

INFORMING THE SOCIETY ABOUT PRESCHOOL AND PREPRIMARY EDUCATION – EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

Modern society also distinguishes itself by a large information flow that has to be selected according to one's needs. A considerable number of researches proved that the spread of information about education is insufficiently efficient, so far the society is too little informed, and there is a lack of information about provided preschool and preprimary education services, in rural areas in particular. Therefore, parents, teachers and other groups of the society, which are either directly or indirectly related to preschool education, cannot use the opportunities provided by this link of education if they are not informed. For this reason it is important to analyse main documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania, to investigate the situation of informing the society about preschool and preprimary education in education policy implementation. The article is based on the content analysis, which generalizes the documents on education policy that regulate informing of the society about preschool and preprimary education in Lithuania.

The analysis of the documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania demonstrated that, informing about preschool and preprimary education, focal attention is paid to the target groups that directly participate in the child's education processes – parents/foster parents and the staff of the education system. Only the context enables us to presume what information is forwarded to other groups of the society that indirectly participate in children's education processes. Such situation may be influenced by the approach consolidated in the documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania about preschool education as an intermediate, transitional link between the family and the school; it is sought "to prove parents and the society the efficiency and necessity of qualified children's education". It is likely that the lack of systematic attitude towards informing various societal groups as potential social partners about children's education and care at the legal level will limit the possibilities both of practical creation of the informing system and its functioning.

JEL CLASSIFICATION & KEYWORDS

■ I21 ■ I28 ■ A21 ■ Education policy ■ Preschool education
■ Informing the society

INTRODUCTION

Public opinion surveys show not a particularly high public trust in education. The education system is ranked the sixth among best evaluated public institutions in Lithuania. According to the data of the public opinion research company VILMORUS (2009-06), in recent years education competes with such institutions of Lithuania as firemen-rescuers, the church, the President, the army, and the State Social Insurance Fund Board with regard to trust criterion. However, in spite of such position of the education system, social strata express dissatisfaction with separate change processes in education. One of them is the lack of information about preschool and preprimary education and educational support (A. Juodaitytė, A. Kazlauskienė, R.

Gaučaitė et al., 2008). This is also confirmed by the ideas in "Preschool and Preprimary Education Development Programme", dated 2007-2012, that "so far families are being informed and consulted too little. There is a lack of information about provided preschool and preprimary education services, particularly in rural areas". Therefore, parents, teachers and other societal groups that are either directly or indirectly related to preschool education cannot use the opportunities provided by this link of education if they are not informed.

According to the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2003), the society should be informed about preschool and preprimary education at various levels: of the country, region, municipality, and educational institutions. The Description of Public Announcement Order on Information about School Activities regulates the order for public announcement of annual information about formal and informal curricula implemented by comprehensive, vocational schools and informal children's educational institutions (2005). However, it has not been analysed what these documents underline: the purpose of information, contents, participants, etc.

National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2003) states that "sustainable development is impossible without extensive participation of the society both solving specific tasks indicated in this Strategy and making important decisions with regard to sustainable development at various levels". Participation of the society in the implementation of corresponding tasks is of high quality only when the society is informed.

The analysis of strategy for sustainable development in Lithuania discloses that there is a lack of information: both information receivers are little informed and information providers know too little about the actual needs. Therefore, it is stated that "if the monitoring of the state of education is not created and if the society is not informed about the actual situation of education, the gap between the strategic provisions and the reality may increase" (National Strategy for Sustainable Development, 2003). Only when informing and participation of the society improves, the society of active and responsible citizens, who will take active part in making decisions that are important to the municipalities and the state, will be formed.

The Strategy for Social Cohesion (2004) focuses on social cohesion – the capability of the society to ensure its members' welfare, reducing differences and eliminating disunity. Therefore, informing of the society becomes particularly important in order to reduce differences between citizens, which determine corresponding exclusion. The citizen who receives information of adequate quality has a possibility to enjoy full rights in the society and take active part in its life. The informed society both ensures social cohesion and contributes to economical development. "Sustainable development of the economy depends on sustainable social development and sustainability of conditions".

Research aim

Employing content analysis of main documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania, to investigate the situation of informing the society about preschool and preprimary education, implementing education policy.

Methods

Content analysis that generalizes documents on education policy, regulating informing of the society about preschool and preprimary education.

