Results of a Qualitative Study of Elementary School Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Preventing and Overcoming Students' School Failure

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We present the results of a qualitative research of the perceptions, attitudes, experiences of teachers and parents of elementary school students on the practices used to overcome school failure. We comapred these practices with the recommended methods that have been shown to be effective in various studies. The sample consisted of 35 female informants living in big cities, regional centers, districts, and rural areas, with different levels of education: 20 teachers (M=38) and 15 parents (M=29) of primary school-aged children were recruited for this study. We gathered information by in-depth interview method, teachers and parents shared their views on the methods which help to overcome and prevent school failure in the context of elementary school. Collected interviews were studied using the method of content analysis and comparison of the obtained data by using the coding technique (A. Strauss and J. Corbin). The date revealed the attitudes of teachers and parents about the concept of school failure, reasons for its occurrence and ways to overcome it, we compared the results with the results of national and international researches on this topic. Summarizing the results of the study, we can conclude that, in general, teachers and parents use school failure overcoming strategies according to their own experience, intuition and sometimes use tools and approaches described in scientific studies. The results of this study can be used for building strategies of interaction between schools and families and for planning professional development of teachers.

Keywords: school failure; teacher and parental practices; school difficulties; younger students.

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Результаты качественного исследования представлений учителей и родителей учащихся начальной школы о профилактике и преодолении школьной неуспешности

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Представлены результаты исследования с применением качественного ди-
зайна для изучения представлений и установок, опыта учителей и родите-
лей учащихся начальной школы по применяемым практикам преодоления
школьной неуспешности, их сопоставления с рекомендуемыми методика-
ми, показавшими свою эффективность по результатам различных исследо-
ваний. Выборку составили 35 информантов женского пола, проживающих в
крупных городах, областных центрах, районах области, селе, имеющих раз-
ные уровни образования: 20 учителей (М=38) и 15 родителей (М=29) детей
младшего школьного возраста. Сбор информации был проведен методом
глубинного интервью, в ходе которого были опрошены учителя и родители
об их взглядах на подходы к обучению, направленные на преодоление и
профилактику школьной неуспешности в контексте начальной школы. Со-
бранные интервью изучались методом анализа контента и сопоставления
полученных данных в технике кодирования, в основе которой лежит стра-
тегия А. Страусса и Дж. Корбин. Результаты исследования могут быть по-
лезны для выстраивания стратегий взаимодействия школ с семьями, для
планирования работы по повышению квалификации учителей.

Introduction

The sustainable direction of the modernization and improvement of the education system in Russia focuses on enhancing the quality and accessibility of education as a whole and on addressing specific challenges. These challenges include increasing motivation for learning, developing new methods and technologies that facilitate the optimal mastery of basic knowledge and skills in educational programs, among others. The attention of state educational policy is increasingly shifting towards the need for conceptualizing educational underachievement and finding practical solutions to the problem of academic failure. There is a growing need for a more comprehensive study of academic failure, its causes, the measures to improve the quality of education, and various practices for overcoming academic failure among all educational actor.

Academic failure refers to the systematic academic underperformance of students, them lagging behind their peers in subjects, which subsequently leads to negative attitudes towards the learning process, such as an unwillingness to study, disciplinary issues, and the avoiding of attending classes [7]. The issue of academic failure occupies a significant place on the research agenda in the field of education. The focus of attention is on the manifestations of academic failure among different social and demographic groups of students, as well as the reasons for difficulties arising [13; 14].

The concept of "academic failure" is interpreted differently by educational actors, depending on their experience, level of involvement in the educational process, and other factors. Therefore, defining the concept, causes, and ways to overcome academic failure requires a complex and multi-aspect analysis, which includes not only statistical data and standard research methods but also a deep immersion into the individual experiences of those who regularly encounter this issue — teachers and parents.

In the context of promoting an evidence-based approach in educational policy and practice [8; 15], research on the effectiveness of various approaches to prevent and overcome academic failure plays a crucial role [8; 15]. Separate attention is given to studying the issues of overcoming academic difficulties among primary school students [14].

Teachers' and parents' beliefs and attitudes are studied as a significant factor in academic success, indicating an understanding of the urgency and causes of the problem of academic failure [18]. In Russia, the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and, partially, parents are regularly investigated within the framework of PISA, TALIS, the Monitoring of the Economy of Education by the Higher School of Economics, the Monitoring of School Effectiveness by RANEPA [10], as well as in separate studies [13].

