Access to education in modern society (lithuanian case)

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Abstract

Access to education is not only the presence of institutions offering general education, but also the fact that it meets the needs of a wide range of education players and the society. Access to education should ensure the justice in the society, although scientists argue that education system is usually powerless to correct other social systems created by inequality and injustice. Therefore, often education system itself reproduces social inequalities caused by social, political and economic factors. Successful participation of all social groups in the process of education is the essential tool to palliate social inequality, to reduce poverty and social marginalization. Accessible and quality education system ensures better life, social mobility, and provides status. Presentation of research the interrogation X-XII (II-IV gymnasium) students. The respondent groups (control and target) were submitted identical questionnaire, which aimed to investigate and determine whether student responses to questions about the accessibility to education and equal participation in education differ when they belong to different social groups.

Key words:

access to education, social status, social services quality, the change of education

Introduction

Education is one of the most important factors that determines both the development of the society and the human achievements in modern society. Education is a social practice which includes education and cultural communication in the broadest sense, as well as actions of human reproduction at large. These two components are not replaceable, rather,

they complement one another. Therefore, in education, one of the most important social institutions, various social fields and activity forces (production, politics, etc..), their values interact with each other, struggling to prevail (Palazzeschi, 2003, Trakšelys, 2013). Generally, even the society's level of development is measured by the achievements in education. Mostly, public growth is closely linked with the quality of education, and the individual's future depends on the opportunity of participation in education system, on the accessibility of performance and education. Education accessibility issue becomes particularly important and problematic in the context of the transformation of society. Society transformation in Lithuania is quite specific, and has also been greatly influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Lithuanian independence. Thereafter, the post-Soviet reality was faced, and its specificity, attributed to the former socialist world, appeared. According to Z. Norkus (2008), post--Communist capitalism has not been created on the ruins of socialism, rather out of the ruins of socialism. Radical changes took place in people's relations, the transition to the free market and democracy was made. Education system and education requirements have been changing during the transformation of the society; the need to reform education that meets the needs of the period, political ideology has emerged.

The analysis of the accessibility to education focuses on comprehensive school reform, as the completed education on lower levels lays the foundation for the successful continuation of studies in higher education and influences individual's social and cultural reproduction. In addition, social and political factors primarily affect the lower (primary, basic, secondary) levels of education institutions and have an impact on the access to education, equality of rights of participation in the educational process, learning contents, and educational functions. Therefore, it is very important to ensure the accessibility to education for all individuals, irrespective of their position in the social system, during the transformation of society. X-XII (II–IV G) class students are chosen as the respondents of empirical research. Three factors determine this choice: 1) the fact that education is compulsary fot children until 16 in Lithuania, and X-XII (II-IV G) class students fall under this age group, when they need free choice to continue to attend school or not, because school attendance depends on the number of factors (social, material, motivation, etc.); 2) In 1996-2010 reorganizing school network 1017 schools were closed. Usually the secondary type schools were reorganized, which have become the primary and basic-type

schools, that XI -XII (III-IVG) class students from the reorganized or closed schools are forced to choose to travel to the closest appropriate type of local schools; 3) According to the data of the Department of Statistics of 2012, 25483 children from social risk families have been studying, 25 per cent of X- XII (II-IVG) class students being among them. Therefore, this group of students living in material deprivation also face the problem of accessibility to education.

The object of the research - the accessibility to education
The aim of the research is to analyze and determine accessibility to education for X-XII (II-IV, G) students.

Empirical research methodology and methods on education accessibility for x-xii (ii-iv, g) class students

The provisions of methodological research. Modernization theories (Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 2000; Beck, 1992, Haberm, 1981) allow to understand the significance of education institute in modern society when researching the transformation of education institute.

The theory of structural functionalism (Parsonas, 1997, Mertonas, 1997). The object of this theory – different segment players. Functionalism highlights the significance of moral consensus to sustain public order and stability. Moral consensus also regulates the behavior of public members and allows to keep order and stability.

