

VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF PRINCIPALS OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

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Abstract

It is especially important to appropriately prepare students with special educational needs for labour activity. The integration of these students in vocational life is possible only through the improvement of labour education and vocational counselling. The article analyzes vocational counselling of students with special educational needs from the viewpoint of principals of mainstream schools. Their viewpoint towards vocational counselling for persons with special educational needs has been revealed; it has been analyzed how vocational counselling for students with special educational needs is provided in mainstream schools; the principals' influence on vocational counselling of students with special educational needs has been investigated.

Key words: *mainstream school, principal of mainstream school, students with special educational needs, vocational counselling.*

Introduction

Problems and relevance of the research. In mainstream school the first actual stage of getting acquainted with the choice of profession begins. The means of vocational counselling should be directed towards the increase of the variety of mainstream education that would meet various needs of person and surrounding world¹. School should as early as possible provide students with necessary information and direct their interest to a certain profession. The more attention is paid to vocational education and vocational counselling of students with special educational needs, the wider will be their possibilities to successfully integrate into social life. Baranauskienė and Valaikienė (2010) have stated that services of vocational counselling are important both for the system of education and labour market, and also for their interaction.

Nowadays not enough attention is paid to vocational counselling of students with special educational needs, teaching often does not correspond to the demands of business and labour market. In the suggestions of Lithuanian Free Market Institute on the improvement of the

¹ LLRI siūlymai dėl profesinio orientavimo, profesinio mokymo ir kai kurių Darbo biržos funkcijų įgyvendinimo kokybės ir efektyvumo gerinimo (2010).

quality and effectiveness of vocational counselling, vocational education and implementation of certain functions of Labour market (2010) it is stated that mainstream education system is not various enough in its contents and form to create an adequate worldview. Mainstream education, although becoming more various, essentially remains very standardized. Education of these students could not be restricted only to school graduation because it is very important to create conditions to choose a certain profession, to deepen knowledge and skills in extracurricular activity that gives untested opportunities for successful socialization of a young person (Baranauskienė, Valčiukienė, & Vinikaitytė, 2008). In order to identify vocational purposefulness of students with special needs it is very important to find out how vocational counselling in mainstream school is provided and school principals' viewpoint towards vocational counselling.

Aim of the research – to find out about the viewpoint of principals of mainstream schools towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs and their influence on the activity of vocational counselling.

Object of the research – viewpoint of principals of mainstream schools towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs.

Objectives of the research:

1. To investigate the influence of school principals on vocational counselling of students with special educational needs.
2. To reveal the viewpoint of school principals towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs;
3. To find out how counselling of students with special educational needs is provided in mainstream schools;

Sample of the research. The sample of the respondents consists of 40 principals of mainstream schools from various towns and districts of Lithuania choosing schools by the method of convenient selection.

Methods and organization of the research. To perform the research a qualitative research method – semi-structured interview has been used. Content analysis method for non-standardized material has also been used and it was applied according to methodological substantiation described by Straus & Korbin (Страусс & Корбин, 2001), Šaparnis (2000), Šaparnis & Merkys (2000). The data have been categorized according to semantic relations and graphically presented using Microsoft Office Excel programme. The reliability of the data is related to the results of the research of content analysis. The control of research intersubjectivity was performed applying the expert method. The expert group consisted of four persons. To perform the research the instrument adapted for the situation of Lithuania used in Leonardo Da Vinci project LLP-2dv-PRT, 2010-LT-0203 was applied. The permission to use the instrument was received from the institution that coordinated the project.

Methods of the research

- 1) Questionnaire (semi-structured interview). Necessary and possible questions are previewed in advance. Questions are only partially standardized. The interview creates more freedom in communication atmosphere.
- 2) Content analysis;
- 3) Graphical presentation of the data of the research has been performed using “Excel XP” programme.

Results of the research

Characteristics of research sample. In order to reveal the viewpoint of the principals of mainstream schools towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs 40 principals from various towns and districts of Lithuania have been interviewed. When performing the research the information about the demographical situation (i.e. age, place of living, gender, type of school the principal manages) of the respondents was collected. Out

of 40, 19 were women and 21 men. The majority of the respondents live in Šiauliai town and district, the smallest number of the respondents was from Kelmė town, Klaipėda, Tauragė and Pasvalys districts. The biggest part of the respondents belongs to the age group from 50 to 55 years of age. The smallest – from 30 to 35 years of age. More detailed distribution of the respondents according to age has been presented in

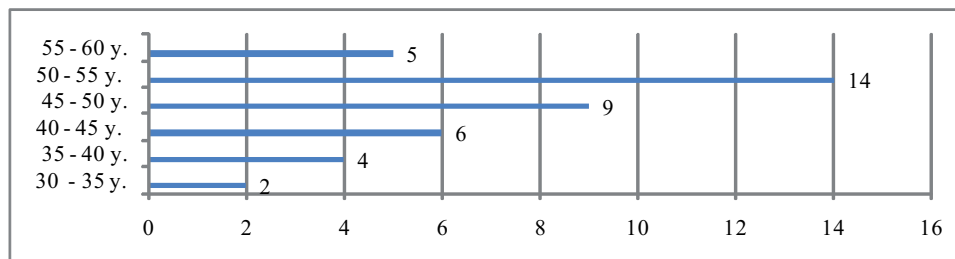


Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents according to age

The majority of the respondents are the principals of gymnasiums, the smallest part – secondary schools (Figure 2).

