ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR A LEARNER AFTER FORMAL EDUCATION: A CASE OF LITHUANIA

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Abstract. *Access to education and support for a learner is among the most important educational policy and management issues in the context of educational reform. In many European countries, both academics and practitioners are looking for optimal ways to ensure the child's well-being through the implementation of the principle of access to education, which, as it is known, contributes to reducing social exclusion and, at the same time, increasing academic success. One of the possible means to implement these goals is the idea of the all-day school. Several patterns of the implementation of this idea in Europe can be detected. However, there is often a lack of arguments about the meaningfulness and feasibility of creating such all-day school models. With a view to solving that problem from the perspective of stakeholders and applying a strategy of case study, a comprehensive analysis was carried out in order to find out the need for education, health, social and cultural services for children in Lithuania. In Lithuania, the length of the school year was extended from 2017–2018. It raised a number of issues related to the package of education and social services can be incarnated at school. The discussion about the need to extend working hours in school created preconditions for talking about the wider possibilities of providing additional education, health, social and cultural services at school. Thus, a representative parental survey was conducted to determine the need for additional education, health, social and cultural services at school and the need for all-day school in general. A sample of 1615 parents from all 10 Lithuanian counties was selected. The results of the research are valuable for the discussion of the researchers of educational sciences.*
Keywords: *access to education, all-day school, support for learner.*

Introduction

Accessibility of education and support for a learner are among the burning issues of education policy and management in the context of education reforms.

The scientists and practitioners in many European countries have been searching for optimal ways to ensure child's wellbeing by implementing the principle of accessibility of education which contributes to the reduction of social exclusion and the increase in academic success.

Until the 1990s, the scientific literature mostly discussed the accessibility of education as an expression of social justice. Nowadays research is linked to the accessibility of education in diferent regions of the world (Durowaiye & Khan, 2017), migration (Garibay, Herrera, Johnston-Guerrero, & Garcia, 2016), challenges of the virtual world (Ally, Grimus, & Ebner, 2014). This encourages rethinking the issues related to the accessibility of education and support for a learner. Scientific debates on the forms and methods of education (Sikand, 2017), the role of the general education, subsequent self-learning and non-formal education in the context of lifelong learning (Farías & Sevilla, 2015; Korinek & de Fur, 2016) bring **the following problematic question**: how the idea of all-day school can contribute to the implementation of the principle of accessibility of education by way of provision of timely support for a learner, particularly after the formal education. On the other hand, it is important to identify what kind of assistance a learner needs so that the principle of accessibility of education could be considered as implemented at the institutional level after school.

Therefore, **the object of the research** provided in the article refers to accessibility of education and support for a learner after the formal education. **The objective of the research** is to identify the need for and possibilities of the accessibility of education and support for a learner after the formal education. The problem was tackled from the stakeholder theory's perspective (Miles, 2017) and by applying the case study strategy (Yin, 2014) with the aim of carrying out a comprehensive analysis of the need for and accessibility of educational, health-related, social and cultural services for a child and family in Lithuania.

In Lithuania, the learning period was formally extended in 2017–2018 and this resulted in a number of questions related to organisation of education and created the prerequisites for assessing the possibility to provide additional educational, health-related, social and cultural services at school. Therefore, in order to identify the need for such services at school, a representative anonymous parental survey was carried out in August–September 2017. The in-depth statistical analysis of the survey data revealed the perspective of the all-day school model from the parents' point of view. The survey results are significant for scientific discussion in the field of educational science.

Solutions of accessibly of education and support for a learner in the context of education reforms in Lithuania

Philosophers of education noted that preconditions for social education are often linked to separate (as it might seem at first glance) issues: social justice, educational equality, quality of education, etc., yet in the content of all these preconditions, the component of accessibility of education can be observed.

