

SCHOOL CHOICE CRITERIA: THE CASE OF ŠIAULIAI CITY

Erika Masiliauskienė, Renata Geležinienė, Rūta Šiaučiulienė
Šiauliai University, Lithuania

Abstract

The article deals with the research related to the school choice process, conducted by Lithuanian and foreign scholars. Qualitative research results are presented disclosing that the most significant school choice criteria are the reputation and location of the school. The section discussing empirical research results presents the content of these and other criteria, analyses their importance for school choice.

Keywords: *a good school, school choice, school reputation, school location, school marketing, teachers' professionalism.*

Relevance of the research

Lithuanian Progress Strategy “Lithuania 2030” (2012) steers education to the development of the active, solidary and learning society. Schools are delegated the role of designing and implementing curricula ensuring self-development of learners’ creativity, creating conditions that are favourable for searches and improvement, development of high quality services. The aspiration for higher quality and the importance of interaction between school activities and “human and society’s needs” are also highlighted in the *The National Strategy on Education* for the years 2013-2022¹. The fundamental aim for future education formed in the latter document is to create conditions for self-development of an energetic, independent, responsible and solidary personality, creating one’s own, the state’s and the world’s future.

Analysing future school perspectives, Donskis (2015) notes that the main aim of education is “practice, creation of different relationships and alternatives” (p. 13), when education enables to create such space “in which we would learn throughout our lives and there would be no happy end points” (p. 13). The scholar maintains that a good school is “a laboratory of freedom and democracy” (p. 12), ensuring the synthesis of theory and practice, the learner’s movement forward and different activities of the teacher, not “the information monopolist’s activities” (p. 12). Bartaševičius (2014) emphasizes the significance of the learner-centred educational paradigm as a methodological approach of the educational system of the school for the development of a *different* school. (Self-)development of a *different*, good school is undoubtedly influenced by accordingly modelled self-educational environment offering the

¹ The National Strategy on Education for the years 2013-2022, p. 3.

possibility of free choice, while the elements of such environment enable activities of pupils and other members of the community with different learning styles and needs (Černiauskaitė, 2012; Kazlauskienė et al., 2014, etc.).

The main aim of *The Concept of a Good School* (2015) is to “commit” schools to implement their long-term development initiatives, involving various interested groups (pupils, parents, teachers, etc.) into this process. Successful activities of such schools are related to appropriate implementation of their mission, comprising good self-educational outcomes (not only academic achievements but also maturity, progress of the personality) and “the way” of their attainment, positive experiences of school life. *The Concept of a Good School* (2015) should be helpful for various groups of the society both assessing school performance and when the child and family make decisions what educational institution to choose.

Studies conducted by Kučinskienė and Rupšienė (2005, 2006a, 2006b) analyse the link between school choice and the pupils’ gender, tier of education, parental education, type of the residential area, etc. Scholars also analyzed pupils’ experiences changing the school and links between school choice and quality of (self-) education. Kučinskienė and Rupšienė (2005, 2006b) actualized parental role and sharing the responsibility for the choice with children. They also identified that important school choice criteria were assurance of quality of (self-) education in a particular school and availability of comprehensive information about the school. Scientifically grounding the concept of alternative education, Černiauskaitė (2012) also mentions school choice in free will. Leončikas (2006), Šliavaitė (2015) investigated links between school choice and the language of instruction. The study conducted by Leončikas (2006) also emphasises links of school choice with the construction of ethnic identity.

The analysis of the latest studies of foreign scholars (Villavicencio, 2013; Bhattacharji & Kingdon, 2016) discloses that information possessed by parents and pupils about activities and performance results of a particular school become a particularly important criterion of school choice. The detailed analysis of the content of this criterion shows that choosing the school, both information about publicly presented academic achievements of pupils of a particular school and information about quality of school performance and how (self-)development of daily living skills, abilities is organised at school become important (Villavicencio, 2013; Benson, Bridge, & Wilson, 2015). Bhattacharji and Kingdon (2016), Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) note that such information is significant in another aspect too: it encourages schools to aspire for higher quality of performance and predict long-term performance improvement perspectives more responsibly. Other people’s personal recommendations become important in the school choice process (Villavicencio, 2013). Thus, those who are choosing a school actually “manage” information that reaches them from various sources and, according to Villavicencio (2013), such situation may lead to not quite rational decisions related to school choice.

