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How Can Social Capital Become a Facilitator of Inclusion?

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Abstract: Students with special educational needs are a diverse group. Promoting their learning success is particularly challenging, even in practice for inclusive schools. At the same time, parents are often left alone with diagnosis and treatment. Therefore, the focus of our study was on the families of successful students with special educational needs and the networks around their families. Our research question is: What are the differences in social capital between parents of successful students with and without learning, behavioural and emotional disorders, and difficulties (SEN B)? We analysed the survey Value-Creating Education 2020 (n = 1156). Parents of 10-year-old children were asked whether their child needs special education services because of difficulties in learning. We used separate ordinal regression models to examine predictors of academic achievement in the two subsamples of parents of students with and without special educational needs (SEN B). Our results showed that factors supporting success differed between the two groups. Family background and involvement of professional helpers (teachers, psychologists, special education teachers) in child-raising were not among the predictors of academic success for students who need special education services because of learning problems, but the availability of an extensive network of the family had a positive significant effect.

Keywords: special educational needs; resilience; social capital; education; inclusion

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1. Introduction

There is extensive literature on the academic failure of students with special educational needs. The majority of research characterised by a deficit approach reports that the academic achievement of these students is lower than the academic achievement of students without special educational needs [1,2]. However, there is a new approach to which our study belongs, namely in the sense that it focuses on solutions at the practical level [2,3]. Our research question is what factors support the academic success of these students [2–7].

In this approach, resilience plays an important role as a theoretical concept. In international academic discourse, the resilience of people, communities, organisations or systems means thriving in the face of adversity or an exceptional response to a setback [8–11]. In this study, resilience refers to a situation in which students with special educational needs perform better than expected and above average despite predominantly disadvantageous background factors.

Several studies discuss the academic resilience of socially disadvantaged learners [4,12]. However, the approach that focuses on the academic achievements of learners who need special education services as an exceptional phenomenon is much less common [5,13]. Socially disadvantaged students are considered resilient when they succeed in their studies despite their disadvantaged social background [12]. In our study, we argue that this definition can be applied to learners with special educational needs as well. Therefore, we consider students with special educational needs who are successful in their studies to be resilient. Since the family plays a prominent role among the agents of education, we

focus on resources within and outside the family of students who need special education services. According to sociological research on education, the family promotes academic achievements [14].

A review of the literature on the topic reveals three thematic foci: (1) a school-based approach, (2) a family-based approach, and (3) an ecological approach, but these are developed to different degrees of depth.

(1) The first thematic focus considers schools as a starting point. Although there is a sceptical view of inclusion [15,16], the majority of the literature believes that an inclusive pedagogical environment can help students with special educational needs to be successful [2,3,17–27]. However, this is only true if there are truly appropriate conditions provided at the school level [2,15,19,22,28]. It presents practices to enhance the resilience of learners with special educational needs (e.g., differentiated instruction; additional instructional and professional resources or support; material, digital, or staff assistance; consultants or advisors; one-to-one, team- and small-group teaching methods; resource rooms; personalised learning programmes or individual education plans) [22,29]. We can find papers on the role of school leadership [30], implementers of different inclusive programmes as well as other professionals and teachers. These studies examine, first, how educators working with children with special educational needs can be resilient despite professional challenges and psychological trials; second, how their teachers or other professionals can enhance the resilience of students with special educational needs [2,20,29,31–33].

From the school's perspective, families are seen as actors in school life, as partners who support the school's work or as less significant actors who do not hinder it. The inclusive approach attributes a crucial role to the family. The family is seen as a stakeholder in school life, primarily from the perspective of teachers and schools. What carries on in the family and how professionals can support families in the upbringing of their children is discussed in less detail, even in sources that regard parents as partners. Furthermore, in many countries, there is no evidence of widespread, well-established practices in this area [2,15,20,22,28,34–38].

(2) Family-centred approaches consistently emphasise the importance of the family in the lives of children with special educational needs, especially in early childhood. Students' academic success is significantly promoted by family factors such as meaningful time spent together, the harmonious functioning of the family, community embeddedness, religiosity, or the presence of cooperative, open parents in the family [35,39,40]. However, some studies place the issue of children with special educational needs in the hands of families or parents [30]. Moreover, some even consider it the parents' responsibility whether they can exploit the available external resources, which the authors take for granted [5]. Others, in contrast, point out that it is paralysing for parents to be expected to act as super-parents and to meet unrealistic requirements, e.g., that they should tackle every problem alone and only they are responsible for their child's well-being. These studies argue that the coping of families with children with special educational needs should not be analysed in terms of individual (e.g., only mothers) or family responsibilities, but should be placed in a social and political context, keeping in mind that the marginalisation of families with children with special educational needs is not only individuals' or families' responsibility [2,5,19,22,40,41].