Assessment of the change in the education system and educational content in Lithuania makes it obvious that throughout the 20th century the classical paradigm was followed in Lithuania (focused conveying of generalized experience, centralized teaching when everyone is taught the same thing, etc.), and it seems that no questions regarding the accessibility of education have ever arisen. However, according to B. Bitinas (2013), it was realized over time that internal conflicts of the classical paradigm have reached such a level that education based on this paradigm fail to meet the needs of a person and society. Therefore, at the end of the 20th century, when modelling a new education system in Lithuania, attempts were made to promote values based on open education. However, new priorities and trends in education soon emerged due to rapid transformation processes (Prakapas & Prakapienė, 2013). In the context of change in structures and ideas, responding to the needs of students, their parents and teachers, quality of education became one of the main aspects in education reform in Lithuania. Social justice and education quality was seen from a new perspective. The educators faced a challenge – to educate students in such a way that would allow them to become not only educated but also creative persons, able to think critically, create, etc. There was a natural need to move from teaching to learning, from ensuring the education quality for all in general to ensuring the education quality for each student (*Švietimo Raidos Lietuvoje Įžvalgos* (Insights on Education Development in Lithuania), 2013).

It can be stated that scientific cognition of the phenomenon of accessibility of education is not a new object of research. Meta-analysis of the results of many surveys (Petronienė & Taljūnaitė, 2011; Martišauskienė & Trakšelys, 2013; De Luigi & Martelli, 2015; Garibay, Herrera, Johnston-Guerrero, Garcia, 2016 et al.) shows that accessibility of education directly correlates with development of person's well-being. An important component in this interactive process is support for a learner. According to K. Trakšelys (2015: p. 129), accessibility of education and education quality is the object and priority of political discussions in many countries because high-quality and accessible education is considered as basis for development of well-being of the society and a person. In the context of interaction of these two components, the object of implementation of the idea of all-day school was started to be analysed in both science and practice as a possible solution. The research shows that many models based on this idea can be observed

in Europe (Merfeldaitė et al., 2017). The performed studies reveal the variety of examples in both legal regulation and practical implementation.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges, such as penetration of modern technologies into education (Spector, 2014, Indrašienė, Merfeldaitė, Railienė, & Jegelevičienė, 2015; Dudaitė & Prakapas, 2017), change in society population structure (Garibay et al., 2016), new attitude towards the roles of educator (Zhu, 2010) and learner (Ally, Grimus, & Ebner, 2014), encourage the search for different models of support for a child and family (Indrašienė & Merfeldaitė, 2010; Kairienė, 2010 et al.).

Based on experience of the foreign and Lithuanian scientists, development of the all-day school model was chosen as one of the possible solutions to this problem. The purpose of this model is to give each learner access to high-quality educational services based on his/her personal skills and needs. In practice of educational institutions in Lithuania, it was observed that there is a new understanding of what is good and how school should operate. In addition to formal education, there are increasing discussions about support for a family by ensuring child safety, satisfaction of child's needs, personalization of education. With expansion of this module beyond the limits of formal education, in-depth discussion with parents is obviously needed.

Research methodology

Questionnaire was chosen as a **survey instrument** to identify the opinion of parents. The questionnaire comprised questions about the need for all-day school and additional educational, health-related, social and cultural services.

Survey sample. The survey population covered parents of school-age children. Parents of school children attending different types of schools were invited to participate in the survey thus ensuring representation of parents with different experiences. 1615 respondents from all 10 regions of Lithuania participated in the survey. To represent the population, the sampling was done by region and type of locality (urban and rural areas). With a view to ensuring the representativeness of the sample, the weights were calculated taking into account the actual proportion of population in urban and rural areas in each county separately. With the sample weights applied, the distribution of the respondents by locality type is as follows: population of cities, towns and rural areas account for around one third of the sample each (36, 31 and 33 per cent respectively). The majority of the participants of the survey were mothers or foster-mothers (91.3 per cent). The average age of the respondents – 38.5 years (standard deviation – 6.1). The participants of the survey differed in terms of income and educational attainment level, yet the majority of them (58 per cent) had a university degree.

This can be explained by the fact that the participants of the survey were younger persons and mostly women (in Lithuania, the number of younger persons with higher education degree exceeds that of older persons, as well as there are more women with higher education degree than men).

