). Its identified dimensions include student-assessed adaptations of teaching to the diverse needs of students (the individualisation and personalisation of teaching) and the support provided to students by teachers. In total, the teacher's work is assessed by students along three dimensions.

The second component of students' school well-being we examined was **relationships with peers in the classroom**. This component is included in all relevant concepts of student well-being at school, stemming from both needs theory and a model of positive psychology adapted to the school context, called positive education (Kern et al., 2015; Seligman et al., 2009). In our study, social relationships in the classroom were examined multidimensionally, including: subjectively assessed popularity in the classroom, perceived loneliness, the experience of peer violence, and general satisfaction with peer relationships.

We defined the third component as **motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school**. Although key concepts of students' school well-being, led by Seligman's PERMA model, distinguish two independent factors, the first of which relates to students' behavioural and emotional engagement in learning, and the second to achievement and the personality predisposition to achieve it, we decided to combine them into a single dimension (Kern et al., 2015; Seligman et al., 2009). Interest in the content being taught, engagement in learning, perceptions



about one's own abilities, and beliefs about the usefulness of school knowledge for current and future life are recognised by educational psychologists as motivational factors. Moreover, their predictive role for academic achievement has been repeatedly confirmed in research (cf. Skinner, 2023; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). This component includes three constructs: academic self-concept, interest in learning at school, and belief in the benefits of attending school.

We also included students' **academic achievements**, operationalised using their grades in Polish and mathematics, in our assessment of their school well-being. Although grades are not usually considered a component of students' school well-being, they can be an important indicator of how students perceive themselves as learners. Research shows that students' academic achievements influence their academic self-concept (skills development model; see Guay et al., 2003), and lower grades co-occur with reduced self-esteem in the role of being a student (Booth & Gerard, 2011).

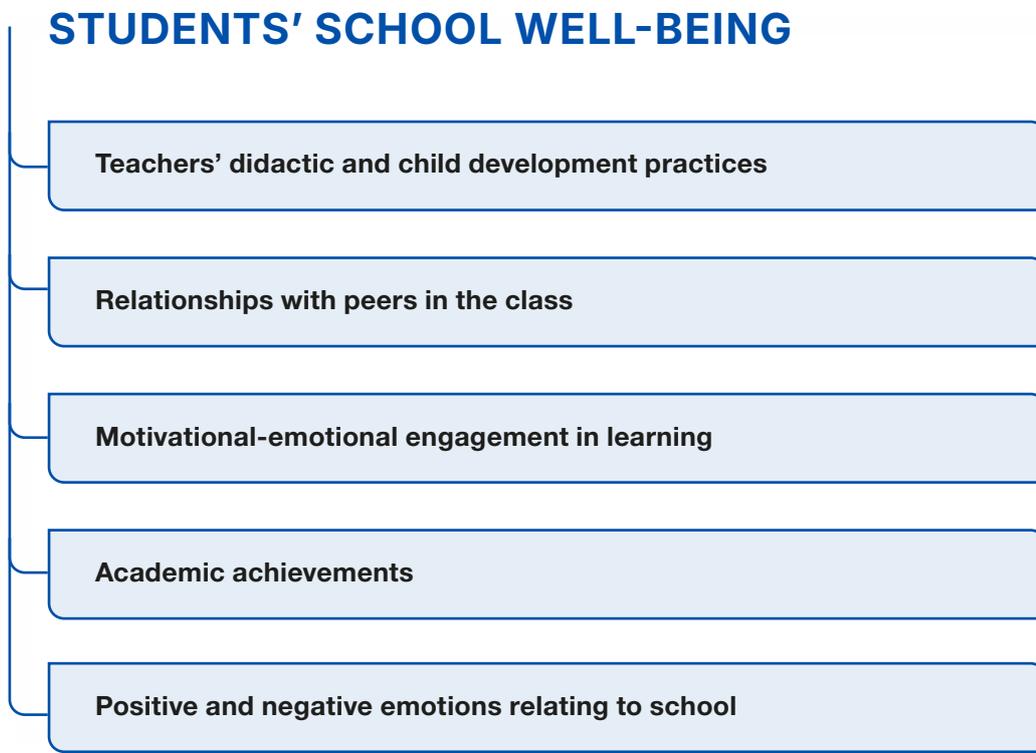
Both the student's school activities and the socially defined function of the school focus on the acquisition of school knowledge and skills, of which grades are one indicator. Positive assessments inform students that their knowledge is growing, they are making progress, they are developing in an important area of life. They also inform them that they are achieving the goals assigned to their role. The internalisation of these goals, linked to the student's attribution of meaning to school education, is one of the dimensions of well-being in the PERMA concept.

Finally, the last two components include **positive and negative emotions associated with school**. Although the different theoretical models and classifications of the dimensions of school well-being name these factors slightly differently, there is consensus among researchers that these two dimensions of emotional attitude should be taken into account. In our study, we identified the positive dimension as emotional integration with the school, which boils down to liking school, while the negative dimension is academic anxiety. It is worth mentioning that academic anxiety is quite often treated as one of the manifestations of negative emotions experienced in relation to school (Hossain et al., 2023), and in the questionnaire designed for the empirical testing of the PERMA model, it is simply treated as a separate factor (Kern et al., 2015).

The survey of well-being among students in schools participating in the 'Accessible Schools for All' project provides a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by children and young people from different backgrounds and identifies factors that can support their adaptation to the school environment. This is particularly important in the context of inclusive education, which aims to ensure equal access to quality education regardless of individual and environmental differences (Dyson & Millward, 2000). Involving the school community, including teachers and peers, in the process of supporting students' well-being can significantly reduce barriers, such as lack of acceptance or feelings of loneliness, which negatively affect the educational and social functioning of students with migration experience and special educational needs.



FIGURE 1 | **Multidimensional framework of school well-being in the study ‘School well-being in diverse classrooms’**



1.3 Operationalising the dimensions of school well-being

Dimension I. Teachers’ didactic and child development practices

Students’ perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

Students’ perceptions of inclusive practices can be described as the subjective experience of their relationship with the teacher, reflecting the extent to which students feel noticed, accepted, and supported in their individuality during the educational process. In the present study, this construct includes, among other things, whether students feel that their teacher recognises their abilities, cares about their emotions, takes their interests into account, and adapts the teaching to their learning needs. In practice, this means that students not only observe the teacher’s actions, but also react emotionally to how they are treated in the classroom. They feel more secure, motivated and engaged when the teacher uses an inclusive approach, i.e., sees classroom diversity as a value rather than a problem. It is worth emphasising that perceptions of inclusivity are more than an assessment of a teacher’s technical skills—they are a reflection of the teacher’s attitudes, empathy, and ability to build respectful relationships, which directly affects students’ psychological well-being, motivation, and sense of belonging. Inclusive teaching practices



contain ways of responding to differences (e.g., cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and social) and attitudes of acceptance and flexibility towards individual students' needs in the design of learning experiences. The interdependence between perceptions of teachers' practices as inclusive and school well-being is supported by research. When students perceived their teachers' didactic approach as more inclusive, their sense of school well-being and social integration improved, as did their academic self-concept (Booth & Gerard, 2011; Venetz et al., 2015).

Students' perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers

Perceived unequal treatment by teachers refers to students' subjective belief that teachers do not treat all students equally, manifesting differences in the level of support provided, respect, and fairness in daily teaching and learning interactions. This construct reflects student experiences of the quality of relationships with teachers, including their willingness to support students' development, recognise their individual perspectives, and provide a fair and motivating learning environment. Perceived inequality can manifest itself in a lack of emotional support, the omission of the student's voice in decision-making processes, the use of inconsistent assessment criteria, as well as different levels of teacher involvement depending on student characteristics (e.g., background, academic performance, behaviour). Consequently, this can have a negative impact on students' sense of belonging, school well-being, and academic self-concept. In the international literature, this notion is sometimes framed within analyses of teacher–student relationships and experiences of fairness in school. The research presented here measured students' perceptions of support and equity, emphasising the importance of treating students equally, respectfully, and motivationally in the educational environment. In this view, perceived inequality in treatment does not necessarily imply overt discrimination, as it can take subtle forms that nevertheless have a real impact on students' sense of equality of opportunity and fairness. Research points to a chain mediating effect of discriminatory behaviour by the teacher, which can set in motion a series of negative emotional and social processes, leading to deterioration in the psychological state of students (Jiang, 2023).

Dimension II. Relationships with peers in the classroom

Loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

The dimensions of loneliness and feelings of dissatisfaction with students' peer relationships in the school environment included in the study indicate subjectively experienced loneliness and problems in peer relationships. Subjectively experienced loneliness is understood here as a discrepancy between the expected and perceived state of one's interpersonal relationships, leading to feelings of negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety (Asher & Weeks, 2013, after Humenny et al., 2020). Loneliness is an unpleasant and stressful state associated with



the unfulfilled need for closeness (Asher & Weeks, 2013, after: Grygiel, Humenny, 2016). The increasing importance of peer relationships for well-being and life satisfaction observed as the child's age increases (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020) means that the inability to form friendships and camaraderie with others has a negative impact on young people's overall sense of class/group membership, social identification, self-esteem, and well-being (Birkeland et al., 2014).

Perceived peer status

Peer status refers to the position an individual holds in the social hierarchy among peers, usually in a school context. It is a complex phenomenon that involves assessing social acceptance, popularity, and the interpersonal relationships a person builds within a peer group. The perceived peer status considered in the study is the individual's subjective feeling about his or her position and positive perception in the peer group. It consists of assessments of one's own popularity in the group, perceived social attractiveness, and how important or well-liked a person feels by peers and is someone with whom others are in tune (Grygiel et al., 2025, in print). This status influences self-esteem and subjectively perceived well-being (Anderson et al., 2012), and low levels are associated with stress and difficulties in psychosocial functioning (Giletta et al., 2021).

Perceived social inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the respondents' relationships with their classmates and denotes a subjective assessment of the extent to which the individual feels accepted, understood and integrated into the class team. Social inclusion, understood in this way, also means integration into a peer group and refers to a sense of belonging, positive interpersonal relationships, and the absence of exclusion, isolation or rejection. High levels of social inclusion promote better psychological well-being and general well-being (Bukowski et al., 2018; Giletta et al., 2021).

Experiencing peer aggression

Peer aggression is conscious and intentional behaviour that is intended to cause harm to a peer (Aronson et al., 2006). It is extremely difficult for a victim to defend themselves against this type of behaviour and the consequences for their psyche can be very serious, whether they experience physical or psychological violence (Haile et al., 2024). There are many types of aggression. This study focuses on the following dimensions: 1) physical aggression – occurs when there is direct contact between the perpetrator and the victim, e.g., by hitting, knocking over, or beating; 2) relational aggression – consists of deliberate actions that lead to a lowering of the victim's status in the group or exclusion, such as gossiping or exclusion from society; 3) verbal aggression – occurs in the direct presence of the victim and manifests itself by name-calling, insults, or ridicule; 4) material aggression, e.g., stealing or destroying the victim's property. One of the most



devastating forms of aggression between peers is bullying, which carries serious consequences for victims. It is a deliberate, prolonged, and repeated aggressive action in which the aggressor clearly dominates the victim, who is deprived of effective means of defence (Plichta & Olempska-Wysocka, 2013). A growing body of research shows that experiencing peer violence at school is associated with long-term negative mental health consequences (Arseneault, 2018; Klomek et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017). Peer violence is widely recognised as a significant stressor (Östberg et al., 2018), and its detrimental effects on health occur through a variety of mechanisms.

Interpersonal self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to how individuals perceive their ability to engage in specific activities competently. It is shaped by previous experiences of success in similar tasks and by social cues received from others (Bandura, 2012). In this context, this variable was operationalised in the study as the perceived ability of students to cope with social challenges (Muris, 2001), manifested in establishing satisfying peer relationships and in assertiveness in various social situations. Interpersonal self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her own ability to deal effectively with social situations, particularly in terms of establishing and maintaining relationships with others, expressing their needs and opinions, and resolving conflicts in interactions with peers. Social forms of self-efficacy predict young people's ability to cope with social challenges. Higher levels of social self-efficacy co-occur with a greater propensity to resist pressure to engage in risky behaviours (Minter & Pritzker, 2015).

Dimension III. Motivational-emotional engagement in schooling

Sense of educational purpose

A sense of educational purpose refers to students' subjective belief that the school activities they undertake are meaningful, valuable, and useful both for learning and for future life. It encompasses the sense that participating in activities, completing assignments and acquiring knowledge is linked to a specific purpose and has meaning beyond current school requirements. A sense of educational purpose is a construct that builds students' subjective well-being (Renshaw et al., 2015). At this stage of life, academic identity is, generally speaking, a significant predictor of student well-being (Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2023). Of particular importance, however, is the fact that a sense of educational purpose—as a central component of academic identity—can act as a bonding function between students' school experiences and their broader sense of meaning in life.



Academic self-concept

In the most general terms, academic self-concept is a construct that describes how students perceive their own intellectual potential needed to cope with the educational demands of school. Academic self-concept is an important component of the hierarchical and multidimensional model of self-concept, which branches into academic and non-academic self-concept. It is therefore an autonomous part of the broader whole in the form of the 'self' concept (Kadir & Yeung, 2020). This concept has a long tradition, dating back to the 1970s (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson et al., 1976). Academic self-concept is a very popular construct in global research in educational psychology and pedagogy, as it is proven to be a stable predictor of academic achievement. Students who are convinced that learning is easy for them, learn quickly and are simply good students, make more progress than students who have a poorer image of their potential, and this effect is not dependent on actual differences in students' abilities (Schneider & Sparfeldt, 2020). This is because a better perception of one's own potential for success increases students' engagement in learning, i.e., their motivation. The interest of educators and educational psychologists in academic self-concept stems from the fact that it has proven to be a better predictor of academic achievement than traditional motivational factors, such as students' academic interests. There are two traditions in the study of students' academic self-concept: (1) a subject-specific approach, which distinguishes between perceptions of one's potential in mathematics, native language, etc.; (2) a general approach, which considers this potential globally. In our study, we adopted the latter approach.

Emotional attitude towards school

It is no coincidence that in many everyday conversations about school in different social contexts, the question of whether students like their school is raised. Students' emotional attitude towards school, also referred to as *emotional bonding with school*, is sometimes even equated with students' school well-being, although, as we wrote earlier, contemporary concepts of school well-being are multidimensional (Guillemont & Hessels, 2022). Nevertheless, a warm, emotional relationship with school and feeling good there are important components of school well-being. However, this should not be reduced to a hedonistic dimension—a pleasurable emotional experience—because an emotional relationship to school also includes identifying with the institution and its socialising environment, as well as having a sense of belonging there, which is also referred to as *emotional engagement* (Fredricks et al., 2005).

An emotional bond with school is positively associated with many dimensions of students' functioning that are important for the quality of their socialisation. Above all, it is a good predictor of their school performance (Wong et al., 2024). In addition, it protects students from dropping out of school (Knickenberg et al., 2022), and from other important socialisation risks, such as increased symptoms of depression or engaging in risky and criminal behaviour (Markowitz, 2017).



Dimension IV. Academic achievements

End-of-year assessments

Academic achievement, often understood as academic performance and formal assessments, is a fundamental part of every student's educational experience. Although intuitively associated mainly with the academic dimension, it is closely linked to the broader notion of school well-being (Guillemont & Hessels, 2022). Educational success not only reflects the level of learning, but also has a significant impact on a student's psychological and social functioning within and outside the school environment. Positive learning achievements, such as good grades, influence self-esteem and competence, which is the basis for psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to self-determination theory, satisfying the need for competence, i.e., a sense of self-efficacy, is crucial for developing intrinsic motivation and overall life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017). High grades can provide tangible evidence of the effectiveness of a student's efforts, build confidence and a positive attitude towards further learning. Students who regularly perform well are often more engaged in the educational process, show more motivation and are more willing to accept challenges. A sense of success fosters the development of resilience to difficulties, allowing students to better cope with frustration and failure (Martin, Marsh, 2008). In the context of well-being, it is important to point out that academic achievement acts as a protective factor: it promotes positive school experiences, can reduce learning stress, and builds a positive self-image as a learner. Moreover, good academic performance is closely associated with maintaining an emotional bond with school, which consequently protects students from prematurely ending their education and reduces the incidence of other socialisation threats, such as increased symptoms of depression or risky behaviour.

In this publication, academic achievement, operationalised as end-of-year grades in the Polish language and mathematics, is analysed as one component of school well-being.

Dimension V. Positive and negative emotions relating to school

Academic anxiety

Academic anxiety is understood as experiencing a negative emotional reaction due to perceiving the broader educational situation as stressful. The subjective experience of anxiety is the result of the interaction of environmental factors (e.g., expectations of academic achievement, educational requirements) and individual factors (disposition to experience anxiety, perceived self-efficacy, previous educational experiences). In a situation perceived as stressful, the degree of threat is assessed relative to the individual's resources for coping with what they are facing (Cassady, 2022; Finch et al., 2024). In the literature, academic anxiety is treated as a general construct



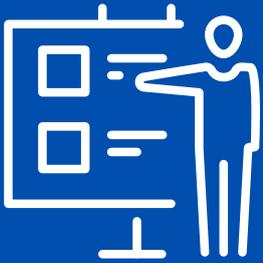
or is detailed in relation to selected educational tasks (e.g., test anxiety) or academic domains (e.g., mathematics anxiety). In line with Cassady (2022; Finch et al., 2024), academic anxiety is treated as an ‘umbrella’ construct that is hierarchically superior to the aforementioned separate dimensions of situational anxiety in educational contexts. Other types of anxiety, such as social anxiety, are also considered in the school context. In turn, anxiety disorders are also recognised in relation to child and adolescent mental health, treated as a nosological unit.

In this paper, we focus on academic anxiety as a broad, unified construct, defined as unpleasant emotions and a state of distress occurring in response to school tasks or situations that are perceived as threatening.

The joy of learning

The joy of learning is understood as experiencing positive yet activating emotions and thoughts when engaging in learning tasks (Renshaw et al., 2015). It includes components such as interest in learning and acquiring knowledge. It is a subjective, individual experience occurring when students discover that they understand new phenomena, extend their knowledge, can control their learning process, and achieve their goals with their knowledge. It is worth noting that an educational culture oriented towards school results and achievement can significantly reduce the subjective sense of enjoyment while learning, regardless of the educational stage (cf. Cronqvist, 2021, 2024).

02.



**Aim of the study
and methodological
framework**

02.

Aim of the study and methodological framework

2.1 Aim of the study

The study on school well-being in diverse classrooms was one of the modules of a broad research component within the 'Accessible School for All' project³. The aim of the research presented in this study was:

- To characterise school well-being along five dimensions in diverse classroom communities,
- To compare school well-being in five dimensions between students with migration experience arriving from Ukraine and their peers attending Polish schools,
- To analyse the predictors of school well-being among such variables as Polish or Ukrainian origin, level of education, family situation, special educational needs or lack thereof, and gender.

The research was conducted in a natural setting, in mainstream classrooms, which formed the unit of analysis. This research approach captured the social-emotional functioning of children in diverse peer groups in their everyday educational environment. The school classroom, as a dynamic social system, was treated as the holistic context of educational interactions, which made it possible to observe naturally formed relationships, patterns of interaction, and forms of participation of students with diverse needs. In contrast to studies based on artificially constructed samples, no selective choice of students for their individual characteristics or homogeneous groups of test subjects was made; actual classroom structures reflecting everyday educational practice were analysed. This methodological assumption was conducive to obtaining data with high ecological value and contextual relevance.

³ The 'Accessible School for All' project is being implemented by the Educational Research Institute – National Research Institute in cooperation with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education from 2023 to 2025.



The research is used to describe the dimensions of well-being, for which methods and support activities should be designed to respond effectively to the needs of all students, with a particular focus on students with diverse learning needs. The research was diagnostic rather than evaluative. Its purpose was to provide an in-depth understanding of how students function in a diverse school environment, and which areas of their well-being require particular support, so the formulation of hypotheses was abandoned.

The findings can serve as the basis for:

- designing effective and inclusive teaching methods,
- supporting specialist teachers in creating an accessible learning environment,
- strengthening the component of school well-being as a goal and outcome of inclusive education,
- more accurately targeting support and psychological-pedagogical measures in the school environment.

More broadly, the research responds to the project's strategic objective of supporting professionals in building accessible, equitable, and inclusive education, in which student well-being is a key criterion for the effectiveness of educational and pedagogical activities. In-depth knowledge of the school well-being of Polish primary school students can contribute to identifying areas of risk that require integrated, coordinated action at individual, local, and systemic levels.

2.2 Description of the research tools

A set of different psychometric tools was used to measure school well-being in a multidimensional approach, each addressing a distinct, theoretically grounded dimension of well-being. The study used existing Polish adaptations of the original tools or adapted them for the purposes of the study described here. The adaptation procedure was conducted in accordance with the principles of the cultural adaptation of psychometric tools (Hornowska & Paluchowski, 2004) and included several stages: parallel translation by two translators, direct comparison of the translations, adoption of a common version of the translation, reverse translation, analysis and improvement of the translation, and agreement by a team of experts on other necessary changes such as: modification, addition and deletion of selected questions due to their content and/or form, modification of the response scale.


TABLE 1 | Tools used in the study ‘School well-being in diverse classrooms’

Well-being dimension	Specific dimension	Tool
Teachers’ didactic and child development practices	Students’ perceptions of inclusive teaching practices	<i>Inclusive Teaching Practices Scale (S-ITPS), Personalisation subscale</i>
	Perceived inequalities in teachers’ treatment	<i>Teacher Discrimination Behavior (TDB)</i>
Relationships with peers in the classroom	Loneliness and lack of satisfaction with peer relationships	<i>Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ)</i>
	Perceived peer status	<i>Perceived Social Position among Peers Questionnaire (PSP PQ)</i>
	Perceived social inclusion	<i>Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ), Social Inclusion subscale</i>
	Experience of being a victim of peer aggression	<i>European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (EBIP-Q), Victimization subscale</i>
	Interpersonal self-efficacy	<i>Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C)</i>

Well-being dimension	Specific dimension	Tool
Motivational-emotional engagement in schooling	Sense of educational purpose	<i>Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ), Educational Purpose Scale (EPS) subscale</i>
	Academic self-concept	<i>Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ), Academic Self-Concept (ASC) subscale</i>
	Emotional attitude towards school	<i>Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ), Emotional Inclusion (EMI) subscale</i>
Academic achievements	End-of-year assessments	End-of-year Polish language assessment in a Polish school
		End-of-year mathematics assessment in a Polish school
Positive and negative emotions associated with school	Academic anxiety	<i>Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS)</i>
	The joy of learning	<i>Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ), Joy of Learning subscale</i>



2.2.1 Tools for assessing teachers' didactic and child development practices

Student well-being in the school environment is primarily shaped by the quality of relationships with teachers and the way teaching and learning activities are conducted. This study pays particular attention to two aspects of these experiences: perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and perceived treatment by teachers. Both dimensions are key to building a climate that fosters engagement, a sense of belonging, and trust in the teacher–student relationship. Complementary questionnaire tools were used to measure these, enabling them to capture both the inclusive nature of didactics and fairness, as well as support in interpersonal relationships. Details of the scales used are presented below.

■ Students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

Students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices were measured using the Polish version of the *Inclusive Teaching Practices Scale – Student version* (S-ITPS), originally developed by Schwab et al. (2019), in the Polish adaptation of Szumski et al. (2022). This tool is used to assess the extent to which students perceive the teacher's inclusive approach, understood as taking into account their individual abilities, emotions, interests, and learning needs. In the study, we used items relating to one of the scale's dimensions, i.e., personalisation. The students surveyed referred to seven statements beginning with the phrase 'During lessons...', which referred to the practices of the Polish language teacher. Examples of items include: "...my Polish teacher takes my capabilities into account" and "...my Polish teacher takes my feelings into account". Responses were given on a 4-point scale: 1 – *yes*, 2 – *rather yes*, 3 – *rather no*, 4 – *no*. We recoded the obtained data before analysis so that higher scores reflected a higher level of perceived inclusivity. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.84.

The S-ITPS scale is a useful tool for investigating the quality of teacher–student relationships in the context of inclusive education and for identifying practices that support diversity in the classroom.

■ Perceived unequal treatment by teachers

Students' perceptions of teacher behaviour indicative of equitable or inequitable treatment were measured using selected items of the *Teacher Discrimination Behavior* (TDB) scale, developed in the context of investigating teacher–student relationships and perceptions of fair treatment (Jiang et al., 2023). In the version of the tool developed for this study, students rated seven statements about the emotional support, fairness, and motivational nature of interactions with teachers, such as: "My teachers always motivate me to be better" and "Teachers respect my opinions".



Responses were given on a 5-point scale: 1 – *I strongly disagree*, 2 – *I rather disagree*, 3 – *difficult to say*, 4 – *I rather agree*, 5 – *I strongly agree*. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.87.

The scale reflects positive aspects of teachers' treatment of students and has been used as an indicator of feelings of acceptance, equality, and support in the school environment. Higher scores indicate a more positive perception of teachers' behaviour, which students interpreted as fair and supportive. This tool enables analysis of the extent to which students feel they are being treated in ways that promote their development, regardless of individual differences or difficulties.

2.2.2 Tools for assessing peer relationships in the classroom

A student's well-being in the school environment depends to a large extent on the quality of their relationships with peers, their sense of belonging, and acceptance in the group. This study takes a multidimensional approach to measuring the social aspect of well-being, including both positive (e.g., peer status, interpersonal self-efficacy) and negative relational experiences (e.g., feelings of loneliness, experience of peer violence). Four complementary questionnaire tools were used to capture a wide range of students' subjective experiences in the context of peer relationships. The following is a detailed description of the scales used.

■ Loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

Feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction with students' peer relationships in the school environment were measured using Cassidy and Asher's (1992) *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire* (LSDQ) in the Polish adaptation by Joanna Smogorzewska (Smogorzewska et al., 2024). The questionnaire was developed to measure the subjective experience of loneliness and problems in peer relationships. The tool is well-established in research on children's and adolescents' peer relationships and shows good psychometric properties in terms of reliability and validity (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). The questionnaire was modified for this study. The modification consisted of adapting the LSDQ scale items' content to a language level appropriate for students in the upper primary grades. Among other things, the replacement of the word 'children' with 'peers' or 'classmates' and the clarification of the context were introduced, e.g., 'play' was replaced with 'spend leisure time'. For example, the item "There are children I can talk to at school" was changed to "There are peers I can talk to at school", "I'm good at working with other children at school" to "I'm good at working with other classmates at school", and "There are children I play with at school" to "I have friends at school with whom I spend my free time". In addition, the response format was changed from a three-point (1 – *no*, 2 – *sometimes*, 3 – *yes*) to a four-point scale (1 – *not true at all*, 2 – *rather not true*, 3 – *rather*



true, 4 – *completely true*), which was also intended to better tailor the tool to older students. The questionnaire consists of 23 items: eight address general attitudes towards school, and the rest address perceived loneliness at school. A total of 15 items were included in the survey, with students assessing the extent to which each statement applied to their school situation. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.92.

Seven of the 15 items referred directly to difficulties in social relationships, such as loneliness, rejection, or lack of acceptance. Responses to items indicating satisfaction with social relationships were reversed before calculating the overall score so that a higher overall score indicates higher levels of loneliness and lower levels of social satisfaction, in line with the purpose of the analyses conducted.

■ Perceived peer status

Perceived peer status was measured using a seven-item questionnaire, *Perceived Social Position among Peers Questionnaire* (PSPPQ), developed by Grygiel et al. (in press). This tool is used to assess a student's subjective sense of social standing within their peer group, particularly in terms of recognition, influence, and social attractiveness in the classroom.

Students rated the degree of agreement with statements about their relationships with their peers, such as: "Classmates often seek my company during breaks or free time" and "I am usually one of the first people invited to parties or to get together with other classmates". Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *rather disagree*, 3 – *difficult to say*, 4 – *rather agree*, 5 – *strongly agree*. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.86.

Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social status in the classroom—a sense of being valued, invited, and influential in the eyes of peers.

■ Perceived social inclusion

Social inclusion was measured using the *Social Inclusion* subscale of the student version of the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* (PIQ) by Venetz et al. (2015; see Zurbriggen et al., 2019) in a Polish adaptation by Szumski et al. (2021). The scale includes four items relating to peer relationships and feelings of being accepted in the classroom, for example: "I have a lot of friends in my class" and "I get along very well with my classmates".

Students rated their agreement with the statements on a 4-point scale: 1 – *not true at all*, 2 – *rather not true*, 3 – *rather true*, 4 – *completely true*. Higher scores indicate a higher level of social



integration in the school environment. In the study by Zurbriggen et al. (2019), the subscale exhibited high reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$) and confirmed theoretical relevance. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.84.

■ Experience of peer aggression

The experience of being a victim of peer aggression was assessed using the *Victimization* subscale of the Polish adaptation of the *European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire* (EBIP-Q), originally developed as part of the European Daphne III project (Brighi et al., 2012) and subsequently adapted to Polish conditions by Twardowska-Staszek et al. (2018).

The subscale consists of seven items relating to different forms of aggression by peers: physical, verbal, and relational violence and bullying. Students responded to how often they had experienced each situation in the past two months, using a 5-point scale: 1 – *never*, 2 – *once or twice*, 3 – *two to three times a month*, 4 – *once a week*, 5 – *more than once a week*. Sample items included statements such as: “I was rejected or ignored by classmates” and “A classmate has bullied me”.

In validation studies of the Polish version of the EBIP-Q, the *Victimisation* subscale showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.81$) and agreement with the original structure. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.85.

■ Interpersonal self-efficacy

Interpersonal self-efficacy was measured using the social subscale of the *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children* (SEQ-C) developed by Muris (2001) adapted to Polish by Łaguna and Kaczmarek (2012). This subscale is used to assess students' belief in their ability to cope with social situations, such as establishing relationships, resolving conflicts, and communicating their own needs and boundaries.

Students responded to eight items on relationships with peers, for example: “How well are you able to make friends with your classmates?” and “How well can you express your opinions when other classmates disagree with you?” Responses were given on a 5-point scale: 1 – *very poorly*, 2 – *poorly*, 3 – *moderately*, 4 – *well*, 5 – *very well*.

In the original study, the social subscale showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$; see Muris, 2001) and good theoretical relevance, as confirmed in analyses with school-aged children and adolescents. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.82.



2.2.3 Tools for assessing motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school

Contemporary approaches to the well-being of children and youth emphasise the importance not only of their social relationships, but also of their engagement in the educational process at both the cognitive and emotional level. In the present study, motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school was treated as a multifaceted construct, encompassing three key dimensions: achievement of educational goals, self-assessment as a learner, and emotional attitude towards school.

The measurement of the individual dimensions was based on recognised psychometric tools that enable an accurate assessment of students' perceived value of school activities, their self-confidence, and their sense of belonging and comfort in the school environment. This made it possible to capture the relevant factors contributing to students' intrinsic motivation and to identify potential difficulties in their educational functioning. The details of the scales used are described below.

■ Sense of educational purpose

The sense of educational purpose was measured using four items from the *Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire* – SSWQ (Renshaw et al., 2015; Polish adaptation: Zadworna et al., 2023). The *Sense of Educational Purpose* subscale assesses the extent to which students perceive their school activities to be important, meaningful, and useful in an educational and life context. Example items include: “I feel that what I do at school is important” and “I believe that what I learn at school will help me in life”.

Students rated the frequency with which they had experienced the described states over the past month using a 4-point scale: 1 – *never*, 2 – *sometimes*, 3 – *often*, 4 – *always*. Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in the undertaken educational activities.

The subscale has high reliability. In the original US version, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this dimension was 0.84 (Renshaw et al., 2015). In validation studies of the Polish version (SSWQ-PL), a similar reliability value ($\alpha = 0.85$) was reported (Zadworna et al., 2023), confirming the internal consistency of the scale. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.89.

■ Academic self-concept

Academic self-concept was measured using four items derived from the *Academic Self-Concept* subscale of the student version of the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* (PIQ; see Venetz



et al., 2015). This tool was designed to assess three key aspects of students' psychological functioning in the school environment: sense of belonging, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem as a student. The questionnaire is used both for research and for the practical evaluation of the effects of inclusive education and the level of inclusivity in school classrooms.

Four items relating to perceived educational competences were used in the study analysed, e.g., "I am a fast learner" and "I am a good student". Students rated the congruence of each statement with their own experience, using a 4-point scale: 1 – *not true at all*, 2 – *rather not true*, 3 – *rather true*, 4 – *completely true*.

A higher score indicates a more positive perception of one's own ability and effectiveness in the educational environment. According to data presented by Zurbriggen et al. (2019), this subscale shows good reliability ($\alpha = 0.79$) and has proven theoretical relevance. The PIQ questionnaire is particularly useful in studying children attending mainstream schools, including in the context of inclusion and the integration of students with diverse learning needs. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.80.

■ Emotional attitude towards school

Emotional inclusion was measured using the *Perception of School Belonging* subscale of the student version of the *Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire* (PIQ) developed by Venetz et al. (2015).

The *Emotional Inclusion* subscale refers to students' emotional attitude towards school as a place where they feel comfortable, accepted, and safe. Students responded to four statements, including "I like going to school" and "I really like it at school". They rated the degree of agreement with their own feelings on a 4-point scale: 1 – *not true at all*, 2 – *rather not true*, 3 – *rather true*, 4 – *completely true*.

Higher scores indicate a positive emotional connection to school and a sense of comfort and satisfaction with being in the school environment. In the study by Zurbriggen et al. (2019), this subscale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$) and was confirmed as theoretically relevant in analyses involving children from mainstream schools. Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.87.



2.2.4 Assessing academic achievements

■ End-of-year grades in Polish and mathematics

In assessing students' well-being, an important role is played by their academic functioning, understood as the result of previous educational experiences and cognitive competence. The study adopted an objective indicator of academic achievement in the form of end-of-year grades in two key subjects, Polish language and mathematics, obtained in the previous school year (see Szumski & Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 2010). This information complements subjective measures of engagement and self-assessment, enabling the relationship between academic achievement and various aspects of students' well-being to be analysed. Details of how this is measured are outlined below.

Participants were asked to self-report their Polish and mathematics grades by answering the questions: "What was your grade at the end of the year in Polish language at a Polish school?" and "What was your grade at the end of the year in mathematics at a Polish school?" Students chose one of the grades in the Polish school system: from 6 (excellent) to 1 (inadequate), in accordance with the applicable six-point grading scale.

A response option was available for students who had not attended a Polish school in the previous year: "I did not attend a Polish school in the previous school year". These data allow objective academic functioning to be assessed in two key subjects and provide an indicator of cognitive school competence, which can be analysed in the context of well-being, emotions associated with school, and socio-cognitive variables.

2.2.5 Tools for assessing positive and negative emotions associated with school

Emotions play a key role in students' daily functioning and influence their motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Balanced school well-being includes both the presence of positive emotions associated with learning and a reduced intensity of negative experiences, such as academic anxiety. The study considered two complementary dimensions of students' emotional functioning: enjoyment of learning as an indicator of positive engagement, and academic anxiety as a manifestation of the emotional burden associated with learning situations. The tools used enable a comprehensive assessment of the emotional dimension of students' well-being, providing a starting point for identifying resources and emotional support needs in the school environment.



■ Academic anxiety

Levels of academic anxiety were measured using the *Academic Anxiety Scale* (see Cassady, 2022; Cassady et al., 2019), adapted for the study described here. The scale was developed to assess generalised anxiety reactions of students in educational situations. The scale consists of 11 items describing typical school stressors, such as fear of failure, low self-confidence in relationships with peers, stress in situations of performing assignments, or fear of being assessed by teachers. Example items include: “I often worry that my performance at school is not as good as expected” and “I tend to put off doing assignments at school because they cause me stress”.

Participants rated the accuracy of each statement in relation to their own experiences on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 – *not at all typical of me*, 4 – *very typical of me*. The scale shows a unidimensional factor structure and high internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$; see Cassady et al., 2019; Finch et al., 2024). The scale is applicable to both screening and diagnostic studies, enabling the identification of students in need of emotional support in educational settings. Cronbach’s alpha reliability index for the scale in this study was 0.87.

■ The joy of learning

The joy of learning was measured using one of the four subscales of the Polish adaptation of the *Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire* – SSWQ-PL (see Renshaw et al., 2015; Polish adaptation: Zadworna et al., 2023). This subscale consists of four items relating to students’ positive engagement in the educational process, such as: “I am interested in acquiring knowledge at school” and “I enjoy learning at school”. Students rated the frequency with which they had experienced the described states over the past month using a 4-point scale: 1 – *never*, 2 – *sometimes*, 3 – *often*, 4 – *always*.

High scores on this subscale reflect genuine interest in learning, positive excitement about schoolwork, and intrinsic motivation to learn. The tool shows good psychometric properties, including a homogeneous factor structure and high internal reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$; see Renshaw et al., 2015; Zadworna et al., 2023). Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient for the scale in this study was 0.82. The questionnaire is used in both research and educational practice to support the assessment of well-being among school-aged students.



2.2.6 Assessing the level of language adaptation

■ Language adaptation scale

The *School Language Adaptation Scale* (SAJwS) questionnaire, designed for this study, was used to assess the level of language adaptation. It is designed to assess competence in Polish in an educational context. The questions concern both everyday communication and the language of school education. They refer to the reception (understanding) of language as well as expression in Polish, and also allow for the assessment of the subjective sense of competence in communication through speech and writing (reading and writing) in Polish, as well as the assessment of the language skills of students with migration experience in the context of teaching in Polish. The scale consists of five questions concerning different aspects of Polish language use, such as understanding the teacher during lessons, the ability to converse with peers, understanding texts in textbooks and teaching materials, the ability to write essays and other written work, and feeling comfortable speaking up in class. Students rated their experiences and skills on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 – *very poor*, and 5 – *very good*. The questionnaire provides insight into the students' subjective assessment of their level of linguistic adaptation and their educational needs in learning Polish. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale in this study was 0.88.

2.3 Research procedure

2.3.1 Recruitment

The study used a random sample of participants, with the criterion being the school's participation in the 'Accessible School for All' project, in which the number of students with migration experience exceeds 20. The survey covered students in grades 4–8 of primary schools.

Recruitment for the study took place in three phases:

<p>1. In the first phase, e-mails were sent to selected schools participating in the 'Accessible Schools for All' project, identified on the basis of preliminary data on the number of students with migration experience. The e-mails outlined the study's purpose, its importance, and the benefits of participation.</p>	<p>2. In the second phase, other educational institutions that were not included in the first phase but also have a large number of students with migration experience were contacted. These institutions received detailed information about the study and were encouraged to participate.</p>	<p>3. The third phase was conducted to maximise the number of participants. Schools that had previously expressed initial interest but had not confirmed their participation were approached.</p>
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The process of recruiting schools was followed by the selection of school study coordinators, who were responsible for organising and supervising the survey in the respective schools. Their task was also to obtain consent from students' parents/legal guardians for their participation in the study.

2.3.2 Ethical issues

The research design was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Educational Research Institute and accepted by the team of the Review of UNICEF Research Project Materials for the Protection of Human Subjects.

All ethical standards for conducting research in the social sciences were observed during the study, respecting the respondents' right to consent and privacy, as well as ensuring their anonymity. Due to the participation of underage students in the study, the school study coordinators—with the help of the form teachers of the randomly selected classes—asked the students' parents/legal guardians to provide written consent for their children to participate. The consents have been archived. Leaflets distributed to parents informed them about the study and its purpose. They also included a description of how the study would be conducted at school, along with procedures to ensure respondents' comfort and the anonymity of the collected data. The leaflets also provided an email address for contacting the organisers in case of any concerns relating to the study.

In order to ensure the comfort of participating students, the school study coordinator was tasked with ensuring that if students felt unwell as a result of their participation in the study, they would be provided with support from a specialist teacher working in the school. Parents and students were informed of this possibility.

2.3.3 Course of the study

The research was conducted between November 2024 and April 2025. Prior to the study, students were informed by the school study coordinator of its purpose, voluntary nature, and complete anonymity. Students who agreed to participate in the study completed the questionnaires electronically via the LimeSurvey platform. The questionnaires took an average of 25 minutes to complete. To ensure anonymity, each student was given a unique code that made it impossible to identify and link the results to a specific person. Respondents who indicated Ukraine as their country of birth were given the opportunity to choose the language version of the questionnaire from the three available: Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian.



2.4 Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

2.4.1 Schools and classes

In accordance with the methodological assumptions, the study was conducted in the natural setting of participating schools—in mainstream classrooms (except for one integrated school), which served as the reference point for the self-descriptions obtained from the students. Twenty-three primary schools participated in the survey, including 22 mainstream schools and one integrated school. A total of 78 school classes were surveyed in the schools. Only those students whose parents/legal guardians had given their consent participated in the study.

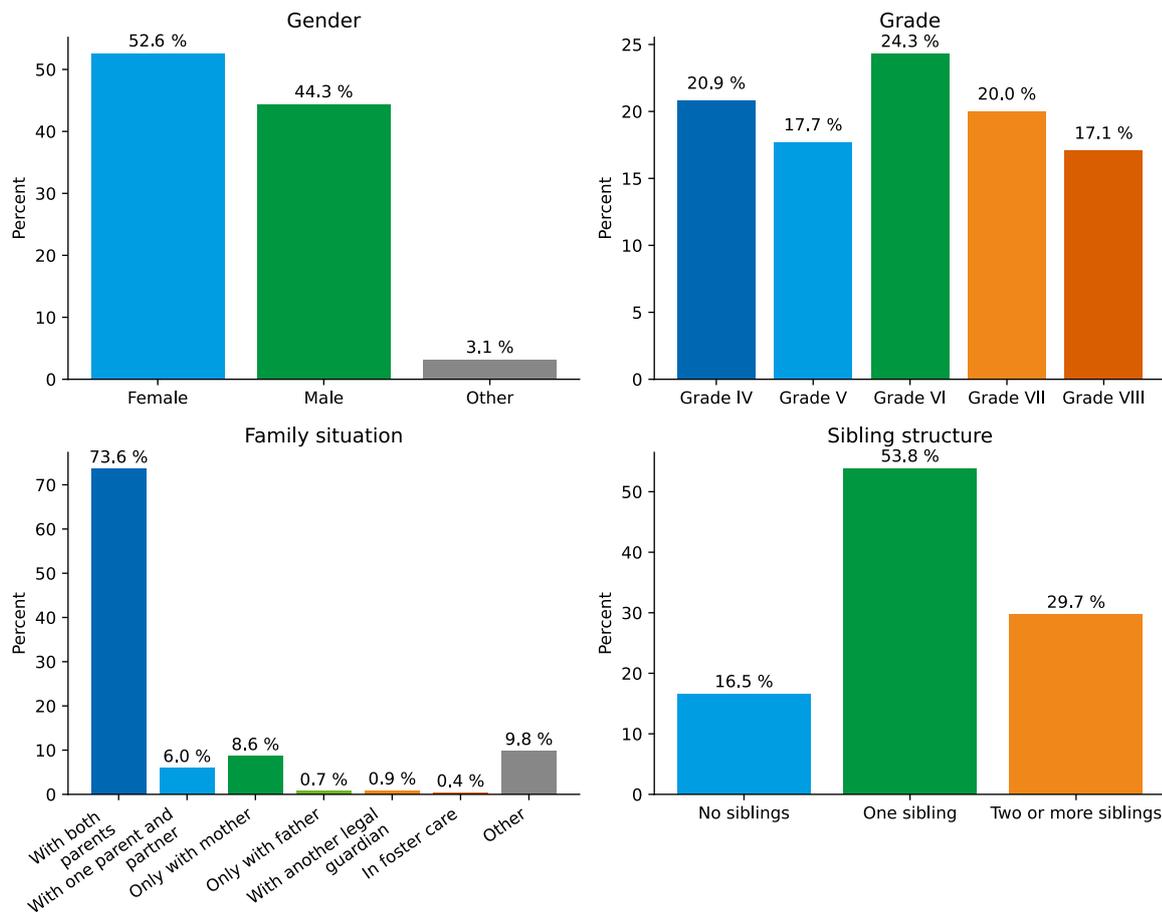
The study covered schools in towns of varying sizes across Poland. The total number of students in the schools participating in the study varied, ranging from 148 to 655 students. In mainstream schools, the number of students with a ruling on the need for special education ranged from 2 to 37, and in the inclusive school, 65 (this applies to students in grades 1–8).

As already mentioned, in line with the theoretical and methodological assumptions, the study concerned schools participating in the ‘Accessible School for All’ project, which allows us to outline the context of the support received by these schools. Direct project participants were specialist teachers (psychologists, educationists, special educators, speech therapists, educational therapists), who, through participation in an extensive training cycle based on an innovative learning-by-doing model, acquired the competences and skills necessary to perform the role of a learning accessibility advisor. As leaders, they shared their knowledge with teaching staff and implemented practical interventions in their schools, successively providing support to teachers, students, and their parents. The project participants, employed in the schools participating in the study, included a total of 50 specialists. Their number ranged from 1 to 5, depending on the school. Most often, they were special educators and psychologists. By participating in the project, they planned and then implemented a variety of educational and specialist strategies appropriate to the identified needs. These strategies were focused on supporting all students, protecting mental health, and conducting integration activities for students with migration experience. These activities were implemented in schools until the end of the school year (see Papuda-Dolińska et al., 2025).

2.4.2 Students

The demographic characteristics of the participating students are presented in Chart 1.

CHART 1 | **Socio-demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study (N = 1608)**



A total of 1,608 students in grades 4–8 participated in the study. Of this group, 52.6% were girls, 44.3% were boys and 3.1% indicated ‘other’. The study group of students is characterised by a small but stable prevalence of girls over boys in all grades (see Table 2). These proportions are fairly constant from year to year. The only noticeable change is a small but steady increase in the percentage of students choosing the ‘other’ category in the older grades.



TABLE 2 | Distribution of the variable ‘gender’ by respondents’ grade (N = 1608)

Gender	Grade				
	4	5	6	7	8
Female	53.9%	50.2%	55.0%	51.6%	51.3%
Male	44.0%	46.6%	42.2%	45.3%	44.0%
Other	2.1%	3.2%	2.8%	3.1%	4.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The students surveyed are pursuing the second stage of education, with 20.9% of students attending grade 4, 17.7% attending grade 5, 24.3% attending grade 6, 20.0% attending grade 7, and 17.1% attending grade 8.

The vast majority of respondents (73.6%) lived with both parents. The remaining students reported other family situations: 6.0% lived with one parent and their partner, 8.6% only with their mother, and 0.7% only with their father. A small percentage of students indicated that they live with a different legal guardian (0.9%), in a foster family (0.4%), or in another configuration (9.8%). In terms of sibling structure, 16.5% of respondents reported having no siblings, 53.8% had one brother or sister, and 29.7% grew up in families with at least two siblings.

2.4.2.1 Students with migration experience from Ukraine

The vast majority of respondents were Polish-born students (95.6%), with students from Ukraine making up 4.4% of the sample. This distribution in the sample reflects the structure of the student population in Polish schools according to data from the Educational Information System (Nowak, 2024), which reports that four out of every hundred students are Ukrainian children. We wanted to include mainstream classes where there are no large concentrations of Ukrainian students, but only a few children with migration experience in the class among Polish students. This configuration reflects the most commonly occurring social situation of these students in Polish classrooms.

