

Forging a citizen through teaching rhetoric and argumentation: Insights from ICCS 2022 for Slovenia

Žan Lep^{1,2}, Janja Žmavc^{1,3}, & Eva Klemenčič Mirazchiyski¹

¹Educational Research Institute, Slovenia

²Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

³Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, Slovenia

The 31st International Scientific Conference Educational Research and School Practice
Faculty of Education, Belgrade, December 6 2024

Introduction

Rhetoric and Citizenship Education: A Discursive Practice

- Citizenship is conceptualised as a discursive practice:
 - ... *how notions and practices of citizenship are formed and realised discursively, how we 'speak' citizenship* ... (Kock & Villadsen, 2012, 2017, p. 572)
- Classical rhetorical education:
 - integrates critical reading, active listening, and persuasive writing and speaking
 - aims at forming knowledgeable and active (male) citizens.
- Modern foci of rhetorical education:
 - civic participation (Danisch, 2015; Dainville & Sans, 2016; Ferry, 2017)
 - critical literacy (Mortensen, 2012; Rutten & Soetaert, 2013)
 - stylistics and oracy (Burke, 2010; Murphy, 2020; Holmes-Henderson, Žmavc, & Kaldahl, 2022).
- Empirical research supports explicit teaching of rhetoric and argumentation: (Costello, 1995)
 - Enhances critical thinking, cultural literacy, and democratic engagement (Brett & Thomas, 2014; Rapanta et al., 2020)

Introduction

“Linguistic Challenges” in Citizenship Education in Slovenia

- Taught for 20+ years (compulsory subject, elective subject, and cross-curricular):
 - focus on skills for interaction, critical thinking, social responsibility, and democracy. [\(European Commission, 2017\)](#)

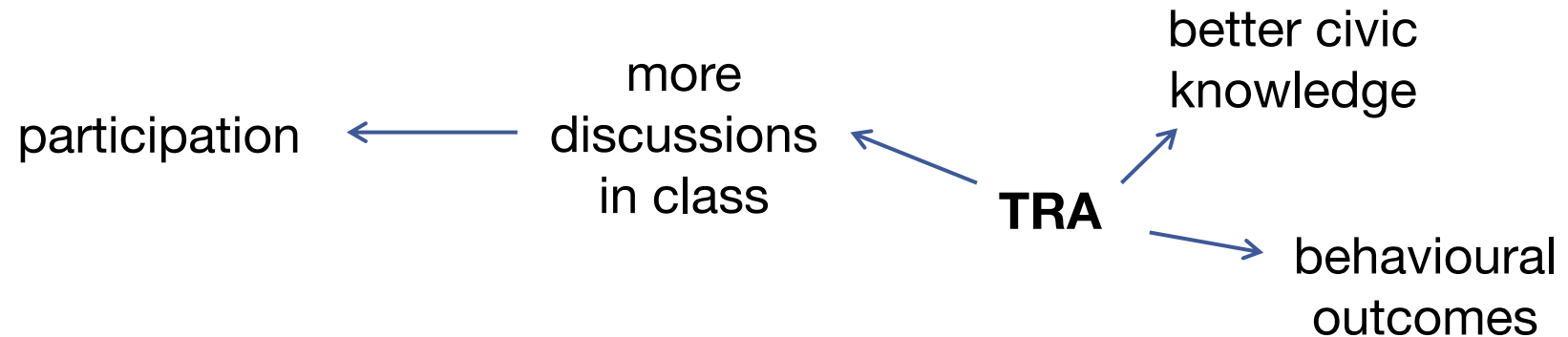
Gap: Limited focus on the systematic instruction of rhetoric and argumentation; treated as spontaneous skills.

Exception: rhetoric is taught as a 9th-grade compulsory-elective, but only 60–70 of 455 schools.

Problem and Hypotheses

How is TRA related with better student's civic outcomes?

- TRA is not considered emancipatory in Slovenia
- The proposed relationships could highlight the importance of TRA in contemporary citizenship education and forging engaged citizens



Methods

Data and procedure

- ICCS 2022 data for Slovenia
- Computer based testing
- 3466 Slovenian 8th grade students (1749 boys, 1707 girls)
- 12 to 16 years old ($M = 13.93$, $SD = 0.36$)
- Analysis conducted in R (RALSA, lavaan)

Methods

Instruments

Scales available in the international dataset

- Students' participation in civic activities at school
- Students' expected active political participation
- Students' expected electoral participation
- Students' participation in wider community groups or organizations
- Students' perceptions of openness in classroom discussions
- Students' beliefs about the importance of conventional citizenship activities
- Civic knowledge