Data analysis methods. The descriptive statistics method was used for the survey data analysis. The χ^2 features homogeneity criterion and the following non-parametric tests were used for calculation of statistical significance: Mann-Whitney criterion which is used for comparison of two independent samples distributions, and Kruskal-Wallis criterion which is used for comparison of three and more independent samples distributions when variables are ordinal. IBM SPSS24 program package was used for the data analysis.

Research Results

The purpose of the research was to find out if all-day school is needed. The survey results show that the vast majority of parents (84.2 per cent) see the need for all-day school. The need for such school is mostly noted by the residents of the cities – 90.3 per cent (rural population – 84.2 per cent) (see Fig. 1). This difference is statistically significant (χ^2p<0.001).
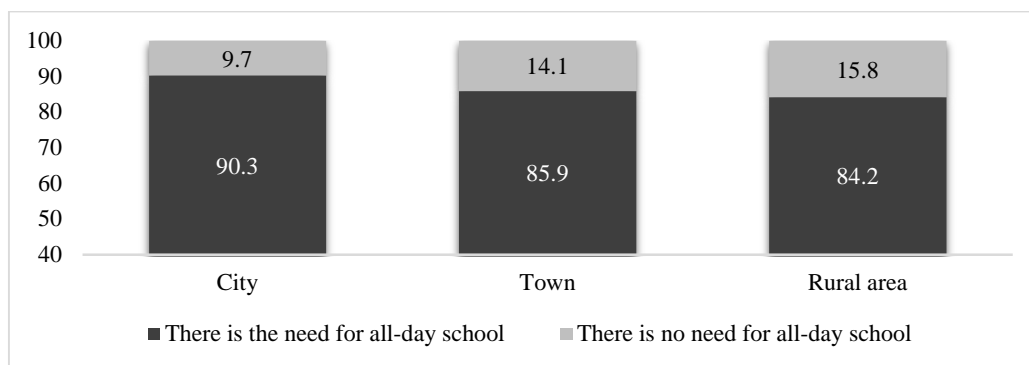

Figure 1. **Need for all-day school by place of residence**

The analysis of the answers of the respondents according to their educational attainment level showed that persons who do not see the need for all-day school are mostly those holding lower educational attainment level (primary, general lower secondary, secondary and vocational education) – 23.1 per cent (those with higher education degree – only 9.9 per cent, χ^2 p<0.001). Thus, the need for all-day school is more often indicated by respondents living in the cities and having higher education degree than by those living in rural areas and holding lower educational attainment level.

The mission of education defined in the State Education Strategy 2013–2022 declares the fundamental objective to provide each person with a basis for

