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Learning Difficulties and Problems in the Psychosocial Functioning of School-Age Children

Trudności w nauce a problemy w zakresie funkcjonowania psychospołecznego dzieci w wieku szkolnym

Abstract

Aim. The article discusses problems in the psychosocial functioning of school-age students in the context of difficulties and school failures, taking into account the following aspects: self-orientation, emotional, motivational-volitional, social, and behavioural. The work aims to indicate areas for further research and practical recommendations for teachers and parents.

Methods and materials. The study is based on a critical analysis of scientific literature in psychology and pedagogy. The analysis includes Polish and foreign scientific publications, taking into account the results of empirical research, concerning the relationship between school difficulties and various areas of a child's functioning.

Results and conclusion. The most frequently examined subjects were students with specific learning difficulties. Students with learning difficulties and school failures face psychosocial deficits, including low self-esteem, a weak sense of competence, high anxiety, and difficulty coping with stress. They have reduced motivation to learn, low persistence

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in action, and tend to withdraw socially, exhibiting low social competence and occupying low social positions. Their relationships with peers and adults are often poor. They display negative behavioural patterns, both internalising and externalising. The article emphasises the need for comprehensive help in creating conditions for children with school difficulties to compensate for deficits in school skills and psychosocial characteristics. It is important to adapt teaching methods to the individual needs of students, implement support programs, and increase teachers' competencies in working with children with such difficulties. The need for further research was also emphasised, especially regarding the long-term effects of school failure and the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions.

Keywords: learning difficulties, school failure, psychosocial functioning, self-esteem, social and emotional difficulties, school age, students, volitional-motivational difficulties

Abstrakt

Cel. W artykule omówiono problemy w funkcjonowaniu psychospołecznym uczniów w wieku szkolnym w kontekście trudności i niepowodzeń szkolnych, uwzględniając następujące aspekty: samoorientacyjny, emocjonalny, motywacyjno-wolicjonalny, społeczny i behawioralny. Celem pracy jest wskazanie obszarów dalszych badań oraz praktycznych rekomendacji dla nauczycieli i rodziców w zakresie wspierania tej grupy uczniów.

Metody i materiały. Opracowanie opiera się na krytycznej analizie literatury naukowej z zakresu psychologii i pedagogiki. Analiza obejmuje polskie i zagraniczne publikacje naukowe uwzględniające wyniki badań empirycznych z ostatnich lat oraz dawniejszych, dotyczące związku trudności szkolnych w różnych obszarach funkcjonowania dziecka.

Wyniki i wnioski. Badaniom poddawano najczęściej uczniów ze specyficznymi trudnościami w uczeniu się. Uczniowie z trudnościami w nauce i niepowodzeniami szkolnymi charakteryzują się wieloma deficytami w funkcjonowaniu psychospołecznym. Wykazują niską samoocenę i poczucie kompetencji, wysoki poziom lęku i niekompetencję w radzeniu siebie z trudnościami i stresem. Mają obniżoną motywację do nauki i wytrwałość w działaniu. Przejawiają wycofanie społeczne, niski poziom kompetencji społecznych i zajmują niskie pozycje społeczne w klasie. Mają niskiej jakości relacje z rówieśnikami i dorosłymi. Problemy te przejawiają się także w negatywnych wzorcach zachowań – internalizacyjnych (np. bierność, rezygnacja) i eksternalizacyjnych (np. nadaktywność, buntowniczość, agresja). W artykule podkreślono konieczność kompleksowej pomocy i tworzenia dzieciom z trudnościami szkolnymi warunków do wyrównywania deficytów w zakresie umiejętności szkolnych oraz w zakresie właściwości psychospołecznych. Istotne jest dostosowanie metod dydaktycznych do indywidualnych potrzeb uczniów, wdrażania programów wsparcia oraz zwiększenia kompetencji nauczycieli w zakresie pracy z dziećmi z takimi trudnościami. Wskazano także na potrzebę dalszych badań,

zwłaszcza dotyczących długoterminowych skutków niepowodzeń szkolnych i efektywności interwencji pedagogicznych.

