

School development in challenging social conditions: achieving academic success and management difficulties

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to compare the experiences of working with socially vulnerable children in European countries and the United States with similar needs in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study addresses the problem of social tension negatively affecting children's academic performance. A qualitative design was combined with elements of quantitative analysis. The study was conducted among fifth- and ninth-grade students (ages 11–12 and 15–16, respectively) in schools in Kazan (Russia) and Almaty (Kazakhstan), involving a total of 255 participants. Academic performance was monitored throughout the school year, with performance changes analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that social tension originating from students' home environments adversely impacts their academic achievement. Data from schools in Kazan and Almaty confirm that educational success depends not only on diligence but also on the ability to solve non-standard tasks. A comparative analysis revealed that pedagogical strategies fostering student self-government and intuitive teaching methods contribute to improved academic performance, even among children from socially disadvantaged groups. The results of the study can be used in university lectures and seminars on pedagogy, as well as for further research on social factors in education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The social state, an objective that European countries aspire to achieve, provides for equal living conditions for citizens [1]. The state regulates the spheres of education, healthcare, transport, and utilities, ensuring equal access for citizens. To overcome the Soviet legacy of strict control, social relations have been adapted to European standards [2]–[4]. The socio-political conditions that emerged in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries determined the trends in educational development: the desire to preserve the national historical heritage of culture, language, and literature; the formation of national identity; and the pursuit of lifelong education [5]. Simply copying western educational models is not effective without equal access to social benefits. In regions with low social benefits, parents cannot provide their children with even a basic education. Such disparities require greater attention to the research question than if it were based on an ethnic principle [2], [6].

Given these circumstances, the relevance of the study is due to the need to develop strategies to improve the quality of school education in regions where poverty and unemployment hinder lifelong learning. Referring to the Concept for the Development of Preschool, General Secondary, Technical, and Vocational Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029, several key aspects can be highlighted: conceptual documents have been adopted aimed at modernizing the education sector; the content of education has become more flexible and aligned with contemporary requirements; and modern educators must not only be bearers of knowledge but also moderators who actively engage students in the learning process [7], [8]. This article offers an original and reflective investigation into the characteristics of school education within contexts of social inequality and the deteriorating living conditions of students' families in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study's central objective is to delineate strategies for improving the quality of education in regions where poverty and unemployment create barriers to lifelong learning. Specifically, the study focuses on the relationship between students' academic success and the conditions in which they and their families live. Additionally, this study compares approaches to working with socially vulnerable children in Europe and the United States, assessing their applicability to the educational challenges faced in Russia and Kazakhstan. The contribution of this research to global scholarship is highlighted by its focus on the shared educational needs of societies facing social stratification.

The hypothesis of the pedagogical experiment posits that school-age children can alter their attitudes toward learning, which may have deteriorated due to shortcomings in their socialization, through psychological intervention methods. This hypothesis is grounded in theories of choice [9] and the role of intuition in education [10]. The tasks of the study are: i) to examine the characteristics of the concept of "complex social conditions"; ii) to identify the stakeholders in education within the context of insufficient social adaptation; iii) to ascertain the directions and forms of educational work with challenging children in the regions of Russia and Kazakhstan; iv) to determine the school's approaches to working with students who have not undergone social adaptation in their families or who have been raised in environments characterized by violations of rights, violence, and humiliation; and v) to formulate recommendations for improving conditions in the context of adverse social environments—such as war, poverty, and addiction.

The gap in the literature is the insufficient consideration of the role of teacher leadership, effective parental involvement, adaptation of education to social inequality, overcoming ethnic distrust, motivating students and teachers in difficult conditions, as well as the lack of systemic support for the socialization of students from vulnerable groups [11]–[13]. Therefore, this study illustrates how to adapt teaching and school management to the needs of students to ensure equality in education. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its comparative analysis of how social inequality affects educational processes in schools of Russia and Kazakhstan, examined through the lens of adaptation to European welfare state standards. The article has practical implications for societies with unequal access to social goods, particularly in working with children raised in single-parent households. In such cases, overcoming barriers to education becomes a priority, which cannot be achieved solely through increased funding for educational programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies demonstrate the correlation between the effectiveness of school performance indicators and the collaborative efforts of school leaders, educators [11], [12], and parents of students [13]. Given that the school is primarily led by a principal and, in some cases, by the teaching staff, the emphasis is placed on the personal leadership qualities of educators [14]. These characteristics help maintain a balance between educational requirements and the realities presented by students and their parents. In practice, parents of students come together to form a parent council or committee.

