SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION: ACCESSIBILITY ASPECT

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Abstract
The article analyzes the problem of accessibility of education. Education accessibility has become of great relevance in the European Union in recent decades, when the attention has been paid to its integral influence in shaping social, cultural, economic and political situation. Education accessibility enhances each country’s or region’s intellectual potential and promotes integration into the economic competitiveness of the area, not only in the context of the European countries, but also in international forums. This decade, all EU member states launched a decentralization of education management by promoting employment and reducing unemployment. In the Republic of Lithuania, on the basis of the principle of subsidiary, education decentralization and responsible management are under implementation; schools, municipal and state functions are redistributed, municipality responsibility to education accessibility has increased. The priority direction of education reform in the Republic of Lithuania is the development of infrastructure, i.e., the reorganization of the network of education services and the optimization that would guarantee access to learning. Education accessibility is particularly relevant for socially marginalized and poor citizens.

KEYWORDS: social justice, education accessibility, social stratification.

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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). 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.

Education accessibility has become of great relevance in the European Union in recent decades, when the attention has been paid to its integral influence in shaping social, cultural, economic and political situation. Education accessibility enhances each country’s or region’s intellectual potential and promotes integration into the economic competitiveness of the area, not only in the context of the European countries, but also in international forums. This decade, all EU member states launched a decentralization of education management by promoting employment and reducing unemployment. In the Republic of Lithuania, on the basis of the principle of subsidiary, education decentralization and responsible management are under implementation; schools, municipal and state functions are redistributed, municipality responsibility to education accessibility has increased. The priority direction of education reform in the Republic of Lithuania is the development of infrastructure, i.e., the reorganization of the network of education services and the optimization that would guarantee access to learning. Education accessibility is particularly relevant for socially marginalized and poor citizens.

because poorer families cannot adequately provide children with teaching aids or to allow the participation in informal education, therefore children become socially and culturally isolated.

The study group, led by J. Coleman (1966, et al), has researched was one of the first strategic public examinations (policy research), focusing on the challenges of social policy. The research project changed the entire strategic educational research policy and became an example for further analysis. The published report has encouraged secondary school desegregation policy for many years to come. J. Coleman proposed to assess the equality of opportunity not so much by the efforts made, but by the parity of outcome. Therefore, the data were compiled not only by the availability of the learning resources for children of different social groups, but also by the students’ achievements. Originally it was intended to get the answer to the question of how much and how the schools were able to overcome inequalities with which children have come to school, however J. Coleman had to admit that the result of this study was twofold:

- School quality (funding per pupil, the size of school library, etc.) differences showed little relationship with the educational achievements, compared with the social origin of the students.
- Students’ achievements were related not only to their family origins, but also to the origins of the other students at the school.

J. Coleman group research results had a clearly defined impact on social engineering: students’ opportunities can be best compared expanded school desegregation strategies (Coleman, et al 1966).

Scientists (Žalimienė, Lazutka, Skučienė and others, 2009) observe that accessibility to education social justice of the society, particularly in the emphasis of the accessibility to primary and secondary education, because it is important for children to have equal opportunities in the initial take-off. The mentioned authors distinguish three indicators of accessibility: territorial, economic and cultural-social.

The following has been chosen for article on education accessibility aspects: economic, cultural and social. It should be noted that the scientific literature and studies (Merkys and others, 2007; Kvieskiienė and others, 2003, et al.) generally emphasize physical accessibility of school and access to education. The study group (Merkys and others, 2004) having analyzed the accessibility of education in Vilnius region sought to investigate physical reach ability of schools, access to learning by the languages of instruction, the availability of special assistance, etc. Merkys G., Kalinauskaitė R., Piščalkienė V., et al. (2004) studied students’ transportation organizational and socio-educational problems in Kelmė area: the empirical analysis and recommendations for improvements. Merkys, G., R. Kalinauskaitė, Piščalkienė V. and others (2004) investigated school reachability issues in Radviliškis district. Merkys, G., Merkienė R., Urbonaitė-Šlyžiuvienė, D. (2004) made the diagnostic test of school reform of Užmargė and district general situation within the Lithuanian context. Merkys G. et al (2003) made quantitative and qualitative research on school reform network and student status. However, as noted, the geographic reachability was emphasized and students’ transporting services have been investigated. It should be noted that a few authors have explored the accessibility to education for students with special needs. The accessibility to education for such students is mostly ensured when providing educational support services.

