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DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS OF POLISH PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: TEACHERS' OPINION

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Abstract. The concept of success has been known to a man since the dawn of time, and even more so today, but it can be understood in different ways. Success applies to people of all ages, genders and locations. Although the concept of success is understood in different ways, it can be assumed that most people strive in their lives to achieve the goals they have set for themselves, and therefore to succeed. It is worth noting that it is not only adults who have the opportunity for success, but also children. Therefore, paying scientific attention to pupils' school success is a need, as it pays off in adulthood with self-confidence, increased motivation to take on challenges and a sense of empowerment. For this reason, the focus of the designed research was to investigate the factors that, in the opinion of teachers, determine the achievement of school success by pupils in primary school grades I-III in eastern Poland. The main research objective was to determine the factors that condition the school success of pupils attending primary school grades I-III. The research sample consisted of 180 teachers. All the respondents worked with pupils in grades I-III and had at least 5 years of work experience in the teaching profession. A non-standardised survey questionnaire was used to obtain research data. The research was conducted at the beginning of 2023. The results from the surveys identified the most important determinants of school success for pupils in primary school grades I-III in eastern Poland. Teachers did not find that gender differentiated attitudes to learning among pupils at younger school ages or achievement of school success. The key to school success is the way the teacher works with students. It is important to choose working methods that are tailored to children's developmental levels, aptitudes and interests. Some of the interviewees indicated actions to be improved in terms of cooperation with the pupils' family environment. Knowing the relationships indicated, actions can be taken to optimise them, which will certainly be the subject of scientific reflection.

Keywords: pupil, younger school age, school success, teacher, school.

1. INTRODUCTION

The desire to succeed has accompanied a man from the dawn of time to the present day. It is a phenomenon that can be encountered when analysing history throughout the ages. Over the years, the pattern of the "successful man" has changed, but whether we look at distant times or at the present day, there is a common denominator - the feeling of fulfilment and happiness that accompanies successful people. So, is the concept of happiness the same as the concept of success? There is no unambiguous answer to this question, as it all depends on the person experiencing it and his or her subjective feelings (Vallerand, 2008, Bandura, 1997). In general terms, success can be defined as the achievement of a chosen goal, the realisation of one's own plans, and often also the related acquisition of popularity, wealth or a high social position, although this is not the rule. Depending on one's area of interest and

personal values and beliefs, different people will associate success differently. Regardless of how the concept is understood, it can be assumed that most people strive in their lives to realise the plans they have set for themselves, and therefore to achieve success. It is worth noting that it is not only adults who have the opportunity to succeed, but also children (Duckworth, 2016). Often, the first place where young people encounter a sense of success is in kindergarten and school. This is also true for children who are in early childhood education. Consequently, undertaking a scientific reflection on the determinants of school success for pupils in primary school grades I-III will be presented in this article from a theoretical and empirical perspective.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It is important to note that success in schooling is influenced by many factors, including the period before a child enters school (Long et al., 2012). Research indicates that already in the prenatal period parents, mainly the mother, have an impact on their child's development. This ranges from factors related to biological functioning, such as adequate nutrition, sufficient sleep or limiting medication, to stimulating the intellectual development of the yet unborn child. All the parents' actions do not go unnoticed by their child. The period after the child's birth until around the age of three is extremely important for the child's future functioning. The first three years should be spent with the mother, or with another carer, with whom the child will have the opportunity to form a strong bond that will become the basis for independent exploration of the world and a confident entry into the next stages of development. It is important to foster a sense of security in the child and give him or her the opportunity to deal with adversity independently, which contributes to harmonious development both physically and intellectually. All these activities contribute to the child's school readiness, which will help him or her to find his or her way in the new reality (Dyrda, 2012). Starting school is associated with the first major failures and successes in a child's life. Therefore, it is important to show children support and create opportunities in order to succeed in school. The sense of achievement and the desire to achieve self-satisfaction, but also admiration among others, is genetically determined, making humans strive to achieve them from an early age (Roeser, et al., 1996; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). The role of the teacher and the school is to support these aspirations, which can contribute to the development of pupils' abilities and talents. The period of early childhood education is categorised as the first school stage in Poland and is extremely important in the child's development as it influences the subsequent stages of schooling. The first school successes and failures build the child's self-esteem and attitude to the challenges they face (Boryszewska, 2004, p.12). The period of early childhood education is a key stage in life that determines the further schooling of young people. Children in this period are still at the time of their most intensive development, which should be supported by didactic and educational activities. In order for a child to have a chance to succeed, they should put in a lot of effort (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013). No less work is required by the actions of parents and teachers who, as significant persons in the child's life, should strive to nurture and educate in a spirit of selfless love, support and respect (Oriol et. al., 2017).