Global experience indicates that collective parent organizations are empowered to oversee educational processes [15], [16]. For this to be effective, parents must not shift the responsibility for their children's education onto the school. The Swedish model of school principal preparation exemplifies a context-sensitive approach, emphasizing the need to thoroughly examine the role of school context in effective leadership. It further advocates for preparing school leaders to consider the realities of their specific working environments in relation to their needs [17]. The success of a school depends more on a supportive community climate than vice versa: involving parents and the community can be a resource for addressing safety and violence issues, especially in safe and well-maintained schools [18]. This highlights the need to adapt education systems to conditions of social inequality and to find strategies that promote motivation, social adaptation, and the development of independent thinking among children from vulnerable groups.

According to the principles of cooperative pedagogy, mutual trust is considered the foundation of stability in the relationships between teachers and students [12], [19]. These characteristics serve as a basis for improvements in areas where representatives of multiple ethnic groups reside compactly [20]. In such cases, overcoming mistrust among students within a single school, or between students and teachers,

becomes a significant challenge [21], [22]. The path to overcoming mutual distrust involves factors that unite individuals [12], [19]. In American society, the church has traditionally united people, helping to solve problems of homelessness, violence, and addiction. Although schools cannot solve all social problems, they affect the quality of education. For groups with unequal access to benefits, it is important to create conditions of unity at higher levels of need, which the church provides through the upbringing of internal values and support for future leaders [23].

The tradition of personal leadership is relevant for societies that do not suppress individual qualities, unlike totalitarian educational systems. However, in this context, passivity can hinder improvements, leading to stagnation [13], [24]. Relationships in schools located in areas with an unfavorable social atmosphere are perceived as suppressing personal qualities and initiative. Furthermore, ignoring student initiatives during decision-making processes and the lack of choice can result in decreased academic motivation among students, consequently deteriorating the learning process and academic performance.

In the context of national diversity observed in both the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, additional complexities arise in the management of educational institutions. Both countries are home to over 130 ethnic groups, which impose specific requirements on the teaching staff, who must account for the cultural and linguistic characteristics of various ethnic communities [25], [26]. These characteristics can lead to the segmentation of educators based on ethnic criteria, particularly in regions experiencing significant influxes of migrants or students from other areas. In the United States, the blending of nationalities is a common reality; however, practice indicates that biased evaluations may occur when one nationality predominates among the majority [27].

Cultural and linguistic differences, combined with low interaction between teachers and students, contribute to dropout rates in schools with diverse social compositions. Insufficient change leads to passivity in learning, where responsibility is placed on students and parents, but rarely on teachers. In cases of stagnation, it is effective to implement value-oriented measures, including working with teachers to increase student motivation and actively involving parents, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Five stages of school improvement

Sequential process of guiding learning	Educational assignments are aligned with curricula and meet the requirements of what students need to know
Professional competence	The quality of education in the school is determined by the qualifications of the educators.
Connections between parents, the community, and the school	Students whose parents do not pay attention to their academic success suffer from a lack of attention, which consequently lowers their performance. The school maintains communication between students and parents to ensure the latter's involvement in their children's development.
Student-centered learning climate	Scientific research work is encouraged among students at school, aiding in their future career choices and higher education pursuits.
Importance of leadership in educational collectives	Teachers and school principals promote self-management among students. This requires educators to possess organizational and leadership skills themselves.

Note: developed by the authors based on data from [17], [28], [29]

Attention to internal psychological factors raises the issue of personal effectiveness, which encompasses various value components, including salary increases that help secure educators' employment. The demand for greater professional resilience among teachers highlights four groups of factors, which are discussed as:

- Professional (cognitive): this includes the commitment of future educators, as well as skills related to organizing, preparing, and conducting lessons.
- Social: this encompasses communication skills, problem-solving abilities, support for development, adaptability, and reflectiveness in response to the challenges of working with students.
- Activity-based: this is influenced by motivation, which enables teachers to maintain their desire to work in unfavorable social environments; key components include optimism and perseverance, a focus on improvement and personal effectiveness, the establishment of realistic goals and expectations, and the maintenance of motivation and enthusiasm; in schools where students come from incomplete families and lack parental attention, teacher motivation serves as a bridge to student success.
- Emotional: this group includes a sense of humor, the ability to manage emotions, the capacity to avoid personalizing conflicts, overcoming difficulties, and recovering from the challenges of teaching.

