

Received: 01.05.2026
Revised: 09.07.2026
Accepted: 15.07.2026
Published: 27.07.2026

Schools as Learning Organizations: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Inclusion

Damaris BACIU*

Abstract

The increasing diversity of students' needs challenges schools to respond equitably. Inclusive education is understood not simply as placing students in the same classroom, but as reducing barriers to participation, learning, and belonging. Such a process cannot be achieved through isolated teacher effort alone, but depends on organizational conditions through which inclusion is supported by school vision, leadership, professional collaboration, and collective learning. The school as a learning organization (SLO) provides a relevant framework for examining organizational conditions that may support inclusive education. The study is theoretically grounded in the relationship between the SLO framework and the SEED model, which positions school-level organizational support as a key condition that may contribute to the development of inclusive education. This study examines how specific SLO practices are perceived by teachers and school leaders. It addresses two research questions: (1) Which SLO practices are perceived by teachers and principals as more developed, and which as less developed? and (2) To what extent are there statistically significant differences between teachers' and principals' perceptions of these practices? The study is based on a secondary analysis of a Romanian dataset of 613 respondents, including 70 principals and 543 teachers, using the standardized SLO Questionnaire adapted for the Romanian context. Given the ordinal nature of the data and their deviation from normality, nonparametric analyses were used. Friedman tests with Durbin-Conover post hoc comparisons examined differences among practices within each dimension. Mann-Whitney U tests compared principals' and teachers' perceptions at item level. The findings reveal a consistent pattern: teachers and principals perceive practices as priorities, commitments or general orientations as more developed than practices related to organizational learning mechanisms. Differences between principals and teachers are selective rather than generalized, and are most pronounced in the area of leadership. The findings are discussed in relation to their implications for school organizational conditions that may support inclusive education.

Keywords: schools as learning organizations; inclusive education; organizational practices; teachers' perceptions; principals' perceptions.

* PhD candidate in Education Sciences, West University of Timisoara, University of Turin, e-mail: damaris.pungila98@e-uvvt.ro



Introduction

Increasing diversity of students and of their needs for support and inclusion challenges schools to respond equitably. Inclusive education is understood as a process of reducing barriers to participation and learning, rather than simply placing students in the same educational space, and therefore requires systemic school transformation (Messiou, 2017). Such transformation cannot rely on individual teachers alone, but depends on organizational mechanisms through which new ideas and practices become coherent collective practices (Mincu, 2022). This is particularly relevant in Romania, where teachers generally report positive attitudes towards inclusive education, while also emphasizing the need for training and organizational support (Jurca et al., 2023). International research similarly shows that teachers' attitudes and practices are shaped by school-level support and resources (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Supriyanto, 2019), and that training alone is insufficient without ongoing school-based support (Donath et al., 2023).

In this context, the school as a learning organization (SLO) framework is a relevant analytical framework because it describes schools' capacity to learn collectively through shared vision, collaboration, professional learning, and reflection on practice (Sava, 2022) towards the desired aim – in this case, towards ensuring a better inclusion. The model developed by Kools et al. (2020) captures interdependent organizational practices that shape how schools learn, adapt, and improve. Building on the limited Romanian research on SLO, this study extends previous work by Dînşorean and Sava (2023) by focusing on item-level practices. In contrast to the objectives of Dînşorean and Sava (2023), which were to validate the instrument and to describe the SLO dimensions at a general level, the present study has two primary aims. First, it seeks to identify the specific organizational practices within each dimension that are perceived as more or less developed. Second, it aims to examine item level perception gaps between principals and teachers. This approach allows a closer interpretation of the organizational mechanisms that may require further development. It examines which SLO practices are perceived as more or less developed and whether teachers' and principals' perceptions of these practices differ significantly.