In the context of the availability of information as a school choice criterion, another problem area should be highlighted: school rankings, which also become a criterion determining school choice. The question is whether school ranking results can really be the only objective truth, on the basis of which one or another school can be properly chosen. In this case, we could get back to the insights of Bhattacharji and Kingdon (2016). The latter scholars emphasize that school rankings are very often related only to their academic reputation, which would mean academic performance results. Meanwhile, other aspects of school activities remain on the sidelines. Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) also state that choosing a school it is common practice to rely on the “headlines” about school rankings, without going deep into other results

characterising school activities. It is also acknowledged in The Concept of a Good School (2015) approved in Lithuania that it is often the case that the key “goodness indicator” of a school is formal academic results, while it should be vice versa: both results and the process of their achievement should be important.

Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) note that in most cases the most important criteria in the school choice process are the location, openness and environment of the school. Authors also mention the school reputation criterion, which lacks objectivity. According to Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015), school reputation is often formed on the basis of subjective personal impressions and rumour type information. As to school reputation, it is also noted that popularity of the school does not necessarily mean high requirements for quality of education. Villavicencio (2013), Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) maintain that other criteria such as attendance of a concrete school by brothers and sisters, the system of the socio-educational support for the child and family, peculiarities of school community are supplementary.

The discussion on the relevance of problems of the research presupposes **the problem question of the scientific research**: What aspects of school activities are considered valuable and desirable and become significant school choice criteria?

The research subject: the criteria of school choice. **The research aim**: to identify the criteria determining school choice.

Research methods: the analysis of scientific literature, free (non-structured) thematic essay, non-structured written survey, qualitative content analysis of empirical data.

Organisation of the research. The research was conducted in 2014, implementing the third-party research ordered by Šiauliai city municipality under the measure of the cooperation programme “The Analysis of Peculiarities of a Good School”. The research was conducted in two stages: the quantitative research and the qualitative research. This article presents the results of qualitative research. The qualitative research strategy (Luobikienė, 2010; Creswell 2014; Gaižauskaitė, 2014; Corbin, 2015, etc.) enabled to collect qualitative data describing the phenomenon under investigation and to interpret the phenomenon according to meanings given by informants.

The qualitative research was attended by 426 informants; i.e., free (non-structured) essays on the topic “Why are you learning in this school?” were written by 426 pupils of 4-5 forms. Qualitative data that are significant for the study were also obtained during the quantitative study. The instruments of the questionnaire survey are designed in such manner that respondents had the possibility both to respond to standardized questions of the questionnaire and freely express their opinion about a good school. To implement this goal open-ended questions were given at the end of the questionnaire: 1) What determined the fact that the pupil attends namely this school? (in the questionnaire for pupils, the sample – 814 pupils) and 2) What additional information about a good school respondents would like to give? (in the questionnaires for parents, the sample – 1025; in the questionnaires for teachers/administrative staff of the school, the sample – 528 respondents).

Research data were processed following the scientific position that the basis of data analysis is the narrative strategy, enabling the analysis of informants’ verbal stories, personal narratives, etc. (Luobikienė, 2010; Creswell, 2014). The data of the qualitative research were analyzed applying content analysis and constant comparative methods, looking for meaningful units, elements that are reflected in informants’ phrases, sentences and words.

Conducting the content analysis of texts, grids of categories and/or categories and subcategories were drawn up, outlining the frequency of repetitions of statements. Drawing up the said grids, the investigator’s impartiality principle was followed and statements ascribed

to them were not divided into right or wrong (Juodaitytė & Šaparnytė, 2008; Masiliauskienė, 2009; Masiliauskienė, 2010).

Empirical research results and their analysis

The analysis of empirical data of the scientific research disclosed that informants maintained that the most significant criteria for school choice were *reputation of the school, its location, marketing, the direction of school activities, professionalism of the teaching staff and personalized learning*. Research results also suggest that in some cases such criteria as *the pupils' safety, physical environment of the school, diversity of extracurricular activities*, etc. are also considered choosing the school. Further the article presents the content analysis of separate school choice criteria.