Regarding the systematisation of factors influencing school success, some difficulty with this should be noted due to the different criteria for their division. Certain educators divide factors into endogenous factors, related to the personal predispositions of each pupil, which is due to the potential inherent in the individual, and exogenous factors, which depend on the influence of the external environment in which the individual lives (Musial, 2017). Strong influence of external factors in achieving school success is pointed out by psychologist Andrzej Sękowski. According to him, a measure of achieved school success is positive grades, and a high-grade point average drawn from them is supposed to indicate the level of students' ability to find their way in school reality (2000, p. 89). The author also emphasises the importance of high results obtained in competitions and Olympiads in achieving a sense of success (2000, p. 49).

In analysing the phenomenon of school success, educationalist Krystyna Kuligowska came to the conclusion that it can be identified in two ways. Firstly, with the assimilation by the child of knowledge and skills described in the curriculum, and secondly, with evoking changes in the pupil's personality through the teaching content provided, as well as a result of educational activities undertaken by the school (1984, p. 67). A slightly different position is adopted by Stanisław Witkowski, who also refers to the influence of external factors, but draws attention to other aspects. In his opinion, the achievement of school success is not limited to satisfaction within intellectual cognition, but also concerns the functioning of the individual in a group, which allows the formation of certain skills useful for life in society (2000, pp. 48-49).

External factors are not only related to activities within the school, the environment closest to the child, i.e., the family and its level of functioning, is also crucial in the process of achieving school success. In the family home, as in the school, the atmosphere is important, as are appropriate living conditions that provide the child with a sense of security. Relationships between family members translate into every aspect of an individual's functioning. In the case of children from incomplete or broken families, it should be assumed that they may face greater disadvantages and problems than their peers coming from complete and well-functioning families (Borawska, 2007, p. 4; Hałaburda, 2020, p. 11)

Other authors, on the other hand, attribute greater importance in achieving school success to innate factors not entirely dependent on the pupils themselves. According to Jolanta Bączkowska, it is the inner potential of the individual that determines his/her success. She points to talent and the level of intelligence. The general degree of fitness of the organism, the state of health, or the degree of physical development is also not without significance (2022). It is difficult to disagree with this position, given that one of the highest goods of a human being is his or her health. Lack of homeostasis means that a person is unable to realise his or her full potential.

Agnieszka Borowska, on the other hand, looks at issues related to the psyche and sees a significant impact of a student's self-esteem on their success in school education. She draws attention to the need to give the child the opportunity to make his or her own decisions and to build a sense of security. She sees a correlation between self-confidence and success. She motivates her beliefs by saying that children with self-esteem are more courageous, open-minded and unafraid to take action, and that they are better able to cope with failure than students with low self-esteem (2007). Taking into account these divisions of factors, a generalised classification of factors influencing pupils' school achievement can be formulated. The first group of determinants includes intrinsic factors, inherent in the child's personality, which can be referred to by the term 'pupil' (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Casey & Caudle, 2013; Corpus et al., 2009). The second group are external factors, among which are social causes, residing in the family and the social environment (which can be referred to as 'the environment') and causes residing in the functioning of the school (i.e. didactic causes - related to the curriculum and the educational system, the personality of the teacher, the conditions of the didactic work – the equipment of the school and the organisation of the work) (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Oriol et al., 2017)