Among the conducted studies, questions are explored regarding how teachers utilize feedback (including its motivating function) to improve the learning process. A significant portion of research is dedicated to identifying the causes of academic failure [24; 10; 1; 9; 11], highlighting specific teacher practices that contribute to the prevention and overcoming of academic failure [15; 18], and examining how the academic and socio-emotional indicators of students at the beginning of their schooling are related to teachers' expectations of each student's academic success [16].

However, these studies primarily focus on identifying teachers' opinions on specific issues rather than comparing their actual experiences with the recommended practices identified by researchers as the most effective.

The term "practice" refers to the application of proven and regularly used educational tools in pedagogical activities that yields sustainable results in terms of their impact on students' academic achievements. Considering that both teachers and

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parents are key figures in the education of primary school students, it is valid to apply the definition of "practice" to parents as well.

The observation of a lack of research of this nature in general, or specifically regarding primary school, necessitates the filling of this gap through the present study, which attempts to describe the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and parents of primary school students regarding existing practices for overcoming academic failure in comparison with the results of studies on the utilization of such practices.

Thus, teachers' knowledge of the causes of learning difficulties among primary school students, pedagogical practices with proven effectiveness in preventing and overcoming academic failure, the transmission of their beliefs to parents, and the effective collaboration between parents and teachers on matters of academic failure represent relevant research directions.

The aim of this study is to investigate the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of teachers and parents of primary school students regarding the applied practices for overcoming academic failure and to compare their opinions with similar practices described in contemporary domestic and international research. This is particularly important in the context of primary school, where the foundations for further education are established. Students need to be motivated to continue learning, develop their talents and interests, and be prepared for continual self-improvement.

The key research questions are: what beliefs about the causes and possible ways to overcome academic failure exist among primary school teachers and parents of primary school students, and how do the practices utilized by teachers and parents for overcoming academic failure correspond to those described in the scientific literature?

To find answers to the research question, the results of interviews with teachers and parents regarding their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, as well as the applied practices for overcoming academic failure, were compared with recommended methodologies and described practices for overcoming academic failure, which have demonstrated their effectiveness in various contemporary studies.

Research Program

Design and Methods

A qualitative design using the in-depth interview method was chosen for conducting the research. This method, with its individualized format of interaction with the informant, allows for the establishment of open, trusting relationships and the obtaining of more sincere, comprehensive, and reflective answers. It takes into account the specific nature of the questions that address the positions, perspectives, and experiences of teachers and parents regarding their interactions with primary school students and the practices used to overcome academic failure.

An interview guide was developed for the teachers and parents of primary school students. The duration of each interview ranged from 40 to 80 minutes with each informant.

To develop the interview guide, the results of meta-analyses of teacher and parental practices, which have a positive impact on improving students' educational outcomes, were considered as the theoretical and methodological basis [21; 22; 23]. These studies focused on schools operating in challenging contextual conditions.

The interviews with teachers included questions about their preferred tactics and practices for identifying and addressing failure in schools, as well as preventive practices and interventions to address academic failure.

The interviews with parents documented parental practices in assisting students in adapting to school and resolving the difficulties they encounter, as well as the resources available to students for the successful completion of the school curriculum.

The analysis of the interviews followed the coding technique based on the strategies of A. Strauss and J. Corbin. The analysis consisted of three stages: 1) open coding: searching for categories and extracting meanings; 2) axial coding: identifying relationships between categories; 3) selective coding: identifying key categories.

During the second stage of coding, the following categories were grouped:

1) Interpretation of the concept of "academic failure" and its causes.

2) Practices for identifying and monitoring students at risk of academic failure in primary school.

3) Measures for preventing and overcoming academic failure.

These identified categories correspond to the previously discussed positions on effective parental and educational practices for overcoming academic failure in primary schools: the concept itself, its causes, the practices used, and their effectiveness for further comparison.

Sample

The study involved 35 informants: 20 teachers and 15 parents (100% are female participants). Ethical principles and norms were considered during the research: informed consent was obtained from the informants for audio recording of the interviews, the confidentiality of data collection solely for scientific purposes was ensured, and personal data was anonymized.

The sample was formed randomly using the "snowball" method among teachers and parents who agreed to participate in the interviews. The participating teachers' ages ranged from 20 to 61 years (M=38); 75% of teachers had a higher education, and 25% had a secondary vocational education. 50% of them resided in large cities or regional centers, while the other 50% lived in district areas or villages.