School reputation. *The reputation of the school* as a key criterion choosing a school is described by the grid of categories and sub-categories (see Table 1), showing the relevance of such features as *the experience of friends and family, the decision of the family and school image*, making a decision to which school their child should go or which school to attend.

Table 1. School Choice Criteria: *School Reputation*

Category	Subcategory	No. of statements	Examples of statements ²
<i>Experience of friends and family</i>	Experience of friends, other acquaintances	73	The majority of classmates moved, that's why I went too [M 4.62]; My friend advised me to go to this school [...] [r5m 5.24]
	Brothers', sisters' experience	36	My sister successfully finished this school, she was satisfied with teachers' attention and thoughtfulness [M 3.144]; Because my brother also went to that school and I wanted to go with him] [r5m 9.9]
	Parents' experience	34	I myself attended for several years, therefore, this school was close to me, now it also became close to my daughter [T 8.98] ³ ; I heard a lot of good things about this school from my mother because she has also graduated from this school] [r5m 9.4] ⁴
	Relatives' experience	7	Relatives were learning in this school [...] [M 3.117]; [...] because my senior cousin said that it was a very good school][r5m 5.20]
<i>The decision of the family</i>	Parents' decision	83	My mother's judgement determines [M 6.4]; I went to this school because my mother said so [r5m 8.1]
	The child's personal choice	30	My own resolve determined, I had many choices but this school corresponded to all criteria, therefore I attend it [M 3.121]; I was asking everyone which school was the best [r5m 6.2]
	Joint decision of the child and parents	8	The wish to learn, parents' approval, because that school is "strong" [M 5.15]; [...] Both because I want and parents asked to go... [r5m 9.2]

² Here and further informants' statements representing the subcategory and / or category are given, language is uncorrected.

³ Code structure: "T" – one of the parents; "M" – the pupil; "number.number" – text number.

⁴ Code structure: "r" – essay; "number" – the form in which the pupil was learning; "number.number" – text number.

<i>School image</i>	Good feedback about the school	73	[...] I had heard good feedback about teachers, pupils [...] [M 1.16]; Good feedback about the quality of teaching, teachers' competence [m1.94]
	School ranking	13	[...] school ranking, "prestige" [M 1.89]; Friends and the level of the school, ranking [m4.16]
	Personal impression about the school	4	During acquaintance with the school it attracted me a lot [M 3.136]; School image, teachers made a good impression, a wonderful canteen [m3.129]

The analysis of statements ascribed to the semantic grid (see Table 1) enables to state that the features describing the school choice criterion (school reputation), named by categories and subcategories are closely interrelated; therefore, they are analyzed as integral elements supplementing one another. The frequency of repetition of statements (the number of statements ascribed to the category/sub-category) demonstrates that in the context of *school reputation* the most significant determinant choosing the school is *the experience of friends and family*.

Content analysis of *the category of experience of friends and family* discloses that the most important are *experiences of friends and other acquaintances*, less emphasised are *parents' and brothers', sisters' experiences*. *Relatives' experiences* are emphasised the least. The research disclosed that choosing a school, **professional and learning experience in a particular school of friends and other acquaintances** was significant. In the first case, the opinion and recommendations on school choice of adult acquaintances working in the school (mostly involved in academic work) are trusted. In the second case, friends' (named as "best friends") positive experience learning in that educational institution becomes an important factor choosing a school. In separate cases, the choice is determined by the fact that a particular school had been chosen by former friends of a group or form of the pre-school educational institution.

Brothers', sisters' experience is related to favourably assessed microclimate of the attended school (good feeling at school and good interrelations of the community) and brothers' and sisters' good academic achievements. In addition, it is maintained that school choice is determined (although very slightly) by the wish to learn together with one's brother(s) or sister(s) in the same educational institution. The analysis of influence of *parents' or relatives' experiences* on school choice shows that in this case it becomes important which school the child's father, mother or another relative attended. Besides, the aspect of convenience (with regard to transportation to the school) is highlighted.