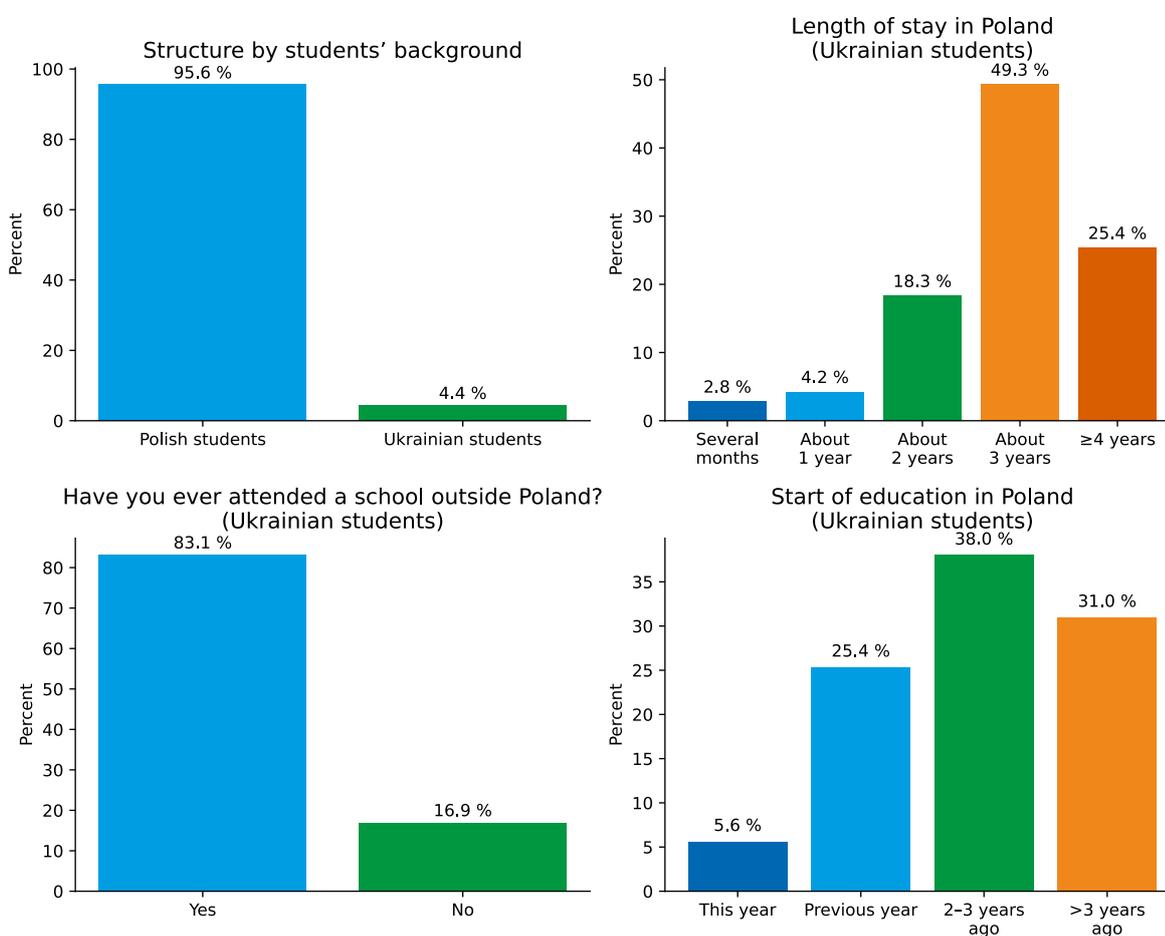
Regarding the length of stay in Poland, among the 71 Ukrainian-born students, the largest group (49.3%) has been in Poland for approximately 3 years. A further 25.4% have lived in Poland for at least four years, and 18.3% for about two years. A shorter period of stay (up to one year) was reported by a total of 7% of the respondents in this group (4.2% – about a year, 2.8% – several months). An estimated 53 out of 71 Ukrainian students (74.6%) have been in Poland for a period

of time that may be related to the migration caused by the war in Ukraine, i.e., they declared a stay of approximately three years, two years, one year, or a few months, and thus their stay began after February 2022. However, it should be noted that these figures are based on students' subjective, rounded estimates of the length of stay, and the survey itself was conducted at the turn of 2024 and 2025. For this reason, we cannot unequivocally determine the moment of arrival or attribute it directly to the war-induced wave of refugees.

Answers to the question about previous school experience outside Poland showed that 83.1% of this group of students had been educated in another country's school system. The remaining 16.9% had never attended school outside Poland, suggesting they migrated early in life and began their education upon arrival.

Regarding when they started school in Poland, the largest group of Ukrainian students (38.0%) reported starting school 2–3 years ago. A further 31.0% indicated that they had been attending school for more than three years, and 25.4% had started school in the previous school year. Only 5.6% of students started school in the current school year. The data is presented in Chart 2.

CHART 2 | Migration indicators of Ukrainian students participating in the study





The distribution of students by place of birth is stable across primary school grades (4 to 8). There are no significant changes in the proportions of Polish-born and Ukrainian-born students by grade level. The participation of Ukrainian students is consistently present in every year surveyed. This means that the demographic structure of the study population of students, by country of birth, is similar across all analysed levels of primary school education (see Table 3).

TABLE 3 | Distribution of the 'country of origin' variable by respondents' attended grade (N = 1608)

Categories	Grade				
	4	5	6	7	8
Poland	95.2%	95.4%	95.1%	96.6%	96.0%
Ukraine	4.8%	4.6%	4.9%	3.4%	4.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In summary, the Ukrainian-born students in the sample have diverse migration and educational experiences. Some of them have been living in Poland and attending school for a long time, while others joined the education system relatively recently, most likely as a result of the war in Ukraine. Although many students had already had contact with the education system in their country of origin, others began their education only after arriving in Poland. These diverse migration and educational pathways translate into different adaptational needs, both in the area of language and in socio-cultural functioning at school. These findings highlight the need for a flexible and individualised approach to supporting students with migration experience.

The sample of students born in Ukraine was analysed for their level of language adaptation at school. Detailed results are included in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 4 | Declared language adaptation at school among students with migration experience from Ukraine

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Skewness	<i>SE</i> (skewness)	Kurtosis	<i>SE</i> (kurtosis)
SAJwS_sum	20.10	3.28	10	25	-0.29	0.29	-0.22	0.56

The aggregate score obtained in the SAJwS among Ukrainian-born students ranges from 10 to 25 points. The mean was 20.1 (*SD* = 3.28), indicating that these students generally rated their Polish language competence at school quite high. The distribution of the results is slightly asymmetric to

the left (skewness = -0.29) and slightly flattened (kurtosis = -0.22), indicating moderate variation in responses, with no strong deviation.

TABLE 5 | Response frequency for the language adaptation of students with migration experience from Ukraine ($N = 71$)

Question	Very poorly	Poorly	Average	Well	Very well
How well can you converse with your classmates in Polish?	–	2.8%	15.5%	38.0%	43.7%
How well do you understand texts in textbooks and other materials from teachers written in Polish?	–	1.4%	15.5%	42.3%	40.8%
How well can you write an essay or other written work in Polish?	1.4%	11.3%	31.0%	36.6%	19.7%
How comfortable do you feel speaking in Polish in the classroom?	2.8%	7.0%	28.2%	40.9%	21.1%
How well do you understand the teacher during the lesson?	–	1.4%	14.1%	36.6%	47.9%

The surveyed students who indicated Ukraine as their country of birth generally rate their Polish language competence well. The highest rated skills are understanding the teacher during lessons (84.5% of 'well' and 'very well' responses) and talking to classmates (81.7%). Slightly lower but still positive ratings are given for understanding texts in textbooks (83.1%) and speaking up in class (61.9%). Students rate their writing skills the lowest, with as many as 44.7% indicating answers of 'average' or lower, although 56.3% still declare that they write 'well' or 'very well'. Overall, the results indicate that the majority of Ukrainian students adapt well linguistically in the Polish schools, although writing and oral activity in class may be areas requiring additional support.

2.4.2.2 Students with special educational needs

In the sample analysed, 19.1% of students have formal documents that allow schools to initiate support measures in the areas of psychological and pedagogical assistance. According to the teachers' declarations, 16.4% of the students they work with have an opinion on special needs in education issued by a psychological-pedagogical counselling centre. Although these opinions

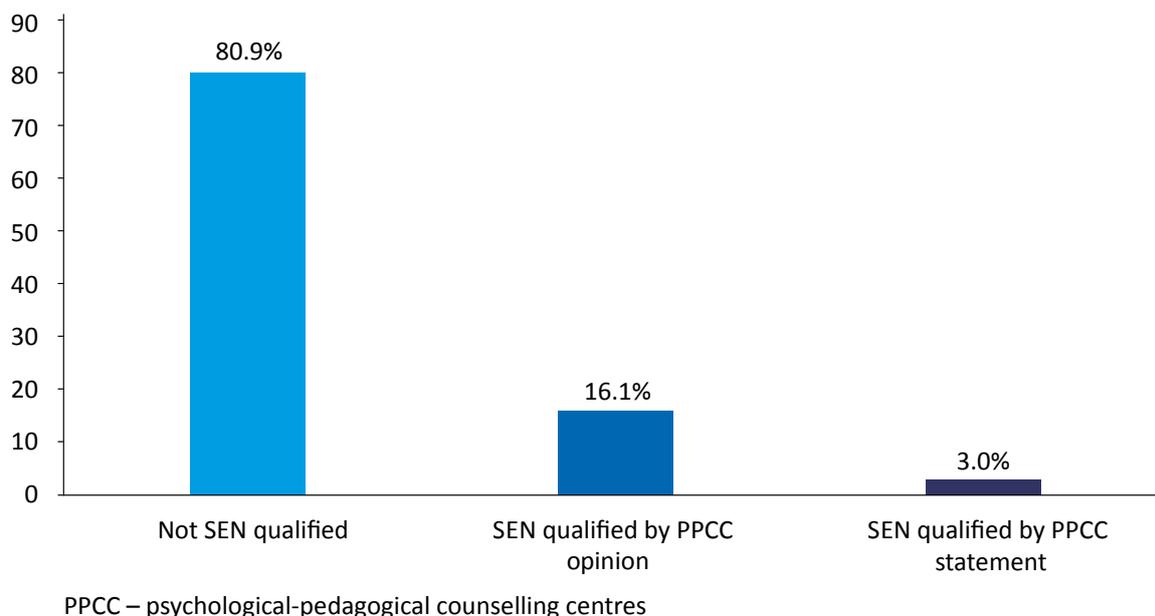


do not constitute grounds for placing a student in special education, they enable teachers to implement recommended adaptations in teaching methods and the organisation of the teaching process, e.g., with regard to the pace of work, assessment methods, or emotional and social support.

Teachers also report that 3.0% of students received a statement on the need for special education. This document requires the implementation of recommendations resulting from an individual educational and therapeutic programme (IPET) and is the basis for providing the student with special educational support, such as individual teaching, education in an inclusive class, or specially organised teaching adapted to the needs and abilities of the student.

CHART 3

Frequency of opinions from psychological-pedagogical counselling centres and statements on the need for special education



The results presented in Tables 6 and 7 indicate that opinions from psychological and pedagogical counselling centres are much more common and show a clear upward trend in older grades compared to rulings on the need for special education. Opinions may often constitute a prelude to further diagnostic measures or relate to a wide range of needs (such as specific learning difficulties), while rulings refer to more permanent and formally confirmed special educational needs listed in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017.



TABLE 6 | Share of respondents with an opinion on special needs in education obtained from a psychological-pedagogical counselling centre by grade attended (*N* = 1608)

Categories	Grade				
	4	5	6	7	8
No	87.4%	86.3%	81.1%	84.6%	78.4%
Yes	12.6%	13.7%	18.9%	15.4%	21.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 7 | Share of respondents with a ruling on the need for special education by grade attended (*N* = 1608)

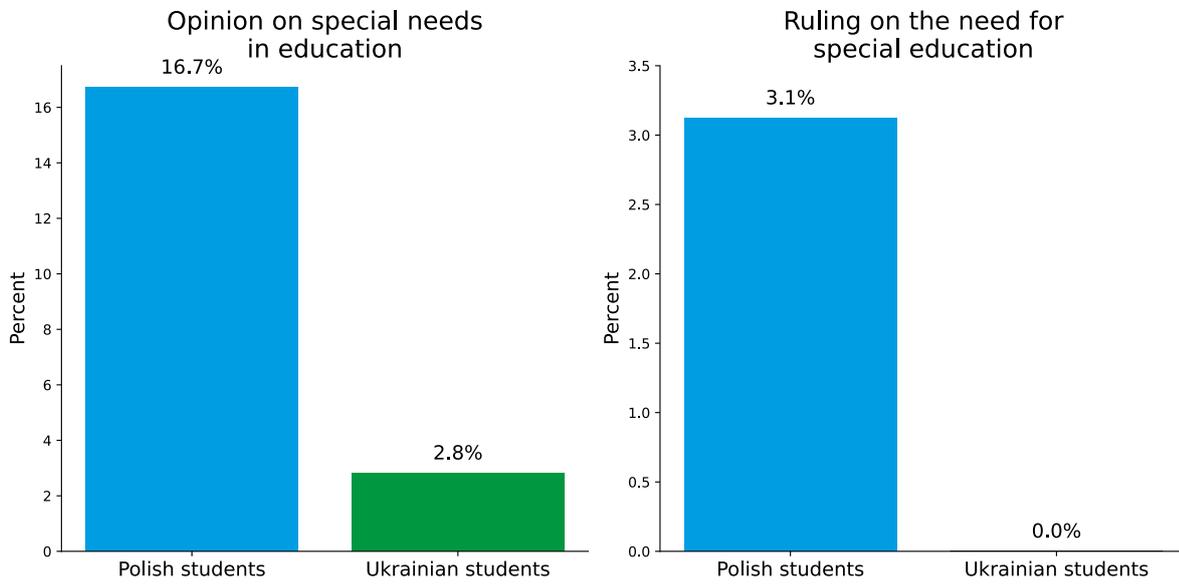
Categories	Grade				
	4	5	6	7	8
No	97.0%	96.5%	97.9%	95.6%	97.7%
Yes	3.0%	3.5%	2.1%	4.4%	2.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In order to examine the relationship between country of birth and opinion on special educational needs, Pearson’s chi-square test was performed for a 2x2 table. The analysis showed a statistically significant relationship, $\chi^2(1) = 9.71, p = .002$ (Fisher’s exact $p < .001$). Of the students born in Poland, 16.7% of respondents had an opinion, while only 2.8% of students born in Ukraine had one (making up a total of 16.1% for the entire group of students surveyed).

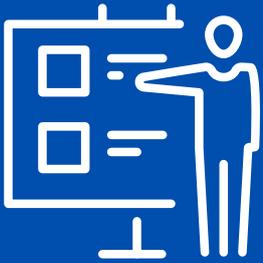
The ‘country of birth’ variable was not statistically significant for rulings on the need for special education, $\chi^2(1) = 2.29, p = .131$ (Fisher’s exact $p = .269$). 3.1% of Polish-born students had obtained such a ruling, whereas none of the students born in Ukraine had. The data is presented in Chart 4.



CHART 4

Share of students with an opinion or ruling on special educational needs by country of origin

03.



Research results and their interpretation



03.

Research results and their interpretation



Students' school well-being is a complex construct that encompasses both an individual's subjective feelings about functioning in the educational environment and more objective indicators of their activity and social relationships. This section presents descriptive statistics and response distributions for key variables depicting various dimensions of school well-being, including: perceptions of teaching practices, peer relationships, school-related emotions, motivational-emotional engagement, and academic achievement. This analysis provides an overview of how students function at school and identifies areas requiring further support or in-depth exploration.

3.1 Teachers' didactic and child development practices

In this study, the analysis of didactic and child development practices of teachers considers both students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and their assessments of being equitably treated by teachers. The two indicators were juxtaposed with information on students' countries of birth to see if migration experience is associated with different experiences in this respect. The educational needs of students with migration experience present teachers with the challenge of individualising and personalising the teaching process and their relationship with students. The literature mentions numerous challenges encountered in professional practice in connection with culturally diverse classrooms, e.g., the need to adapt teaching methods, assist with completing assignments, ensure the linguistic availability of materials, adapt learning requirements, organise remedial lessons, employ additional assistants, as well as provide extended working hours and additional support materials (Bartnikowska et al., 2023). Undertaking these efforts can be perceived as teachers' responsiveness to the diverse needs of students and objectively improve the quality of teaching, while in subjective terms, it means feeling noticed, appreciated, and treated appropriately. Appropriate adaptations of teaching practices, taking into account the

individual educational and linguistic needs of students, can significantly contribute to shaping a sense of security, experiencing care about one's well-being, and enhancing educational comfort for students from groups at risk of experiencing learning difficulties.

3.1.1 Students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

There is no doubt that quality teaching must be inclusive, i.e., accessible, adequate, and effective for all students, especially if education is perceived as a process based on the principles of social justice. Teaching designed to provide cognitive stimulation for every learner, despite the differences inherent in the process, which are additionally conditioned by, among other things, differences in access to learning content (e.g., linguistic, sensory, cognitive), is crucial in inclusive education, which is synonymous with high-quality education. Following this direction, didactic approaches are being developed that respond to the diverse needs of learners: from traditional differentiated teaching to universal, proactive strategies such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), through individualisation, to personalisation based on the active role of the student in managing their own learning process (Lindner & Schwab, 2020).

With regard to students with migration experience, the adaptability of the didactic process requires the teacher to understand the impact of the 'cultural script' on how students participate in class and demonstrate their knowledge (Cumming & Van der Kleij, 2016). Therefore, a 'culturally responsive teaching' (CRT) approach is promoted in the literature. It is based on the premise that every student, regardless of their background, deserves an educational experience that affirms their identity and supports their academic development. In accordance with this approach, the teacher acknowledges and appreciates the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of the students present in the classroom and, as far as possible, eliminates cultural and linguistic barriers that may hinder academic success (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024; Pamuła-Berhens, 2024). Research findings (Rahaman, 2024) indicate that CRT strategies, such as the use of diverse materials and building personal relationships, significantly increase students' motivation, participation in class, and sense of belonging.

Teaching understood as inclusive is therefore an organisational process on the one hand, with teachers operating in the context when designing the material, conditions, and teaching method (Loreman, 2017; Saloviita, 2018). On the other hand, it is also a social process, where the teacher is in a responsive relationship with the student, observing and examining their abilities and reactions in order to adapt their actions accordingly (Dumont & Ready, 2023). Such teaching practices as perceived by the student may influence their subjective assessment of the degree of the individualisation of teaching and foster a sense of being noticed, listened to, and adequately supported in the educational process. Research shows that when students perceived teaching approaches as more inclusive, their sense of school well-being and social inclusion improved,



as did their academic self-concept (Booth & Gerard, 2011). This relationship is based on the fact that a key element of school well-being is the feeling of being able to meet the expectations and demands of school. If they are rigid and the same for all students, the possibility of meeting them, especially for students with diverse needs, may be significantly limited.

Measuring students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

Inclusive Teaching Practices Scale (S-ITPS)



4-point scale

yes

1 → 2 → 3 → 4

no



What does it measure?

Students' perceptions of the teacher's inclusive approach, understood as the extent to which the teacher takes into account their individual abilities, emotions, interests, and learning needs in everyday teaching practice.



Interpretation

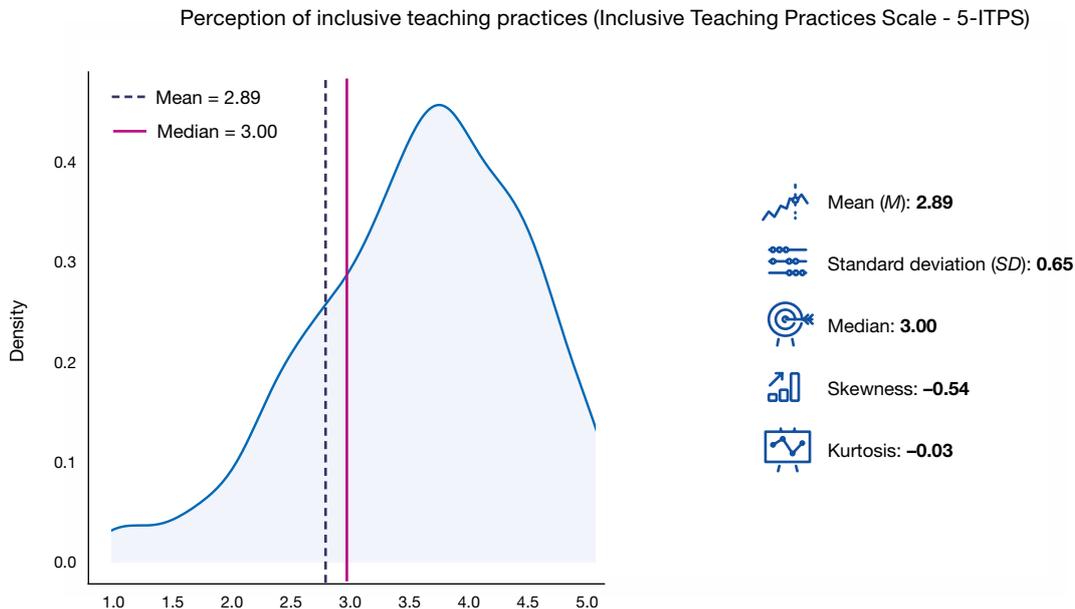
The data has been recoded so that a higher score reflects a higher level of perceived inclusivity. High scores on the scale indicate a positive perception of teachers' practices as inclusive.

For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

Overall level of students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

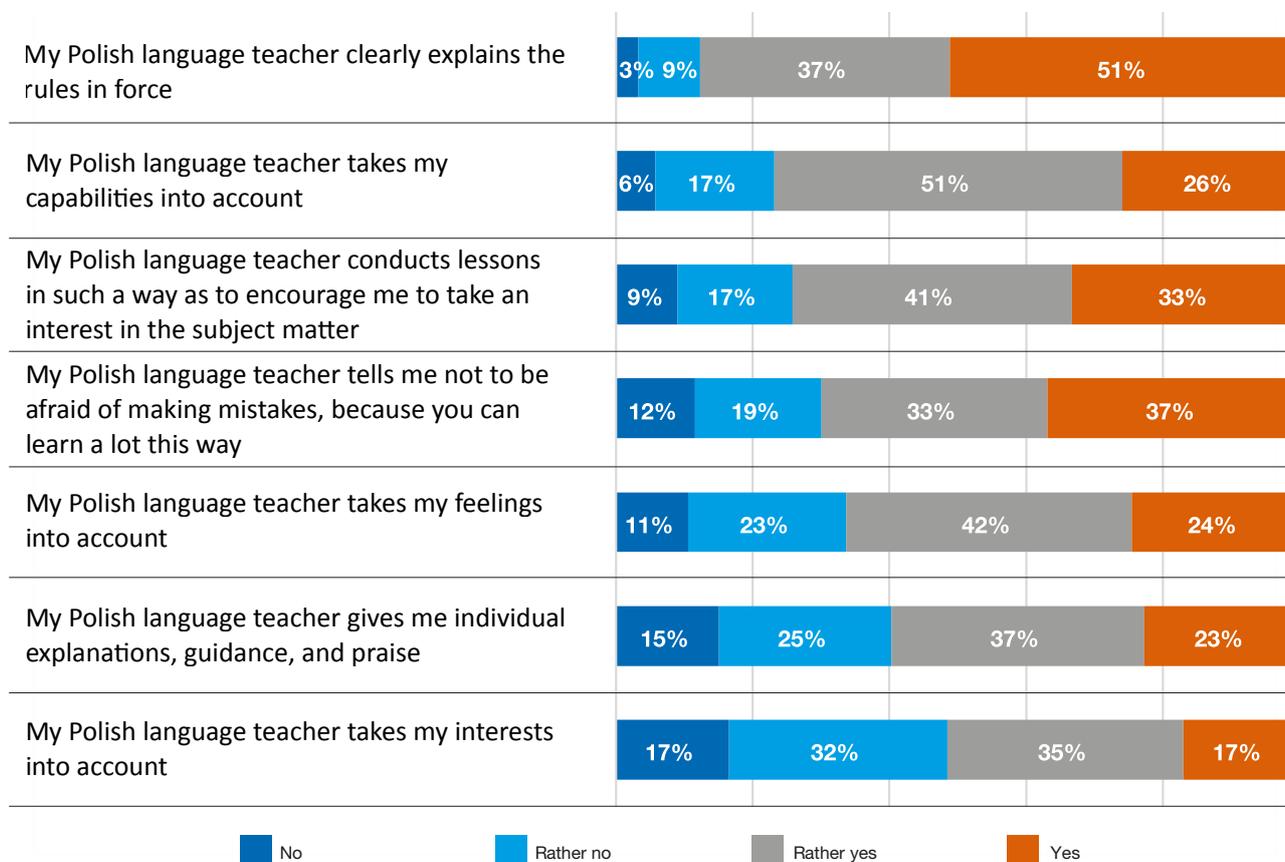
The study reported a relatively high level of perception of inclusive teaching practices among Polish language teachers. On average, students tended to agree with statements suggesting the presence of inclusive practices, although the average lies slightly below the value corresponding to unequivocal approval ('yes').

CHART 5 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the S-ITPS scale



The data in Chart 6 shows that the majority of responses to questions about inclusive teaching practices fell between 'rather yes' and 'yes'. The recorded results indicate a rather moderate level of conviction that the assessed teachers individualise teaching practices. An analysis of the averages and frequencies of the individual scale items shows which teachers' actions received the highest scores (e.g., taking students' interests into account) and which received the lowest (e.g., explaining the rules clearly).

CHART 6 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the S-ITPS scale



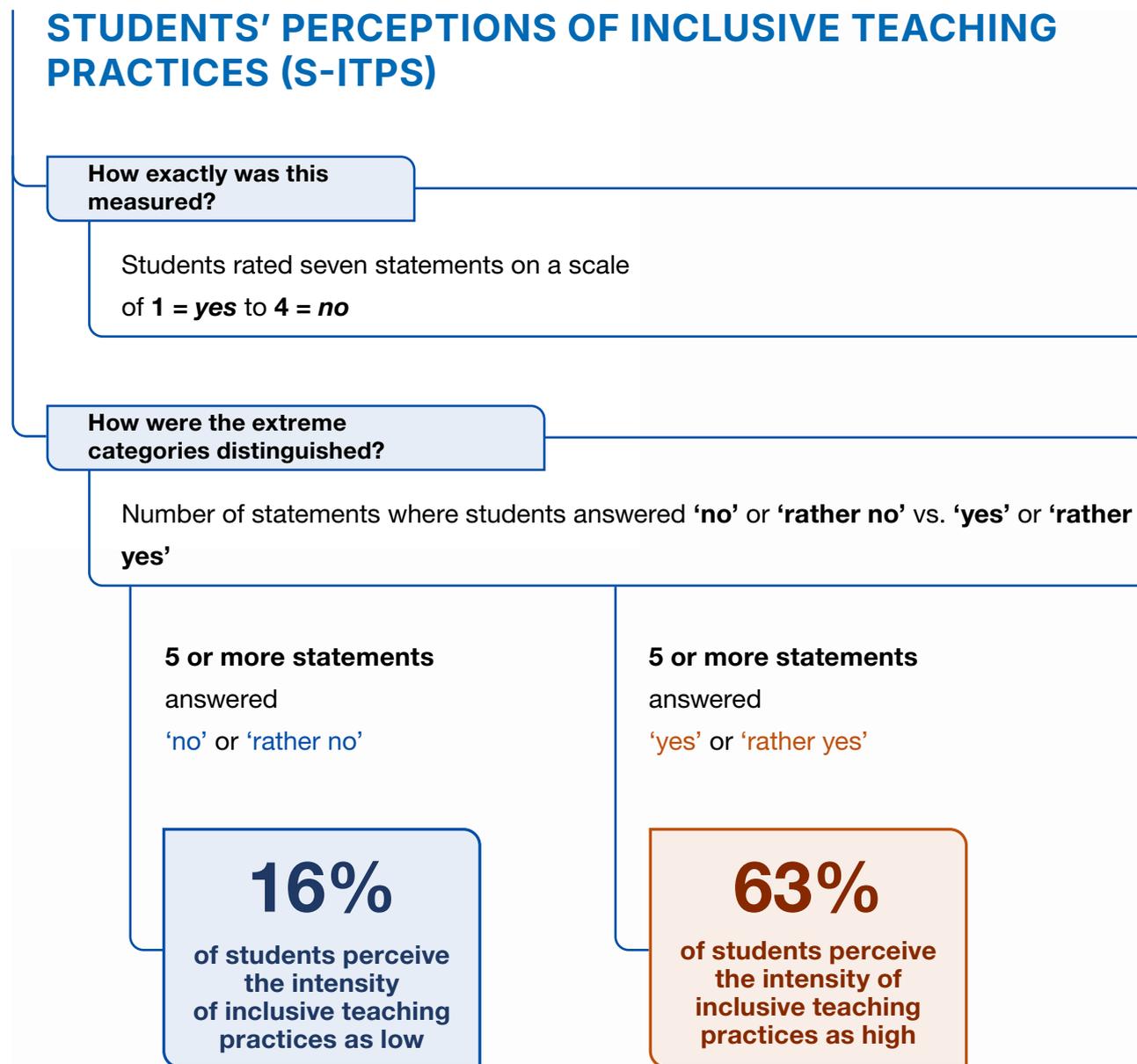
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

How many students perceive their Polish language teachers as those who involve them in the teaching/learning process to a small or significant extent? Figure 2 shows the scheme used to categorise students with different perceptions of teaching practices. Remember that students rated seven statements on a scale from 1 to 4. We considered those students who gave negative responses ('no' or 'rather no') to five or more statements (out of a maximum of seven) as those who perceive teachers as involving them to a low degree. Overall, 16% of the entire sample, or one in eight students, did not consider themselves to be actively and effectively engaged by their teacher. In contrast, those who perceived their teachers to be effectively and intensely engaging were identified as students who answered 'yes' or 'rather yes' to at least five of the seven statements. Almost two-thirds of all students surveyed were in this group. Therefore, it can be stated that the majority of students perceive their teachers to be highly involved in the process of inclusion, with only one in eight feeling excluded.



FIGURE 2

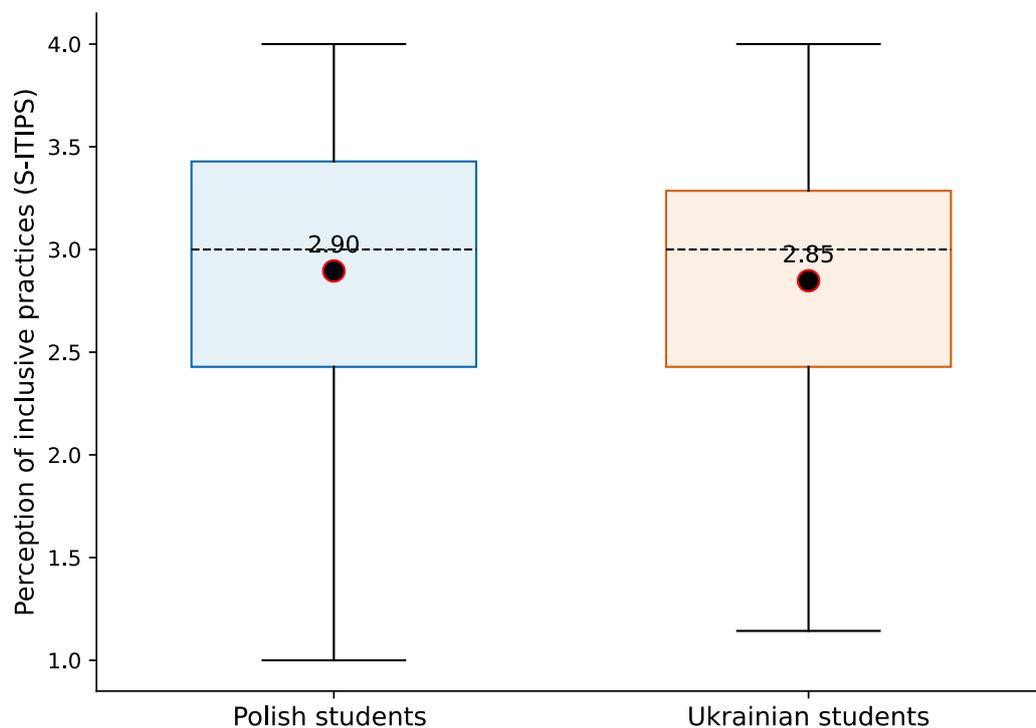
Categorisation of students by low and high perceptions of inclusive teaching practices



Differences among students by country of origin

In our research, we examined whether perceptions of teachers' didactic and child development practices in Polish schools differ between Polish students and students with migration experience coming from Ukraine.

CHART 7 | Perception of inclusive teaching practices by students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it.



Polish students: $M = 2.90$ ($SD = 0.65$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.85$ ($SD = 0.61$).
 Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1084) = 0.60$, $p = .548$. Difference of means = 0.05 (95% CI $[-0.10, 0.19]$). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.07 ; 95% CI: $[-0.16-0.31]$.

The results indicate that students from both groups perceive Polish language teachers as using practices that promote inclusion to a similar extent. The lack of significant differences may indicate a relatively uniform school experience in this regard, regardless of the students' country of origin.

Both Polish students as well as students with migration experience arriving from Ukraine were likely to moderately agree with statements suggesting the presence of practices promoting inclusion. This does not necessarily mean that teachers use the same didactic strategies for Polish and Ukrainian students. On the contrary, these two groups, which differ in their educational needs, perceive teaching activities as relatively inclusive, that is, individualised and responsive. Despite the fact that studies conducted among teachers in 2022, when they first faced the



challenge of teaching newly arrived students in the Polish education system, indicated significant difficulties and a sense of burden (Herbst & Sitek, 2023; Pyżalski et al., 2022), subsequent assessments of the situation revealed a gradual development of teaching strategies conducive to the effective teaching of students with migration experience (Papuda-Dolińska & Wiejak, 2024), as well as a declared change in working methods (Nazaruk et al., 2023).

Most teachers respond to the additional needs of students who have arrived from Ukraine, but the methods and approaches used to adapt educational material to their needs vary: from universal solutions (e.g., the use of simplified text, contextualising teaching), to strategies strictly targeted to students with migrant experience (support from an intercultural assistant), to intuitive and ad hoc responses (e.g., translations into Ukrainian or Russian). Nevertheless, all these activities, regardless of their methodological correctness, may be perceived by students, especially in mainstream classes, as supportive measures dedicated to them (even though in the perception of Polish students, the extra attention given to Ukrainian students may be perceived as favouritism; see Tędziągolska et al., 2024).

It is also worth noting that the students surveyed responded to the practices of Polish language teachers. Perhaps the fact that Polish is the language of instruction in almost all subjects makes teachers of this subject feel naturally responsible for supporting students in mastering the language of education and undertake additional teaching activities. For this group of teachers, teaching students with migrant experience can be seen as a challenge in their professional development and may encourage them to reflect on their teaching practice (cf. Ćwirynkało et al., 2024).

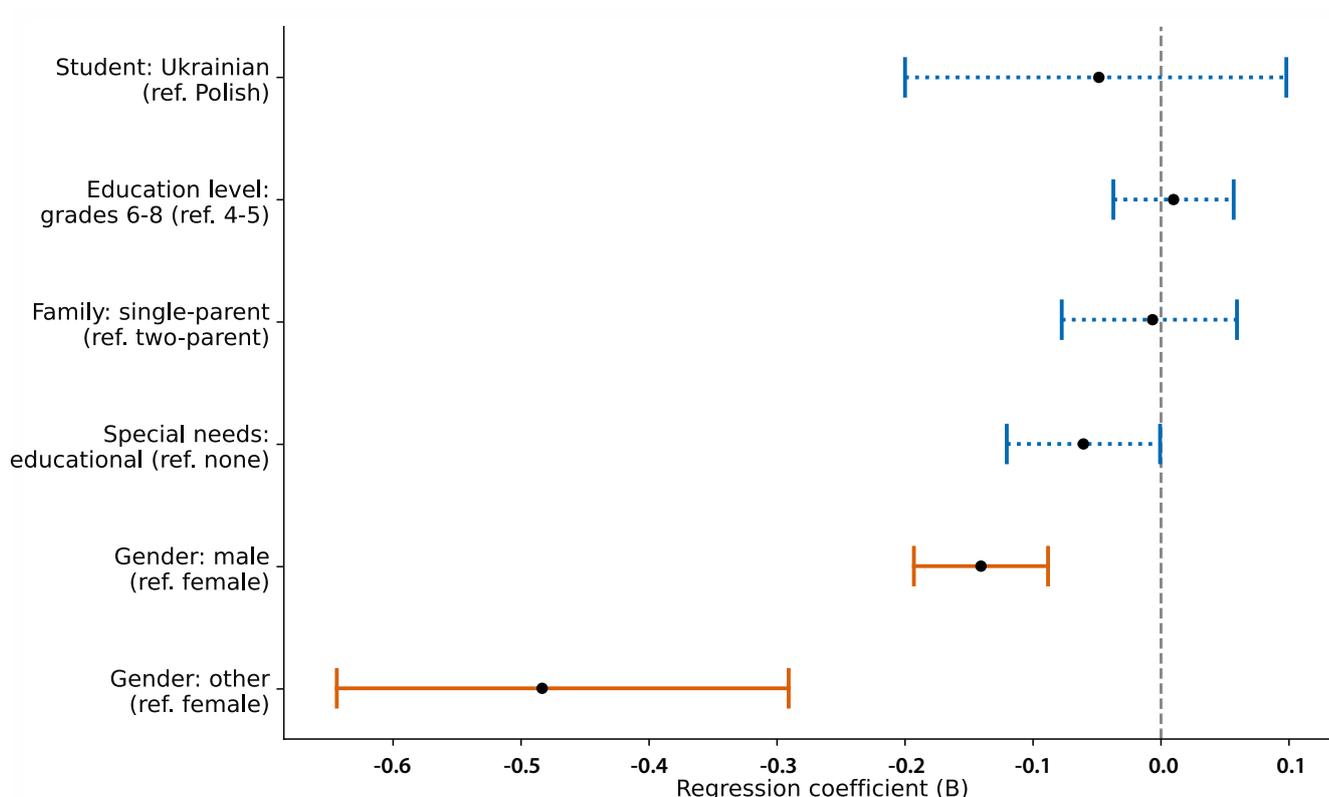
Undoubtedly, the results of this study emphasise the need for further reflection on the quality and depth of the inclusive practices implemented, as well as on the extent to which they are actually adapted to students' diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Future research should also consider qualitative methods of analysis, which may reveal subtler differences in the experiences of students from different groups.

Other variables associated with students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices

In the further part of the analysis, a linear regression model was used to identify factors associated with the assessment of inclusive practices implemented by teachers. The dependent variable was the result in the shortened version of the S-ITPS scale, while the following were included as predictors: country of origin (Ukrainian vs. Polish students), educational level (grades 6–8 vs. 4–5), family structure (single-parent vs. two-parent families), presence of special educational needs (SEN), and gender (male vs. female; other vs. female). The reference groups consisted of students who are Polish, attending grades 4–5, from two-parent families, without SEN, and identifying as girls.

CHART 8

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with perceptions of inclusive teaching practices



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of inclusive practices perceptions, along with 95% confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. The B values represent changes in the level of loneliness attributed to each predictor when controlling for other variables in the model.



The linear regression model proved statistically significant as a whole ($F(6.1601) = 7.18, p < .001$), but explained only a small part of the variance in the assessed practices ($R^2 = .026$). Significant predictors of students' perceptions of inclusive teaching practices were: the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.47, p < .001$) and male gender ($B = -0.13, p < .001$).

The analysis showed that perceptions of inclusive practices differed primarily by the declared gender response (see Chart 8). Students who selected the 'other' option (rather than boy or girl) rated the teachers' actions as less inclusive. Boys also had slightly less positive experiences in this regard than girls. The other factors analysed, such as family situation, educational stage, background, or educational needs, did not show any clear association with the assessment of teaching practices in this model.

A few words of clarification are needed regarding the variable 'gender' as a moderator of inclusive practices' perceptions. This is not a new finding in research. Previous analyses have also found that students' gender predicts their perceptions of teacher-initiated learning and teaching processes, with girls more likely to perceive higher levels of differentiation and personalisation than their male counterparts (Lindner et al., 2019; Schwab et al., 2020; Tennant et al., 2015). This may be due to the fact that teachers are more likely to provide them with additional explanations, especially when they have lower achievements (Tennant et al., 2015). Girls are also more sensitive to the relational and emotional aspects of the classroom environment, which may influence their positive perception of teacher support. They are also more likely to ask for help, and teachers are more likely to respond to such signals. Additionally, certain teaching styles—based on structure, collaboration, and communication—may be better suited to girls' cognitive preferences (Brown et al., 2022).

3.1.2 Students' perception of unequal treatment by teachers

In inclusive education, counteracting prejudice and promoting equality is not only an ethical obligation, but also a prerequisite for creating a school accessible to all students, where everyone has the opportunity to develop and succeed.

Even if teachers care about their students and appreciate the opportunity to teach every child, unintended and sometimes intentional biases may arise in their practice (Tropp & Rucinski, 2022). When teachers display biases, students experience unfair treatment (Kauffman, 2020; Starck et al., 2020). Classrooms with unidentified and uncorrected teacher biases create an exclusionary school environment for all members of the community (Glock & Kovacs, 2013). The equitable treatment of students by teachers, free from prejudice and discrimination, is fundamental to children's well-being at school, as it provides a sense of fairness, security, and acceptance in the educational environment.

Research from cultural contexts other than the ones in Poland shows that, in the case of ethnic origin, a shift in teachers' expectations is observed—from favouring students of native origin in long-term expectations to favouring students of migrant origin in short-term assessments, suggesting a compensatory approach to assessment (Gil-Hernández et al., 2024).

Distorted expectations and stereotypical attitudes are associated with differences in educational attainment based on ethnicity or race, reduced self-esteem, a sense of not belonging in the school, low motivation to participate in class, and negative effects on mental health, such as stress, anxiety, and depression (İnan-Kaya & Rubie-Davies, 2022; Okonofua et al., 2016). Students' reports of unfair treatment in the classroom also translate into lower engagement in learning (Berti et al., 2010; Gasser et al., 2018). Furthermore, discrimination in the school



environment leads to an increase in educational inequalities, reinforcing barriers and social exclusion, which can have a long-term impact on students' opportunities in education and life. Research has shown that teachers' implicit racial biases can affect students' educational outcomes; children belonging to a teacher's preferred racial-ethnic group scored better on average on end-of-year standardised tests (Peterson et al., 2016).

Therefore, the importance of how students perceive prejudice in the classroom is increasingly being recognised, as it is crucial for taking effective action to create a more inclusive learning environment (Kaufman & Killen, 2022).

Measuring students' perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers

Teacher Discrimination Behavior (TDB)



5-point scale

strongly disagree
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5
strongly agree



What does it measure?

The subjective feeling of students that they are accepted, treated fairly, and receive support from teachers, regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties.



Interpretation

High scores on the scale indicate a high level of agreement with the statements regarding equitable treatment by teachers.

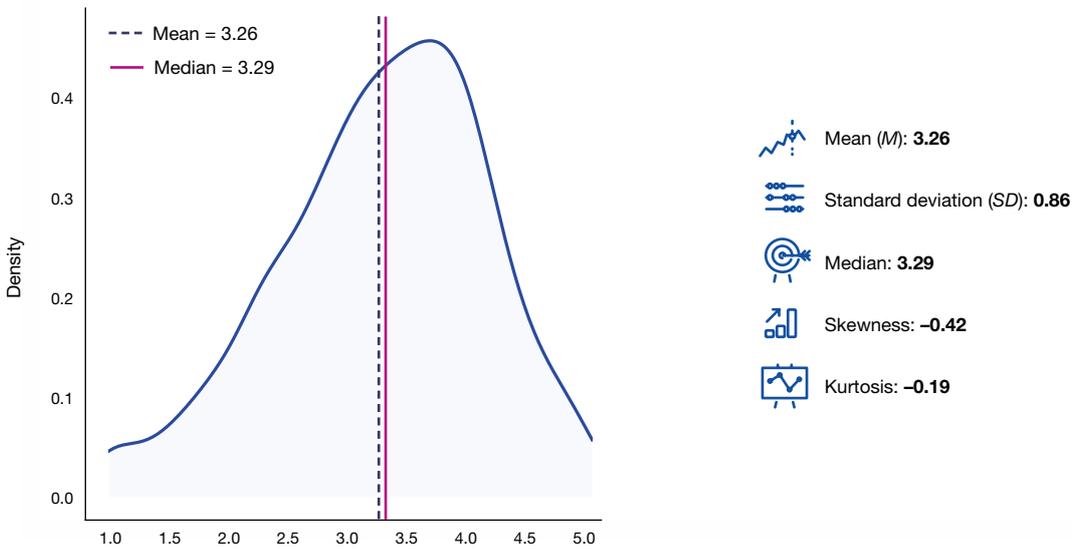
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools](#).

Overall level of students' perception of inequitable treatment by teachers

The study found a relatively high level of equal treatment by teachers. This result indicates that the average level of agreement with statements regarding equal treatment by teachers was slightly above neutral.

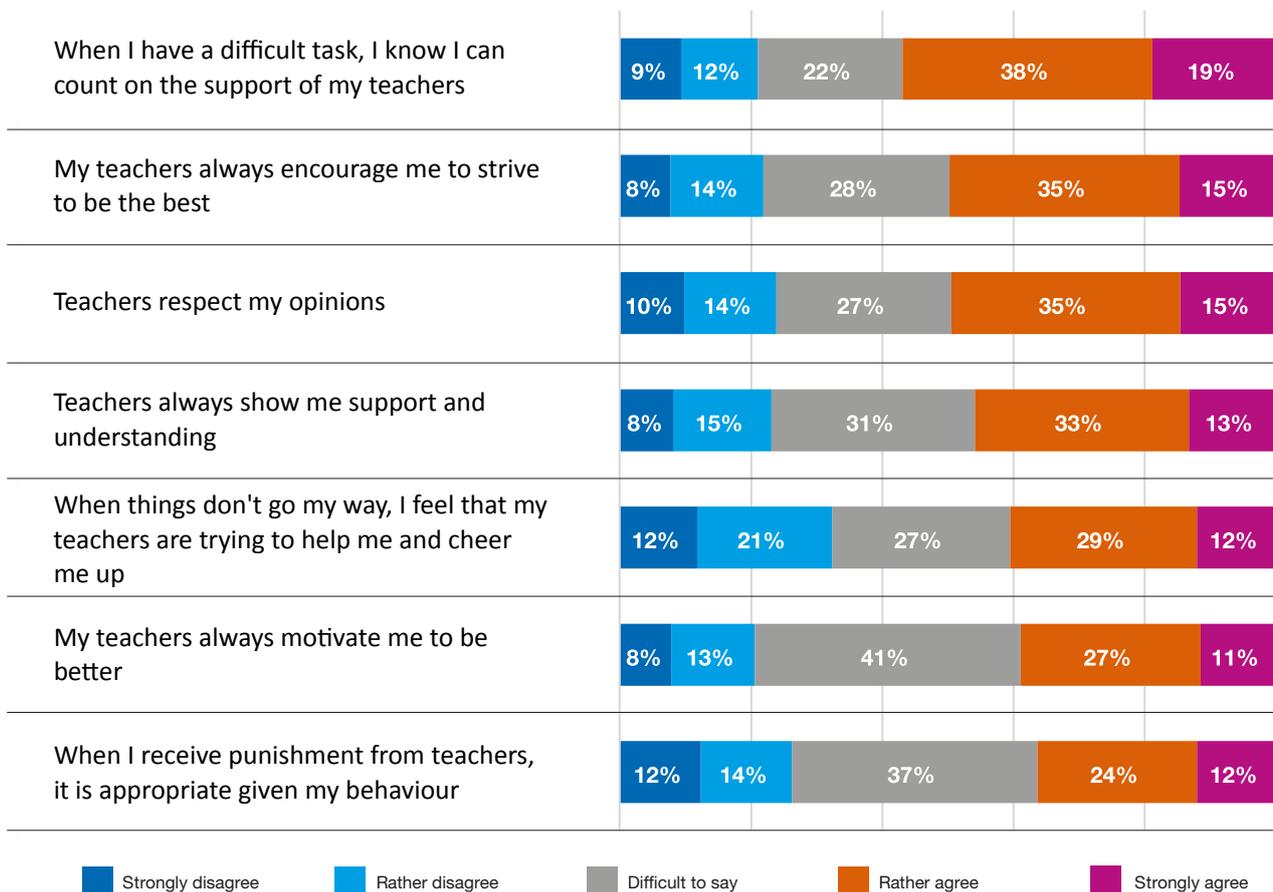
CHART 9 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the TDB scale

Perceived inequalities in teacher treatment (Teacher Discrimination Behaviour – TDB)



The data in Chart 10 shows that the majority of responses to questions about inequitable treatment by teachers were situated between ‘difficult to say’ and ‘rather agree’.