independent and active life, help to continuously improve personal skills to become full member of the democratic society which actively participates in social, economic and cultural life. The aim of the survey was to point out the spectrum of educational services and assistance possibly integrated into the vision of all-day school. Therefore, the focus was put on the organization of additional lessons and informal activities, analysis of the need for health-related, cultural, social and educational assistance services to the participants of educational process and demand for such services at all-day school. Analysis of the parents' opinion of additional lessons and activities (see Fig. 2.) revealed that parents see the need for additional lesions of all types. The chart provides the averages of the results where code 1 means "unimportant", 2 – "not very important", 3 – "neither important nor unimportant", 4 – "rather important", 5 – "very important". The chart shows that the need assessment averages for all listed additional lessons stand at 4 and more. The most important thing for parents is that all-day school would organize additional lessons for students showing worse study results and would provide lessons for improving literacy (mathematical, linguistic, digital, natural science, financial, economic literacy), various activities corresponding to the student's hobbies, sports lessons for those engaged in sports, and creativity lessons (all averages M = 4.3). Lessons that promote healthy lifestyle (M = 4.1) and civic-mindedness and awareness (M = 4.0) were considered by parents as the least relevant.
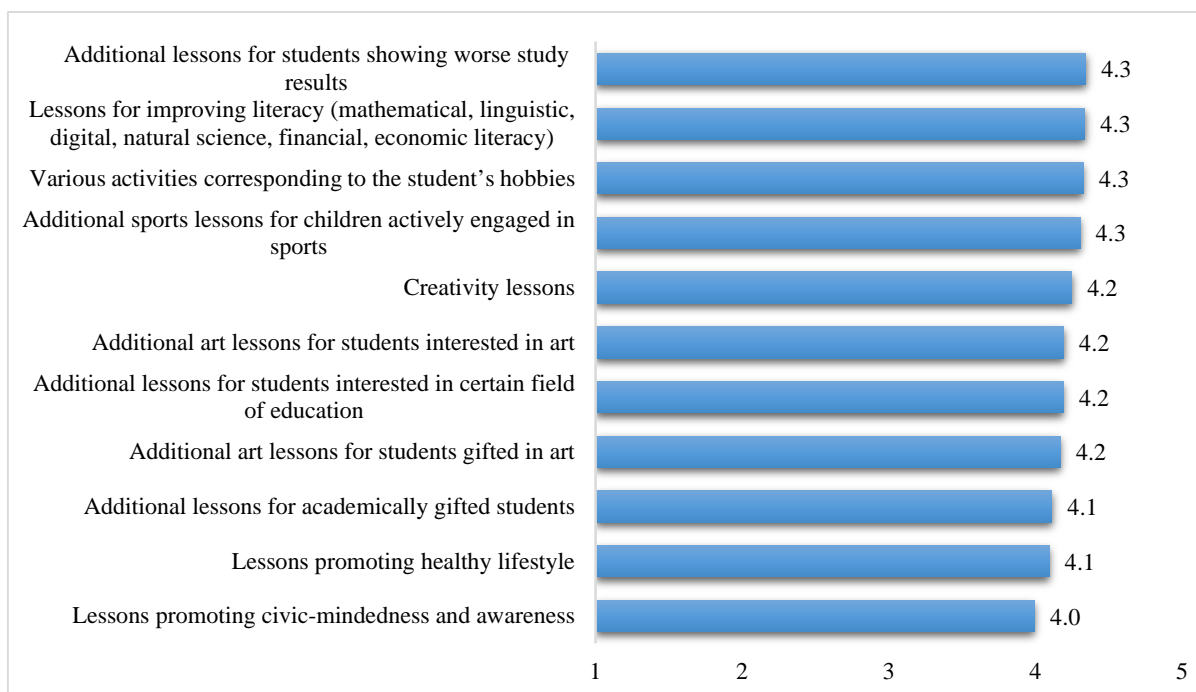
Figure 2. **Need for additional lessons and activities**

For more detailed assessment of the need for additional lessons and activities, comparison of the parents' answers in respondent groups by educational attainment level and place of residence was carried out.

Applying the Kruskal-Wall criterion according to the average rank and the received statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), it is concluded that the importance of need for additional lessons significantly differ in the groups of parents with higher educational attainment level and those with lower educational attainment level. Parents with higher educational attainment level place stronger emphasis on the need for additional lessons for weaker students ($p \leq 0.05$), students interested in certain field of education ($p \leq 0.05$), students gifted in art ($p \leq 0.01$), as well as lessons for improving literacy (mathematical, linguistic, digital, natural science, financial, economic literacy) ($p \leq 0.05$).

Significant difference in assessment of the need for additional lessons is also observed in groups of parents by place of residence. Parents living in the relatively smaller territorial units (rural areas, towns), compared to those living in cities, put stronger emphasis on the importance of additional lessons for weaker students ($p \leq 0.001$) and take more note of the importance of lessons promoting civic-mindedness and awareness ($p \leq 0.05$).

