

Promoting Resilience in Children Attending Primary Schools

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Abstract:

Aim. Resilience is a process that leads the individual throughout his education, professional development and life in individual spheres (working, family, school, personal, social). It helps us manage stress, trauma, conflicts and other difficult situations in life. The concept of resilience is used in various sciences, helping professions where the main aspects are key competences such as self-knowledge, self-regulation, critical thinking, optimism and a healthy lifestyle that can be acquired and developed through targeted training. Therefore, we are talking about the concept of resilience as a process that is not congenital but which is learned by life, education and education, improves.

Methods. In our paper we present the findings of a qualitative research study conducted in cooperation with teachers of el-

elementary schools in the Nitra region. The aim was to get an overview of the role of resiliences in the professional practice of teachers, to identify how the resilience manifests itself in pupils from the perspective of teachers, how teachers perceive it, respond to it and examine the stressors that pupils are exposed to in primary education. We conducted research through qualitative methodology, we used the observation method and the semi-structured interview. The research sample consisted of five qualified early primary school teachers (gender distribution: four women and one man). At the end and part of the discussion, we compared the results of research with similar research and proposed recommendations for practice.

Results. The results of this study highlight resilience as a key attribute in the lives of primary school pupils. The findings suggest that resilience can be naturally fostered through everyday classroom practices by capitalising on the inherent features of primary education, such as consistent rule-setting, the cultivation of a positive classroom and school climate, effective communication, value development, emotional regulation, and other supporting factors.

Conclusion. The concept of resilience is a key dimension in the field of education and vocational training. It is an essential part of the education and training of children, which significantly affects the process itself in terms of functioning, managing situations, reactions as well as the success of the pupil.

Introduction

Resilience, also referred to as mental toughness, is defined as a set of qualities that enable an individual to cope with both favourable and unfavourable life circumstances. As Šolcová (2009, p. 11) asserts, resilience may be described as “the cumulative result of dynamic processes of interaction between the child, family, and environment over time.” The concept of resilience differentiation is a widely discussed topic.

Many Czech authors use the term “resistance” as a synonym for “resilience,” although it is a concept open to varied interpretations. Paulík (2017) outlines three possible approaches to characterising resistance. In the first, resilience is understood as a relatively stable foundation underpinning the processes or strategies through which an individual withstands stressful situations. Secondly, resilience can be seen as a process enabling an individual to adapt flexibly to negative environmental changes. The third approach conceptualises resilience as a dynamic state, reflecting the degree to which

an individual’s adaptive processes have been shaped by previous experiences with stress and the way such situations were managed (Paulík, 2017). Although the specific features of resilience may vary across authors, a common denominator is the individual’s ability to adapt to stress or stressful situations. Therefore, resilience can be understood as the capacity to adapt to stress, overcome adversity, and transform seemingly negative experiences into opportunities for growth and advantage. The development of resilience is shaped by the complex interaction of personal, cultural, and environmental factors.

Definition of key terms related to resilience

Several terms have emerged from the general definitions above that are either integral to the concept of resilience or closely linked to its existence and development. It is therefore necessary to clarify and briefly characterise the following related concepts: adaptation, stress, strain, competence, and risk and protective factors.

Adaptation

Adaptation constitutes a fundamental characteristic of all organisms. It encompasses behaviours essential for maintaining functionality, survival, and successful interaction with the environment. According to Cannon (1939), the process of adaptation involves the interconnection of biological and psychological functions that ensure the maintenance of homeostasis, that is, the internal equilibrium of the organism (Paulík, 2017).

Stress

As Paulík (2009) states, individuals are continuously engaged with their environment throughout their lives, which places varying demands upon them. Stress is, therefore, defined as any situation in which an organism is exposed to demands that require a certain level of effort or energy to handle. A defining feature of stress is the development of pressure originating from various sources, which may be either short- or long-term in nature.