(3) Ecological approaches interpret the family in its natural context and start from the question of whom families can rely on [5,40,42]. Many studies draw attention to the fact that families feel abandoned. Although the importance of efficient professionals (e.g., psychologists, counsellors, special education teachers, i.e., the whole network of professionals in schools and outside schools, for example, in church-run, private or NGO institutions) is undisputed and good practices can be found [2,22,29,30], families often report that they do not benefit enough from the formal help available to them. The professional network, perceived by parents as overly bureaucratic, impersonal, inflexible, and slow, does not function in a way that has a visible impact on students' academic resilience, who need special education services. According to the parents concerned,

the wider and closer informal network (kinship, neighbourhood, and friends) is more significant. The role of lay helpers surrounding the family is therefore crucial for the functioning of families with children with special educational needs and for supporting their children's academic achievement [5,19,40]. Both the received and perceived, as well as the emotional and practical nature of these supportive networks, are important [41].

However, limited information is known about this area in relation to its importance. Therefore, our study aims to understand the impact of these networks on academic success. To conceptualise the family environment and interpret the compensating effect, we apply social capital theory. In this study, we examine the social capital of families with children with special educational needs in a similar approach to previous research to understand how disadvantages arising from the social background are overcome [14].

The theoretical part of our study is structured around four themes (social capital in families of children with special educational needs, definition of the target group, effects of inclusion and social background on academic achievement of students with special educational needs, pedagogical support professionals and inclusion) and points out the incomplete areas that the present study intends to serve as a supplement. In the empirical part, we perform ordinal regression analyses on a parent survey data set.

2. Social Capital in Families of children with special educational needs

James Coleman described the effects of social capital on academic achievements in his 1988 article. He proved that the time and attention parents devote to their children has a greater impact than the high education and high socioeconomic status of the parents. He calls this investment in social capital within the family. The concept of social capital includes relationships, support, trust, and information sharing, as well as the cohesive power of effective norms. This is an independent component of family background and family–school relationships. Coleman [14] considers parental time investment and parental attention to be the most significant indicators of social capital within the family. Regular and meaningful communication between parents and children, time spent together, and multiple contacts between parent and child are characteristics of parenting rich in social capital. Without them, the material and human capital of parents are not utilised in raising children [43,44]. Because of its multifaceted nature, multiplex parent–child contact has a stronger impact on student achievement. Studies test this by the amount and nature of actual interactions during a given unit of time, and numerous studies prove its clear positive effect on academic achievement [45].

Coleman [14] paid attention primarily to effective cooperation between parents and schools in the context of networks of relationships outside the family. However, he also drew attention to the importance of the parents' network outside the school and the network between parents [46]. In this model, parents can support each other with information, favours, and the consistent representation of mutually accepted norms, as well as control over the observance of norms, for the success of child-raising [47]. Fischer and Lee [48] found that parental networks can moderate the effects of low social status on academic achievement through parental involvement in school. Depending on social status, parents can mobilise different types of contacts, and middle-class parents were more likely to keep in touch with each other, as well as have easier access to supporting professionals [49]. Parents' contact with a school counsellor was associated with significantly better academic performance [50]. Close contact with professionals is especially important for parents of children who are not average.

In addition to immediate family, relatives can also be a possible source of voluntary support, as they are part of the child-raising network that supports parents. This is especially important in unexpected situations. The support network for parents is often barely visible, but its indispensable members are babysitters, grandparents, relatives, friends, and neighbours, who can be involved in child-raising in place of parents in an emergency. The pandemic has shown how fundamental this role is [51].

Our research is based on Coleman's concept of social capital, which suggests that belonging to a community improves the efficiency of the school, reduces the problem of individualisation, and can be a source of inclusion. Most research on the factors that support the achievement of students with special educational needs is exploratory, looking for resources in social networks, but without operationalising social capital and related concepts. As a consequence, most of this research is not based on a comprehensive conceptual framework [52–54], and few studies have attempted to find a link between social capital theory and special educational needs [53,55–57]. However, social capital theory can provide an important contribution to the study of the inclusion of students with special educational needs because it can support the development of a research perspective that moves from a student-focused approach to a family-network-focused approach. This allows for a complex view of social interactions and their role in the academic success of learners with special educational needs [53]. The application of the conceptual framework of social capital theory and research on the inclusion of students with special educational needs in this area is further justified by the fact that the networks of this group are more complex than those of students who do not need special education services, or at least they need a more complex network to be successful [58,59].

Since the introduction of the special educational needs concept in the Warnoch report [60] we no longer focus on what students lack (deficit), but on what they need, and what efforts they require from teachers. Vehmas [61] defines three forms of inclusion: (1) technical inclusion: provision of material means that enable participation in society; (2) institutional inclusion: institutional inclusion in society is conditional (primarily rights); (3) interpersonal inclusion: peer attitudes, respect, and recognition. In an appropriate inclusive practice, it is important to emphasise needs in addition to inclusion.