The study involved 15 parents: 8 parents of first-grade students (53.3%) and 7 parents of fourth-grade students (46.7%) from schools in a large city or regional center (11 participants, 72.3%) and district areas (4 participants, 26.7%). The ages of the participating parents ranged from 27 to 52 years old (M=29), and all of them had a higher education.

By utilizing qualitative data collection through interviews, guided by the research objectives and their specific focus, more extensive and reflective responses were obtained from the informants, which were compared with contemporary research findings.

Results

Teachers
Definition of academic underachievement and its causes

In their approaches to defining academic failure, teachers primarily rely on identifying the characteristics of students: a lack of attention, a lack of perseverance, impulsiveness, a fear of answering, introversion. Unlike the most commonly encountered definitions of academic failure in scientific literature, teachers often do not solely correlate academic failure with academic performance. Instead, they are more willing to provide more detailed answers regarding the definition of academically successful children, where the main indicator of success becomes students' engagement in the classroom.

For the formation of academic success, teachers emphasize the importance of preparing children for school, placing primary responsibility for this process on parents.

"Successful children are primarily a result of a supportive family. A good foundation for starting school. They engage with the child, foster their development, communicate with them, and read to them. Such a child has a good foundation and continues to develop successfully" (4th-grade teacher, 50 years old, higher education; rural area).

The reasons for academic failure, as indicated by teachers, include the parents' lack of interest in their children's education, a lack of parental supervision over homework completion and knowledge acquisition, family factors, as well as low levels of academic motivation, health issues, and the developmental characteristics of primary school students.

Similar reasons for academic failure are identified in research. Researchers highlight the attitudes of significant adults (parents, caregivers, teachers) towards primary school students. Increased control over task completion, the desire to accelerate a child's development, the non-acceptance of the individual learning processes, the denial of the right to make mistakes, and the suppression of children's willpower [13] affect the emotional perception of the learning process and worsen the problems of underperformance [7], leading to a decrease in students' motivation and cognitive mechanisms in primary school.

Practices for Identifying and Monitoring Students at Risk in Primary School

According to the interviews with teachers, the situation regarding the identification of failing students and monitoring the measures for working with this category of students is ambiguous.

Teacher surveys indicate that targeted actions to overcome academic failure generally begin to be implemented after the administration takes control of the situation with each specific student.

In scientific literature, the diagnostic competence of the teacher, which includes the ability to assess the impact, monitor the methods and practices used on the dynamics of students' educational outcomes, is considered one of the main factors for overcoming and preventing academic failure [8].

Measures for Preventing and Overcoming Academic Failure

The main measures for preventing and overcoming failure in schools, as highlighted in scientific literature, include differentiated approaches, group-based learning, providing detailed feedback

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(including the use of formative assessment tools), tracking the impact of teaching practices on student learning, and collaborative research among educational professionals on learning difficulties in primary school students [21; 22; 23].

During teacher surveys, a set of measures which are used in schools and aimed at overcoming learning difficulties was identified. The development of an individual plan for additional consultations for students during non-class hours can be considered the main measure. However, teachers themselves note the limited effectiveness of such an approach, both due to the high workload of teachers and the lack of motivation among students to attend such sessions.

"It is good if the child themselves understands that they have problems. Then they participate in additional classes, and everything works out for them. But if adults agree, and the child doesn't want to, nothing will work out, the child won't do anything" (4th-grade teacher, 31 years old, higher education, district center).

However, a significant dissemination and implementation of this approach in teaching practices is not observed, despite the fact that the described strategies are presented by researchers as the most effective for improving educational outcomes [19].

Emotional support becomes important, emphasizing the child's successes and praising their achievements. Generally, the younger the child, the more the lack of emphasis on their successes by significant adults tends to foster a growth mindset of academic failure rather than the highlighting of failures.

Differentiated approaches are widespread, but their utilization is noted to be challenging. Teachers acknowledge that students require special attention and a more individualized approach, which is not feasible due to teachers' workload and large class sizes.

All teachers participating in the survey noted the absence of unified developed algorithms or assistance schemes for underperforming children implemented in educational institutions. However, the efforts of support service specialists (speech therapists, educational psychologists, social workers, etc.) in addressing the difficulties are recognized.

The resources utilized by teachers to enhance their competence in working with underperforming children primarily include in-school activities: individual conversations with other teachers, discussions and deliberations on challenging issues during school gatherings, lectures, and consultations with the school psychologist.