The term “**stress**” has assumed a prominent position in both academic and everyday discourse, as evidenced by its widespread use in scholarly literature and the public. Hartl and Hartlová (2010) associate the well-known fight-or-flight response with acute stress, which emerges suddenly and demands immediate reaction. In contrast, chronic stress involves prolonged exposure to stressors, gradually depleting the body’s physiological and psychological resources until they are exhausted. Since family conflicts and financial problems are significant sources of stress, the social worker needs to support improving communication among family members (Tkačová & Pavlikova, 2024, p. 103). As Oláh and his team of authors (Olah et al., 2024) point out, effective communication is important, representing the degree of understanding and the ability to communicate with each other; but also understanding the barriers and communication challenges that cause difficulties in communication or make it impossible, and these barriers need to be overcome in order to provide assistance in an effective manner. Communication as such is an essential part of life. With the help of communication, we can

progress in life and solve everything necessary. (Planka et al., 2024) As Garcia (2024) defined from a psychological perspective, the current generation of youth is associated with significantly higher incidences of stress, depression, and general apathy.

Coping

Paulík (2017) states that there is a strong connection between coping mechanisms and the adaptation process. While adaptation is often discussed in general contexts associated with stress, the term coping is more specifically used in situations involving excessive or overwhelming stress, where individuals must exhibit increased commitment and resourcefulness to manage the demands placed upon them. **Competence** refers to the abilities a pupil gradually acquires and is prepared to apply in real-life situations. In relation to resilience, competencies are considered adaptive in nature and are demonstrated by the pupils at their particular developmental stage.

Risk and protective factors

The final group of terms to be addressed comprises risk and protective factors, which are among the most significant concepts associated with resilience. The labels ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ inherently indicate the expected direction of an individual’s response. Šolcová (2009) defines risk factors as stressors present in an individual’s environment. These stressors have been shown to increase the likelihood of maladaptive responses or contribute to negative changes in physical or mental health, academic performance, or social functioning. Risk factors categorises as either proximal or distal. Proximal factors directly affect the individual and may include, for example, problematic sibling relationships, parental conflict, or the influence of negative peer groups. In contrast, distal factors exert a more indirect influence—such as growing up in a high-risk neighbourhood (Šolcová 2009). As Čakarová et al. (2025, p. 29) point out, it is important to realize that these children often come from environments that are not ideal for their physical, mental, and social development, which can have lasting consequences.

Not all children are able to process traumatic events quickly, if at all. On the other hand, protective factors are defined as “characteristics that, in interaction with adversity or opposition, reduce or eliminate the potential negative effect of risk factors” (Šolcová, 2009, p. 14). They help to moderate the impact of individual vulnerability, although their presence does not automatically result in resilience.

The family environment, peer relationships, educational institutions, and the wider community all play a crucial role in shaping resilience. In this case, resilience is considered to be the result of the interaction between environmental conditions, personal experiences, and available opportunities. In an educational environment, all the factors specified above interact with and influence resilience. Hamarova’s research points to the need to accept broader contexts. In this context, we should not neglect the factor of family environment (bad upbringing) and media age, which respondents identified as the main causes of socially deviant behavior of some people (Hamarova et al., 2024, p. 31). However, as Čakarová and co-authors (2025, pp. 33) point out, the fact that adaptation to a different language environment may distort a child’s performance in tests is also not taken into account. Overall behavior can be classified as problematic because it does not correspond to the norms of behavior in the facility.

The following features typically characterise a school environment that supports health and well-being: shared decision-making and planning, community involvement, a supportive physical and social environment, positive relationships between the school and the wider community, clearly articulated health policies, and access to appropriate health services (Stewart et al., 2004). Findings from an Australian health promotion initiative, which addressed, among other themes, the resilience of school-age children, have confirmed the substantial influence of the school environment on the development of mental resilience. Schools where pupils reported positive relationships with adults and peers, a sense of connectedness, and a strong feeling of autonomy were associated with higher levels of self-rated resilience (Stewart et al., 2004).

These findings support a multi-level approach to mental health support, as advocated by the World Health Organisation. In theory, we also talk about the term “mental health”, which is an umbrella term for mental disorders, psychosocial disabilities, mental conditions associated with significant suffering, impaired function, or risk of self-harm (Petrovic et al., 2024, p. 57).

A further important dimension concerns the use of leisure time, including its theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and potential for supporting children’s strengths. The concept of leisure time relies on the view of individuals as creators of cultural and material values, regardless of their health status or age (Kováčová, 2004, p. 8]. According to Kratochvílová (2004) a range of actors—including the family, educational institutions, local communities, municipal and regional authorities, and the state—contribute to the formation of a favourable social climate, the development of moral values, and the provision of suitable conditions for the meaningful use of leisure time, particularly for children, adolescents, and other citizens. However, we must realize that not all of them come from a favorable family and social environment. As stated by Čakarová et al. (2025, p. 27) It’s important to recognize that these children often come from environments that are not ideal for their physical, psychological, and social development, and it can have lasting effects. The way individuals spend their leisure time—whether in purposeful, enriching activities or passive disengagement—significantly impacts how leisure is perceived as both a personal and social value, and plays a role in shaping their overall lifestyle. As stated by Slašťan et al. (2024, p. 117), passive disconnection can also pose a threat in a certain sense. It disrupts personal relationships and overall quality of life.