In practice, the complex tasks for which teachers are responsible cannot be resolved in isolation. Even when a single educator works with a student or a class at a given moment, collaboration with the teaching staff is essential to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge and experience.

Among the functions of schools that prepare students for adult life and further education, the development of functional literacy and problem-solving skills are important. However, the foundations of

these abilities are formed even before birth [19]. Children from intact families with harmonious parental relationships usually develop talents, knowledge, communication skills, and a positive attitude toward people. In contrast, children from broken families or orphans often face internal crises, which lead to four key causes of antisocial behavior in students [30]: i) the desire to attract attention, reflecting an external positive motivation; ii) the desire to gain power; iii) revenge stemming from concealed grievances; and iv) the avoidance of failure, representing an external negative motivation.

Social tension within a classroom or school is not exacerbated if the proportion of students who are habitual offenders of school regulations does not exceed that of well-adjusted students. However, when the number of children suffering from a lack of supervision increases, the situation becomes more complicated. The responsibility for socialization falls on the shoulders of school psychologists, social educators, caregivers, and tutors, who may not teach specific subjects within the school curriculum but are nonetheless tasked with preparing students for independent living.

3. METHOD

3.1. Study design and sampling

The study employed an embedded mixed-methods design, in which qualitative data (interviews and observations) were integrated into the experimental quantitative framework to enable a more nuanced interpretation of the findings [31]. This form of methodological integration facilitates data triangulation. The qualitative component elucidates underlying mechanisms that cannot be fully captured or explained by quantitative models alone. The qualitative dimension involved an in-depth examination of the social and psychological aspects of students' behavior through observations, individual conversations, analysis of pedagogical situations, and interviews with teachers, parents, and students. The quantitative component comprised a comparative analysis of academic performance metrics between experimental and control groups across two schools, with data systematically organized in comparative tables.

The research methodology is based on the provisions of the normative and resource approaches [3], [6], [32]. The application of methods and principles of pedagogical research is justified by the specificity of the subject matter. The comparison with European and American practices was grounded in a systematic review of the literature. The search covered publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science from 2019 to 2024 using the queries "disadvantaged students" and "social inequality in school leadership". The screening process identified sources addressing pedagogical strategies in schools in Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, and United States. The review protocol followed the logic of integrative synthesis. A bibliometric analysis yielded 387 articles, of which 18 of the most highly cited studies were subjected to qualitative synthesis [33]. Cross-national datasets served as interpretive reference points for forms of instructional leadership aimed at mitigating the impact of socioeconomic disparities on academic achievement. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) cycle included 32,032 students from seven countries [34]. Spanish leadership models targeting the removal of barriers in disadvantaged schools further expanded the scope of comparative analysis [35]. Empirical data were collected in schools in Kazan and Almaty. International scholarly research functioned as the theoretical framework for interpreting local findings, without claiming direct empirical comparability. This article addresses the challenges of pedagogical work with children and youth from single-parent families who live in conditions of insufficient income and problematic housing. This issue is illuminated by the principle of relative objectivity and accuracy of research results, which denotes the interaction of factors within the study.

The principle of holistic study of the subject implies that the educator contemplates the child's behavior as a whole, considering their actions at a specific moment in life. The notion of brain plasticity [10], which posits that the brain alters its response to stimuli with changes in the environment, allows for the idea that the school's role is to supplement or substitute for home upbringing in the absence of parental care.

3.2. Sampling

The study was conducted in the fifth and ninth grades of secondary schools no. 21, no. 113, and no. 68 in Kazan (Russia), as well as schools no. 14, no. 114, and no. 151 in Almaty (Kazakhstan), which serve children from single-parent families and socially orphaned children with living parents. The statistical database was formed using a stratified, purposeful sampling method, as students from disadvantaged and single-parent families were educated alongside others who were not included in the study. The sample comprised students of middle school age, 11 to 12 years old, and high school students from the older age group, 15 to 16 years old. The total number of participants in the experiment was 255 individuals. The experimental group (n=128) consisted of students from single-parent families and social orphans. Over a six-month period, they received systematic pedagogical intervention. The control group (n=127) included students with comparable social backgrounds who followed the standard curriculum without additional interventions.