CHART 10 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the TDB scale



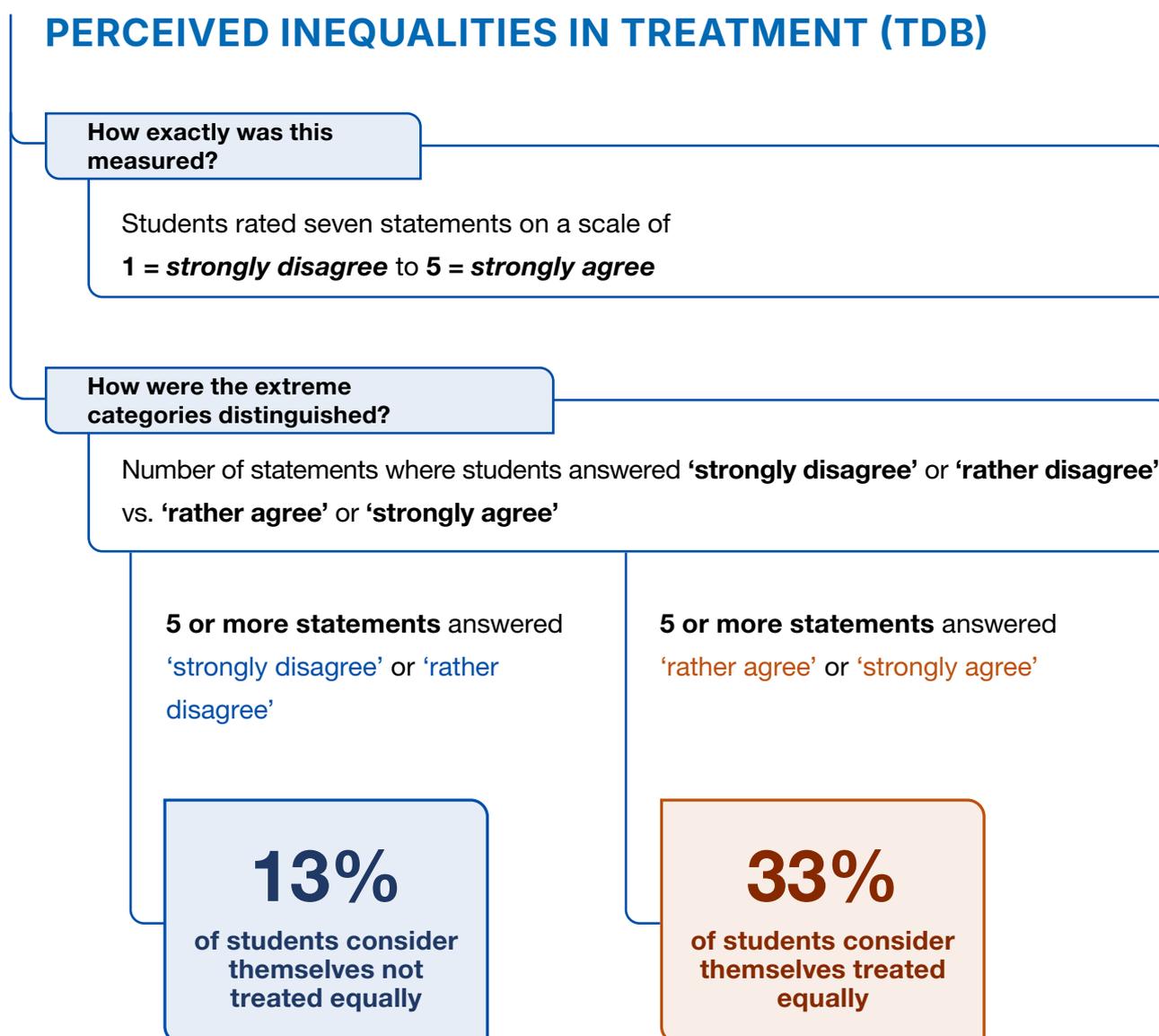
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Did students generally perceive teachers as treating them fairly and equally, or did they feel that they were being treated unfairly by their teachers? Students who agreed with at least five of the seven statements used to assess inequitable treatment by teachers were classified as having low scores. These students accounted for 13% of the total number of respondents, meaning that one in eight students felt that they were often or very often not treated properly and fairly by their teachers. The opposite category—students who strongly believed that they were often or always treated fairly—accounted for one-third of the total respondents (33%). The vast majority of study participants (54%) were therefore situated between these extremes. These students did not have a sense of chronic inequality in their treatment, nor did they believe that they were usually treated fairly (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Categorisation of students by low and high perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers



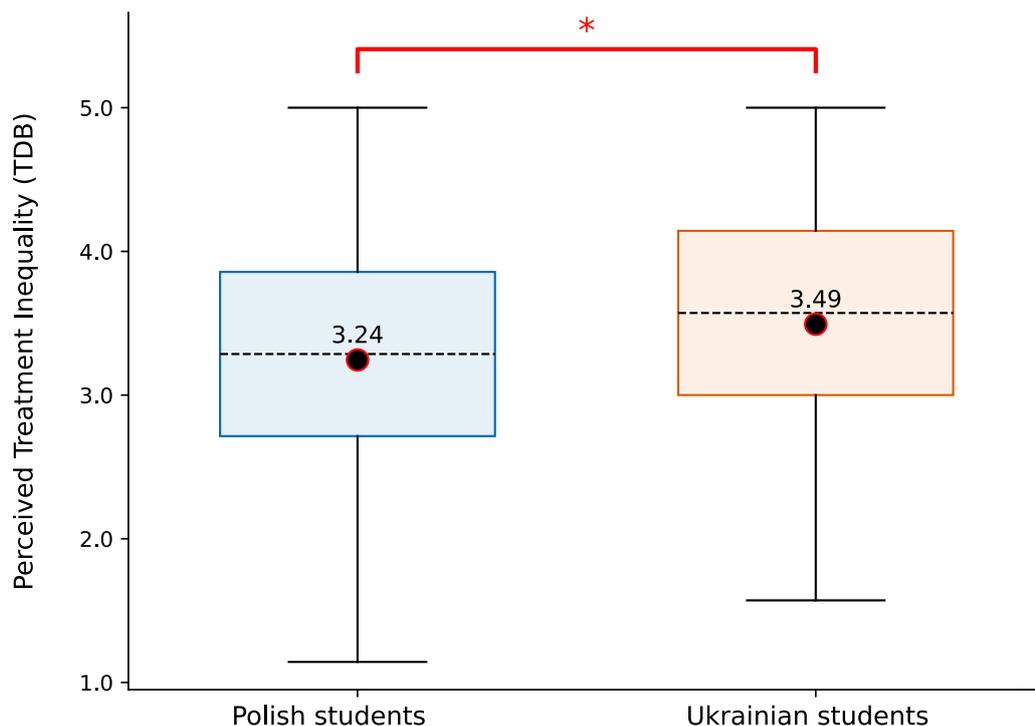


Differences among students by country of origin

We also examined whether students' perceptions of equal treatment by teachers in Polish schools differed between Polish students and those with migration experience coming from Ukraine.

CHART 11

Perception of unequal treatment by teachers depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between the groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 3.24$ ($SD = 0.86$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 3.49$ ($SD = 0.86$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = -2.37$, $p = .018$. Difference in means = -0.25 (95% CI $[-0.45, -0.04]$). Effect size (Cohen's d) = -0.29 ; 95% CI $[-0.53, -0.05]$.

The results indicate that Ukrainian students—contrary to concerns about possible marginalization—more often perceive teachers as treating all students equally. This may reflect the measures taken to support students with refugee experience or cultural differences, as well as the references used by students when assessing equality in school relationships.

The results on perceptions of equal treatment are consistent with the results on perceptions of inclusive practices, which may indicate that, from the students' perspective, teachers—in addition to organising an accessible learning process—also motivate, show empathy and support, and respond fairly to behaviour to the same extent in relation to both Polish and Ukrainian students. Recent Polish qualitative research confirms that teachers do not give Ukrainian students any special treatment in terms of teaching or education, even though such an approach was observed when they first arrived in schools (Tędziągolska et al., 2024). Importantly, the analysis of teachers' assessment of Ukrainian students reveals a strategy of acting in the “best interests of the child”. Teachers take into account the social aspects of well-being and either try to ensure that students are promoted to the next grade to avoid disrupting the peer group or recommend repeating the grade if this enables better preparation for school learning (Koterwas & Nowosielska, 2025).

Of course, the 'School Well-Being in Diverse Classrooms' study does not characterise teachers' actual attitudes towards students of other nationalities, as it is based on students' subjective assessments. Nevertheless, the more positive experiences of Ukrainian students can be taken as an indicator of the actual pro-inclusive attitude of teachers in these schools. It is worth noting that they volunteered for this project, which may indicate that their teaching staff were particularly committed to developing competences relating to inclusive education. It is possible that these teachers have been equipped with the knowledge and tools to support diverse students more effectively, and that the school as a whole has adopted a more conscious and open attitude towards linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity.

Other variables associated with students' perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers

Further analysis assessed the extent to which students' socio-demographic characteristics may be associated with their perception of equal treatment by teachers (TDB scale; a higher score indicates a more positive perception).

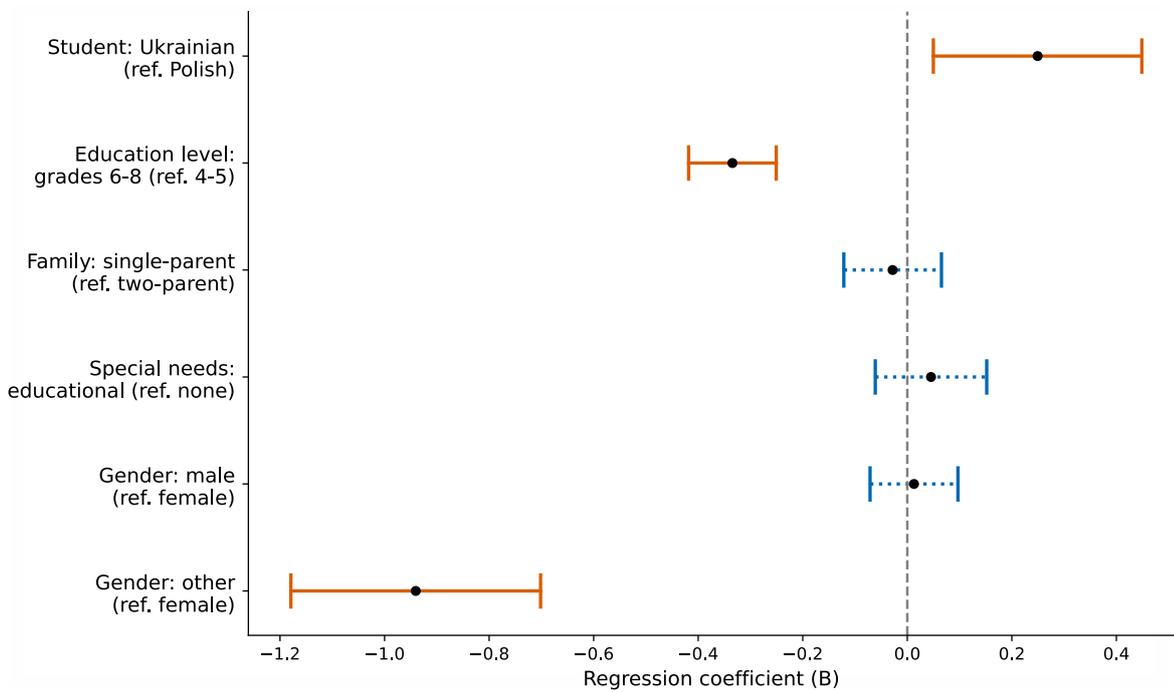


The regression model was statistically significant: $F(6, 1601) = 22.25, p < .001$, $R^2 = .077$. Three variables had significant associations with equality ratings: nationality ($B = 0.25, p = .014$), education level ($B = -0.33, p < .001$), and gender ($B = -0.94, p < .001$).



CHART 12

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with students' perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers (TDB)



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of perceived unequal treatment by teachers (TDB), along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. The B values represent changes in the level of perceived unequal treatment associated with each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

The results indicate that Ukrainian students have more positive experiences than Polish students, while older students and those identifying as a gender other than male or female report greater difficulty in perceiving teachers as fair and equitable. The other predictors—family structure, special educational needs and male gender—were not significantly associated with perceptions of equal treatment (see Chart 12).



Summary

The results of the analyses indicate that the overall perception of school well-being in the areas of inclusive practices and unequal treatment by teachers varies to a limited extent across students' socio-demographic characteristics.

In the case of inclusive practices, no differences were found between Polish and Ukrainian students—both groups perceived teachers' actions as inclusive to a similar degree. However, the regression model confirmed that the subjective assessment of these practices was lower among boys than girls, and particularly low among students who declared a gender category other than female or male. This indicates the possible difficulties of this group in perceiving their relationships with teachers as inclusive and supportive. Other factors analysed, such as background, family structure, or the presence of special educational needs were not significantly associated with perceptions of inclusive practices.

A slightly different picture emerges from the analysis of equal treatment. Contrary to assumptions about the risk of marginalisation, Ukrainian students rated their teachers as more fair than Polish students did. This may reflect the effects of additional support provided to students with migration experience or differences in their expectations of school. At the same time, students in the upper grades and those declaring a gender other than male or female expressed less positive opinions about equal treatment by teachers. Factors such as male gender, family structure, or the presence of special educational needs did not have a significant impact on assessments of equality.

Taken together, the results suggest that while the majority of students—regardless of socio-demographic characteristics—have similar school experiences of inclusion and equality, some groups, particularly students who identified their gender as 'other' and those who are older, may experience more exclusion or less equality. Particularly significant, however, is that Ukrainian students—a key group in the context of the analysed research—perceive teachers to be more fair and equitable than their Polish peers. This may reflect the effectiveness of measures supporting students with migration experience or cultural differences in the assessment of school relationships.

3.2 Relationships with peers in the class

Peer relationships are an important element of students' school functioning and, at the same time, a significant determinant of children's and adolescents' well-being (Brzezińska, 2000; Brzezińska et al., 2024; Bukowski et al., 2018). In their concept of school well-being, Roberson and Renshaw



(2019) identified social well-being as one of the core areas, which essentially boils down to the ability to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying peer relationships. A growing body of research also shows that satisfying relationships with others and adequate levels of students' social-emotional competences contribute to better functioning in school, which is also important for academic achievement (Weissberg et al., 2015). The study analysed variables such as loneliness and social dissatisfaction, perceived peer status, social inclusion, experiences of peer aggression, and interpersonal self-efficacy as important areas of peer relationships directly linked to students' social well-being.

3.2.1 Loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

Positive social relationships, a sense of belonging to a group, and satisfaction with the contacts established with peers are important for young people's overall satisfaction (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020). Children and adolescents who easily establish relationships with others feel affection and acceptance from their peers, have a greater sense of belonging to the class/group, and higher self-esteem (Birkeland et al., 2014). Having friends enables them to obtain social support from their peers and satisfy their need for belonging and significance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), thus preventing difficulties in emotional functioning (Kekkonen et al., 2020; Nangle et al., 2003). Social activities, meeting friends, and friendships in and out of school are also positively connected with young people's life satisfaction (Tepordei et al., 2023). In turn, feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction with one's social relationships significantly correlate with reduced well-being and emotional adjustment (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2020).

The experience of being a refugee and the need for resettlement may be associated with a sense of loneliness, especially in the initial stages of this situation. Studies conducted in different countries and across groups of refugees of different ages, backgrounds, or reason for emigration regularly indicate loneliness as a feeling that accompanies migration (Nguyen et al., 2024). Kim and Amar (2025) emphasize the particular intensification of loneliness in the process of adapting to a new cultural environment as a consequence of migrants' acculturation stress (Berry, 2008), which is particularly relevant in the context of refugee status and war trauma (Kurapov et al., 2022). This is related to the loss or severance of existing ties as a result of the change of residence, but also to difficulties in finding one's place in the new reality, establishing new interpersonal relationships, redefining one's social identity, and experiencing various difficulties in everyday functioning (Berry, 2008). These universal phenomena and mechanisms of experiencing loneliness as a result of migration also apply to children and students (Lashari et al., 2022; Sawir et al., 2008), and the uniqueness of their situation stems from their lack of influence over the decision to relocate, its suddenness, and compulsion (Błaszczak, 2025). Moreover, the absence or severance of close relationships with others can be particularly acute for this group. School-age children and adolescents are at a stage of development where peer relationships are very



important for personal development, self-concept, and self-esteem (Brzezińska, 2000; Brzezińska et al., 2024). In addition, young people do not yet have well-developed and effective mechanisms for coping with rejection or social failure, which means that difficulties and limitations in forming close bonds with peers significantly reduce their well-being and impair their functioning (Bukowski et al., 2018; Jaskulska & Poleszak, 2015).

Measuring loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ)



4-point scale
not true at all
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4
completely true



What does it measure?
 The subjectively experienced discrepancy between the expected and perceived state of one's interpersonal relationships, leading to feelings of negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety.



Interpretation
 The responses collected were re-coded in such a way that high scores on the scale indicate feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction.

For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

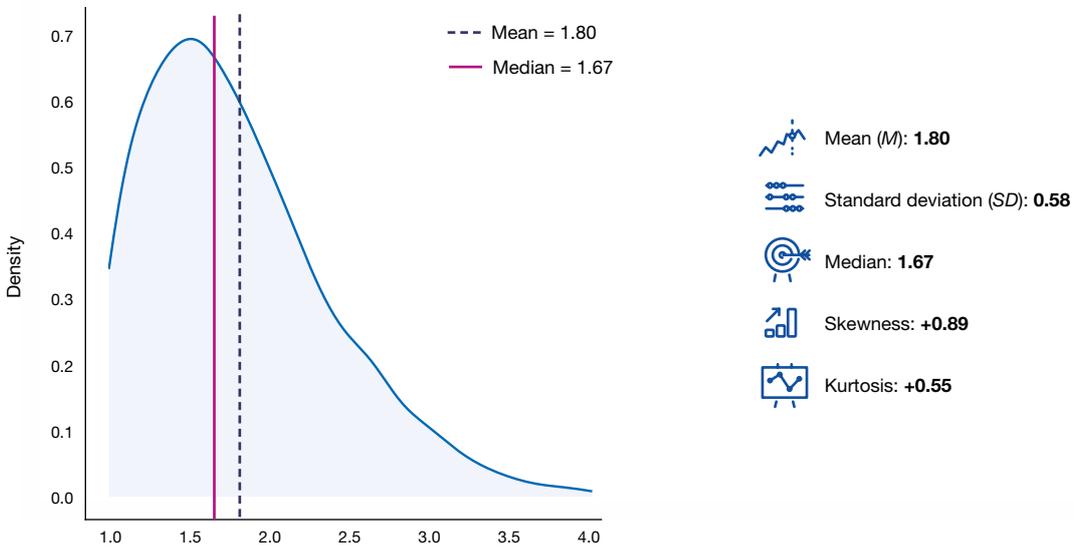
Overall levels of loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

The study reported relatively low levels of loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships, suggesting a slight subjectively experienced discrepancy between the perceived and expected state of one's interpersonal relationships. The mean score was $M = 1.80$ ($SD = 0.58$) and the median score was 1.67. The distribution of results was also slightly convex (kurtosis = 0.55) and skewed to the right (skewness = 0.89), indicating a higher number of lower responses (see Chart 13).



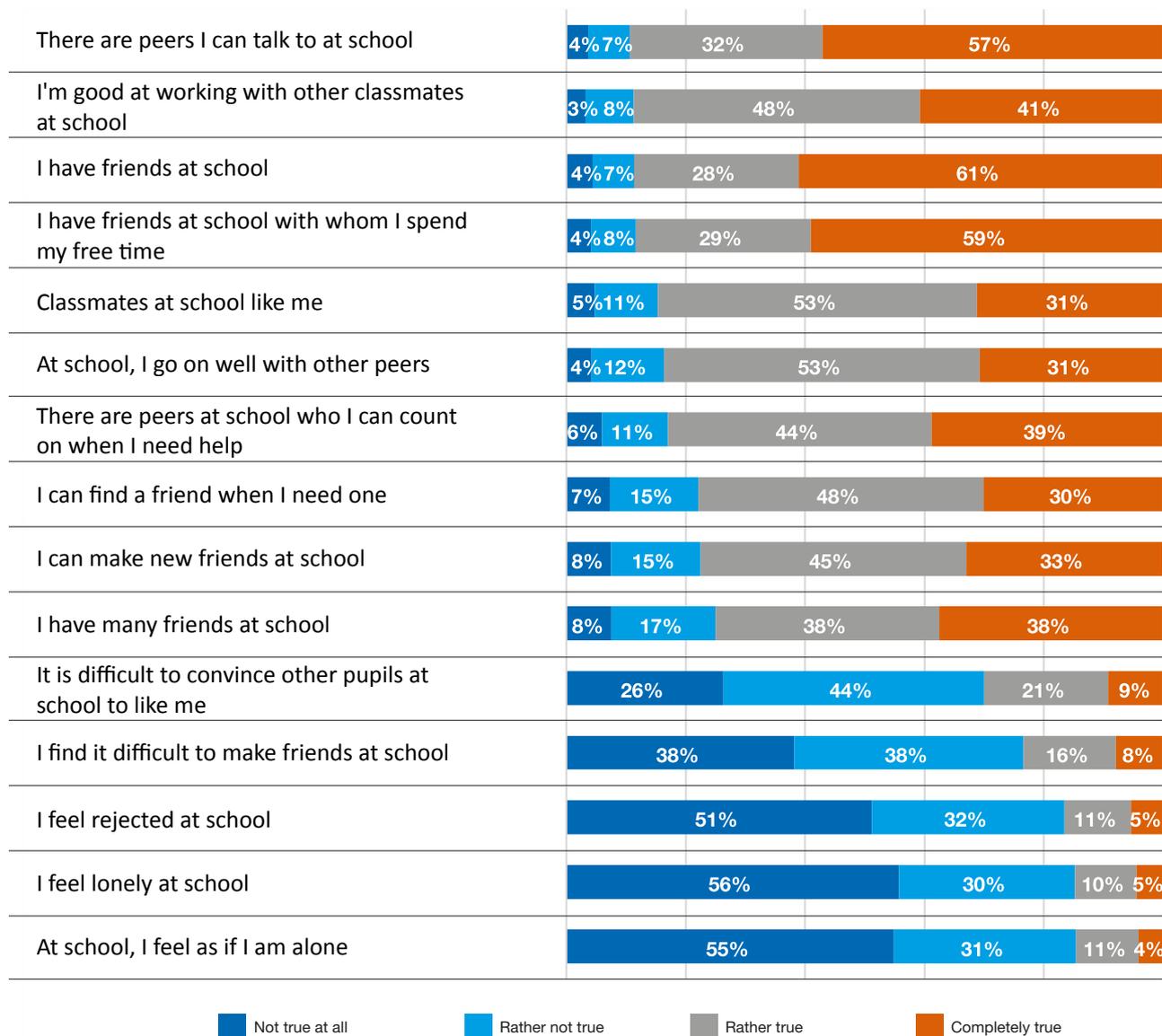
CHART 13 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the LSDQ scale

Loneliness and social dissatisfaction (LSDQ)



The data in Chart 13 show that the majority of responses to questions about difficulties in maintaining satisfying and friendly relationships with peers or experiencing loneliness were situated between 'not true at all' and 'rather not true'. The detailed distribution of responses is presented in Chart 14.

CHART 14 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the LSDQ scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The results indicate that the majority of surveyed students experienced relatively low levels of loneliness and were relatively satisfied with their social relationships. Importantly, around 15% of respondents selected answers indicating loneliness and dissatisfaction with social relationships in more than half of the questions. One in six young people felt they lacked friends or had difficulty forming lasting, meaningful relationships. However, the vast majority, 82%, declared that they found it very easy to establish and maintain relationships.

FIGURE 4

Categorisation of students by low and high levels of loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships

LONELINESS AND DISSATISFACTION WITH PEER RELATIONSHIPS (LSDQ)

How exactly was this measured?

Students rated 15 statements on a scale of 1 = *not true at all* to 4 = *completely true*

How were the extreme categories distinguished?

Number of statements where students answered '*not true at all*' or '*rather not true*' vs. '*rather true*' or '*completely true*'

3 or more (out of a max. of 5) statements answered '*completely true*' or '*rather true*' under items directly indicating loneliness

15%

of students have a high sense of loneliness

4 or more (out of a max. of 6) statements answered '*completely true*' or '*rather true*' under items indicating a sense of belonging and having friends

82%

of students have many friends in the class

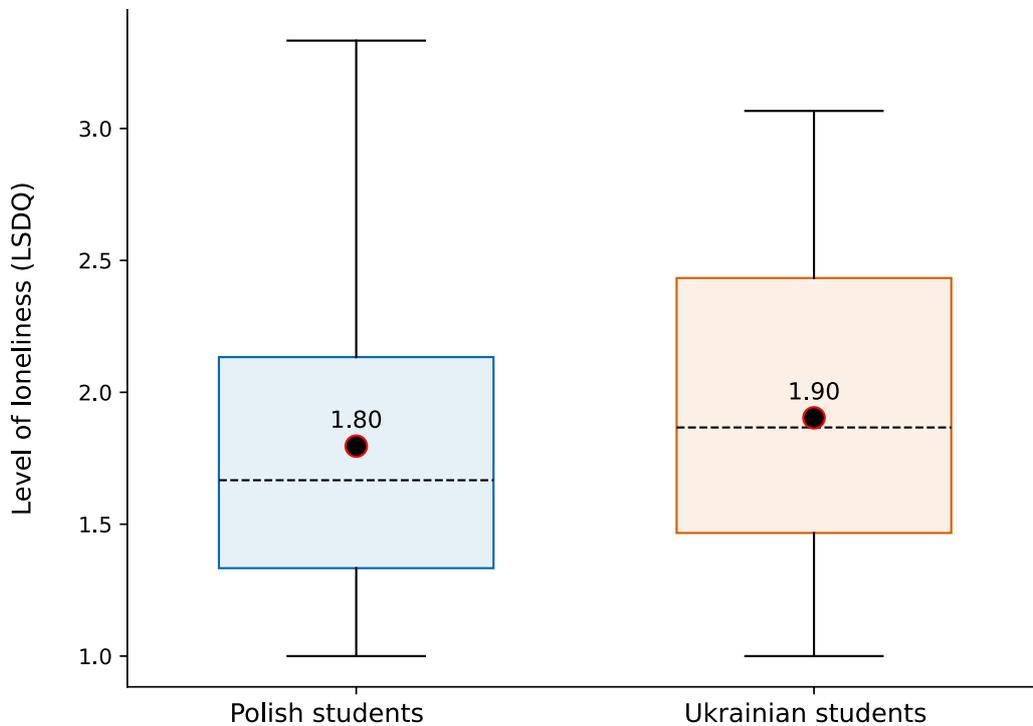
Differences among students by country of origin

An analysis of the study results from the 'Accessible School for All' project showed that the country of origin was not a major differentiator of loneliness levels between the compared groups. The detailed results of the comparisons are presented in Chart 15.



CHART 15

Loneliness (LSDQ) and dissatisfaction with peer relationships depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results – from the first to the third quartile – and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within 1.5 × the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it.



Polish students: $M = 1.90$ ($SD = 0.56$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 1.80$ ($SD = 0.58$).
 Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = -1.54$, $p = .125$. Difference in means = -0.11 (95% CI $[-0.24, 0.03]$). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.27 ; 95% CI $[-0.43, 0.05]$.

The results indicate that Polish and Ukrainian students attending Polish primary schools do not differ significantly in the level of experienced loneliness and problems in relationships with peers. The mean level of the measured item in Polish and Ukrainian children was similar, and the small difference between the mean values in the two groups is of no practical significance. The research conducted was quantitative and allowed Polish and Ukrainian students to be compared, while also indicating a similar level of experienced loneliness, thus differing from the previously cited study by Centrone et al. (2023). The discrepancies in the results of our research against the findings of Centrone et al. (2023) are most likely due to differences in the methodology used and the context of the analyses conducted. The study by Centrone et al. (2023) was conducted using qualitative methods on a homogeneous sample (exclusively young Ukrainians) and aimed to

capture the specificity of subjective experiences of loneliness in the immediate or close aftermath of the refugee crisis. This methodology, while valuable for learning about individual experiences and understanding the trauma of young refugees, limited the ability to generalise the results to the population, to consider them as an indicator of a persistent condition, and to compare them with Polish students. It seems that the suddenness and circumstances of the migration, the severance of ties with previous friends or colleagues, and the relatively short time for adapting to the new educational environment may have accounted for the feelings of increased loneliness in this particular group. On the other hand, the research conducted by the 'Accessible School for All' project provided an opportunity to compare the feelings of loneliness experienced by Polish and Ukrainian students attending schools in Poland, and was conducted at a time when the social situation and the adaptation process of Ukrainian students to new conditions were already much more stable. This reinforces the validity of making such comparisons and the resulting conclusions regarding the similar levels of loneliness experienced by students in Polish schools, regardless of their nationality. The report by Tędziągolska et al. (2024), based on research conducted in the 2023/2024 school year, highlights the gradual normalisation of the presence of Ukrainian students in Polish schools. Some of them are already quite comfortable in Polish schools—they communicate more easily in Polish, are more likely to establish relationships with Polish peers, and are actively involved in lessons and school life, although the problem of separation between Polish and Ukrainian students remains visible. In many cases, students of Ukrainian origin enter into relationships mainly within their own group, i.e., other students with migration experience born in Ukraine. The authors emphasise that the integration of students from different cultural contexts is a complex and multidimensional process, but the data from their report suggest (as does the research conducted as part of the 'Accessible School for All' project) that the loneliness of students of Ukrainian origin may already be less than that experienced immediately upon arrival in Poland (Tędziągolska et al., 2024).

Predictors of loneliness among surveyed students

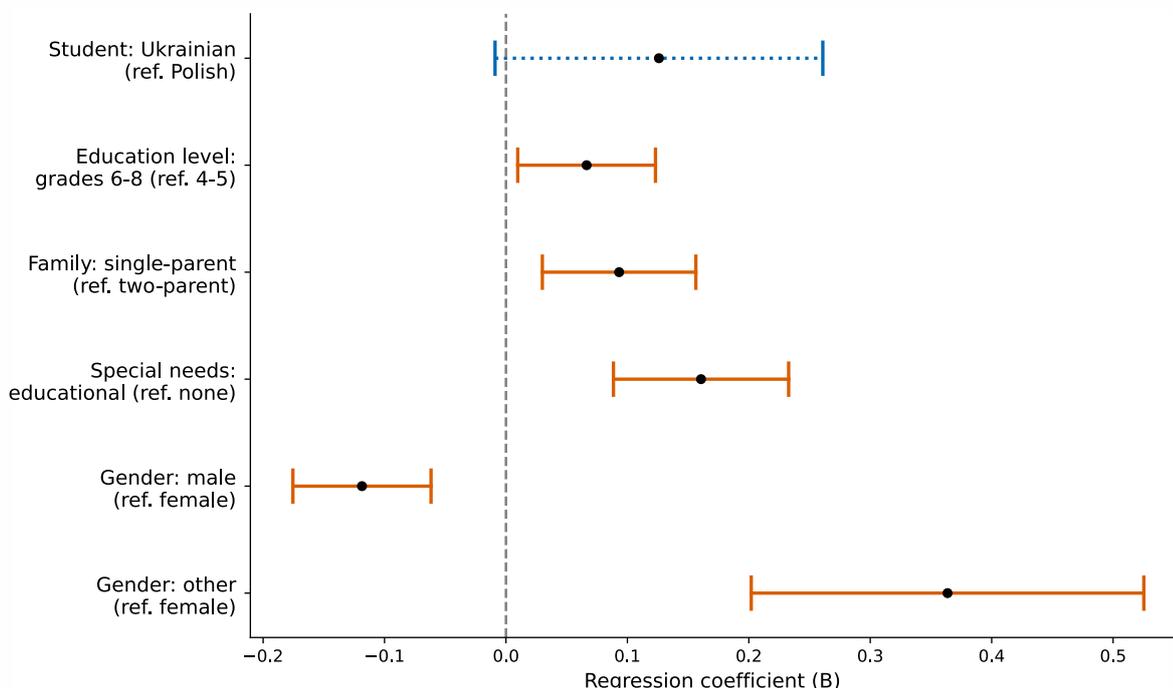
In the next step, a linear regression analysis was performed to identify factors significantly associated with levels of loneliness in school-age children. The LSDQ score was used as the dependent variable, while the following factors were included as predictors: belonging to the Ukrainian (vs. Polish) student group, educational level (grades 6–8 vs. 4–5), family situation (single-parent vs. two-parent family), presence of special educational needs, and gender (male vs. female, other vs. female).



The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F = 14.00, p < .001$), although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.05$). Significant predictors of the level of experienced loneliness and social dissatisfaction were: having special educational needs ($B = 0.16, p < .001$), attending the upper grades ($B = 0.07, p = .022$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = 0.09, p = .004$), indicating the category 'other' when asked about gender ($B = 0.36, p < .001$), and male gender ($B = -0.12, p < .001$).

While country of origin did not significantly differentiate feelings of loneliness among the students surveyed, other variables included in the study, such as special educational needs, gender, family situation (two-parent vs. single-parent family) and educational level (grades 4–5 vs. 6–8), were found to be significant predictors of loneliness and difficulties in relationships with peers. Considering these variables as predictors helps to explain approximately 5% of the variation in the level of experienced loneliness. The detailed results of the regression analysis are presented in Chart 16.

CHART 16 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with loneliness and dissatisfaction with peer relationships



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of loneliness levels, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < 0.05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. The B values represent changes in the level of loneliness attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The presence of special educational needs was associated with higher levels of loneliness, which is consistent with previous reports of a greater risk of social isolation among children and youth who do not develop typically (Margalit & Raskind, 2013). Students with diverse learning needs are more likely to experience loneliness (Broomhead, 2019) because they have difficulties establishing and maintaining peer relationships due to communication, emotional, or cognitive barriers (Bossaert et al., 2012). In addition, because of their special needs, they may be at risk of social exclusion and stigmatisation (Monjas et al., 2014), which limits their participation in the classroom group and exacerbates their sense of isolation.

The 'gender' category also proved to be a significant predictor of experienced loneliness. Students declaring their gender as 'other' reported significantly higher levels of loneliness compared to girls, which may reflect greater difficulties in social integration and sense of belonging in the school environment for those who do not define themselves by the division into women and men (Hajek et al., 2023; McDanal et al., 2022). It is also worth noting that in the surveys conducted, boys—compared to girls—declared higher levels of satisfaction with social relationships and lower levels of loneliness. This is an interesting result, given that studies of gender differences in feelings of loneliness produce very inconclusive results, with some indicating higher levels of loneliness among girls (e.g., Podila & Chi, 2019), others among boys (e.g., Salkic, 2023), and still others point to age and other significant moderators of this relationship other than gender (e.g., Pagan, 2020). The importance of age on experienced feelings of loneliness was also confirmed in the research presented here. Students in the upper grades (6–8) scored higher on the loneliness scale than students in the lower grades, suggesting that feelings of loneliness increase with age and the related changes in the peer relationship structure.

Family situation was also a significant predictor, with children growing up in single-parent families declaring higher levels of loneliness than their peers living with both parents. Due to the absence or limited presence of one parent, children growing up in single-parent families are more likely to experience loneliness and a lack of emotional support and security. Such deprivation and the additional challenges often associated with the more difficult living situation that accompanies single-parent families translate into difficulties in establishing peer relationships and increased levels of loneliness (Clark et al., 1993).

In line with the analyses cited earlier, the difference between Ukrainian and Polish students was not statistically significant.

In summary, the results of the regression analysis described above showed that higher levels of loneliness in school-age children are significantly associated with such factors as being a student with special educational needs, identification with a gender other than female or male,



being raised in a single-parent family, and attending the upper grades of primary school. Being a boy was associated with lower levels of loneliness than being a girl. These results indicate that both individual factors (gender identity, educational needs) and socio-developmental factors (family situation, educational stage) are important for the experience of loneliness in the student population.

3.2.2 Perceived peer status

A student's peer status refers to their popularity among classmates and is related to their position in the social hierarchy. It is important for satisfaction with social relationships (Ferguson, Ryan, 2019), self-esteem, and subjectively perceived well-being (Anderson et al., 2012), while low levels of peer status are associated with stress and difficulties in psychosocial functioning (Giletta et al., 2021). Lack of peer acceptance and low social standing lead a young person to withdraw from or limit social activities (Ferguson & Ryan, 2019), thereby missing out on opportunities to establish close, satisfying relationships and to meet basic needs—belonging and a sense of security (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Research has shown that such difficulties are often experienced by young migrants (Wahl et al., 2022) due to the language barrier preventing them from fully and spontaneously engaging in a group (Grünigen et al., 2012), as well as their unfamiliarity with or misunderstanding of social norms and behaviour patterns (Jugert & Feddes, 2017). In this study, we examined the perceived peer status of children in grades 4–8 and how it differs between groups of Polish and Ukrainian students in Polish schools.

Measuring students' perceived peer status

Perceived Social Position Among Peers Questionnaire (PSPPQ)



5-point scale

I strongly disagree
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5
I strongly agree



What does it measure?

The subjectively experienced sense of one's social standing within the peer group, especially in terms of recognition, influence, and social attractiveness in the classroom.



Interpretation

Higher scores indicate higher perceived social status in the class, i.e., a sense of being a valued, important, and influential person in the eyes of peers.

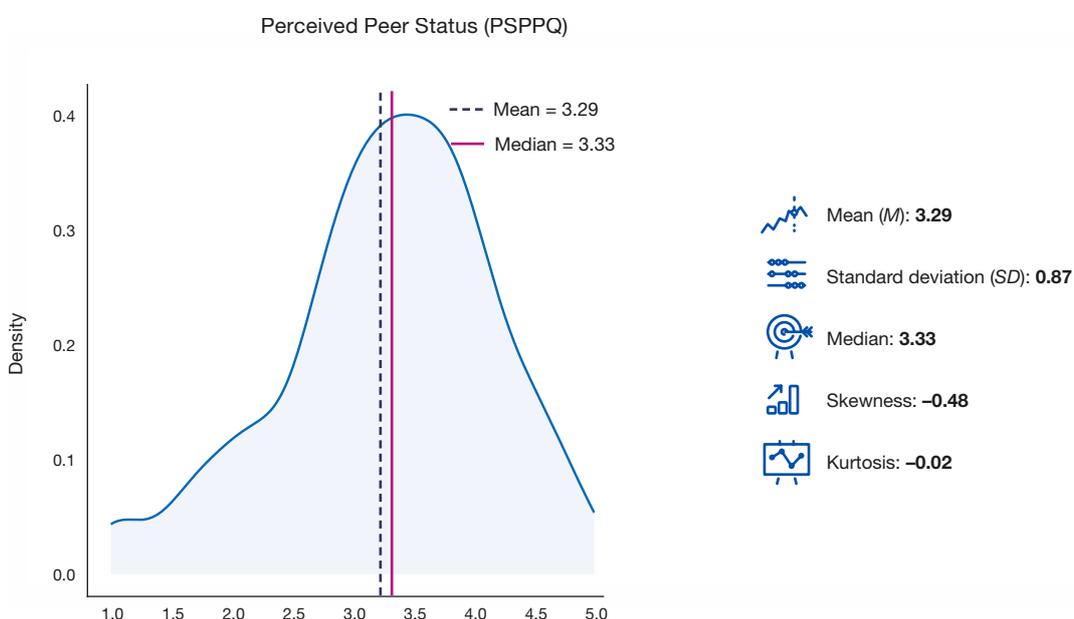
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)



Overall level of students' perceived peer status

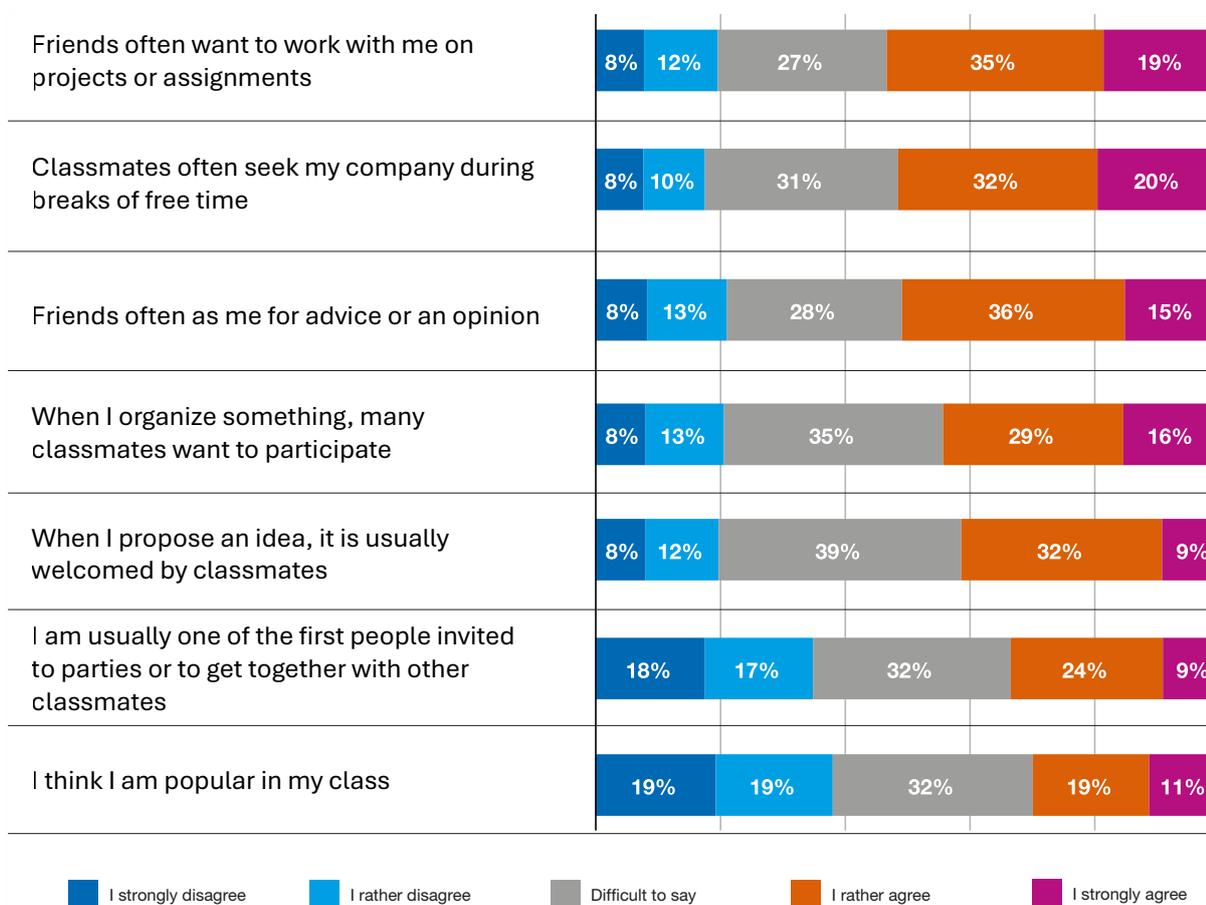
The students surveyed rated their own peer status quite moderately. The mean score was $M = 3.29$ ($SD = 0.87$) and the median was 3.33. The distribution of results was characterised by minimal kurtosis (kurtosis = -0.02), close to that of a normal distribution. It was also slightly skewed (skewness = -0.48). Participants answered questions about how much they considered themselves to be valued by others, significant, or influential, indicating the categories 'difficult to say' and 'rather agree'. The distribution of responses to each question is illustrated in Chart 17.

CHART 17 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the PSPPQ scale



The detailed distribution of responses in the questions concerning the assessment of one's own position in the peer group is presented in Chart 18.

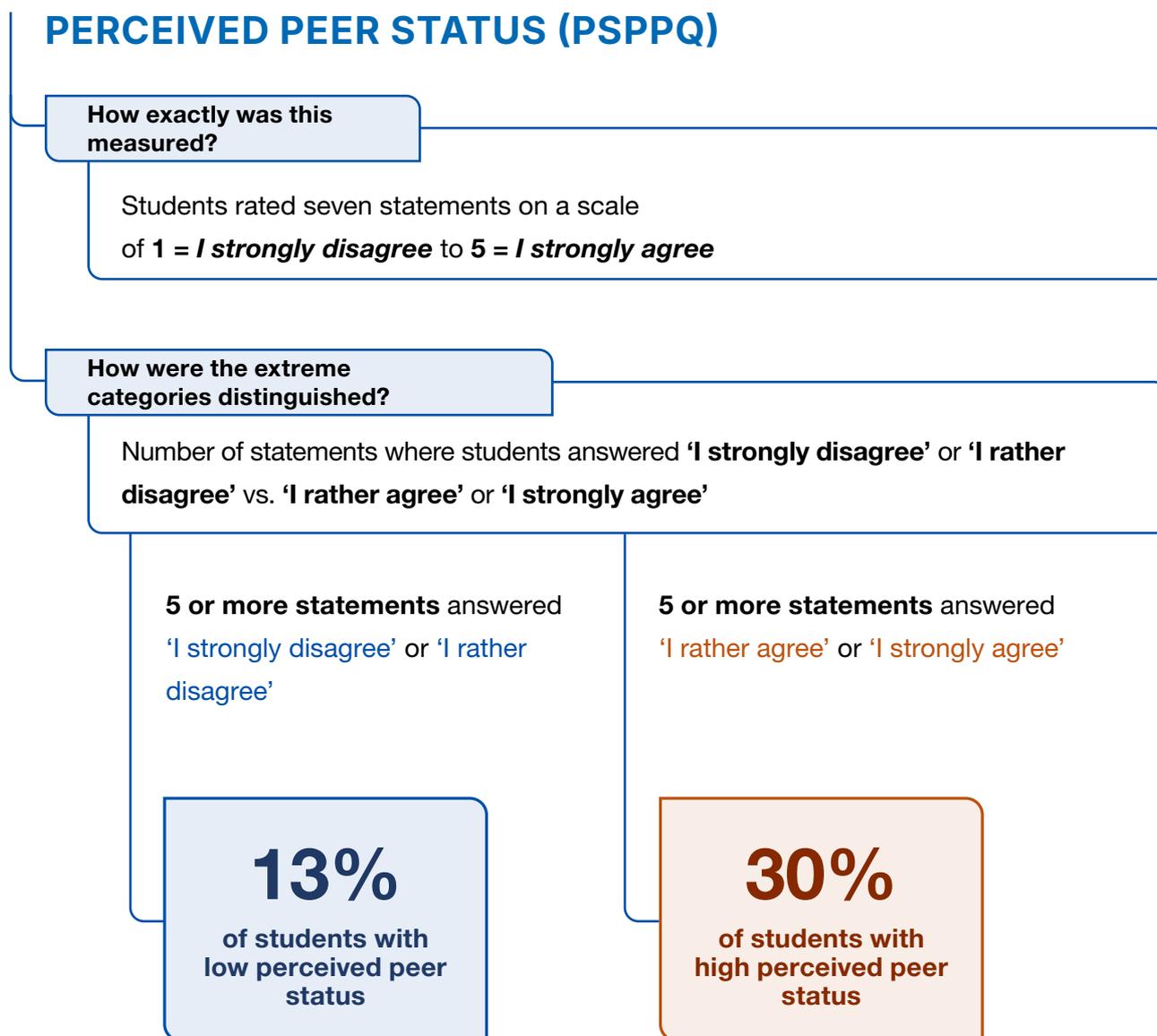
CHART 18 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the PSP PQ scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As the data presented in Chart 18 indicate, the majority of responses to questions about one’s perceived peer status are on the positive side. However, one in eight students surveyed (13%) described their peer status as clearly low. Those students who selected ‘I strongly disagree’ or ‘I rather disagree’ in five or more of the seven statements asked about peer relationships were considered to have low peer status, thus distancing themselves from the view that they occupied an important, often central position in the peer group. In contrast, about one in three students (30%) agreed (strongly or rather) with most of the statements diagnosing status in the group (in at least five out of the seven items presented), resulting in a classification into the high perceived status group. It can therefore be seen that 57% of the total number of students fell outside of the highest and lowest values of the scale.

FIGURE 5 | Categorisation of students by low and high perceived peer status



Differences among students by country of origin

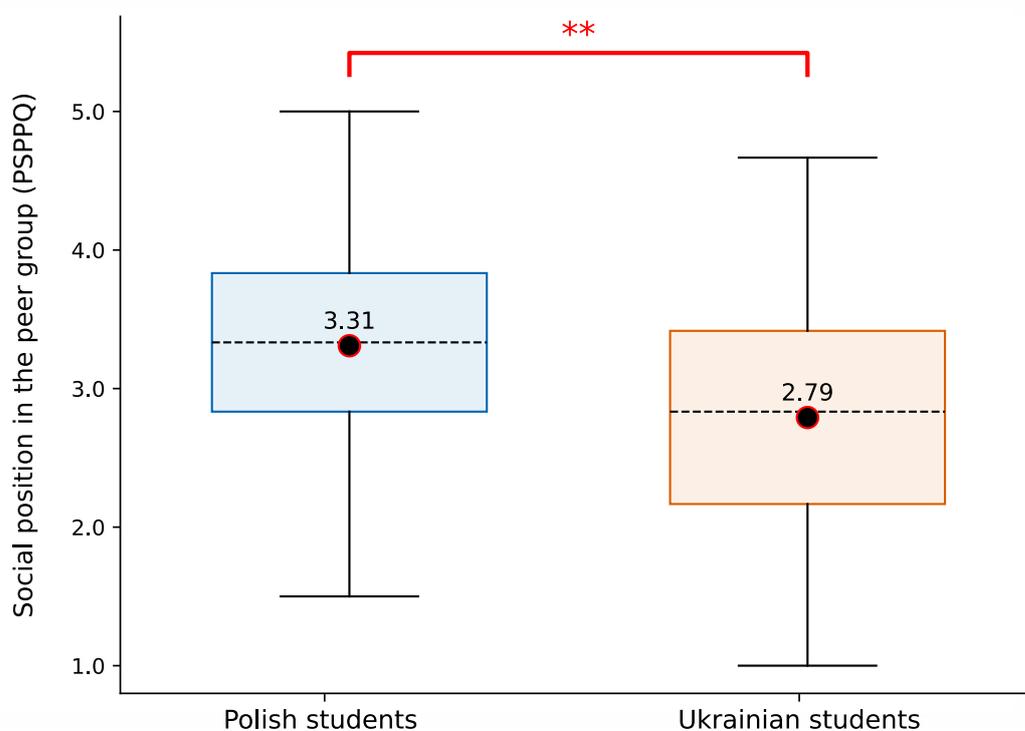
Peer status and social position in the school group are important factors influencing the well-being of children and adolescents (Brzezińska, 2000; Brzezińska et al., 2024; Bukowski et al., 2018). For students with migration experience, these are particularly sensitive areas, as their situation is often associated with an increased risk of marginalisation, social isolation, and low peer acceptance (Berry, 2008; Wahl et al., 2022). Research by Wahl et al. (2022) showed that young migrants, especially during the initial period after arrival, experience difficulties building social relationships, which in turn leads to lower levels of popularity and acceptance in the school environment. Centrone et al. (2023) and Tędziągolska et al. (2024) highlight similar difficulties in the population of Ukrainian students who arrived in Poland as a result of the war. For this reason,



it was important for our study to examine whether perceived social position in the peer group (measured by the PSPPQ questionnaire) differs between children born in Poland and those born in Ukraine.