Theoretical framework

Inclusive education has been conceptualised in many different ways (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014), ranging from a definition based on physical access to a definition based on participation and belonging (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017; Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022). Establishing a single, universally accepted definition is very difficult (Ainscow, 2020a). This lack of consensus highlights the contextual nature of the term and the importance of studies explicitly specifying their intended meaning (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). This study conceptualised inclusive education as a systemic and pedagogical approach oriented towards meaningful learning, active participation and belonging for all students, irrespective their special needs for support and inclusion. This definition

supports the idea that inclusive education is an ongoing process of transformation, achieved through the continuous adjustment of practices with a view to reducing barriers to participation, learning and belonging (Ainscow, 2020b).

If inclusion is understood as a process of transformation, then school organization becomes central to translating inclusive intentions into stable practices. Systemic change cannot rely on individual teachers alone; it requires the transformation of the school as an organization, so that new actions, ways of thinking, and behaviours can be consolidated into coherent collective practices (Mincu, 2022). The implementation of inclusive education therefore depends on organizational conditions such as professional collaboration, access to resources and services, time for planning and reflection, and sustained opportunities for professional learning (Ainscow, 2005; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Research on professional learning further shows that continuing education is more effective when it is embedded in teachers' daily work and connected to the real needs of the school, rather than delivered as isolated training events (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley et al., 2007; Donath et al., 2023). Teachers' attitudes remain important for implementation, as they are associated with willingness to adapt practice and respond to diversity (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Lindner et al., 2023). In Romania, teachers generally report positive attitudes towards inclusion, but these are also linked to the need for training and support (Jurca et al., 2023). International research similarly shows that teachers' attitudes and practices are shaped by school-level resources and support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Supriyanto, 2019).

The SEED model offers an integrative framework for understanding these interdependencies (Struyf et al., 2022). It conceptualizes inclusive education across three levels: the micro level of teacher–student interaction, the meso level of school support through collaboration, leadership, and professional development, and the macro level of policy, rights, and values. From this perspective, school organization functions as a key meso-level condition for inclusion: without support and coordination at school level, inclusive education is unlikely to become sustainable practice. In this context, the school as a learning organization (SLO) provides a useful framework for understanding school-level conditions that may sustain inclusive change. Originating in the broader literature on learning organizations, the SLO concept describes schools as institutions capable of learning collectively, adapting to changing contexts, and improving their practices over time (Kools et al., 2020). The model proposed by Kools and Stoll (2020) is particularly relevant, as it was developed through a critical review of the literature and formulated in action-oriented dimensions such as shared vision, continuous professional learning, collaboration and team learning, inquiry and innovation, knowledge sharing, learning from the external environment, and learning-oriented leadership (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Stoll & Kools, 2017). The relevance of this model for the Romanian context is also supported by its previous adaptation and validation in Romania (Dînşorean & Sava, 2023). The relevance of SLO for inclusive education lies in its focus on collective learning and continuous adaptation. A shared vision can provide direction and coherence for

inclusive values; professional collaboration allows teachers to exchange knowledge and address difficulties collectively; continuous learning supports the refinement of practice; inquiry and reflection help schools identify and revise routines that may generate barriers; and external partnerships extend the resources available for responding to students' needs (Kinsella, 2020; Kools & Stoll, 2016). However, these mechanisms do not function automatically. They must be intentionally supported through decisions, resources, routines, and leadership. Leadership is therefore central in connecting vision with practice, creating the conditions for collaboration, professional learning, participation, and the use of evidence in decision-making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020; Stoll & Louis, 2007). In this sense, SEED and SLO are complementary: SEED explains the broader ecological structure of inclusive education, while SLO identifies the organizational mechanisms through which inclusion may emerge, develop, and be sustained at school level. The complementarity between SEED and SLO is based on the premise that SEED identifies the school organization as a fundamental meso-level condition for inclusive education, while the SLO framework outlines the organizational practices through which this condition can be examined empirically. In this study, the SLO is therefore used not as a direct measure of inclusion, but as a framework for analyzing organizational practices that may support inclusive development.