In the light of the literature, it is possible to make the claim that there is no single key determinant of school success but that it is the sum of a very large number of different factors that depend to a greater or lesser extent on the pupils themselves as well as on the environment in which they grow up. Some of these factors are difficult to assign to a group of factors such as endogenous or exogenous. When reflecting on pupils' achievement and success at school, but also on school failure, which cannot be ignored in the school environment, it should be borne in mind that the different categories of factors are linked to each other through interactions of various kinds and in many respects constitute a syndrome that determines the school achievement of the pupils concerned, and the degree to which these factors are intensified determines a child's success or failure at school. It is the sense of success that gives rise to a person's willingness to take on new challenges and unleashes creativity, while failure breeds frustration and has a negative impact on self-esteem. The task of teachers is to enable pupils to gain satisfaction during their education, which can perhaps translate into their future life. With this

approach, an informed, satisfied society can be shaped, ready to take action.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The above theoretical background indicates that there is a wide spectrum of factors influencing pupils' school success. School and teachers have a key role to play in this process. It is their responsibility to ensure that pupils have opportunities to achieve learning achievements that lead to success, which will pay off in adulthood with self-confidence, increased motivation to take on challenges, and a sense of empowerment as a driving force in action. For this reason, the research design focused on investigating the factors that, in the opinion of teachers, determine the achievement of school success in pupils attending grades I-III of primary schools in eastern Poland. The main research objective was to determine the factors that condition school success in pupils attending primary school grades I-III. For the purposes of the research, the main problem was posed in the form of a question: what determinants influence the achievement of school success in pupils attending grades I-III of primary school in eastern Poland in the opinion of teachers? Specific problems were also identified:

- How do teachers define the concept of school success?
- What factors are involved in creating school success among pupils of early childhood education?
- What is the contribution of the pupil himself/herself in the process of achieving school success?

The research sample consisted of 180 primary school teachers from eastern Poland. All the respondents worked with pupils in grades I-III and had at least 5 years of experience in the teaching profession. In terms of gender, the respondents were female, proving that working in grades I-III is still the domain of women. A non-standardised survey questionnaire was used to obtain research data. The research was conducted in early 2023.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first of the questions exploring teachers' views on the impact of factors on school success addressed the question of how the group of people surveyed understood and defined this concept. It was an open-ended question because of the assumption made to find out the individual answers of the teachers based on their own experiences. The answers given are very similar to each other, although they were formulated in different ways. The majority of teachers reported that in their opinion, school success is an effective process of acquiring knowledge by pupils, resulting in their mastery of knowledge and skills in accordance with what the core curriculum stipulates in a given grade. With this approach, the teachers link pupils' achievement of high learning results, which are reflected in positive grades and high places won in subject competitions and obtaining the maximum number of points in school examinations. In their statements, the teachers pointed out that certain favourable factors are necessary for school success, such as the pupils' good health and well-being, their innate predispositions, good organisation of school work and a nurturing environment conducive to learning. Such an extensive explanation of this concept by the surveyed group of teachers allows the assumption to be made that teachers understand what school success is and know how they can help pupils achieve it. This is an extremely important approach, because without understanding the mechanisms for achieving school success, it is not possible to create the conditions for pupils to develop a sense of self-confidence.

The next question raised the issue of how the teacher works with pupils and its impact on school success. Respondents answered the question: does the way in which they conduct their school activities condition pupils' learning success. All 180 respondents, i.e., 100% unambiguously indicated, the answer "yes", which allows us to assume the statement that they are aware that the school success depends on their way of working with students. The result obtained makes it possible to accept as correct the statement that the competence and experience of teachers in this matter have an important role. Some

research results, in addition to the teacher's work with pupils, even point to the importance of matching school time to pupils' biological rhythms in increasing pupils' chances of success (Rodríguez Ferrante et al., 2023).

With regard to the detailing of teachers' work with pupils, the next question in the survey questionnaire aimed to find out the teaching method or methods that the respondents believe are most effective in working with pupils of younger school age. The respondents considered the practical method to be the most effective one, with 53% in favour. The second most effective method was an observation-based method such as demonstration, which was favoured by 30 % of people. The activity-based method received a score of 17%, while the verbal method was not mentioned by any of the respondents. Taking into account the answers given by the respondents, it can be seen that the methods they use most often in practice are those which received the highest percentage score in this list. Thus, the appropriate choice of methods by the teachers is one of the factors for the school success of the pupils. The importance of working methods in pupils' school success is indicated by a recent study conducted by a team of researchers from China, who identified the project method as effective in pupils' success in mathematics at the primary school level (Rehman et al., 2023).