The analyses conducted showed that the country of origin significantly differentiates students' perceived peer status. Polish-born students are more likely to perceive their peer group position as higher compared to Ukrainian-born students. The detailed results of the comparisons are presented in Chart 19.

CHART 19 | Perceived peer status depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within 1.5 × the interquartile range outside the box). Mean values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Polish students: $M = 3.31$ ($SD = 0.86$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.79$ ($SD = 0.84$).
 Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = 4.95$, $p < .001$. Difference in means = 0.52. Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.61; 95% CI [0.37, 0.85].





The results indicate that students of Polish nationality are more likely to perceive their peer group position as significantly higher than students of Ukrainian nationality attending Polish primary schools, and the strength of this effect is moderate. The subjective perception of one's social position in a peer group in terms of recognition, importance, or social attractiveness among Ukrainian students is relatively lower than among Polish students, which may be due to difficulties in integration. Limited knowledge of the Polish language, which remains one of the fundamental problems faced by Ukrainian-born students attending Polish schools (Tędziągolska et al., 2024), hinders spontaneous communication and participation or initiation of social interactions, which may result in a lower assessment of their own position in the peer group (Grünigen et al., 2012). In addition, different behavioural patterns or social norms may be incomprehensible to students in the host class leading them to distance themselves from students with migration experience (Jugert & Feddes, 2017), thereby negatively affecting the subjectively assessed peer status of the Ukrainian students.

Predictors of perceived peer status among surveyed students

The subsequent analysis examined the extent to which students' socio-demographic characteristics are associated with their assessment of their peer group position as measured by the PSPPQ scale. The same predictors as in previous regression models were taken into account, including country of origin, educational stage, family structure, special educational needs and gender. The reference groups were Polish students, grades 4–5, from two-parent families, without special educational needs, identifying as girls.

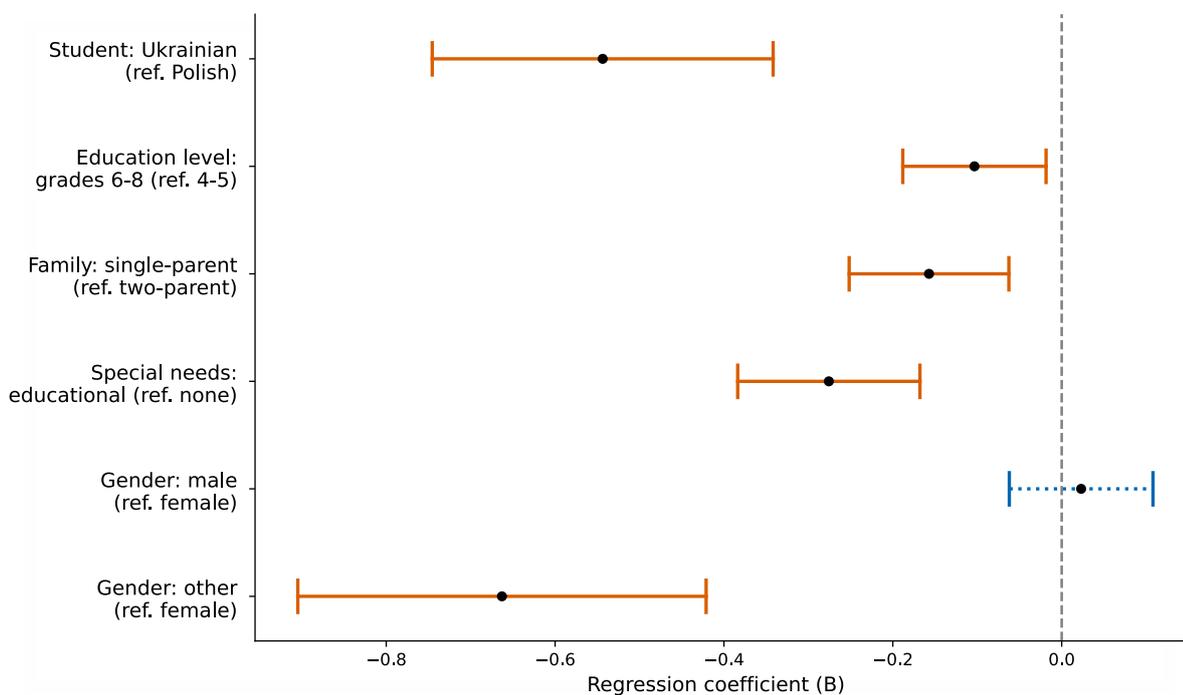


The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F = 18.46, p < .001$), although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.065$). Significant predictors of the level of perceived peer status were: nationality ($B = -0.54, p < .001$), having special educational needs ($B = -0.28, p < .001$), attending the upper grades ($B = -0.10, p = .017$), being raised in a single parent family ($B = -0.16, p = .001$), and indicating the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.66, p < .001$).

Five of the variables analysed had a significant impact on perceived peer status. Considering them as predictors helps explain around 6.5% of the variation in subjectively assessed peer status. The detailed results of the regression analysis are presented in Chart 20.

CHART 20

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with perceived peer status (PSPSQ)



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of perceived peer status (PSPSQ), along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of perceived peer status attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

Apart from nationality, which, as described above, is a significant predictor of perceived peer status differences between Polish and Ukrainian students, the presence of special educational needs was also clearly significant. Students with SEN opinions or rulings were more likely to assess their social position in the peer group lower than their typically developing peers, confirming the higher risk of social exclusion for children and youth with diverse educational needs (Gamboa et al., 2021; Martín-Antón et al., 2024; Monjas et al., 2014).

Similarly, children from single-parent families reported lower self-assessments of their social standing, consistent with the literature and indicating a greater risk of social isolation for this group of students (Clark et al., 1993). Being in the upper primary school grades (grades 6–8) was also associated with a lower assessment of social status. This may reflect increased competitiveness or greater social self-awareness among older students (Bukowski et al., 2018).

Difficulties in perceived peer status also applied to students who chose the category ‘other’ when indicating their gender. Compared to the remaining students, these individuals rated their



position significantly lower, which may indicate that individuals who do not identify as a boy or girl subjectively experience barriers to gaining peer acceptance. The results did not significantly differ between males and females.

In summary, lower self-assessment of peer group status was associated with Ukrainian origin (and indeed with the experience of migration behind this variable), having an opinion or ruling indicating individual educational needs, being at a higher educational stage, having a single-parent family home structure, and identifying with a gender other than female or male. These findings suggest the need to strengthen inclusive social practices in schools, with a particular focus on support for Ukrainian students.

3.2.3 Perceived social inclusion

Social inclusion, like peer status described above, refers to a sense of belonging to a group, positive interpersonal relationships, and the absence of exclusion, isolation, or rejection. This is extremely important for young people, as group participation and peer acceptance provide emotional and social support, a sense of security, and satisfaction with one’s interpersonal relationships (Romeo et al., 2024). High levels of social inclusion promote better psychological and general well-being (Bukowski et al., 2018; Giletta et al., 2021). For students with migration experience, full participation in a peer group may be hindered by lower peer status (Wahl et al., 2022), the previously mentioned language difficulties (Grünigen et al., 2012), or a lesser understanding of social behaviour patterns (Jugert, Feddes, 2017).

Sposób pomiaru postrzegania włączenia społecznego uczniów

Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ)

Subscale: Social Inclusion (SI)



4-point scale
not true at all
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4
completely true



What does it measure?
 Level of social integration, subjectively experienced satisfaction with group participation, and feeling understood and liked.



Interpretation
 Higher scores indicate a higher level of social integration, a positive assessment of one’s own participation in the group, and a sense of being liked.

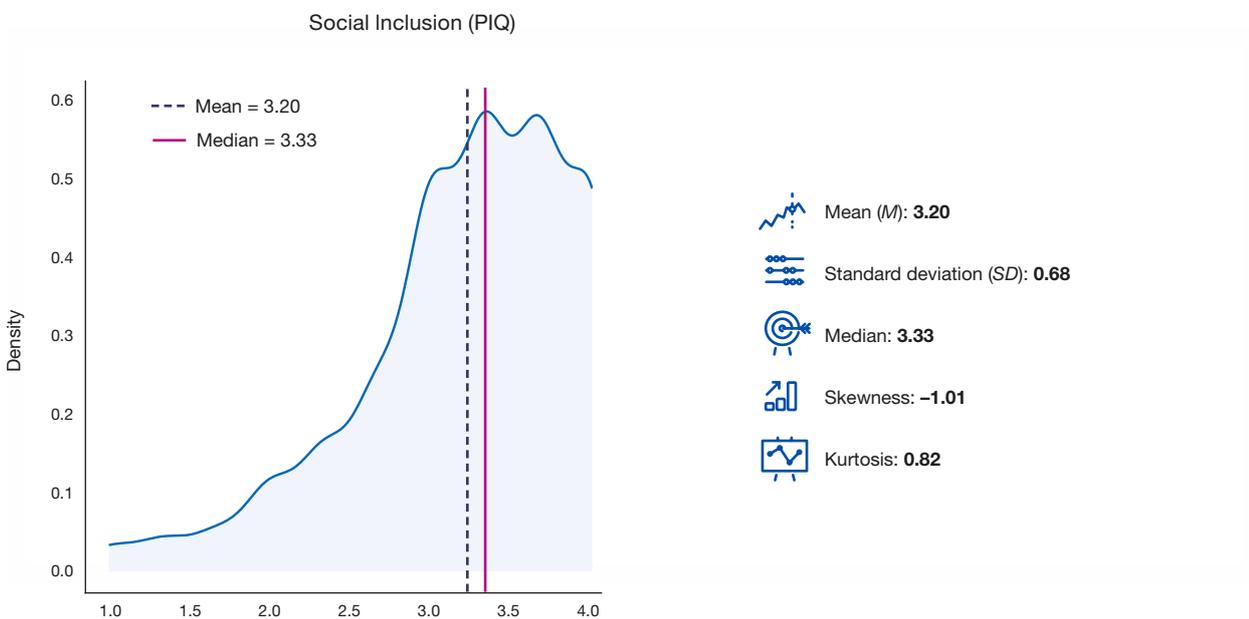
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)



Overall level of students' perceived social inclusion

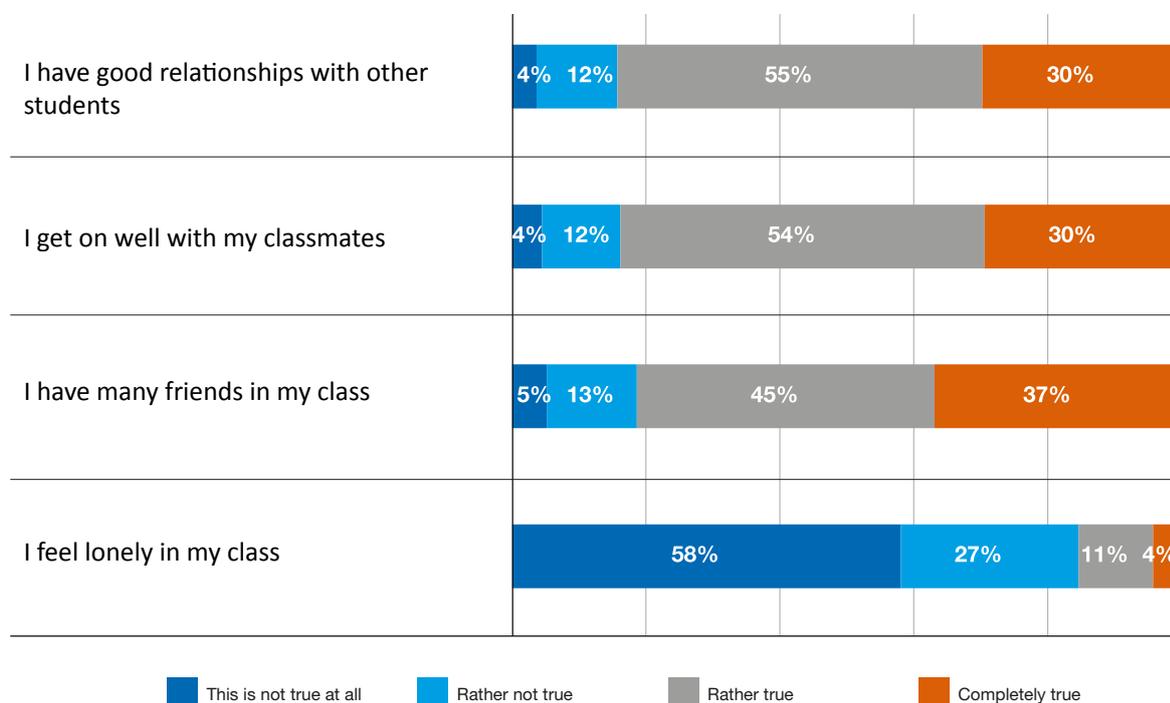
The students surveyed rated their social integration positively, with the distribution of responses clearly tending towards higher scores. The mean score was $M = 3.29$ ($SD = 0.68$) and the median score was 3.33. The kurtosis was 0.82. The distribution of scores was also distinctly skewed (skewness = -1.01), indicating that respondents, when asked whether they got along well with their classmates and whether they have friends in the class, predominantly indicated these statements as 'rather true' or 'completely true'. In addition, it was characterised by slight kurtosis (kurtosis = -0.24), close to that of a normal distribution. The data is presented in Chart 21.

CHART 21 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the PIQ (SI) scale



The detailed distribution of responses to the questions about one's integration into the peer group is presented in Chart 22.

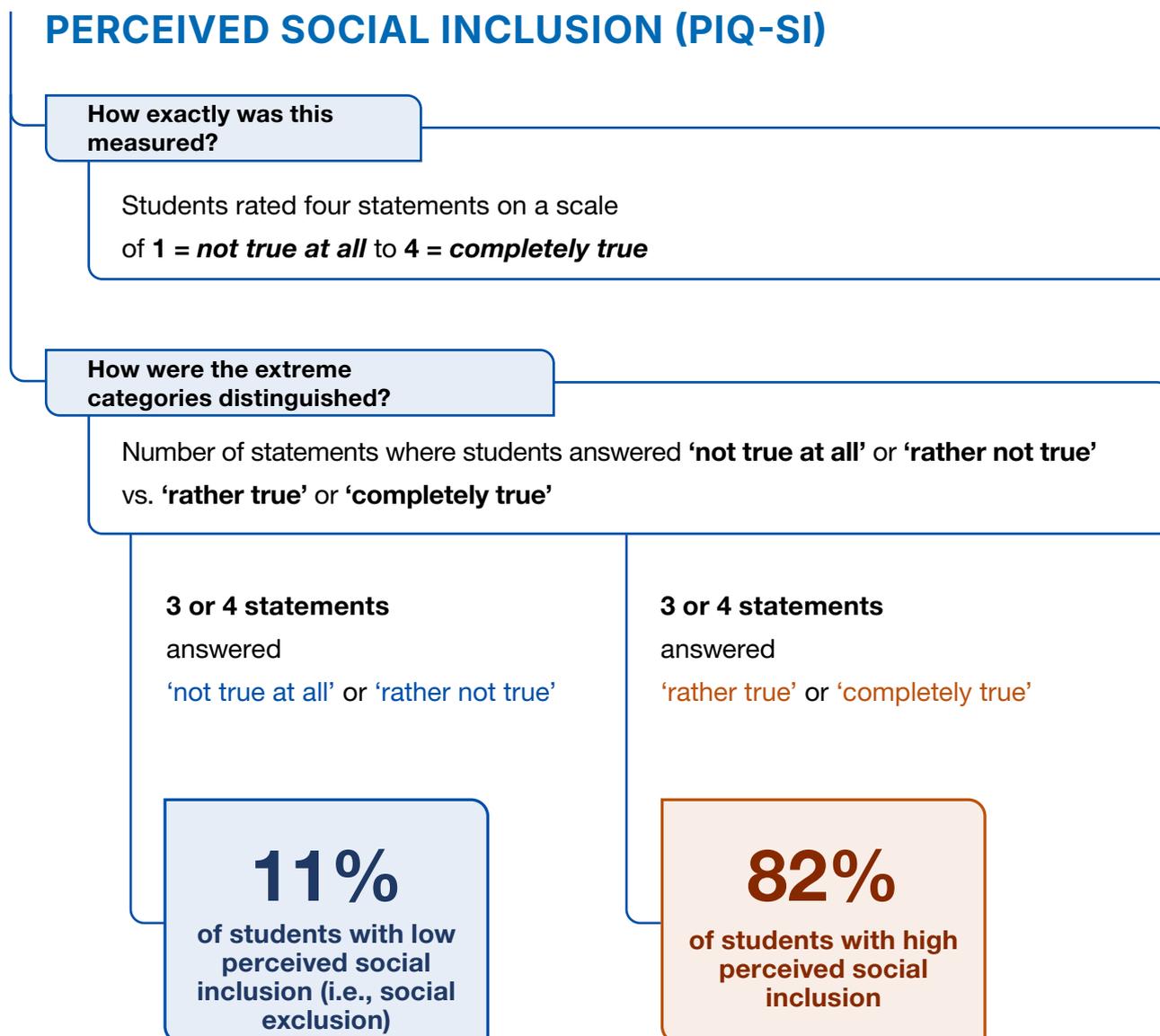
CHART 22 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the PIQ (SI) scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The data in Chart 22 show that the vast majority of responses to questions about subjectively assessed social inclusion and feeling liked in the classroom are positive (affirmative). However, one in nine students (11%) perceived their level of social inclusion in their relationships with classmates as low and possibly problematic. Such students were considered to be those who chose the option ‘not true at all’ or ‘rather not true’ in three or four (out of four) of the positively oriented statements presented, agreeing instead with the one negatively oriented statement: “I feel lonely in my class”. In contrast, the vast majority of students (82%) stated that the positive statements describing group relationships were ‘completely true’ or ‘rather true’.

FIGURE 6 | Categorisation of students by low and high perceived social inclusion



Differences among students by country of origin

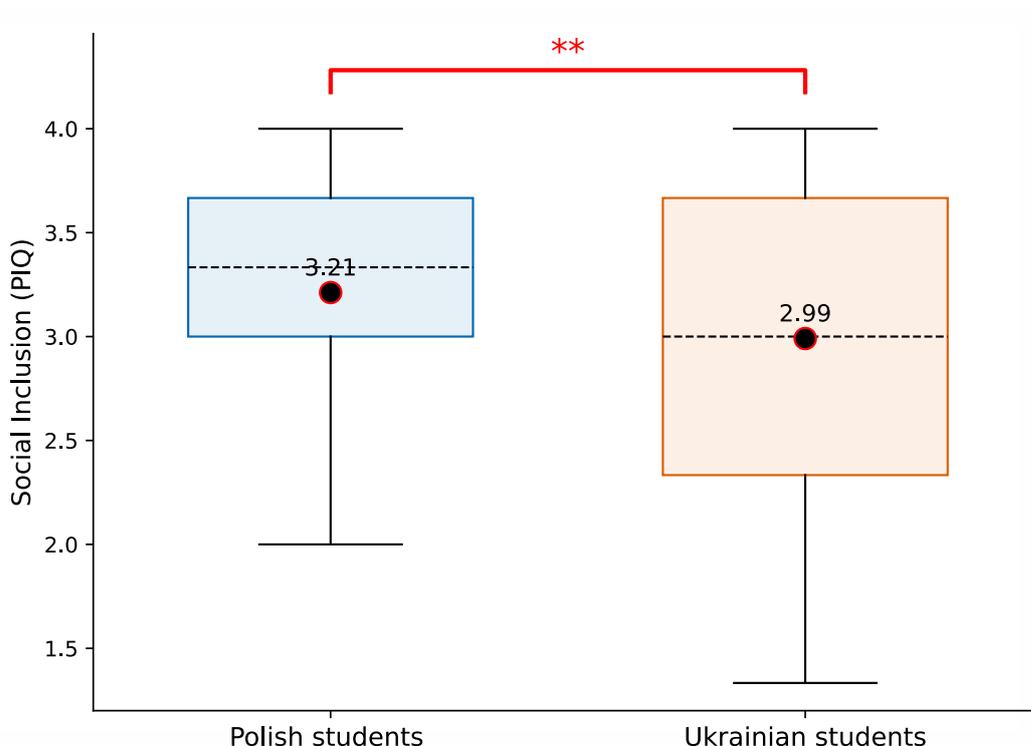
Social inclusion, satisfaction with peer relationships, and a positive overall assessment of one's group participation are important for the psychosocial functioning and overall well-being of young people (Bukowski et al., 2018; Giletta et al., 2021). This area is extremely important for students of Ukrainian origin attending Polish schools, as they often face difficulties integrating into their peer group in the host class (Tędziągolska et al., 2023, 2024). Young migrants, especially in the early stages after arriving in a new country, find it difficult to establish social relationships. Research shows that children and adolescents with migration experience are at risk of exclusion and more likely to have difficulty in gaining acceptance from their peers (Wahl et al., 2022). This also applies to Ukrainian students who, as a result of the full-scale war in Ukraine, have emigrated to Poland and attend school here (Tędziągolska et al., 2024). Therefore, the study considered the



dimension of social inclusion (which is part of the *Perceived Inclusion Questionnaire – PIQ*) and tested whether the level of this variable differed significantly by country of origin.

The analyses conducted showed significant, although not very large, differences between the surveyed Polish, and Ukrainian-born students in terms of subjectively perceived social inclusion. Polish students, compared to their Ukrainian classmates, rated their satisfaction with relationships with classmates and their sense of being understood and liked significantly higher. The detailed results of the comparisons are presented in Chart 23.

CHART 23 | Perceived social inclusion depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within 1.5 × the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 3.21$ ($SD = 0.67$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.99$ ($SD = 0.71$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = 2.70$, $p = .007$. Difference of means = 0.22 (95% CI [0.05, 0.39]). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.32; 95% CI [0.08, 0.56].



As shown in Chart 23 and the analyses in the box above, students of Polish nationality rated their participation in the class significantly higher and felt more strongly that they were liked and well understood than students of Ukrainian origin, although the recorded effect of nationality is small to moderate. As in the case of perceived social status, a likely reason for this discrepancy is the language barrier, which makes it difficult for Ukrainian students to have spontaneous interactions with Polish classmates, and to respond quickly and appropriately to interactions initiated by their peers (Tędziągolska et al., 2023).

Predictors of perceived social inclusion among surveyed students

In order to identify factors significantly associated with students' perceived social inclusion, a linear regression analysis was conducted, in which the dependent variable was the mean score on the social inclusion dimension (extracted from the *Perceived Inclusion Questionnaire* – PIQ). As in the previous analyses, the model takes into account six independent variables: the student's country of origin, level of education (grades 6–8 vs. 4–5), family structure (two-parent vs. single-parent), presence of special educational needs, gender (female vs. male), and the indication of 'other' in the question about the respondent's gender.

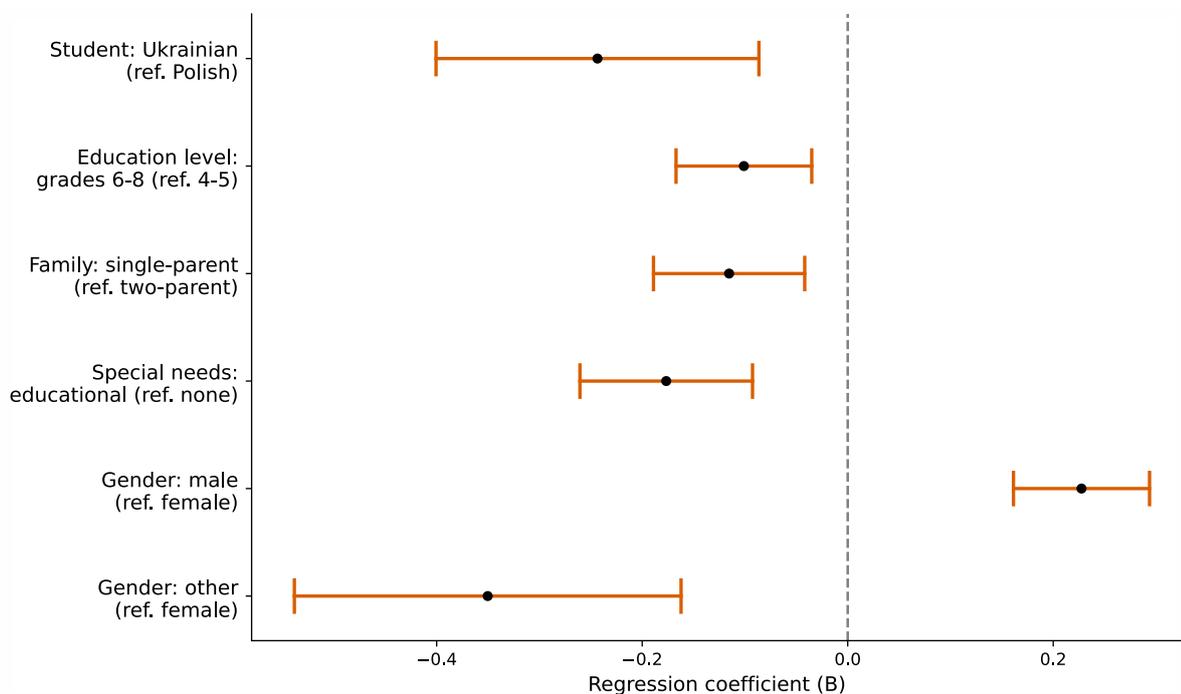


The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F = 19.16, p < .001$), although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.067$). Significant predictors of students' level of inclusion were: having special educational needs ($B = -0.18, p < .001$), nationality ($B = -0.24, p = .002$), attending the upper grades ($B = -0.10, p = .003$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = -0.12, p = .002$), indicating the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.35, p < .001$), male gender ($B = 0.23, p < .001$).

All included predictors were significantly associated with the level of subjectively experienced inclusion in the peer group. Taking these variables into account helps to explain approximately 6.7% of the variation in the level of subjectively assessed inclusion in the peer group. The detailed results of the regression analysis are presented in Chart 24.

CHART 24

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with perceived social inclusion



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of perceived social inclusion in the classroom, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of perceived social inclusion attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

As in previous analyses of the determinants of loneliness and reduced peer status, having a SEN opinion or ruling was a significant predictor of weaker social inclusion for this group of students ($B = -0.18, p < .001$). Respondents with diverse learning needs were significantly more likely than their typically developing peers to report low levels of social inclusion, a sense of belonging in the class, and being liked and understood by their peers. This indicates that they have difficulty integrating with classmates. This is sometimes due to the very nature of the students' difficulties, such as problems with responding appropriately in social situations, frequent absences from school, or limitations in spontaneous and uninhibited interactions with others (Gamboa et al., 2021), but also to a certain distancing of typically developing children and adolescents from peers whose behaviour or needs are different, misunderstood, or difficult to accept (Monjas et al., 2014).

Other predictors were also found to be significantly related to the level of perceived social inclusion. In light of the significant differences between Polish and Ukrainian students in terms of subjectively perceived integration with the class described in the previous section, it is natural that



nationality emerged as a significant predictor. Children from single-parent families declared lower levels of perceived peer inclusion compared to classmates from two-parent families, similar to the analysis of predictors of perceived peer status. Children growing up with a single parent often experience various difficulties pertaining to financial circumstances, additional responsibilities, or emotional stress (Walker et al., 2008), which can make it more difficult for them to participate spontaneously in school life or integrate with their peers. They also have lower self-esteem (Mohan & Priya, 2020), which affects their social relationships and leads to weaker integration with the group.

Attending the upper grades of primary school (grades 6–8) was also associated with lower subjective perception of peer inclusion and relationships with classmates. This is probably due to increasing social self-awareness that comes with age and a more critical view of whether one is liked by others and whether they get along well (Bukowski et al., 2018). Gender was also a significant predictor of inclusion. Students who chose the category ‘other’ when specifying their gender declared significantly lower levels of inclusion than girls. Boys, on the other hand, declared a significantly higher sense of social inclusion than girls. This suggests the importance of the gender variable for the sense of being accepted, understood, and liked, and thus for perceived participation in the peer group.

In summary, the level of social inclusion within a peer group is determined by a number of important demographic and psychosocial predictors. Key predictors of a lower sense of inclusion include having a formal opinion or ruling indicating special educational needs, Ukrainian nationality, being raised in a single-parent family, and older school age (students in grades 6–8). These difficulties stem both from individual circumstances and burdens, as well as from the attitudes of those around them. Gender also proved to be a significant moderator, with male gender being a predictor of higher levels of inclusion compared to female gender, while the lowest levels of subjectively perceived peer inclusion were declared by students selecting ‘other’ as their gender category.

3.2.4 Experiencing peer aggression

Peer aggression is one of the most serious threats to the well-being of children and young people in the school environment. It is a multifaceted phenomenon involving repeated and deliberate actions by one or more individuals against a peer who is socially or psychologically disadvantaged. Research shows that the experience of aggression (both direct and indirect) in the school environment lowers students’ psychological well-being, reduces their sense of security, and affects the quality of social relationships and engagement in learning (Schoeler et al., 2018). Such experiences can have long-term consequences for students’ mental health and social functioning (Pyżalski, 2021). Experiencing aggression is associated with higher levels of stress,



lowered self-esteem, difficulties in peer relationships, and poorer academic performance. Forms of relational violence, often overlooked by adults but deeply damaging to an individual's sense of belonging and worth, can be particularly damaging (Małkowska-Szkutnik, 2014; Pyżalski, 2012).

OECD analyses (in print) show that in 2022, Polish students experienced a decrease in the incidence of peer violence compared to 2018. According to PISA data on the intensity of bullying, this indicator decreased by 23% between 2015 and 2022, pointing to a clear improvement in the situation of students in terms of experiencing aggression and exclusion in the school environment.

Nevertheless, the experience of migration remains a factor that increases the risk of peer aggression. This phenomenon is complex and depends on the coexistence of various factors, such as gender and socio-economic status. For example, among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, boys with migration experience score 11% higher in experiencing peer aggression than girls of native origin (Figure 5), while among students from more privileged backgrounds, this difference increases to as much as 69% (OECD, 2022).

Young migrants, especially in the early stages after arriving in a new country, often encounter difficulties establishing social relationships and are at increased risk of exclusion (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2020). This pattern may also apply to students from Ukraine who, as a result of the full-scale war, have emigrated to Poland and are continuing their education here.

This section will analyse the phenomenon of peer aggression using data obtained from the EBIP-Q questionnaire.

Measuring the experience of peer aggression

European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (EBIP-Q)



5-point scale

1 (*never*) → 2 (*once or twice*) → 3 (*two to three times a month*) → 4 (*once a week*) → 5 (*more than once a week*)



What does it measure?

Frequency of being a victim of peer aggression (e.g., ridicule, exclusion, verbal or physical violence).



Interpretation

The results collected were coded in such a way that high scores on the scale indicate a higher frequency of experiencing peer aggression in the two months preceding the survey.

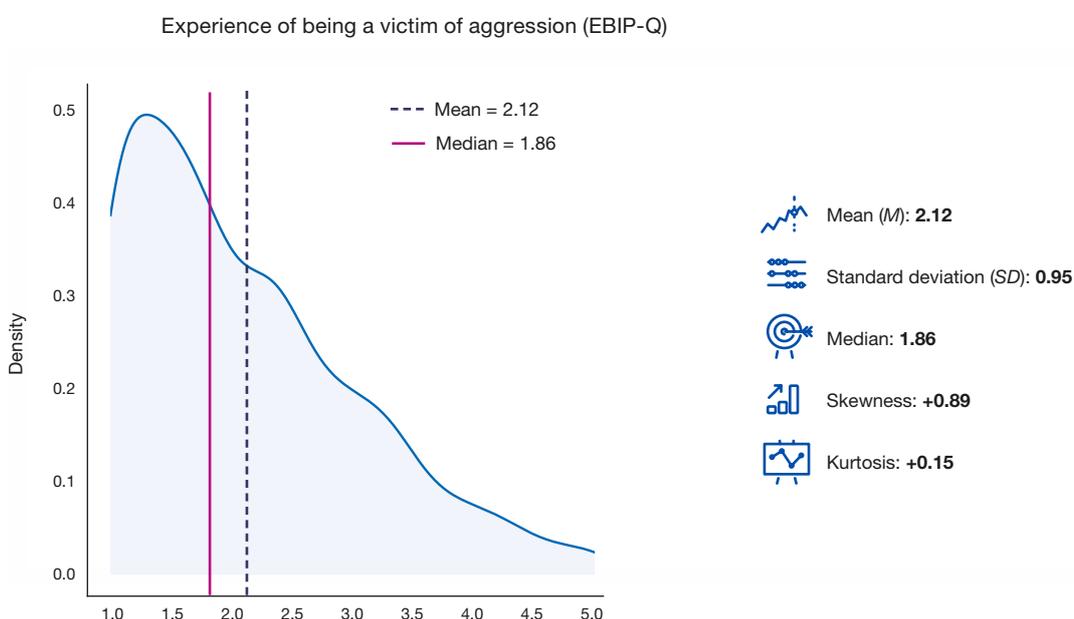
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)



The overall level of experiencing peer aggression among the surveyed students

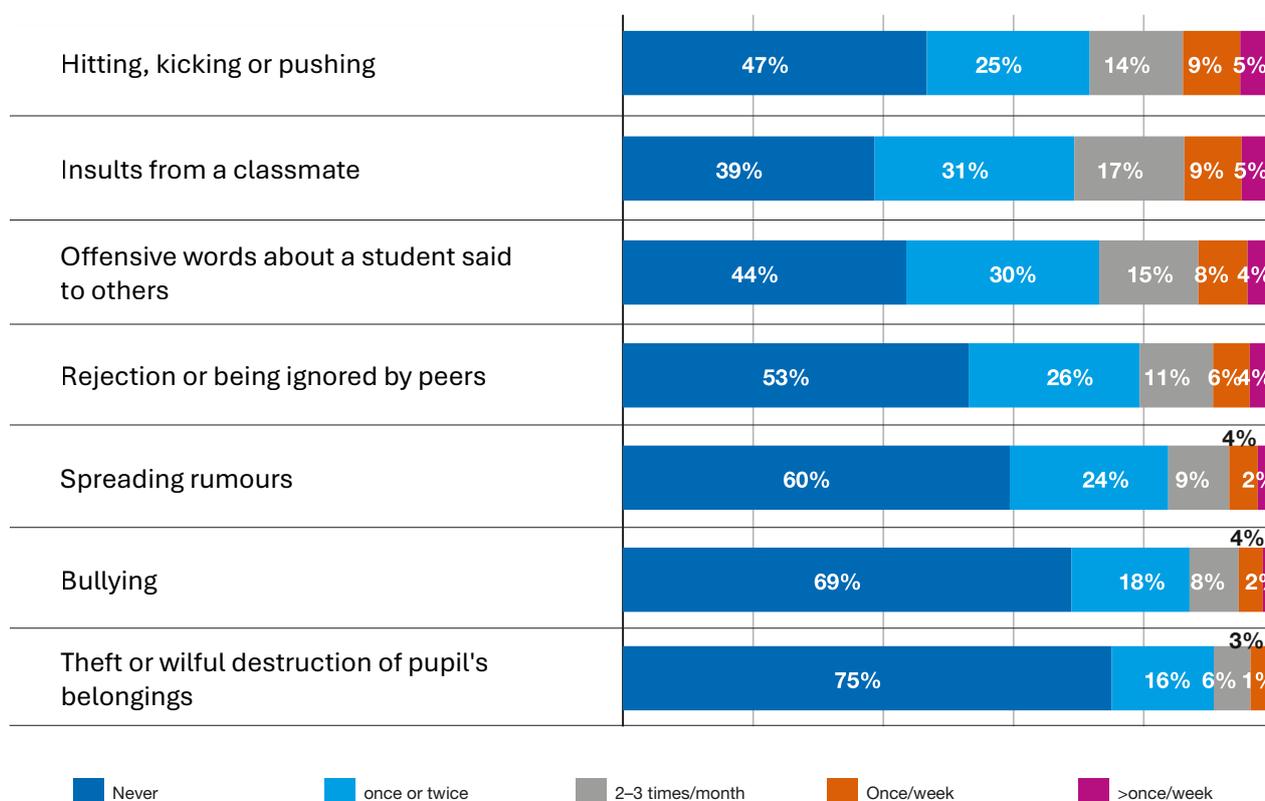
The students surveyed rated their experience of peer aggression at a fairly low level, with the distribution of responses tending clearly towards lower scores. Respondents answered questions on the frequency of experiencing aggression, selecting answers from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*more than once a week*). They mostly answered the statements with ‘never’ or ‘once or twice’. On average, students reported occasional experiences of peer aggression. The distribution of responses is illustrated in Chart 25.

CHART 25 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the EBIP-Q scale



To accurately assess the extent of peer aggression, it is necessary to analyse the averages for the different forms of aggression and the frequency distributions for each category (see Chart 26).

CHART 26 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the EBIP-Q scale



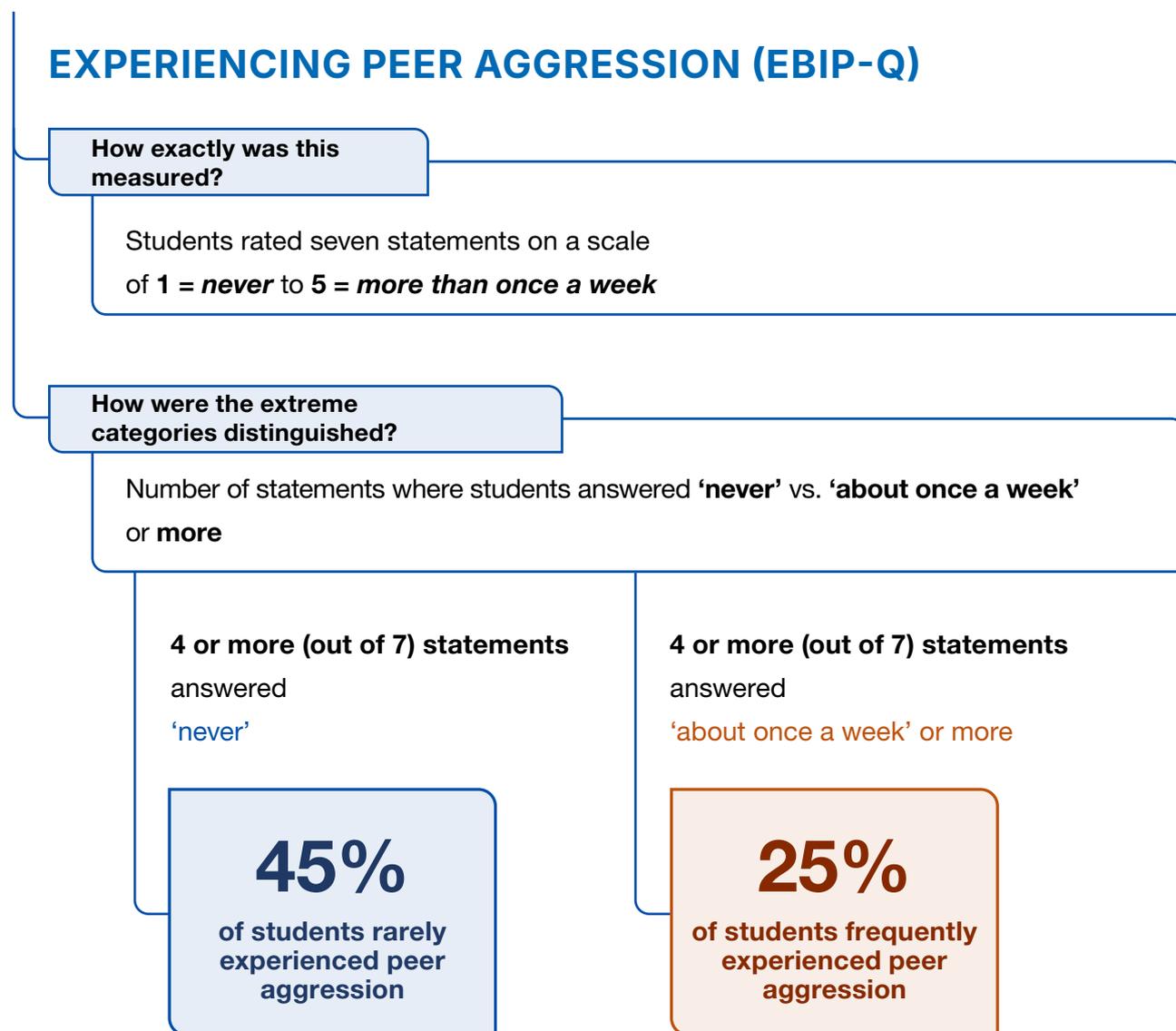
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The frequency of experiencing particular forms of aggression was analysed. Students most often experienced insults from peers (38.8% never, but as many as 30.7% at least once or twice, and 16.9% several times a month), as well as situations in which others said offensive things about them (only 43.6% of respondents had never experienced this). There were also incidents of physical violence, with over half of the students (53.2%) reporting that they had been punched, kicked, or pushed at least once in the previous two months. Less frequently reported were experiences of rejection or being ignored by peers (53.2% never), and rumour spreading (59.5% never). The least frequent forms of aggression were intimidation (69% of students had never experienced it) and stealing or having things destroyed (75.2% never). In summary, verbal aggression (insulting, badmouthing) was the most commonly reported form, while physical violence (against a person or their property) and social isolation were more incidental.

Overall, one in four students reported being the victim of peer aggression at least once a month (or more often) in at least four of the seven situations described. In contrast, almost half of the respondents (45%) experienced peer aggression very rarely. These students acknowledged that they had not been exposed to peer aggression in at least four of the seven statements presented to them about being a victim of such behaviour.



FIGURE 7 | Categorisation of students by low and high rates of experiencing peer aggression

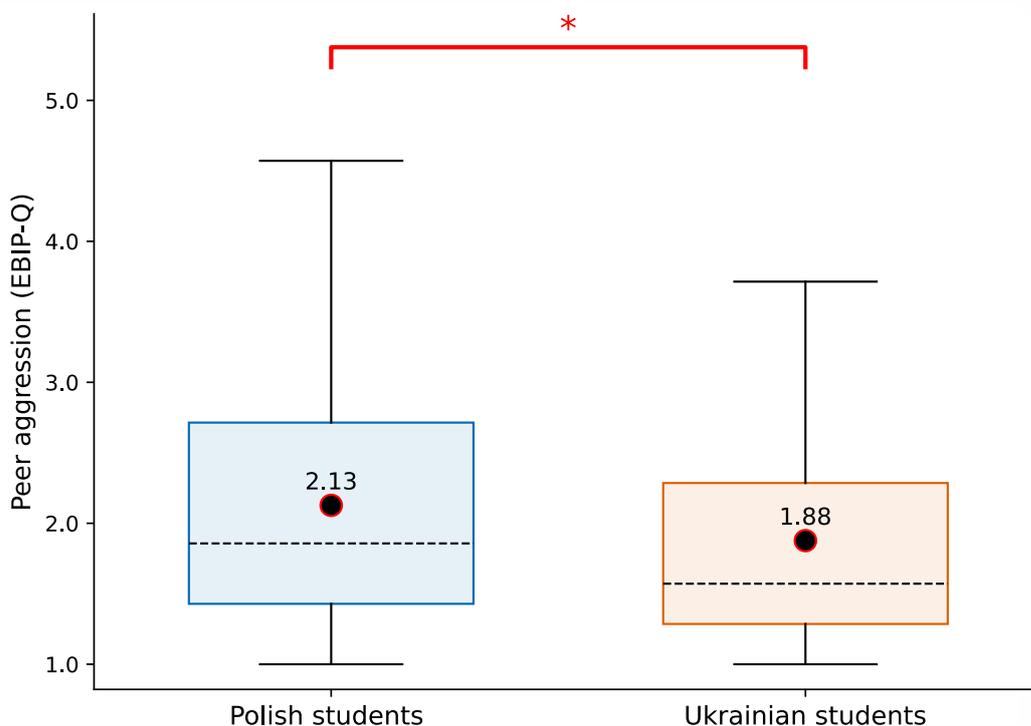


Differences among students by country of origin

An analysis was conducted to determine whether the level of peer aggression differs by country of origin. The analyses showed that there were statistically significant differences in experiencing peer aggression between Polish and Ukrainian students attending primary schools in Poland. The detailed results of the comparison are presented in Chart 27.

CHART 27

The experience of peer aggression (EBIP-Q) depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Mean values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 2.13$ ($SD = 0.95$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 1.88$ ($SD = 0.89$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1603) = 2.18$, $p = .029$. Difference in means = 0.25 (95% CI [0.04, 0.46]). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.27; 95% CI [0.03, 0.51].

A comparative analysis showed statistically significant differences in the experience of peer aggression between Polish and Ukrainian students. Polish students were significantly more likely to declare being a victim of peer aggression than Ukrainian students. Although the value of Cohen's d effect coefficient was small, the results show noticeable differences.

The result may seem counterintuitive in the context of previous studies indicating a higher risk of marginalization, stigmatization, and violence affecting students with migration experience. As highlighted in international studies (OECD, in press), the risk of aggression does not stem solely



from having a migration background, but from its interaction with other dimensions of inequality, confirming the need for an intersectional approach in analysing this phenomenon.

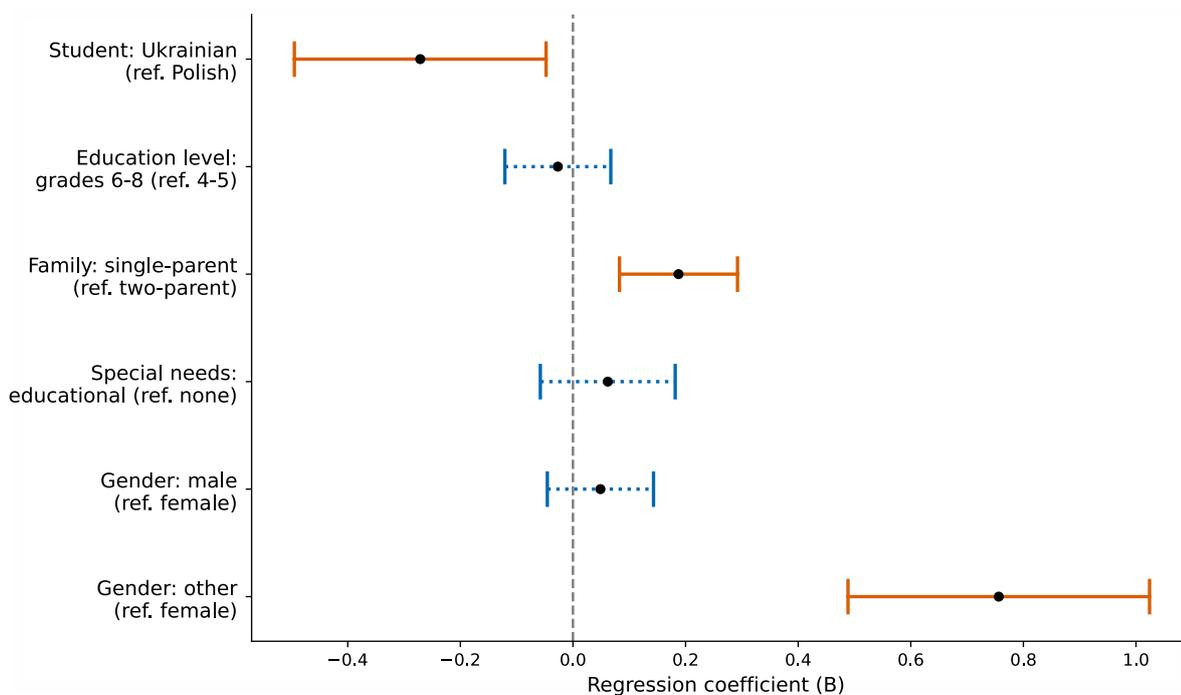
Other variables associated with the experience of peer aggression

A linear regression analysis was conducted to identify factors significantly associated with the intensity of experiencing peer aggression among students (dependent variable). As in previous analyses, the model takes into account six independent variables: the student’s country of origin, level of education (grades 6–8 vs. 4–5), family structure (two-parent vs. single-parent), presence of special educational needs, gender (female vs. male), and the ‘other’ category for gender.