In addition to organisation of additional lessons or activities, the survey aimed at finding out what additional educational opportunities, in the opinion of parents, should be provided in terms of all-day school model. The analysis of the results showed (see Fig. 3.) that all the offered educational opportunities are significant to parents (assessment averages stand at 4 and more).
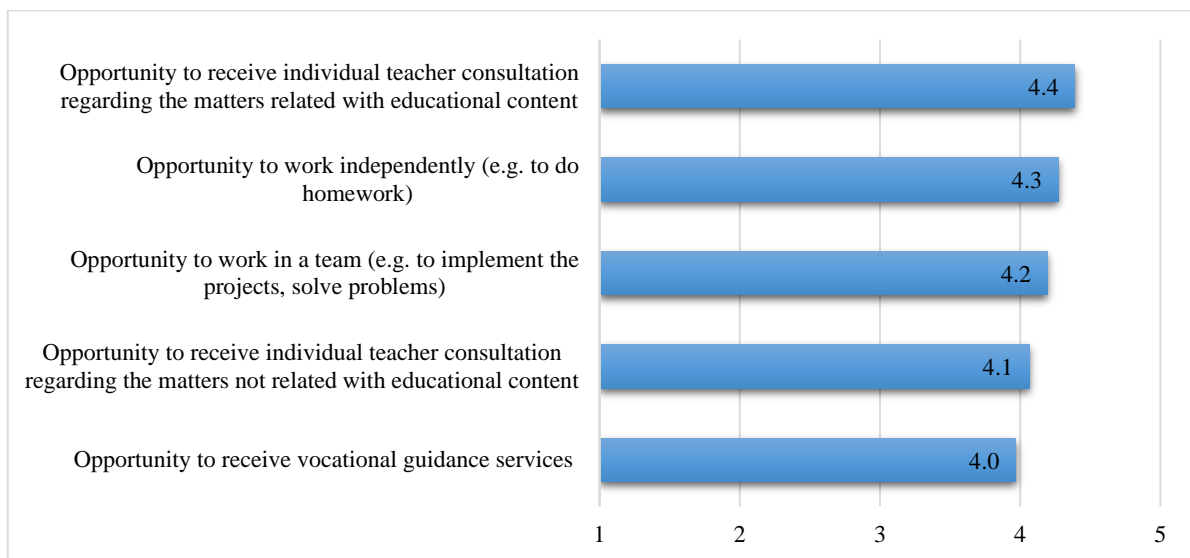

Figure 3**. Need for additional educational opportunities**

The analysis of the results showed that the vast majority of parents noted that in terms of designing of all-day model it is important for the school to provide access to individual teacher consultation regarding the matters related with educational content (M = 4.4). The similar number of parents think that it is important to provide opportunity for students to work individually (M = 4.3) and in a team (M = 4.2). The smallest number of parents agree that it is important to have access to vocational guidance services (M = 4.0) at all-day school.

With a view to performing a more detailed analysis of educational opportunities to be ensured at all-day school, distribution of answers in respondent groups by educational attainment level was compared. Application of Kruskal-Wallis criterion did not reveal evident differences depending on the educational attainment level of the respondents. However, differences in answers were received when the respondent groups were compared by locality. Assessment of the averages of the provided ranks shows that parents whose children attend school in relatively smaller territorial unit (rural area, town) place stronger emphasis on the importance of individual teacher consultations regarding educational content (e.g. regarding homework, project task) (p ≤ 0.01) and opportunity to receive vocational guidance services (p ≤ 0.05).

One of the goals set in the Law on Education (2011) is to convey to a person the basics of national and ethnic culture, the traditions and values of the humanistic culture of Europe and of the world, to foster the maturation of a person's national identity, moral, aesthetic and scientific culture as well as personal outlook, to guarantee the continuity of ethnic and national culture, the preservation of its identity and continuous renewal of its values, to promote the country's openness and inclination for dialogue. The Law provides that the goal of education in different stages of education is also related with satisfaction of cultural needs. Therefore, the aim of the survey was to identify the need for cultural education services. Parents were asked how important different cultural services (from participation in celebrations to visiting museums and concerts) would be at all-day school.