***Słowa kluczowe*:** trudności w nauce, niepowodzenia szkolne, funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne, samoocena, wiek szkolny, uczniowie z trudnościami szkolnymi, trudności społeczno-emocjonalne, trudności motywacyjno-wolicjonalne

Introduction

The article presents the results of the analysis of Polish and foreign publications on the psychosocial functioning of school-age students in the context of learning difficulties and school failures. The study focuses on deficits and problems to better understand their mechanisms and specificity. This knowledge can be used to design educational and upbringing strategies adapted to different groups and needs of students, to develop more effective pedagogical interventions and to reveal areas requiring scientific knowledge.

Learning difficulties are one of the key educational problems, affecting not only students' academic achievements but also their psychosocial development. For decades, this has been the subject of interest of researchers and specialists. However, the problem seems to be constantly relevant due to the dynamically changing socio-cultural context and events of recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown (Frączek, 2020), and the war in Ukraine.

Studies conducted over several decades have shown that the number of children referred for examination to a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre is growing year by year, either because of deficits in readiness to start school, or because of difficulties in learning to read, write, and count (*cf.* Jakubowicz *et al.*, 1999; Kowaluk, 2009; Kupisiewicz, 1964, 1996; Okoń, 2004; Opolska, 1997; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998; Spionek, 1973; Tyszkowa, 1976; Wilgocka-Okoń, 2003). The Ministry of Education and Science reported in 2023 that there were 280,000 children and students with special educational needs in the Polish education system, and the trend is still growing (Ministry of Education and Science, 2023). Among them, by the regulation of the Ministry of National Education of August 9, 2017 (Ministry of National Education, 2017), on the principles of organizing and providing psychological and pedagogical assistance, in public kindergartens, schools and institutions, there is a group of students defined as students with educational failures (Journal of Laws 2023, item 1798, § 2.2). This group includes children who are the subject of this work. However, it seems that they are a rather neglected group, because currently in schools and psychological and pedagogical clinics, attention is mainly focused on children

with autism spectrum diagnoses or other, more visible, disorders (specific learning difficulties). A review of relevant publications indicates that dyslexic children are most frequently studied in this area. Apart from them, the psychosocial functioning of students with difficulties and school failures is relatively rarely the subject of research. There is a great need to diagnose and support students already at the stage of the first, rarely noticed, difficulties. To do this, scientific knowledge about their psychosocial functioning is necessary. Various studies have indicated the co-occurrence of personality, behavioural-emotional and social problems, and learning disorders (*cf*. Aro *et al*., 2022). It has also been confirmed that it increases the risk of poorer educational achievements and has a negative impact on the effectiveness of interventions. The number of children with learning difficulties, at risk of school failure and all the problems that accompany this phenomenon, raises considerable concerns, especially since this data does not include students who have not yet been identified and diagnosed, although they are struggling with such difficulties and need real help. At the same time, reports from studies on the health, well-being, and mental health of children and adolescents during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are alarming. They have proven a significant deterioration in the mental condition of students (including Ombudsman for children, 2022, 2023; Pawlak, 2022; Pyżalski, 2022; Ministry of Health, 2022). Any crisis (the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning) is considered an additional burden for people struggling with any difficulties. It can therefore be assumed that students with learning difficulties and school failures have found themselves in a particularly difficult situation and have become a group at increased risk of developing various problems, including in the field of psychosocial functioning.

Methodology

The main research question of this paper is: What psychosocial factors are associated with (influence, or are a consequence of) academic difficulties and failures among school-age students?

The study is based on a critical analysis of the scientific literature in psychology and pedagogy, including both Polish and international scientific publications. The main goal of this analysis is to understand the relationship between academic difficulties and various aspects of children's psychosocial functioning.

For this article, databases (Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus) were searched from 2010 to 2025 using the following search terms: "functioning of students with academic difficulties," "social and emotional functioning of students with learning difficulties," and "students with learning difficulties." The article considers the results of empirical studies, which provide significant information on the mechanisms un-

derlying academic difficulties and their impact on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

The literature analysis encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research, providing a broad perspective on the phenomenon of academic difficulties. Additionally, key theories and models are considered, providing a framework for further understanding the issue under review. The aim is to provide a comprehensive picture of how learning difficulties impact other areas of children's lives and to identify key areas requiring further research.

