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RESILIENT LIFE PATHS IN RELATION TO SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Resilient life pathways are of particular importance in special needs education, whether for children with mild intellectual disabilities, speech impairments or learning disabilities. All these children may already face barriers during their education which can have a significant impact not only on their development but also on their social integration. Successfully facing and overcoming these difficulties can be a key factor in adapting to future challenges in different areas of life. One of the main aims of special education is to support the child's development through personalised development methods based on the child's strengths. Understanding the life course of a child can help to focus attention on individual resources and strengths, which can help to better define intervention points, increase the effectiveness of educational work and, in the long term, contribute to more successful social integration.

KEYWORDS

special needs education, resilient life, intellectual disabilities, speech impairments, learning disabilities, development

INTRODUCTION

Special needs education plays a key role in supporting children and young people with a range of developmental and learning difficulties, both in education and in social inclusion. The pedagogical approach aims not only to develop different skills but also, increasingly, to promote the emotional, social and psychological well-being of learners. One of the most important areas, which is also becoming a focus of special education work today, is the development of the ability to cope with challenges and difficulties. According to Ceglédi (2012), difficulties are inevitable throughout life. The results of pedagogical and psychological research point in the direction that in coping with frustrating situations, individuals make both cognitive and behavioural efforts. Thus, coping refers to the mobilisation of an individual's internal and external forces, which are directed at different levels (cognitive, emotional, behavioural) to deal with a problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 cited in Pikó & Hamvai, 2012; Szabóné 2019). The success of coping can be facilitated by a number of protective factors that give a chance to avoid or even counteract negative effects (Solymosi, 2017).

Resilient life paths refer to life trajectories in which individuals are able to respond adaptively to difficulties, maintaining or regaining mental and emotional balance (Ceglédi, 2012).

Research in recent years has increasingly shown that resilience is not an innate trait but a developable ability that is significantly influenced by the environment, in particular by

supportive educational processes (Masten, 2008). Methods used in therapeutic pedagogical work, safe educational frameworks, positive self-esteem and the development of coping strategies can all contribute to the development of resilient life pathways for the children and young people concerned.

The aim of the present study is to highlight the relationship between therapeutic education and resilience by showing how therapeutic educational support contributes to the development of long-term life skills and helps individuals to withstand difficulties and adapt successfully to changing life circumstances, thus enabling them to integrate well into society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The education and support of pupils with special educational needs is one of the most important areas of inclusive pedagogy, which is receiving increasing attention in educational research. The aim of the inclusive school approach is to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn and develop, regardless of their specific, individual characteristics and needs (Varga, 2015). Students with special educational needs have a range of abilities, the development and nurturing of which can have a positive long-term impact on both their academic achievement and quality of life. Inclusive educational environments can provide opportunities for these abilities to emerge and develop through appropriate pedagogical methods after integration. However, the success of learners depends to a large extent on the attitudes, commitment and competences of teachers, i.e. their ability to provide the conditions and equities that enable children to integrate effectively into the classroom community and then into society (Hardy & Woodcock, 2013).

Independence and self-reliance are key competences in the development of pupils with special educational needs. Pedagogical research emphasises that developing independence not only improves academic performance, but also strengthens learners' confidence, resilience and problem-solving skills in other areas of life. Moreover, more independent learners are better able to adapt to social and labour market challenges that help them to succeed as adults (Levin & Schrum, 2017).

Several studies show that the development of independence is particularly important for learners with special educational needs, as it is one of the factors that determine their ability to integrate into society (Fernandes et.al., 2021, Harðardottir et.al., 2015. Johnson et al. (2021) have shown that pupils with special educational needs who receive adequate support to develop independence during their school years are more likely to become autonomous, active members of their communities later in life. Developing the ability to be independent can help them to cope with the challenges of school and everyday life, and can also contribute to their mental and emotional well-being (Johnson et.al., 2021).

Resilience, i.e. the ability to cope with adversity and stress, is also a priority for pupils with special educational needs. In a comprehensive study, Harðardottir and colleagues (2018) concluded that the development of resilience has a significant impact on the educational outcomes of pupils with special educational needs. Research shows that students who develop greater levels of autonomy are better able to cope with educational challenges and less exposed to the negative effects of stress and failure. As a result, these learners are more successful in the school environment and more successful in the long term in different areas of life (Harðardottir et.al., 2018).