Results

This qualitative study focuses on promoting resilience in primary school children (years 1–5). Three fundamental research objectives were defined at the outset:

- To provide a comprehensive account of the manifestations of resilience exhibited by younger school-age pupils during lessons, as

- observed by teachers;
- To identify the methods used by early primary school teachers to foster resilience in pupils;
- To determine the stressors that younger school-age pupils are exposed to, as perceived by teachers.

Research Methodology

The research sample consisted of five qualified early primary school teachers (gender distribution: four women and one man). Efforts were made to ensure a balanced representation of urban and rural schools in the Nitra Region. Another key selection criterion was teaching experience, as resilience is a relatively recent but widely acknowledged concept in education. The sample, therefore, included teachers working with fourth- and fifth-graders, ranging from novice to experienced professionals.

Brief participant profiles are as follows:

- Petr, aged 55, is a fourth-grade class teacher at a village school with 27 years of experience.
- Jitka, aged 42, teaches at the same school as Igor and has 16 years of experience. She is one of two fourth-grade class teachers, where classroom observations were conducted.
- Andrea is the deputy head teacher at a village school. Although not a class teacher, she regularly teaches multiple subjects in primary (years 1–5) and lower-secondary (years 6–9) school. She has 25 years of teaching experience.
- Marta has been teaching at a city school for 12 years. She is a class teacher for one of the two Year-5 classes.

- Pavla is a Year-4 class teacher at a city primary school. She has two years of teaching experience.
- Data collection methods included classroom observation and semi-structured interviews.

Discussion

The first research question addressed was: *What manifestations of resilience can be observed in primary school pupils during lessons, from the teacher’s perspective?* Based on the collected data and teachers’ statements, three key categories of resilience-related behaviours were identified:

- Positive personality traits,
- Interpersonal relationships,
- Specific individual abilities.

Within the category of **Positive Personality Traits**, personality traits were included that associate with a constructive self-perception and a positive outlook on the surrounding environment. These encompass, in particular, friendliness, openness, and cheerfulness. Traits such as diligence and perseverance are also part of this category, as they support pupils in their school efforts and encourage persistence in the face of difficulty.

The second category, **Interpersonal Relationships**, consists of abilities and social skills that facilitate pupils’ integration into peer groups and enhance their capacity to manage stress. These include the ability to communicate effectively with both teachers and classmates, resolve conflicts constructively, and trust the teacher.

Table 1 Categorisation of manifestations of resilience in children as perceived by teachers.

Resilience categories as perceived by teachers	Individual manifestations of resilience in pupils
Positive personality traits	Friendliness, openness, cheerfulness, diligence, and perseverance
Interpersonal relationships	Communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and trust in teachers
Specific individual abilities	Fearlessness (in educational matters), ability to stay calm under pressure/resistance to emotional breakdown

Source: Own research

Table 2 Categories of teachers' practices that support pupil resilience

Categories of teachers' practices promoting resilience	Individual teachers' practices
Social support	Supporting pupils, showing interest in pupils, respecting pupils' needs, sharing experiences, using the power of stories, supporting group functioning, taking an individualised approach with students, and acting as a guide
Creating a safe environment	Establishing rules for everyone and cooperation with experts
One's competencies	Creating opportunities for success and experiencing failure

Source: Own research

The third category, *Specific Individual Abilities*, comprises traits directly linked to school resilience. These include the ability to remain calm and unafraid in the face of assessments, such as tests or oral exams, as well as the ability to cope constructively with failure.

The second research question was formulated as follows: *What practices do primary school teachers (Years 1–5) employ to support pupil resilience?* Based on the combined results of both data collection methods, four categories of teachers' practices that foster resilience in pupils were identified.