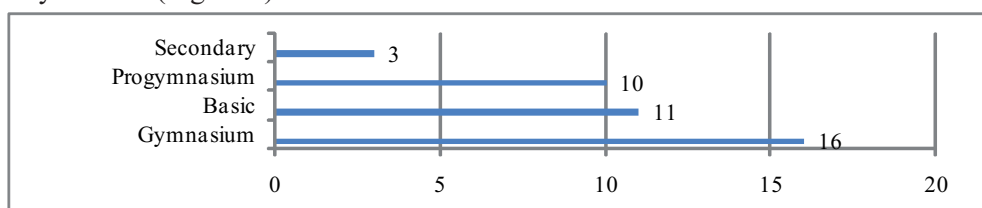


Figure 2. Distribution of the respondents according to the type of school they manage

Analysis of the viewpoint of mainstream school principals towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs

The respondents' viewpoint towards future visions related to students with special educational needs has been investigated. **Integration into common school activity** is the biggest category that reflects positive viewpoint towards the education of students with special educational needs. Galkienė (2005), states that the concept of integrated education in mainstream school comes from the viewpoint to admit equal rights for everyone in the society. Also a big part of the respondents stated that it is obligatory to give necessary assistance to students with SEN in choosing a profession. Only a small part of the respondents stated that these students should be educated in special schools (Figure 3)

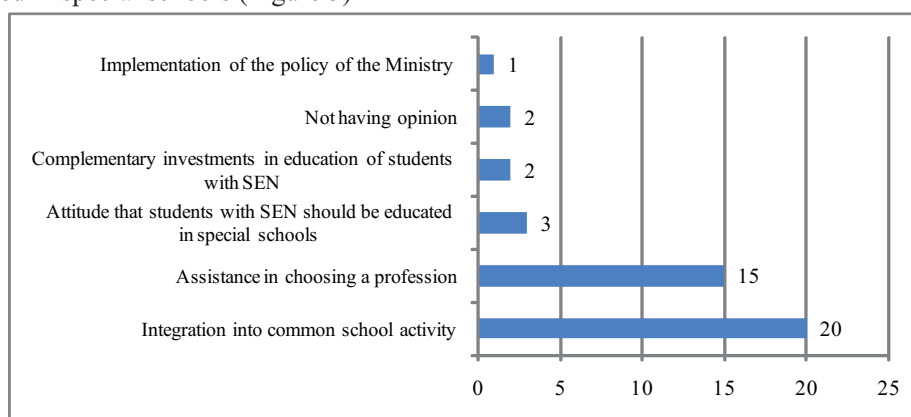


Figure 3. Visions of mainstream school principals related to students with special educational needs

Information about persons that have the biggest influence on vocational counselling at school is reflected in the category **Person responsible for vocational counselling** that consists of 8 subcategories. The results have revealed that the specialists of vocational counselling point (VCP) are the most influential persons in the issue of vocational counselling. The subcategory *Other specialists* comprises teachers of technologies, managers of non-formal department, speech therapist, subject teachers, psychologists, tutor, separate person responsible for vocational counselling, career planning group, manager of career centre (Figure 4).

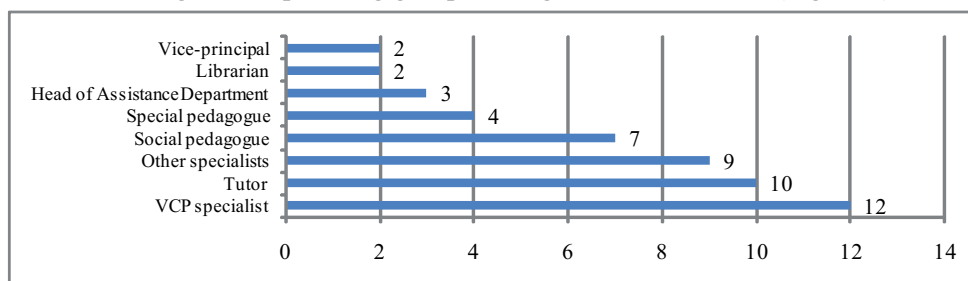


Figure 4. Responsible person having the biggest influence on vocational counselling at school