The study by Ceglédi (2012) summarises resilience as follows. One of the narrowest interpretations of resilience refers to motivated students with high self-esteem as resilient, who appear to adapt successfully to difficulties, regardless of whether these characteristics

have developed despite adverse circumstances. In European academic discourse, however, resilience has a deeper meaning and is often interpreted as "mental resilience" or "resilience". This concept is most often used as a synonym for "thriving in the face of adversity", referring to the ability to enable individuals to succeed in spite of adverse circumstances. The International Resilience Project also emphasises this approach, defining resilience as a universal capacity to help prevent or minimise the negative effects of adversity (Ceglédi, 2012).

A simple, positive behaviour-based approach to resilience can be nuanced by taking into account the different difficulties and how individuals, groups or communities respond differently to them. Sameroff and Rosenblum (2007) point out that resilience is a complex concept and that overcoming difficulties cannot be understood in a one-plane way. Life can present many different challenges, which are associated with different coping strategies. According to Sameroff and Rosenblum (2007), observing positive adaptations in one area does not necessarily guarantee that an individual will be equally successful in other areas. For example, children who adapt well to a particular environmental difficulty may, however, struggle with problems in other areas, such as their emotional life, such as depression (Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2007).

The straightforward progression of an individual's life path can therefore be hampered by a number of factors. In the case of people with special educational needs, avoiding a frustrating situation - choosing ways to avoid it in the case of cognitive impairment - can also be difficult. The fact and severity of the SEN or disability may also affect the richness of the repertoire of coping strategies (Radványi, 2007 cited in Szabóné, 2022). Depending on where the individual is in his/her life course and development, he/she may react differently to the difficulties and problems that arise. They can be seen as a trigger for negative behavioural change, but also as a chance to mature (Berszán, 2015).

RESEARCH METHODS

In our study, we would like to outline the results of two separate pieces of qualitative research, each with a deeper context from the point of view of the topic in focus. In the first research (Balogh, 2023), the life paths of adults born with cleft lip and palate and with speech impediments were mapped, while in the second (Szabóné, 2022), adults with mild intellectual disabilities were mapped. The questionnaires and interviews sought to answer, among other things, whether the persons concerned show a positive attitude in their lives despite the difficulties, whether they can be proud of themselves and of what they have achieved. What risk and protective factors can be identified from the results? We also wanted to gather information on how they look back along emotional lines, how they have integrated each of the highlighted events into their individual life story. The questions also focused on their experiences of school life and teachers, as we know that what happened there is not only important for later socialisation at work, but also for individual well-being.

RESULTS

In presenting the results, we would first like to present the results of the adult sample born with cleft (n=20). The questionnaire was composed of five sections: sociodemographic data, well-being index, current feelings, questions related to studies, questions related to speech/language therapy/pedagogical development. From the sociodemographic data, the first table illustrates the studies completed by the study sample with speech impairments.

1. Table 1: Educational attainment of respondents with a speech impediment

Primary school (8 classes)	completed by all completers
Secondary education (vocational school, technical school, technical college)	13
Secondary education (gymnasium)	2
Bachelor's degree (BA, BsC)	4
Master's degree (MA, MsC)	1
PhD	0

Source: Own editing (authors)

It can be seen that there is a higher proportion of respondents who completed their secondary education in vocational or technical schools. Fewer are those who have pursued higher education. Unfortunately, the sample size is not large, so the results are not representative, but the responses to the rest of the questionnaire show that more people did not like being at school because of the teasing, name-calling and bullying. This could also have an impact on their studies.

Looking at the Well-being index for people with clefts (WHO, 1998, Bench, 2004), 5 short statements were scored from one to five by respondents. The first statement ; I feel happy and cheerful had an average score of 3.91, the second statement ; I feel calm and rested had an average score of 3.1. The statement I feel active and vigorous received an average score of 3.41, while the average response to the statement I wake up feeling fresh and rested was 3.08. The fifth item My everyday life is full of things that interest me was 3.7.