The regression model was statistically significant: $F(6, 1598) = 9.16, p < .001, R^2 = 0.033$. Nationality ($B = -0.27, p = .017$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = 0.19, p < 0.001$) and indicating the ‘other’ category in the gender variable ($B = 0.76, p < .001$) were significantly related to the level of experienced peer aggression.

CHART 28 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with experiencing peer aggression



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of declarations of having experienced peer aggression, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < 0.05$) and dotted blue lines

indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of experiencing peer aggression attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

The results of the regression analysis indicate that individuals who identify as neither female nor male experience significantly higher levels of peer aggression than boys and girls. Smaller but also significant differences were related to family structure, with students from single-parent families reporting higher levels of aggression than students from two-parent families. The smallest but still statistically significant difference was noted between Ukrainian and Polish students, with Ukrainian students declaring lower levels of peer aggression than Polish students. Other variables, such as education level, SEN status and male gender, were not significantly associated with the intensity of experiencing peer aggression.

The results obtained are in line with previous studies, indicating that the majority of students in Polish schools experience a variety of aggressive behaviours from peers at least from time to time, with verbal and relational actions being more common than physical aggression (Kaczan et al., 2025; Przewłocka, 2015). The analyses presented here indicate that Ukrainian students reported significantly lower levels of experiencing aggression than their Polish peers. This may suggest a beneficial impact of the support provided to students who have migrated or other conditions relating to their educational and social situation. The opposite pattern was observed for students from single-parent families. These children experienced higher levels of victimisation, which may indicate greater vulnerability to peer group exclusion.

However, the effect was strongest for students who did not identify as either female or male. These individuals reported significantly higher levels of experienced aggression. This may indicate that this group is more frequently the target of peer aggression, which calls for further in-depth analysis and decisive actions to build a safe school climate.

The other variables—male gender, education level, and SEN status—were not significantly related to the level of aggression experienced. This result is not obvious, as the literature indicates that children with special educational needs are at increased risk of becoming victims of peer aggression (cf. Plichta, Olempska-Wysocka, 2013). Taken together, these results suggest that the experience of being a victim of some form of aggression may be familiar to all students, not just those at risk of social exclusion.

3.2.5 Interpersonal self-efficacy

Interpersonal self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to cope effectively in social situations, to initiate and sustain satisfying relationships with others, and to resolve conflicts. Low levels of interpersonal self-efficacy can lead to avoidance of contact, difficulties making friends, and,



consequently, reduced overall psychological well-being and engagement in school life (Bandura, 1997). In the context of this research, a specific mediator of interpersonal self-efficacy may be communication difficulties stemming from incomplete Polish-language proficiency or special educational needs.

This section attempts to analyse students' levels of interpersonal self-efficacy, based on data obtained from the SEQ-C questionnaire.

Measuring interpersonal self-efficacy

Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C)



5-point scale

very poorly
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5
very well



What does it measure?

Students' opinions of their self-efficacy in social situations (such as interacting with peers, asking for help, resolving conflicts).



Interpretation

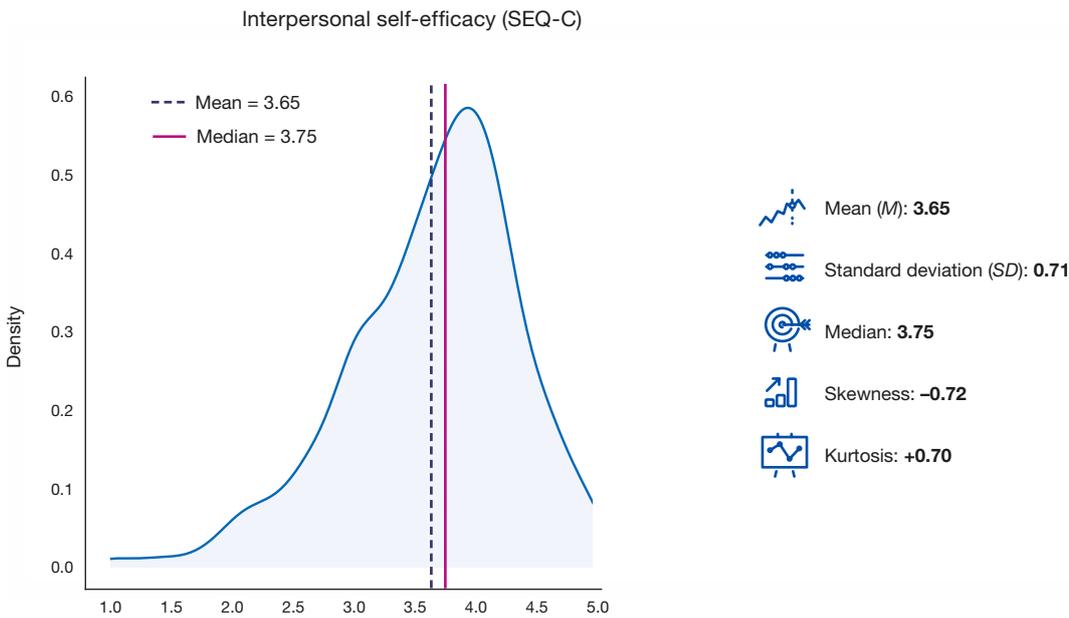
The results obtained were coded in such a way that high scores on the scale indicate a higher level of self-reported self-efficacy in social situations, i.e., students' stronger belief that they are doing well in their interactions with others.

For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

Overall intensity of perceived interpersonal self-efficacy among surveyed students

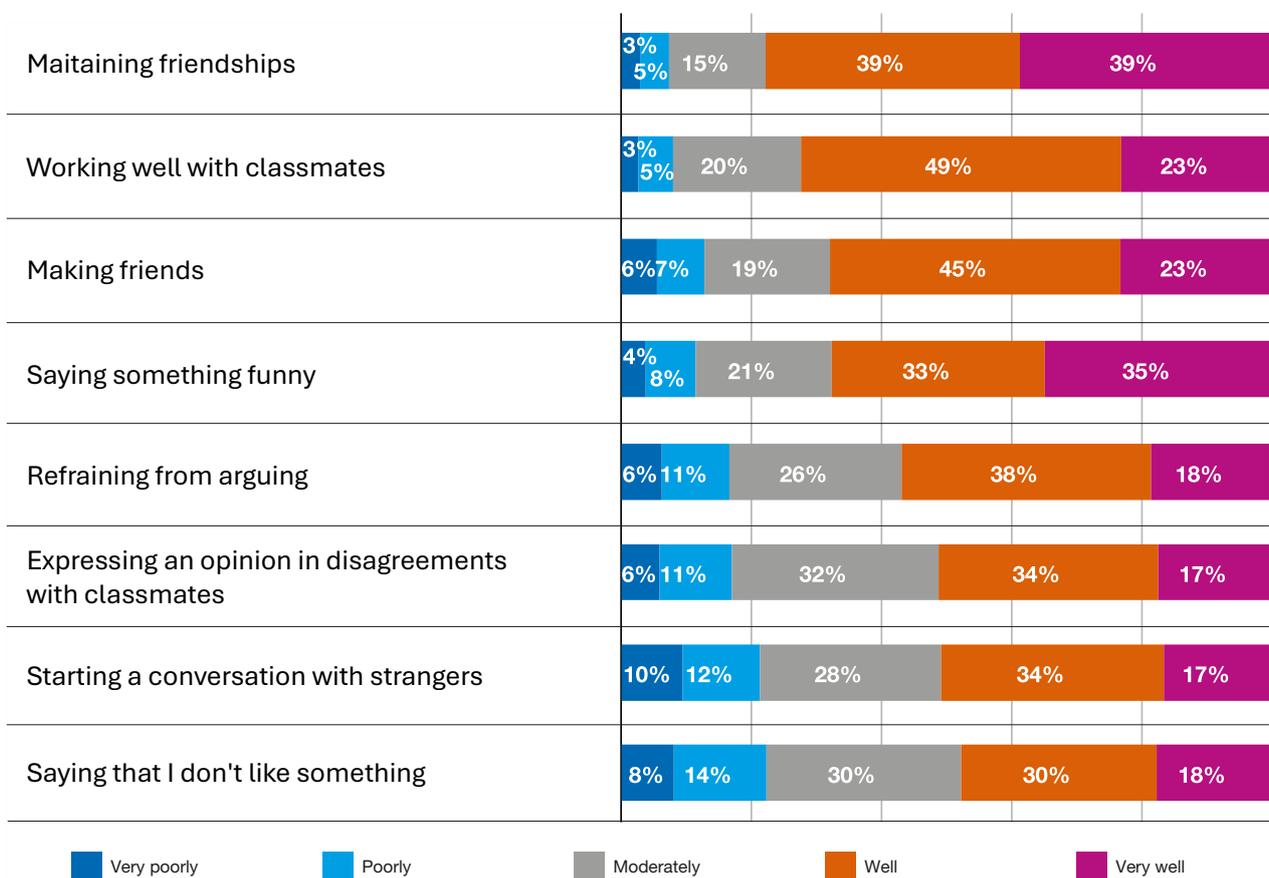
The results recorded indicate a relatively high sense of students' efficacy in social situations. The students' average level of self-assessment of their social competence fell between 'well' and 'very well', indicating a positive perception of their social competence. The median value confirms that the majority of students rate their social competence as at least good. The moderate leftward skewness and positive kurtosis indicate a greater density of responses in the higher categories of the scale, meaning that students were rather unlikely to rate their social competence as low. These results may indicate a relatively high sense of self-confidence among students in their relationships with peers and in social situations at school.

CHART 29 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the SEQ-C scale



The mean values for statements indicating a sense of interpersonal self-efficacy were analysed. Detailed data are presented in Chart 30.

CHART 30 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the SEQ-C scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

In the next step, the frequency of responses to the particular items relating to a social competence was summarised. Each question asked for an assessment of students' ability to cope with specific social situations, both in peer relations and in assertive communication. Students rated their ability to maintain friendships highest, with as many as 77.8% of respondents indicating that they did this well or very well, the highest percentage of positive responses in the set.

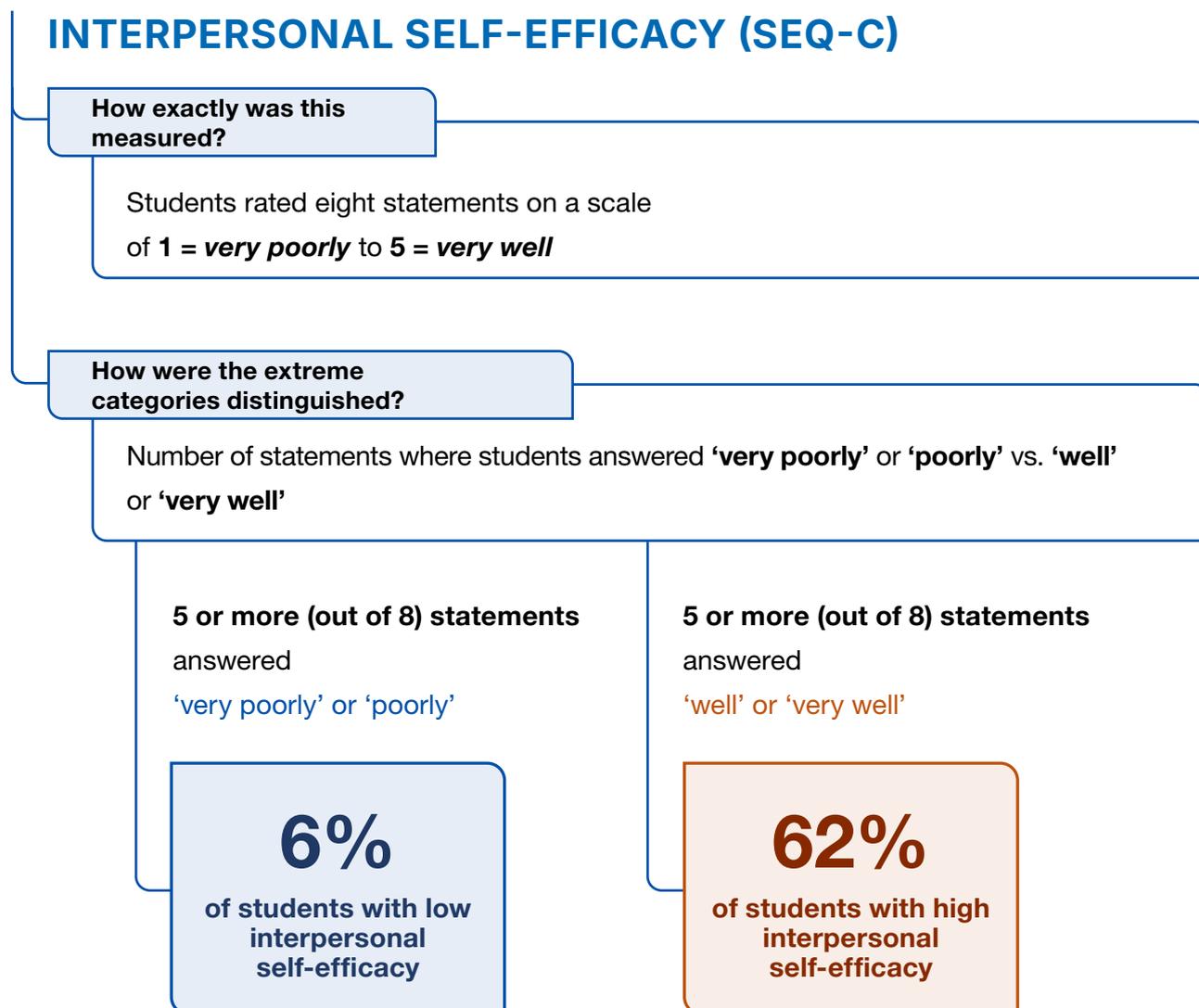
Some difficulties were reported by students in relation to starting a conversation with someone they didn't know, with 50.9% selecting positive responses, but 21.3% admitting that they manage this poorly or very poorly. In contrast, when asked about their ability to refrain from arguing, 56.8% of students declared that they do this well or very well, but 16.7% admitted they found it difficult.

In summary, the results indicate that students generally cope well in building and maintaining relationships with their peers, particularly in the context of friendship, cooperation, and sharing positive experiences. At the same time, difficulties are observed in the area of communication skills that require expressing one's opinions, objecting to something, or interacting with strangers.

In general, students' perceived interpersonal self-efficacy is high. Only one in eighteen (6%) students chose explicitly negative answers in most of the statements presented describing this trait, while almost two-thirds (62%) were confident that they were coping well or very well with most (at least five out of eight) of the situations described in the instrument.



FIGURE 8 | Categorisation of students by low and high rates of interpersonal self-efficacy



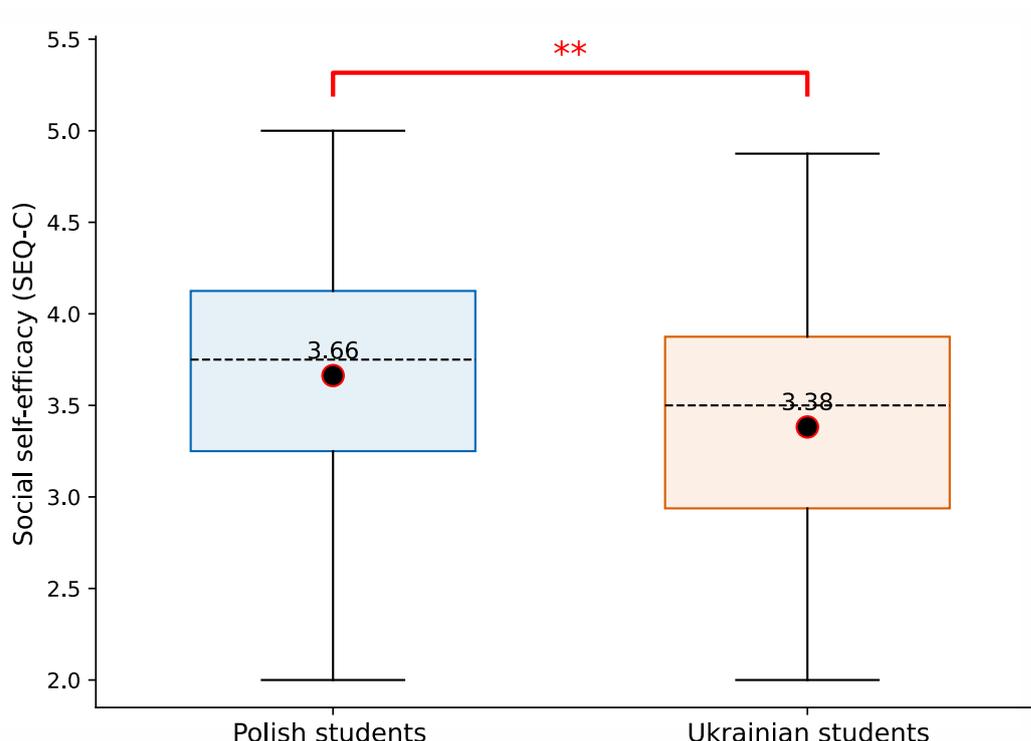
Differences among students by country of origin

An analysis was performed on whether perceptions of self-efficacy in interpersonal relationships differ between Polish-born students and students who had migrated from Ukraine.



Polish students: $M = 3.66$ ($SD = 0.71$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 3.38$ ($SD = 0.67$).
 Difference in means = 0.28 (95% CI [0.12, 0.44]). Cohen's d effect coefficient value = 0.41
 (95% CI [0.17, 0.64]).

CHART 31 | Interpersonal self-efficacy (SEQ-C) depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The results show a statistically significant, albeit moderate, difference between the groups. Polish students reported higher levels of perceived interpersonal self-efficacy than Ukrainian students.

Despite generally low academic anxiety and good language adaptation, the lower self-assessment of Ukrainian students' interpersonal self-efficacy may be due to subtler challenges in cultural and social adaptation. Although the language barrier is receding, it may take more time and effort to fully understand the nuances of communication, social norms, and the specifics of interpersonal relationships in a new environment. Ukrainian students, despite their positive



attitude towards learning, may still feel a certain level of insecurity when establishing deeper interpersonal relationships, which is a normal part of the acculturation process. This result suggests that supporting the development of social skills and building a sense of belonging may still be important for the full well-being of these students.

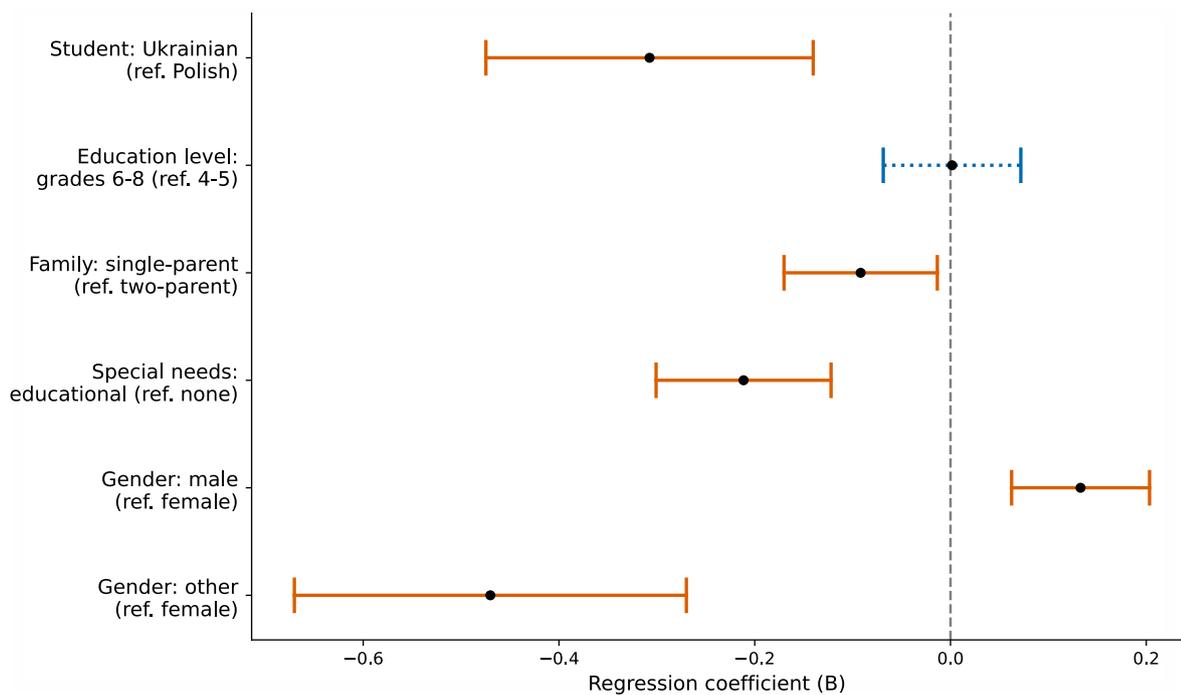
Predictors of interpersonal self-efficacy among the surveyed students

A linear regression analysis was performed, with the dependent variable being the sense of interpersonal self-efficacy (measured by the SEQ-C questionnaire) and considering six predictors: student's country of origin, educational level (grades 4–5 vs. 6–8), family structure, special educational needs, gender (boy and 'other' gender relative to the reference group of girls).



The model is statistically significant as a whole ($F(6.1601) = 13.86, p < .001$), although it explained a moderate proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.049$). Significant predictors were nationality ($B = -0.31, p < .001$), indicating the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.47, p < .001$), having special educational needs ($B = -0.21, SE = 0.05, p < .001$), coming from a single-parent family ($B = -0.09, SE = 0.04, p = .022$), male gender ($B = 0.13, SE = 0.04, p < .001$).

CHART 32 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with interpersonal self-efficacy among students





Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of interpersonal self-efficacy statements, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of interpersonal self-efficacy attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

Student origin proved to be the strongest negative predictor, with Ukrainian students showing significantly lower levels of self-efficacy than Polish students. This result is consistent with the overall intergroup difference observed earlier and may be indicative of adaptation challenges associated with a new social and linguistic environment (OECD, 2015).

Students with special educational needs also reported lower interpersonal competence, which may be due to additional communication and relationship difficulties, often relating to their specific needs. Similarly, students from single-parent families declared a lower sense of interpersonal self-efficacy, which may be related to less social support in the home environment or to more stressors (Dronkers & van der Velden, 2013b; McLanahan, 2004). In contrast, boys scored significantly higher on interpersonal self-efficacy than girls. Gender differences in social self-efficacy are sometimes observed in the literature, but their direction may vary depending on the cultural context and the specific dimension being measured (Bandura, 1997).



Summary

Although it might seem that students with migrant experience—especially those who came from Ukraine as a result of the war—are at risk of higher levels of socio-emotional isolation, the results of the study did not confirm this assumption. Feelings of loneliness were at comparable levels in both groups, which may suggest the relatively effective adaptation and support mechanisms at work in Polish schools. This is also consistent with international research findings (see, e.g., OECD, 2023; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), which indicate that migrants do not always experience higher levels of loneliness, especially if they are studying in an environment where migration is a mass phenomenon and educational institutions are taking measures to support their integration.

A more nuanced picture emerges from the results concerning perceived position in the peer group. Polish students rated their position significantly higher than Ukrainian students did. This may be indicative of persistent inequalities in social and cultural capital, but also language barriers, which, even when migrant students are highly motivated, affect their ability to participate actively and confidently in the classroom. The literature emphasises that it is precisely this perceived low social position that is one of the factors reducing the well-being of young migrants (Kia-Keating, Ellis, 2007), regardless of their actual level of integration.

Surprisingly, it was Polish students who more often declared that they felt they were victims of peer aggression. This result may be a consequence of several factors—from the difficulty of recognising subtle forms of aggression in culturally mixed groups, to the more critical perception of relationships by majority students, who may experience tensions arising from the reorganisation of classroom dynamics after the admission of new students. This phenomenon should be interpreted not as a reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator, but as an expression of complex adaptive processes that can cause tensions on both sides. Similar observations emerged in studies on the relationship between effective intercultural education and bullying (Okagbue et al., 2022), which noted that tensions can also be felt by majority students, especially when the school lacks transparency in its anti-violence measures and a non-discriminatory systemic approach.

Finally, the level of interpersonal self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's ability to successfully establish and maintain social relationships, was high in both groups, but significantly lower among Ukrainian students. Reduced interpersonal self-efficacy can result from both language limitations and migration experiences, which are often associated with the loss of stability, the need to adapt to new social norms, and a reduced sense of control. According to Bandura's (1997) theory, low self-efficacy can undermine overall psychological well-being, leading to withdrawal or avoidance of social challenges, which can hinder integration in the long term.

Against the backdrop of the above results, the situation of students with special educational needs may be of particular concern, as this characteristic was associated with lower well-being in the dimension of relationships with peers in the classroom. This includes feelings of loneliness as well as perceived position in the peer group, interpersonal self-efficacy, and experiences of violence. This may indicate that the school environment is not sufficiently adapted to the needs of this group of students, as well as limited opportunities to participate in peer relationships on an equal basis. This requires in-depth analysis and intervention at the systemic, school, and individual levels.

3.3 Motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school

A student's motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school is one of the key predictors of school well-being, understood as a sense of satisfaction, security, and belonging in the school environment.

Motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school was analysed based on three indicators: achievement of educational goals, self-assessment as a student, and attitude towards school. All variables were measured on a 4-point scale, where higher values indicated a higher level of the given dimension of engagement (from 1 – *never/not true at all*, to 4 – *always/completely true*).

3.3.1 Sense of educational purpose

The sense of educational purpose—one of the important components of school well-being—refers to how students perceive the meaning and value of their educational activity. It encompasses the belief that participation in school activities and the effort put into learning and daily tasks are important both in the context of current experiences and future life—personal, professional, and social (Zadworna et al., 2023).

This construct combines cognitive and motivational elements. On the one hand, it concerns a conscious assessment of the value of education, and on the other, it reflects an internal conviction that learning has deep meaning and purpose. A student who understands why they are learning and how the knowledge gained at school can contribute to the achievement of their life goals strengthens their need for competence, and this—as research based on self-determination theory shows—is closely linked to school well-being (Klemp et al., 2025).

Students who demonstrate a high level of awareness of the importance of learning-oriented goals tend to be more motivated to learn, more willing to engage in school assignments, are better able to see the connection between school requirements and their own aspirations. They also exhibit greater resilience to difficulties or frustrations arising from educational challenges (Martin et al.,



2022; Steinmayr et al., 2019). Exposure to educational failure (e.g., due to language or cognitive difficulties) may be a risk factor for students, particularly, those with migration experience or special educational needs, in achieving educational goals. The accumulation of negative educational experiences can lead to ‘learned helplessness’, which in turn results in the student setting fewer goals and having greater difficulty in planning future actions (Ciżkiewicz, 2009). This is, of course, only one of the premises serving as the basis for concluding that the sense of educational purpose and the meaning of learning is an issue worth exploring in analysing the socio-educational functioning of the aforementioned groups of students.

Measuring students’ sense of educational purpose

Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ) Subscale: *Educational Purpose Scale (EPS)*



4-point scale

never

1 → 2 → 3 → 4

always



What does it measure?

The extent to which students perceive their school activities as important, meaningful, and useful in their educational and life context.



Interpretation

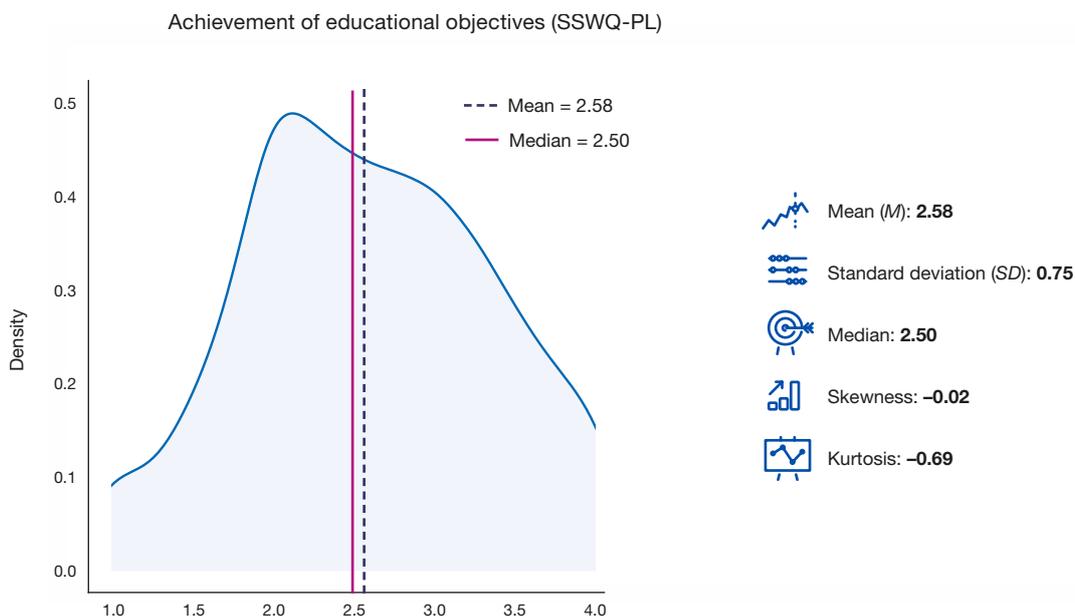
High scores on the scale indicate that students often perceive their activities at school as important and useful.

For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

Overall level of sense of educational purpose

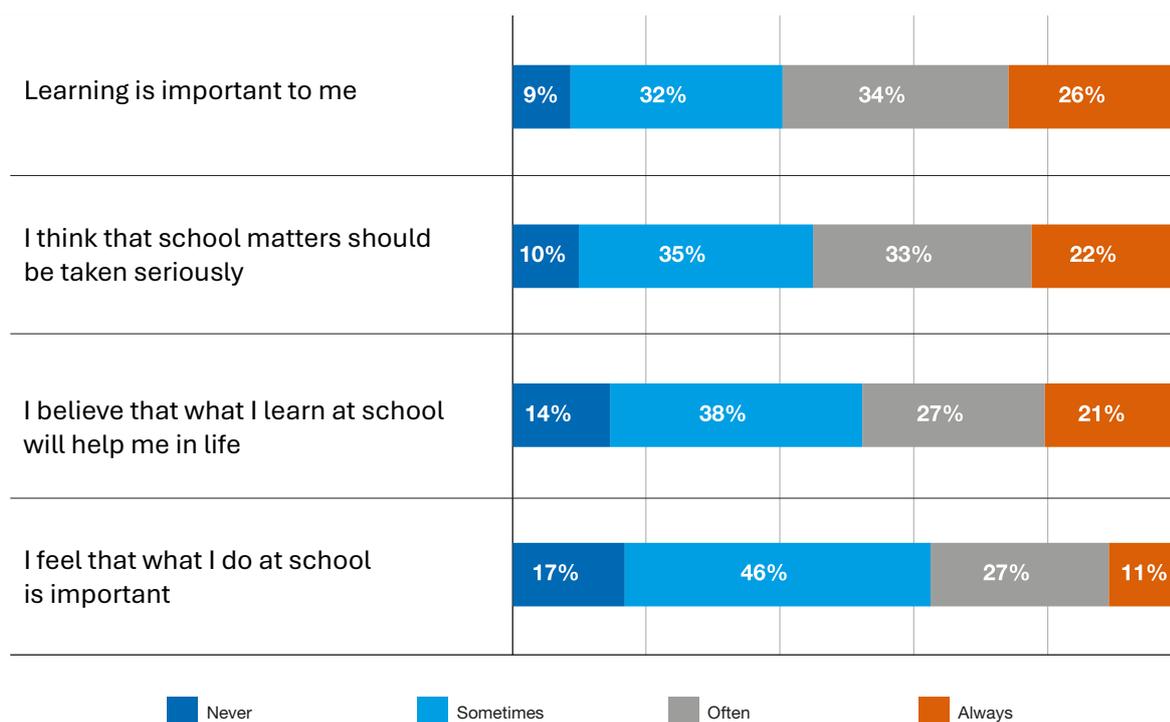
The result suggests that the average student quite often perceives their activities at school as important and useful, although not at an unambiguously high level. The number of low and high ratings was similar, and the responses were relatively scattered, with no clear concentration around one level (see Chart 33).

CHART 33 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the SSWQ scale



As Chart 33 indicates, the majority of responses to questions on the sense of educational purpose were situated between ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’. The results indicate a rather moderate level of sense of educational purpose. As shown in Chart 34, the statement receiving the greatest number of positive responses was: “Learning is important to me”, whereas the statement “I feel that what I do at school is important” received the smallest number of positive responses.

CHART 34 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the SSWQ scale

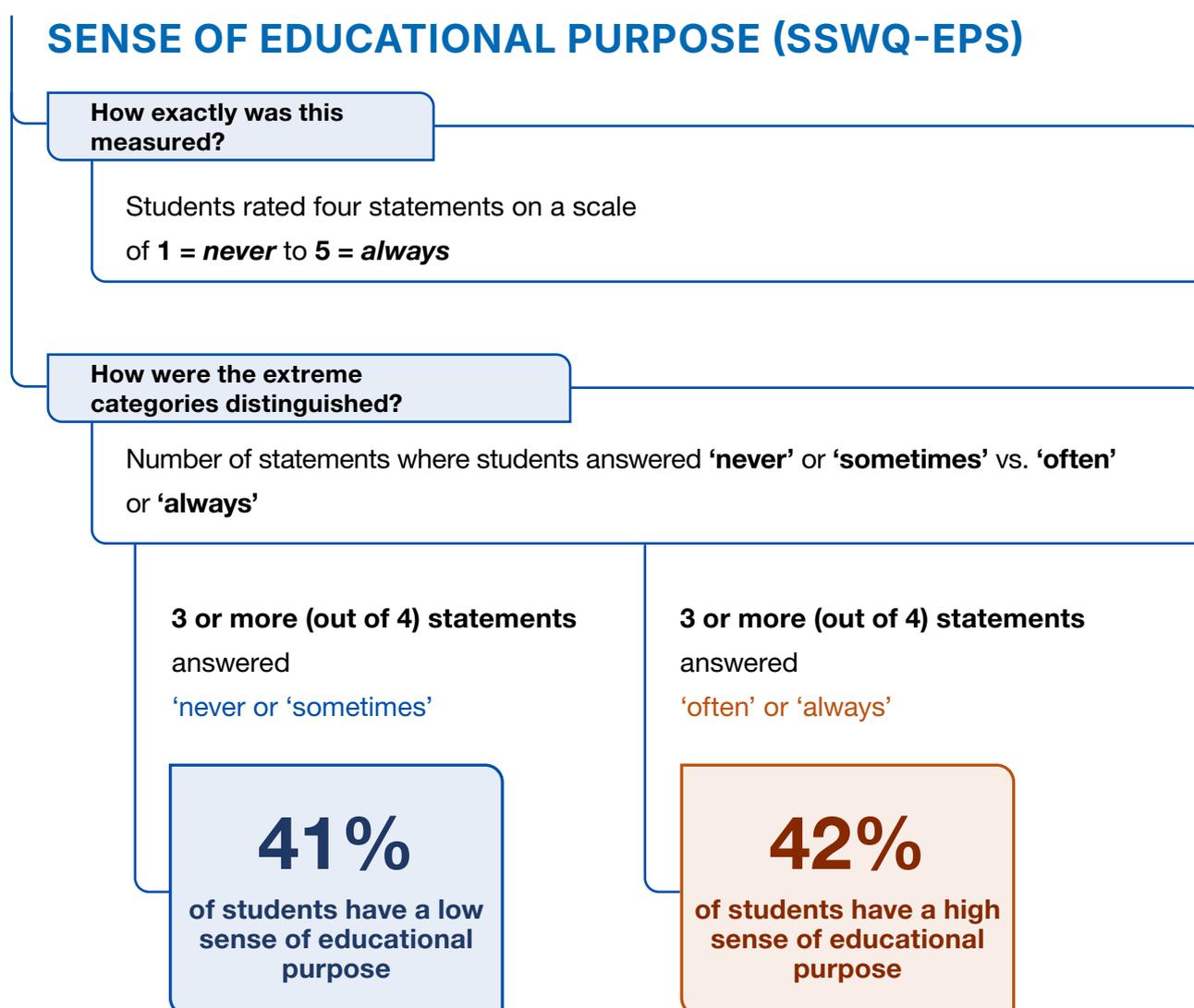


Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



So, did students generally feel a sense of purpose and awareness of achieving educational goals? The answer to this question is not easy. In fact, it turned out that as many as 41% of respondents reported a low sense of educational purpose. In response to at least three of the four statements presented, these students disagreed, stating that, at most, they noticed such a purpose 'sometimes'. Almost equal in number, accounting for 42% of all participants, was the group with a strong sense of purpose, i.e., those who declared that they 'often' or 'always' understand why and for what purpose they are learning, and see the point of education.

FIGURE 9 | Categorisation of students by low and high sense of educational purpose

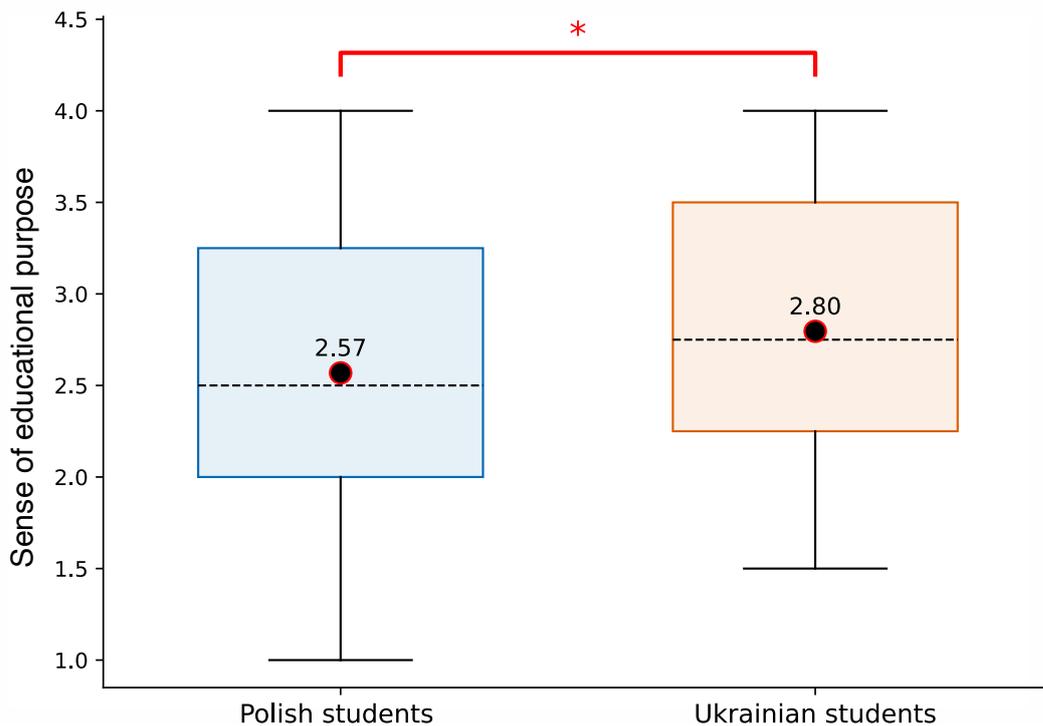




Differences among students by country of origin

In our research, we examined whether the sense of educational purpose differs between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience.

CHART 35 | Sense of educational purpose depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. The red line indicates statistically significant differences between the groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 2.57$ ($SD = 0.75$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.80$ ($SD = 0.69$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = -2.51, p = .012$. Difference in means = -0.23 (95% CI $[-0.39, -0.06]$). Effect size (Cohen's d) = -0.32 ; 95% CI $[-0.55, -0.08]$.



The results suggest that Ukrainian students scored higher in their sense of educational purpose than Polish students.

This result, together with Ukrainian students' higher perception of teaching practices as inclusive (see subsection 3.1), is consistent with the general description of the situation as determined by the research findings in this area. Adapted forms of support and pro-inclusive attitudes of teachers contribute to strengthening motivation, well-being, and a sense of agency in the school environment (Halvorsen & Bunting, 2019). Such protective factors were documented as having a significant impact on students' school motivation and their sense of coping at school (Krane et al., 2016). Ukrainian students may have a stronger awareness of the value of education, also due to the lost opportunities to continue their education in their country of origin. In the context of migration and being a refugee, education is often seen as an important tool for improving quality of life, social advancement, and integration. These students and their families see learning as a real opportunity to change their life situation, which reinforces its meaning and significance (OECD, 2015a). In addition, school education provides an opportunity to recreate a familiar and safe daily routine, maintaining the student's identity and sense of agency (Cerna et al. 2021).

In addition to individual reasons, Ukrainian students who are educated in the Polish education system may demonstrate a greater sense of purpose in learning and see real value in education for systemic reasons as well. These motivational orientations may be linked to the perception and understanding of the geopolitical context. As a member state of the European Union, Poland offers access to a secure, democratic, and developed education system and labour market. Students from Ukraine—often forced to leave their homeland because of war—may see education as an opportunity to build a future in a place that offers stability, the protection of rights, and personal development.

Other variables associated with the sense of educational purpose

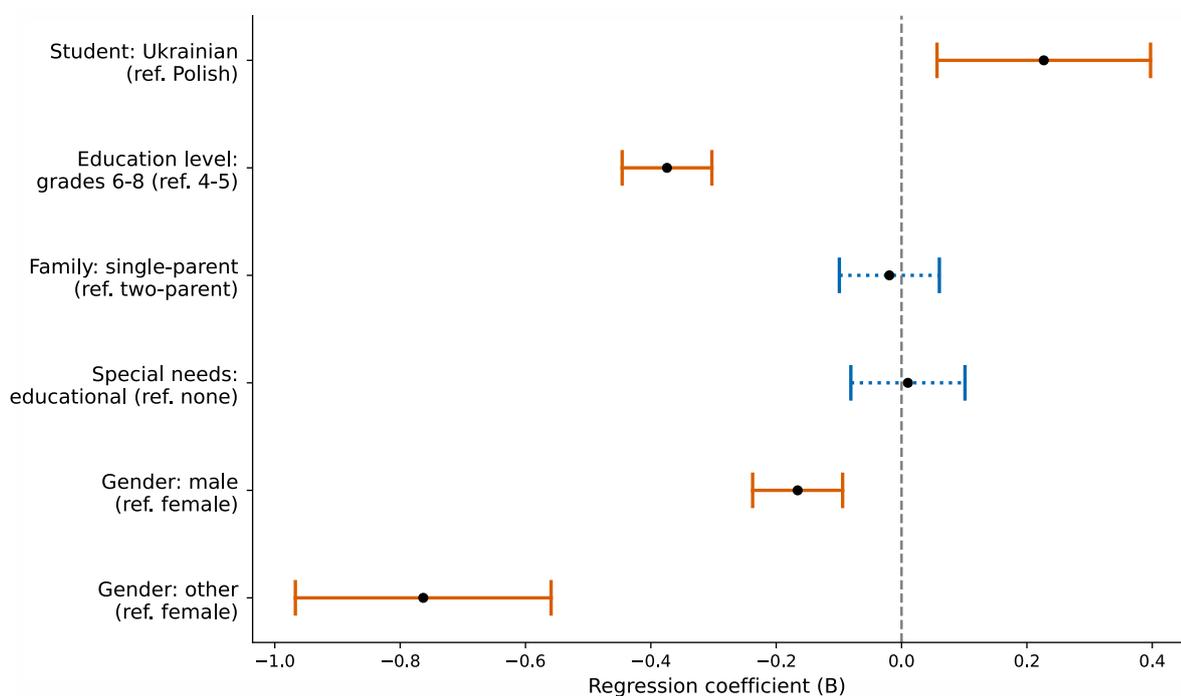
In the next part of the analysis, a linear regression model was used to identify factors associated with a sense of educational purpose.



The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F(6.1601) = 30.19$, $p < .001$), although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.098$). Significant predictors of the level of a sense of educational purpose were nationality ($B = 0.23$, $p = .009$), attending the upper grades ($B = -0.37$, $p < .001$), male gender ($B = -0.17$, $p < .001$), and indicating the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.76$, $p < .001$).

CHART 36

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with the sense of educational purpose



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of declarations regarding the level of sense of educational purpose, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of a sense of educational purpose attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.

Educational level was found to be the strongest predictor, with students in grades 6–8 scoring significantly lower on the sense of educational purpose than those in grades 4–5. Similar results can be found in the literature. Adolescents usually show a marked decrease in intrinsic motivation to learn during their school education (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016).

Gender also proved to be a significant factor. Boys reported having a weaker sense of educational purpose than girls, and students who indicated a gender other than male or female also had significantly lower results. Similar differences were found in studies using the same scale: girls' scores were significantly higher than those of boys. Research suggests that boys may perceive learning as less relevant to their future goals, and as a less important determinant for their future, and may exhibit lower motivation to learn (Bugler et al., 2015; Yeung et al., 2011). Importantly, Ukrainian students had a higher sense of educational purpose than their Polish peers. In contrast, variables such as family type (two-parent vs. single-parent) and special educational needs were not significantly associated with a sense of educational purpose.



3.3.2 Academic self-concept

Academic self-concept can be an important component of school well-being, as it influences how children and young people perceive their abilities and success in education, prevalent at this stage of development. Research confirms that academic self-concept is related to socio-emotional well-being (Di Giunta et al., 2013; Korhonen et al., 2014). High academic self-concept is crucial to the development and maintenance of self-esteem in students, as they spend a significant part of their lives being assessed in school settings. Consequently, self-assessment directly influences learning processes and academic achievements. In addition, it supports the formation of various cognitive and self-regulatory strategies (Zimmerman, 2000) that translate into academic performance (Susperreguy et al., 2018). Positive self-assessment builds a sense of agency and strengthens resilience to failure. It makes students more willing to take on challenges and be more involved in school life. In turn, low self-assessment can lead to withdrawal, anxiety, and decreased motivation. In the study presented here, we examined the level of academic self-concept among students in grades 4–8.

Measuring academic self-concept

Perceived Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ)

Subscale: Academic Self-Concept (ASC)



4-point scale

not true at all
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4
completely true



What does it measure?

Self-assessment in the role of a student.



Interpretation

A higher score indicates a more positive perception of one's own abilities and effectiveness in the educational environment.

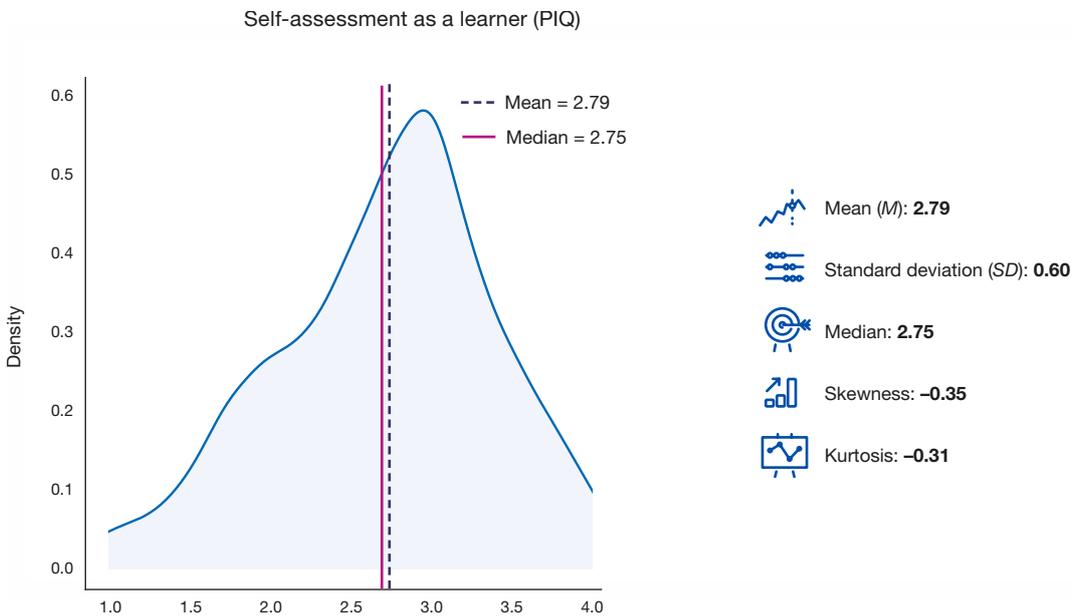
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

General level of academic self-concept

The results of the survey indicate that, on average, students perceive themselves as rather competent, but lack a strong belief in their abilities (see Chart 37).