Another factor analysed was peer relations and the atmosphere in the school classroom. The vast majority of respondents - 87% - felt that both the relationships between pupils and the general atmosphere in the classroom have a significant impact on the level of learning. Not without significance, according to those surveyed, are the collegial relationships formed between children that influence school success. Positive relationships result in children eager to attend school, able to work in groups with greater commitment and to support each other. Only 13% of respondents felt that these factors do not have an impact on pupil achievement. The answers given indicate that teachers recognise the influence of the school environment on pupils' achievement. Therefore, it can be assumed that care should be taken not only about the level of knowledge imparted to pupils, but also about creating a conducive environment for relationships between children. The importance of relationships, friends and school experiences as predictors of success is indicated by the results of some studies conducted in other countries (Oriol et al., 2017).

Teachers were asked whether, in their opinion, children are likely to succeed in the school they attend. All 100% of those surveyed felt that the school provides their students with such opportunities. This is a satisfactory result of the survey, allowing us to assume that many pupils attending grades I-III have had a taste of success in their previous school education. The results of the survey showed that the teachers are satisfied with the ways of working of the school they work in, but when asked to give their opinion on what they could do to increase the pupils' chances of success, they describe what they think a school that supports the holistic development of the pupils should look like. This question was of an open-ended type. Teachers pointed out that school should evoke positive associations in pupils, which is not possible without taking care of the right atmosphere during and outside classes. That is why it is so important, according to the teachers, to take care of building positive pupil-teacher or pupil-pupil relationships. Another important aspect from the teachers' point of view is that school should be a place for discovering the world and not for fulfilling an unpleasant obligation to attend classes. In both cases, teachers perceive the school as a pupil-friendly place. In addition to human resources, material resources are also important, which is why it is important to continuously develop and modernise the school to equip classrooms with interesting teaching aids and to make changes to keep up with the dynamic development of the world.

The specific nature of teachers' work also includes their cooperation with the pupils' family environment. The vast majority of respondents - 97% - considered cooperation with parents fruitful, with only 3% admitting that pupils' parents do not interact with them as they expect. Despite the appearance of these negative opinions, which should certainly be clarified, the majority of positive data allows us to conclude that parents willingly cooperate with teachers. It is important that this cooperation is successful and without major problems, because it is well known that the teacher is not able to

influence the children's attitudes, build up lasting knowledge or support their holistic development without the parents' help. School and family should work together as indicated by the results of other studies (Oriol et al., 2017).

The teachers surveyed were asked about the impact of their parents' financial situation on learning achievement. The largest number of respondents, 73%, felt that material situation was a minor determinant of learning success. Significantly fewer, 20%, were in favour of a high influence of this factor, while 7% of respondents opined that the family's material situation has no influence on children's learning success. None of the teachers indicated this factor as the most important in the educational process. These are satisfactory results from the researcher's point of view, as they lead to the belief that every child, regardless of which family they come from - poor or wealthy - has equal opportunities at school. The decreasing influence of family socio-economic status on pupils' school achievement over the last decade was shown by a study conducted in Brazil (Ferrão & Alves, 2023).

Questions in the survey questionnaire addressed the impact of gender on learning achievement. Teachers were asked whether they thought gender had an impact on school success. The majority of respondents, 87%, felt that gender did not have an impact on learning success. Only 10% perceived such an impact, while 3% felt they had no opinion on the subject. Such results suggest that there is no clear difference in school achievement between girls and boys in early childhood education. Analyses of some research results show that there are gender differences in terms of school achievement, particularly for primary school pupils (Weis, Heikamp & Trommsdorff, 2013; Ferrão & Alves, 2023).

Teachers were asked to indicate which endogenous factors are most significant in the educational process of children. The highest score was given to answers indicating the influence of the level of intelligence-80%, followed by pupils' motivation-indicated by 10% of the respondents. This was followed by the pupils' state of health - indicated by 6% of respondents and the pupils' personality was indicated by 4% of respondents. Similar endogenous factors are indicated by the American study by Gallen et al. (Gallen et al., 2023) and an earlier US study by Lerner et al. (Lerner et al., 2015).

The last question in the group of questions investigating the influence of endogenous factors on pupils' school success is about finding out teachers' opinions on whether each pupil is able to achieve satisfactory learning results and on what they think this depends. Almost all respondents 97% agreed that in their opinion all pupils are equally predisposed to achieve satisfactory learning results. However, they noted that it mainly depends on the pupil themselves. According to the interviewees, this is influenced by the child's motivation, the amount of time spent studying, the effort put in, or the level of intelligence. Some teachers also recognise the influence of the family environment on this process. This is a rather optimistic assumption, allowing one to believe that with hard work much can be achieved. In the answers given to this question, the teachers' belief that endogenous factors may be more important in the educational process than exogenous factors were outlined. These factors were also pointed out by some findings from primary school pupils in Chile and the USA, further recognising the importance of self-control, conscientiousness and perseverance (Oriol et al., 2017; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Duckworth & Carlson, 2013).