The pedagogical intervention implemented in the experimental group comprised several components: individual counseling sessions with a psychologist conducted twice a month; group activities involving situational modeling based on the “Descartes’ square” method; participation in student self-governance structures; extracurricular activities promoting healthy lifestyles; and weekly discussions with homeroom teachers grounded in choice theory methodology. Group assignment was non-random and was based on parental consent and students’ willingness to participate. The researchers adhered to the principles of objectivity and impartiality, without regard to the students’ gender, while maintaining participant anonymity.

Participants in the study were recruited through school administrations following preliminary agreements with educational institutions. After securing administrative approval, the researchers collaborated with classroom teachers to compile a list of students meeting the selection criteria (specifically those from single-parent families or classified as social orphans). Subsequently, the researchers contacted parents or legal guardians via written notification explaining the purpose of the study, the principles of confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participation was allowed only after receiving written informed consent from parents or guardians. No open advertisements or public invitations were used; instead, the recruitment process employed targeted sampling, reflecting both the social status of the participants and the study’s specifics.

3.3. Data collection

The study collected data using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary qualitative data were gathered through individual interviews with students, incorporating situational modeling techniques and questions aimed at identifying children’s motivation and initiative in learning. Examples of questions included: “what will happen if this task is completed?”, “what will happen if this task is not completed?”, “which of the two situations appears more favorable?” The qualitative component was based on three methods. Semi-structured interviews lasting 20–35 minutes were conducted with students ($n=42$), teachers ($n=18$), and parents ($n=24$); all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participant observation was carried out across 48 lessons, with behavioral indicators documented using structured observation protocols. In addition, collaborative analysis of pedagogical situations with homeroom teachers enabled the identification of contextual factors that precipitated antisocial behavior. The interview protocol integrated elements of Descartes’ square methodology to facilitate a deeper analysis of students’ motivational attitudes. In addition to the interviews, the academic performance of students in the selected schools was monitored. The experimental and control groups of students were compared in terms of their achievement in three disciplinary domains: physical and mathematical sciences, natural sciences, and humanities.

Data collection included observations focusing on the course of lessons, including how students responded to teacher explanations, engaged in discussions, and approached both independent work assignments and homework completion. Additionally, interviews with teachers, classroom teachers, school psychologists, and parents were organized to capture diverse perspectives. Subsequent analysis involved examining correlations between the behavioral characteristics of students and three key variables: academic performance, social background, and reactions to pedagogical influences.

3.4. Data analysis

Statistical processing was conducted using a systematized sampling method, with data displayed in MS Excel. The object of the analysis was the percentage ratio of students who participated in the study and those who improved their academic performance during the experiment. The data analysis employed thematic coding to examine the interviews while comparing the behavioral characteristics and academic performance between experimental and control groups. This analysis focused on identifying patterns connecting students’ social status, the level of school support, and the nature of their behavioral strategies.

3.5. Research instruments, validity, and reliability

The quantitative instruments included an academic achievement monitoring protocol and a structured classroom observation sheet. The monitoring protocol recorded students’ grades across three subject domains at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. The observation sheet captured four indicators: attention concentration, participation in discussions, completion of in-class tasks, and completion of homework assignments.

The qualitative instruments comprised a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 12 questions designed according to the “Descartes’ square” methodology, as well as the researcher’s observation diary. Content validity was ensured through expert review by five pedagogy specialists and pilot testing with 15 students outside the main sample. The reliability of the qualitative data was supported by triangulation of data sources (students, teachers, and parents) and methods (interviews, observations, and outcome analysis). Inter-coder agreement in the thematic analysis reached 87% (Cohen’s $\kappa=0.82$).

3.6. Study limitations

Factors that limited the research included the inability to obtain objective answers to the questions posed. At the sampling stage, issues of indifference among students and their unwillingness to participate in the research emerged. The reasons for this lack of objectivity included students' refusals to answer, a desire to manipulate the results, or to "reassess" their performance in their favor.