Control variables

- Gender
- Immigration status (local, immigrant background)
- Language use at home (other language, Slovenian)

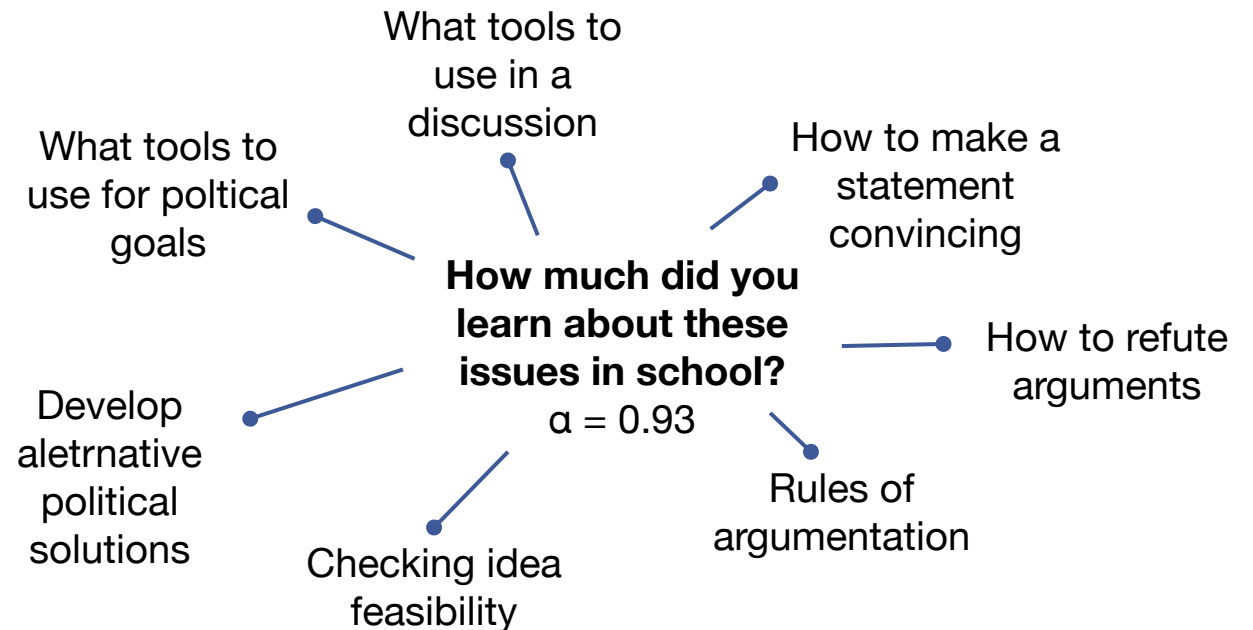
Methods

Teaching of rhetoric and argumentation (TRA)

CFA: $\chi^2 (13) = 275.78, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99,$
 $RMSEA = 0.079, 90\% CI [0.071, 0.087], SRMR = 0.028$