Theoretical Context. Learning Difficulties and School Failures

Children with learning difficulties or school failures are children who do not achieve success in their struggles with the demands of learning in school, and the challenges of school social situations. They receive low grades (D and E), which are a consequence of certain factors that interfere with the implementation of the school's program tasks (Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998).

The terms *school difficulties* and *learning difficulties* are most often used interchangeably. Halina Spionek (1973) assigns two meanings to the term learning difficulties. The author uses the first one to determine the cause and the first stage of school failures. Here, learning difficulties mean a situation in which a student, despite efforts, is unable, in due time, to acquire knowledge and skills specified in the core curriculum. The second meaning of school difficulties has been assigned to situations in which a student shows progress in learning and receives satisfactory grades, but this is the result of disproportionately large efforts by him or her or other people (parents, tutors, *etc*.). This type of difficulty is often unnoticed at school, because the student, with difficulty, nevertheless demonstrates achievements that do not differ significantly from the level of knowledge and skills of other students. Difficulties in learning can turn into school failures of students (Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, 1985, 1997). These are most often defined as discrepancies between school requirements and students' achievements, but also as a process or state "[…] in which a child finds himself or herself as a result of failure to meet school requirements"[1] (Konopnicki, 1966, p. 14). Czesław Kupisiewicz (1996, p. 225) states that these are "[…] discrepancies between the educational and didactic requirements of the school and the behaviour of students and the learning outcomes they achieve."[2] Wincenty Okoń (2004, p. 274) defines them as "the process of emergence and consolidation of discrepancies between educational goals and school achievements

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[1] Author's own translation.

[2] Author's own translation.

and the formation of a negative attitude of young people towards school requirements."[3] In the typology of failures proposed by Okoń (2004), which assumes the occurrence of certain phases in this process, a distinction is made between hidden and overt school failures. Hidden failures, *i.e*., gaps in knowledge and skills, are not noticed by the teacher; although they exist, they are accompanied by the first symptoms of dissatisfaction with school and a negative attitude. Over time, accumulated hidden failures become overt failures, the consequence of which is unsatisfactory grades. They can be temporary or relatively permanent; then their effect is repeating the year, and in the worst case, multiple years and the dropping-out of students (Kupisiewicz, 1972).

Results. Psychosocial Functioning of Students with Difficulties and School Failures

Research and theoretical analyses confirm the relationship between learning difficulties, school failures and problems in students' psychosocial functioning (*e.g*., Aro *et al*., 2024; Bogdanowicz, 2008; Brophy, 2002; Ciżkowicz, 2009; Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015; Frączek, 2020; Górniewicz, 2000; Kowaluk, 2009; Krasowicz-Kupis, 2009; Kulas, 1986; Łukasik, 1998; Maciarz & Dutka, 2000; McWhirter *et al*., 2001; Spionek, 1970, 1980, 1985; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998; Schaffer, 2007; Tucholska, 1998; Wiliński, 2005).

Difficulties and failures at school at an early school age most often concern reading, writing, and arithmetic. They are followed by several negative consequences:

psychological, as it promotes neurotic disorders and unfavourable personality changes, including: low self-esteem, non-constructive ways of coping with stress, a sense of helplessness, lack of motivation and persistence in action (Brophy, 2002; Ciżkowicz, 2009; Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015; Gadeyne *et al*., 2004; Kulas, 1986; Łukasik, 1998; Łysek, 1998; Schaffer, 2007; Spionek, 1970, 1980, 1985; Szurmiak, 1987), social, as it contributes to problems in interpersonal contacts, improper relations with the environment (family, teachers, and peers), peer rejection and low social competencies, *etc*. (Gadeyne *et al*., 2004; Górniewicz, 2000; Kowaluk, 2009; Tucholska, 1998; Maciarz & Dutka, 2000).

Studies confirm the co-occurrence of learning disabilities with other disorders. Benjamin B. Lahey, Kenneth D. Green, and Rex L. Forehand (1980, as cited in Kendall, 2004) found that children with learning disabilities have emotional, behavioural, and self-regulation disorders (*cf*. Cantwell, 1987; Hinshaw, 1992; all as cited in Kendall, 2004; Kowaluk, 2009; Wicks-Nelson & Izrael, 1991). These children have poorer social

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[3]   Author's own translation.

perception, social interactions, and social competences (Deptuła, 2013; Kowaluk, 2009; Toro *et al*., 1990, as cited in Kendall, 2004). They have internalizing disorders and are more likely to exhibit criminal behaviour (Brier, 1989; Thompson & Kronenberger, 1990; all as cited in Kendall, 2004).

