

ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS TOWARD DISCRIMINATION OF CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

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Abstract

The goal of the paper is to find out attitudes of teachers toward discrimination of schoolchildren on the ground of ethnicity, disability and social position in order to prevent discrimination in early stages.

Survey research was done in Lithuania's schools. 1062 respondents (heads of classes (teachers) and helping professionals) selected by representative sample answered to questionnaire.

Research data shows that teachers allow using dialects at school for schoolchildren of different ethnicity and regions. Teachers more than helping professionals agree that schoolchildren with ethnical background have possibilities to become a class or school leaders. Bullying is mostly prevailing in 5-8 grades, in smaller schools and by richer schoolchildren. Social position has a big impact to communication among children. During class formation bigger attention to parents' social position is paid in gymnasiums then in basic or secondary schools. Children with disabilities have communication problems during after-classes activities.

Keywords: School, discrimination of children, discrimination of schoolchildren

1. Introduction

In Lithuania similarly as in other EU countries there are differences in population according to age, ethnicity, religion, social position, etc. Human Rights Convention, Constitutions of the member states, other legal acts protect human rights and reinforce anti-discriminatory policies, however, statistic and researches data shows that discrimination exists almost in every country.

Some countries are more successful than others in ensuring human rights. Public opinion plays important role in preventing discrimination on different grounds. Lithuania isn't among these countries. According to Eurostat data only 16 % of Lithuanians agree that the biggest value is tolerance, and 7 % - respect to other cultures. In comparison with old EU countries this is double less (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_values_en.pdf).

Different social institutions have different sensitivity to the issues of discrimination. Educational system on the one hand is a reflection of a society on the other hand is more vulnerable for discrimination. Data of TNS Gallup research shows that the most prevailing form of discrimination at school is bullying, 15-25 % of schoolchildren felt bullying at schools in Baltic countries. 26, 5 % of girls and 27, 9 % of boys were bullied in Lithuania (<http://www.gelbvaik.lt/gelbvaik/node/71>).

Any type of discrimination disturbs dignity of personality, person's ability to participate in social life, to feel equal in community. Discriminated person often feel sense of fear and isolation, what influence their psychological health and wellbeing (Hnilica, K., 2011 [1]; Dambrun, M., 2007 [2], Lindström, M, 2008 [3]).

Different aspects of discrimination are investigated by sociologist, psychologist, educologist in Lithuania: V. Grybaitė (2006) [4], A. Sprindžiūnas ir kt. (2007) [5], A. Bagdonas, R. Lazutka, A. Vareikytė, L. Žalimienė (2007) [6], A. Zdanevičius, J. Reingardė, J. Samuolytė (2007) [7], A. Valackienė, A. Krašėckienė (2007) [8], R. Povilaitis, S. J. Jasiulionė (2008) [9], S. Mikulionienė (2008) [10], V. Beresnevičiūtė, T. Leončikas (2009) [11], J. Reingardė, N. Vasiliauskaitė; R. Erentaitė (2010) [12], L. Okunevičiūtė Neverauskienė (2011) [13]. There is rising attention to this issue in Lithuania; however, majority of research concentrates on discrimination of adults, there is lack of research about discrimination in educational system of Lithuania, there are no researches about discrimination on the ground of race, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, language, social position, etc. The relevance of the research is also based on EU communicate "Tackling early school leaving" which states that "equality of opportunities and choice in education, and access to high-quality education for individuals from all social, ethnic and religious backgrounds, regardless of gender or disability, is vital for creating a fairer, more equal and inclusive society that is vibrant, innovative and cohesive. School education is one of the best ways of giving everyone an equal chance of success" (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1179566&t=d&l=en>).

The goal of the paper is to analyse attitudes of teachers toward discrimination of schoolchildren on the ground of ethnicity, disability and social position. The main research question is what is the most prevailing discrimination of schoolchildren in secondary school in Lithuania?