Capital theory (P. Bourdieu,1978). Participating in the process of individual's reproduction and education system, based on the access to this theory, is described by an individual's habits (habitus) and according to what complies with the individual's social status.

The conflict of social theory (Dahrendorfas, 1996; Coseris, Lewis, 1969) asserts that conflicts can be identified in all social systems, in education institute among them as well.

Social constructivism theory (Piaget, 1972, 1990, Vygotsky, 1978). On preparation of questionnaire construction it is crucial to analyze the social environment, subjective experience of respondents and the ability to interpret events. For the education access the social environment is particularly important. The social environment consists of communication with other people, understanding of the environmental effects and its changes, inter-

pretation of events.

Humanistic training theory (Maslow, 1968, Rogers, 1969). On the basis of this theory the issues of instrumentation, which questions students' emotionality, freedom, education on equal rights, were formulated. These questions outline the relations between teacher and student and their co-operation. They ensure access of education, equivalence, respect and create positive climate in school and in classes.

Ethical principles of the research. Fundamental ethics norms, as being crucial to maintain a balance between the desire to obtain objective information, moral norms and the security of participants, have been retained during the empirical study, because the study participants were 10 - 12 (II-IVG) class pupils.

The study aimed the respondents to be competent to consider the issue under investigation, to complete questionnaires of the study on a voluntary basis, to receive full information on the research and its objectives. Since the author conducted the study, the students were given access to the questionnaire to find out if they known all concepts and terms. All respondents participated in the survey on a voluntary basis (verbal consent was obtained and the questionnaire completed).

The research methods and organization. The respondent groups (control and target) were submitted identical questionnaire, which aimed to investigate and determine whether student responses to questions about the accessibility to education and equal participation in education differ when they belong to different social groups. The questionnaire was made on the assertion principle (Annex 5), the respondents were asked to evaluate each assertion from 1 to 5 (1 - completely inappropriate; 5 - totally appropriate). Individual interviews were taken. The students completed the questionnaires during a lesson (45 min); they were not influenced by the researcher or other persons. Only the interviewer was present in the classroom during the filling of forms. The respondents put the completed questionnaires into envelopes, thus confidentiality was guaranteed. Since the survey was conducted in the classroom, the return of questionnaires was 100 per cent.

The selection of respondents. Random selection method has been used at selecting the respondents. Two student groups have been interviewed: socially disadvantaged (target group) and socially not disadvantaged (control group). The quantitative survey sample is formed by geographical convenience principle. The study has been conducted in 12 those days

Klaipėda, Telšiai, Šiauliai and Kaunas districts various type (basic, secondary and high) schools. The mentioned those days counties had a total of 460 schools in 2011-2013. The schools were chosen by random selection method. The author has chosen only 4 those day counties out of 10 because of the limited funds. Then, with reference to the survey data of 2008-2010, 80171 (general totality) 10-12 (II-IVG) class pupils studied in those days counties. The disadvantaged students amounted to 8341 (target group), and to 71830 (control group) students, who were outside social support. The surveyed respondents amounted to 1200 control group, and to 325 target group respondents.

Empirical research results and discussion on education accessibility for x–xii (ii–iv g) class students

By the results of the research it can be argued that many of the analyzed documents, related to the theory of education in Lithuania, are not fully implemented in practice. The opinion of the majority that education is the basis for social security is widespread, because an individual is able to protect oneself against many risks. Moreover, findings of the research suggest that the transformed Lithuanian education institute is not the basis for social security and accessibility to education is not fully guaranteed. School can not ensure security for evryone on equal rights. Socially disadvantaged respondents do not feel safe (emotionally, physically). The sense of insecurity appears because of the social stratification of the society. In many cases students are discriminated on property basis (they are discriminated by peers, teachers, knowledge evaluation, etc.). It is obvious that the answers to the issues of the questionnaire differ substantially between the control and the target groups of repondents. The respondents of the control group have better living conditions, belong to the higher social group, the existing rules in school are focused on the middle layer, etc.). According to the respondents of the target group, wealthier students demonstrate their social position- they have diffrent rules in school during classes. Based on the survey results of the analysis, it can be argued that socially disatvantaged students are less self-confident because of their financial position. Low self-esteem formation is observed. According to the respondents of the target group, they would be more happier if they were richer. The respondents of this particuliar group blame their parents because of their social position, but parents themselves, by the opinion of respondents, feel discrimination. Many of them are reluctant to attend class

parents' meetings because, more affluent parents are dominating during the discussions on class affairs, and they impose their proposals.