Summing up the significance of *experience of friends and family*, it can be noticed that choosing a school two groups of persons dominate: persons related (1) and not related (2) to the pupil by family ties. The importance of both groups of persons choosing the school is basically tantamount. This is shown by the frequency of repetition of statements.

In the context of *school reputation* as the most significant school choice criterion, the category *the decision of the family* is distinguished. The content of this category discloses how school reputation determines decisions of the family or family members choosing a school. Subcategories describing the said category show that as a rule *parents' decision* determines which school the child will attend. The research disclosed that making a final decision regarding the school, parents primarily thought about **the child's good feeling**. Attention is also paid to the competence of the teaching staff or specificity of school activities (e.g., more attention is

paid to children's musical education). The analysis of research results disclosed a tendency that often the final decision on school choice is made by the mother.

Data collected during the research enabled to distinguish the subcategory *the child's personal choice*, which shows that there are cases (less emphasized than *parents' decision*) when the very child plays the decisive role choosing a school, i.e., his/her opinion making the decision of the family is most significant. The content of the analyzed subcategory discloses that before making the final decision regarding the future school, children mostly rely on **peer opinion** about one or another educational institution. Least emphasised are situations when **parents' and children's' opinions are reconciled** making the decision in the family which school the child should attend and *the child's and the parents'* joint decision is made.

The semantic meaning of statements and the frequency of repetitions of statements describing the category of *school image* suggests that the image as a social-psychological phenomenon affects the life of every school. Today, this is particularly relevant for schools that implement their mission in the conditions of intense competition. The study discloses that the main tool forming the positive image of the school is *good feedback about the school*. This means that making school choice, people mostly **rely on information** about a particular educational institution passed "**from lips to lips**".

In the context of *personal impression about the school*, the importance of the visit to the school in which one wants to learn is emphasised, when first of all **the physical environment of the school** (e.g., the canteen), the school staff (impressions after communication with school teachers become particularly important) are analysed and assessed. However, *the personal impression about the school*, like *the school ranking*, choosing a school are not essential features of the school reputation criterion.

Research results also enable to observe a trend that such features characterising the reputation of the school as *personal impression about the school* (e.g., after the pupil's independent visit to it, taking interest in school activities, offered possibilities, etc.) or *school ranking* are weakly accentuated by the research informants.

Location of the school. *School location* as a significant criterion of school choice is characterized by features (categories) that show that choosing a school the focus is on its *proximity to the place of residence*, also on *attractiveness of school location* and links of its choice with *life in the catchment area* (see Table 2).

Table 2. School Choice Criteria: *School Location*

Category	No. of statements	Examples of statements
School close to the residential place	231	[...] The school is close to my home. [r5m 12.11]; Therefore I chose the closest gymnasium which I attend [M 1.78]
Catchment area of the school	15	It was in my catchment area [...] [M 5.16]; I am learning at this school because it is located in my catchment area [r5m 9.4]
Attractiveness of school location	15	[...] and because the residential area is convenient for me [r5m 5.32]; [...] convenient school location in the city [M 1.90]

Analysing the content of the grid of the categories given in Table 2 (statements and the frequency of repetition of statements – the number of statements ascribed to the category), it becomes clear that in the context of *school location*, its **proximity to the place of residence of**

the choosing person(s) (the child and family) is of crucial importance choosing the school. Research participants weakly accentuate other features related to school location. It should be pointed out that separation of categories *school close to the residential place* and *catchment area of the school* is relative. It is likely that the informants who chose the school due to the short distance from home live namely in the catchment area ascribed to this school but did not name that.

The study discloses that ***proximity of the place of residence to school*** in some cases is also related to other requirements for the educational institution, which were also important making school choice. These requirements are expectations related to *quality of school performance* and hope that *the school is good*. In the context of proximity of school to the place of residence, informants also mention such advantages as *avoidance of the use of public transport* or the possibility to *sleep longer* and, if necessary, to *return home quickly* (in a very short period of time, e.g., 5 minutes). It is also necessary to note that the content of the category *the school is close to the place of residence* shows convenience for the child and family, when the attended school is as close to home in which they live as possible.