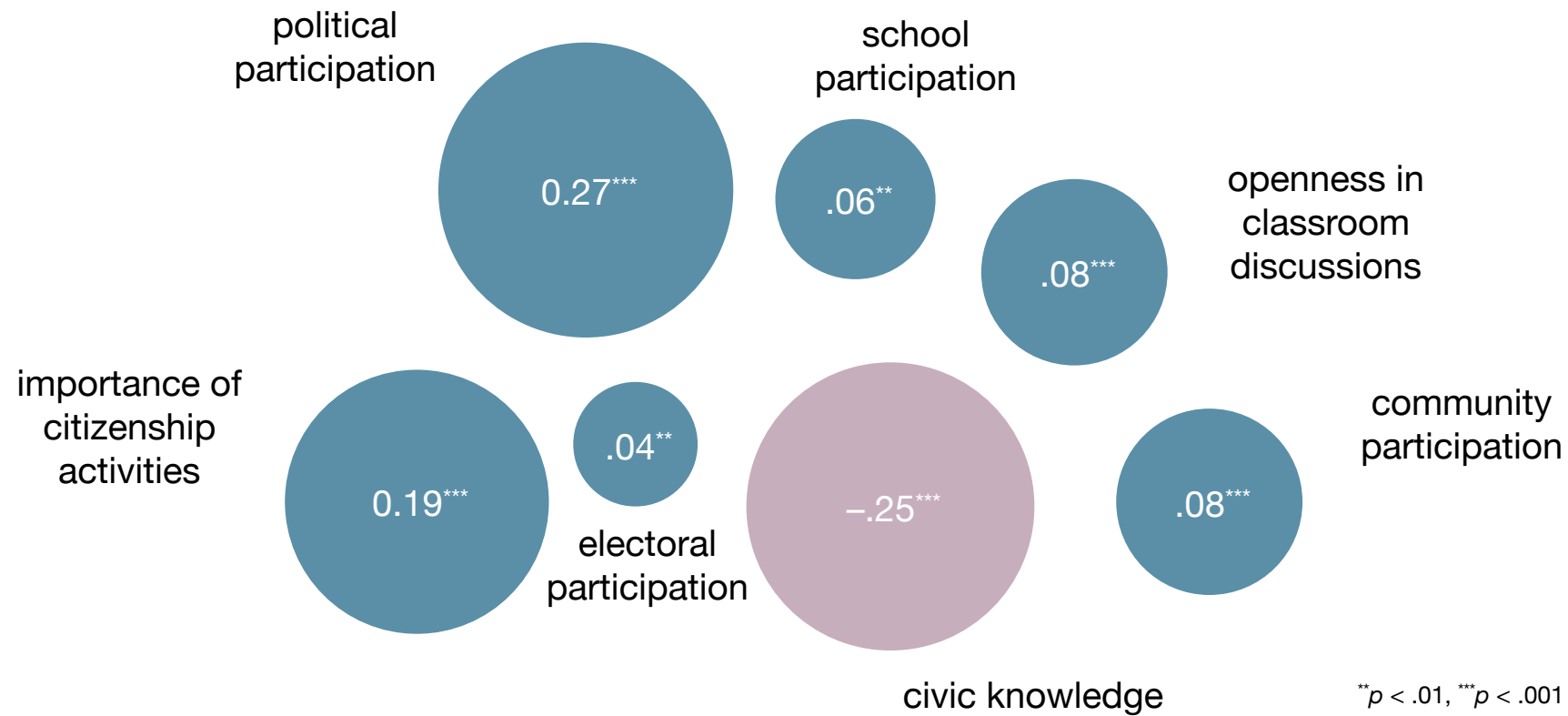
Descriptives: $M = 2.45, SD = 0.76$
 (between “to a small extent” and
 “to some extent”)

Good dispersion of results.