Research on learners (who do not have special educational needs) highlighted long ago that low parental involvement, the quality of parent-child interactions, family lifestyle and values, and the socioeconomic characteristics of the family have an impact on early school leaving and academic success [62–66]. However, research on students with special educational needs has shown that families of children with special educational needs have lower social status, higher divorce rates, and poorer quantitative and qualitative indicators of parent-child interaction than the general population [67,68]. Research on families raising children with special educational needs has often focused on the lack of family relationships as a negative consequence of raising children who have special educational needs [69,70]. It has been shown that the development of internal and external family relationships is largely determined by the extent of the child's special needs, the circumstances in which the difficulties are recognised and accepted, and the social support and financial situation of the families [41,68]. In addition to the family's quality of life, the quality of their relationships will also be affected. This affects the relationship between mother and father, between child and parents, between parents and siblings, and the closer and wider social context [41,68,71]. Therefore, students with special educational needs are in a less favourable, or at least more vulnerable situation, in terms of social capital, both within and outside the family.

3. Definition of the Target Group

The definition of the phenomenon under study is an important but sensitive issue when studying the difference from the average. The term special educational needs (SEN) is most commonly applied in various contexts of schooling and education to describe a student's ability to meet academic requirements, but different disciplines have different definitions of the term. SEN and related concepts in the school context, as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), refer to students for whom countries provide additional services so that they are able to access the curriculum and successfully progress in their studies [72]. However, the interpretation of disability and special educational needs and the additional services provided by the institutions are very different from country to country. With this in mind, we used the cross-national

categorization created by the OECD to make the countries comparable and to make the issue of special educational needs understandable in an international context [72]. In this way, the following categories were created. Disabilities and impairments belong to the category SEN A. According to the OECD, special educational needs in this group primarily stem from disabilities of organic origin, such as sensory or mobility impairments [72]. The SEN B category includes difficulties, typically behavioural or emotional disorders, or problems that cause difficulties in learning. These students may have special educational needs due to problems that occur in the interaction between the educational context and the student [72]. Disadvantages belong to the category SEN C. For these students, special needs arise due to cultural, socio-economic or language difficulties, and for these students, the goal is to compensate for the resulting disadvantages.

In this study, we examine students who belong to the SEN B category or who are suspected by their parents of potentially having needs of special education services because of their difficulties in learning. Although this categorization was created within the framework of the deficit approach, we consider it important to emphasise that its use was necessary because of the definition of the target group in the questionnaire. However, this study goes beyond the deficit approach and focuses on what promotes the success of these students in an educational setting where they are categorised in legal and educational practice based on their deficits and without adequate support. In this research, therefore, we examine not what deficits students with special educational needs have, but what they need to be successful [61].

4. Effects of Inclusion and Social Background on Academic Achievements of Students with Special Educational Needs

In addition to the deficit approach, there are several studies in the literature that examine how participation in inclusive education affects academic achievement, and the presence of this topic in the literature is also reflected in systematic reviews and meta-analyses [15,27,28]. Several studies have shown that inclusive settings improve academic achievement for students with special educational needs [2,3,23–26]. However, there are also results that suggest that an inclusive setting is only effective under certain circumstances and may even have negative effects in some cases [15,16]. Ekeh and Oladajo's research [23] highlighted that students with special educational needs in inclusive classes achieved better academic results than children with special educational needs learning in a non-inclusive setting. However, it was also pointed out that students with special educational needs learning in an inclusive setting still perform significantly worse than their peers who do not have special educational needs but learn in an inclusive setting. Reasons given for this include "inappropriate instructional strategies and materials, large class sizes, teachers' expertise in dealing with special needs pupils which may be lacking, school curriculum which may not serve the purpose of special needs pupils, inadequate facilities, lack of supportive services and specialists for students with special needs" [23] (p. 148).

However, most research does not adequately examine the role that social background and context play in all of this. Riddell et al. [73] do examine the social background of families, but this appears more in connection with advocacy and school choice. Kocaj et al. [74] include it as a control in their calculation, but it does not appear in the analysis. Haber et al. [28] pointed out in their meta-analysis that research examining the achievements of students with special educational needs in inclusive or non-inclusive settings either does not examine or does not adequately take into account the social background of families [28]. In light of this statement, we believe it is important that this unexplored area be examined. This will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the society of students and their families, in order to create a more suitable inclusive environment for them so that the inclusive environment more effectively supports the academic achievement of students with special educational needs.

5. Pedagogical Support Professionals and Inclusion

It is a great challenge for teachers to teach a more heterogeneous student body [49]. In a school, inclusion works properly when each student is supported in learning and school life in ways that are appropriate for them. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs raises many difficulties. Teachers need to be adequately prepared and aware of their special needs and how they can work for students' success in school who needs special education services. Teachers' responsibility for the academic success of students with special educational needs is as unquestionable as in the case of their peers who do not need special education services, but attitudes and methodological diversity are even more important according to the findings of a 20-year-old research study [75]. At the same time, as in many other countries [1,20], teachers in Hungary are not adequately supported. On the one hand, it would be necessary for teacher education to have an adequate focus on preparation for integration and inclusion. On the other hand, teachers and parents should have access to a sufficient number of support professionals to facilitate the educational process (e.g., psychologists, special education teachers, and teaching assistants). Teachers tend to blame external, out-of-school factors for the failures of children with special educational needs and view their responsibility as negligible [3,76]. The parents of children with special educational needs need much more support because they face significantly more difficulties. After all, their children need more intensive care and attention, which makes everyday life more difficult. Because of this, they also have more difficulties in education and expect more and more effective support from teachers and other professional support staff [19,20,77–79].