Based on the analysis of the topic, five aspects of the psychosocial functioning of students with learning difficulties were identified: self-orientation, emotional, motivational-volitional, social, and behavioural. They will be presented in turn.

Self-orientation aspect. The development of self-esteem, self-worth, and competence is crucial during school age. Deficits in this area impact various aspects of development, both in the present and later life stages (Appelt & Jabłoński, 2004; Bee, 2004). Younger school children develop significant self-awareness and recognise their difficulties and lack of acceptance by peers (Appelt, 2005; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998). This awareness promotes a sense of incompetence and lower social position in the class, which leads to the formation of a negative self-image. Studies confirm the link between children's self-esteem and school achievements, showing that those with learning difficulties have lower self-esteem, which declines further if difficulties persist (*cf.* Łodygowska, 2017). Research by Piotr Gindrich (2002) on students with and without learning difficulties also revealed lower self-esteem and a negative self-image in the first group.

Michael E. Thomson (1990, as cited in Krasowicz-Kupis, 2009) emphasised that the most important aspects of self-esteem in children with learning disabilities are school, social, and general self-esteem. These children rated themselves low in acquiring knowledge in comparison to their peers. Polish studies (Gindrich, 2002; Kulas, 1986) confirmed that students with learning disabilities have low and inadequate self-esteem. Henryk Kulas also noted that students with dyslexia rated their *physical self*, *mental self*, and *social self* with lower self-acceptance than their peers. Ewa Domagała-Zyśk and Agnieszka Amilkiewicz-Marek (2019) studied 30 children aged 9–13, revealing that those with learning disabilities had low self-image and sense of agency scores, perceiving themselves as incapable of achieving success and coping with everyday challenges, with these scores declining with age.

Marzena Kowaluk-Romanek (2022) confirms that students with specific learning disabilities have a lower sense of self-efficacy than their peers, which impacts their perseverance in achieving goals and involvement in activities. A low sense of this competence can lead to avoiding school challenges and decreased motivation to learn (Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015).

Children with learning difficulties often experience criticism. Their abilities and work results are assessed as worse by their parents, teachers, and peers, which leads to lower self-esteem. Negative messages and school failures reinforce this state, and chronic

failures perpetuate low self-esteem. This phenomenon is a risk factor for risky beha-viours (McWhirter *et al.*, 2001; Molicka, 2007; Seligman, 1997; Spionek, 1970).

The consequences of low self-esteem are a sense of helplessness, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation to learn and undertake any tasks, and constant dis-satisfaction with one's achievements (Kowaluk, 2009; Kulas, 1986; Łukasik, 1998). Gindrich (2002) confirmed that low and inadequate self-esteem in these students results in anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-worth. They critically assessed their intellectual abilities, felt discouraged and helpless, doubted future success, and had lower aspirations than peers without dyslexia.

Due to negative educational experiences and low self-esteem, children develop the belief that they are incapable of learning. New situations are interpreted through this belief, often becoming self-fulfilling prophecies and reinforcing the expecta-tion of failure. This is attributed to two factors: a distorted, pessimistic explanation style typical of children with school failures, and low self-esteem, which hinders persistence, effective coping, and resilience to setbacks (Appelt, 2005; McWhirter *et al.*, 2001; Seligman, 2007).

Deficits in attitudes and self-image are considered to be factors influencing school dropout (McWhirter *et al.*, 2001). Low academic achievement, and poorer academic performance in direct comparison with other students, affect self-esteem and a sense of competence. For this reason, these psychological variables play a key role in the functioning of students with learning disabilities and should be the direct target of intervention.