Results

Correlations with TRA

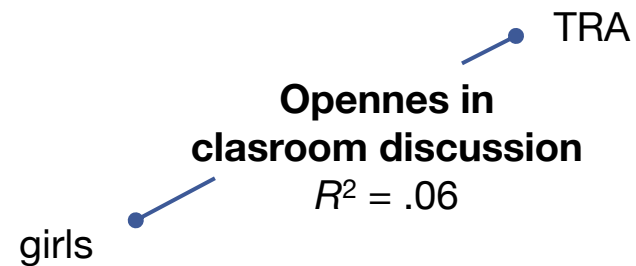


Results

Predicting openness in classroom discussion

Predictor: TRA

Control variables: gender, immigration status, language used at home

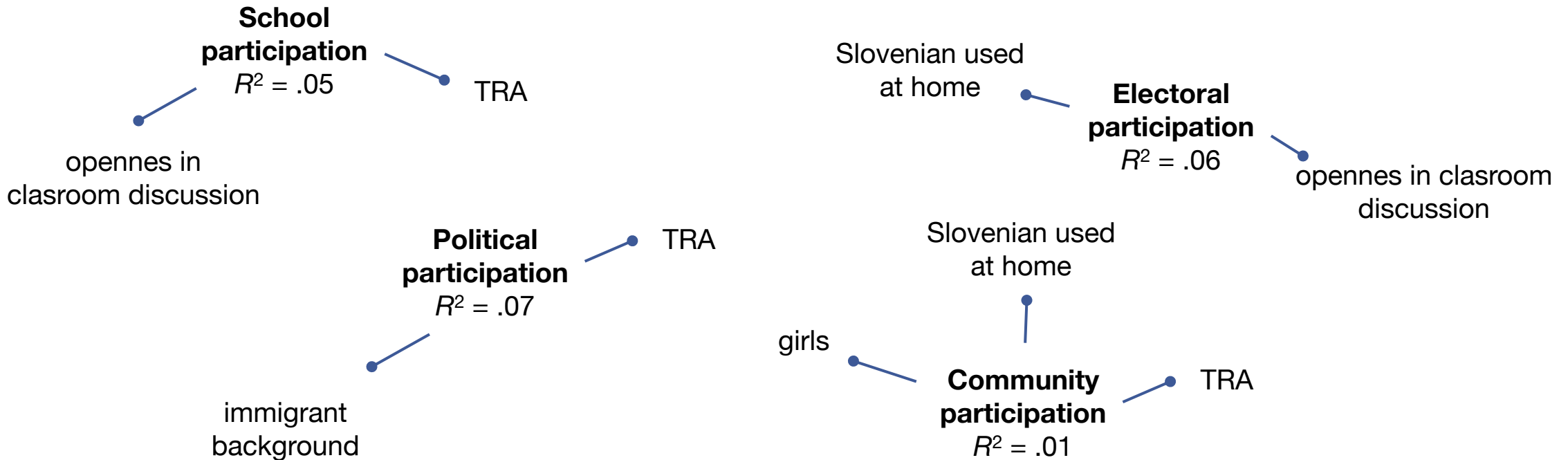


Results

Predicting behavioural outcomes

Predictors: TRA, openness in classroom discussion

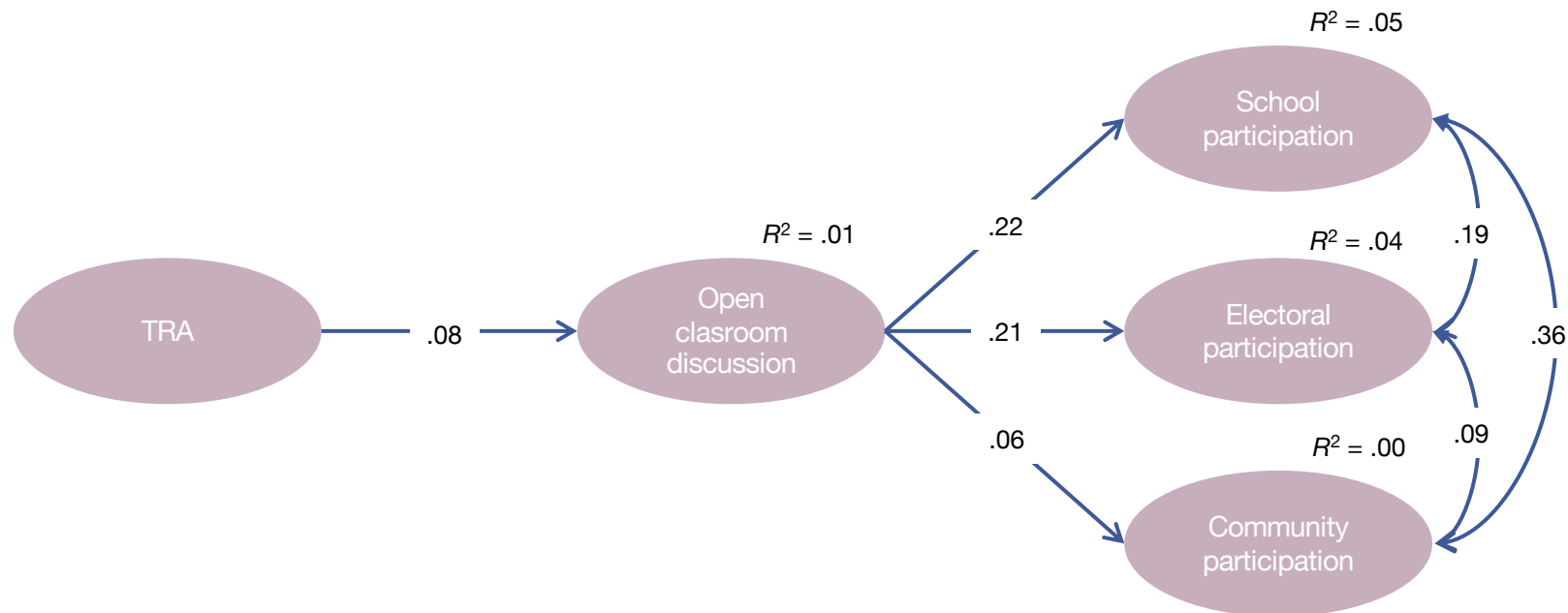
Control variables: gender, immigration status, language used at home



Results

Mediation

Model fit: $\chi^2(3) = 18.70, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.94,$
 $RMSEA = 0.040, 90\% CI [0.024, 0.058], SRMR = 0.019$



Discussion

- Limited range of some outcome scores (low end heavy) → small shares of explained variance
- Still, TRA contributes to more discussion in class and various behavioural outcomes both directly and indirectly
- Negative correlation between civic knowledge and TRA suggests that students with better civic knowledge sense a lack of RA skills
- **Limitations:** Self-evaluations (need for more objective measures), hypothetical questions, correlational design
- Possible interventions and action research

Time for rethorical questions and otherwise...

The research was conducted within the research programme *Educational Research* (P5-0106) funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, and supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Slovenia (contract nr. C3350-24-431002).

✉ zan.lep@pei.si