6. Context

The field of our research is Hungary, where the average percentage of diagnosed students with special educational needs in the 2019/2020 school year in primary schools (ages 6–14) was 7.8% [80]. Research analysing the support network of professionals supporting these children and their families shows deficiencies in both the diagnostic process and care (e.g., a low number of special education teachers, a lack of co-teachers and teacher assistants, that is, we can say a lack of inclusive classroom settings) [81–83]. In our research, we therefore address the question of what kind of support families can expect when professional help is lacking.

In Hungary, the majority of students with special educational needs (72%) attend schools where they can study in regular classrooms with their peers who do not need special education services [80]. The children who are the focus of this study also attend such schools. Overall, it is also true in Hungary that the very basic principles of system-level inclusion are laid down in the country's legal background [2,3], but there are still shortcomings at the school and family level [81–83]. In this context, the question our study investigates may be particularly important. The question is: What is the role of schools and available professional help compared to non-professional help in the support network perceived by parents?

7. Materials and Methods

7.1. Hypotheses

Our research sought to answer the question of whether the path to academic success for students with special educational needs is similar to that for the majority of students. As we have outlined, there is less research on the resilience of students with special educational needs, particularly with regard to social capital as a resource.

H1: *Family social background helps both groups to become successful to the same extent* [28,74].

H2: *School professionals help both groups to be successful to the same extent. Support: School professionals also play a role in the success of children with integrated learning problems in inclusive education* [3,17,18,52–54].

H3: *Relationship networks within and outside the family help both groups to become successful to the same extent* [14].

7.2. Participants

The sample included 1041 parents of 10-year-old children from 72 Hungarian inclusive schools, aged between 27 and 68 years. In total, 86% of the participants were women. The survey was conducted in January 2020, right before the pandemic.

7.3. Sampling

We analysed the survey parent database of the Value-creating Education 2020 Survey (n = 1156) conducted by the Mária Kopp Institute for Demography and Families. The sample was geographically (settlement type and region) and by school social composition representative of Hungary. The sample design used was stratified multistage sampling.

7.4. The Methodology of the Analysis

In our analysis, we first conducted a factor analysis and attempted to isolate the dimensions along which family support groups are formed. The items we included in the factor analysis are based on Coleman's social capital theory. However, the essence of factor analysis is not to draw networks based on the theoretical background, but based on the responses of the respondents.

As a second step, we had chosen the ordinal regression method, because our dependent variable has three values. All the explanatory variables to be studied were entered into the model and the regression was performed by splitting the two groups. The variables that were significant in the analysis were highlighted as results. The analysis was performed using the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (IBM Corporation International Business Machines Corp. Armonk, NY).

7.5. Variable Created to Identify the Target Group

The present study examines students with SEN B diagnoses that are not physical and sensory disabilities (students with special educational needs type B according to the OECD categorisation system), students with so-called BTMN diagnoses (roughly corresponding to the British category BESD: Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties) [84–86], and students who do not have a diagnosis but are in need of support according to the suspicions of the parents surveyed. These students make up the group with learning difficulties in our sample (n = 149), which we compare to students who did not have one of these diagnoses or any other learning disability according to their parents' responses (n = 892). It is necessary to focus attention on students with a parent-suspected learning problem, who can be neither diagnosed nor receive professional help. For these students, access to the general curriculum is not fulfilled. There were 20 pupils in this database.

7.6. Dependent Variable

We measured academic success based on whether the child was an excellent student (rewarded with grade 5 (This is the best grade in Hungary on a scale from 1 to 5)) or participated in competitions (Student competitions in Hungary can be both in-school and out-of-school, with the latter usually organised by other schools. Schools organise competitions in most subjects, such as mathematics and foreign languages, as well as skill subjects such as sports, in which students can participate. The vast majority of school academic competitions do not cost money. At this age, competitions are most often organised close to where students live, or the school organises the trip to the place of the competition. Teachers usually send those who perform well in the given subject to the competition.). (At the variable level, this means that we created an index in which we summed the above two achievements by 1+1 points.) Those who achieved a score of 0 were those who were not among the best students and competitors.

7.7. Independent Variables

Social background index (SB): a simple enumeration of family disadvantages was used to construct this indicator. We aimed to obtain an index that best fits the concept of multidimensional individualised disadvantage [87–89], based on Beck's theory of extreme individualisation and individual combination of risks. We included the following characteristics as disadvantages of social background: (1) the parent completing the questionnaire did not take the school leaving exam; (2) the other parent (birth or adoptive) did not take the school leaving exam; (3) the parent completing the questionnaire does not have a job or active income; (4) the other parent (birth or adoptive) does not have a job or active income; (5) the place of residence is a village or farm; (6) the respondent finds the subjective financial situation of the family unfavourable ("Sometimes we cannot cover our everyday expenses; it often happens that we do not have money for our everyday necessities") (Imputation has not been used to address non-response).