CHART 37 | **Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the PIQ (ASC) scale**

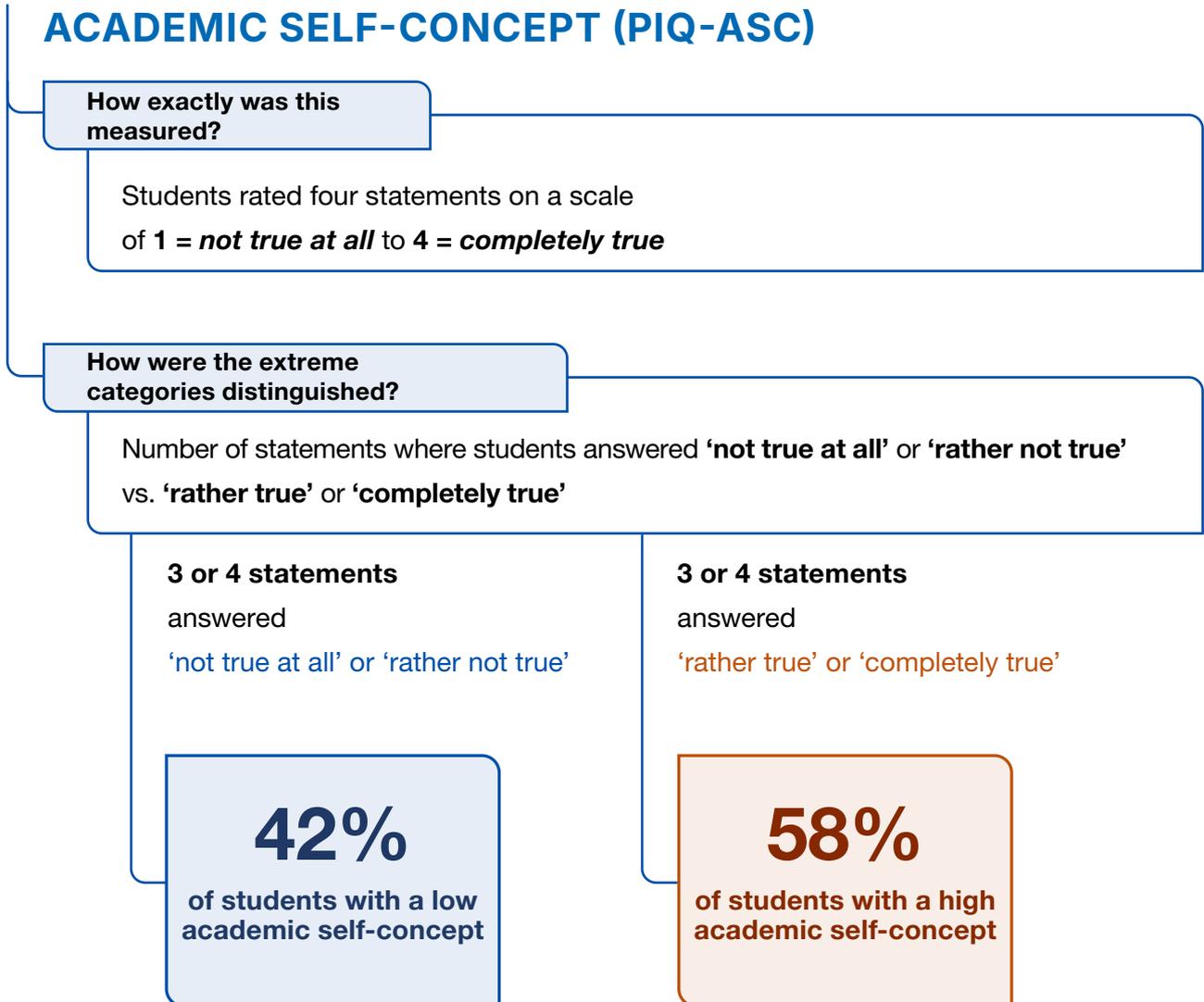


Almost four out of ten students (39%) were characterised by low academic self-concept. These individuals did not believe they were good students; instead, they admitted that they found learning difficult. Six out of ten respondents (61%) saw their academic abilities in a much more positive light.



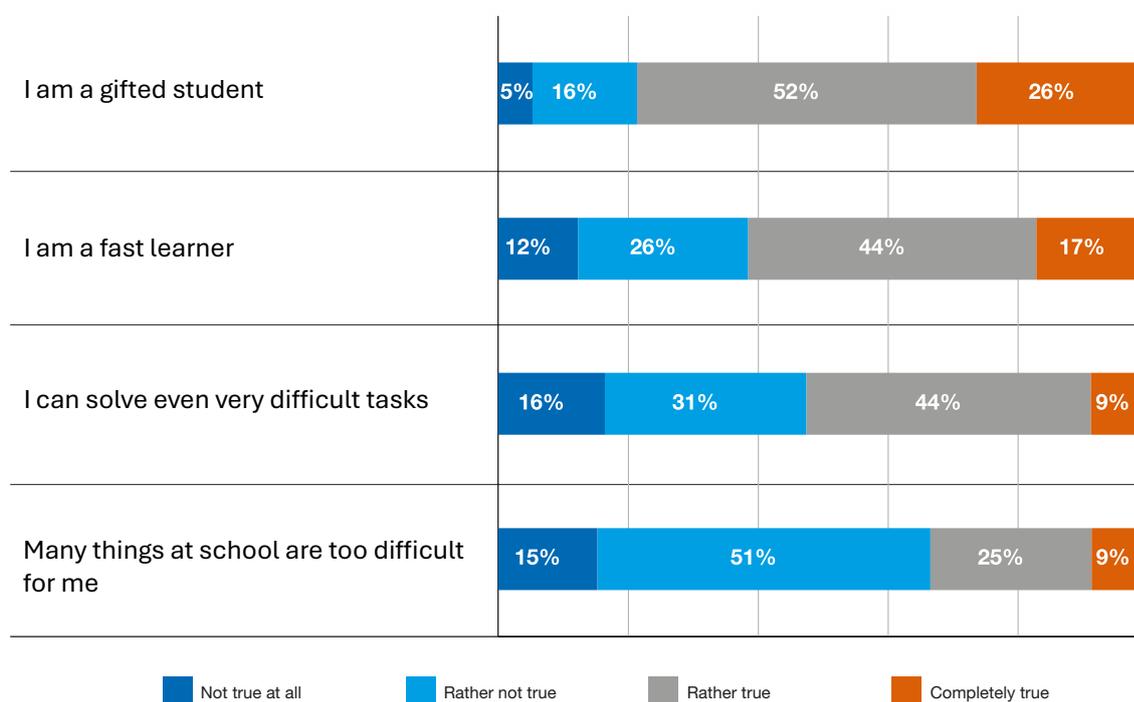
FIGURE 10

Categorisation of students by low and high levels of academic self-concept



The statement with the most positive responses was “I am a good student”, followed immediately by “I am a fast learner” (see Chart 38). More than half of the students surveyed believed that many things at school are too difficult for them.

CHART 38 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the PIQ (ASC) scale

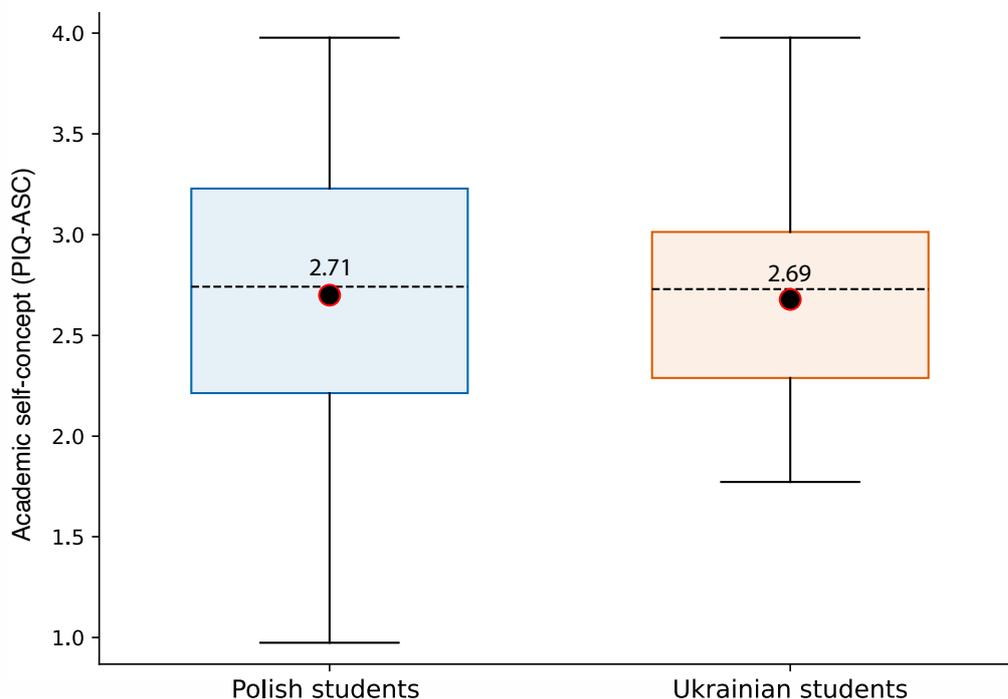


Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Differences among students by country of origin

The research allowed a comparison of the academic self-concept reported by Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience attending Polish schools.

CHART 39 | Academic self-concept depending on students' country of origin





Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it.



Polish students: $M = 2.71$ ($SD = 0.67$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.69$ ($SD = 0.54$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t = 0.32$, $p = .751$. Difference of means = 0.02 (95% CI [-0.15, 0.19]). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.03; 95% CI [-0.20, 0.27].

As shown in Chart 39 and the results of the analyses in the box above, Polish students rate themselves slightly higher as learners than Ukrainian students, but these differences are not statistically significant. The self-assessments of Ukrainian students do not differ significantly from those of Polish students. This is a positive and somewhat surprising result, given that Ukrainian students' reported grades were significantly lower than those of their Polish peers, and that grades play an important role in the mechanism of comparison with peers (the 'big fish in a small pond' effect; cf. Karwowski, Szumski, 2014).

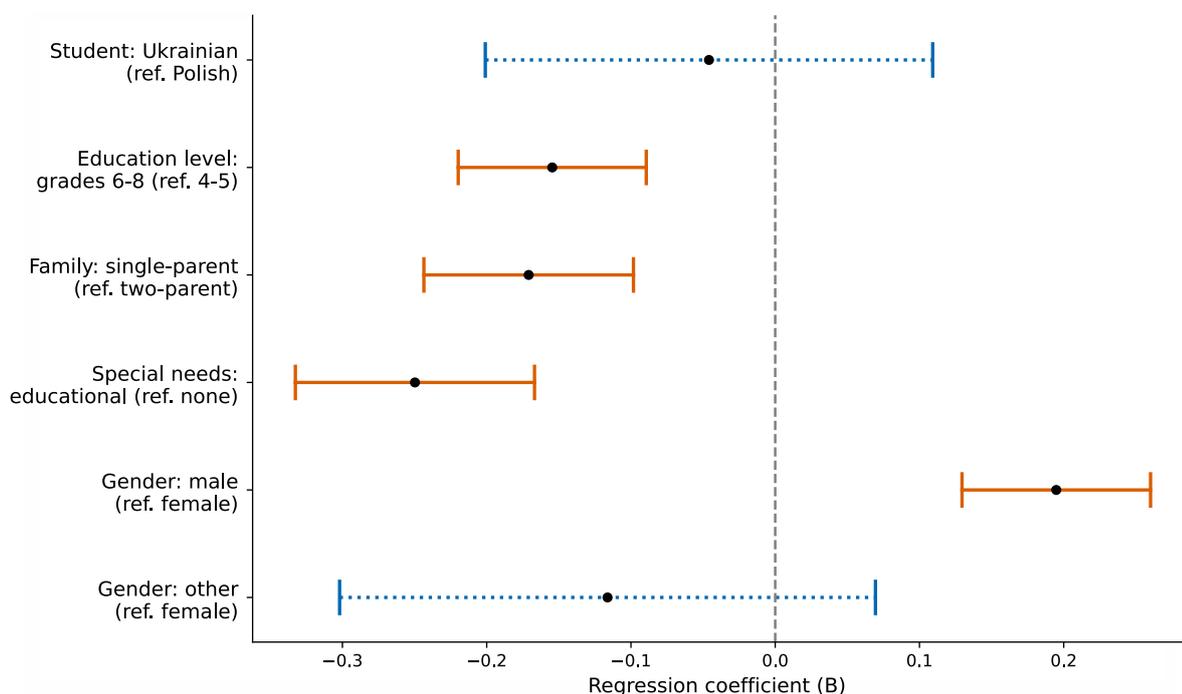
Far more worrying than the lack of differences between these groups is the finding that, overall, students in Poland feel a weak emotional bond with their schools. Although the average score was slightly above the middle of the scale, it is significantly lower than for students in Austria, Finland, or France (Guillemot, Hessels, 2022; Knickenberg et al., 2022; Kytälä et al., 2025). In all of these countries, scores exceeded 3 points, with the exception of one study of Austrian youth, where the average score was 2.66 points. At the same time, students' weak emotional bond with the school is not surprising, as many previous studies have reported this problem. It is worth recalling the PISA studies because of their cyclical nature. For years, students in Poland have had very low school affiliation rates according to PISA surveys, and this trend has continued to decline. In the 2022 PISA edition, Polish students scored the lowest in Europe and eighth from last among the 78 countries participating in the survey (Kaźmierczak, Bulkowski, 2024).

Other variables associated with academic self-concept

The next step in the analyses was to identify factors associated with the level of academic self-concept. For this purpose, a linear regression analysis was performed taking into account country of origin (Poland vs. Ukraine), level of education (grades 4–5 vs. 6–8), family type (two-parent vs. single-parent), special educational needs (absence vs. presence), and gender (girls as the reference category).

CHART 40

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with academic self-concept



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for academic self-concept predictors, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of self-concept as a learner attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F(6, 1601) = 27.24, p < .001$) and explained approximately 7% of the self-assessment scores ($R^2 = 0.070$). Significant predictors of academic self-concept were: attending the upper grades (6–8) ($B = -0.15, p < .001$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = -0.17, p < .001$), having special educational needs ($B = -0.25, p < .001$), and male gender ($B = 0.19, p < .001$).

Boys had significantly higher self-assessment scores compared to girls. In contrast, gender identification as ‘other’ was not associated with significantly different levels of self-assessment relative to the reference group. Ukrainian origin did not differentiate the results—Ukrainian students rated themselves as learners at a similar level to Polish students, after controlling for other variables.

However, having special educational needs had a negative effect on educational self-assessment, which is consistent with many previous studies (see, for example, Szumski & Karwowski,

2015). The association between special educational needs and lower self-assessment as a learner that emerged here is confirmed by findings from studies using the same tool in other countries (see e.g., DeVries et al., 2022; Krull et al., 2014; McCoy & Banks, 2011). Students with special educational needs assess themselves at lower levels as learners, which may be due to accumulated negative educational experiences and difficulties achieving school success. Such experiences may be typical in mainstream schools. Frequent exposure to socially unfavourable comparisons with peers of typical development promotes the internalisation of beliefs about one's own inferior cognitive value (the “big fish in a small pond” effect; cf. Karwowski & Szumski, 2014). This process is exacerbated by labelling and stigmatisation, which can reduce self-esteem and the sense of belonging to the student group. Research indicates that teachers often display lower expectations of students with special educational needs, thereby limiting these students' opportunities for educational success and positive reinforcement (Stanczak et al., 2023). In addition, the dominance of the deficit paradigm in school practice limits opportunities to reinforce a positive self-image as a learner. The lack of adapted assessment formats and insufficient consideration of individual progress in the learning process weakens the academic self-identification of students with special educational needs (Cartagena & Pike, 2022).

3.3.3 Emotional attitude towards school

A student's emotional attitude towards school is a separate category from aspects directly relating to learning and fulfilling school obligations. It is not equated with the teaching process, as it remains closer to the idea of the ‘school climate’, i.e., the individually perceived network of educational relationships, including both interactions between students and teachers as well as the mutual perceptions of both groups within the school environment. The affection felt towards school, which is a manifestation of emotional comfort, is an important component of student well-being (Schmidt et al., 2021). In this context, the emotional attitude towards school is shaped by the complex educational, developmental and social relationships in which the student participates as a member of the school community.



Measuring emotional attitude towards school

Perceived Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ)

Subscale: Emotional attitude towards school (Emotional Inclusion – EMI)



4-point scale

not true at all
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4
completely true



What does it measure?

Emotional attitude towards school.



Interpretation

Higher scores indicate a positive emotional connection to school, a sense of comfort and satisfaction with being in the school environment.

For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

General level of emotional attitude towards school

The survey results indicate that the students have a rather neutral or moderately positive attitude towards school, but without a clear dominance of strong emotions. The distribution was almost symmetrical (skewness = -0.05). Kurtosis = -0.72 indicates a wide variety of responses—students varied in their assessments, with no option decidedly prevailing (see Chart 41).

CHART 41 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the PIQ (EMI) scale

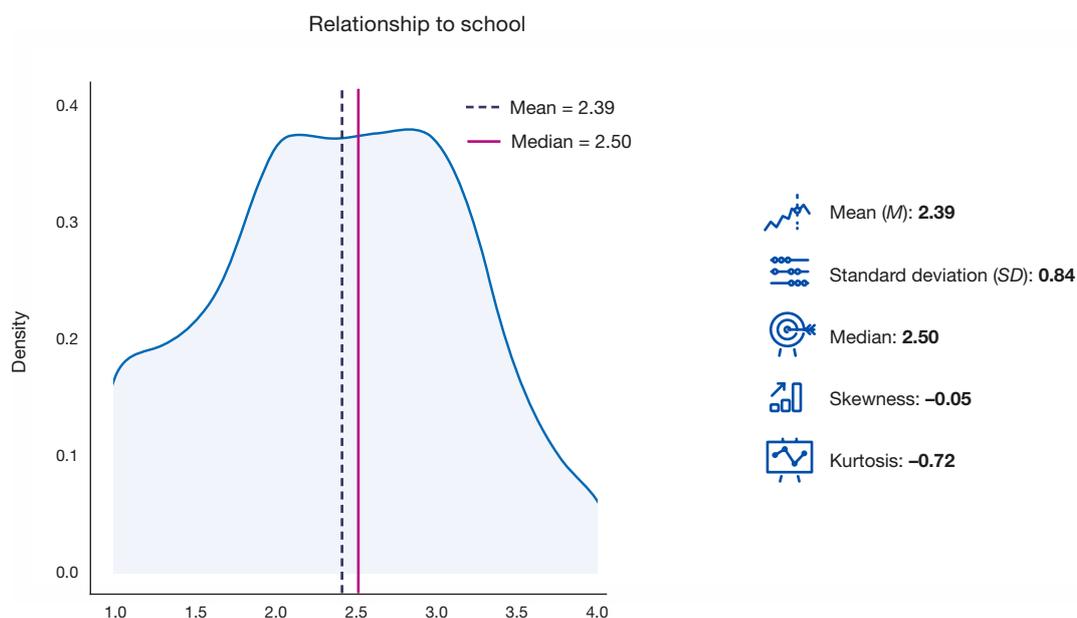
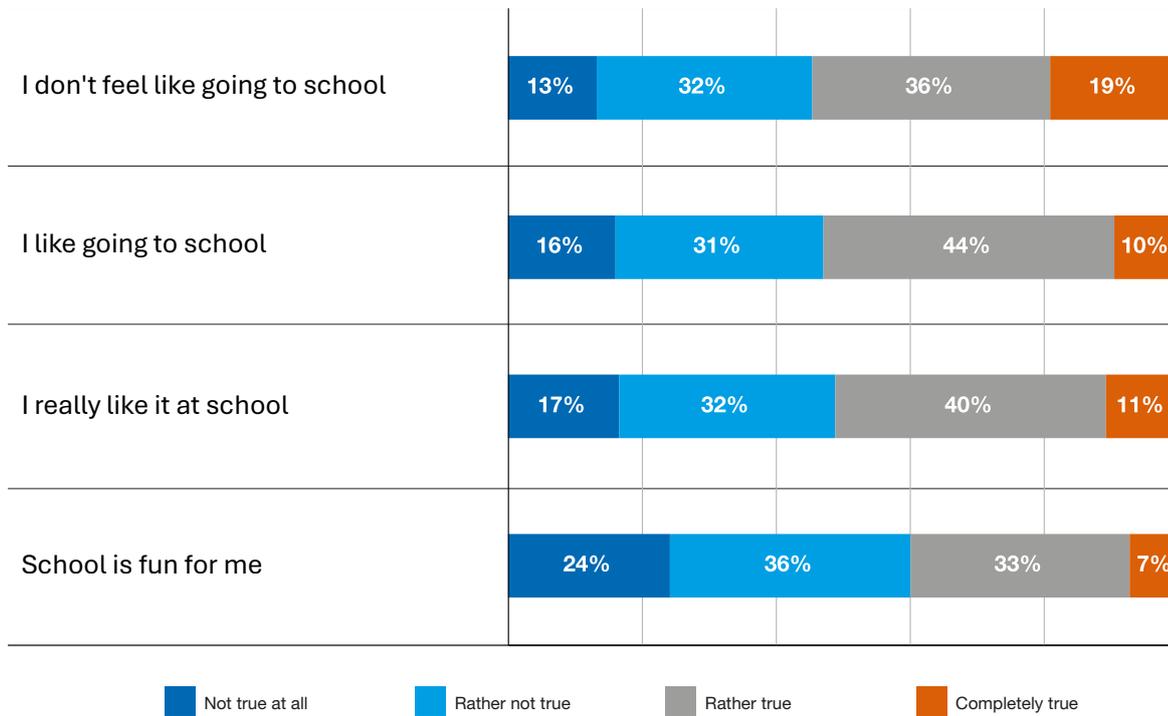




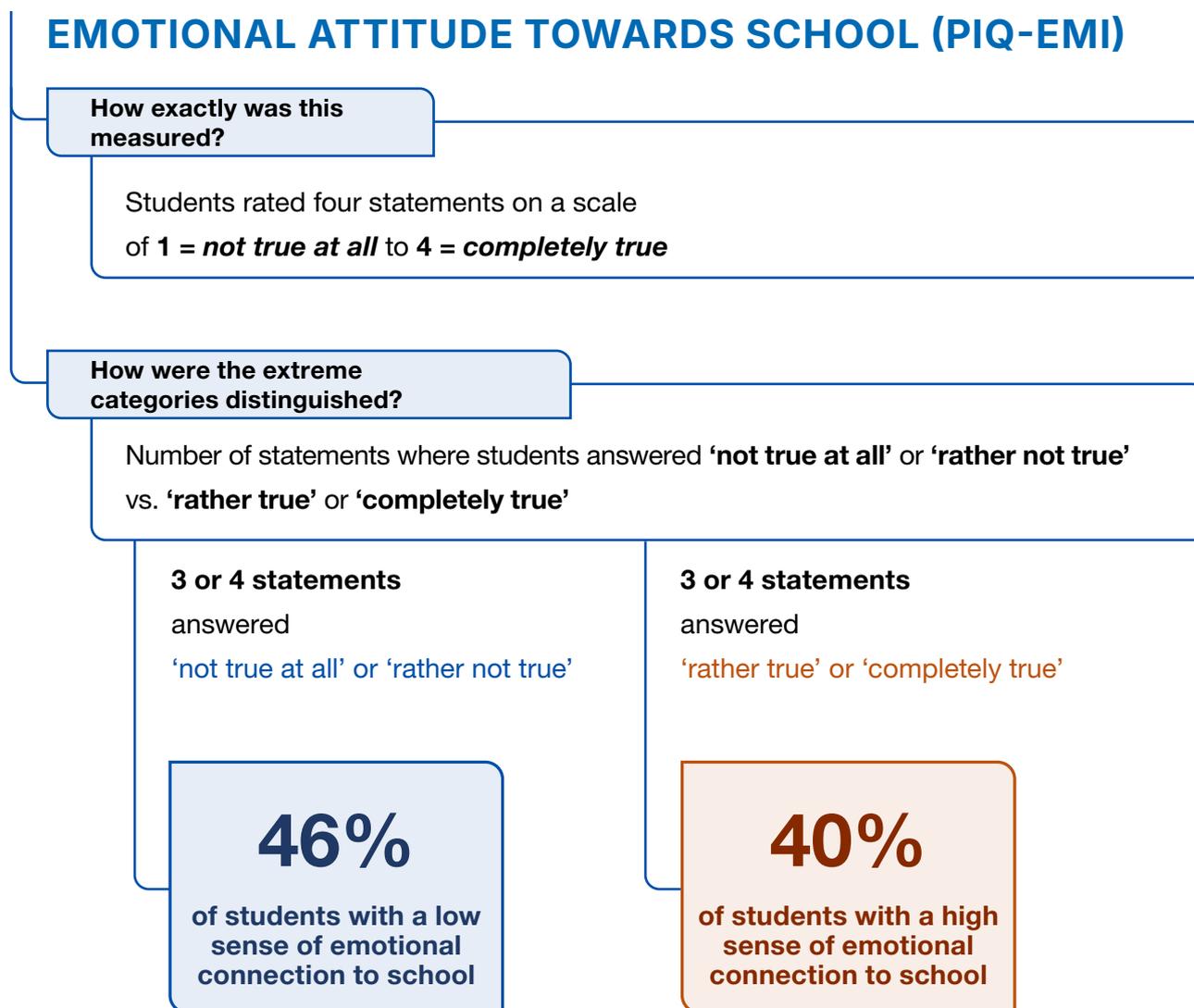
CHART 42 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the PIQ (EMI) scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The most positive statement was: “I like going to school”, the least positive was: “School is fun for me”. This could signal the need for a deeper analysis of the relationships between school stress, learning overload, and a transmissive teaching style and their effects on students’ well-being.

FIGURE 11 | Categorisation of students by low and high sense of emotional inclusion



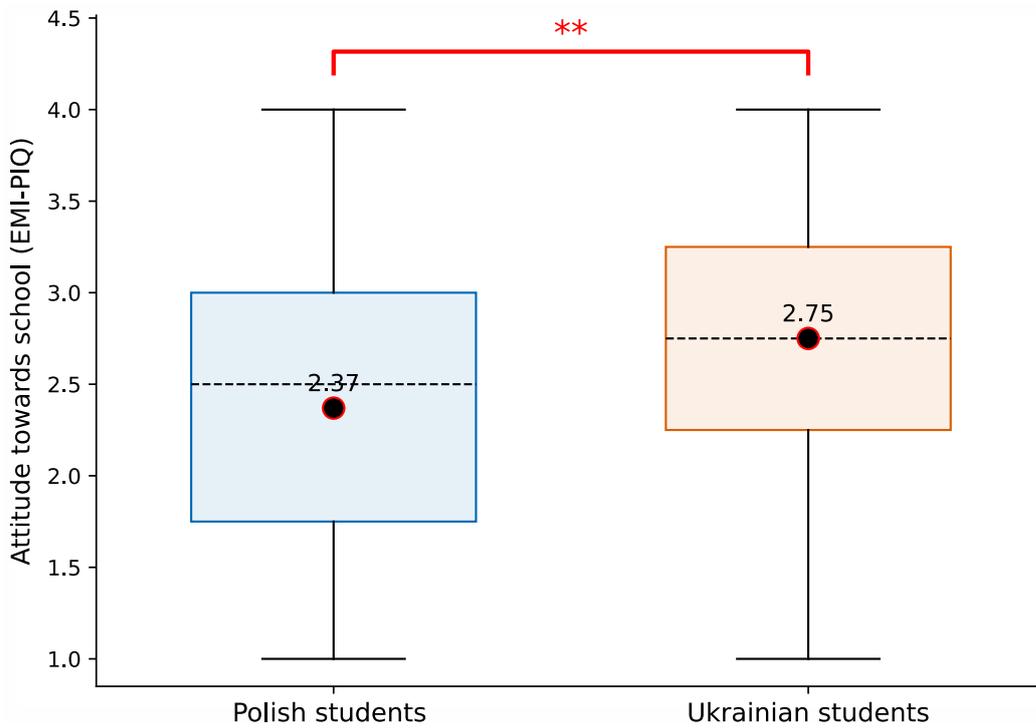
Almost half of all students (46%) had a low level of emotional connection with the school and other students. These individuals showed a clear tendency to disagree with statements mentioning positive emotional attitude towards school and classmates. Slightly fewer, 40% of all participants, had the exact opposite attitude, i.e., they were strongly emotionally integrated with the school, recognising that statements claiming such a relationship were true in their case.

Differences among students by country of origin.

The research conducted allowed a comparison of the emotional attitudes towards school of Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience attending Polish schools.



CHART 43 | Emotional attitude towards school depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 2.37$ ($SD = 0.76$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 2.75$ ($SD = 0.75$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = -4.11, p < .001$. Difference in means = -0.38 (95% CI $[-0.56, -0.20]$). Effect size (Cohen's d) = -0.50 ; 95% CI $[-0.74, -0.26]$.

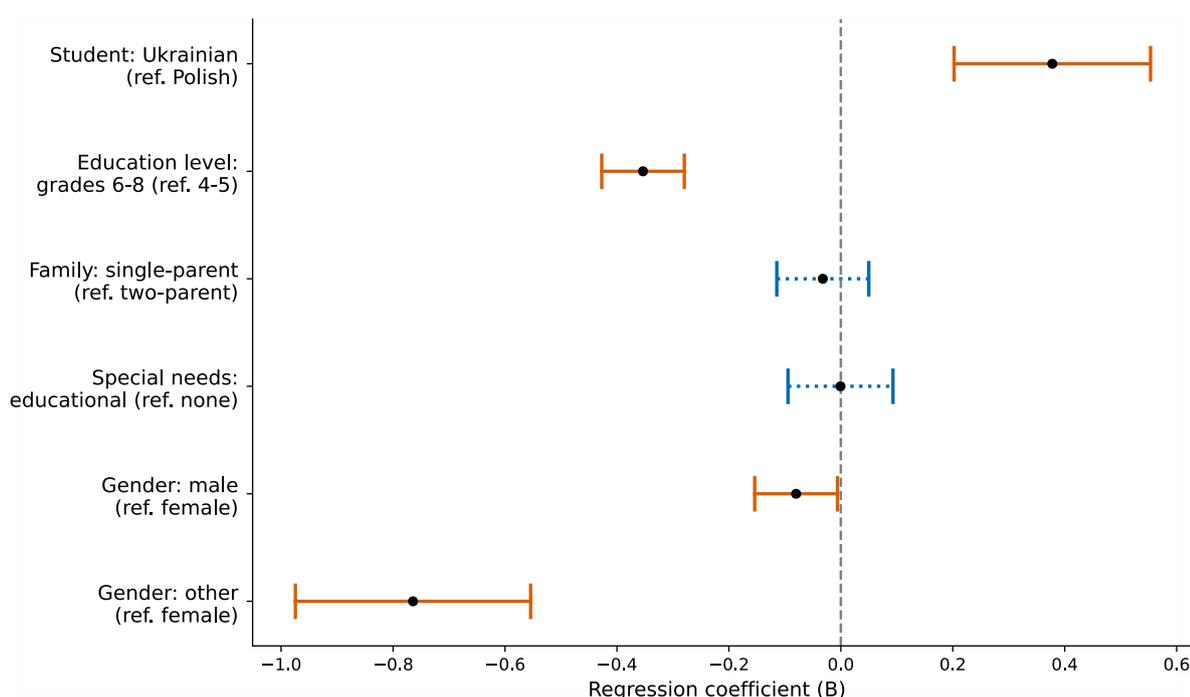


The results suggest that Ukrainian students show stronger emotional engagement with school than their Polish peers. This phenomenon co-occurs with a higher level of declared sense of educational purpose, which—although primarily referring to the perceived usefulness of learning—may also reinforce an emotional attitude towards school. Positive attitudes towards attending school, commonly referred to as ‘liking school’, are more prevalent among Ukrainian students, which is confirmed by the results of previous qualitative research (UNICEF, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, 2024). Ukrainian children attending Polish schools indicate that, despite numerous challenges, such as language barriers and the need to adapt to a new educational system, school has an important stabilising function for them, as it is a permanent part of their daily rhythm, enables them to establish peer relationships, and fosters the learning of the Polish language. Students also appreciate the support of some of the teachers and the intercultural assistants, as well as the opportunity to express themselves freely.

Other variables associated with emotional attitude towards school

The next step of the analyses was to identify factors associated with students’ emotional attitudes towards school. For this purpose, a linear regression analysis was performed taking into account country of origin (Poland vs. Ukraine), level of education (grades 4–5 vs. 6–8), family type (two-parent vs. single-parent), special educational needs (absence vs. presence), and gender (girls as the reference category).

CHART 44 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with emotional attitude towards school





The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F(6, 1601) = 27.24$, $p < .001$) and explained approximately 9% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.093$). Significant predictors of the level of emotional attitude towards school were nationality ($B = 0.38$, $p < .001$), attending the upper grades ($B = -0.35$, $p < .001$), male gender ($B = -0.08$, $p = .034$), and indicating the 'other' category in the gender variable ($B = -0.76$, $p < .001$).

Several of the analysed predictors were statistically significant in terms of their association with the dependent variable. Ukrainian students scored significantly higher in terms of positive attitudes towards school compared to Polish students. In contrast, students in the upper grades (6–8) showed lower levels of emotional attachment than their younger counterparts in grades 4–5.

Male gender was also a significant predictor of emotional attitude towards school, associated with lower rates of this variable. Research shows that for boys, academic engagement depends mainly on social factors, while for girls, it is shaped more by a sense of belonging to the school (Xia et al., 2025).

No significant results were reported for the variables of family structure (two-parent vs. single-parent) and special educational needs.

In conclusion, the results indicate that students' experiences of nationality, educational stage, and gender are significantly associated with their emotional attitude towards school.

Summary

The results of the school well-being study in the dimension of motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school show that this is an area that should be particularly supported in a systemic and universal way, as a reduction in the sense of satisfaction with school learning can affect any student, regardless of additional educational needs.

Additional context is provided by results from studies in other countries using the same tool. As self-assessment plays an important role both in shaping the psychological well-being of children and adolescents, as well as in their educational functioning, understanding the reasons for lower self-assessment levels among students in Poland—compared to their peers in other countries (Guillemot & Hessels, 2022; Knickenberg et al., 2022; Kytälä, et al., 2025)—and taking action to address this seems particularly important. It is also worth remembering that one important source

of this self-assessment is information from significant adults, primarily teachers. Meanwhile, Polish teachers are far less concerned with students' well-being than teachers worldwide, as indicated by the TALIS study (Hernik, 2015). They are also perhaps less supportive of their students' academic self-concept than their counterparts abroad.

An important and positive finding is that, according to our study, Polish schools appear to be institutions that effectively integrate students from minority groups. The emotional bond with the school among students with special educational needs is no different from that of students without such needs, and the bond among students with a Ukrainian background is even stronger than that of students without migration experience. These results differ from those of most studies conducted in other countries, which indicate an increased risk of reduced school attachment among students with special educational needs (DeVries et al., 2018, 2022) and those with a migrant background (Chiu et al., 2012). However, it is worth noting that a recent Finnish study using the same measurement tool as ours also observed a stronger emotional bond to school for students with a migration background than among native students (Kyttälä et al., 2025). The high results of Ukrainian students on this scale may be due to the short distance separating Polish and Ukrainian culture, as well as to their plans to settle in Poland permanently due to the prolonged war in their homeland. It is worth adding here information on signs indicating that Polish schools are relatively responsive to the needs of students with migration experience, which may create a sense of security. Research shows that teachers recognise the needs of students with refugee experience, such as feeling safe and being understood and accepted in the school environment. These emotional and psychological aspects are seen by teachers as key to the students' ability to learn and adapt in a new educational and cultural context. Teachers also emphasise the importance of providing a sense of calm and order, which can help reduce anxiety and create a stable learning environment for children who may have experienced forced displacement (Antoszewska et al., 2025). In this study, teachers highlighted that a well-organised school environment plays a key role in fostering a sense of comfort in students with refugee experience, both in the classroom and in the broader school context. These findings can be interpreted as one of the reasons for the higher level of emotional engagement with school life in this group.

3.4 Academic achievements

Academic achievements are a key part of the educational experience of primary school students. Although traditionally seen mainly through the lens of academic performance, they are closely linked to the broader concept of school well-being. Educational success, as measured by formal assessments, not only reflects the level of knowledge and skills acquisition, but also influences many aspects of a student's functioning in the school environment and beyond it. The construct of academic achievements itself combines both a cognitive dimension, concerning the acquisition

of knowledge and the development of skills, and an emotional-motivational dimension. Good academic performance can foster self-esteem and competence in students, which is fundamental to psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Polish literature on the subject still pays little attention to the analysis of differences in students' needs—including cultural differences—in the context of the educational outcomes of both normative students and those requiring educational and specialist support. Meanwhile, research conducted in other migration contexts indicates that the influx of refugees may be associated with differences in the results of native students, among other things, due to changes in the educational resources available per student (Assaad et al., 2023; Cooc & Kim, 2023). One of the key factors is the student-to-teacher ratio—an increase in this ratio, if not accompanied by appropriate organisational measures at the systemic level, may lead to a deterioration in teaching conditions and a reduction in the effectiveness of education.

In the context of this study, the analysis of end-of-year grades in Polish and mathematics, as well as their comparison between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience will allow us to identify differences in educational achievement between these groups.

Measures of academic achievement

As part of the objective assessment of academic achievement, students were asked to indicate their end-of-year grades in Polish and mathematics from the previous school year. Responses were given using the six-level grading scale of Polish schools, where 6 stands for excellent and 1 stands for inadequate.

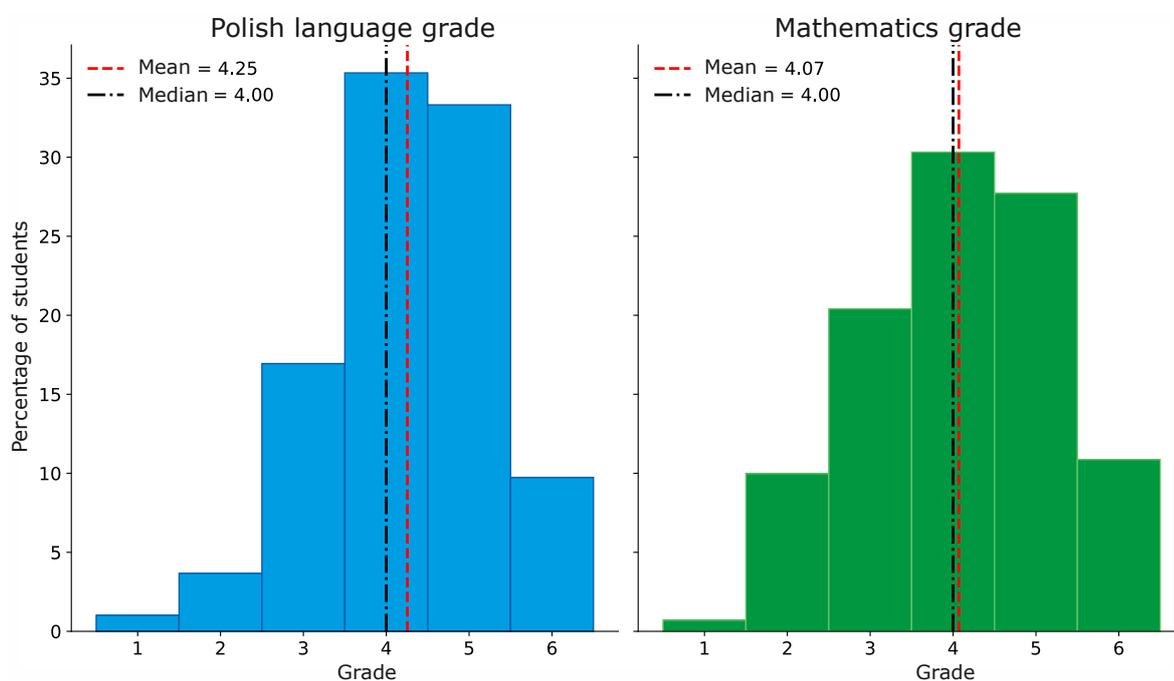
Overall level of academic achievement

The final Polish language grades covered the whole range of the scale—from 1 (inadequate) to 6 (excellent). The average grade was 4.25, meaning that the average student received a good grade. The median, or middle value of all scores, was 4.00. The grade distribution was slightly skewed towards higher grades, meaning that more students received good, very good, or excellent grades than the lower grades. The distribution was close to normal, suggesting that the scores were predictably distributed around the mean.

Mathematics grades were also in the full range from 1 to 6. Analysing the end-of-year grades in mathematics, it should be noted that the mean was 4.07 and the median was 4.00, which means that the average score is also good. As with Polish, the distribution of grades in mathematics was slightly skewed towards higher grades. However, the distribution was somewhat flatter, which may indicate a little more variation in the achievement of students, both very good and poorer. A detailed summary of the results can be found in Chart 45.

CHART 45

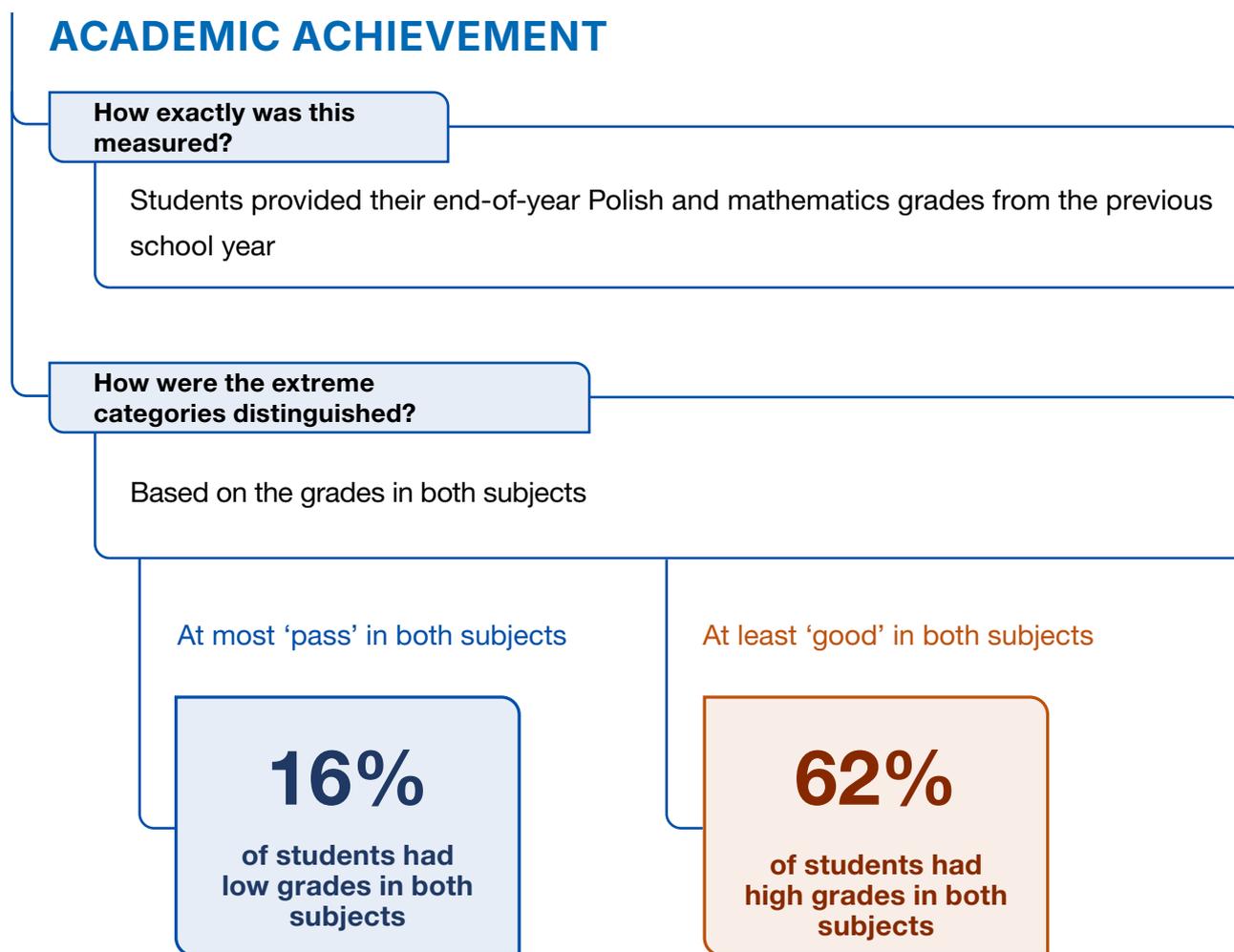
Analysis of the distribution of school grades: Polish ($N = 1582$) and mathematics ($N = 1573$)



In the previous school year, one in seven students (16%) had a satisfactory grade or lower in both Polish and mathematics, and almost two-thirds of the respondents (62%) had a good grade or higher in both subjects.



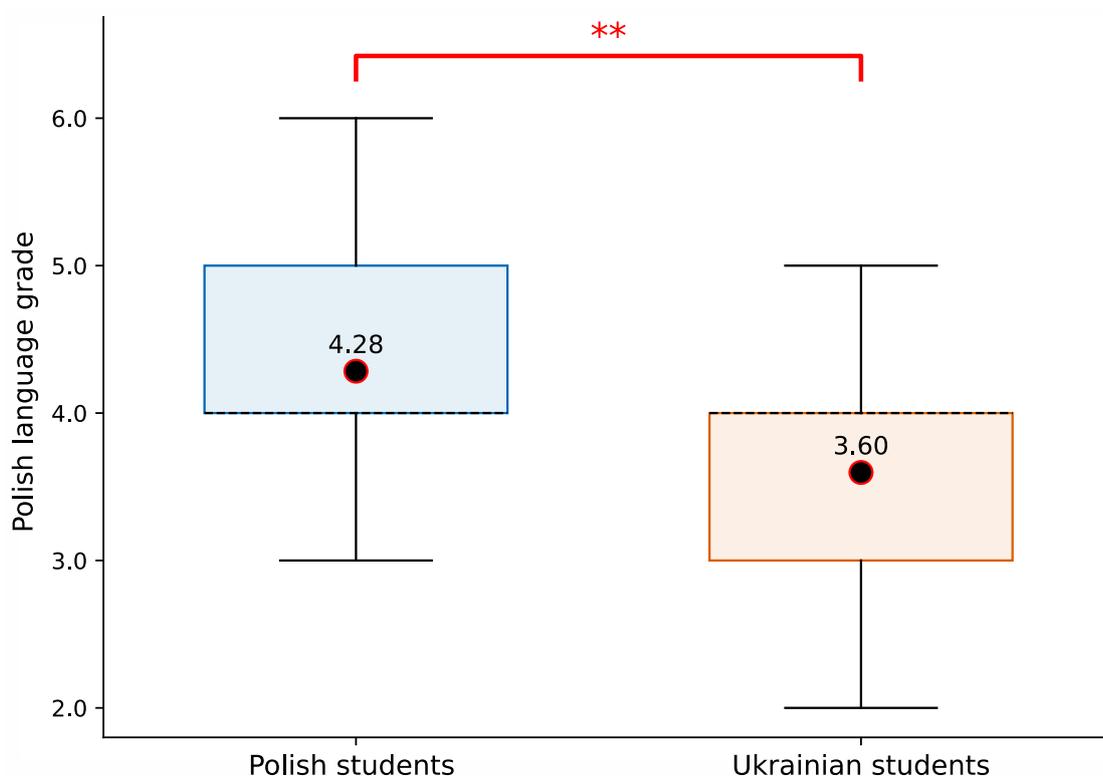
FIGURE 12 | Categorisation of students by low and high academic achievement



Differences among students by country of origin

In the analyses conducted, we examined whether educational achievement expressed as the end-of-year grades in Polish and mathematics differed between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience.

CHART 46 | End-of-year Polish language grade depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Average values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.