Methodology

The main *objective* of the study is to examine how teachers and school leaders perceive the development of their schools as learning organizations. Specifically, the study employs a *secondary data analysis*, and focuses on item-level data analysis, to identify differences in the perceived development of practices within SLO dimensions and to assess whether statistically significant differences exist between principals' and teachers' perceptions of these practices. The rationale for focusing on item-level analyses was that dimension-level scores may mask meaningful differences among specific organizational practices. A dimension may appear relatively well developed overall, while particular practices within that dimension, such as mentoring, constructive feedback, regular dialogue, use of research, or distributed leadership, may be perceived as less developed.

It should be noted that the study does not directly assess inclusive classroom practices or student outcomes. Rather, it examines organizational conditions that, according to the theoretical framework, may support the development of inclusive education.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which SLO practices are perceived as more developed or less developed?
2. To what extent are there statistically significant differences between the perceptions of principals and the perceptions of teachers regarding the SLO practices?

This study is based on a secondary analysis of the dataset originally collected by Dînşorean & Sava, (2023). The present analyses address distinct research questions and

employ analytical strategies not reported in the original study. More specifically, while previous study focused on SLO dimensions, the present study examines variation among individual practices within each dimension and compares principals' and teachers' perceptions at the level of specific items. This provides additional information about concrete organizational practices, such as mentoring, feedback, knowledge sharing, participation in vision-building, and distributed leadership. Permission to use the dataset for the purposes of the present study was obtained from the authors. While the initial dataset consisted of a *sample* of 650 respondents, 37 individuals belonging to the auxiliary staff category were excluded to allow for a focused comparison between leadership and teaching staff. Consequently, the final sample comprises $N = 613$ respondents, including 70 principals and 543 teachers.

The *instrument* used is the standardized SLO Questionnaire (Kools et al., 2020) adapted for the Romanian context (Dînşorean & Sava, 2023). The instrument is designed to assess perceptions of organizational practices of schools as learning organizations. It comprises 65 items rated on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a higher perceived level of development of the respective practices.

The questionnaire is structured around eight dimensions that represent distinct but interrelated domains of organizational practice. An overview of the dimensions and the distribution of items is provided in Table 1 – Structure of the SLO Questionnaire. Each dimension is theoretically relevant for inclusive education, as the dimensions collectively describe meso-level organizational conditions that may support teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their interaction with students.

Table 1. Structure of the SLO Questionnaire

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Focus of practices assessed</i>	<i>Number of items</i>
A	Shared vision centered on student learning	8
B	Involvement of internal and external partners in the school vision	3
C	Opportunities for continuous professional learning	10
D	Team learning and staff collaboration	10
E	Inquiry-, innovation-, and exploration-oriented culture	9
F	Systems for knowledge sharing and use of data	8
G	Learning with and from the external environment	5
H	Leadership practices that support organizational learning	12
Total		65

Evidence from the original instrument development indicates strong internal consistency across all dimensions (Kools et al., 2020). The Romanian adaptation similarly demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.90 for all eight dimensions (Dînşorean & Sava, 2023).

Data analysis was performed using a statistical processing, conducted using Jamovi (Version 2.7.12). Preliminary analyses of item-level distributions (skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro–Wilk test) revealed deviations from normality. Items exhibited negative skewness values ranging from -1.68 to -0.695 and kurtosis values ranging from -0.227 to 2.86 . Additionally, Shapiro–Wilk tests were significant for all items ($W = 0.695\text{--}0.864$, $p < .001$). Given these results and the ordinal nature of the responses (Likert 1–5 scale), nonparametric analyses were conducted (Pereira et al., 2015). For RQ1, differences among items within dimensions were examined using the Friedman test, followed by Durbin–Conover post hoc comparisons for all dimensions. For RQ2, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to analyze item-level differences between principals and teachers.