Emotional aspect. School difficulties and emotional dysfunctions are intercon-nected. It is assumed that emotional problems can be a consequence of school problems, can be their cause, and can also co-occur (Gindrich, 2002; Krasowicz-Kupis, 2009; Łodygowska, 2017; Sorokosz, 2014). School obligations and constant confronta-tion with teachers' demands and parents' expectations, often exceeding the student's abilities, cause learning to be perceived as threatening and emotionally distressing (Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015; Łodygowska, 2017). A student experiencing school failures functions in a difficult emotional state. Faced with criticism, they may feel they are failing and disappointing important adults. These difficulties foster negative attitudes toward school and growing frustration, which can lead to neurotic and behavioural disorders (Jaklewicz & Bogdanowicz, 1982). Symptoms include excitability, restless-ness, hypersensitivity, tearfulness, and anxiety (Półtorak, 2017). Kenneth A. Kavale and Steven R. Forness (1966, as cited in Kowaluk, 2009) report that this may affect up to 75% of children with learning disabilities.

The emotional functioning of students with learning difficulties and failures is marked by increased emotional tension, high levels of anxiety, and a fearful at-titude, often resulting in discouragement and inhibition of activity (Adi *et al.*, 2024;

Anonim, 2017; Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015; Eliason & Richman, 1984, as cited in Gindrich, 2002; Epstein *et al*., 1985; Łodygowska, 2017; Spionek, 1970). Spionek (1970) found that first-grade students with learning difficulties also display increased excitability and psychosomatic symptoms. By second grade, 48% of these students show such disorders, rising to 85% by fourth grade. Anxious students feel insecure, helpless, and anticipate failure in school situations (tests, questioning; Łodygowska, 2017; Spionek, 1970; McWhirter *et al*., 2001; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998).

The conditions in which students with learning difficulties function also affect their experiences of shame, guilt, disappointment, worry, sadness, and anger. These factors, similar to anxiety, inhibit the activity of an individual, or cause aggressive behaviour, and disturb interpersonal relationships (Łodygowska, 2017; Molicka, 2007). In extreme cases, under the influence of long-term difficulties at school, emotionally hypersensitive students are at risk of developing school phobia (Ciupińska, 2023; Czekaj & Łukasik, 2012), anxiety neurosis (Spionek, 1970), and depression (Willcut & Pennington, 2000, as cited in Krasowicz-Kupis, 2009). Michael H. Epstein *et al*. (1985), in a study of 6–18-year-olds with learning disabilities, found that girls were more likely to show internalised emotional and behavioural disorders, such as lack of self-confidence, elevated levels of anxiety, social withdrawal, depression, and personality disorders. Boys showed externalised (rebellious) behaviour. Michele Eliason and Linn C. Richman (1984, as cited in Gindrich, 2002) found that 30% of children with learning disabilities aged 6–14 had behavioural problems, such as increased motor activity, high anxiety levels, and concentration problems. These findings are also confirmed by Adi and colleagues (2024).

Students with learning disabilities often perceive stressful situations as beyond their ability to cope and expect failure in everything they do. This leads to discouragement and inhibition of activity, which over time may result in avoidance strategies, such as skipping classes, further deepening their difficulties (Dłużniewska & Kucharczyk, 2015; Łodygowska, 2017; McWhirter *et al*., 2001; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998; Spionek, 1970).

Research conducted by Grażyna Krasowicz-Kupis (2009) has shown that young people with dyslexia react more emotionally, which manifests itself in frustration, hypersensitivity to criticism, a sense of guilt, doubt, and aggression. However, they rarely use a coping style focused on the task, *i.e*., making an effort to solve the problem. Low competence in coping with difficulties by students with school failures was also demonstrated in the research by Domagała-Zyśk and Amilkiewicz-Marek (2019). Neil Alexander-Passe's research (2008) shows that school-age children with dyslexia perceive and react to stress differently. The highest stress levels are linked to interactions with teachers and tests. For girls, additional stressors include self-image as a student and peer relationships; for boys, the effectiveness of their actions. In girls, stress leads

to negative emotional reactions toward others, while in boys, it results in fear, shame, and social withdrawal. These findings highlight non-constructive coping strategies used by students.

Motivational-volitional aspect. Motivation to learn and persistence in action, understood as mobilising oneself to act and to complete an activity despite obstacles, are crucial in school learning. Studies show that students with learning difficulties have deficits in both areas compared to their peers (Anonim, 2017; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998). Long-term failure reduces motivation (Brophy, 2002; Tyszkowa, 1964, 1976). As a result, students may lose interest, feel aversion to learning and school, neglect duties (*e.g.*, homework, test preparation), skip classes, and avoid school (Pomirska, 2023; Selikowitz, 1999). Research confirms that mainly weaker students develop negative attitudes toward learning, school, and teachers (Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998).