Barasnevičienė and Donielienė (2011) state that education in family forms the bases that later enable to improve possessed skills, apply them in labour market, in creating business. During the research the respondents were asked to enumerate the ways that are used involving parents in school activity. It has been found out that the best way involving parents in school life is joint activity (Figure 5). In the category **Joint activity as a form of vocational counselling** 2 subcategories have been distinguished: *Organization of joint activity of parents, children and school community* (19 statements, e.g.: The best way to involve parents – organizing out-of-lesson-time activity together with students; Organization of useful events for parents and children; Non-traditional events: round table discussions, quiz shows (parents, children, pedagogues), open lessons) and *Parents' support as a form of vocational counselling* (11 statements, e.g.: Discuss with parents on the aims of school, directions of activity; Meetings of active parents; To inform parents which of their suggestions have been accepted (motivated feedback). The answers of the first subcategory reveal that the assistance in joint events is the most appropriate way to involve parents in school activity. The second subcategory points out that it is especially important to pay attention to parents' opinion, only then it will be possible to achieve appropriate collaboration. The last category **Lack of parents' motivation**. The subcategory *Lack of parents' interest in school activity* (2 statements, e.g.: I do not know, because parents lack motivation) has been distinguished here. Only a small part of the respondents stated that practically it is not possible to get parents interested in participation in school executive activity because they are apathetic.

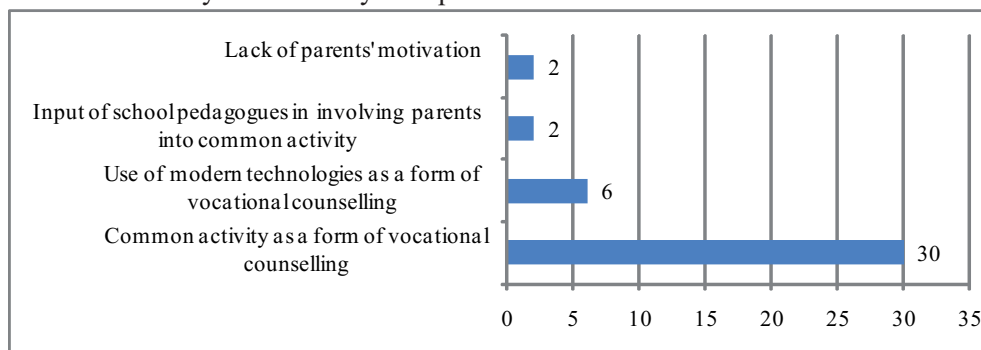


Figure 5. Ways used to involve parents in school activity

The ways how school introduces employers, press and governmental institutions with the situation of students with SEN have been investigated. In the category **Dissemination of information** the subcategory *Presenting information to mass media* has been distinguished (5 statements, e.g.: Dissemination of experience in national, regional press – the articles are written; It is published in press; We write articles, publish photographs). Mainstream school principals stated that one of the ways to introduce employers, press and governmental institutions is to present articles in mass media. They named publishing information on the internet as the second way. Their answers are reflected in the subcategory *Presenting information in virtual environment* (7 statements, e.g.: Information is presented on the website of the gymnasium; School website; There is a public school website, electronic diary). The subcategory *Meetings as a way introducing with the situation of students with SEN* (7 statements, e.g.: Meetings with employers; Conversations during meetings; During the meetings with the representatives of various professions) reflects the third way that is used to present the situation of students with SEN. Only two respondents mentioned that employers are not interested in the situation of students with SEN. More detailed information has been presented in Figure 6.

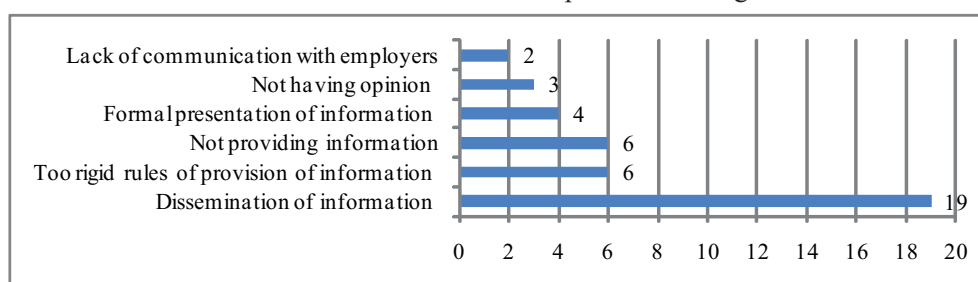


Figure 6. Ways how school introduces employers, press and governmental institutions with the situation of students with SEN

It has been investigated whether trade and industry representatives inform school staff members about rapid changes in the labour market (Figure 7). It is reflected in the category **Informing school staff members**. In this category **Informing school staff members** the subcategory *Representatives' information about the changes* has been distinguished (17 statements, e.g.: 1–2 times a year such meetings are organized; Representatives present their activity; Representatives of production sector participate in school events). It reflects school staff members' interest in changes in the labour market, collaboration with trade and industry representatives. The answers reflected in the second category **Representatives are not invited** are contrary to the aforementioned category. The subcategory *Industry and trade representatives do not visit school* (16 statements, e.g.: No, they are not invited, Separately for the staff they are not invited, Representatives are not invited) has been distinguished. A small part of the respondents stated that school staff members themselves are interested in changes.