Analysis of the need for additional cultural education services showed that all the offered cultural services are approximately equally assessed by parents – M = 4. Comparison of the need for cultural education services by place of residence showed certain difference in opinions regarding performances and museums. The residents of cities, compared to those of rural areas, express stronger need for their children to have possibility to watch performances ((p ≤ 0.05) and visit museums (p ≤ 0.01). Analysis of the opinions of parents according to their educational attainment level did not reveal any significant differences.
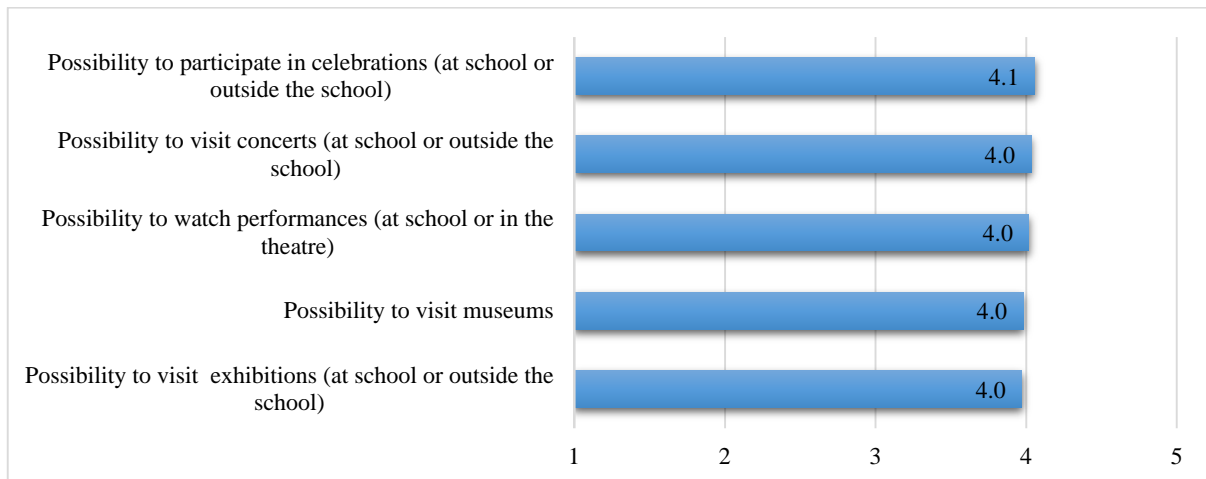
Figure 4**. Need for additional cultural education**

The Law on Social Services (2006) provides that social services refer to services aimed at providing assistance to a person (family) to independently care for his/her private (family) life and to participate in society. The objective of social services is to create conditions for a person (family) to develop or to enhance the abilities and possibilities to independently solve his social problems, maintain social relations with society as well as to assist in the overcoming of social exclusion. According to the Law on Education (2011), the purpose of social educational services is to help the parents (guardians, curators) so that the child's right to education be exercised, to ensure the child's safety at school, to eliminate reasons because of which a child cannot attend the school or avoids attending the school, to return drop-outs to school. The aim of the survey was to reveal what social and socio-educational services should be provided at school and which of them should be prioritized.

Data analysis clearly revealed the need for social services and the importance of integration of these services' package into the all-day school model (see Fig. 5.). Parents would mostly prefer the school to provide the possibility to receive individual psychological or social assistance (M = 4.6). Moreover, parents find the extracurricular and preventive activities greatly relevant (M = 4.5 in both cases). Free or partly free meals were considered by parents as the least relevant services (M = 3.9 in both cases).