Parent-child multiple contact index (PCMC index): We constructed a parent-child multiple contact index, which included the amount of quality time spent together, openness to school (parental involvement), and openness to a wider social network on the parental side. Respondents were asked about the frequency of each activity. Quality time spent together was measured with the following items (The wording of the question was: "Has it happened during the last month that you . . . "): how often the parents talked to the child about school experiences; studied with the child; read stories, fiction or educational literature with the child; talked to the child about what he or she found on the internet, about life, the world and spiritual questions or religion; organised leisure activities together; played with the child; had meals together as a family. Data on parental involvement were obtained from the following items: whether the parents talked to their child's teachers and whether the parents talked to schoolmates' and friends' parents. An indicator of openness to an extended social network was the frequency of taking part in activities with extended family or friends. The frequency of these activities could be daily, frequent, infrequent, or never. The more frequent the activity, the more points the respondent scored for each item, and these were used to form an index by adding the items. Missing responses were not replaced (items with a missing response scored 0 points).

We used data reduction methods to try to figure out how the groups that families can count on are organised into groups. Based on the data, we formed three groups, which were also included as explanatory variables in our model:

Consultant child-raising network (CCRN): in addition to multiplex relationships within the family, we also looked at the extent and strength of parents' network of child-raising relationships outside the family. As one indicator of this, we looked at who was involved by the parents in child-raising in their immediate and wider environment and to what extent they did this. Factor analysis was used to create the variables, including the extent to which parents involved the leaders of extracurricular activities, the child's teachers, other professionals such as psychologists, special education teachers, the pastor, other parents, friends, other relatives, neighbours, and the online community in child-raising—according to their perception. These variables were subjected to an alpha factoring procedure, so the variables were arranged into three factors, which were named weak-bonded, strong-bonded, and school-based. The weak-bonded factor contained the weak-bonded relationships, such as relationships with other professionals, the pastor, other parents, and members of the online community. Relationships known as strong bonds, such as friends and other relatives, were placed in the strong-bonded factor, and so were neighbours, with the highest factor weight. The school-based factor was made up of professionals who regularly surround the child, such as the child's teachers, tutors, and leaders of extracurricular activities. The KMO value of the factors was 0.892, which was found to be particularly high, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$. Values were assigned to 784 respondents in the sample (Due to the peculiarities of the self-filled questionnaires, the cumulative missing answers of the included items took on a large scale, therefore we decided to use "exclude cases pairwise" when creating each factor [90]).

Emergency parental network (EPN): we also examined who parents could rely on from their extra-familial network if they were unable to attend to their child due to an engagement. Respondents were asked how much they could count on maternal grandparents, paternal grandparents, other relatives, the other biological parent, friends, and neighbours. In this case, we also conducted a factor analysis using data reduction with alpha factoring, which arranged the variables into three factors. The out-of-family factor contained those relationships that belonged outside the (nuclear) family, such as other relatives, friends, and neighbours. The other birthparent constituted a separate factor, which we named other parent, and the maternal and paternal grandparents were a third factor. The KMO value of the factors was 0.627, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$. In the sample, 450 respondents were assigned values and 706 had a missing response for an item. The reason for the high non-response rate was presumably the fact that if the respondent did not have one of the listed contacts in their network, they were not allowed to indicate this for that item. Consequently, they did not answer the question of whether they could rely on that person's help. This may have been the case if one or both grandparents or the other biological parent were not present in a family.

Weekend child-raising network (WCRN): with respect to social capital supporting child-raising, we considered it important to look at the average amount of time spent with the child by persons around each family and child during a weekend. Respondents were given the option of indicating how much time was spent with the child by the parent completing the questionnaire, the other birth parent, grandparents, other relatives, siblings, friends, other peers, neighbours, and some hired help. The included variables were subjected to principal component analysis, where the included variables were arranged into four principal components. Friends, other peers, other relatives, grandparents and, with lesser weight, neighbours were grouped into the extrafamilial principal component. The nuclear principal component contained the adult members of the nuclear family, i.e., the parent completing the questionnaire and the other birth parent. Hired help was a separate principal component, and so was spending time with siblings. The KMO value of the principal components was 0.64, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$. In the sample, 564 respondents were assigned values, and 592 respondents had missing responses to an item. These responses were also not replaced to avoid biasing the results. Therefore, the low number of items in the subsequent analyses is the result of missing values from the factors and principal components created. The resulting low item counts are a limitation of the research, so it is important to note that our results cannot be applied in general to fourth-grade students and their families in Hungary, but to respondents who provided information on the given relationships.

See Table A1. for the correlation between the independent variables.