The first category, *Social Support*, encompasses all teachers' practices that contribute to the development of positive relationships with pupils, thereby reinforcing the teacher's role as a source of emotional and social support. These include both verbal and non-verbal forms of assistance, as well as expressing interest in pupils and their families, and showing respect for pupils' individual needs. Additionally, this category encompasses specific pedagogical practices designed to help pupils connect educational content to real-life experiences, such as encouraging them to share personal stories and employing narrative approaches to facilitate the processing of challenging life situations. Social support is understood not only as the relationship between teacher and pupil, but also in terms of fostering positive peer relationships. Teachers consistently highlighted the importance of classroom support. For instance, teacher Igor explained his pedagogical approach concerning a pupil with below-average school performance:

"I endeavour to acknowledge and value each modest accomplishment." Teacher Jitka shared a personal observation from her family experience: *"I noticed this with my older son, who has severe ADHD and couldn't concentrate... It was clear that he really valued encouragement."* Her statement also suggests that such an experience has shaped her professional behaviour, as she now offers words of support spontaneously and without conscious effort. Within the category of social support, a personalised approach emerged as a central theme. According to the teachers, tailoring responses to the individual needs and observed resilience levels of pupils is a key component in fostering resilience. Teachers' interactions and pedagogical strategies appear to be influenced by how resilient a pupil is perceived to be. Thus, two distinct subcategories were identified: Non-resilient Pupils/Pupils Displaying Low Resilience and Resilient Pupils/Pupils Demonstrating Strong Resilience.

A) Non-resilient pupils/ pupils displaying low resilience

Teachers noted that pupils exhibiting lower levels of resilience often require a tailored pedagogical approach. Teacher Marta described her response to such pupils: *"It seems that there is a difference in my behaviour, in the way I treat him... I must adopt a different approach."* She elaborated on her experience with one girl with lower resilience: *"When she is not doing well, she tends to give up. In such situations, I try to help her ... I try to help her complete the task. So that she knows how to work."* Teacher Andrea

Table 3 Categories of stressors affecting primary school pupils in the school environment

Teacher's perspective on categories of school stressors	Teachers' explanations of stressors
Peer rejection and feelings of failure	Teacher Jitka: "When I am accepted, I feel good. That's definitely a success. When I'm not accepted, it feels like failure. Why don't they want me? When I'm struggling and not accepted, it becomes very stressful."
Tests and 'meaningless' grades	Teacher Adela: "It's the tests... I think it's the testing itself. It's stressful, and sometimes the grade, on the other hand, means nothing."
Fear of failure and parental reaction	Teacher Marta: "It's not the test itself that's stressful, but the bad grade and the thought of having to show it to my parents and see their reaction." Teacher Petr: "There's fear of how the parents will react, especially when the pupil already knows they won't react well."
Witnessing inappropriate behaviour	Teacher Pavla: "Probably when I catch them doing something they shouldn't be doing."

Source: Own research

provided an example of a pupil who pretended to know the answer, although it was not true: "He is not yet resilient enough to say, 'I don't know.'" According to her, the only way a teacher can react in such a situation is, "To reassure him that it's not a mistake now – but if he continues to do this in the future, it will be." Teacher Jitka added her own experience and suggested that the most effective way to build resilience in such pupils is through a gradual, structured approach: "To strengthen his resilience, it would be counterproductive to let him give up completely. ... A gradual, step-by-step approach in helping him overcome challenges."

B) Resilient pupils/ pupils demonstrating strong resilience

Teachers reported that working with more resilient pupils is generally easier. Teacher Marta observed: "With one of them, I'm confident... I may ... I may raise my voice or be more assertive... I know he won't break down, you know..." She added that one of the signs of resilience is the ability to resist peer pressure: "She doesn't cry because someone says something about her out loud in front of the class..." Teacher Jitka described resilient pupils as: "Friendly, open,

sporty, cheerful. They may also be naturally intelligent." Also, teacher Petr highlighted a link between cognitive traits and resilience: "Strongly resilient pupils are not afraid to assess their own skills and knowledge... They can resolve peer conflicts..., communicate well, ... and they show perseverance and thoroughness in their schoolwork." Andrea argued that the child's environment and upbringing influence resilience; she also stated that resilient pupils trust their teachers: "It is the upbringing and the environment in which these kids live, and then it's us, how we actually guide them, and it is the trust."