Applying the Kruskal-Wall criterion according to the average rank and the received statistical significance (p <0.05), it can be concluded that the significant difference in assessment of social services is observed in parent groups by educational attainment level and place of residence. Parents holding higher education degree note that all-day school should organize the extracurricular activities (p ≤ 0.001) and give access to individual psychological or social assistance (p ≤ 0.001). Parents having no higher education degree and those living

in rural areas put stronger emphasis on free meal services (p ≤ 0.001 in both cases). Parents living in cities particularly emphasize the need for extracurricular activities (p ≤ 0.001), individual psychological or social educational assistance (p ≤ 0.001) and prevention programmes (p ≤ 0.001). It is interesting to observe that the larger the territorial unit where parents live is, the stronger is the emphasis on the possibility to play (p ≤ 0.001).
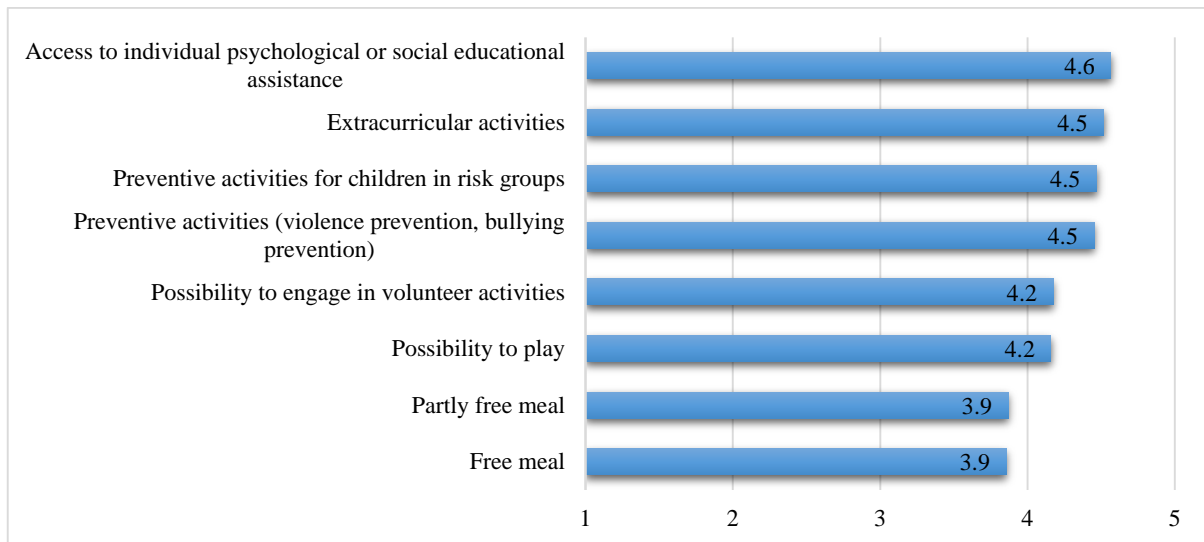

Figure 5**. Need for additional social services**

The Law on Education (2011) provides that the purpose of healthcare in schools is to protect and improve health of learners, by actively cooperating with their parents. For this purpose, schools develop and implement health improvement programmes and seek to meet the need for child healthcare services.

The aim of the survey was to find out how important the healthy lifestyle services related with organisation of sports activities, improvement of psychological health, training of healthy lifestyle, implementation of bad habits (addiction) prevention programmes, etc. at all-day school would be to parents. The results (see Fig. 6.) show that part of healthy lifestyle education services do not seem very significant to parents (the average M is close to neutral position 3).