8. Results

In this study, we mainly examined the factors that influence students' academic success. The data in Table 1. show the characteristics of the variables examined in the entire sample. The correlation matrix of the variables can be seen in the appendix (Table A1).

In the analysis, we tested several explanatory variables that affect academic success. Firstly, we examined the impact of social background (H1), secondly, the impact of the social capital provided by parents within the family (H2), and thirdly, the impact of the resources available to parents (H3), on academic success.

Table 1. Variables and descriptive statistics.

			n	*M*	*SD*
Dependent variable	Academic success (index)		1156	0.91	0.75
Independent variables	Social background (index)		696	4.76	1.20
	PCMC (index)		1156	35.11	9.27
	Weekend child-raising network (factors)	extrafamilial	564	−0.23	0.98
		nuclear	564	0.00	1.01
		hired	564	−0.11	0.80
		sibling	564	−0.07	1.05
	Emergency parental network (factors)	out of family	450	−0.13	0.82
		other parent	450	−0.10	0.94
		grandparents	450	−0.25	0.75
	Consultant child-raising network (factors)	weak-bonded	784	−0.01	0.79
		strong-bonded	784	−0.03	0.77
		school-based	784	−0.04	0.77

(n = 1041).

9. Discussion

We can see that students with special educational needs are less successful than students without special needs (Table 1) [23]. This was expected since we are examining a group for whom learning is problematic for various reasons. We can also see that the socioeconomic background of the families is lower in the group of students with special educational needs, which corresponds to the patterns of the international and Hungarian literature [68,91,92].

We wrote about the fact that studies did not examine the effect of SES on achievement in the case of students who need special education services because of their difficulties in learning. Since this is traditionally a highly influencing factor, in our first hypothesis, we investigated the effect of social background on achievement using ordinal regression analysis. The hypothesis must be rejected because the statistical calculations show that the social background exerts a stronger effect in the case of students who do not have special educational needs, but in the case of students with special educational needs, the supporting effect of the social background does not prevail (See Table 2). Examining social background is a very important factor because in Hungary there is a particularly high correlation between social background and academic success [12]. In the regression analysis, we found that for children with learning problems, the estimation was much lower and less significant than the correlations between other variables, although it had the highest explanatory power for students without special needs. This implies that learning difficulties have a downward equalising effect. If students have such difficulties, the favourable family background does not give them an advantage, and they do not experience the steep slope in learning outcomes as a function of background that students without special needs do.

The second hypothesis concerned the variables constituting the PCMC index of social capital. It was hypothesised that among students with special educational needs, the parents of students who achieved academic success provided the same multiplex family social capital for their children. Our results show that there was not a large difference in the mean PCMC index scores between students with and without special educational needs because of difficulties in learning. Therefore, we cannot say that students with special educational needs had higher scores. However, it is striking that the standard deviation of the index was much higher for students with special educational needs. This indicates that there were significant differences between families, more significant than in the other group. Students with special educational needs usually require more attention, which, however, does not necessarily show in their academic results, as they also encounter greater challenges at school [77,79]. The data in Table 2 show that for students without special

needs, the association between PCMC and academic success is not significant in either group, and the explanatory power is weak.

Table 2. Parameter Estimates of the regression. Testing hypothesis 1–3. The dependent variable is academic success.

Variable		Students without SEN		Students with SEN B	
		b	*p*	*b*	*p*
Social background index		**0.598**	**<0.001**	1.074	0.199
PCMC index		0.035	**0.186**	0.144	0.419
Weekend child-raising network	extrafamilial	0.150	0.415	2.538	0.057
	nuclear	−0.011	0.948	1.337	0.260
	hired	−0.148	0.492	0.509	0.671
	sibling	0.108	0.497	0.170	0.856
Emergency parental network	out of family	−0.014	0.949	0.376	0.741
	other parent	**0.586**	**0.013**	0.405	0.678
	grandparents	−0.083	0.736	**−3.031**	**0.020**
Consultant child-raising network	weak-bonded	0.141	0.484	−0.340	0.724
	strong-bonded	0.004	0.987	1.341	0.229
	school-based	0.031	0.883	−0.387	0.734

(n = 1041). Note: Significant results are highlighted in bold.

Before testing the third hypothesis, our first step was to examine what kind of networks develop around families. It is worthwhile to look at the differences between the explanatory variables included for students with and without learning problems. The extrafamilial, the other parent, and grandparents variables are more characteristic factors for students without special needs, while the sibling, weak-bonded, and school-based factors are more characteristic for students with special educational needs.