The second category of teachers' practices, **Creating a Safe Environment**, involves fostering a sense of psychological safety for primary school pupils, including ensuring that all pupils respect clearly defined rules and expectations. Another key practice is collaboration with professionals, such as school psychologists, special education teachers, or social pedagogues, who play an essential role in supporting pupils' resilience.

The third category, **One's Competencies**, encompasses practices designed to assist pupils in identifying their strengths and limitations. A recurring theme across the interviews was the im-

portance of creating opportunities for success, particularly for pupils who need additional support. Teachers actively constructed scenarios that promoted resilience and school growth. This category also recognises the value of failure. While failure may appear as a risk factor, the frequency and intensity of failure experiences are crucial. Understanding one's limits is considered an essential element of resilience – and children can develop this understanding through carefully managed experiences of failure.

As noted earlier, collaboration with external professionals is considered a key component in fostering resilience. Most teachers indicated that other experts, especially psychologists, were actively involved in the classroom. Teacher Jitka described the establishment of regular cooperation with the school psychologist during the current school year due to ongoing difficulties in her class, stating, “*It’s really great that we have a psychologist at school who guides us...*”

Teacher Igor reported working closely with both the school psychologist and a special education teacher in cases involving pupils with low resilience and limited cognitive abilities. Another particularly challenging case involved an emotionally unstable pupil who “*responded highly inappropriately to a remark ... to reprimands for inappropriate behaviour. The pupil suddenly started screaming, crying, throwing classroom items, ... and began to threaten with suicide.*”

The third research question was formulated as follows: *From the perspective of primary school teachers, what stressors do pupils encounter in the school environment?* Interview data revealed four categories of commonly reported stressors: Peer rejection and feelings of failure, School exams, tests, and grades, Fear of failure and parental reaction, and Witnessing inappropriate behaviour.

The first category of stressors is **Peer rejection and feelings of failure**. Teachers indicated that such experiences can be critical to pupils’ further personal development. Interview responses referred to a psychological analysis of a well-known collaborator, highlighting the profound impact of rejection, particularly when combined with poor school performance. These

situations, which pupils often perceive as personal failure, are typically accompanied by intense stress.

The second category, **Tests and ‘meaningless’ grades**, remains one of the most recognised and widely discussed sources of school-related stress. Despite the evolving nature of educational systems, pupils continue to experience anxiety related to cognitive performance and low grades, mirroring patterns observed decades ago.

The third category, **Fear of failure and parental reactions**, is closely linked to the previous one. In this case, however, the stress arises not from school failure itself, but from the anticipated parental response. Such a situation can be especially problematic when parents expect high performance despite a pupil’s limited school capacity, or when pupils feel compelled to avoid disappointing their parents.

The fourth category, **Witnessing inappropriate behaviour**, is associated with pupils’ anxiety about being caught breaking school rules. In such cases, the fear of punishment can be a significant source of stress.

Conclusions

The results of this study highlight resilience as a key attribute in the lives of primary school pupils. The findings suggest that resilience can be naturally fostered through everyday classroom practices by capitalising on the inherent features of primary education, such as consistent rule-setting, the cultivation of a positive classroom and school climate, effective communication, value development, emotional regulation, and other supporting factors. The involvement of other educational professionals also plays a crucial role. Without the support of special educators, social educators, school psychologists, and social workers, the practical promotion of resilience would be significantly hindered. Many schools are developing multidisciplinary support teams that involve various professionals, who contribute to identifying and addressing risk factors that may adversely affect pupils. Our research has revealed that teachers and supporting school team members have a clear understanding of the risk factors that can, without their help, negatively impact pupils. Understand-

ing the stressors to which pupils are exposed is considered essential for providing meaningful resilience support. While resilience may develop organically through daily school activities, the findings also underscore the need for intentional and structured approaches. Teaching pupils specific coping strategies to manage stress independently appears to be a promising direction. Planka (2025, p. 272) states that the concept of empowerment could be beneficial. The process focuses on transferring power, i.e., providing assistance to people who feel powerless and developing their abilities and potential to resolve situations and problems. By doing so, schools contribute to the development of individuals who are capable of facing future challenges with stability and strength. We should not forget about teachers, focus on their support and eliminate burnout. Psychological hygiene as Hubkova (2024, p. 18) is key and includes skills for positive thinking and a good relationship with oneself; social skills that help prevent stress in interpersonal relationships; good time management; skills in managing stressful situations (processing psychological problems, relaxation, effective communication, etc.); seeking help in difficulties.

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