Children with learning difficulties often face failure from the very beginning of school and understand its consequences. In this context, the reaction of the social environment significantly affects their motivation. Negative attitudes from teachers, family, and peers — who view the child as problematic and expect failure — lower the child's motivation, effort, and perseverance. These conditions foster the development of failure syndrome and learned helplessness (Brophy, 2002).

Tommaso Feraco, Gerardo Pellegrino, Nicole Casali, Barbara Carretti, and Chiara Meneghetti (2025), in their study on soft skills among Italian students aged 11–20 with specific learning disabilities (SLD), focused on volitional skills, referred to as self-management (*e.g.*, conscientiousness, task and time management, goal-oriented action). They found that students with SLD struggle with planning, perseverance, and self-regulation in goal-directed behaviour.

Elżbieta Zwierzyńska and Andrzej Matuszewski (2002) cite research showing that as students grow older, their motivation to learn decreases while anxiety increases. This is linked to changing expectations and lower self-esteem regarding abilities and skills. Students stop believing that effort can compensate for deficits and begin to see increased effort as a sign of low ability, which further reduces motivation and increases school-related anxiety. Małgorzata Półtorak (2017) lists personality traits of people with dyslexia that are related to motivation and purposeful action, such as lack of initiative, low ambitions, conformism, and group dependence. A common trait is a sense of external control. Children with school difficulties also struggle with decision-making, setting realistic goals, anticipating consequences, and perseverance. These deficits often lead to repeated failures (Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, 1998; McWhirter *et al.*, 2001; Spionek, 1970; Tyszkowa, 1976).

Studies show that motivation and persistence are linked to school achievements. Jere Brophy (2002) emphasises the role of feedback and grades – negative feedback lowers motivation, acts as punishment, and evokes unpleasant emotions. Repeated

failures combined with negative (also social) evaluations reduce the willingness to persevere. The child abandons the task and does not make further efforts for fear of failure (Kowaluk, 2009). It is worth noting that poor quality peer relationships, reflected in negative interactions and low social status in the group, reduce children's motivation to learn (Deptuła, 2013; Kowaluk, 2009).

Problems with motivation and persistence were also noted in a 2022 study on the well-being of children and youth after the COVID-19 pandemic, involving over 300 pedagogues, psychologists, and students. The most common difficulties related to remote learning included problems with self-regulation, independent organisation of the learning process, motivation, social isolation, and poor home learning conditions. Although the study involved the general population of Polish students, these issues likely affect students with school difficulties even more (*Głos pedagogiczny*, 2022).

Social aspect. The vast majority of children with learning difficulties show various social deficits (*e.g.*, Kavale & Forness, 1966, as cited in Kowaluk, 2009). They have low social competencies, particularly in communication (Domagała-Zyśk, 2004, 2012), and struggle to build and maintain relationships (Feraco *et al.*, 2025; Ledwoch, 1995). Research by Agnieszka Pawluk-Skrzypek (2015) shows that most 15- and 16-year-olds with dyslexia have low or average social competencies, often expressed through passive or aggressive behaviour, resulting in peer withdrawal and lack of friendships (Kowaluk, 2009; Kulas, 1986; Łukasik, 1998). These issues are especially evident in cases of grade repetition or school dropout due to long-term academic failure. Research also shows that social competencies decline the longer the difficulties persist (Domagała-Zyśk & Amilkiewicz-Marek, 2019; McWhirter *et al.*, 2001; Sorokosz, 2014).

The poor social situation of students with school failures is reflected in their low sociometric status in the peer group – they are rejected or isolated (Appelt, 2005; Deptuła, 1996, 2013; Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998; Spionek, 1970). Among younger students with learning difficulties, half are rejected and over 30% isolated, especially in contexts of learning, play, and friendship (Gindrich, 2002). Similar findings are reported by Piotr Wiliński (2005) and Anna Brzezińska (2004). Students with low academic performance are rarely chosen as friends and struggle socially, experiencing loneliness and rejection. This leads to fear of exclusion, further weakening social contact and reinforcing a cycle of isolation.