The aim of the research is to analyze and determine accessibility to education

The objectives of the research:

- To analyze theoretical links between accessibility of education
- To identify educational and social assumptions that will ensure accessibility of education.

1. Theoretical aspects of accessibility to education

The analysis of this article on the transformation of society and the individual’s position in the transformed society refers to theoretical access to Structural functionalism (Parson, 1997, Merton, 1997 and others). With the approach to this theory, it can be said that inequality in education stems from the ascription to social class, strata, ethnic groups, etc., also due to individual’s achievements, which are usually associated with the innate talents and efforts. Modern society justifies only the latter factors that determine inequality; they are considered as functional and correct. However, emphasizing the importance of the society moral consensus, education accessibility barriers are completely unjustified, since one of education roles is to regulate social stability, and to reduce social tension in the society. Functionalists argue that education can overcome stratification and inequality.

The analysis of an individual’s social functioning and social stratification is based on the approach to Capital theory (P. Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, the participation of education players in the education system, also the accessibility of education to an individual depends on the volume and structure of the available capital. With reference to the available amount of capital P. Bourdieu reveals the specifics of social
classes. Such concept of capital decides the attitudes of the accessibility to education and the equivalent participation in education system.

Participation in individual’s reproduction process and education system, based on the approach to this theory, is defined by individual’s habits (habitus), and harmony with individual’s social status. Usually the society sets the requirements for habits and social status by some influences. Inequality and access to education may vary, and vary not only between groups but also within them, because capital owned by the group, because the group members own capital may also vary. In particular, cultural capital emphasizes the accessibility to education and equal participation in the system of education, because it is a much greater prominence of the presence in the education system than parents’ social, economic situation.

The theory of social conflict (Dahrendorf, 1996, Coser, Lewis, 1969 and others) argues that conflicts can be identified among all social systems and the educational institute. In terms of social conflict society is the actual and potential arena for conflicts. R. Dahrendorf (1996) concludes that conflicts and constraints stem from structural positions in a society. According to the conflict theory, teachers occupy a privileged position compared to students. It should be noted that any privilege or power demonstration can provoke conflicts. R. Collins (1988) also distinguishes two groups of individuals: order enforcers and order recipients. Order enforcing individuals, according to the author, often self-identify with the organization and its ideals. Order recipient individuals often have their own culture, language code, are passive performers of rituals and observers (Collins and Makowsky, 1993). Usually teachers or the dominant social group of students who dictate own rules and demonstrate the predominance, establish the order of the education institute.

Network activity theory (Burt, 1982; Granovetter, 1973; Castells, 2005 and others) and others, aims to analyze and describe reciprocal link models in the social system. The followers of this theory keep to the opinion that social structures need to be investigated first, as the players’ behavior is constrained by social structures (Wellman, 1983). Very often it is the case at education institution that students from the disadvantaged families with negative evaluations or various disorders, are often isolated from the classroom and school community. Isolation comes out with minimal communication, exclusion from cultural or cognitive activities, and social discrimination.

Social constructivism theory (Piaget, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978 and others,) argues that the awareness of the world is based on the gained experience that we reflect. In this case we actively create the knowledge by questioning, exploring and evaluating the information which was given before. The pupil, who is thought by a teacher, gains the knowledge actively and not mechanically. This theory allows to analyze the attitude of education participants towards educational accessibility and the participation in educational system on equal rights for pupils from different social groups.