90% of the sample, 18 people, had seen a speech and language therapist. Their responses to questions about therapy were as follows. 12 out of 19 needed private speech therapy and had to travel a long way from their home. The average score for the rating of the importance and usefulness of speech therapy was 3.91. 7 out of 20 people still have a nasal tone of voice, which makes it difficult to communicate or speak in front of others, as many of the respondents indicated that they have problems with clear and accurate articulation and with the intelligibility of their speech. The responses received also show that family members, friends and colleagues ask a lot about the scars on their faces. The following figure (Figure 1) shows the responses to the question on exclusion.

From the responses, it can be seen that the group with a speech impediment felt more excluded during their studies. Children born with a cleft therefore face a range of difficulties at school. They often have speech development problems which can make it difficult for them to communicate with their peers and teachers. They can also face serious challenges of self-doubt and social isolation, as they often feel "different". The support of the school environment and a range of developmental activities can help children to overcome these barriers successfully.

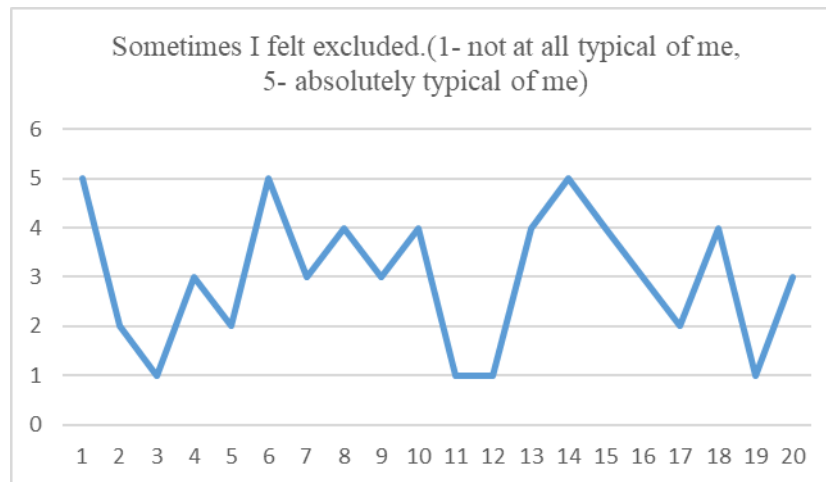


Figure 1: Feelings of exclusion. Source: own editing

So the next question was directed at their teachers, asking whether they had been helpful to them during their studies and whether they had received the extra fairness/help they needed. The average rating for this statement was 2.4, which suggests that unfortunately they did not receive the extra attention they needed.

At the end of the questionnaire, we gave the respondents the opportunity to give short answers about what they were proud of, some of which we include in our study, as they reflect the resilience that is also indicated in the main title:

"I have stood and stand my ground in life, and of course I am very proud of my family, my children and my little granddaughter."

"I am proud that I have successfully overcome many difficulties and that I am now living a largely happy life."

"I'm living a full life as it is! My partner in life loves me like this, I am a happy mother of 3 children (1 of them with cleft)!"

"I have learned a lot, I have managed to get a university degree."

The interviewing of persons with mild intellectual disability who were once students in a special education institution (Szabóné, 2022) was complicated by a number of factors. The most current of these is the one already reported by Kemény in a follow-up study in 1985, according to which successfully integrated persons concealed the location of their former studies from their workplace or even their spouse because of the possible stigma. Thus, sampling was mainly based on access, supplemented by a snowball method, which eventually reached 49 individuals.

From the results of the semi-structured life history interviews obtained through thematic analysis, only the information relevant to the central theme will be highlighted in this study. The central theme of the life stories is the difficulties that have been identified as obstacles to successful progress. A large proportion of them were related to the family, the primary socialisation arena. In many cases, the negative factors did not stand alone, but were a kind of negative spiral that brought new difficulties into the lives of the interviewees.

"Well, we were living in a very bad situation. My mother was beating, she was starving, we had to beg money from other people to live, because my dear mother refused to work..."

The negative narratives related to the school life were mostly still related to the mainstream institution and told of slower progress and increasing backwardness. A more prominent image was that of a lack of acceptance and inclusion, and of grievances about the work of teachers.

"They are (teachers). They felt you were stupid, you couldn't do it well. You're not good enough, and then classmates looked down on you. Well, because I wasn't that fast... Well, I had sleepless nights with him."

And for many, the stigma of being in a special education institution and the years spent there were also a challenge to overcome.