The final question raised the issue of pupils' school achievement in terms of its long-term impact on their lives. Teachers were asked whether the school success of pupils in grades I-III has an impact on their future. All teachers felt that any achievement gained even at a lower stage of education has positive results in the future. None of the teachers considered this factor to be without influence on the child's further development. Such results support the assumption that school success influences the child's psyche by building a positive self-image and gives them courage to overcome difficulties in their adult life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the conducted research made it possible to determine the most important

determinants of school success of primary school pupils grades I-III in eastern Poland. This topic is so important because learning about the detailed determinants of pupils' success provides the basis for creating a society satisfied with life, with a sense of self-esteem. Providing pupils with opportunities for learning achievement by teachers will certainly pay off in their adult life with self-confidence, greater motivation to take on challenges and a sense of agency as a driving force in action. The analysis of the research results has led to the following conclusions, which can be used in school practice:

Knowledge of the concept of school success and the factors influencing pupils' achievement of success provides the opportunity for teachers to ensure that they create opportunities for pupils to achieve it;

Teachers do not find that the pupils' gender at younger school ages differentiate their attitudes to learning or the achievement of success. Hence, it is important to provide both boys and girls with the same educational opportunities and should not be guided by stereotypes when working with the youngest;

The way in which the teacher works with the pupils is crucial for school success. It is important to choose working methods that are adapted to children's developmental level, predispositions and interests. Practical and observation-based methods are considered to be the most effective methods of working with pupils in the younger grades.

According to the teachers, every pupil is capable of success. This is a very optimistic assumption, allowing one to believe that the joint work of teachers and pupils will overcome difficulties and bring results.

Some of the respondents indicate actions to be improved in terms of cooperation with the pupils' family environment. Knowing the indicated relationships, actions can be taken to optimise them.

Summarising the answers given by the respondents, it can be clearly concluded that they perceive the influence of different types of conditions on the school success of their pupils and are able to define them. Knowing this relationship, actions can be taken in the school environment to optimise them. Hopefully, these environments will also make effort to change what is disadvantageous in these environments from the perspective of pupils' welfare.

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Поняття успіху відоме людині з давніх-давен, а тим більше сьогодні, але розуміти його можна по-різному. Успіх стосується людей різного віку, статі та місця проживання. Хоча поняття успіху розуміють по-різному, можна припустити, що більшість людей прагнуть у своєму житті досягти цілей, які вони перед собою поставили, а отже, досягти успіху. У статті зазначено, що можливість досягти успіху мають не лише дорослі, а й діти, тому приділяти наукову увагу їх шкільній успішності є необхідністю, адже вона винагороджується в дорослому житті впевненістю в собі, підвищеною мотивацією до прийняття викликів та відчуттям власної значущості. З цієї причини основна увага в підготовленому дослідженні була зосереджена на вивченні факторів, які, на думку вчителів, визначають досягнення шкільного успіху учнями початкових класів (I-III класів) у східній Польщі. Вибірка дослідження складалася з 180 вчителів. Всі респонденти працювали з учнями I-III класів і мали щонайменше 5 років досвіду роботи в педагогічній професії. Для отримання даних дослідження було використано нестандартизовану анкету-опитувальник. Дослідження проводилося на початку 2023 року. Результати опитувань визначили найважливіші детермінанти шкільної успішності учнів початкових класів I-III на сході Польщі. Вчителі не виявили гендерної диференціації у ставленні до навчання серед учнів молодшого шкільного віку або у досягненні шкільної успішності. Запорукою успіху школи є те, як вчитель працює з учнями. Важливим вважаємо обирати методи роботи, які відповідають рівням розвитку, здібностям та інтересам дітей. Крім того, доцільно вдосконалити організацію співпраці з сімейним оточенням учнів. Таким чином, зрозуміло, що можна вживати заходів щодо їх оптимізації вищезазначеного, що, безперечно, стане предметом наших подальших наукових рефлексій.

Ключові слова: учень, молодший шкільний вік, шкільна успішність, учитель, школа.