Humanistic training theory (Maslow, 1968, Rogers, 1969 and others,) proposes that the student is the centre of education. The most important points of humanistic training theory are “self-actualization” and the promotion of the child’s emotional experiences. This theory suggests that human’s behavior is one of the symptoms of his inner world manifestation. In order to understand the behavior of the student, it is important to understand his inner life- it is important to communicate with student and to have a deep knowledge of his inner life. The main reasons of the behavior reside in emotions, attitudes, beliefs, values, hopes and aspirations (Pukelis, 1998). In school the student should feel free, be an equal member of the community, be free from fears, discrimination and bullying, because the theorists always emphasize the security of child’s emotions and freedom. If freedom of student will become the accumulation of positive experience, there will be positive conditions for personality growth, expression and humanistic moral training. On this basis the social peer-topper and student-teacher relationships, can be normalized. In summary, this study asserts that an individual finds himself in an ambiguous situation in the transformed society. On the one hand as if public system ensures equality for all individuals and a well-balanced participation in public life, in education, on the other hand, an individual finds oneself in a conflicting situation due to different capital amounts during the public degradation and social structures. Individuals are socially and economically in different social tiers, thus social differentiation in society moves into schools. However, modern society must ensure that all members, regardless of the individual’s economic and social status, have the accessibility to education and equal participation in education.
2. The objective factors of education accessibility

The approach to access to education depends on the historical period and the ideology. The development of education is primarily related to the religious training in Church, but it was not a general education. In Europe and in Lithuania the most significant factor for education was Reformation, the foundation of Education Commission and the compulsory primary education in the inter-war Lithuania, which could be defined as a formal start of educational access in Lithuania. In the Soviet period the volume of compulsory education was extended- the attention was drawn to the physical aspects of accessibility, geographical network of schools, etc. After the restoration of independence of Lithuania, the concept of educational access changed, so it gained aspects of social and economic problems.

Usually (Kuncaitis, 2009; Laužackas, 2003:) there are two main types of factors of access to education given in the scientific literature: subjective factors (student motivation, values, individual personal qualities such as character, age, etc.) and objective factors. Objective education accessibility factors are the most important ones in transformed societies, which cannot be changed or influenced by a person.

Scientific literature (Trakšelys, 2014, 2008; Giddens, 2000; Gary, 2004; Dromantienė, 2002; Polanyi, 2002 et al) generally identifies objective factor groups that influence social change and the accessibility to education: physical, political, economical and cultural factor groups.

It is reasonable that the previously discussed political, economical and social environmental changes and power distribution in social space had an effect on the structuring of society, educational institute and the accessibility to education. However, it must be noted that the transformation of educational institute cannot replace economical and political reforms, above all it becomes a catalyst and the object of power and influence distribution. According to Ž Jackūnas (2010) the exclusive focus on social, economic, educational opportunities and great influence of the mentioned fields on educational institute consolidate pragmatic, instrumental concept of education, overshadow specific personality- linked and its power development related objectives of education, devalue the significance of personality, humanistic and cultural outlines within the theoretical education reflection and practice.

Traditionally education has the following functions, which ensure access to learning and equal participation in the educational process: education is an essential educational function, which, according to B. Bitinas (2011), can be interpreted as management of the development of pupils’ personality. Education involves the external and internal interaction between learner and educator, which must be based on human values. On the basis of this interaction the development of personal, spiritual, physical and mental is being made. Cultural function – ensures cultural preservation, transmission and cultural development.

It uses the cultural values which were accumulated previously. Social function – reproduction and development of the public system, participation in the process of socialization. Economic function – formation of professional social structures, training of professional employee, the guarantee of education and production interconnectivity.

Education as a social institution, must take into account the ongoing and ready for a child who would be willing to: learn full time, live in a free market, knowledge creation, democratic and consumerist society, continuing social and technological change. In the modern society, the start of learning should be equal for all students. The disadvantaged children should be enabled to integrate and successfully learn. The education system plays an important role in developing and mature person’s personality, revealing his talent, it should help promote the moral, and physical powers of development. Educational success and availability can be measured by how many are afforded an enhanced and the student’s ability to fully realize themselves, but this largely depends on how development actors are able to effectively carry out the functions assigned to education and to implement them in practice because there is a legal framework favorable and sufficiently regulated.

3. Empirical research methodology

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). Students are entitled to free meals and support to purchase school aids, if the average monthly income per family member is less than 1.5 magnitude of the state supported income (SSI) size (525 LTL) attributed to the disadvantaged group of respondents. In view of the living
conditions of families, the children are entitled to free meals if the average income per family member is lower than 2 SSI. 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. 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. 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.

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.

4. The research of accessibility to education

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 everyone 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 respondents. 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 different rules in school during classes. Based on the survey results of the analysis, it can be argued that socially disadvantaged 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 particular 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. The 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, 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.

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.

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