"I was ashamed to be ashamed, I sometimes denied where I came from."

"They said we were lemurs because we were called lemurs. And we were nuts."

"What was it that was so hard about it? That I was aware that it was an auxiliary school and not a regular school."

By highlighting these few ideas, we can also see the main difficulties that characterise the life paths that start from a special education institution. Since in current work we focus mainly on the work of the special needs teacher(s), we highlight that in contrast to the difficulties described above, the person and work of the special needs teacher(s) can be identified as a protective factor in most of the narratives.

"Well, it was completely different there. I loved Teacher P. and the other teachers. They were not angry, they were patient, they loved me."

"... and I think that for a child it is very important both the contact with the teacher and the opportunities that he/she gets. To show that you are not a zero. You may be different from the others, but you have more."

And success in school can have an impact not only on the stage but also on the stages of later life. The majority of the interviewees interviewed have gone on to further education, obtained a professional qualification and have been successful in the labour market. Many of them also reported satisfaction with their current life, despite previous difficulties, as an important "yardstick" of subjective well-being.

"I'm doing very well at the moment, no problems really. I have what I need, what I need, I don't need more."

"Super. What more do I need. I have housing, I have a serious girlfriend, I have a good fraternal relationship."

Through the presentation of these two small snippets of research, we can see that the teacher's personality, attitude and preparation are also a focus for successful social integration and individual well-being at school.

CONCLUSION

Pupils with special needs often face a number of barriers and challenges in their education, which affect their academic performance, social relationships, emotional well-being and future prospects. In coping with these difficulties, the role of an inclusive school environment and teachers can be decisive factors in determining whether these learners are able to shape their life path in a positive way. Teachers' attitudes and attitudes, which include empathy, patience and professionalism, are key determinants of the extent to which learners feel accepted and supported in the learning process (Vida, 2022, Pető & Ceglédi, 2012, Szabó, 2016).

An inclusive school environment (Varga, 2015), which is sensitive to different individual needs, can provide community experiences and educational opportunities that contribute to students' personal development and self-confidence. If educators are able to recognise the specific needs of special education cases and adapt their teaching methods accordingly, learners may be able to overcome difficulties, which in the long run can help them to succeed in life. Continuous positive feedback from teachers, a focus on development

and a supportive environment are all factors that promote students' success, not only in school but also later in the labour market and in social integration (Széll, 2018).

Working together in an inclusive environment, involving the joint efforts of pupils, teachers and parents, can create a positive vision in which special education cases can lead successful and independent lives. Creating equal opportunities is therefore not only an important task at the educational level, but also at the societal level, which in the long run benefits both individuals and communities (Varga, 2015). Therefore, it is the responsibility of educators to actively contribute to ensuring that all learners receive the support, opportunities and motivation they need to develop, as all of these can be key to achieving a positive life path later on.

COMPLETION

In our study, we sought to answer the question of whether the life paths of individuals from different groups with special educational needs can have a positive outcome despite the difficulties they experience. Using qualitative measurement tools (questionnaire, interview), we explored the experiences of the study and related them to current psychological state and satisfaction.

Although the sample size is small and the results are not representative, it is clear that the interviewees have experienced several difficulties during their school years (bullying, teasing, bad grades, neglect). Nevertheless, their current psychological state, their personal opinion and their satisfaction with their life give us information that the resilience factor is present in their lives. The results of the questionnaires and the interviews suggest that an inclusive school environment, the existence of equity and an accepting, inclusive and positive teacher attitude all influence students' resilience, which may also have an impact on their subsequent positive life course.

The key role of teachers can be to create a supportive, inclusive environment in which learners can build resilience. Using educational strategies that build on learners' strengths can help to develop a positive self-image and self-confidence, as well as emotional stability and problem-solving skills. Special education work is therefore not only focused on academic success, but requires a holistic approach in which the personal and social competences of learners are also emphasised. The ultimate aim of this process is to promote positive social integration. Learners who are able to withstand adversity, learn to adapt, manage change flexibly and cope with challenges are more likely to become adults who can participate effectively in society. Resilience is therefore not only a key to personal success, but also a prerequisite for social inclusion and active participation. Special needs education that consciously builds on the development of resilience can contribute to creating a future where learners with special educational needs can become full members of their communities and make a valuable contribution to the development of society.

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