Figure 7. Information of trade and industry representatives for school staff members about rapid changes of life out of school

Having systemized the principals' answers about encouraging students for out-of-lesson-time activity 7 categories have distinguished (Figure 8): 1) Encouraging the activeness of students with SEN; 2) Creating equal conditions for out-of-lesson-time activity; 3) Activity corresponding to abilities for students with SEN; 4) Not having opinion; 5) Input of a hobby group supervisor in encouraging activeness of students; 6) Students with SEN are not encouraged for out-of-lesson-time activity; 7) Priority for studying.

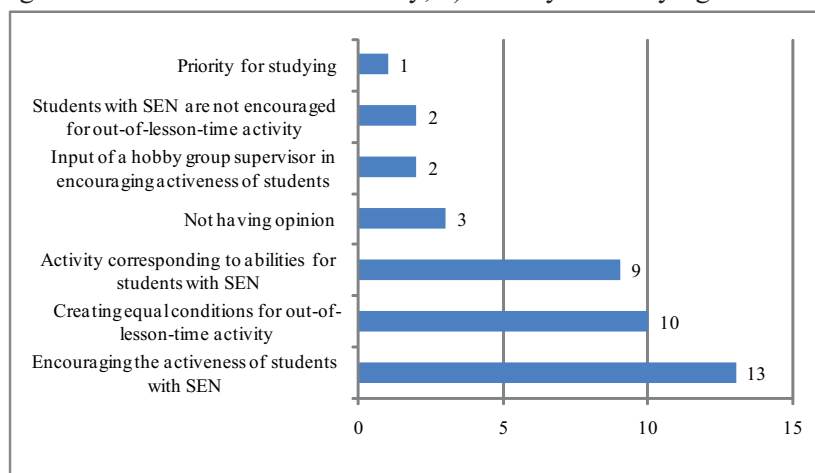


Figure 8. Encouraging the activeness of students with SEN for out-of-lesson-time activity

As it can be seen from the data of the diagram the biggest category is **Encouraging the activeness of students with SEN**. The subcategory *Ways of encouraging the activeness of students with SEN* (13 statements, e.g.: Verbal support of students; The same as with all students – with acknowledgements, prizes, trips; We encourage them verbally and with acknowledgements). The data of the researches have revealed many ways by which school staff members encourage students with SEN to participate in out-of-lesson-time activity.

In the national programme for employers' education (2007) (cit. Barasnevičienė & Donielienė, 2011) it has been emphasized that the aim of developing entrepreneurship abilities in adolescence is to help a teenager to find his/her place in the society and develop his/her abilities to effectively interact with the society. In order to systemize the answers of mainstream school principals the first category **Participation in out-of-lesson-time activity as encouragement of entrepreneurship** has been distinguished. In this category two subcategories have been distinguished. The first one – *Projects encouraging entrepreneurship* (4 statements, e.g.: School participates in various projects encouraging entrepreneurship; Students as well as teachers participate in the project of the confederation of business people and employers; At the moment the project "Toc for education", encouraging entrepreneurship is taking place) reveals that students' entrepreneurship skills are developed during projects. The second subcategory *Events for encouraging entrepreneurship* (8 statements, e.g.: Participate in entrepreneurship tournaments, business exhibitions; Students of the gymnasium participate in various events where entrepreneurship is developed; They can participate in various fairs where they present, exchange, sell their handicrafts) reveals that events also help in encouraging students' entrepreneurship. The answers of the category **Not performing entrepreneurship activity** reveal that in some schools entrepreneurship activity is not performed at all. The subcategory *Activity encouraging entrepreneurship is not performed* (10 statements, e.g.: Students do not have possibility to participate in activity encouraging entrepreneurship; At school we do not have possibility to encourage entrepreneurship; Activity encouraging entrepreneurship is not performed) has been distinguished here (Figure 9).

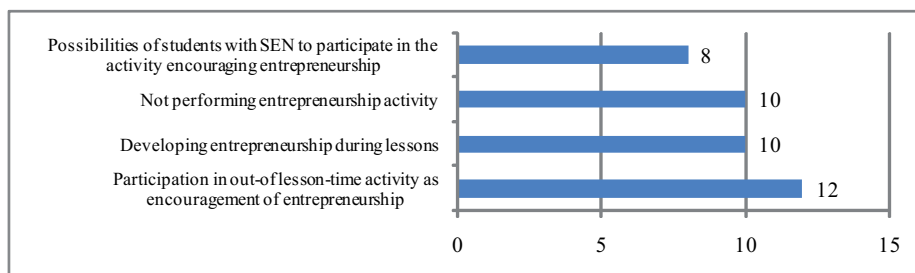


Figure 9. Possibility to participate in activity encouraging entrepreneurship

Performing the research it has been attempted to find out whether students with special educational needs have possibility to participate in conferences of practical type. The category **Conferences are not organized** gathered an especially big number of statements. The subcategory *Conferences for SEN students are not organized* (25 statements, e.g.: No, they are not organized; Not organized; No). More than a half of the respondents answered that practical conferences are not organized. More detailed information has been presented in Figure 10.