Methodology

The research is grounded on the conceptions of social and interactive communication, when social communication means sharing the content of communication (information) among various social groups that maintain social stability of the society, accepting general values and information, which are the basis of creation of these values. One of the key values of social communication is education as a social phenomenon, the main function of which is rendering information that is important to the society as a social, cultural organisation. Therefore, communication processes are maintained by state institutions; they initiate them and create conditions necessary for the efficacy of their quality.

Preschool and preprimary education is understood as local subsystems of the education system, which are characterized by the same features as all other links of the education system and simultaneously by relative autonomy that determines the quality of functioning of these subsystems, which in turn depends on their own organisational structure. Therefore, the processes of informing the society are created in the organisations of preschool and preprimary education subsystems and are like communication tools that disclose the significance of functioning of these organisations both in the general system of education and in the society.

The research is grounded on the conception of education policy, involving diverse services of education. The conception of the service of education also encompasses orientation towards the person, his/her individual needs and general features of the quality of the service. Therefore, the suitability of the service is defined through its aims, content and the forms of presenting this content, which with regard to education services mean accessibility, reliability of information, and its suitability (applicability). Therefore, the network of links (informing) between the user and the supplier has to be permanently developed and maintained both at macro (the level of ideas) and micro (the level of institutions) level.

Analysis of the aspects of documents on education policy regarding informing the society about preschool and preprimary education

Of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2003 06 28) defines the purpose of preschool education – “to assist the child to meet natural, cultural and also ethnic, social and cognitive needs”. It indicates that preschool education takes place in the family, and if parents (foster-parents) wish or if the institutions that are responsible for the protection of the child rights recommend, according to preschool curriculum.

Of the same document notes that the purpose of preprimary education is “to help the child to prepare for successful learning according to the primary curriculum. Preprimary education is started to be provided to the child when in that calendar year the child turns six years old. Preprimary education can be provided earlier upon parents’ request and if the child is sufficiently matured for such education but not earlier than he/she turns five years old”. In Lithuania the

one-year preprimary curriculum is implemented by nurseries, primary and other schools, freelance teacher or another provider of education. If the child does not attend the educational institution, educational support is provided according to the order established by the government or its authorised institution.

Fundamental guidelines related to informing, recorded in Article 26 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2003), are applicable to preschool and preprimary education too (Table 1). The purpose of informing discloses the main addressee – the learner. As you know, in preschool age the addressees of such kind of information and the users of this service are the child’s parents.

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Purpose of education	The child’s natural needs	“to help the child to meet natural, cultural and also ethnic, social, and cognitive needs”.
	Children’s cultural, ethnic needs	
	Children’s social, cognitive needs	
Self-institutionalisation of education	Education in the family	“preschool education takes place in the family and if parents (foster parents) wish or institutions responsible for the protection of child rights recommend, according to preschool curriculum”.
	Wishes and recommendations of parents and institutions protecting child rights on education according to curricula	
Content and availability of information for parents	Information about the child’s state	“to receive information about the child’s state, (self-)educational needs, progress, behaviour”.
	Information about educational needs	
	Information about the child’s progress	
	Information about the child’s behaviour	
Objectives of cooperation with parents	Solution of educational problems	“to participate choosing the curriculum, form, school or another supplier of education for a child”.
	Choice of the children’s curriculum	
	Choice of forms of children’s education, choice of the school	
	Choice of another supplier of education	
Participants	Suppliers of education services	“to cooperate with the supplier of education, teachers, other specialists who provide special, psychological, social, special pedagogical support, health care, solving the child’s self-education issues”.
	Teachers	
	Specialists	
	Providing special, psychological support	
	Health care specialists	

Source: Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, 2003

The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2003) indicates that parents have to be provided with information of the following content: the child’s state, (self-)educational needs, the child’s attained progress, and the child’s behaviour. Parents can receive the necessary information from the staff of the preschool educational institution, choosing the preschool educational institution and the curriculum. It is pointed out that this information is provided cooperating with parents, and this enhances relations between parents and teachers.

The document points out that in order to reach the objectives of cooperation with parents the following information is significant: solution of educational problems, discussion of curricula. It explains who should participate when

information is provided. Information participants are all specialists of the institution as of the provider of the service: teachers, special educators, psychologists and health care specialists.

The Provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 (2003) sets out the objectives planned for the above mentioned period, which are designed for all links of education and in certain places addressed directly to preschool and preprimary education. The document indicates that in order to ensure the efficiency and sustainability of education development, it is necessary to implement the system of responsible management that is based on permanent analysis of the state of all levels of education, on management culture that is orientated towards improvement of education, and on informing the society and participation of the society. This objective is to be implemented ensuring availability of education and social justice, assessing the quality of education and informing the society about this; creating information system of education, which timely provides information necessary to various levels of education management and social partners of education. This document underlines that, ensuring the availability of the development of education, continuity of education and social justice, it is necessary to create the system of pedagogical informing and counselling for families; to expand the service of preschool education, to create and develop the general preprimary education system. Preschool education in the first place has to be opened for children experiencing social exclusion and for those from social risk families (Table 2).

Table 2: Emphasis on the necessity of informing the family and counselling

Category	Statements
Development of preschool education services	"preschool education services are expanded"
Informing, counselling of families	"pedagogical informing and counselling system for families is created"

Source: In the provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 (2003)

The document under analysis defines the quality of preschool education in two types of categories: "development of preschool education services" and "informing and counselling of families". This way the Provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 (2003) focus all attention on preschool education services, their content and development and on the creation of the societal group that is directly responsible for children's education and care – the system of parents' informing and counselling. However, no social partners have been named.

The Concept of Children's Preschool Education in Lithuania (1989) underlines the necessity of knowledge on the ways of providing social pedagogical support for the family and knowing of the institutions which provide such type of support to the family. Besides, it is stated that, providing information, its providers must have knowledge on modern processes of adult education (essence, principles, methods). It is pointed out that appropriate provision of information and its functioning helps the preschool educational institution to maintain relations with the society, various institutions and is the condition of their purposeful cooperation. Besides, the Concept of Children's Preschool Education underlines spread of information as a necessary condition for increasing efficiency of the child's education because it enables "to prove parents and the society the efficiency and the necessity of children's qualified education" (Table 3).

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Table 3: The network of informing and the type of knowledge underlined in the Concept of Children's Preschool Education in Lithuania (1989)

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Knowledge about the ways of social-pedagogical support for the family	Knowing of ways	"to know main ways of support for the family and institutions providing assistance"
	Knowing of institutions	
Knowledge on education	Knowing of the essence of adult education	"to know main principles and methods of adult education"
	Knowing of the principles of adult education	
	Knowing of the methods of adult education	
Public relations	Relations with various institutions	"to establish constructive relations with various institutions and purposive cooperation"
	Purposeful inter-institutional cooperation	
Efficiency of the child's education	Substantiation of efficiency	"to prove parents and the society the efficiency and the necessity of qualified children's education"
	Proofs of efficiency	

Source: The Concept of Children's Preschool Education in Lithuania (1989)

Conceptual State Policy on Children's Welfare (2003) acknowledges that the right to preschool care and education of the child whose parents work in Lithuania has been considerably limited, having closed many kindergartens and nurseries. Providing these services, the child's preparation for school is emphasized but not family support, combining work with parents' duties. Seeking to eliminate such situation, it is planned to pay sufficient attention to the organisation of preschool and child day care institutions. These services should be developed implementing general preprimary education and care through creation of the network of day care centres, which would be available to all preschool age and school age children, so that the schools providing preschool, preprimary and primary education are as close to the child's home as possible.

Implementing the concept, it proposed to various institutions and departments to coordinate their activities, creating and implementing common strategy of children's welfare policy. Implementation of the strategy is directed towards inter-departmental cooperation, exchanging information so that children's problems are successfully solved. This concept also provides for participation of the child to whom it is important to provide information.

Analysing the tasks of organizing preprimary education, the institutional context observed in the documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania is underlined (Table 4).

The Description of the Organisation Order of Preprimary Education (2005) points out that the educational department informs persons and schools located in the territory of the region or municipality about approved models of preprimary education, whereas school informs parents (foster parents) about preprimary education models at school, approved by the founder; signs teaching agreement with parents (foster parents), which legitimizes agreements of both parties regarding conditions of implementing preprimary curriculum and/or educational support, rights and duties of the school and parents (foster presents).