The disadvantaged social position of students with learning difficulties limits their chances to gain new experiences, which are essential for developing social competencies, improving group status, building self-esteem, and learning to cope with failure and success (Wiliński, 2005). Longitudinal studies by Gary W. Ladd, Sarah L. Herald-Brown, and Mark Reiser (2008) with children aged 5–12 showed that peer rejection negatively affects initiative, independence, cooperation, and adherence to norms. On the other hand, these students often receive negative reactions from others (disapproval, hostility, or

limited sympathy) and report low social support. However, an improvement in social status can increase their participation in class life (Łodygowska, 2017; Richman *et al*., 1998, as cited in Domagała-Zyśk & Amilkiewicz-Marek, 2019).

Some studies show that younger students with low academic results often have a positive attitude toward their class and seek recognition and bonds with high-achieving peers. This suggests they are looking for positive role models and want to improve their situation and image, though not always constructively. This tendency should be used to support them by teaching constructive behaviours and goal achievement (Parafiniuk-Soińska, 1998).

School failures in younger students disrupt adaptation processes. Most children with learning difficulties show signs of social maladjustment (*e.g*., infantile, antisocial, or re-bellious behaviours) and personal maladjustment (*e.g*., hyperactivity, attention deficits, impulsiveness). These behaviours are largely related to the lack of social acceptance and limited opportunities to experience success in play, learning, or other areas of social life (Sorokosz, 2014; Wiliński, 2005).

A student experiencing learning failure faces a socially and psychologically difficult situation both at school and at home (Spionek, 1970). Besides peers, parents, educa-tors, and teachers play a key role in the child's psychosocial functioning, especially at a younger school age (Appelt, 2005; Wiliński, 2005). According to Domagała-Zyśk (2004), school difficulties negatively impact relationships with significant others, particularly parents, leading to a sense of not meeting expectations. Children may be punished emotionally or physically by their parents, while teachers may reject them, showing reluctance and misunderstanding, often labelling them as lazy. Research shows that both parents and teachers rate these students' academic and social skills lower and more often notice behavioural issues (Łodygowska, 2017). As a result, students feel wronged, rejected, and misunderstood (Ledwoch & Giza, 2006), leading to conflicts, reduced trust, and viewing adult expectations as authoritarian, which further lowers motivation and satisfaction with learning (Gindrich, 2002).

Behavioural aspect. Many studies have revealed two basic behavioural patterns of children with low school achievements: externalising and internalising. The inter-nalising pattern includes apathy, withdrawal, anxiety, somatisation, and symptoms of childhood depression such as anhedonia, low energy, tearfulness, sleep and eating disorders, social isolation, and low self-esteem. It suggests a link between reading/writ-ing difficulties and emotional disorders. The externalising pattern involves impulsivity, hyperactivity, poor self-control and concentration, defiance, and aggression. These students seek immediate gratification and show low anxiety but high internal discomfort. They may engage in risky or antisocial behaviours in search of recognition, sometimes joining deviant peer groups. Both patterns reflect low resilience and poor behavioural regulation (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Coie *et al*., 1993; Frejman, 1995; all as cited

in McWihrter *et al.*, 2001; Ledwoch & Giza 2006; Nelson & Harwood, 2011a, 2011b; all as cited in Aro *et al.*, 2024; Porter & Rourke 1985, as cited in Rudzińska-Rogoża, 2006; Selikowitz, 1999).

One of the most serious consequences of school failure is grade retention. Research conducted during the pandemic on educational problems highlighted that students who were not promoted often included those with a history of truancy during traditional learning and prior episodes of depression or anxiety (Nowosielska, 2020).

School failures contribute to the development of behavioural disorders in children, often appearing before age 10 as oppositional-defiant behaviours. Wiliński's (2005) staircase model of behavioural pathology describes these issues as a secondary effect of school failure, potentially leading to antisocial personality disorder.

Spionek (1970) described negative behaviour patterns in students with learning difficulties. In grades 4–6, these included pranks, disrespect for teachers, lying, truancy, theft, joining hooligan groups, and running away from home (the latter three being less common). The frequency of these behaviours, especially truancy, increases with age, with grade 6 students showing signs of advanced behavioural derailment.