In testing the third hypothesis, our explanatory variables focus on the surrounding social resources that support students' academic success. We also consider who else parents can rely on in their environment, and who else is involved in their children's education. Our investigation centres on three areas. During the research, one of the most important questions was whether the school's professional staff could provide support to families. The first is who parents involve in child-raising (consultant child-raising network CCRN), the second is who parents can count on when they are unable to take care of the child (emergency parental network, EPN), and the third is who the child spends time with at weekends (weekend child-raising network, WCRN). These actors form the support network around parents, ready to help them in everyday life and when needed. In the present study, we investigate how this network is related to academic success. For students with special educational needs, we expected that formal help (school-based) would contribute to their resilience. The averages show that parents make more use of this formal assistance, but we find that it does not contribute to better academic success, while for parents of students without special needs, the association is clear. There may be several reasons for this. If the involvement of teachers, school psychologists, and special education teachers has a positive effect on children without learning problems, the fact that the same does not apply to children with learning problems is due to the fact that these students' difficulties cannot be addressed by this intervention in the short term. Therefore, the school is not yet able to adequately support the inclusion of students, and the reasons for success or poor results can be found outside the school [76]. Moreover, if professional help does not change parenting habits, it is very difficult to measure results even in the long term. Another reason for these results may be that families of students without special needs turn to such professionals to find some support, but families of students with special educational needs do so when the child's problem is so severe that more frequent help is needed, which means that frequent contact with such professionals is more of a corrective nature [78].

For students without special needs, the effect of intact nuclear families—in which parents can rely on their spouses—is positive, while for students with special educational needs we cannot demonstrate such an effect. We looked at the marital status of respondents in the two groups, but found no significant difference, with no more single parents in the group of students who need special education services. Grandparent involvement in emergency situations negatively affects academic success. It appears that families who have a wider network at their disposal are the ones whose children do better at school. These research findings add Hungarian data to the literature, which has found similar associations [5,22,29,40]. When we look at weekend time, we find that for the group of students who need special education services, spending time with extended family and friends has a positive effect on academic success.

10. Conclusions

As the number of children with special educational needs has risen steeply in Hungary, and their academic performance has not improved despite formally intensive education, it has become increasingly important to examine the environment in which these students are being brought up. For a long time, the study of students with special educational needs was primarily within the scope of psychology, special education, or methodology. However, we now know that families with children with learning disabilities are more exposed to the breakdown of relationships, poverty, and divorce. Taking a positive approach, our study did not seek to identify difficulties and barriers, but to examine the resources that support learners with special educational needs who succeed. It is therefore important to consider the contexts and networks surrounding a child's family as potential determinants of his or her academic performance. Our earlier research revealed that the success or failure of students should be considered in the context of their social environment. Within this context, it is the family that plays a prominent role in school careers. The role of intra- and extrafamilial relationships in compensating for social disadvantage is consistently emphasised in social capital theory, but there is insufficient evidence of this for students with special educational needs.

In our research, we analysed the parent database of the Value-creating Education 2020 Survey (n = 1156) conducted by the Mária Kopp Institute for Demography and Families in Hungary. Parents of 10-year-old children were asked whether their child had a learning problem (psychological developmental disorder; adjustment, learning or behaviour difficulties; or undiagnosed learning problems as suspected by parents, n = 179). For students both with and without learning problems, we used a linear regression model to explore the predictors of academic success, with a focus on the social background and social capital of families.

Our results show that students with special educational needs come from families with lower socio-cultural backgrounds, while their multiplex social capital within the family is the same as that of their peers without learning problems. Previous research has made it clear that socio-cultural background has a strong influence on academic success. Our research findings show that, although this relationship holds for the group of children without learning problems, for those who do have learning problems, this effect is cancelled out, i.e., a favourable background does not provide an advantage, but high multiplex family capital does. Looking at the families' child-raising networks, we find that there is no distinct separation between intra- and extra-familial networks and for both study groups, we see that the parents of more successful students can rely on larger family networks. However, the involvement of professional school helpers (teachers, psychologists, special educators) in child-raising does not reflect positively on academic success for students with and without special educational needs. The reason for this is probably that there are not enough professionals in the Hungarian school system. Even if a psychologist or a special needs teacher can identify the main directions for their development, there are not enough professionals to help in the classroom to ensure that the student receives differentiated instruction. After classroom work, they do not have enough professionals

to practice with or catch up. Instead, there are only teachers with extended role sets and working under heavy workloads. These teachers are far beyond their competence limits to support children with special educational needs, as they have not been adequately trained in teacher training.

An important finding is that students with special educational needs are more likely to be successful if their parents are surrounded by a wide network of friends and neighbours. However, for their peers without learning problems, the effect of a strong spousal relationship is more pronounced. In Hungarian society, family and local networks have traditionally played a very important role, and during the decades of the Soviet era and the economic crisis that followed its collapse in 1989/1990, it became common for families to fill in for the missing public services. Families and the support network immediately surrounding them can effectively fill the gap in the care system.

Our study provides valuable insight for professionals, teachers, parents, and communities involved in the education or upbringing of students with SEN and/or learning problems. It investigates a less researched issue, the impact of social capital on academic success, this time from the perspective of the sociology of education. A unique and very rich questionnaire was used to measure social capital, with several questions about the inner functioning of the family and the network surrounding the family. To capture the social capital provided by parents within the family, we constructed a parent-child multiplex contact index, which included the amount of quality time spent together, openness to school (parental involvement), and openness to a wider social network on the parental side. Our important finding is that the factor and principal component analyses, which were conducted to explore the dimensions and structure of social capital, revealed intersecting fluid boundaries between social capital within and outside the family so that there was no clear separation between the family and the community it belonged to. As a result of careful research deliberation, the authors decided to accept the boundaries drawn by the data, rather than artificially defining factors within and outside the family, as is the tradition in the literature.