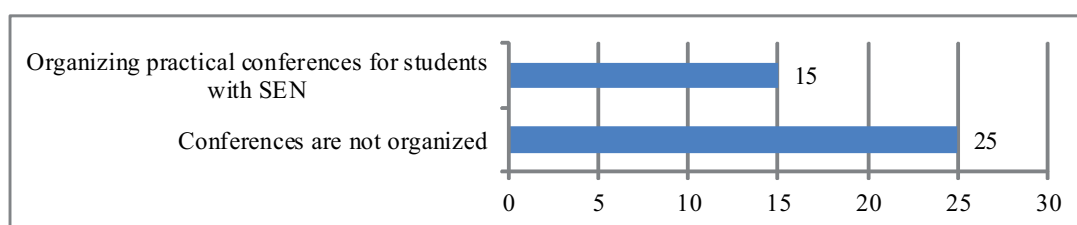


Figure 10. Organizing practical conferences for students with SEN

During the research it has been investigated what methods are used to impede the “wastage” of students (Figure 11). The biggest category is **Individual work with students**. In this category the subcategory *Individual conversations* gathers the biggest number of statements (10 statements, e.g.: There are many individual talks with students; Especially active communication with a student is needed; Individual communication is needed). In the second place there is the subcategory *Providing with universal support* (7 statements, e.g.: Explaining the situation and providing assistance (psychological, special, social); Necessary assistance and its methods are foreseen; Help to solve occurring difficulties).

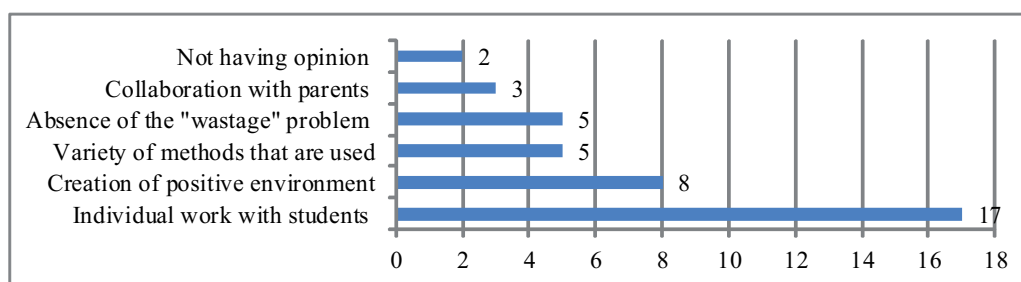


Figure 11. Methods used to impede the “wastage” of students

Organizing of vocational counselling has been investigated (Figure 12). The biggest category is **Activity of vocational counselling point** in which the subcategory *Implementation of vocational counselling by VCP specialists* (10 statements, e.g.: School provides vocational counselling with the help of VCP; This activity is organized by Career Planning Group and VCP functioning in the gymnasium; VCP work group has been formed) has been distinguished.

School principals indicated that an important role in organizing vocational counselling is played by the specialists of vocational counselling point.