Parents
**Identification of Academic Failure
and its Causes**

In approaches to identifying academic failure, parents, like teachers, mainly focus on highlighting the individual-personal characteristics of students that may contribute to learning difficulties, such as restlessness, impulsivity, a lack of motivation, inattentiveness, and others.

Difficulties among younger students, as described above, are predominantly associated with the educational environment (the readiness for learning, an insufficient mastery of the curriculum, the completion of homework, classroom participation, etc.). However, parents also note significant challenges that directly or indirectly affect the academic component, such as the motivation for learning ("Well, there was no immediate desire to study. There was no motivation at all," "Initially, he had no interest in studying; it was impossible to make him do it"), which is also supported by research [3; 4]; difficulties related to the child's independence/self-organization ("The biggest problem is self-organization at home," "It's difficult to organize for homework in the evening. It's very hard to convince him to do anything") [3; 4].

The majority of studies focus on the causes of academic failure, coping strategies for school difficulties, and parental interventions and preventive measures to address failure in schools. The causes identified include the family and school environments, inattention, low cognitive activity, a lack of academic motivation, interpersonal relationships, and others [1; 9; 10; 11; 24]. These reasons can be compared to the results of the survey conducted among parents of younger students.

According to parents, the following factors can contribute to their children's success:

— Teachers and the school environment: "A lot depends on the teacher. If the teacher manages to engage the children, it's a big plus. The children will then strive for something new, acquiring new knowledge. Consequently, they will continue going to school with a positive attitude," "It was difficult to adapt to the school routine, to sit in class and not run around, not being allowed to stand up";

— Family circumstances: "Presumably, a lot comes from the family, a lot depends on what has been instilled in the child since childhood, how much they have been shown, and how much they have been able to remember, how much infrastructure surrounds them";

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— Individual characteristics of the child: "I think character once again plays a role. There are many different reasons. It depends on the child's characteristics, their development, and motivation... And self-esteem also influences it," "Everyone has a different mentality, and it's not just children. It applies to adults and all living beings. Some people need more time. It depends on their internal state, mentality, and personal qualities";

— Restlessness and inattentiveness (primarily mentioned as causes in responses from the parents of first-grade students): "There is still a lack of patience; sometimes she can get distracted," "We are not very patient, we are active. I think it hinders us, it's not very good during lessons."

When discussing academic success among children, parents emphasize the importance of personal characteristics such as sociability, activity, balance, non-confrontation, patient, responsibility, and a positive attitude towards learning. According to parents, a lot depends on the intellectual abilities and physical development of their children.

Other factors that influence a child's success, as mentioned, include parenting styles, the presence of support from parents, their attitudes, and the nature of the child's relationship with teachers.

The Identification of Groups at Risk and the Monitoring System

The situation regarding parents' recognition of failing students and the monitoring of measures taken to address this category of children is more understandable, regular, and person-oriented compared to the results of teacher interviews.

The primary method for identifying at-risk groups and monitoring the situation, as well as providing the support and assistance to the child from parents, involves conversations and discussions initiated by parents, during which children can talk about their day and any problems they may have encountered. For instance, "I always tell her that if there are any problems, she can come to me, and we'll discuss them. We talk, communicate, and I advise her on how to do things better."

For many parents, it is important to maintain a trusting relationship with their child, which can positively impact the child's success. On one hand, this allows parents to provide support, and on the other hand, it serves as a form of monitoring the situation. It was also noted that some parents try to establish a systematic approach to such conversations, respecting the child's personal boundaries, allowing them the freedom to make their own decisions, and avoiding persistent questioning.

Preventive Measures and Overcoming Academic Failure

Scientific literature highlights several key measures taken by parents to influence and prevent academic failure in schools. These measures include showing interest in the child's life, discussing problems and emotions, praising and using other forms of encouragement for academic achievements, creating the conditions for completing homework, and providing assistance when necessary [5; 6; 11]. Many of these practices were reflected in interviews with parents of primary school children. It is worth noting, however, that not all parents were able to articulate and describe the support practices they employ to overcome and prevent academic failure in the context of primary school.

According to parents, the following parental practices stand out in addressing school difficulties and promoting successful learning:

— The home environment, which encompasses the preservation of family values and a comfortable and psychologically calm atmosphere within the family. The home environment is a key factor that positively impacts students' academic outcomes. Children in a positively-oriented home environment develop corresponding behavioral patterns in various areas of life [6].