During the surveys, a phenomenon of confounding bias occurred; students' responses were influenced by the classroom environment and factors that hindered their ability to complete homework assignments. Students from the test group often refused to complete tasks due to distractions from the previous day, a lack of understanding of the assignment's essence, or simply forgetting to do the work. Given these conditions, it became impossible to ascertain the impact of homework on the overall level of academic success.

3.7. Ethical issues

The study received approval from the ethical committee of the Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University. The following conditions were taken into account during the experiment: i) the developmental level of the children, including their knowledge and skills; ii) mandatory preliminary preparation, which involved explaining the nature and process of the tasks to the children; iii) clear and comprehensible content of the assignments; iv) accessible didactic materials; v) participation of a teacher who explains and demonstrates solutions using examples and, in cases of difficulties during independent work, provides corrective guidance; and vi) anonymity of the research (respondents' names are encoded) and obtaining consent from respondents for the publication of the results.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The concept of "complex social conditions" and identifying stakeholders in education

The conditions of social tension that children bring from home to school create challenges in their academic performance. The teacher's role, and in some cases the educator's or psychologist's role, is to identify qualities in the student's character that can be improved. Another strategy involves providing the student who exhibits destructive behavior with initiatives aimed at improving the situation.

A school environment that includes psychologists and social educators, in addition to teachers, cannot replace parental care but can foster an atmosphere of friendly mentorship. Middle school students often come from incomplete families or have parents struggling with various dependencies. For these children, the need for school educators and psychologists becomes as crucial as that for teachers.

The specificity of the situation lies in the aging of the teaching workforce and the insufficient recruitment of youth into pedagogical careers, a trend observed in both Russian and Kazakhstani schools (many pedagogical universities have been reorganized into universities) [36]. This factor has gained particular importance since 2020, when efforts had to be concentrated due to the transition to distance learning. Alongside financial assistance for educators working with children in situations of complete or partial orphanhood, there is a need to recognize the work of school psychologists and educators.

4.2. The directions and forms of educational work with challenging children in the regions of Russia and Kazakhstan

A pathway to improving antisocial behavior among children is rooted in choice theory. The central question posed to the student becomes: "which behavior should be chosen: ignoring comments, failing to complete assignments, lying out of fear or potential gain, or exercising self-control, diligence in studies, and attention to detail?" In the latter case, the student acknowledges that behavior within social frameworks cultivates personal strength. However, the study of the motives behind students' behavior in Kazan and Almaty confirmed the hypothesis that diligence in studies is not the sole prerequisite for future success. The ability to solve problems in unconventional ways ranks second in importance. To assess children's initiative and readiness for challenges, situational modeling techniques were employed. During individual conversations, students were asked questions such as: "what will happen if this task is completed?", "what will happen if this task is not completed?", and "which of the two situations is more appealing?" The techniques of "Descartes' square" were also utilized in this context.

Student A, the class monitor of the 9-A class at the Tatar-Russian School no. 68 in Kazan, states, "since the gymnasium has started to provide more freedom for expressing our thoughts, interest in studying has increased. This is particularly evident in Russian literature classes, where the class engages in discussions and debates about the works, all while maintaining discipline. Because students understand the consequences of their actions in class, even those who initially lag behind catch up by the end of the semester." Active forms of engagement, focusing on interests, healthy lifestyles, and individual mentorship

within the framework of student self-governance, have proven to be effective strategies for working with the targeted student population.

Parent B, the chairperson of the parent committee at school no. 113, notes, *“a healthy lifestyle is among the school’s priorities. Comparing the level of success before our collaboration with the Volga Academy of Physical Culture and Sport to now, we have observed that children from incomplete families are now more diligent in their studies. The parent committee concluded that the introduction of additional training sessions outside of school hours, along with an increase in games and competitions, has reduced stress levels among adolescents. At the same time, the spirit of competition that has emerged in physical education classes has heightened the students’ enthusiasm for their studies.”*