Results

To address RQ1, Friedman tests were conducted separately for each SLO dimension in order to examine whether statistically significant differences existed among the practices included in the same dimension. All eight tests indicated significant within-dimension differences, suggesting that the SLO practices were not perceived as equally developed: Dimension A, $\chi^2(7, N = 613) = 533.00$, $p < .001$; Dimension B, $\chi^2(2, N = 613) = 7.39$, $p = .025$; Dimension C, $\chi^2(9, N = 613) = 516.00$, $p < .001$; Dimension D, $\chi^2(9, N = 613) = 365.00$, $p < .001$; Dimension E, $\chi^2(8, N = 613) = 273.00$, $p < .001$; Dimension F, $\chi^2(7, N = 613) = 98.00$, $p < .001$; Dimension G, $\chi^2(4, N = 613) = 161.00$, $p < .001$; and Dimension H, $\chi^2(11, N = 613) = 557.00$, $p < .001$.

Durbin–Conover post hoc tests were conducted to determine the relative ranking of practices within each dimension. Table 2 summarises these results by presenting the practices ranked highest and lowest across all dimensions.

Overall, the results show that practices related to formal direction, general commitment, and visible organizational priorities tended to be ranked higher, whereas practices requiring sustained interaction, feedback, mentoring, or distributed participation tended to be ranked lower.

To address RQ2, differences between principals' self-evaluations (Group 1, $n = 70$) and teachers' perceptions (Group 2, $n = 543$) were examined at the item level. For each item, the Mann–Whitney U statistic, associated p value, and rank-biserial correlation were computed as a measure of effect size. Group-level descriptive statistics were examined to support the interpretation of statistically significant results.

Table 2. Highest- and lowest-ranked practices within each SLO dimension

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Rank position</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Item content</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>
A	Highest	O_A_3	The school's vision considers all students.	5.219
A	Lowest	O_A_7	All staff members are involved in developing the school's vision.	3.546
B	Highest	O_B_1	Students are invited to contribute to the school's vision.	2.033
B	Lowest	O_B_2	Parents are invited to contribute to the school's vision.	1.959
C	Highest	O_C_1	Professional learning for staff is a high priority.	6.595
C	Lowest	O_C_6	Mentors/coaches are available to help staff improve their practice.	4.418
D	Highest	O_D_7	Staff treat one another with respect.	6.488
D	Lowest	O_D_4	Staff provide one another with honest feedback.	4.926
E	Highest	O_E_1	Staff members are encouraged to experiment and innovate their practice.	5.659
E	Lowest	O_E_7	Staff members are open to others challenging their beliefs, opinions, and ideas.	4.336
F	Highest	O_F_1	The school development plan is based on learning from ongoing self-evaluation and is updated at least annually.	4.925
F	Lowest	O_F_2	Structures (systems) are in place for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff members.	4.234
G	Highest	O_G_5	The school as a whole is involved in networks or collaborations that include other schools.	3.316
G	Lowest	O_G_2	Staff actively collaborate with higher education institutions to deepen staff and students' learning.	2.649
H	Highest	O_H_1	The principal(s) participate in professional learning to improve their practice.	7.144
H	Lowest	O_H_4	The principal(s) develop others' potential to become future leaders.	5.383

For Dimensions A–G, statistically significant differences were selective rather than generalized, as shown in Table 3. Significant differences were found in Dimension A for four items related to the school vision and its orientation toward student learning ($p = .032$ to $.002$; $r = -.14$ to $-.21$), in Dimension B for one item referring to parents' contribution to the school vision ($p = .032$; $r = -.14$), in Dimension C for one item concerning the priority given to professional learning ($p = .001$; $r = -.22$), in Dimension E for three items related to innovation and inquiry ($p = .014$ to $< .001$; $r = -.16$ to $-.24$), and in Dimension F for two items concerning self-evaluation and structures for dialogue and knowledge sharing ($p = .002$ to $.003$; $r = -.20$ to $-.21$), while no statistically significant

differences were detected in Dimensions D and G. Across all significant items, principals consistently rated the practices more positively than teachers.