Table 4: The tasks of organizing and informing about preprimary education in the documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania				
Level of strategy of education policy	Legal acts	Categories	Subcategories	Texts
Institutional context	Description of the Organisation Order of Preprimary Education Order of the minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-1180 dated June 22, 2005.	Particularity of preprimary education	Contextuality of preprimary education	"organisation of preprimary education takes place in a certain context, considering the majority of factors"
	Description of Organisation Models of Preprimary Education Order of the minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-1478 dated October 29, 2003.	Creation of self-educational environment	Permanent education	"formation of the space that requires permanent improvement, acquisition of new competencies or usage of the possessed ones".
			Implementation of innovations	"it is necessary to create open spaces of education, implement innovations, use various technologies in the education process".
	Recommendations to the Municipalities regarding Centralised Children's Admittance to Preschool and Preprimary Education Groups of Educational Institutions Order of the minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-918 dated June 25, 2003.	Informing	Rapidness of mastering information	"rapid mastering of new information".
	Order of Providing Educational Assistance for the 5-6 Year Old Child who does not Attend an Educational Institution Order of the minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-1809 dated December 16, 2003.		Adequacy of using information	"appropriate usage of new information"
			Informing parents	"information is provided about provided support for children who do not attend educational institutions".
Source: Author				

The Description of Organisation Models of Preprimary Education (2003) does not speak about informing the society in the preprimary education aspect but indicates that it should be available to all and presents milestones assisting to ensure this availability. More concrete data about informing the society on preprimary education issues are listed in the regulations prepared by schools or kindergartens.

Informing is particularly emphasized in the Recommendations to the Municipalities regarding Centralised Children's Admittance to Preschool and Preprimary Education Groups of Educational Institutions (2003), in the Order of Providing Educational Assistance for the 5-6 Year Old Child who does not Attend an Educational Institution. It is pointed out that the provided information regarding centralised children's admittance to preschool and preprimary education groups of educational institutions in the first place has to be directed towards parents whose children still do not attend preschool institutions. This information has to encompass various kinds of provided support; the processes of fast mastering and appropriate usage of information are emphasized.

The Description of Public Order of Announcing Information about School Activities (2005) aims to provide the society (pupils, their parents (foster parents, guardians) with information about formal and informal curricula implemented at school, curricula choice possibilities, admittance conditions, paid services, teachers' qualifications, key school assessment results, traditions and attainments of the school community, which would help the person to choose education according to his/her interests, inclinations, abilities, and its supplier, seeking educatedness

and/or profession. This document elaborates the content of information which encompasses general school information, explanations about implementation of curricula, pupils' admittance conditions, provided paid services, annual school budget, pupils' provision with teaching aids, pupils' nutrition, transportation, managerial and teaching personnel, summaries of internal audit, school values, traditions, etc. This description is used by preschool and/or preprimary educational institutions.

Conclusion

1. Informing the society about preschool and preprimary education is based on hierarchic system: the Ministry of Education and Science – municipalities of cities/districts – heads of preschool/preprimary institutions – teachers – parents/children.
2. Informing the society about preschool and preprimary education in the Concept of Children's Preschool Education in Lithuania (1989) was attributed to social support to the family. This document elaborates knowledge of such specialists who provide information to the family (necessary knowledge about modern adult education processes: essence, principles, methods) and also distinguishes the priorities of informing the society: educational institutions maintain inter-institutional cooperation, public relations.
3. The analysis of the documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania demonstrated that, informing about preschool and preprimary education, the biggest attention is paid to target groups which directly participate in the child's education processes – parents/foster parents and staff of the education system. Information

to other groups of the society which indirectly participate in the child's education processes can be implied only from the context. Such situation can be influenced by the fact that general documents on education of the Republic of Lithuania consolidate the approach that preschool education is a intermediate, transitional link between the family and the school, it is sought "to prove parents and the society the efficiency and the necessity of children's qualified education". It is likely that when there is insufficient systematic attitude towards informing of various groups of the society as of potential social partners on the issues of children's education and care at the legitimate level, the possibilities both of practical creation of the informing system and its functioning will be restricted.

4. Alongside with changes in the attitude towards the child's education, the purpose of informing the society about preschool and preprimary education was changing. The content of informing the society in Conceptual State Policy on Children's Welfare (2003) is directed not towards children's preparation for school (this has been emphasized before approval of this document) but towards inter-departmental cooperation, exchanging information in order to solve the child's problems successfully.

This policy provides for participation of the child to whom it is also important to provide information.

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