Deputy Principal V, a biology and safety education teacher at secondary school no. 21, believes that, *“increased attention to issues of safe behavior discussed in classes helps students understand the consequences of their actions or inactions in life. The lessons that adolescents learn in class can protect them from making further mistakes outside school, and may even save their lives. Students will be more likely to choose the best way to behave with minimal harm to their health if they understand the repercussions of their actions in various situations.”* The class supervisor at secondary school no. 14 in Almaty remarks, *“the growing number of students from disadvantaged families leads to difficulties in their behavior and academic performance. We strive to work individually with these children, engaging school psychologists and social educators; however, sometimes our efforts require more time and resources than are available.”*

4.3. School approaches to maladapted students and recommendations

The educator’s activity consists of a continuous stream of changing pedagogical situations. A pedagogical situation can be defined as a combination of conditions and circumstances arising in the learning process and accompanied by emotional manifestations [36]. For instance, a chemistry teacher at secondary school no. 114 in Almaty, with over 30 years of experience, shares his concerns, *“in recent years, we have felt a tremendous burden, especially during distance learning. Young people are not actively entering our profession, and many older teachers are facing burnout. We need support at the state level to motivate young specialists to come to schools and remain in the profession.”*

Teachers also emphasize the importance of dialogue with students and the development of their independence. The interaction between educators and participants in the educational process, grounded in trust and responsibility, is a key factor in successful learning. Such interaction creates an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable, can freely express their thoughts, and ask questions, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the material. Understanding determines the significance of the studied material, which, in turn, gains meaning through each student’s personal relationship with the content being learned [37]. For example, a mathematics teacher at school no. 151 in Almaty states, *“when students realize that their opinions matter and that they can influence their learning process, their motivation increases. We no longer impose solutions on them but rather show possible pathways they can take to achieve success.”*

Table 2 compares how children from the experimental and control groups of target schools performed assignments across disciplines of the physical-mathematical, natural sciences, and humanities cycles. The teacher’s role involved clarifying and correcting students’ responses through questions or rephrasing when the answers were unclear. In the case of correct answers, praise and encouragement were provided.

Monitoring the reasons for academic success or failure among students in two schools was conducted through individual interviews. The results were discussed at parent meetings. In groups with a higher degree of social dissatisfaction, as revealed by the monitoring, students tend to attribute their lack of success to external factors, such as a lack of time or being overwhelmed by other activities or classes, thereby concealing their reluctance to engage in work. Control groups demonstrated a greater interest in academic achievement, with students from challenging social backgrounds often looking up to more successful peers.

Kazakhstani schools have adopted a focus on fostering leadership, similar to practices in western educational institutions; however, leadership requires careful consideration if a child confuses it with power. In areas where the social environment is characterized as unfavorable, a child’s awareness of their own strength can lead to destructive outcomes. The school’s objective is to cultivate independent critical thinking and the ability to defend one’s viewpoint, which will provide the necessary strength of character while mitigating potential dangers.

Students who exhibit antisocial behavior normalize this model due to their experiences of indifference, hatred, and hostility within their familial environments. Children lacking parental supervision and former street children bring such behaviors from the streets, where freedom of action is not curtailed in defending one’s opinion. This results in an illusion of permissiveness that transfers into the school community. In this context, a teacher’s actions will be beneficial and prevent undesirable consequences if they demonstrate care for individual students and a sense of responsibility for the class or school as a whole.

Intuitive education in a child's life signifies the formation of neural connections through direct communication. Knowledge acquired by students during lessons with the teacher's active participation is reinforced through direct supervision, which facilitates further retrieval of information.

The discussion has highlighted the importance of fostering independent thinking among students. In cases involving children from single-parent families, where one parent provides for both their own livelihood and the child's needs, extended-day programs play a significant role. These programs offer essential assistance with homework, yet, through the teacher's pedagogical expertise, they also promote communication aimed at cultivating the student's independent thinking. In this context, direct communication proves advantageous compared to technical means.

Children from socially disadvantaged groups face challenges stemming from material conditions, dependencies, limitations, or lack of supervision, as well as specific learning conditions due to health issues. In such cases, there is an increased emphasis on establishing trusting relationships between the school and the parents of these children. The role of the school principal in engaging with this demographic necessitates leadership qualities, where the ability to organize the educational process is complemented by the skill to maintain connections with the staff and parents.