The main message of this study is that we can confirm the view held by the literature, namely that responsibility cannot be placed on the family alone. Without a supportive network around the family, student achievement will decline. The school is an important factor in this support network, with a strong emphasis on the relationship between teachers and parents.

In our study, we argue that the problem cannot be reduced to a school-based issue. We argue that pedagogical practices can be considered inclusive if the subjects of mutual inclusion are not only the students themselves but also their families. A school environment can be regarded as inclusive if it involves, and collaborates with, families, and helps parents support their children in the out-of-school environment to achieve common goals with the school [2,19,21,22,93]. As it is known, children spend more time with their families than at school. Leaving the family alone is not only a problem in the afternoons or during school holidays, but also during a seasonal or prolonged illness/treatment (possibly due to SEN), or even at times of natural or corrective school changes.

If "the terms inclusion and inclusive education are empty signifiers" [3] (p. 23), the source of inclusiveness can be families as well as the communities surrounding families. In an inclusive school, the family has to be an important cornerstone of the community. If children experience inclusiveness in the family and in the community surrounding the family, they will follow this pattern at school. In the same way, the patterns at school serve as models for the home. Moreover, as our data show, family and school communities mutually influence each other.

The most important policy recommendation is to increase the number and availability of professionals working with students with special educational needs on a daily basis. This will ensure that everyone receives a fair and appropriate education. Those supported by such a network can become resilient.

A limitation of the analysis is that the variables introduced here were not tested on other subsamples, so we were not able to make comparisons. A further limitation is that the number of items decreased substantially due to the data reduction method for the WCRN and EPN variables. Even with pairwise deletion, this resulted in a missing value when at least one response among the items was missing, although we also took these responses into account when constructing the factor structure [94]. To avoid data bias, the authors of the analysis have chosen not to replace missing data for these variables (e.g., replacing them with mean values).

An additional limitation of the analysis may be the presence of only one parent's perspective in the questionnaire. However, this is offset by the fact that the carefully planned questionnaire has brought us closer than before to understanding family functioning, of which parental perception is a particularly sensitive indicator. Despite the limitations of the study, since the problems of these families are rarely discussed, our research results can be still considered to be a very important and new contribution.

The limitation of these two separate regressions is that they do not provide an indicator of a statistically significant relationship between the obtained coefficients. Nevertheless, the paper points to the lack of a school support network for the real inclusion of students with special educational needs, as well as to potential resources to support pupils' success, which has not yet been described by researchers in Hungary.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Correlation matrix between the variables. (n = 1041).

	Social Background	PCMC	Extrafamilial	Nuclear	Hired	Sibling	Out of Family	Other Parents	Grandparents	Weak-Bonded	Strong-Bonded	School-Based
social background	1	0.073	0.123 *	0.087	−0.039	−0.076	0.044	0.065	0.085	0.085	0.121 **	0.116 **
PCMC	0.073	1	0.242 **	0.133 **	−0.055	−0.072	0.129 **	−0.028	0.162 **	0.018	0.086 *	0.168 **
extrafamilial	0.123 *	0.242 **	1	0.101 *	−0.073	−0.023	0.356 **	0.109 *	0.364 **	0.050	0.173 **	0.221 **
nuclear	0.087	0.133 **	0.101 *	1	0.093 *	−0.001	-0.161 **	0.340 **	0.198 **	−0.084	−0.072	0.022
hired	−0.039	−0.055	−0.073	0.093 *	1	0.011	0.003	0.180 **	0.056	0.010	0.022	−0.052
sibling	−0.076	−0.072	−0.023	−0.001	0.011	1	0.057	−0.347 **	−0.011	0.100 *	0.032	0.004
out of family	0.044	0.129 **	0.356 **	−0.161 **	0.003	0.057	1	−0.040	0.091	0.198 **	0.432 **	0.158 **
other parents	0.065	−0.028	0.109 *	0.340 **	0.180 **	−0.347 **	−0.040	1	0.192 **	−0.038	−0.027	−0.034
grandparents	0.085	0.162 **	0.364 **	0.198 **	0.056	−0.011	0.091	0.192 **	1	−0.009	0.065	0.055
weak-bonded	0.085	0.018	0.050	−0.084	0.010	0.100 *	0.198 **	−0.038	−0.009	1	0.179 **	0.168 **
strong-bonded	0.121 **	0.086 *	0.173 **	−0.072	0.022	0.032	0.432 **	−0.027	0.065	0.179 **	1	0.142 **
school-based	0.116 **	0.168 **	0.221 **	0.022	−0.052	0.004	0.158 **	−0.034	0.055	0.168 **	0.142**	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.005$

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