2. Research methodology

In order to answer research question survey research was done in Lithuania's schools. Two level samples were used. At first, 287 schools were chosen by random probability sample. Different types of school (basic, secondary, gymnasium), from different administrative units (villages, administrative centres, towns) were included in sample. Secondly, all heads of classes (teachers) and helping professionals were questioned. Total sample is 1062 respondents what constitutes representative sample. Respondents were asked to fill in questionnaire, which was composed after reviewing scientific literature and legislative regulations which prohibit discrimination on the various grounds. All aspects except race and sexual orientation were investigated. This paper presents part of the data about discrimination, including discrimination on the ground of ethnicity, disability and social position. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

3. Discrimination on the ground of ethnicity

Research data shows that 79, 7 % agree, 5, 1 % don't agree and 15, 2 % don't have opinion about the statement "teachers allow using dialect at school". There is significant reliable relation between this statement and working years of the teachers, place of school. Respondents who work at school less than 10 years and more than 21 years ($\chi^2=8,325$, $p=3$, $p=0,040$) and who work in villages ($\chi^2=7,426$, $p=2$, $p=0,024$) tend to agree more with the statement.

77, 2 % of respondents agree, 11, 7 disagree and 11, 1 % don't have opinion about the statement that if a schoolchild is of another ethnicity or race s/he could be a leader in a class or school. Teachers more than helping professionals agree with the statement ($\chi^2=9,250$, $df = 2$, $p=0,001$).

4. Discrimination on the ground of disability

45, 3 % agree with the statement "schoolchildren don't avoid communication with peers who have mental disability", 39, 0 % agree with the statement "schoolchildren don't avoid communication with peers who have physical disability". 13, 8 % agree that schoolchildren don't want to participate with disabled peers in after classes' activities. Almost one third of respondents don't have opinion concerning relationships among disabled children and the rest of the class.

There is statistically significant relation between the statement and respondents' occupation at school, type of the school and working years of the respondents. Teachers more than helping specialist agree with the statement about physical disability ($\chi^2=13,746$, $df = 6$, $p=0,033$) or psychical disability ($\chi^2=23,025$, $df = 6$, $p=0,001$). Concerning physical disability respondents from basic schools more agree with the statement than teachers from secondary schools or gymnasiums ($\chi^2=13,012$, $df = 4$, $p=0,011$). Also respondents who work the first year at school agree with the statement more than those who work longer period ($\chi^2=18,358$, $df = 2$, $p=0,000$).

5. Discrimination on the ground of social position

Social position has a big impact to communication among children - they tend to friendship with the children with similar social background According to respondents, social position of schoolchildren parents plays important part in children relationships. 48.2 % respondents agree with this statement. Women, teachers of Lithuanian origin, and teachers who have children tend to agree more with the statement. There is statistically significant relation between the statement and place of the school – teachers from villages more than from towns ($\chi^2=7,822$, $p=2$, $p=0,020$) agree with the statement.

33, 8 % of respondents think that schoolchildren from richer families are bullying or ignoring peers from poor families. Single teachers and teachers of Lithuanian origins tend to agree more with this statement. There are significant reliable relations between the statement and place of the school, grade of leading class. Teachers from villages ($\chi^2=6,845$, $p=2$, $p=0,033$) and those who leads 5-8 grade classes ($\chi^2=15,698$, $p=2$, $p=0,000$) agree more with this statement.

Teachers were asked if they agree with the statement "classes at schools are formed according to social position of the parents". 86, 1 % disagree with the statement, 2, 7 % agree and 11, 2 % don't have opinion. There is statistically significant relation between agreement to the statement and type of the school – teachers working in gymnasiums ($\chi^2=11,416$, $p=2$, $p=0,003$) more than teachers from basic and secondary schools agree with the statement.

6. Support for children at school

Respondents were asked what kind of support schoolchildren could receive at school. 95, 2 % answered that social, 95, 9 % social pedagogical, 81, 1 % special pedagogical support. Less possibility is to receive psychological support, 64, 5 % of respondents choose this answer. Data shows that not every school have

employed psychologist. Respondents of non-Lithuanian origin in comparison with Lithuanian origin teachers ($\chi^2=8,603$, $df = 2$, $p=0,014$) and these who works in younger classes ($\chi^2=18,103$, $df = 4$, $p=0,001$) agree more with the possibility for children to receive psychological support. Teachers who work at basic schools think that children have less possibilities for psychological support than these who work in secondary schools or gymnasiums ($\chi^2=120,534$, $df = 4$, $p=0,000$).

7. Conclusions

Research data shows that according to teachers' attitudes children at school are discriminated more on the ground of social position than on the ground of ethnicity or disability.

Place of school (village, administrative centre, town) and type of school (basic, secondary, gymnasium) are independent variables which influence mostly teachers' attitudes to the children discrimination on the ground of social position.

Number of working year and occupation of respondents as independent variables influence mostly their attitudes toward discrimination on the ground of ethnicity and disability.

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