Students with learning difficulties often try to cope with their situation using strategies that are ineffective or harmful to themselves, their environment, and academic success. Thomson (1996, as cited in Łodygowska, 2017) noted that children with dyslexia respond to school stress through withdrawal (passivity, avoidance, somatic symptoms) or compensation—either positive (*e.g.*, sports, volunteering) or negative (*e.g.*, disrupting class, acting as the *class clown*). Similarly, Spionek (1970) described defence mechanisms like escape, denial, self- or other-blame, reducing the value of grades and teacher authority, fantasising about success, and various forms of rebellion such as neglecting duties, arrogance, or antisocial behaviour.

Discussion of Results and Conclusion. Research Perspectives and Practical Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the literature indicates that difficulties and failures at school have a significant impact on the psychosocial functioning of children. They create a specific network of risk, intertwining unfavourable individual and social conditions and generating further obstacles. They are the main risk factor for serious school failures, dysfunctions, and disorders, which in turn correlate with other harmful factors (McWhirter *et al.*, 2001). Successes and failures in the first years of education often determine the course of the further school career and professional work as an adult (Jabłoński, 2005). The actions taken should support the development of children, among others, building a sense of self-worth and positive self-esteem, motivation, self-

management skills, and social-emotional competencies. All difficulties at school should be treated as factors threatening the psychosocial development of the child and should be counteracted by compensating for deficits and supporting the development of those characteristics of the child that constitute a *protective shield* against unfavourable social, family, and personal experiences. These are some of the most important arguments in favour of researching the phenomenon of difficulties and failures at school.

Previous studies confirm the existence of a link between failure in learning and problems in the self-orientation, emotional, social, motivational-volitional, and behavioural spheres. Nevertheless, some areas require further exploration. The students with learning difficulties most frequently studied are students with dyslexia. The author of this paper sees a need to include in the research students with learning difficulties of a broader scope, characterised by non-specific features. There is also a need for longitudinal studies, tracking the development of children with learning difficulties over the years after the experience of forced remote learning. This would allow us to determine the long-term consequences of educational failures and their impact on adult life. It is also worth examining what individual factors (*e.g.*, mental resilience, strategies for coping with stress) affect children's ability to overcome difficulties in school. There is a lack of systematic research on how the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning affected children with learning problems. It is worth conducting retrospective studies to assess the educational and psychological consequences of this period. In the scientific literature, there are references to the strengths of students with learning difficulties (mainly dyslexic students). Therefore, there is a need to complement the image of a student with difficulties and school failures with these factors. It can be assumed that the potential and resources of children with these problems can play an important role in changing negative psychosocial functioning and promoting psychological well-being and success.

Based on the study, exemplary recommendations for school practice and family upbringing were formulated. Pedagogical therapy for children with learning difficulties should be multi-track, encompassing not only corrective-compensatory or didactic-compensatory classes, but also psychotherapeutic classes (the aim of which is to extinguish intense reactions to stimuli, reducing emotional problems and behavioural disorders, supporting psychosocial development in the scope of the aspects discussed in the work). It is then that the therapy is most effective (Anonim, 2017; Dąbrowska-Jabłońska, 2012; Jastrząb, 2009; Kowaluk, 2009). It is necessary to implement at school and home daily activities adequate to address the school difficulties and the psychosocial problems of students. It is important to improve teachers' competencies in working with students with various types of learning difficulties. As part of professional development, they should acquire knowledge about the entire spectrum of learning difficulties, learning mechanisms, and ways of supporting students. Emphasis should be placed on creating a positive school environment and a supportive classroom atmosphere. Promoting

acceptance and social integration while counteracting the stigmatisation of students with learning difficulties is crucial for many aspects of psychosocial functioning. Cooperation between the school and parents should be based on educating them in a similar scope as teachers, and learning effective methods of supporting children in learning and providing them with access to appropriate resources and specialists. It is also worth noting that the school implements screening tools for identifying children's educational difficulties at an early stage and implements an adapted program supporting psychosocial development included in the core curriculum of students' education.

Learning difficulties are one of the key educational problems. The literature review confirms that children with school failures are more vulnerable to developmental and psychosocial dysfunctions, and schools are unable to provide sufficient support for this group of students. This can lead to many long-term consequences, such as grade retention, dropping out of school, and difficulties in adult professional and social life. Therefore, it is important that supporting children with learning difficulties is treated as a priority by teachers, educators, and educational policymakers.

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