Although statistically significant, the effect sizes in Dimensions A–G were small to small-moderate, suggesting that the differences between principals and teachers should be interpreted cautiously. These results indicate perceptual gaps rather than strong group separation.

Table 3. Mann–Whitney U test results for significant items in Dimensions A–G

<i>Dim.</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r (rank-biserial)</i>	<i>Principals M (Median)</i>	<i>Teachers M (Median)</i>
A	O_A_1	16343	.032	–.140	4.54 (5)	4.39 (5)
A	O_A_2	15029	.002	–.209	4.54 (5)	4.26 (4)
A	O_A_3	15802	.009	–.169	4.66 (5)	4.38 (5)
A	O_A_5	15498	.008	–.185	4.31 (4)	3.98 (4)
B	O_B_2	16260	.032	–.144	4.24 (4)	4.02 (4)
C	O_C_1	14911	.001	–.215	4.59 (5)	4.23 (4)
E	O_E_1	15876	.014	–.165	4.39 (4)	4.10 (4)
E	O_E_2	14925	.001	–.215	4.44 (4)	4.09 (4)
E	O_E_3	14431	<.001	–.241	4.33 (4)	3.92 (4)
F	O_F_1	14975	.002	–.212	4.41 (5)	4.08 (4)
F	O_F_2	15200	.003	–.200	4.21 (4)	3.88 (4)

The most pronounced pattern of group differences was observed in Dimension H, where statistically significant differences were observed for all items ($p \leq .007$), as shown in Table 4. Effect sizes ranged from moderate to large, with rank-biserial correlations between $r = -.18$ and $r = -.35$. The largest effect was observed for the practice referring to principals' role in developing others' potential to become future leaders ($r = -.35$), indicating a substantial divergence between principals' and teachers' perceptions. Across this dimension, principals consistently ranked these items higher than teachers.

Table 4. Mann–Whitney U test results for significant items in Dimensions H

<i>Item</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r (rank-biserial)</i>	<i>Principals M (Median)</i>	<i>Teachers M (Median)</i>
O_H_1	14907	.001	–.22	4.67 (5)	4.36 (4)
O_H_2	14602	<.001	–.23	4.63 (5)	4.28 (4)
O_H_3	14231	<.001	–.25	4.69 (5)	4.29 (4)
O_H_4	12272	<.001	–.35	4.59 (5)	3.94 (4)
O_H_5	12955	<.001	–.32	4.63 (5)	4.12 (4)
O_H_6	14377	<.001	–.24	4.41 (4)	3.98 (4)
O_H_7	14830	<.001	–.22	4.66 (5)	4.35 (4)
O_H_8	14253	<.001	–.25	4.60 (5)	4.17 (4)
O_H_9	13620	<.001	–.28	4.71 (5)	4.29 (4)

<i>Item</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r (rank-biserial)</i>	<i>Principals M (Median)</i>	<i>Teachers M (Median)</i>
O_H_10	13945	<.001	-.27	4.67 (5)	4.29 (4)
O_H_11	15350	.004	-.19	4.47 (4)	4.15 (4)
O_H_12	15586	.007	-.18	4.61 (5)	4.33 (4)

Overall, the results indicate that differences between principals' and teachers' perceptions are selective rather than generalized. While most organizational practices are perceived similarly by both groups, systematic divergences emerge for specific practices—particularly those related to leadership. The largest effect size was observed for the practice referring to principals' role in developing others' potential to become future leaders. This suggests that principals perceive leadership capacity-building and distributed leadership as more developed than teachers do, indicating a possible gap between leadership intentions and how these opportunities are experienced by staff in everyday school practice.

Discussion

The objective of the present study was to examine the extent to which learning organization practices are perceived as developed by teachers and principals in Romanian schools. This investigation does not evaluate the implementation of inclusive education directly, but examines whether teachers and principals perceive the presence of organizational conditions that may support inclusion development.