Parents most strongly agree that all-day school should ensure access to sports (M = 4.5), provide possibility to spend at least 1 hour outdoors per day (excluding breaks) (M = 4.4), implement bad habits (addiction) prevention (M = 4.3). Growing vegetables and collecting herbs, berries and mushrooms were not considered by parents as significant activities (M = 3.4 and M = 3.2 respectively).
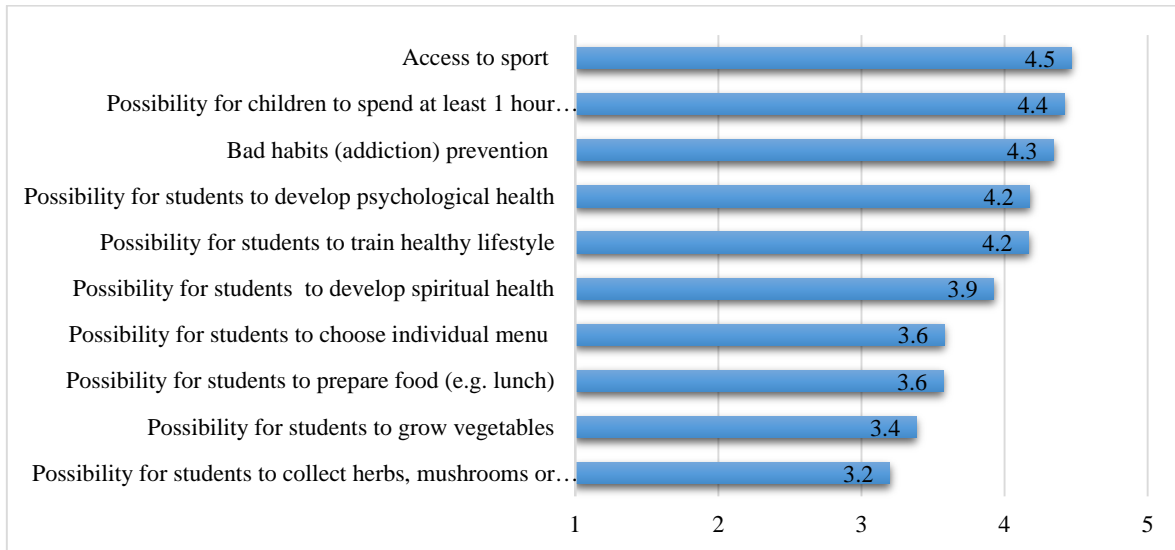
Figure 6**. Need for additional healthy lifestyle education**

Comparison of the answers of parents in respondent groups by educational attainment level and place of residence revealed certain differences. Analysis of the averages of ranks of Kruskal-Wallis criterion showed that parents holding higher education degree put stronger stress on the access to sports (p ≤ 0.001) and possibility to spend at least 1 hour outdoors per day (p ≤ 0.001). It can be observed that the higher educational attainment level of parents is, the stronger is their emphasis on the importance of psychological health development (p ≤ 0.001). Similar trend is observed in assessment of the importance of spiritual health development: the higher educational attainment level of parents is, the stronger is their emphasis on the importance of spiritual health development (p ≤ 0.001).

In terms of the place of residence, the analysis of the survey results showed that the smaller the territorial unit where parents live is, the stronger is the emphasis on access to sports (p ≤ 0.001) and possibility to spend at least 1 hour outdoors per day (p ≤ 0.001). It can be observed that the larger the territorial unit where parents live is, the stronger is emphasis on the importance of psychological health (p ≤ 0.001) and healthy lifestyle (p ≤ 0.001) education. The smaller the territorial unit where parents live is, the stronger is emphasis on the importance of bad habits (addiction) prevention (p ≤ 0.001).

Conclusions

With a view to increasing the accessibility of education and support for a learner after the formal education, all-day schools need to be established. The need for such schools was mostly expressed by parents holding higher education degree and by those living in the cities.

All-day school should be modelled to achieve coherence between formal and non-formal education. Parents find it important for all-day school to organize additional lessons for weaker students, lessons improving literacy and creativity, activities corresponding to student's interests, sports lessons.

The need for additional lessons was mostly expressed by parents with higher educational attainment level and those living in the cities. Parents living in smaller territorial units put stronger emphasis on the importance of lessons promoting civic-mindedness and awareness and access to individual teacher consultation regarding the matters related with educational content.

The importance of integration of social services package into all-day school model is also noted. Parents holding higher education degree find it important for all-day school to organize extracurricular activities and provide access to individual psychological or social assistance. Free meal services are more important for parents having lower educational attainment level and those living in rural areas.

Cultural and healthy lifestyle services are less important to parents. Parents living in the cities more strongly express the need for their children to be provided with opportunity to visit performances and museums. Parents holding higher education degree note that all-day school should provide access to sports and possibility to spend time outdoors. The higher educational attainment level of parents is, the stronger is their emphasis on the importance of psychological and spiritual health development.

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