

## **Learning Difficulties and School Failure in the Focus of Psycho-pedagogical Research**

Modern international studies of the quality of educational achievements and Russian psychological, pedagogical, and sociological studies show that the number of Russian schoolchildren experiencing difficulties in learning and not reaching the threshold values of functional literacy is significant and tends to increase (in terms of science literacy, for example). A growing diversity of students due to demographic and socio-political factors became a serious challenge to the capacity of the modern school system, which is supposed to provide quality education for all. We have more and more students with disabilities, from migrant families, refugees, single-parent families, and orphans, coming into schools. The problem of learning difficulties has serious anthropological and socio-economic dimensions. School failure is a significant predictor of professional and social failure at the next stage. The negative effects of this problem are manifested in the lives of some children, affect the well-being of territories, and have a long-term impact on the quality of human capital in Russia, especially in conditions of population decline.

According to surveys, teachers, educational psychologists, heads of educational organizations, and parents experience to a greater or lesser extent a deficit of knowledge and competencies for preventing and overcoming learning difficulties in students and formulate a request for psychological and pedagogical science. In turn, for science, this problem opens wide opportunities for impact, generation, and mobilization of knowledge to solve the acute problem and promote an evidence-based approach in educational policy and practice.

At the same time, it can be argued that the topic of unsuccessfulness, underachievement, and learning difficulties in Soviet science did not have a simple fate. The initial keen interest in its study, including the "fight against grade repetition," was based on the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and on the achievements of foreign scientists (A.R. Luria, P.P. Blonsky, etc.), and then there was a long period of "cooling down" by the campaign against pedagogy.

Later, Soviet and Russian researchers addressed this topic in a number of profound and original works, but this subject was not a priority; it did not become the subject of large-scale comprehensive, longitudinal studies, and it did not stimulate the emergence of original theories and scientific schools on this topic on an international level. It was developing in isolation from global trends and without reliance on the potential of cultural-historical theory. Russian science didn't provide practitioners with a full-fledged set of tools for diagnostics, prevention, and solving problems.

Recognition of the learning difficulties at the state level in recent years has stimulated a growing interest in some universities and academic research in this area.

In the period 2020—2022, teams of the Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, the National Research University Higher School of Economics, educational institutions in the CIS, and regional centers in Russia conducted research on a wide range of learning difficulties and school failure. Among them are the studies "Development and testing of the target model of the prevention and correction of learning difficulties students with relevant risks of unfavorable social conditions may face" (2020), "Formation of the psychological component of methodological training for the future teacher, necessary for the analysis of the causes of learning difficulties and school failure" (2021-2022), and "Diagnosis of learning difficulties among elementary school students" (2022). The first Russian longitudinal study of educational failure factors was launched in 2022.

Since 2020, a permanent seminar "School failure: prevention, diagnosis, and overcoming" has been operating, organized by the Moscow State University of Psychology and Education and the Institute of Education of the National Research University Higher School of Economics. It has become a communication platform for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, as well as a platform for public consolidation to implement the problem of school failure into the agenda of Russian national educational policy. In 2022, leading Russian scientists and specialists from the Russian Academy of Sciences organized the seminar "School Failure Prevention: Diagnosis and Overcoming." In 2023,

specific aspects of the problem were included in the "List of topical topics of PhD research in the field of educational sciences," approved by the Russian Academy of Education and the Higher Attestation Commission.

The special thematic issue of the journal "Psychological Science and Education" is designed to record the changing situation of the problem of learning difficulties in the agenda of Russian science, to present the results of research, and to contribute to the solution of this complex problem of state and public importance.

When selecting articles for the issue, the editors sought to reflect the diversity of aspects of the problem, including the range of difficulties, the variety of factors that determine the emergence of difficulties, the specifics of their manifestation at different ages, and the peculiarities of their perception by different participants. The editors listed approaches to the diagnosis and correction of difficulties at school, program support in national-level policies. The authors come from research teams in Russia (Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, and Elabuga), Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The opening article by E.I. Isaev and A.A. Margolis presents an objective analysis of the possibilities and limitations of understanding the nature of difficulties and ways to overcome them developed in Russian science. From the standpoint of cultural-historical theory, diagnosing and overcoming learning difficulties is dominated by the idea that learning and development are two independent processes. The approach proposed by the authors, synthesizing the ideas of "zone of proximal development," scaffolding, and RTI (response to intervention), is designed to expand the possibilities and increase the effectiveness of practical diagnosis, prevention, and correction of learning difficulties in school. This approach formed the basis of the target model for learning difficulties prevention and correction, developed and tested in 2020-2022 by the research teams of the Moscow State University of Psychology and Education and the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