Regarding the first research question of the study, the results outline a relatively stable pattern across the dimensions analyzed: practices that can be formulated as commitments, guidelines, or priority statements are perceived as better developed, while practices describing recurrent mechanisms of organizational learning (support in practice, regular dialogue, feedback, use of research, internal capacity development) are perceived as less developed. This pattern is supported by the organizational learning literature, which highlights that although learning is often recognized as important in schools, it remains difficult to translate into concrete and sustained procedures in everyday work (Schechter et al., 2022).

One possible explanation is that schools have begun the process of transforming themselves into learning organizations by adopting an explicit direction and priorities, but the mechanisms that enable learning to occur on a regular basis are still in the process of being consolidated. In operational terms, learning mechanisms can be understood as institutionalized arrangements through which the school collects, distributes, interprets, stores, and retrieves information relevant to teaching and the performance of the school system; without these arrangements, learning remains rather individual and fragmented (Schechter et al., 2022). In this sense, the results suggest that without a good consolidation of these mechanisms, inclusive education may risk remaining at the level of intention, as it is limited by the infrastructure through which support for teachers becomes constant in daily practice.

In terms of vision, the results suggest that the participatory process of vision building is perceived as being less developed (involvement of teachers and parents). This result may indicate that the vision functions more as a formal benchmark than as an ongoing process of negotiation and guidance for daily decisions. The literature on "shared vision" emphasizes that vision becomes functional when it is co-constructed and periodically revisited within the school community, not just communicated as a statement (Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024; Kools & Stoll, 2016). Consequently, a vision oriented toward inclusion that is not maintained through participation may have less influence on everyday school practices.

With regard to continuous learning, a similar difference can be observed between orientation and support: priority given to professional development is ranked high, while the availability of mentors/coaching and regular feedback is ranked low. This result is consistent with the idea that schools can promote training as a value, but have fewer mechanisms through which learning is integrated into daily practice. Recent Romanian literature on SLO consistently emphasizes that the existence of training opportunities is not sufficient in itself, and that the interpretation of results must distinguish between the presence of a training framework and its quality/integration into the professional routine of staff (Rădulicea & Sava, 2025). The literature on professional development emphasizes that participation in training may be insufficient for stable change if it is not complemented by practical support, such as mentoring, coaching, and feedback (Donath et al., 2023). Such support can help teachers translate principles into teaching decisions, observe their effects, and adjust interventions over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley, 2011). For inclusive education, this area may be important because inclusion involves a continuous process of identifying and reducing barriers to learning, which requires support for diagnosis, adaptation, and fine-tuning of practice (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Without solid support, there is a risk that inclusive practices will depend on individual initiative and that teachers will feel unsupported in implementing inclusive practices.

The results regarding collaboration and innovation complete the picture with the same nuances. On the one hand, there is general collaboration and a respectful collegial climate; on the other hand, the comfort of asking for advice and giving/receiving direct feedback is less perceived. This may suggest that there are functional relationships, but collaboration is not fully institutionalized in stable routines that support deep professional learning. Similarly, teachers are encouraged to take initiative and experiment, but open discussion of failures and openness to challenging ideas appear to be less developed. One possible interpretation is that there is a focus on improvement, but the conditions necessary for consistent feedback and learning from difficulties are not sufficiently established. For inclusion, this may be important because adapting teaching for vulnerable students involves trial and error, and learning from what does not work becomes a component of progress, not an individual failure (Donath et al., 2023).

With regard to knowledge and learning exchange systems, the results suggest that self-evaluation and planning are perceived as being better implemented than the use of research to improve practice and the existence of structures for regular dialogue between teachers. This contrast is relevant for SLO because planning and self-evaluation produce educational value when they are connected to regular conversations about teaching and to the shared interpretation of evidence (Kools & Stoll, 2016). A related finding that may help explain the weaker use of research is that partnerships with universities are perceived as less developed than partnerships with other schools. In the absence of sustained collaborations with academia, schools may have fewer opportunities to access research and guidance for translating research into teaching; thus, the use of research may remain peripheral, even if planning and self-evaluation exist.