The aim of social services is to mitigate social inequality, reducing poverty and social exclusion. However, according to the survey results, it should be noted that the rendering of social services at school becomes the basis for discrimination. All socially disadvantaged individuals are entitled to free meals, but many refuse free meals. Reasons for denial: peers bullying, taunt, feeling ashamed. This is confirmed by the respondents of the control group. The survey data allow the suggestion that school social services are not of high quality. Social workers, psychologists and tutors do not perform their direct functions competently. Students cannot talk to school administration and school professional because of their physical, psychological bullying and violence. The survey responses affirm that social integration and socialization functions are not carried out at schools in full.

The survey responses relate to social background and the learning outcomes. The disadvantaged students have not enough money to buy the necessary training aids, lack of money prevents them from going on sightseeing trips, participating in contests, and so on. This leads to cultural isolation and reduces the learning opportunities. Meanwhile, the control group respondents affirm that they do not feel the lack of money for the acquiring of training aids, they can hire private tutors. Thus, the preparation for lessons and additional training influences the final assessment (grade). Also, many disadvantaged students do not have the right conditions for learning at home, cannot attend the payable non-formal education activities. Social differences mostly reveal themselves during art, technology, English and physical education lessons.

Target and control group respondents' answers also distinguished when responding about the role of students in the classroom. The richer students most often dominate in the classroom. They feel more confident and daring. The level of their self-esteem is high. The survey results showed that the richer pupils' solutions and proposals receive better attention. The survey results also ascertain that the tutors are not always interested in students' social / economic conditions, although interest in pupils' living conditions would adequately represent the student when discussing his/her issues. Consequently, the target group members do not feel equivalent class members. This makes even be ashamed of their family members (parents, brothers, sisters, etc.).

It is also emphasized that the transformed Lithuanian educational institute does not fully guarantee equal accessibility to education and participation in the educational process for all social groups. The ideological and political aspects, the curriculum, etc. were addressed during the transformation of Education institute. However, Education institute is not yet completely ready to ensure the safety of an individual, student's self--esteem, equality, to integrate children from the disadvantaged families, children with disabilities, special needs, etc.

Based on the analysis of scientific literature and the research results it can be deduced that the shaped hypothesis - Lithuanian education system does not ensure the accessibility to general education in full, because it was designed for the less differentiated social structure, has been verified.

Educational and social assumptions as the warranty of education accessibility for x–xii (ii–iv g) class students

The investigation established that the welfare recipient students designate the following problems that prevent significant barriers in access to education and equivalence in participation and learning process: differentiation of disadvantaged pupils by teachers and students by social, property status of parents; the lack of communication and cooperation between pupils and teachers; unfavourable school and classroom microclimate for disadvantaged students and teaching of special needs; inappropriate educational assistance to the educational process. The causes of problems are: the lack of interaction between teachers, schools' professionals, students and their parents and ineffective involvement and empowerment of the ideas of the school.

The reduction of social tensions between different social groups. In order to prevent discrimination against students and school differentiation by society, property status of parents in educational institutions, educational and social services are provided. The aim of these services is to reduce social tensions between different social groups and to ensure access to education and equivalence.

The effective communication of education participants. The investigation revealed the lack of cooperation and communication between student, teacher and school. It is possible to minimize the scale of the problem, if individual peculiarities of child development, family relationships, reasons for unsuccessful learning, etc. would be considered.

Creation of favourable school climate and learning environment. Friendly climate in school and classroom could be created after assessment of student's personal qualities, development of physical and spiritual strength and creation of social security. The child must participate equally in the education system, teachers have to accept the student and try to cherish him.