The content of the category *catchment area of the school* shows that this aspect of school choice is not supplemented with other requirements for the educational institution that was planned to be attended. Therefore, no more detailed analysis of the content of the said category is presented.

Attractiveness of school location is related to the fact that *the school is in the city centre* or *there is a popular and frequently visited commercial place (store) next to the school*. In addition, such feature as convenient transportation is also ascribed to *attractiveness of location*. *Attractiveness of location of the school* is also related to *convenient access roads* to it.

School marketing. The criterion *school marketing* is to be related to meeting the needs of future direct and indirect “customers” (prospective pupils, their parents) of the school. This means that today various educational institutions, which live in constant competition conditions, undertake certain strategies that would enable to attract the desired contingent of pupils to the school. For example, in some cases, schools may orient to gifted children, this way increasing their number in the school, in other cases, the school follows the universality position; i.e., focus most on the number of admitted pupils and not on certain abilities. The results of the conducted study indicate that the key tool of school marketing is ***cooperation agreements*** between schools (see Table 3), which directly “bridge” educational institutions, implementing curricula of different tiers (pre-school educational institution – primary school; primary educational school – progymnasium; progymnasium – gymnasium).

Table 3. School Choice Criteria: *School Marketing*

Category	No. of statements	Examples of statements
Cooperation agreements	17	[...] the nursery that I attended had concluded a cooperation agreement with the school [r4m 11.14]; I think, many go due to the agreement with [...] the gymnasium [M 7.23]
Admission conditions	7	Friends offered because here you can be easily admitted to it [...] [M 3.92]; We chose this because the one the child wanted asked for a bribe [...] [T 5.22]
Promotional invitations to learn	5	[...] Invitations that I used to find in the post box [r4m 11.9]; When I attended the pre-primary group in the nursery, teachers of this school told and invited to visit [r4b 8.9]

School marketing criterion also contains *admission conditions*. The content of this category is to be related to those cases when the school is chosen due to its “openness” policy for future pupils. Research participants describe such openness as “easy access” (e.g., there are no entrance exams), when the educational institution accepts all who want to learn in it. The study also highlighted that schools that implement the said “openness” policy for future pupils become a reserve school choice option. This means that if the pupil is not admitted to the school he/she wants, he/she will choose that school which offers simplified admission conditions.

In the context of school choice, *promotional invitations to learn* also become significant. Implementation of this school marketing strategy is “approached” to the prospective pupil and his/her family, *directly handing in the said invitations* to them. Usually such invitations are distributed by pupils of that school, who pass (“give”) invitations made by themselves to their friends, peers who they know. Invitations contain the most important information about the school (school photographs, other school attributes, contact details and brief information about the advantages of learning at that school). Invitations to learn are also put into post boxes, this way hoping for more targeted information dissemination.

The direction of school activities. Based on the conducted research results, the criterion of school choice – the direction of school activities – was formulated (see Table 4).

Table 4. School Choice Criteria: *The Direction of School Activities*

Category	No. of statements	Examples of statements
The direction of school activities	24	I considered the unique “profile” of the school: sports, artistic education <...> [T 7.84]; I think that I came namely to this school because it is Catholic [M 11.23]

The content of this criterion discloses that choosing the educational institution such aspects of school activities as exceptionality of school activities and programmes implemented in it are also considered. Such examples can be Baccalaureate programmes implemented at schools or the “unique” profile of school activities (sports, artistic, religious (Catholic)).

Professionalism of the teaching staff. Research participants who distinguished the criterion of professionalism of the teaching staff (see Table 5) draw attention to the fact that it is relevant for certain interested groups (pupils, parents) what teacher(s) will teach the child rather than what school the child will attend.

Table 5. School Choice Criteria: *Professionalism of the Teaching Staff*

Category	No. of statements	Examples of statements
Professionalism of the teaching staff	12	Teachers’ professionalism [T 14.22]; [...].Parents are choosing not a school but a teacher. This is very important for them [P 13.18]

The content of the category *Professionalism of the teaching staff* discloses that choosing the school, not professionalism of a concrete teacher of the school but **professionalism of the teachers’ staff**, which is characterised by the **teacher’s creativity** and the **ability to arouse interest in the taught subject**, is important. Scientific research results also indicate that

there are cases when satisfaction with the selected school teachers' work is directly related to **changes in the school image** (towards positivity).