In the area of leadership, the lowest-rated practice is developing the potential of others to become leaders, and this coincides with the greatest difference in perception between teachers and principals. In this sense, weaker development of this aspect may contribute to maintaining some practices at a rather declarative level, without consistent routines to support learning in practice. At the same time, this result may indicate a possible direction for further organizational development. Rather than demonstrating a specific stage of development, the findings suggest that leadership practices could be further oriented toward distributed participation (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Regarding the second question of the study, the results indicated that the most significant discrepancies between teachers and principals were identified in the area of leadership. Similarly, the study conducted by (Dînşorean & Sava, 2023) identifies discrepancies between teachers and principals in the areas of leadership and vision. This result is relevant because leadership is often described as a central factor for school transformation, through its role in creating conditions, allocating time, and establishing routines for collaboration and collective learning (Leithwood et al., 2020; Mincu, 2022). The differences in perception can be interpreted as a sign that leadership intentions and actions are not always experienced similarly in teachers' daily lives. In other words, the school may have elements of direction and organization that are reported more positively by principals, but teachers perceive less real access to support and opportunities, which may limit the consolidation of SLO mechanisms.

A similar pattern can be observed in relation to significant differences found in other dimensions, where principals also tended to rate school practices more positively than teachers. These practices concern, for example, the extent to which teachers are encouraged to innovate, participate in shaping the school vision, or benefit from regular structures for professional dialogue. Taken together, these results suggest that the differences between teachers and principals are not generalized across all SLO practices, with the most substantial divergences emerging in the area of leadership.

Limitations

The interpretation of the results must take into account several limitations. First, the data are perceptual and based on self-reporting, which means that they reflect participants' subjective assessments of SLO practices rather than direct observations of implementation. Therefore, response biases or differences in item interpretation may have influenced the results. Second, the imbalance between group sizes (principals $n = 70$, teachers $n = 543$) may affect the sensitivity of the Mann–Whitney U test and the interpretation of group differences. The unequal group sizes have no effect on effect size estimates, but they may reduce their stability and precision, particularly because the principals' group is much smaller. Finally, although the study is relevant to inclusive education, it does not directly measure inclusive classroom practices or student outcomes. Thus, the link between perceived SLO practices and inclusion remains interpretative and theoretically supported, but not empirically confirmed in this design.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggest that Romanian schools display several practices of learning organizations, particularly in terms of shared priorities, commitment to professional learning, and general openness to improvement. However, the least developed practices are those that sustain organizational learning in everyday school life: mentoring and coaching, regular professional dialogue, constructive feedback, the use of research, and the development of distributed leadership. From the perspective of organizational conditions relevant to inclusive education, this indicates that schools may not be limited primarily by a lack of inclusive intention, but by the still-fragile organizational mechanisms needed to translate such intentions into consistent and sustainable practice. At the same time, because the study examines perceived organizational conditions rather than inclusive classroom practices or student outcomes, the findings should be understood as evidence of schools' organizational readiness to support inclusion, not as direct evidence of inclusive practice implementation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Simona Sava for her careful supervision, valuable guidance, and support throughout the development of this study. I would also like to thank Adela Dînşorean for providing access to the database used in this research.

Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools

During the preparation of this manuscript, artificial intelligence tools were used to support the writing and revision process. ChatGPT was used for brainstorming ideas related to the theoretical framework, for methodological guidance, and for support in identifying the concrete steps required to conduct the statistical analyses in Jamovi. It was also used to refine some sections of the text and to improve the overall coherence,

clarity, and logical structure of the manuscript. DeepL Translate and DeepL Write were used to improve the quality, fluency, and academic style of the English writing. All AI suggestions were critically reviewed, edited, and verified by the author, who remains fully responsible for the content, accuracy, interpretation of results, and final version of the manuscript.

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