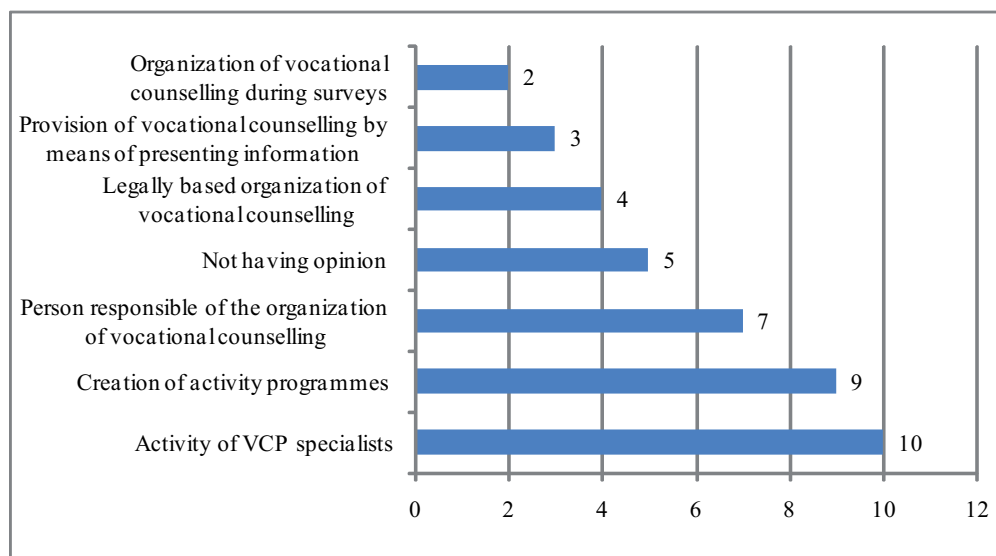


Figure 12. Organization of vocational counselling

Performing the research it has been found out what forms of vocational counselling are dominating in schools. **Meetings as a form of vocational counselling** is the biggest category where 2 subcategories have been distinguished. The first subcategory *Meetings at school* (12 statements, e.g.: Meetings with the representatives of other educational institutions are organized; Meetings with the representatives of various specialities; Meetings with business people) and the second subcategory *Meetings during trips* (5 statements, e.g.: We go to companies, institutions with students; Excursions to educational institutions and companies; Trips to profession fairs). The results of the data presented in the subcategories reveal that it is expedient to orient students towards certain professions during the meetings. Meetings with the representatives of various professions are organized both in school and out of school. According to Baranauskienė and Juodraitis (2008), family directly and indirectly contributes to the choice of profession because it is in the family where the role models are introduced, experience is accumulated and opportunities are foreseen, a certain value system is implemented. It is reflected in the category **Influence of students' parents on vocational counselling**. The subcategory *Presenting parents' professions and career* (3 statements: Parents present the experience of their career; Parents tell about their professions) reflects that one of the factors that have influence on students' choice is parents. It is their professional experience that often encourages students to choose a profession of a similar type if it suits their abilities

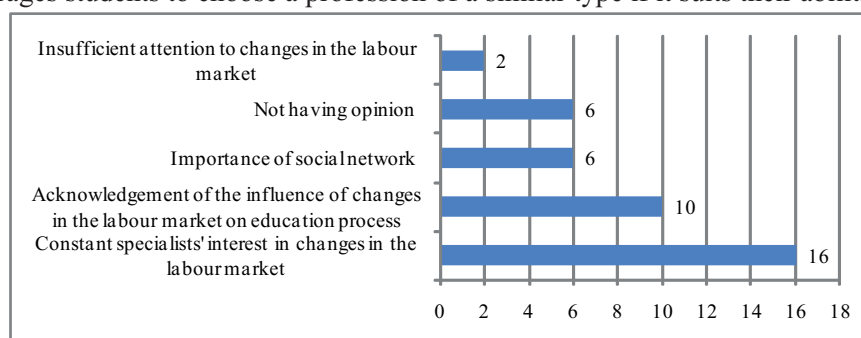


Figure 13. Variety of forms of vocational counselling

Feedback is considered as an especially important factor acknowledging the value of the process of vocational counselling. It is reflected in the first category **Emphasis on feedback** (Figure 14). In the subcategory *Students' responses on the issue of vocational counselling* (13 statements, e.g.: Students returning to the gymnasium are asked to what extent vocational counselling activity was relevant and useful; Very good acknowledgements and responses from students; Feedback, students' responses).

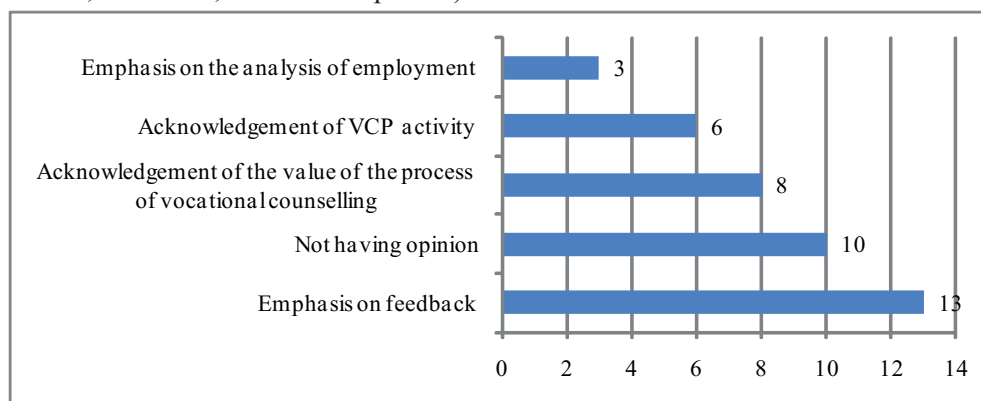


Figure 14. Acknowledgement of the value of the process of vocational counselling

Baranauskienė and Valaikienė (2010), point out that creating and developing common system of vocational counselling of Lithuania an especially important role is given to prevocational education and provision of vocational counselling services for students of mainstream, vocational and higher schools. The authors also emphasize that the aim of these services in mainstream schools is to help students to distinguish their vocational interests and inclinations, to gain the basics of career planning and create individual education plan. Performing the research it has been attempted to find out how school creates conditions for prevocational growth. The majority of the respondents did not have any opinion on this issue. More detailed information has been presented in Figure 15.