The criterion of personalized learning discloses that those who are choosing the school find it important that the school is ready both to meet pupils' individual needs (*I chose the school possibilities and microclimate of which best suit to my needs and personality ... [M 1:53]*) and "to see" the child's personality in the learning process ([...] *I am gifted enough to learn in it [1.97 m]*) as a holistic formation.

Analysing research data, it was noticed that choosing one or another educational institution in some cases attention is paid to the *microclimate* prevailing in the school (friendly peer interrelationships), *pupils' safety at school* (collection of information on successful prevention of bullying), *diversity of extracurricular activities* (the supply of events, clubs), *quality of the educational process* (the possibility to learn in a particular school is related to the future prospect of acquiring good education, and as a result, work) and *physical school environment* (with a particular focus on a large school stadium and beautiful and tidy school environment). However, attention must be drawn to the fact that in the context of the conducted research the latter school choice criteria are weakly emphasised. Based on these research results it can be stated that choosing the school to attend, the criteria of *microclimate*, *pupils' safety at school*, *diversity of extra-curricular activities*, *quality of the educational process* or *physical school environment* supplement school selection criteria analysed above.

Discussion

The results of the qualitative research conducted by the authors of the article demonstrate that the most significant school choice criteria are reputation and location of the school. It was identified that in the context of school reputation professional and learning experience of friends and family (especially of friends, acquaintances) are of crucial importance choosing the school. Professional experience is the experience of familiar adults engaged in education, while learning experience is the one of peers learning in one or another school. The role of experiences for school choice is also emphasized by Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015). However, these scholars note the importance of learning experience in a corresponding educational institution of namely brothers and sisters rather than friends or other acquaintances. On the other hand, in general, analysing the importance of the experiences of persons who are close to the child and of the family for school choice it was found that in this process experiences of persons related to the pupil by family ties (parents, brothers, sisters) and not related to the pupil by family ties (friends and acquaintances) were equally important. Such perspective of the results of the conducted empirical research partially confirms the said conclusions of Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) regarding the importance of brothers' and sisters' experiences in the school choice process.

The content of the school reputation criterion also highlighted another empirical research result: parents tend to play the key role in the school choice process. The essential aim of such dominance is to choose such educational institution for the child in which the child would feel good. In this case, it is important to note that the final decision regarding school choice is made by the mother. The significance of parents' role in the school choice process is also confirmed by studies conducted by Kučinskienė and Rupšienė (2005, 2006b). The results of these studies also demonstrate parents' shared responsibility with children choosing the school. The results of the empirical research presented in the article demonstrate that such sharing of responsibility is expressed particularly weakly. Another trend is also noticed: delegation of full responsibility to the child; i.e., the child is allowed to decide which school to attend on his/her own.

School reputation is formed as a consequence of school image. This is a complex and long-lasting process. Therefore, school communities should treat formation of school image as a targeted investment in the future of the organization. In many cases school image determines the resolve of the family and/or the very pupils regarding school choice. On the other hand, the experience of the pupil's parents related to a particular educational institution also serves for the formation of school image. The study conducted by the authors of the article demonstrates that the positive image of the school is primarily formed by good feedback "from lips to lips". Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) doubt the objectivity of such information, because, according to scholars, the image of the school is formed by subjective impressions and information that does not correspond to reality. Villavicencio (2013) also emphasizes other persons' personal recommendations but at the same time doubts rational decisions regarding school choice, relying solely on this type of information. In this context, the contradiction of scientific researches that has shown up can be related to cultural differences of countries represented by researchers.