Elementary school is where learning difficulties first appear for everyone, and it is still possible to provide prevention, diagnosis, and management of the problem. Here you'll find articles that consider the manifestation of difficulties of younger schoolchildren in communication and social adaptation (anxiety, fears, aggression, stress), which act as predictors of learning difficulties and school failure (S.P. Sanina, M.D.D. Kuznetsov, M. A. Kuznetsov), as well as predictors of previous educational experience and family conditions and their impact on children's success in elementary school (D.R. Akhmedjanova, R.M. Bayramyan, E.G. Lisunova, A.K. Nisskaya).

The teacher is a key figure in ensuring that schoolchildren achieve the necessary level of functional literacy. Hence, teachers' ideas about the causes of learning difficulties, optimal methods of their prevention and correction, teachers' attitudes towards low-achieving students, as well as beliefs about their own professional responsibilities and capabilities, are a significant factor in maintaining or solving the problem and an important subject of research. These issues are discussed in articles by Russian authors (E.V. Hovakimyan, R.M. Bayramyan, N.A. Serova, and O.M. Isaeva) and Kazakh researchers (Sh.O. Tazabek, K.A. Tursunbaeva, and A.A. Shcherbakov). In the first article, the issue is revealed by comparing teachers' and parents' perceptions of elementary school students. In the second article, researchers from Privolzhsky Research Medical University (E.D. Bozhkova, V.V. Katunova, and A.A. Konovalov) assess the differences in the results of the expert surveys filled out by parents and teachers. It's made on the basis of the continuous psychological examination of the elementary school children in order to identify individual risk factors for mental and behavioral disorders.

The challenge for students, their families, and teachers was the change in the mode of education during the pandemic. The forced transition to distance learning created difficulties in mastering educational programs for children from low socio-economic backgrounds. They lack resources for the successful organization of the educational process at home. It was also challenging for students with low motivation, autonomy, and purely developed skills in organizing learning activities. Research on

the impact of changes in learning environments is relevant not only for retrospective analysis but also in the case of possible recurrences of similar phenomena, as well as in the more general issue of ensuring the quality of educational outcomes for all students involved in digital learning. Here you'll find the results of research on changes in the academic performance of students in rural and urban schools before and after the onset of the pandemic (Y.D. Kersha, O.V. Nedosyp, and O.I. Piotukh).

In this issue, you'll also find research on factors that determine the ability of a student to adapt to social situations, to demonstrate high academic achievement despite adversity and limitations caused by living conditions and developmental circumstances, and to develop resilience. In the article written by V.L. Vinogradov and V.L. Shatunova, the authors propose the following versions of answers to the questions about the correlation between personal resilience and other characteristics of the student: his or her academic success, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the educational process, on the other hand.

Given the scale of the existing problem, the realization of models of prevention of school failure and assistance to children with learning difficulties cannot become the exclusive responsibility of teachers and pedagogical psychologists but implies the development of a corresponding state educational policy with mechanisms of normative and resourceful support. The article by S.G. Kosaretsky discusses the experience of solving this problem in Russia from the 1990s to the present day and reveals the shortcomings of the implemented approaches and promising solutions based on the principles of educational equity and inclusion.

The first Russian state project in recent decades that addressed the problems of overcoming school failure was the Project of Targeted Methodological Assistance to Schools with Low Educational Results. I.S. Denisenko's article presents the results of the research that accompanied the implementation of the project and made it possible to draw significant conclusions about the factors of success in preventing low educational results in students by changing some school practices. The experience of other countries is important for selecting effective approaches to solving the problem at the state level. Azerbaijan's education system is historically connected to Russia. It is very interesting to learn about the factors influencing the performance of secondary school students and their correlation with the reforms carried out in Azerbaijan (U.T. Mikayilova, G.Z. Huseynzadeh).

We hope that the studies presented in this thematic issue stimulate discussions in the scientific community. We will be glad to receive your feedback. We believe that learning difficulties will not be limited to a single thematic issue but will be reflected in further editorial policy. We invite researchers to submit their publications on this topic.

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