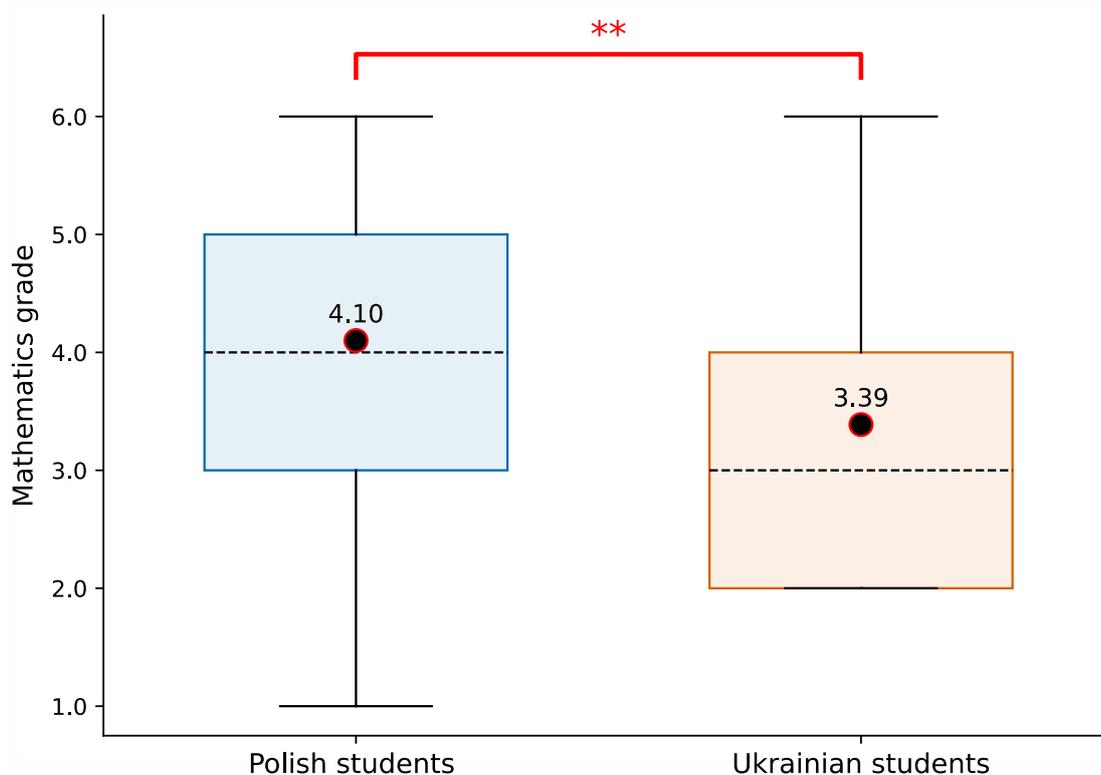
Polish students: $M = 4.28$ ($SD = 1.02$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 3.60$ ($SD = 1.03$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1580) = 5.38$, $p < .001$. Difference in means = 0.69 (95% CI [0.43, 0.94]). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.67, 95% CI [0.42, 0.91].

The analyses clearly show statistically significant differences in Polish language grades between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience. Polish students scored significantly higher on average. This disparity in language attainment, despite Ukrainian students' potentially high sense of educational purpose and motivation to learn, may have complex origins. The results obtained are in line with OECD (2018) data, which show that migrant students in Europe underperform compared to their peers in host countries. One reason for this may be an



incomplete command of the Polish language. Students with a migration experience take about two years to master basic communication, but as many as five to seven years to gain proficiency in the language of school education (Cummins, 2008). Other factors can also influence formal results in language subjects. These include disruptions in the continuity of education caused by interruptions in attending school or fragmentation of curricula in the country of origin, as well as significant curricular differences between the Polish and Ukrainian education systems. Additionally, the system of remedial classes, although theoretically intended to be supportive, may not be fully effective or sufficiently accessible in practice, as evidenced by data on the low level of additional classes offered in Polish as a second language (Tędziągolska et al., 2024). Although Ukrainian students may have a strongly developed awareness of the value of education—perceiving learning as a tool for improving quality of life, social advancement, and integration (Cerna et al., 2021; OECD, 2015a, 2015b)—and may perceive teaching practices as inclusive (see subsection 3.1), their lack of full proficiency in Polish, combined with the factors mentioned above, remains a key challenge hindering their full participation in the educational process. These multidimensional difficulties directly affect measured academic achievements in subjects heavily dependent on language competence and overall adaptation to the new educational system.

CHART 47 | End-of-year mathematics grade depending on students' country of origin





Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Mean values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Polish students: $M = 4.10$ ($SD = 1.17$) vs. Ukrainian students: $M = 3.39$ ($SD = 1.13$). Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1571) = 4.90, p < .001$. A parallel Welch's t -test also showed a significant difference between students in both groups: $t(72.41) = 5.05, p < .001$. Difference of means = 0.71 (95% CI [0.44, 0.99]). Effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.62, 95% CI [0.38, 0.87].

The analysis of mathematics grades also revealed statistically significant differences between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience. As shown in Chart 47, Polish students scored significantly higher on average compared to Ukrainian students.

Although mathematics is often perceived as a subject less dependent on language proficiency than Polish, the results suggest that this disparity is due to a complex set of factors beyond knowledge of Polish alone. Understanding complex instructions, mathematical terminology, and the context of problems can be difficult without full knowledge of the language of school education, which is a significant barrier. Disruptions in the continuity of Ukrainian students' education and differences in curricula and the didactic methods used in the Polish and Ukrainian education systems may be equally important. Even when teachers use inclusive practices (see subsection 3.1), these systemic differences may affect the process of acquiring new mathematical knowledge and skills.

The observed differences are consistent with the results of external state examinations, such as those conducted by the Central Examination Board (CKE), which also indicate lower achievement of Ukrainian students in science subjects. The average score of Ukrainian students in the 2025 eighth-grade exam is 34%, while Polish students achieved an average of 50%. There is also a difference in Polish language skills, with Ukrainian students averaging 55% and Polish students averaging 64% (CKE, 2025).

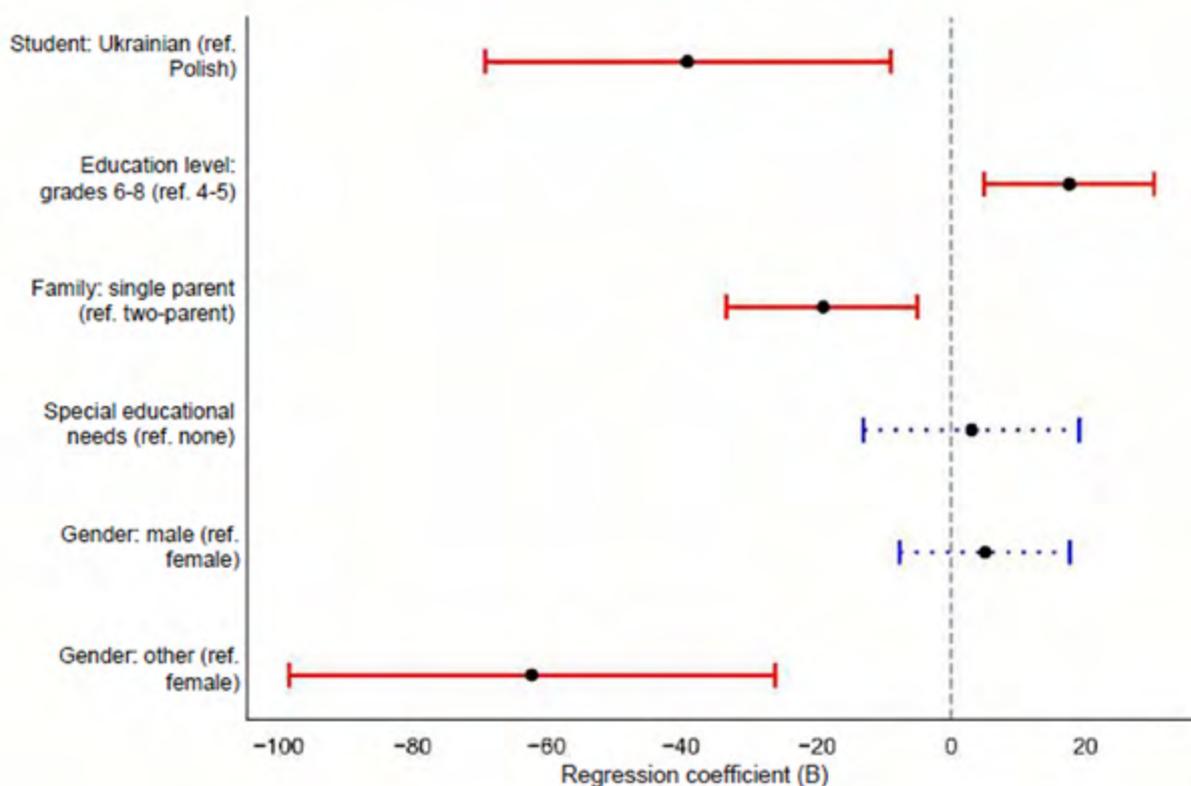
This confirms that the challenges faced by students who have experienced migration are broader than just the language barrier and require a comprehensive approach to educational integration.

Other variables associated with educational attainment

Further analysis used a linear regression model to identify factors associated with academic achievement. The predictors of the end-of-year grade in the Polish language are discussed first.

CHART 48

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with Polish language end-of-year grades



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of grades in mathematics, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the mathematics scores attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The linear regression model proved to be statistically significant overall: $F(6, 1601) = 6.31$, $p < .001$, but it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.023$). Significant predictors of educational achievement expressed as the end-of-year grade in Polish language were: nationality ($B = -39.08$, $p = .011$), attending higher grades ($B = 17.61$, $p = .006$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = -19.12$, $p = .008$), and indicating the “other” category in the gender variable ($B = -62.25$, $p = .001$).

Regression coefficient analyses showed that the strongest predictor is declaring a gender other than female or male. Students who indicated a gender other than female or male received significantly lower grades in Polish.



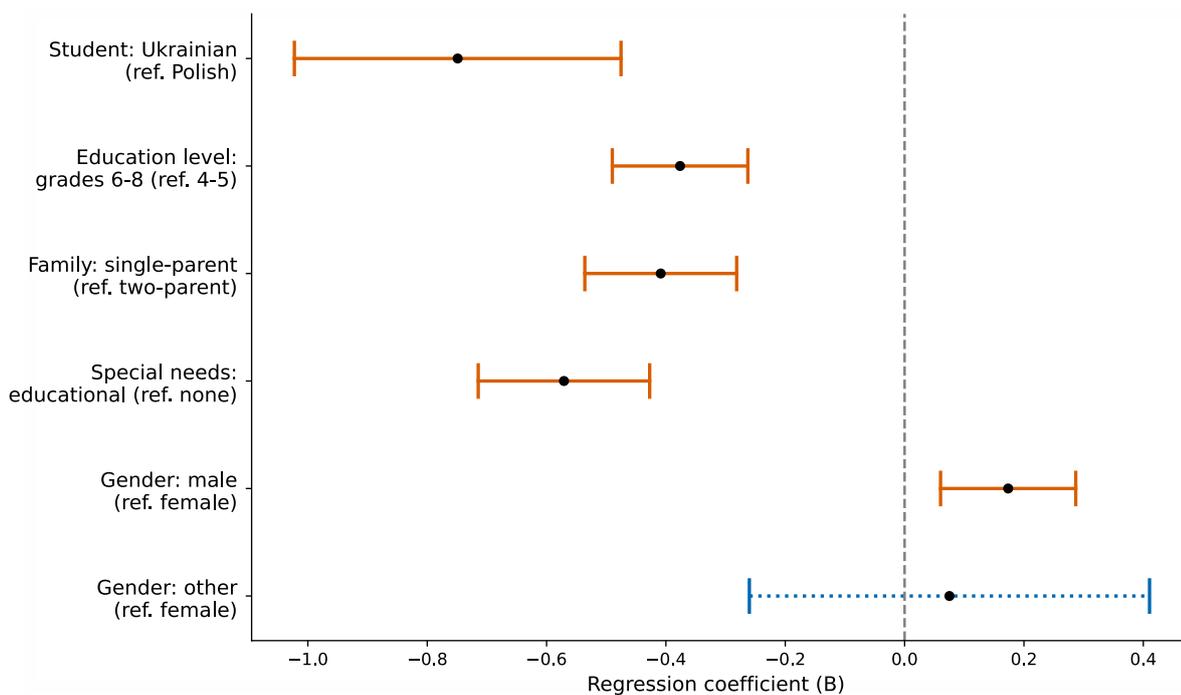
Education level also emerged as a significant factor, with students in grades 6–8 scoring significantly higher than those in grades 4–5. This result may reflect the accumulation of knowledge and language skills in the upper grades and the natural progression of cognitive development. Greater linguistic and intellectual maturity can lead to a better understanding of content and contexts.

Coming from a single-parent family was also a significant factor, with students from single-parent families scoring significantly lower in this area than those from two-parent family backgrounds. This result aligns with HBSC research (Mazur, 2014), which found that adolescents raised by both biological parents perform better academically.

Student origin was another significant predictor, with Ukrainian students scoring lower in Polish than their Polish peers. This result is consistent with numerous studies indicating that the adaptation challenges and language barrier faced by migrant students have a significant impact on their performance in the language of instruction. This was discussed more extensively in the previous section.

Further analyses identified predictors of academic achievement expressed as end-of-year mathematics grades.

CHART 49 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with end-of-year mathematics grades





Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of mathematics grades, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the mathematics scores attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The model as a whole proved statistically significant ($F(6.1566) = 31.37, p < .001$), although it explained 11% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.107$). Significant predictors of educational attainment as expressed in terms of final year mathematics grade were nationality ($B = -0.75, SE = 0.14, p < .001$), attending the upper grades ($B = -0.38, SE = 0.06, p < .001$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = -0.41, SE = 0.07, p < .001$), having special educational needs ($B = -0.57, SE = 0.07, p < .001$), and male gender ($B = 0.17, SE = 0.06, p = .003$).

Regression coefficient analyses revealed several significant predictors influencing end-of-year mathematics grades. Student origin proved to be a significant factor, with Ukrainian students scoring significantly lower in mathematics compared to Polish students. This result may confirm the negative impact of a migrant background on academic achievement, which may relate to language barriers in understanding directions and instructions, as well as adaptation challenges in the new education system.

Education level was also a significant predictor, with students in grades 6–8 scoring lower than their younger counterparts in grades 4–5, suggesting increasing difficulty in learning mathematics at higher educational levels, where the material becomes more abstract and requires more advanced problem-solving skills.

In addition, family structure had an impact on the results, as children from single-parent families also received significantly lower scores in this subject. The literature indicates that lower economic resources, lower availability of parental support, or additional emotional burdens in single-parent families can negatively affect children's educational achievement (Dronkers & van der Velden, 2013b).

Special educational needs were another significant factor, with SEN students performing significantly lower. Literature from other countries confirms this trend. The disparity in educational attainment between students in different categories of special educational needs and their peers persists (Daniel, 2024; Lenkeit et al., 2022).

Regarding gender, the male gender was positively associated with mathematics grades, with boys scoring slightly higher than girls. This is a phenomenon often observed in studies of mathematics



achievement, although the differences may be small and depend on the cultural context (Else-Quest et al., 2010).

In conclusion, this analysis indicates that migration status, age/stage of education, family situation, and having special educational needs are significant factors differentiating mathematics performance, with boys performing slightly better than girls. These findings highlight the complexity of factors affecting educational attainment and identify groups of students who may require targeted support.

Summary

The analysis of end-of-year grades in Polish and mathematics revealed statistically significant differences between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience. The lower achievements of Ukrainian students, also confirmed by the results of external examinations, point to a complex web of educational barriers beyond language competence alone. Factors affecting outcomes include disruptions in the continuity of education, systemic differences, and the limited availability of effective forms of support. These findings highlight the need to implement multifaceted strategies to support the educational inclusion process of students with migration experience.

Educational attainment was also affected by family structure, with students from single-parent families achieving significantly lower results, possibly due to limited resources and less support. Special educational needs were also a significant differentiating factor, with SEN students achieving lower results across subjects, confirming the continuing trend of educational inequality for students with diverse needs.

3.5 Positive and negative emotions associated with school

Students experience a wide range of emotions relating to the school situation. These include, among others, the joy of learning, pride in achievements, anger, anxiety, fear, and boredom (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Pekrun, 2009). To highlight their specificity, Pekrun (2025; Pekrun et al., 2002) introduced the term 'achievement emotions', defined as the specific emotions experienced by learners in the context of activities relating to achievement, learning, and their educational outcomes (success or failure). The term is sometimes narrowed down to the school context as 'academic emotions'. The experience of emotions that vary in significance and intensity is due both to the social nature of the school environment, including relationships with teachers and peers, group dynamics and processes, as well as to the significant importance attributed to academic achievement for students' subsequent educational careers (Pekrun, 2009).

Emotions play an important role in shaping motivation to learn, cognitive performance, and personality development. Those of an adaptive nature (e.g., the joy of learning) foster the imagination of educational goals and challenges, support creative problem-solving processes, and provide the basis for the development of self-regulatory mechanisms (Ashby et al., 1999; Pekrun et al., 2002). Non-adaptive emotions (e.g., excessive anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, boredom) can negatively affect students' educational attainment and increase the risk of absenteeism and early school leaving. In addition, they have an adverse effect on overall mental and physical well-being.

Two contrasting emotions were considered in the present study: academic anxiety and the joy of learning. Both indicators were juxtaposed with information on students' countries of origin to examine whether migration experience is associated with distinct emotional states in the educational environment. The influence of other factors on the intensity of the emotions displayed was also assessed.

3.5.1 Academic anxiety

In the context of human development, anxiety is a fundamental emotion that serves as a signal, mobilises and motivates, and its presence is essential for proper adaptive functioning. In children and adolescents, experiencing anxiety may manifest itself as an adequate and normal response to stressful situations or take a pathological form requiring intervention. School-related anxiety is observed during late childhood and early adolescence (Ahlen et al., 2012; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012; Nelson & Harwood, 2010). It is characterised by the occurrence of negative, unpleasant emotions arising in response to school tasks or situations that are perceived as threatening to self-esteem. It includes feelings such as exhaustion resulting from school requirements, severe stress, and fear of failure (Chen et al., 2010; Lichtenfeld et al., 2012; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008). As students progress to higher levels of education (e.g., from primary school to secondary school), academic demands and pressure to achieve good results increase, which in turn generates anxiety about poor grades, exam failure, academic failure, or failure to meet the expectations of parents and teachers. Anxiety can, of course, motivate learning, but in excess it leads to task avoidance or to perfectionism or lowered self-esteem (cf. Strelau, 2000). When its intensity, frequency, and duration are inappropriate to the situation and significantly impede the child's functioning in various areas of life (such as school, social relationships, and personal development), it becomes a cause for concern for teachers and parents (cf. Brzezińska et al., 2024).

When a child experiences excessive and inadequate reactions to both specific situations and imagined scenarios of future events, anxious behaviour can evolve into anxiety disorders, including school phobia—conditions that require specialist intervention. It is also worth mentioning that problems classified as internalising (as is the case with anxiety) tend to be less



visible to those around the child, more difficult to notice, but just as devastating as externalising problems (aggression), and their long-term consequences go far beyond the educational sphere. The difficulty teachers have in recognising this group of students has been confirmed by research that indicates weak and insignificant links between the internalisation problems assessed by teachers and the self-reported symptoms of anxiety in students aged 8–12 years (Pedersen et al., 2019). In this context, it is particularly important to identify students experiencing such severe anxiety that it significantly hinders the fulfilment of developmental tasks and exceeds the limits of normal psychological adaptation, as well as to intervene at an early stage.

Measuring academic anxiety

Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS)



4-point scale

not at all typical of me
 1 → 2 → 3 → 4
very typical of me



What does it measure?

Students' generalised reactions of anxiety to educational situations.



Interpretation

High scores on the scale indicate high perceived academic anxiety.

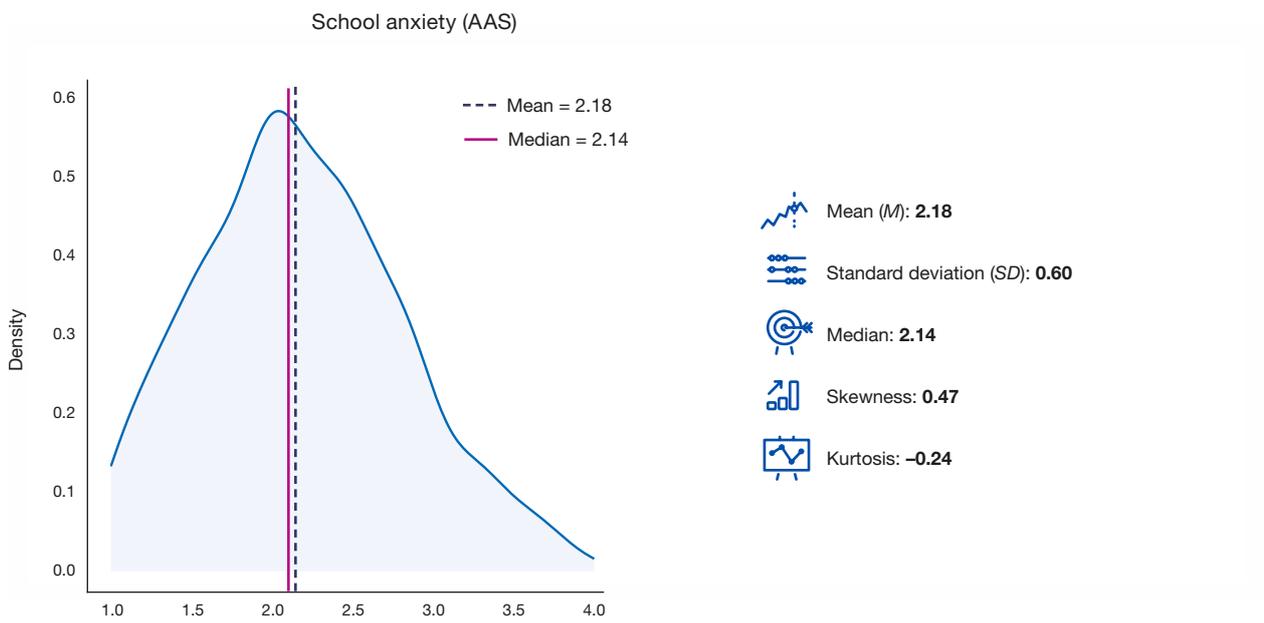
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools](#).

General level of academic anxiety

The results of the study indicate relatively low to moderate levels of reported academic anxiety. The mean score was $M = 2.18$ ($SD = 0.60$) and the median score was 2.14. The distribution of the results was skewed to the right (skewness = 0.47), indicating more negative responses ('not at all typical of me', 'rather not typical of me') and was characterised by a slight kurtosis (kurtosis = -0.24), close to the value for a normal distribution. The data is presented in Chart 50.

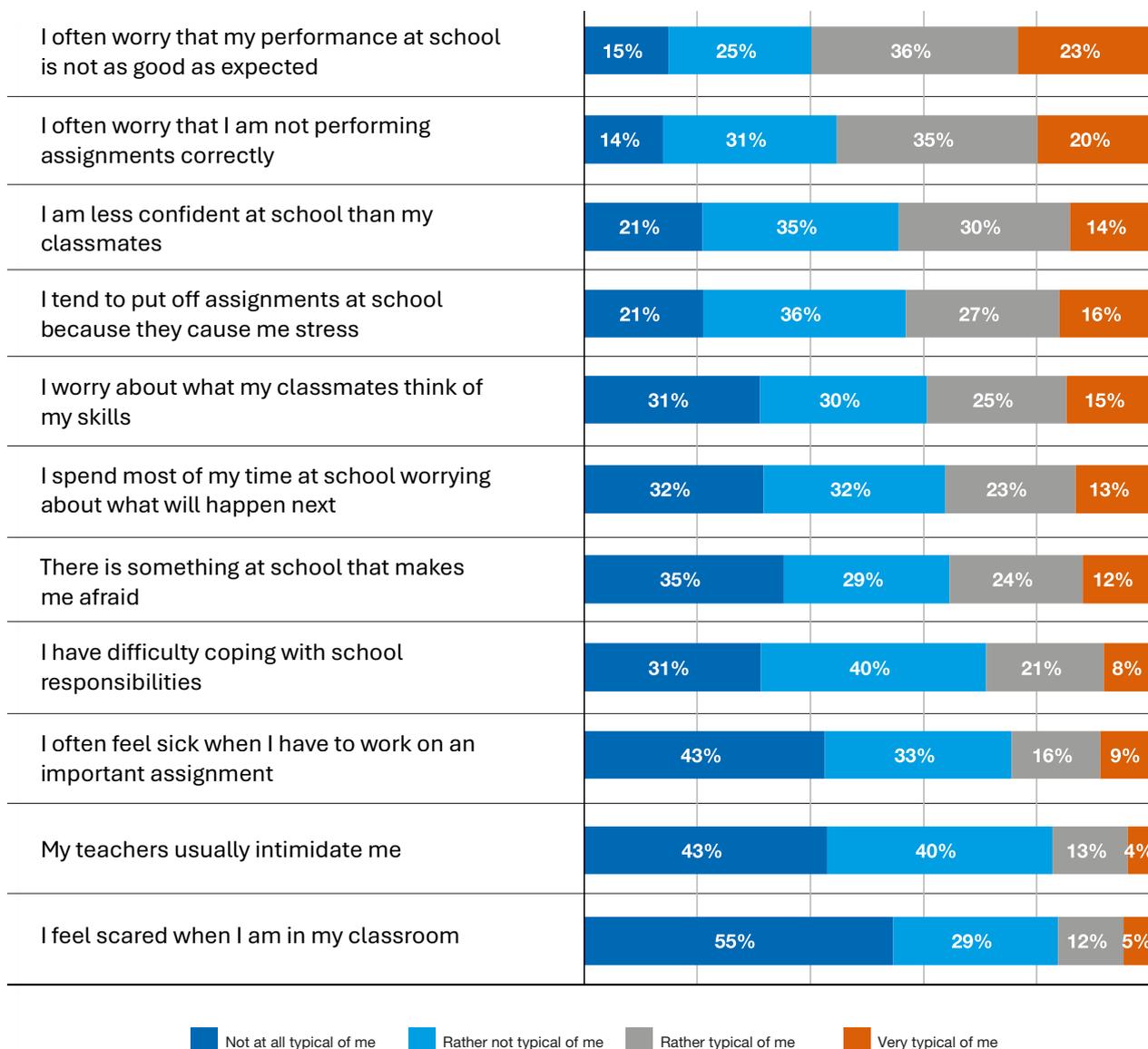


CHART 50 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the AAS scale



The distribution of responses to the particular statements of the questionnaire is presented in Chart 51.

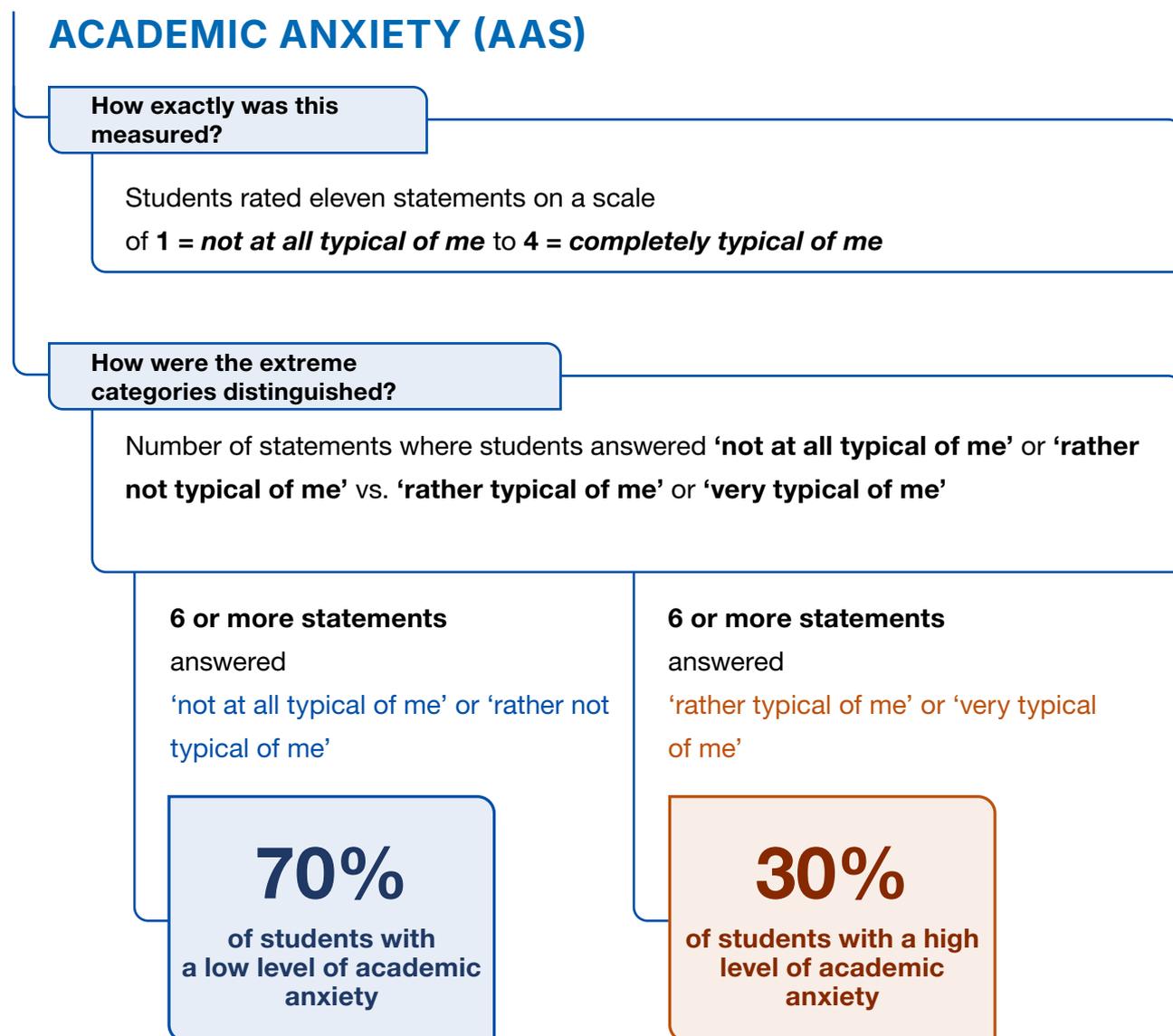
CHART 51 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the AAS scale



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Overall, the level of academic anxiety among the respondents was low. Consequently, disagreement or agreement with more than half of the statements presented to respondents was used as the criterion for classifying respondents into extreme groups. In the case of academic anxiety, 70% of students disagreed with at least six of the eleven diagnostic statements. At the same time, however, one in three respondents (30%) declared a high level of anxiety, agreeing with most of the statements describing school stress, tension, or uncertainty.

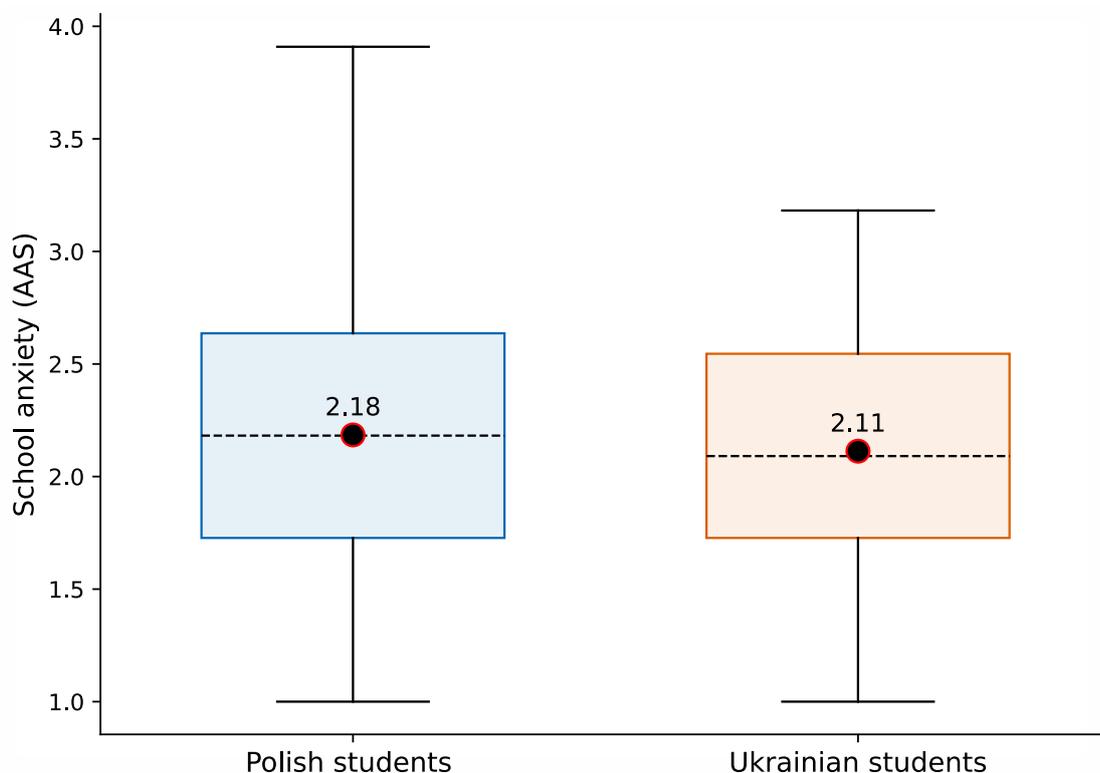
FIGURE 13 | Categorisation of students by low and high levels of academic anxiety



Differences among students by country of origin

The analyses conducted allowed a comparison to be made of the level of academic anxiety experienced by Polish and migrant students of Ukrainian origin attending Polish schools.

CHART 52 | Academic anxiety depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Mean values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it.



Polish students: $M = 2.18$ ($SD = 0.64$) vs. Ukrainian students $M = 2.11$ ($SD = 0.55$). The result of Levene's test, which is used to assess the equality of variance in the compared groups: $F = 1.83$, $p = .177$. The result of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = 0.94$, $p = .347$. The result of Welch's t -test, which does not assume the equality of variance: $t(79.04) = 1.08$, $p = .283$. The size of the effect ($d = 0.12$, 95% CI [-0.12, 0.36]) indicates a very small difference, with no practical significance.

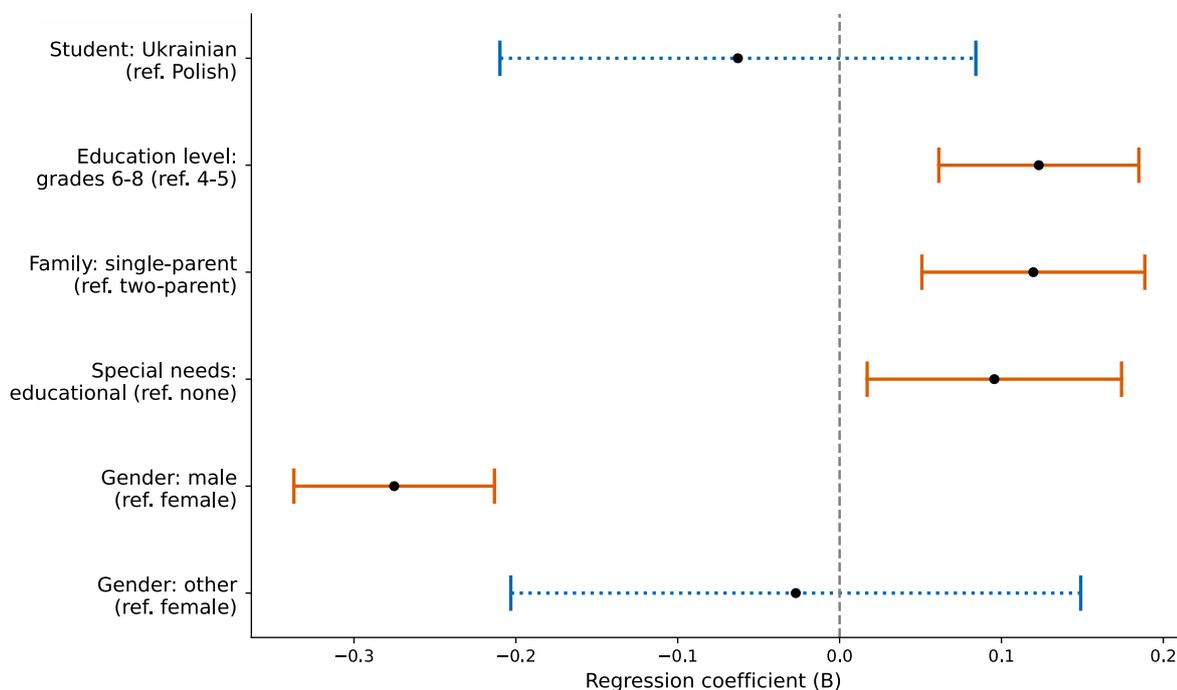
The level of declared academic anxiety of Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience is similar and rather low to moderate, which should be interpreted as a positive sign for students' emotional well-being. This is an indicator of the healthy and adaptive development of the adolescents studied. This level of anxiety is a state in which it does not dominate the learning process and social interaction, but serves as a constructive signal that supports development and adaptation. A relatively low level of anxiety enables students to effectively take advantage of educational opportunities, build positive social relationships, and develop healthy self-esteem.

In the context of studies pointing to growing mental health problems among young people, the result obtained may be surprising, especially in relation to students from Ukraine, as at least some of them have experienced the trauma of war and refugee status. However, it is worth noting here that in our study, we did not analyse generalised anxiety, but only anxiety limited to school situations. Therefore, its relatively low intensity does not rule out the psychosocial problems or negative consequences of trauma reported in other studies (Tędziągolska et al., 2024). This study was conducted in the 2024/2025 school year, and most of the Ukrainian students had been attending school in Poland for 3 years (see subsection 2.6.2.1), which means that they had already gone through the period of adaptation to the new education system. These assumptions are confirmed by the results of another qualitative study, based on a process of consultations with 90 participants of Ukrainian origin, aged 8–17, conducted 15–16 months after the escalation of the war in Ukraine. This study showed that students had a positive attitude towards learning in the Polish education system (Centrone et al., 2023). Similarly, a report by UNICEF and CEO (Tędziągolska et al., 2024, p. 20) states that, in the perception of teachers, there has been an “increasing blurring of differences between Polish and Ukrainian students, both in terms of language and responsibilities, rules and functioning”. Furthermore, the level of Polish language proficiency measured by the School Language Adaptation Scale is rated at a relatively high level by students from Ukraine. They indicate that they do reasonably well in oral communication with both peers and teachers. Therefore, the language barrier (except for written communication) does not prevent them from coping with educational tasks.

Other variables associated with academic anxiety

The next step of the analyses was to identify factors associated with students' levels of academic anxiety. For this purpose, a linear regression analysis was performed taking into account country of origin (Poland vs. Ukraine), level of education (grades 4–5 vs. 6–8), family type (two-parent vs. single-parent), special educational needs (absence vs. presence), and gender (girls as the reference category).

CHART 53 | Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with academic anxiety



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for predictors of academic anxiety, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in academic anxiety attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The linear regression model is statistically significant as a whole ($F = 18.41, p < .001$), although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.065$). Significant predictors of anxiety levels were: attending the upper grades ($B = 0.12, p < .001$), being raised in a single-parent family ($B = 0.12, p = .001$), having special educational needs ($B = 0.10, p = .017$), and male gender ($B = -0.28, p < .001$).

The analyses presented here confirm previous observations that there was no significant relationship between the level of anxiety experienced in school and the student's country of origin. This means that, after controlling for other variables, students with migration experience from Ukraine and Polish students did not differ significantly in terms of the intensity of academic anxiety experienced. Similarly, there was no significant effect for students who identified with a gender other than male or female.



The results obtained indicate that differences in the level of academic anxiety were significantly related to students' age, family situation, SEN status, and gender. Higher levels of academic anxiety are experienced by students in grades 6–8, students who are brought up in a single-parent family, and students whose special educational needs have been confirmed by a psychological-pedagogical counselling service opinion or a ruling. The gender of the students also proved to be a significant predictor of anxiety, with boys experiencing lower levels of anxiety.

An important predictor of academic anxiety was found to be the grade level attended by students. Students in the upper grades are more likely to declare that they experience anxiety relating to the school situation, which corresponds to their developmental trajectory. The intensity and variety of emotions experienced during school years change as the child develops. At the beginning of their education, typical students experience joy in learning and are unlikely to feel academic anxiety. As they develop and gain experiences in subsequent years of primary school, academic anxiety increases significantly and the joy of learning decreases (Pekrun et al., 2007). The increase in anxiety may be related to a more realistic self-assessment of one's role as a student, increased expectations from the environment, or receiving negative feedback on school performance (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). Early adolescence is characterised by emotional instability and a disproportion between the actual significance of certain situations, their perception, and the feelings they evoke in an adolescent. This results in an overestimation of the significance and magnitude of stimuli and excessive emotional reactions. Emotions often experienced by teenagers with great intensity are anxiety, shame, and guilt (cf. Brzezińska et al., 2024). Stress (including examination stress—the eighth-grade exam) associated with the transition to the next educational stage is also significant.

An important factor associated with academic anxiety is gender, with boys reporting lower levels compared to girls. Such gender differences in the intensity of academic anxiety are consistent with other research reports (cf. Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Huttunen et al., 2025). This may be related to girls' higher levels of school involvement and educational aspirations when transitioning to the next stages of education (Huttunen et al., 2025), as well as the higher levels of psychological resistance to stress reported by boys (Feraco & Meneghetti, 2023). This distribution of results may be influenced by the research-confirmed tendency of males to underreport negative emotional symptoms in self-assessment surveys (see Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Putwain & Daly, 2014).

In the context of inclusive education, the relationship between academic anxiety and students' special educational needs deserves particular attention. The higher incidence of academic anxiety of SEN students is consistent with research reports on the emotional and social functioning of this group of students, both broadly defined as students with needs that affect their learning (Bunting et al., 2022; NHS Digital, 2022), and narrowly defined in relation to specific diagnoses such as



dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, sensory dysfunctions, or intellectual disability. The experience of academic anxiety among students with special educational needs is associated with the higher educational demands they face, typically lower academic achievement, as well as other difficulties that arise in the school context, such as difficulties with peer relationships.

Studies in which students with special educational needs are treated as a homogeneous, general group are much less common. There is much more research on specific SEN subgroups, as each of them may be associated with different mechanisms of anxiety formation and different types of anxiety. Here, we will cite studies on the most common difficulties that form the basis for issuing an opinion on special needs in education or a ruling on the need for special education, such as school difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, or intellectual disabilities. Students with learning disabilities have higher levels of academic anxiety and lower self-esteem compared to their peers (Alesi et al., 2014). This group also showed higher levels of test anxiety (a type of academic anxiety) compared to their peers without such diagnoses (Fong & Soni, 2022; Nelson et al., 2015; Peleg, 2019; Stevens, 2000). In the case of students with learning disabilities in reading and mathematics, an increase in anxiety was observed in relation to the subject area of difficulty (Sainio et al., 2019). Higher levels of school- and learning-related anxiety, compared to typically developing peers, were found in students on the borderline of intellectual normality, who, due to their condition, experience learning difficulties (Alesi et al., 2015). Higher levels of academic anxiety, especially in situations involving the testing of knowledge, also characterise students with dyslexia (Łodygowska & Czepita, 2012). Research results indicate that children with dyslexia have problems with anxiety and self-esteem in the school context, but their overall anxiety and self-esteem have not deteriorated (Novita, 2016).

The academic anxiety of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is also commonly reported, both in quantitative (Adams et al., 2018, 2020) and qualitative studies (e.g., Giltinan et al., 2025; Goodall, 2018), using self-descriptions or descriptions by people close to the child (parents and/or teachers). Students with ASD are particularly vulnerable to experiencing unpleasant emotions in the school environment due to the presence of potential triggers of emotional reactions, such as sensory stimuli, disruptions to routine, unpredictable behaviour of teachers or peers, and the inability to calm down. Moreover, academic anxiety for this group is sometimes misinterpreted as a symptom of autism, delaying the provision of adequate support, or remaining unrecognised by the social environment (Adams et al., 2020).

In this publication, we analyse the predictors relating to the individual characteristics of students, but it is worth mentioning that academic anxiety is also associated with a number of variables relating to the learning environment, such as: the overall ability of students in the class, the level of structured teaching and testing, the format of tests, the way knowledge is verified, as well as the



attitudes and behaviours of teachers (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). Although an analysis of these variables is beyond the scope of this publication, it is worth studying educational practices in terms of their potential impact on students' academic emotions.

3.5.2 The joy of learning

The joy of learning, like other emotional experiences, is an important but often underestimated aspect of the learning environment (Tvedt et al., 2021). Positive emotions affect students' cognitive functioning, including attention span and working memory. Feeling positive emotions in relation to a task performed by a student makes the task the object of emotion, which is why attention is focused on the task rather than on the emotional experience, and cognitive resources can be engaged in its performance (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016). Positive emotions influence student engagement, which, in turn, is important for both motivation to learn and performance (Asikainen et al., 2018; Kahu et al., 2015; Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2013), and more broadly, for students' well-being. Particularly important is the relationship between the joy of learning and the intrinsic motivation to learn (Pekrun et al., 2002). The joy of learning is linked to the interest and effort put into learning. In addition, it promotes the use of flexible learning and self-regulation strategies, while positively influencing overall school task performance (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016) and academic achievements (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Pekrun et al., 2002). The joy of learning not only affects students' achievements, but also their behaviour and well-being (Hascher, 2011; Hascher & Edlinger, 2009).



Measuring the joy of learning

Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ)

Subscale: Joy of learning (JL)



4-point scale

1 (*never*) → 2 (*sometimes*)
→ 3 (*often*) → 4 (*always*)



What does it measure?

Enjoyment from learning, understood as positive engagement in the learning process.



Interpretation

High scores on the subscale are indicative of a genuine interest in learning, positive excitement about school tasks and intrinsic motivation to learn.

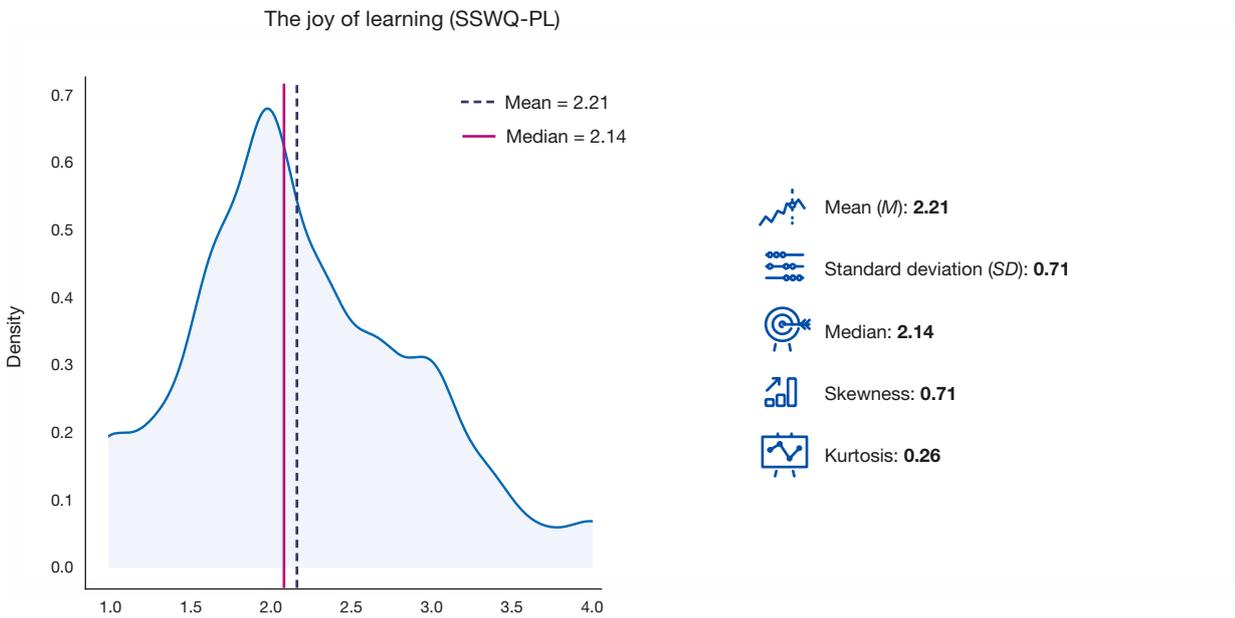
For more on the scale, see the chapter → [Description of research tools.](#)

Overall level of the joy of learning

The mean response for the joy of learning was $M = 2.21$ ($SD = 0.71$) and the median was 2.00. As values 2 and 3 corresponded to responses 'sometimes' and 'often', this result suggests that students experienced positive emotions relating to school learning less than often in the past month. The distribution was skewed to the right (skewness = 0.71), indicating a predominance of lower values, and showed positive kurtosis (kurtosis = 0.26), indicating a slight concentration of results around the median. The detailed distribution of results is shown in Chart 54.