The criterion of school location discloses that proximity of the school to the place of residence is the most significant factor in the school choice process. In this case, it is appropriate to note the findings of Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) where scholars pay attention to the need of eliminating bureaucratic hindrances of "tying" school choice to the place of residence of the child and family. Scholars believe that such freedom of choice directly responds to life in market conditions, when customers of education are free to choose the school they want to attend. It is also interesting to note that choosing the educational institution, the perspective of convenience "here and now" prevails rather than consideration about the child's long-term learning possibilities in a particular school (for example, to choose a primary school or a progymnasium, which also implements primary education curricula). Benson, Bridge, and Wilson (2015) call such process of school choice passive.

Manifestation of other school choice criteria – school marketing, direction of school activities, professionalism of the teaching staff, personalized learning – is much weaker than the one of reputation and location of the school. The criterion of school marketing reveals that the main tool for the formation of school contingent (pupils' community) is cooperation agreements between schools. Having conducted the research, it was found that choosing a school, such school performance aspects as exceptionality of implemented programmes, competence of the teaching staff (the ability to act creatively, arouse interest in a subject) and meeting the child's needs were also considered.

Analyzing the "relation" of the authors' research and the research conducted by above mentioned scholars, other problem issues are actualised; i.e., strategies of parent-child "cooperation"/"negotiations" in the family, making the final decision on the choice of the school, links of the content of "negotiations" with socio-demographic characteristics of the family (for example, intensiveness of male (father's) and female (mother's) participation in "negotiations", its change). It would be also appropriate to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of school marketing processes; i.e., why and how pupils are involved in the creation and dissemination of promotional material about the school, whether this is related to (self-) formation of the pupil's identity in the school or this is one of the "sacrifices" of the school in order to survive in competitive conditions.

References

- Bartaševičius, R. (2014). Bendrojo ugdymo mokykla mokymosi visą gyvenimą kontinuume: vaidmuo, funkcijos ir jų realizavimo galimybių įžvalga. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 33, 33-45.
- Benson, M., Bridge, G., & Wilson, D. (2015). School Choice in London and Paris – a Comparison of Middle-class Strategies. *Social Policy & Administration*, 49(1), 24–43. Retrieved from: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=4251905e-9795-45f2-a0ab-6d0b5b92b037%40sessionmgr4003&vid=5&hid=4107>
- Bhattacharji, P., & Kingdon, G. G. (2016). School Education and the Lack of Parent Information. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 13, 57-92. Retrieved from: <http://ced.sagepub.com/content/13/1/57.short>
- Bitinas, B., Rupšienė, L., & Žydzūnaitė, V. (2008). *Kokybinių tyrimų metodologija*. Klaipėda: S. Jokužio leidykla-spaustuvė.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Los Angeles (Calif.): SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks (Calif.): Sage Publications.
- Černiauskaitė, N. (2012). Alternatyvi mokykla: samprata ir kriterijai. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 29, 73-84.
- Donskis, L. (2015). Ateities mokykla ir savęs kolonizavimo grėsmės. *Geros mokyklos link*. Retrieved from: http://www.esparama.lt/documents/10157/490675/2015_Geros_mokyklos_link.pdf/c7f9894a-10fc-44cf-86ab-d0f144266a0b
- Gaižauskaitė, I. (2014). *Socialinių tyrimų metodai: apklausa*. Vilnius: Mykolo Romerio universitetas.
- Geros mokyklos koncepcija* (2015). Vilnius: Švietimo ir mokslo ministerija. Retrieved from: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f2f65120a7bb11e5be7f919a1e1e>
- Juodaitytė, A., & Šaparnytė, E. (2008). Vaikų kompiuterinės kultūros komunikacinio diskurso empirinis tyrimas. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 21, 101-116.
- Kazlauskienė, A., Gaučaitė, R., Pocevičienė, R., Masiliauskienė, E., Vilutienė, R., & Norutienė, L. (2014). *Pradinių klasių mokinių kūrybiškumo ugdymas sprendžiant praktines problemas*. Vilnius: Eugrimas.
- Kučinskienė, R., & Rupšienė, L. (2006a). Mokinių išgyvenimai keičiant mokyklą ir jų vertinimas švietimo sistemos tobulinimo kontekste. *Pedagogika*, 83, 87-95.
- Kučinskienė, R., & Rupšienė, L. (2006b). Tendencies of School Choice and its Influence on Quality of Education. *Socialiniai mokslai*, 1 (51), 52–64.
- Kučinskienė, R., & Rupšienė, L. (2005). Mokyklos pasirinkimo galimybės. *Pedagogika*, 79, 110-115.
- Leončikas, T. (2006). Asimiliacijos prielaidos ir mokyklos pasirinkimas: pirmokų tėvų grupių palyginimas. *Sociologija: mintis ir veiksmai*, 1, 76-98.
- Luobikienė, I. (2010). *Sociologinių tyrimų metodika*. Kaunas: Technologija.
- Masiliauskienė, E. (2010). An Educational Discourse of Children's Computer Culture in the Context of the Construction of Social Reality. *Acta Iadertina*, 1, 84-103.
- Šliavaitė, K. (2015). Mokyklos valstybinė arba mažumos mokomąja kalba pasirinkimo strategijos Pietryčių Lietuvoje: tarp etniškumo išlaikymo ir socialinio mobilumo galimybių? *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 26 (2), 135-145.
- Valstybės pažangos strategijoje „Lietuva 2030“* (2012). Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas. Retrieved from: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=425517&p_query=&p_tr2=2
- Valstybinė švietimo 2013-2022 metų strategija* (2013). Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas. Retrieved from: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=b1fb6cc089d911e397b5c02d3197f382>
- Villavicencio, A. (2013). “It’s our Best Choice Right Now”: Exploring how Charter School Parents Choose. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21 (81), 1-23. Retrieved from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1018882.pdf>