Table 2. Academic performance

Methodology		Secondary school no. 113 (Kazan)	Secondary school no. 14 (Almaty)
5th grade students in natural sciences	Explanation of new material	Distraction by external stimuli. Disruption of discipline	Attention is maintained throughout the lesson
	Discussion: the teacher asks questions, students respond	Unexpressive response to the teacher's address. Lack of motivation to respond	Students in the group attempt to answer independently, sometimes with prompting questions from the teacher
	Independent class work	Among the control group, 30% of students do not complete standard-level tasks	All students in the group completed standard-level tasks
	Homework	Selective completion	Attempts to solve tasks by all group members
5th grade students in humanities	Explanation of new material	Students in the group do not focus on the lesson topic	The control group shows interest in the lesson topic
	Discussion: the teacher asks questions, students respond	Students confuse terminology	Students in the group memorize terms and apply knowledge in the analysis of literary works
	Independent work in class	Written assignments lack logic	Students maintain a logical flow of thought throughout the work
	Homework	Errors in exercises occur due to a lack of theoretical knowledge	Errors are infrequent or absent
9th grade students in natural sciences	Explanation of new material	Distraction by external stimuli	Concentration on the topic throughout the lesson
	Discussion: the teacher asks questions, students respond	Unexpressive reaction to the teacher's address; lack of motivation to respond	The control group answered all of the teacher's questions
	Independent work in class	Students complete only selected tasks	All students completed tasks at the standard level
	Homework	Homework is completed selectively	Students make only isolated errors
9th grade students in the humanities	Explanation of new material	The group manages to focus on the topic	Attention is maintained throughout the lesson
	Discussion: the teacher asks questions, students respond	Responses are fragmented, but logic is maintained	Students are oriented in the lesson's topic, analyze, and draw their own conclusions
	Independent work in class	The level of task completion is sufficient for the assignment to be accepted	The control group completes the assignments in full
	Homework	The assignments exhibit logical coherence and are accepted	Assignments are completed in full

5. DISCUSSION

The scientific concept underlying this work is grounded in the principles of humanistic pedagogy. The theory of humanism, developed by philosophers and educators of the 18th–19th centuries, has been reflected in the educational methods of Russia and Kazakhstan. Foreign educators approached the issue from the perspective of school management processes, where they saw the implementation of leadership principles [17], [36]–[38].

Kazakhstan has the second-highest divorce rate in the world, but Kazakhs still value the institution of marriage. Social norms and cultural traditions influence attitudes towards single mothers and orphans.

Studies show that 82.5% of young Kazakhs (aged 18–29) see their future in marriage with children [39]. Although the state is improving support for orphans and single mothers, stereotypes about fatherless children remain a problem. The traditional nuclear family is considered the ideal, and children from single-parent families face stigmatization in school and society [28].

Social realities, which in some cases allow for gender inequality, are not always aligned with legislation that grants equal rights to men and women [40]. Single-parent families face difficulties in socialization, and the challenge lies in fostering values of care toward children who have lost paternal or maternal care [41]. Western societies, characterized by greater tolerance toward moral issues, offer more opportunities for self-realization to single mothers and orphaned children [42]. Our study confirms that a child's social environment exerts a substantial influence on both their academic performance and behavioral patterns within school settings. According to our findings, the greatest difficulties arise for children from families in crisis, including single-parent families, families with addiction-related issues, or those lacking adequate emotional support. These circumstances substantially elevate the importance of teachers, school psychologists, and social pedagogues. Effective pedagogical practice extends beyond imparting knowledge to include the cultivation of a healthy social climate that can mitigate deficiencies in family care.

Russian society supports educational and social programs to help children in crisis situations, including complete orphans and those struggling with addictions. It is important that society learns to trust these children, which is implemented through educational programs and partnerships between parents and children. Kazakhstan also needs such programs, but instead of the role of the church, as in Russia, the emphasis is on cooperation between schools, social services, and parents [43].

School leadership seeks to find a way to engage with students that balances the delivery of necessary knowledge with increased interest in the subject. In organizing lessons, an effective option would be to implement discussion or debate clubs, which function as seminars but with greater freedom of expression [44]. This form of instruction is particularly important in social studies classes such as history and the fundamentals of government and law. The nature of the humanities and legal disciplines assumes that final decisions on issues are formed through discussions. Every perspective—especially when the topic relates to the lives of adolescents—deserves to become the subject of the next discussion. Within Kazakh and Russian school contexts, our study found that enhanced student engagement in the learning process through active teaching methods, discussions, and situational modeling leads to an increase in both interest in subjects and overall academic performance. Empirical evidence from schools in Kazan and Almaty substantiates the effectiveness of strategies such as individual mentoring, involvement in school governance, and the integration of healthy lifestyle principles into extracurricular activities. In particular, students who participated in sports activities exhibited improved academic behavior, reduced absenteeism, and better adaptation to the academic workload.