— The cognitive involvement of parents in their children's education, which involves the providing of various academic and cultural-historical information, engaging in the joint reading of literature, and more.

The joint spending of time, involving the child in socially significant topics, engaging in family leisure activities, and cognitive involvement in joint activities contribute to a trusting and friendly family atmosphere, foster academic motivation, and subsequently, a sustained interest in acquiring new knowledge [12].

The interaction between parents and teachers and a supportive school environment has been proven to be essential and important. Parents recognize the need for and value recommendations from teachers or having discussions with them, as well as the opportunity to seek consultation from teachers [15]. Another study demonstrates the significance not only of parental involvement with teachers for the intellectual and socio-emotional

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success of primary school-aged children, but also the engagement of parents in actively participating in their child's school life, such as organizing school events, attending parent meetings, being members of parent committees, and participating in school programs, among others [17].

Showing interest in the child's life through conversations and addressing questions about the child's experiences ("We simply talk and try to encourage him to tell us more. We show interest in everything that happens to him. I have conversations and provide explanations, trying to maintain a positive motivation. I also inquire about his social interactions, whether they are going well or not, and offer advice") helps establish understanding, acceptance, and trust in parents' relationships with primary school children, thereby building a reliable line of relationship development within the family [5; 6].

Assisting with homework, tutoring, and providing additional education ("We explain assignments that she struggles with... We sit down and work through these moments to make it easier for her at school and to prevent her from making such mistakes in the future," "There are different extracurricular activities available. Maybe there's something that interests you. Let's try it out. This is how I help him," "We have a tutor, but she comes to us only 1-2 times a week") have been shown by research to have an impact on students' academic success. Children whose families lack or have limited opportunities for additional activities, including tutoring, tend to show less successful results in school [10; 11].

Praising, encouraging, and recognizing the child's achievements ("I definitely praise him. I say, 'You're doing great!'" "I express joy and always tell him, 'You're amazing, keep it up, continue in the same spirit. That's very good.' I support and encourage him") verbal and other forms of support for students' accomplishments catalyze a positive effect on the productivity in academic activities, foster trusting relationships, and promote a sense of overall success.

Conclusion

Based on the conducted research and the formulated research questions, the study examined the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers and parents of primary school children regarding the practices employed to overcome academic failure.

This study has allowed for a shift in focus towards exploring the current perceptions of teachers and parents of primary school children regarding the causes of academic failure in primary school and analyzing the effectiveness of practices.

Conducting such comparisons allows to identify the deficiencies in teachers' and parents' understanding of the phenomenon of academic failure in primary school, in order to further incorporate the findings of current research into additional professional development programs for educators and the planning of school-family collaboration in student support matters.

During the interviews with teachers, it was revealed that the presented formats of work partially correlate with the description of effective practices in scientific literature. However, their integration into daily teaching practices is complicated by several factors, as indicated by the teachers. These factors include the insufficient methodological preparation of teachers to work with students experiencing learning difficulties in primary school, the high workload of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and parents' reluctance to fully follow teachers' recommendations.

In turn, as measures towards maintaining academic success, parents rely on teachers (homeroom teachers) and the school as a whole (the organization of school life, school norms and rules, conditions, shared values, etc.). Despite the overall positive school environment and the significance of the teacher figure for younger students, in some cases, interactions with the teacher and the school can become sources of difficulties for primary school students.

The primary tool for monitoring the situation, assistance, and support of the child becomes conversations with parents, during which children talk about their day and any problems that may arise. When unable to influence academic failure, parents attribute the cause not to the ineffectiveness of their support methods but rather to the child's personal qualities (conflictiveness, distractibility, laziness) and the school environment.

The format of in-depth interviews complicates the inclusion of a more significant number of teachers and parents (legal representatives) of students in modern schools in the sample. However, it not only allows for the comparison of teachers' perspectives on effective approaches to overcoming learning difficulties in primary school students but also involves teachers and parents in reflection — contemplating educational practices and extracting personal expe-

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riences in working with academically low-performing children, and possibly reforming them [18].

It is also essential to consider the opinions of the educational process participants regarding measures to overcome academic failure, in terms of their predominant experience in working with children already identified and documented as hav-

ing learning difficulties, as well as more motivated students. Comparing their perceptions of effective practices with those described in scientific literature is crucial. In this case, such a division and comparison of interview participants' opinions among themselves were not conducted and could serve as a continuation of the presented research.

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