SCHOOL CHOICE CRITERIA: THE CASE OF ŠIAULIAI CITY

Summary

*Erika Masiliauskienė, Renata Geležinienė, Rūta Šiaučiulienė,
Šiauliai University, Lithuania*

The article deals with the research related to the school choice process, conducted by Lithuanian and foreign scholars. The discussion on the relevance of problems of the research presupposes **the problem question of the scientific research**: What aspects of school activities are considered valuable and desirable and become significant school choice criteria? **The research subject**: the criteria of school choice. **The research aim**: to identify the criteria determining school choice.

The research was conducted in 2014, implementing the third-party research ordered by Šiauliai city municipality under the measure of the cooperation programme “The Analysis of Peculiarities of a Good School”. The research was conducted in two stages: the quantitative research and the qualitative research. This article presents the results of qualitative research. The qualitative research strategy (Luobikienė, 2010; Creswell 2014; Gaižauskaitė 2014; Corbin, 2015, etc.) enabled to collect qualitative data describing the phenomenon under investigation and to interpret the phenomenon according to meanings given by informants.

The analysis of empirical data of the scientific research disclosed that informants maintained that the most significant criteria for school choice were **reputation of the school, its location, marketing, the direction of school activities, professionalism of the teaching staff and personalized learning**. Research results also suggest that in some cases such criteria as the pupils’ safety, physical environment of the school, diversity of extracurricular activities, etc. are also considered choosing the school. Further the article presents the content analysis of separate school choice criteria.

The results of the qualitative research conducted by the authors of the article demonstrate that the most significant school choice criteria are reputation and location of the school. It was identified that in the context of school reputation professional and learning experience of friends and family (especially of friends, acquaintances) are of crucial importance choosing the school. The content of the school reputation criterion also highlighted another empirical research result: parents tend to play the key role in the school choice process. The essential aim of such dominance is to choose such educational institution for the child in which the child would feel good. In this case, it is important to note that the final decision regarding school choice is made by the mother. School reputation is formed as a consequence of school image. This is a complex and long-lasting process. Therefore, school communities should treat formation of school image as a targeted investment in the future of the organization.

The criterion of school location discloses that proximity of the school to the place of residence is the most significant factor in the school choice process. In this case, it is appropriate to note the findings of Benson, Bridge, Wilson (2015) where scholars pay attention to the need of eliminating bureaucratic hindrances of “tying” school choice to the place of residence of the child and family. Manifestation of other school choice criteria – school marketing, direction of school activities, professionalism of the teaching staff, personalized learning – is much weaker than the one of reputation and location of the school.