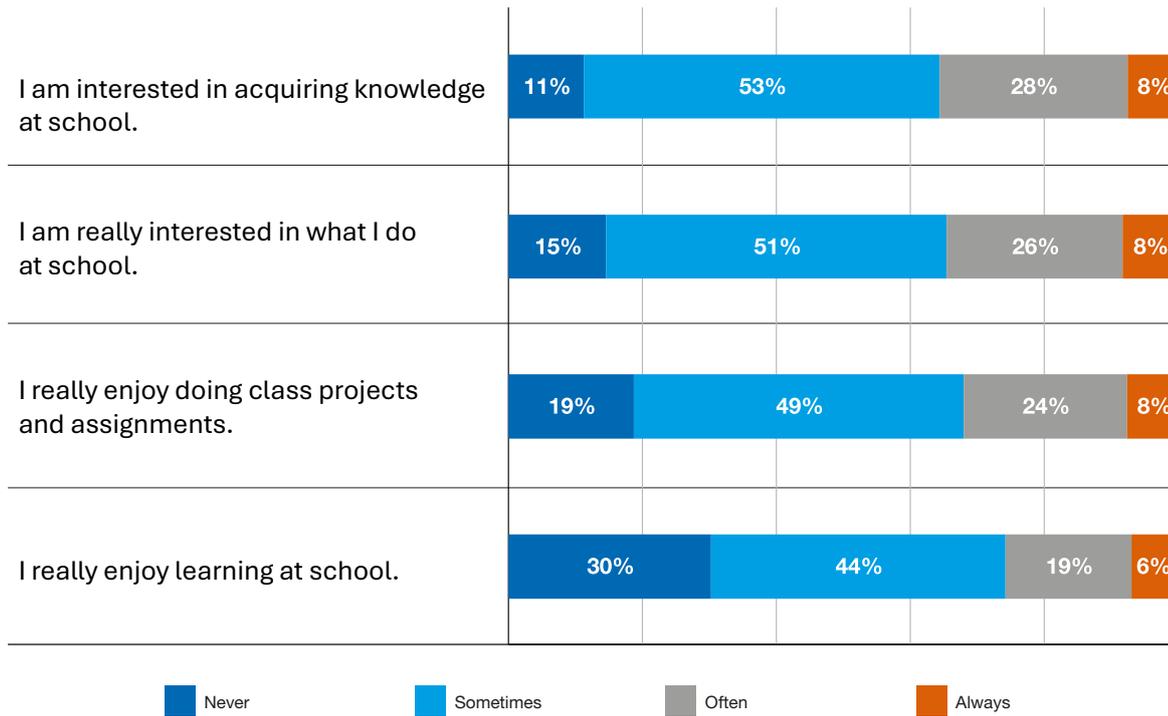
CHART 54 | Distribution of responses from surveyed students to the SSWQ-PL scale



An analysis of the responses to the individual questionnaire items shows that almost a third of the students (30.2%) never feel happy about learning in school and 43.8% only sometimes experience this emotion (item “I enjoy learning at school”). One in four students experiences positive emotions relating to school learning ‘often’ or ‘always’. In contrast, the predominant response category for items relating to interest in learning and gaining knowledge is ‘sometimes’, suggesting that interest in learning and gaining knowledge is likely linked to specific subjects. One in three students declares an interest in science.



CHART 55 | Analysis of the response frequency to individual items of the SSWQ-PL scale

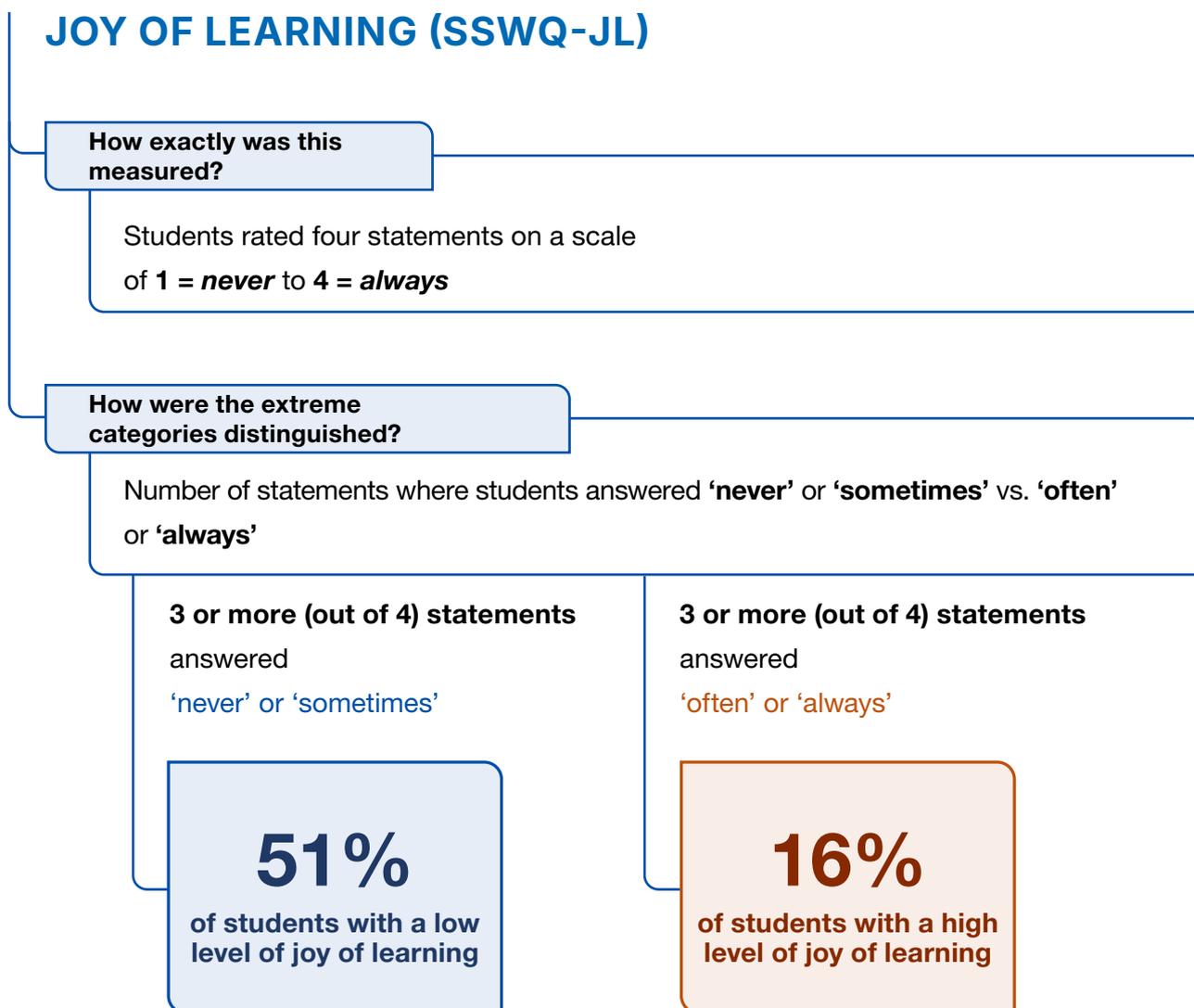


Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

So do students experience joy while learning in school? Unfortunately, the answer to this question has to be negative. As many as half of all respondents (51%) had low levels of joy in learning (disagreement with three or four statements describing the joy of learning). Only one in six students (16%) declared a high level of such enjoyment.



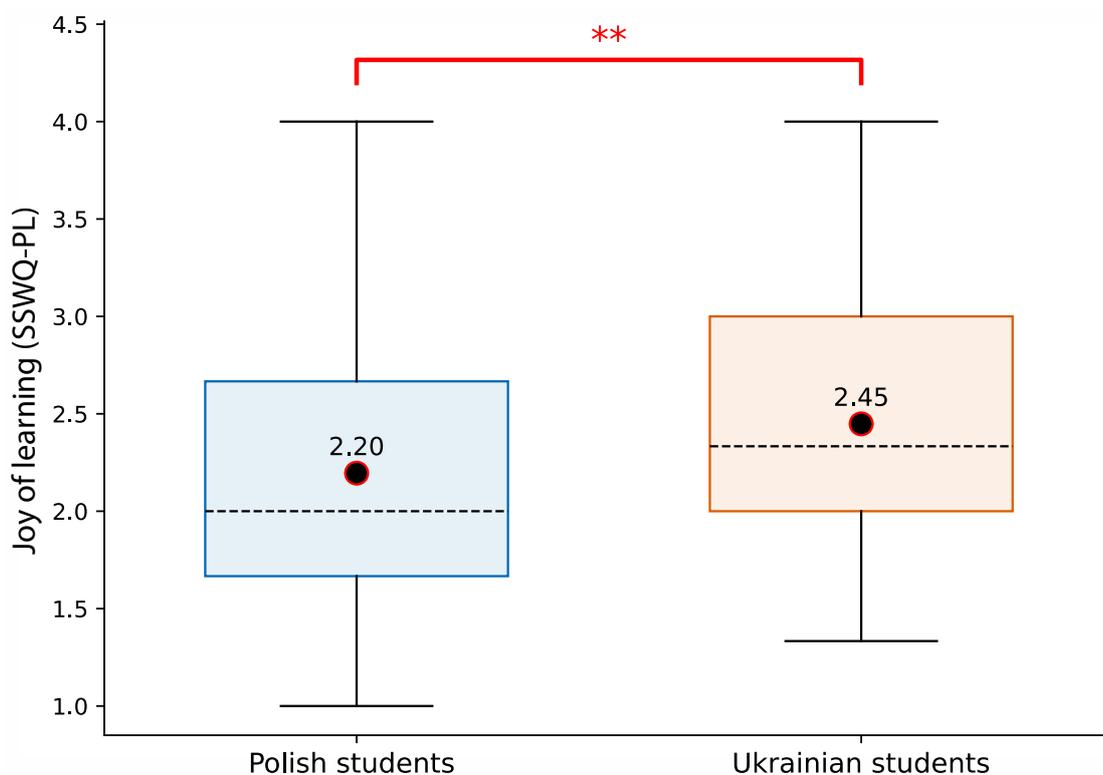
FIGURE 14 | Categorisation of students by low and high joy of learning



Differences in the joy of learning depending on students' country of origin.

The next step of the analyses was to compare the level of the joy of learning between Polish students and Ukrainian students with migration experience. The results are presented in Chart 56.

CHART 56 | Joy of learning depending on students' country of origin



Note: The box covers the middle 50% of the results—from the first to the third quartile—and the dashed line inside the box indicates the median. The whiskers extend to values that are not considered outliers (i.e., they fall within $1.5 \times$ the interquartile range outside the box). Mean values are indicated by a black dot with a numerical value above it. Red lines with bars indicate statistically significant differences between groups: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.



Ukrainian students: $M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.65$ vs. Polish students: $M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.70$.
 Results of the t -test for independent groups: $t(1606) = -2.98$, $p = .003$. The difference in means was 0.25, and the 95 per cent confidence interval was $[-0.41, -0.10]$.
 The effect size assessed by Cohen's d was -0.37 (95% CI $[-0.61, -0.14]$), indicating a small but statistically significant effect size. These results suggest that Ukrainian students experience more joy associated with learning than their Polish peers.

Both the simple group comparison and the regression analysis showed that Ukrainian students with migration experience attending Polish schools reported significantly higher levels of joy during learning than their Polish peers. This difference also persisted after other factors were taken into account, suggesting that it may be independent of age, gender or family situation. In the context of educational adaptation, this may be indicative of the high cognitive engagement of



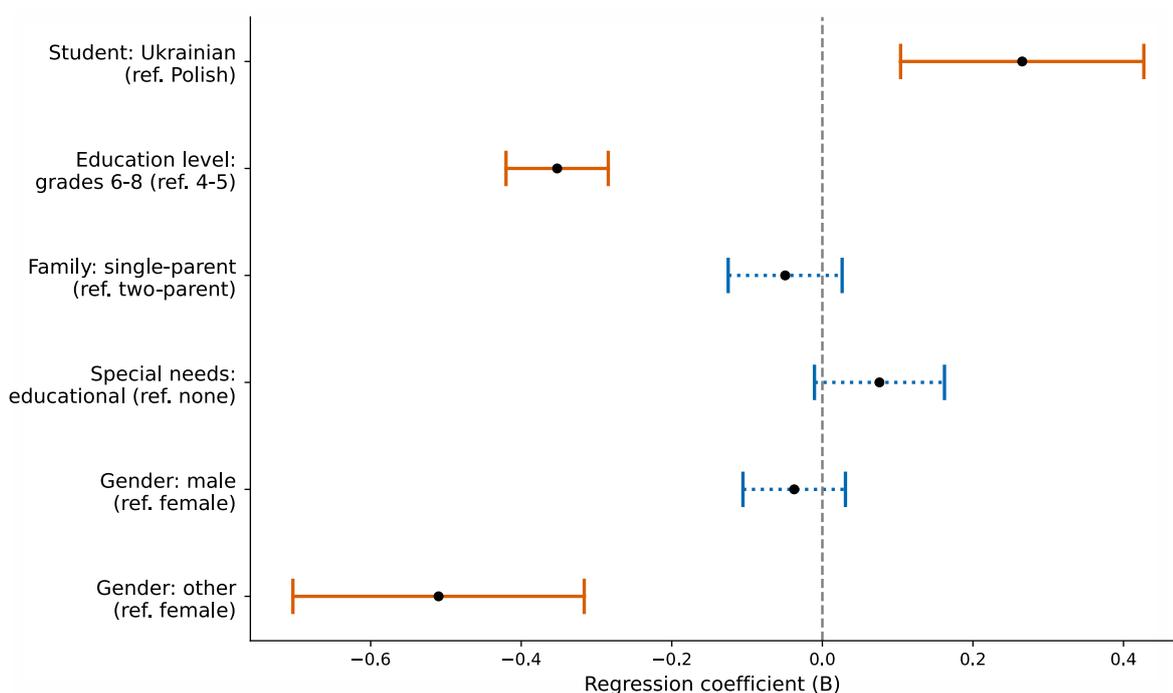
Ukrainian students and their positive perception of the school environment as a space conducive to learning and development. A higher level of joy in learning may also reflect a greater focus on educational goals or treating school as a stable part of everyday life in a situation of change and uncertainty. At the same time, it may reflect a positive perception of the support offered to students with migrant experience, as well as positive learning experiences.

Other variables associated with the joy of learning

A multivariate linear regression analysis was also performed for the level of joy of learning, taking into account the following predictors: student nationality (Ukrainian vs. Polish), education level (grades 6–8 vs. 4–5), family structure (single-parent vs. two-parent), special educational needs, and gender (boys vs. girls; ‘other’ vs. girls).

CHART 57

Linear regression coefficient values for variables associated with the joy of learning



Note: The graph shows estimates of the linear regression coefficients (B) for the predictors of joy of learning, along with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Solid red lines indicate statistically significant predictors ($p < .05$) and dotted blue lines indicate non-significant predictors. B values represent changes in the level of learning enjoyment attributed to each predictor when controlling for the other variables in the model.



The linear regression model is statistically significant: $F(6.1601) = 23.91, p < .001$, although it explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .082$, adjusted $R^2 = .079$). Significant predictors of the joy of learning were: attending the upper grades ($B = -0.35, p < .001$), nationality ($B = 0.27, p = .001$), indicating 'other' for gender ($B = -0.51, p < .001$).

Differences in the level of perceived joy of learning between students in grades 4–5 and grades 6–8 may be influenced by developmental and social factors. In later primary school grades, students begin to study a range of subjects that require increasingly advanced forms of abstract reasoning. If the teaching methods are predominantly passive, this can lead to frustration and a sense of misunderstanding. With regard to students in the upper grades of primary school, the education system is becoming more exam-oriented, so the pressure for results, grades, and achievement is increasing, which, as research confirms, is not conducive to the enjoyment of learning. Extrinsically motivated, results-oriented, and comparison-based learning is not conducive to feeling joy in acquiring and building knowledge. The pressure to learn and the results-oriented approach lead to feelings of stress associated with school, and learning becomes a source of anxiety. This is borne out by the results of our research, which indicate that 30% of students experience severe academic anxiety, precluding them from feeling joy while learning.

Summary

The analysis of students' emotional functioning in the school context revealed that the absence of negative emotions relating to school does not guarantee that their emotions will be positive. The results indicate that students' school well-being requires simultaneous attention to both minimising stress factors and enhancing positive learning experiences. On the one hand, levels of academic anxiety were found to be relatively low—the majority of students did not identify with statements describing stress, tension, or uncertainty in the school environment. On the other hand, the low level of positive emotions associated with learning is cause for concern. Half of the students do not enjoy learning in school, which may indicate reduced intrinsic motivation and a limited sense of the purpose of education. The higher enjoyment of learning among Ukrainian students remains a result consistent with the direction of interpretation we took when analysing the sense of educational purpose or emotional attitude towards school. Ukrainian students may regard the Polish school as a stable part of everyday life amid change and uncertainty.

Of particular note is the fact that students with special educational needs experience higher levels of academic anxiety than their peers. This may be due to a build-up of educational difficulties,



lowered self-esteem, and more stressful situations in the school environment. The elevated level of academic anxiety in this group of students poses a significant challenge for inclusive education and requires adequate emotional and pedagogical support.

3.6 Towards a synthesis—an overall picture of school well-being

The analysis of descriptive statistics and response distributions reveals a complex picture of students' well-being at school, characterised by significant diversity in its various dimensions. Both subjective and objective data allow us to identify areas of relative strength and those that may require further attention in educational practice.

In terms of perceptions of teachers' didactic and child development practices, students rated the presence of inclusive practices in a relatively positive direction, with average responses oscillating around the 'rather yes' level. The assessment of equal treatment by teachers toward students was somewhat less clear, indicating a moderate rather than a strong sense of fairness.

Peer relationships present a mixed picture. Students experienced little loneliness and social dissatisfaction—the average responses were low, indicating a lower level of difficulty and greater satisfaction with relationships. At the same time, social inclusion and peer status were rated relatively high. Experiences of peer violence were rather rare, while self-assessments of interpersonal skills were positive—on average, students considered themselves to be good at interacting with others.

Regarding students' motivational-emotional engagement in learning at school, the results are clearly varied. The relatively highest means were recorded for academic self-concept and the sense of educational purpose, which may be indicative of students' moderately positive attitudes towards their abilities and a sense that their school activities are meaningful. In contrast, the lowest values were obtained in the area of attitudes towards school as an institution. Average responses were slightly below neutral, suggesting that the students' emotional bond with the school is the weakest link in the engagement discussed. Although this result does not indicate a clearly negative attitude, it may suggest a lack of deeper attachment or identification with the place of everyday educational functioning.

In terms of educational attainment, students achieved an average grade of good in both Polish and mathematics, indicating a relatively satisfactory level of cognitive functioning in key school subjects. Slightly greater variation was evident in mathematics grades, suggesting a wider spread of competence in this area.

Finally, in the area of school-related emotions, the level of reported academic anxiety was found to be rather low, which should be interpreted as a positive sign for the emotional well-being of students. Joy of learning, on the other hand, averaged low values. Students experienced positive emotions in an educational context less than often. This may suggest limited positive emotional involvement and provide a starting point for an in-depth diagnosis of this dimension.

In summary, the data indicate a relatively favourable picture of students' functioning in terms of peer relationships, self-assessment of competences, and academic achievement, with moderate emotional engagement and fairly low levels of positive emotions associated with everyday learning. These areas can provide important directions for activities to support well-being in the school environment.

Although it is difficult to synthesise many of the results presented in this publication—especially when attempting to answer the seemingly simple question of what percentage of students have low or high levels of school well-being—multivariate statistical techniques prove useful in meaningfully reducing the numerous detailed findings we obtained. One such technique, known as latent class analysis (Spurk et al., 2020), allows the detection of internally consistent yet distinct participant groups (types). This typology, based on all the aspects of school well-being analysed above, identified four distinct groups, illustrated in Chart 58.



CHART 58 | School well-being profiles

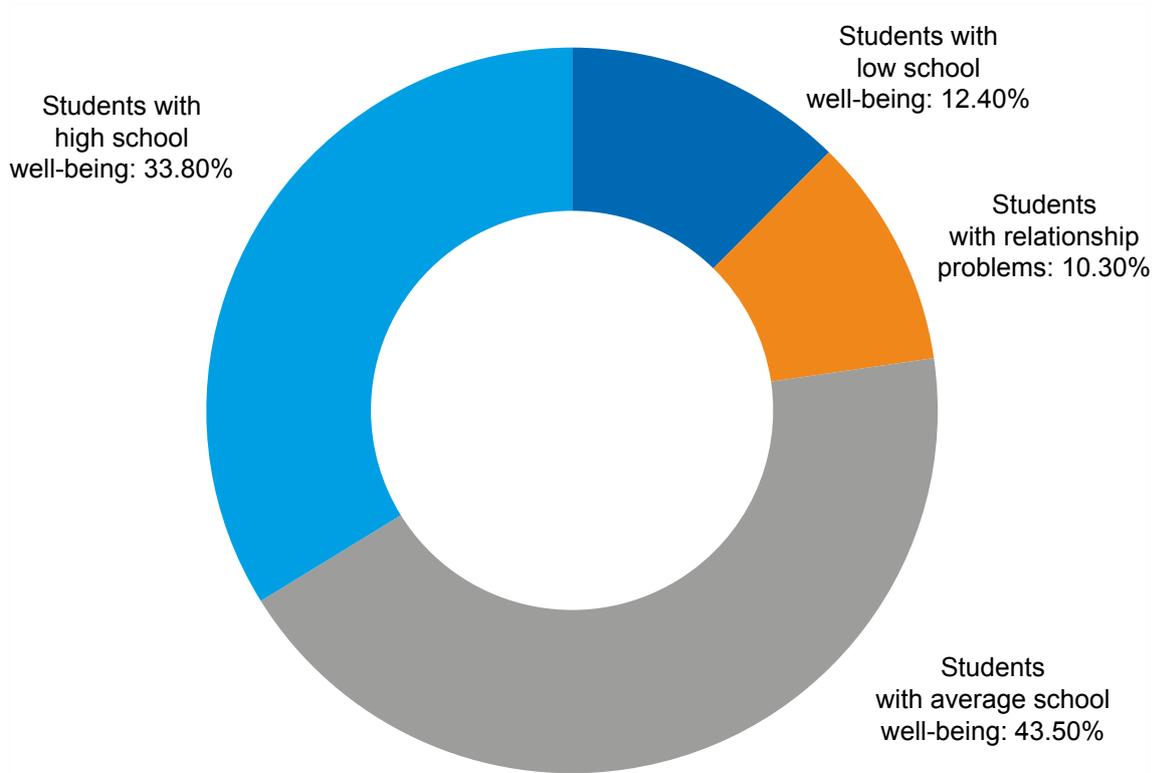
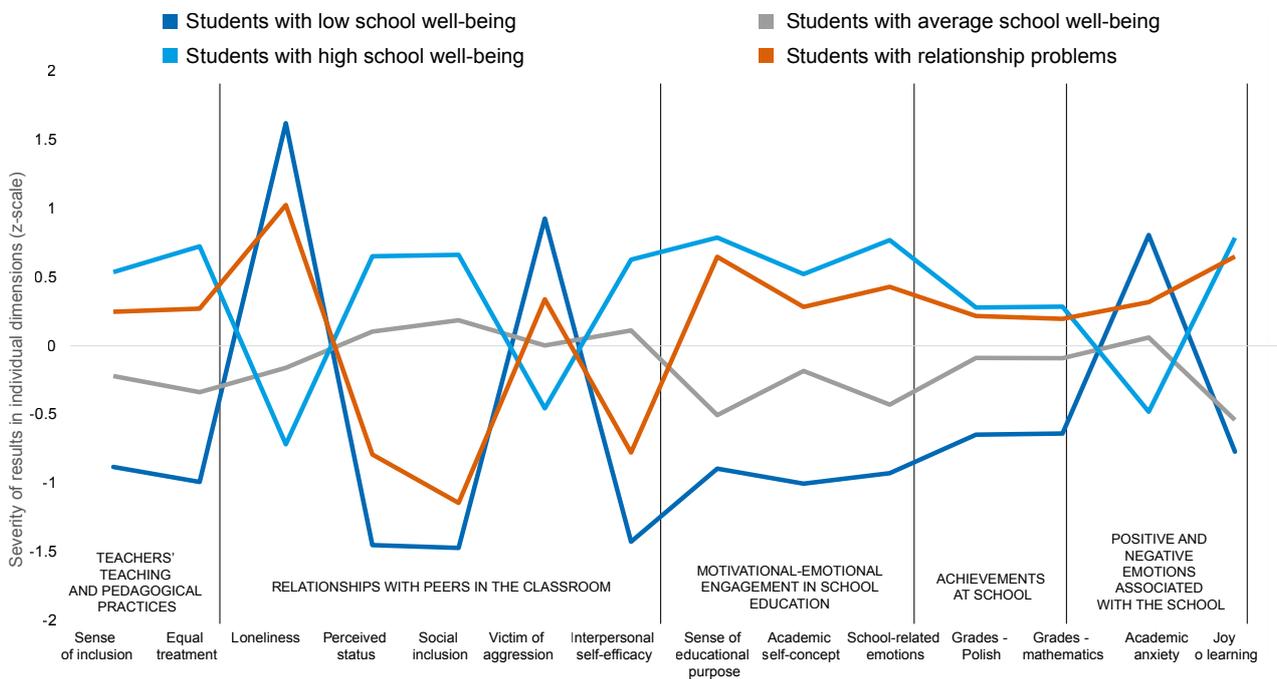


Chart 59, in turn, presents the profiles of the distinguished types, in particular those aspects of school well-being or lack thereof that were characterised by above-average intensity within each group.

CHART 59 | Intensity of results of the specific dimensions



One in eight students (12% of the total) had a low level of school well-being. The profile of this group is very clear—they are individuals with a very high sense of loneliness and academic anxiety, often victims of peer aggression, with low or very low levels of the other dimensions analysed, especially feeling excluded from the class, interpersonally ineffective, with low achievement and self-esteem. In an average class of 30 students, we will find three to four such students.

Another group attracting attention with its profile, despite being relatively small at 10% of the total, are students with clear problems in their peer relationships. The group is intriguing in many ways. On the one hand, these students feel noticed by their teachers and treated fairly, understand the purpose and meaning of learning, and learn well (although they experience a high level of academic anxiety). On the other hand, however, they have a sense of loneliness in relationships, a low opinion of their interpersonal status and relationships with peers, and are often victims of peer aggression. Thus, their interpersonal and social aspects of school well-being are low, while their involvement in learning and school performance is quite high. In a typical class, there are about three such students.

What both types described above have in common is the fact that their school well-being is low. Almost one in four students (22.7%), therefore, show signs of feeling unhappy at school, whether in relationships with peers or in terms of motivation and emotions (or in both these dimensions).

The largest category, accounting for 43.5% of the total, are students whose school well-being falls within the broadly understood norm—it is at an average level, with only slight deviations from these values. What is most striking is the low level of engagement of these young people in the learning process and the lack of enjoyment derived from it. This type does not particularly recognise the importance of learning or the activity of teachers, but has good relationships with their peers.

One in three students (33.8%) was classified as having a clearly high level of school well-being. These individuals have a balanced profile of perceived school self-esteem and learning engagement. They are characterised by positive interpersonal relationships with others and a low sense of loneliness. They rarely experience violence and aggression, and their sense of academic anxiety is also low.

Do the four types distinguished by school well-being differ in terms of socio-demographic characteristics? As can be seen in Chart 60, such differences do indeed exist. In relation to the other groups, there were slightly more Ukrainian students among those with low levels of well-being (5% compared to 4.4% in the total sample), significantly more older students in grades 6–8 (71.4% compared to 61% in the total sample), a greater number of students from single-parent families (35.7% compared to 26.4% of the total sample), as well as students with special educational needs (29.1% compared to 18.9% of the total sample), and finally students who find it difficult to define themselves by the dichotomous gender division (the ‘other’ category—11.6% compared to 3.1% of the total sample). Thus, it can be concluded that being non-binary, growing up in a single-parent family, having special educational needs and, to a lesser extent, being an adolescent (attending the upper grades of primary school), as well as coming from outside of Poland (in this case from Ukraine) are risk factors for low well-being.

Students with peer relationship problems are a group with a clear overrepresentation of Ukrainian students (10.8% compared to 4.4% of the total sample) and, similar to the previous type, a group in which it is relatively easier to find students from single-parent families, individuals with special educational needs, and girls. This type differs from the previous one in that it has a significantly higher percentage of Ukrainian students (10.8% vs. 5% in the previous case), and a lower proportion of students who do not fit into binary gender categories (0.6% vs. 11.6% in the previous case). But this group also has a more balanced proportion of students from grades 4–5 and 6–8 compared to the previous group. However, what makes the two types similar, while also constituting risk factors for low well-being, are single-parent families and special educational needs.

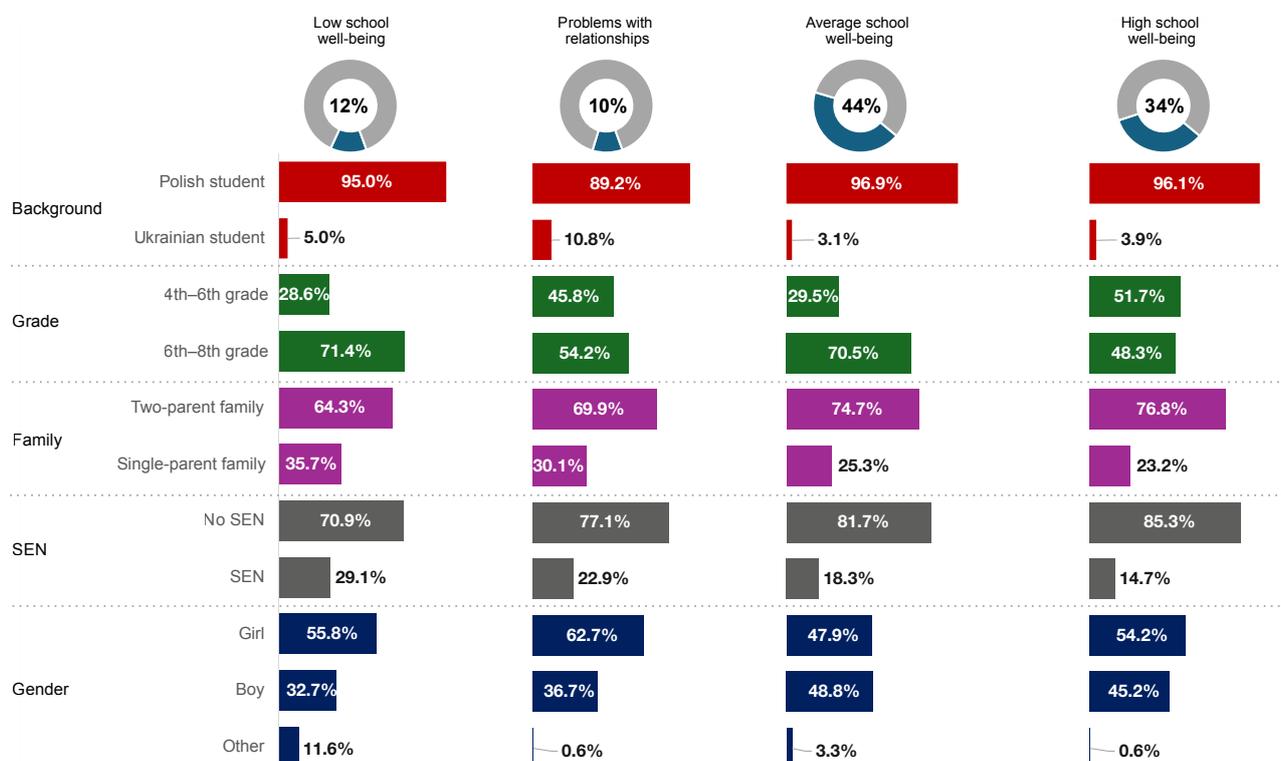
Students with an average level of school well-being are an almost perfect reflection of the socio-demographic profile of the entire sample studied. The vast majority of this group is of Polish origin



(96.9% compared to 95.6% among the total sample), with a slight over-representation of older students (grades 6–8 at 70.5% against 61.4% among all participants), where one in four (25.3%) is being raised in a single-parent household (identical to the total sample at 26.4%), and one in six (18.3%) has special educational needs, which also perfectly reflects the share in the total sample (18.9%). This group is composed of boys and girls in similar proportions.

The last type distinguished, that is, the group of students with high school well-being, which constitutes 1/3 of the total, does not stand out in any particular way in terms of its socio-demographic profile. The proportion of students of Ukrainian origin in this group was small, but almost identical to that in the total sample (3.9% vs. 4.4%). The proportion of younger (grades 4–5 grade) and older (grades 6–8) students, girls and boys, was also similar, with a slightly lower percentage of students with special educational needs (14.7% compared to 18.9% in the total sample) as well as those growing up in single-parent families (23.2% compared to 26.4% in the total sample) than in the group with average well-being (and significantly lower than in the groups with low well-being). Overall, however, it should be noted that while the socio-demographic and educational characteristics taken into account allow us to predict the risk of low well-being, they are only to a very small extent able to explain the chances of achieving high well-being.

CHART 60 | Socio-demographic and educational characteristics versus school well-being





Differences in sense of well-being among students

The research paints a complex picture of students' social and educational situation across diverse class groups, with a particular focus on children who migrated to Poland from Ukraine. Analysis of the data shows that Ukrainian students have a relatively more positive attitude towards school than their Polish peers. They report higher levels of satisfaction with participating in school activities and, to a similar extent as Polish students, perceive teachers as supportive individuals who adapt their activities to students' individual needs. The noticeably higher level of positive attitudes towards school can be interpreted as a result of teachers' individual responses to the specific needs of students with migration experience. Students may perceive this increased attention as an expression of support, care, and acceptance, which encourages their greater involvement and positive attitude towards education. In addition, it can be assumed that the opportunity to continue their learning in a safe and predictable school environment and to take advantage of the development opportunities offered may be positively perceived as an asset in attending a Polish school.

Significantly, a relatively positive attitude towards school does not always translate into educational results—Ukrainian students achieve lower end-of-year grades in key subjects such as Polish or mathematics. The lower grades of incoming Ukrainian students in Polish and mathematics may be due not only to ongoing language difficulties, but also to the cumulative effects of previous interruptions in education, as well as curriculum differences between education systems. Despite years of attendance at a Polish school, factors such as a protracted adaptation process, migration stress, and limited access to systemic support may still affect their academic performance.

At the same time, Ukrainian students rate their own social functioning at school less favourably. This may be due to their still-limited language skills, ongoing cultural adaptation, and a possible sense of social isolation. However, the findings do not indicate that they experience open dislike, aggression, or violence more frequently. This suggests that the lower assessment of social functioning is not a direct result of hostile behaviour from those around them, but rather a subjective sense of being an 'outsider' in the class and of difficulties in participating fully in the school's social life.

The results of the study indicated the worrisome situation for students with special educational needs, whose well-being—both educationally and socially—is at a noticeably lower level than that of their peers without additional needs. The self-assessment of these students, as expressed in their survey responses, confirms their more difficult functioning at school, both in terms of educational achievement and social relations. The identified differences indicate that students with special educational needs should be seen as a group at higher risk of educational and social exclusion.



The results of the research emphasise the urgent need to strengthen support mechanisms for students functioning in diverse classroom communities, including children with migration experience and those with special educational needs, and to fully involve teachers, specialists, and entire school teams in creating environments conducive to learning and building peer relationships that will effectively respond to their diverse needs.

Limitations of the study

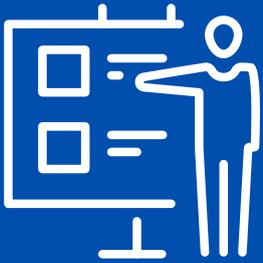
Although the research provides valuable and in-depth information on the well-being of students at school, certain limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalisability of the results should be taken into account. First, the research was conducted in schools participating in the 'Accessible School for All' project, which involved specialist teachers participating in training and workshops, and implemented measures in line with the project's objectives. This institutional context could have influenced the functioning of the schools and students' experiences, thereby distinguishing these institutions from schools that do not implement similar forms of support. This limits the ability to generalise the results to the entire student population. The conclusions should therefore be interpreted with the specific nature of the described research context in mind.

Second, comparisons were made between groups of significantly different sizes, which could affect the precision of the estimates and the stability of the comparative analysis results. The smaller size of one of the groups increases the risk of obtaining less stable parameters and greater sensitivity of the results to outliers.

Third, the status of students with special educational needs was treated in the analysis as a predictor variable rather than as a criterion for distinguishing a separate comparison group. In the case of this group, only information on having a ruling on the need for special education or an opinion on special needs in education from a psychological-pedagogical counselling centre were used. Data on the type of disability or specific educational needs were not categorised, which limits the ability to interpret the results in depth.

Fourth, students with migration experience are characterised by significant internal diversity, including the length of their stay in Poland, their level of Polish language proficiency, previous educational experiences, and family situation. These factors could have modified the results obtained.

04.



Recommendations and implications for practice

04.

Recommendations and implications for practice

Student well-being has become a central reference point in educational debates, research, and policy documents. At the same time, increasing attention is being paid to the risks associated with its simplified, normative, and individualising interpretations (Simovska, 2021), which may shift responsibility onto individual students while obscuring the structural, organisational, and cultural conditions of school functioning.

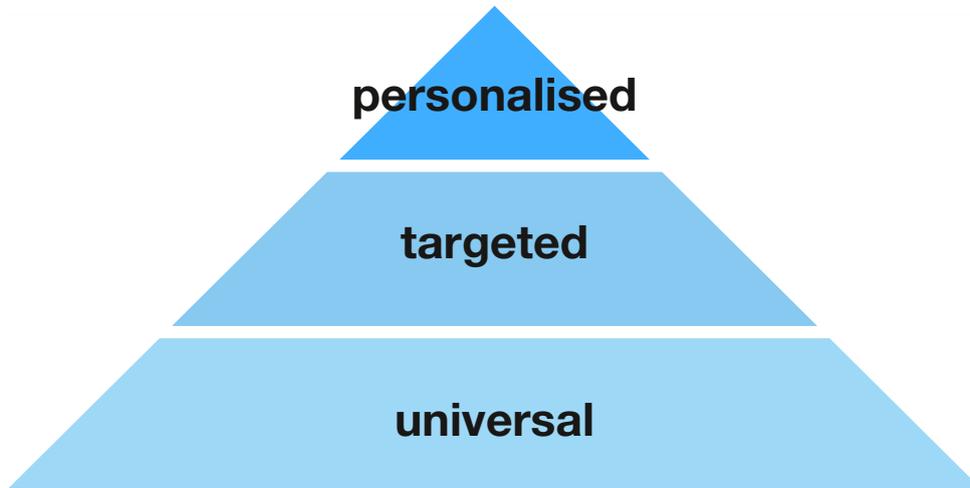
In this chapter, we adopt an expanded understanding of student well-being as a complex and dynamic process encompassing the interrelated dimensions of being, belonging, becoming, and agency. Well-being is thus conceptualised not as an individual trait or a fixed state, but as an emergent outcome of relationships, pedagogical practices, and the culture of the school as a social and educational organisation.

Since the point of reference in the analyses was the school, rather than the system, recommendations can be formulated primarily at the mesostructural level, encompassing the daily operational and organisational activities of schools. The direct addressees of the recommendations are schools, primarily school principals and teaching staff, who—taking into account the current legal regulations—have real opportunities to support students' well-being in their daily practice.

For this reason, we formulate our recommendations based on the latest European guidelines for supporting school well-being, comparing the results of the research described in this study with guidelines not for policymakers, but for leaders, teachers, and educational specialists (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024). The authors of this guide take a proactive view of well-being—the absence of problems is not enough to ensure it. They emphasise that piecemeal strategies addressing the challenges of students' social and emotional functioning, undertaken only when problems arise, are ineffective. Sustainable well-being and mental health in schools can only be achieved through a systemic approach involving the entire school community, known as the *whole-school approach* (WSA) (Cefai et al., 2021).



FIGURE 15 | Levels of support for school well-being in the whole-school approach (WSA)



Source: authors' own translation based on: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2024).

A whole-system, whole-school approach to well-being and mental health is based on a universal model in which all students are supported in developing and maintaining their well-being through teaching and extracurricular activities, as well as relational and contextual processes, both at the school and classroom levels. The aim is to reduce risk, develop social and emotional competence, resilience, enhance self-esteem, and create supportive environments conducive to well-being. In addition to this universal approach, it is important to identify individual, social, and structural risk factors so that students at risk of developing mental health problems can receive additional, targeted support, in small groups or individually, in collaboration with professionals and health institutions.

Given the results of the presented research and the ambiguous picture of school well-being in Polish classes with a diversity of students, it would be advisable to take integrated and coordinated measures at a universal level, strengthening each dimension of well-being, not only the spheres in which difficulties have been observed. These should be prioritised at the level of targeted and individualised support.

In the area of universal strategies, at least three of the guidelines formulated in the European Commission document deserve wider attention, which we specify in the context that emerged from the research:



- Positive school climate, active participation, and empowerment of students,
- Inclusion of social and emotional education in the curriculum,
- Prioritising equality, inclusion, and diversity as essential conditions for well-being, ensuring that no one is marginalised or excluded.

A positive school climate is an educational environment in which all students feel welcome, respected, supported, and have equal opportunities to learn and develop regardless of their background, identity, level of ability, language, or social status. To prioritise these values, schools must develop three interrelated areas: school culture (it should foster an atmosphere of mutual support, a sense of belonging and recognition for every student, regardless of their needs or abilities), school policy (it must include effective strategies to counteract exclusion, discrimination, segregation, as well as actively promote the equitable treatment of all members of the school community), and pedagogical practice (it should be based on flexible teaching methods and the adaptation of content and assessment methods to the diverse needs of students, so that each of them has a real chance to participate fully and achieve educational success) (UNESCO, 2017). In operationalising these recommendations, it should be expected that in every school, in practice, all teachers would be implementing activities such as differentiating learning activities and using the principles of universal design for learning – UDL (Rose & Meyer, 2002) or culturally responsive teaching – CRT (Semião et al., 2023). These approaches go beyond superficial and occasional acknowledgement of diversity—they require teachers to take a critical look at their own biases, assumptions, and teaching practices in order to create inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and have a sense of agency.

Integrating social and emotional education into the curriculum is an important proposal, the implementation of which can be considered both a preventive and proactive measure—important for all students. Today, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) educational movement is increasingly being promoted worldwide as a complement to traditional education focused on acquiring knowledge and practical skills. This approach aims to support the development of social and emotional competences, which are crucial not only for educational success, but also for later functioning in a professional environment. SEL-based interventions have been shown to improve skills, attitudes, behaviours, school climate and safety, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement (Cipriano et al., 2023). Investing in systemic relationship building in the school community by introducing regular educational activities that strengthen bonds between students, teachers, and other members of the school community seems to be a worthwhile goal. Importantly, in its implementation, the use of available forms of educational activities, such as child development classes, extracurricular activities, etc., is only one of the ways leading to ‘occasional’ effects, which are not lasting if the educational activities are not integrated into the standard didactic process that dominates the time spent at school.

Prioritising equality, inclusion, and diversity as essential conditions for well-being, ensuring that no one is marginalised or excluded, is another very important guideline in research findings showing that social inclusion is an issue affecting both children who have experienced migration as well as those with special educational needs. In the case of the former group, in which potential social problems may be exacerbated by communication difficulties resulting from the language barrier, establishing a learning environment conducive to well-being requires careful attention to effective communication, involving both newly-arrived students and their peers from the host country. In addition to activities that can be implemented at the level of individual teaching practice, such as designing learning activities that are accessible to students who are not fluent in Polish (e.g., simplified text, universal learning design) or organising forms of work that promote intercultural cooperation (e.g., working in culturally and linguistically diverse pairs and groups, projects requiring cooperation and mutual learning), systemic measures are also necessary. These may include the sanctioning of solutions supporting the language development of students in schools, e.g., a separate 'Polish as a second language' subject in the core curriculum for students who start learning in mainstream classes and whose knowledge of Polish is insufficient for education in a Polish school, or professional development for subject teachers in the basics of language didactics (Pamuła-Berhens, 2024). In the case of students with special educational needs, their school situation is more complex and improving their social and emotional functioning may require tailored, individually designed measures. For this reason, the introduction and implementation of regular screening tests in schools aimed at the early detection of risk factors using appropriate tools and in collaboration with a team of specialists will enable a faster response and the planning of adequate forms of support (Papuda-Dolińska et al., 2024).

At the level of targeted support, the guideline 'Ensure the creation of safe schools to prevent and counteract various forms of violence at school' is also an important recommendation, although in our research, being a victim of aggression was not commonly experienced by students with migration experience. However, it did occur among students with special educational needs. In addition to preventive mechanisms, such as making it possible for students to report problems anonymously, including those relating to violence, exclusion, or unequal treatment in line with child safeguarding principles (Kaczan et al., 2021), interventions based on the whole-school approach, anti-bullying policies, classroom rules, informing parents, informal peer involvement, and working with victims are effective (Gaffney et al., 2021).

Strategies that fall within this area and help reduce the existing and identified problem of social exclusion consist of peer support (e.g., peer mentoring or mediation). Mentoring programmes that place students with special educational needs in the role of mentees result in significant improvements in their social functioning, e.g., increased self-esteem, fewer incidents of depressed mood, and improved interpersonal skills (Haft et al., 2019).



Peer mediation is used in conflict resolution. Students trained in mediation assist other students in disputes, aiming to reach a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict (Çeviker Ay et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies have shown a significant reduction in conflicts at school following the implementation of a peer mediation programme (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Schellenberg et al., 2007).

Ensuring access to support services for students with mental health needs and diverse educational needs is a guideline from the level of personalised support. Regarding the first group, this approach entails implementing targeted, individualised interventions for those in need, conducted in close cooperation with qualified mental health professionals, such as psychologists or medical professionals. Students with mental health problems usually first seek help from the education system, especially from mental health specialists working in schools and psychological-pedagogical counselling centres. Only later do they seek support from the health care system (Buchner et al., 2020; Grzelak & Žyro, 2021). The importance of intersectoral cooperation in this area has been highlighted for years, and the effectiveness of the support provided is highest when it forms a coherent system—a ‘continuum’—based on the interaction of the school, the family, and medical institutions (Lenkiewicz, 2024). At the level of individual support for students with special educational needs, it is particularly important to respond not only to school difficulties, learning problems, or unsatisfactory academic achievements, but also to the emotional needs and social functioning of the students through well-designed educational and specialist interventions based on an assessment of the functioning of the student and the class they are attending by the whole team of teachers, specialist teachers, and parents.

In conclusion, we appreciate the value of a systemic, holistic approach to supporting student well-being, especially in classrooms with diverse learning and developmental needs. A key prerequisite for the effectiveness of actions in this area is the mobilisation of the resources of the entire school community, including the active involvement of students, teachers, specialists, parents, and local partners in the processes of supporting mental health and creating a supportive learning environment. Universal prevention activities, embedded in the organisational culture and ethos of the school, should be closely linked to targeted forms of support for students at risk or experiencing difficulties with mental well-being.

Thus, the well-being of students should be treated as a priority, one of the fundamental components of an education accessible to all students. A school that places well-being at the heart of its mission creates a space conducive not only to the cognitive development of its students, but also to their emotional, social, and identity development, enabling each child to participate fully and feel a sense of belonging to the educational community.



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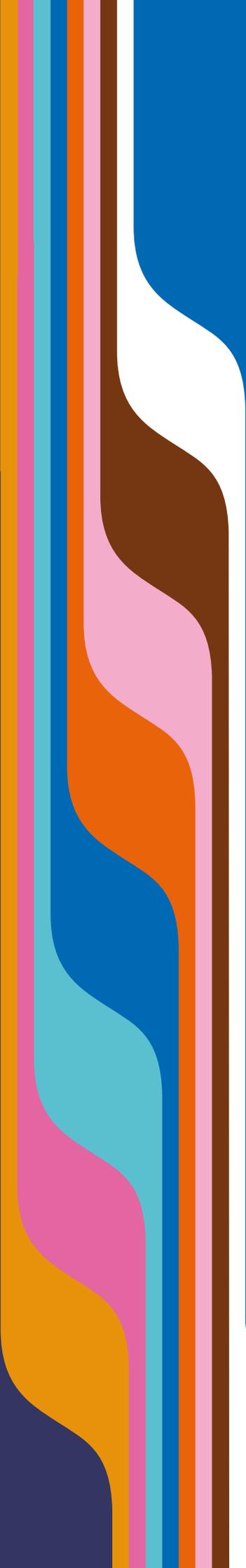
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This publication, *School Well-Being in Diverse Classrooms*, is not merely a diagnosis of the current situation, but is something more, striving for positive change aimed at 'democratising' the sense of well-being, regardless of the degree of difference and diversity experienced. I can say with conviction that this work will be extremely helpful both for those who have specialised in education, including inclusive education, for years (because learning is, after all, a lifelong process), and for those who are just beginning their adventure with education.

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The monograph is of a high standard in terms of content and methodology, and its findings bring a new perspective to the discussion on the quality of school life in socially diverse classes. The work deserves recognition as a valuable study combining rigorous research with practical application of the results. It is an important voice in the debate on inclusive education and should be of interest to both researchers and practitioners. I consider this monograph to be very important in the canon of literature that builds knowledge about inclusive education.

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