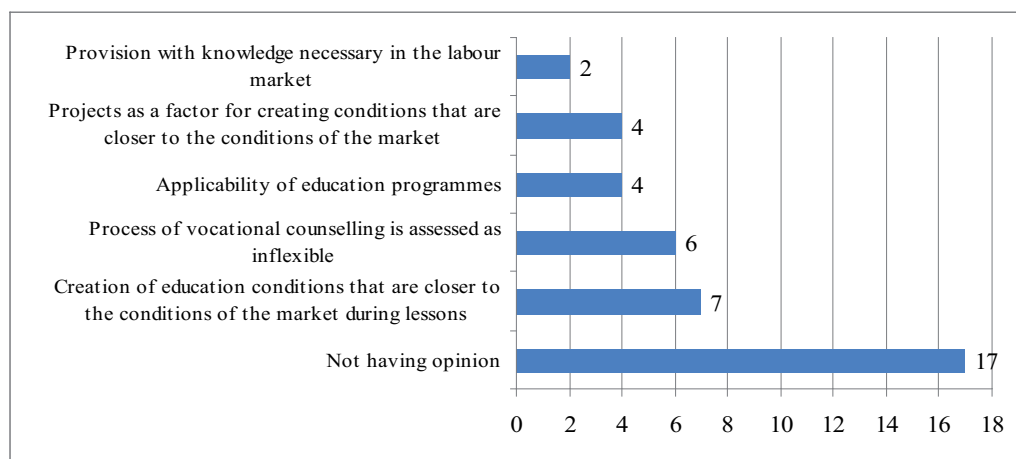


Figure 15. Creation of conditions for prevocational "growth" at school

The reaction of schools towards changes in the labour market has been investigated. From the presented data it can be seen that school principals emphasized **Constant specialists' interest in changes in the labour market**. In the subcategory *Interest and introducing newest information* (16 statements, e.g.: The very newest information is monitored and presented to

children; Career specialist monitors the changes and talk about that with children; We present useful and detailed information) it is emphasized that school staff members are intensively interested in changes that take place in the labour market. This information is constantly presented to students (Figure 16).

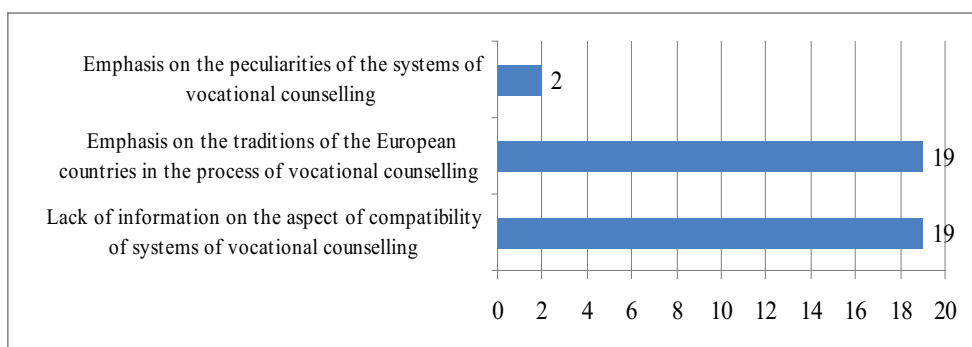


Figure 16. Reaction of school to the changes in the labour market

During the research it has been attempted to investigate the performance of the change of contents of education and forms of education management. In the category **Performance of the change of contents of education and forms of education management** the subcategory *Change of contents of education and forms of education management takes place at school* (24 statements, e.g.: Of course. It is the necessity of our times; Yes, it does; Of course, it does) dominates. More than a half of the respondents stated that at school flexible and modern adaptation of contents of education and change of forms of education management take place. It allows stating that school principals are not indifferent about changes in the labour market and innovations (Figure 17).

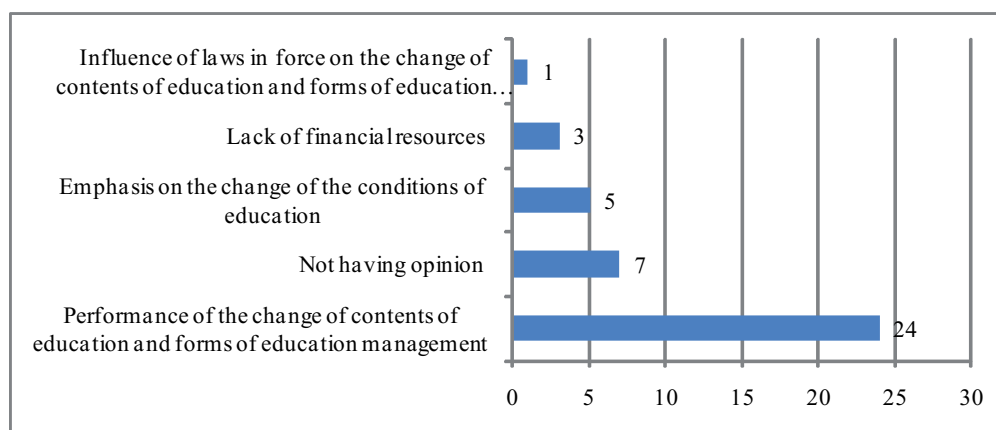


Figure 17. Performance of flexible and modern adaptation of contents of education and change of forms of education management

From the obtained data it can be seen that school principals emphasized **Creation of education conditions during the lessons that are closer to the conditions of the market** (Figure 18). In this category the subcategory *Integration of the changes of the labour market into lessons* has been distinguished (7 statements, e.g.: Relevant topics are included into lesson plans; Subjects to encourage entrepreneurship are integrated into the lessons; market changes are analyzed during class meetings and certain lessons). This category reflects that the most effective way to create education conditions that are closer to market conditions is the integration of changes of the labour market into the content of the lesson.