Socialization and successful integration of students of all social groups and with different abilities. The study found that students from low-income families and students with special educational needs are not liked by classmates, so they are not integrated into the school community and not feel emotionally safe. Successful integration and socialization of students would be ensured if the equivalence and education access would be guaranteed. So one of the major educational assumptions, which guarantee access to education, is to ensure that all social groups and mixed ability pupils successful socialize and integrate – in other words it is important to provide quality of education that would ensure not only subject knowledge transfer, but would develop an independent, constructive-looking, clear-formed values and capable to function in nowadays personality. Programs should be differentiated and adjusted to the specific student. School professionals (social workers, psychologists, special educators, etc.) are generally charged to provide educational and social support to students, to ensure integration and socialization of all social.

Pedagogical and psychological support. The aim of pedagogical and psychological support is to guarantee to children from all social groups and with different skills the access to education and equal rights in the educational process. It should be noted that educational psychological support was given to students in the Soviet education system. Only after the declaration of independence, in contrast to the Soviet system of education, children with special education needs started to go to public schools – before that they had special schools. In Lithuania pedagogical psychological help for children of all abilities are given in 4 levels. The first level – the commission of special education at school; the second level - Educational and Psychological Centre in municipality; the third level is regional- Educational and Psychological Centre; the fourth level - the state level, centre of Special Education and Psychology.

The analysis of pedagogical-psychological assistance model shows that there are enough measures to help integrate the various skills and social marginalized students into the school community and to properly include

them in the learning process. However, as shown by the survey results, it is clear that not all of them they effectively used.

Conclusions

Empirical research showed that the transformation of Lithuanian society affects education and equal participation in education, as school students are divided according to social and cultural background, which condition learning, inequality of students' social resources, quality of education, discrimination, differentiation in class, and accessibility to education: X–XII (II–IV G) grades disadvantaged children often incur educators and peers discrimination for their social status – according to the students, the selection of friends depends on the social status, they are ashamed of their family members (parents, brothers, sisters), are not satisfied with their family social status, they are constantly reminded of their social position;

• social status influences learning results and achievements – according to the disadvantaged respondents, they lack money to to buy all the necessary learning materials; the majority of them are socially and culturally isolated because of their social and economic situation; due to the lack of funds they cannot pay to attend non-formal education classes, participate in the Olympiads or go on school organized sightseeing excursions; according to them, teachers are pre-disposed to poorer students, and this tells on the teacher's assessment of their knowledge;

• in schools, where the study was carried out, microclimate is not favorable for different social groups and skills students, integration into the school community weakly affects different social groups, children from disadvantaged families, students with special needs, equal participation in the educational process is not ensured; according to many X–XII (II–IVG) grades disadvantaged students, they feel emotionally, physically unsafe at the school, wealthier students use their position, they are subject to other rules; decisions and proposals of students from wealthy families receive greater acceptance and support in dealing with class issues; social class differentiation is apparent, the absence of the relationship between the disadvantaged and affluent students; the disadvantaged students do not fit to their peers;

• it was found that many of the X-XII (II-IV, G) classes disadvantaged students suffer bullying, discrimination, insecurity, cultural and physical isolation, discomfort.

Thus, the study confirmed assumption and the defensive statements prove that social tensions not reduced, but on the contrary, even more increased if educational assistance, educational and social services not properly organized and provided.

Theoretical and empirical analysis of accessibility to education within the context of the transformation of Lithuanian society allows to distinguish these educational and social services, and tools that would ensure the X-XII (II-IV G) classes students more successful access to education and equal participation in education: reduction of social tensions between different social groups, effective communication of the training participants, creation of a positive school microclimate and learning environment; successful integration and socialization of all social groups and all abilities pupils; orientation to the natural diversity of learners without dividing them into groups according to social status and the capacities; more active use of open educational environments under development of schools, country and the world; better quality educational, social and educational assistance for the needs of each student and family.

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