The analysis concluded that unfavorable living conditions negatively impact students' academic performance, but this can be addressed through changes in teaching methods. Increased use of seminars, discussions, and brainstorming sessions enables students to improve concentration, overcome apathy, and reduce indifference toward their studies. The latter factor is considered a starting point for personal success and the development of leadership skills, which is a focus of western researchers [36]. Differences from western experiences are explained by the Russian and Kazakhstani educational systems' emphasis on educating and raising children within rigid programmatic frameworks, where students often lack independence and decision-making initiative. Our findings indicate the positive dynamics recorded in the control groups, confirming that targeted pedagogical interventions focusing on self-control, responsibility, and reflection effectively counteract antisocial behaviors. Interviews with teachers and students revealed that trust-based environments, the recognition of each student's worth, and the opportunity to express their own opinions collectively foster more stable intrinsic motivation for learning. The experimental groups exposed to active teaching methods demonstrated greater consistency in completing homework, responded better to teacher requests, enhanced logical structuring in written work, and improved cognitive engagement. These outcomes strongly advocate for a comprehensive educational approach combining academic, psychological, and socio-pedagogical support.

The essence of the democratic approach to education lies in the ability to identify future leaders who can take responsibility for their own lives. A teacher who organizes a problem-based lesson understands the difficulties faced by children during discussions and subsequently guides them in the right direction. The principle of activity is crucial for the educational process [45], as it helps identify and reinforce an individual's character traits. Children who grew up in environments of neglect, lack of parental attention, or, conversely, under strict control, require changes to the behavioral patterns they previously internalized as norms [46].

Humanistic pedagogy supports the education and upbringing of both sides [22]. When a child faces difficulties in a single-parent family, the responsibility does not solely shift to the school; parents or guardians are also educated in the process. The theory that children who, under the influence of social conditions, violate the law or behave in ways that deviate from social norms cannot be reformed loses its foundation when the educator places themselves in the position of the child. This opens new prospects for cooperation between the school, children, and families or guardians. Russia and Kazakhstan face the challenges of child orphanhood and homelessness despite having living parents, making collaboration between students and educators a bridge to adult life for young people [47].

6. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that students' out-of-school social circumstances substantially influence both their academic performance and behavioral patterns. Educational support provided by teachers, school psychologists, and social workers emerges as particularly impactful for enhancing the academic performance of students, especially those from vulnerable social groups. Active pedagogical strategies emphasizing independence, responsibility, and initiative prove effective in cultivating strong motivational attitudes and improved academic outcomes. Schools that prioritize healthy lifestyles, create safe learning environments, and support student initiatives consistently outperform those maintaining traditional pedagogical interaction based on knowledge transmission. The practical application of the research results involves further exploration of the needs of children from socially vulnerable groups. Educating children who have suffered due to parental neglect or violence from parents or guardians resembles the approach used with students who have special needs. The difference lies in the varying factors contributing to their vulnerability.

Several methodological limitations warrant consideration, including differences in school functioning across different cities and countries, the constrained duration of observation, and possible influences of external factors such as distance learning. Future investigations should focus on long-term monitoring of pedagogical intervention effectiveness across diverse educational settings. In addition, it is necessary to examine the impact of cross-disciplinary approaches and design practical models to support children at risk of social maladjustment. The further implementation of the study's findings relates to enhancing the resilience of teachers who have taken on the challenge of educating children from difficult family backgrounds. At this level, specific methods of interaction between teachers and such students must be developed within the framework of cooperative pedagogy. The prospects for collaboration between the school and parents also require discussion to ensure that the pedagogical dialogue remains continuous and mutually beneficial for both parties.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

This research has no conflict of interests.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration. The study received approval from the Ethical Committee of the Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University (Protocol FREBO of May 13, 2024).

DATA AVAILABILITY




The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and/or its supplementary materials].

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