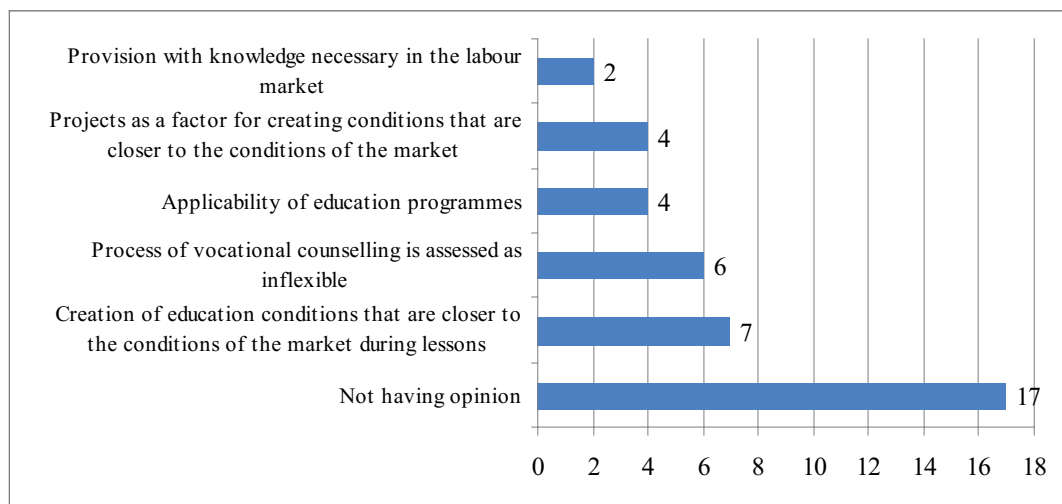


Figure 18. Creation of education conditions that are closer to the conditions of the market

During the research it has been attempted to find out principals' viewpoint towards the system of vocational counselling that is predominant in the European countries. The results of the research have shown that the majority of the respondents lack information about systems of vocational counselling of other countries. It has become distinct that some respondents purposefully are not interested in the experience of other countries counselling students on the choice of profession. It is reflected by the subcategory *Not showing interest in the experience of other countries* (19 statements, e.g.: I do not have purpose to match systems of vocational counselling; I was little interested in it; I was not interested in this issue). **Emphasis on the traditions of the European countries in the process of vocational counselling** gathered equal number of statements as the first category. The last category is **Emphasis on the peculiarities of the systems of vocational counselling**. The distinguished subcategory *Uniqueness of the systems of vocational counselling in the countries* (2 statements, e.g.: Every country/culture has a unique system) emphasizes that every country is characterized by different features characteristic only to this country in organizing vocational counselling.

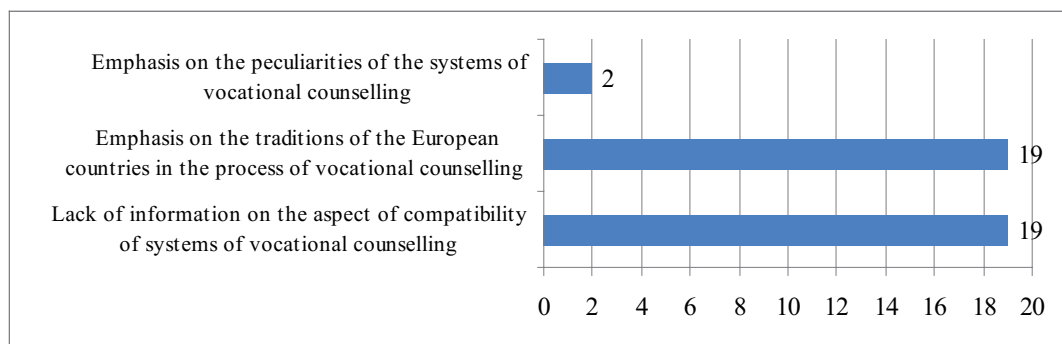


Figure 19. Compatibility of the systems of vocational counselling of students with SEN in Lithuania and other countries

Conclusions

1. The data of the research have made clear that the viewpoint of the majority of mainstream school principals towards vocational counselling of students with special educational needs is positive.

2. Vocational counselling at schools is provided with the help of vocational counselling point (VCP).

- The data of the research have revealed the forms of vocational counselling that are dominating at school: presenting information about vocational counselling, meetings at school, meetings during trips, performing tests, presenting parents' professions and career.
- During the research the problems hindering successful provision of vocational counselling have been revealed. It is lack of financial resources, lack of collaboration with potential employers, lack of parents' motivation, insufficient legal basis.
- Positive changes in the field of vocational counselling have been noticed: developing general abilities, updating education programmes, taking changes in the labour market into account during the lessons and preparing projects – thus education programmes that are closer to the conditions of the labour market are created.
- The obtained data have revealed that students especially lack opportunity to develop practical skills.

3. Although the data of the research have revealed that the viewpoint of mainstream school principals from the aspect of vocational counselling of students with SEN is positive, they do not directly participate in it and do not influence it. The role of school principals in the process of vocational counselling is only formal.

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