

Development of Lifelong Learning Perspectives for Students with Special Educational Needs in Special Schools in Lithuania

Abstract

The article briefly surveys the system of special pedagogical support in Lithuania, the types of educational institutions of a specific purpose and their place in the context of comprehensive education. The research on the quality of education and educational support provided in special schools and special education centres is introduced. The research aim is to investigate creation of the perspectives of lifelong learning for students with special educational needs. The research employs a combined research methodology: empirical methods of quantitative and qualitative research are combined. The quantitative research involved 317 pedagogues and specialists of educational assistance working in special schools and special education centres. The qualitative research involved 4 selected educational institutions devoted to students with special educational needs. Participants of the qualitative research: heads of educational institutions (N=12); pedagogues and providers of educational support (N=37); school students (N=32); students' parents (N=45). The pedagogues suppose they help school students and parents decide concerning future perspectives, support students' motivation for learning, develop the competences required for lifelong learning; they even state that they design individual curricula for the pupils (even though this is not the established common practice in Lithuanian schools). In general, parents are not aware of what perspectives are available for their children after graduation from the institution of special purpose education, the limited opportunities to gain the skills required for a specific occupation, especially without travelling long distances from home. Students are thinking of their life perspectives after graduation from school, discuss them with family members; however, they lack support of pedagogues in order to adequately assess their abilities, possibilities to choose a profession.

Keywords: lifelong learning perspectives, special educational needs, special schools, special education centres, special educational support, educational system

Introduction

Special education in Lithuania as an integral part of comprehensive education

Having approved the first Law on Education (1991) of the restored Republic in Lithuania in 1991, the right of every person with special educational needs (SEN) for education and choice of an education institution which is in the closest proximity to the place of residence was established. Such provision became the start of formal teaching and learning of individuals with severe and highly severe special educational needs together with their peers in Lithuania. Striving to ensure equal opportunities and accessibility of the education system to every learner as well as to offer them an opportunity to choose diversity of services, Lithuania has chosen the model of “many paths” for its education system, when students with special educational needs can attend the schools ensuring both comprehensive and special education (Aidukienė, Labinienė, 2003).

A contemporary system of education in Lithuania divides comprehensive education schools into mainstream schools and schools for students with special educational needs¹; however, education of students with special educational needs is implemented by all schools providing compulsory and general education². In separate cases, this education is implemented by schools (classes) dedicated to education of students with special educational needs. A comprehensive education school dedicated to students with special educational needs enrolls individuals who have severe and highly severe special educational needs. According to Lithuanian Education Management Information System, the data of 2016, 12.47 per cent of school age children with special educational needs of various levels out of all students attending comprehensive education schools in Lithuania were being educated in comprehensive education schools of various types. 11 per cent of students with mild, moderate, severe and highly severe special educational needs attended comprehensive education schools; and 1.47 per cent of students with severe and highly severe special educational needs attended special classes and comprehensive education schools dedicated to students with special educational needs.

Special and developing classes³ are being formed in an institution of a specific purpose. In a *special class*, students who due to innate or acquired disorders (e.g. mild mental disorder) have severe or highly severe special educational needs are being educated. In *developing classes*, students having moderate, severe or highly severe mental disorder, a complex disability, various developmental disorders

¹ *Mokyklų, vykdančių formaliojo švietimo programas, tinklo kūrimo taisyklės*, „Valstybės žinios“, 2011-06-30, Nr 79-3869 (summary edition of 2016-04-20).

² *LR švietimo įstatymas*, suvest. red. 2016-09-01 – 2016-12-31; 29 str. 4 d.

³ *Mokyklų, vykdančių formaliojo švietimo programas, tinklo kūrimo taisyklės*, 2011, summary edition since 2016-04-20; p. 2.3.

may be educated. *Curricula* are adapted or individualised according to identified special educational needs of a student, wished by a student, parents (care-givers, foster-parents) and in compliance with the conclusions and recommendations provided by the pedagogical psychological service or educational support service⁴. Students having special educational needs caused by their mental disorders are being educated according to an individualised primary, basic education programme upon completion of which they may continue learning according to a vocational training programme or learn according to a programme designed for development of social skills.

Striving to ensure higher efficiency of education of students with SEN, **educational support** is provided in all schools. Educational support is the support provided to students, their parents (care-givers, foster-parents), teachers and providers of education rendered by specialists. It encompasses vocational orientation, educational informational, psychological, social pedagogical, special pedagogical (speech and language therapist, special pedagogue, tiphopedagogue, surdopedagogue) and special support (interpreter of sign language, teacher's assistant), health care in school, counselling, developing teachers' qualifications and other support.

Like all participants of the system of comprehensive education, students with special educational needs should gain not only abilities in various fields but also develop their general competences, learn to learn and form attitudes to be active learners in school. Under rapidly changing circumstances of living, implementation of new technologies, lifelong learning, continuous perfection and development of competences are becoming increasingly more important. The perspective of lifelong learning is being created by attributing the most important role to continuous education to make an individual able to integrate himself/herself in the surrounding environment undergoing changes⁵. The strategy "Lithuania 2030" states that a well-developed and successfully functioning system of lifelong learning is one of the major factors determining the processes of society development, and individual development of person's abilities is highly important in developing person's creativity and civic spirit. Usually, curricula are based on repetition, they do not stimulate the processes of thinking, analysis and creation, which are a precondition for becoming part of the lifelong learning society.

Research aim is to investigate creation of the perspectives of lifelong learning for students with special educational needs being educated in special schools and special education centres.

⁴ *Mokinių, turinčių specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių, ugdymo organizavimo tvarkos aprašas*, Valstybės žinios, 2011-10-11, Nr 122-5771.

⁵ Linkaitytė G. M., Žilinskaitė L., *Mokymosi visą gyvenimą idėjos įgyvendinimo perspektyva Lietuvoje*, 2008, p. 46, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=1&hid=2&sid=7527f770-0853-4a93-969d-3d17f8216c79%40sessionmgr4>>), [access date: 5.10.2017]

Research methods and methodology

The research employed a combined research methodology. Empirical methods of quantitative and qualitative research have been combined.

The research data was processed by applying methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis. During quantitative analysis, the data was processed by employing the “SPSS Statistics” package and analysing it by employing the methods of descriptive statistics (percentage frequency, mean M , standard deviation SD), non-parameter criterion (Kruskal-Wallis test, providing calculations of mean range MR and statistical significance p).

The group interview method facilitated collection of the data on the experience accumulated in special schools being represented by the pedagogues, specialists of educational support and administrative staff working there. Using the data of content analysis of the group interview, i.e. singled out categories and subcategories, a survey of heads of special schools was conducted additionally by applying the two-stage *Delphi* group methods: the information collected by employing the *Delphi* group method was processed by applying the method of content analysis (singling out categories and subcategories); then, the research participants were given the subcategories to be rated (1 – disagree, 5 – agree) (Cuhls, 2003; Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Methods for processing of qualitative research data: qualitative and quantitative (M , SD) content analysis.

The research complied with *the common principles of research ethics* closely related to reliability of analysis and presentation of theoretical and empirical data to avoid paltering with facts. The *ethics* was followed *in respect to the research participants*. In all stages of the research, research participants were informed about the aims of the research, methods of data collection, the strategy of publicising of the data and principles of assurance of confidentiality of personal information.

Research sample

The research involved 317 (90% of women, 10% of men) pedagogues and specialists of educational support working in special schools and special education centres. This comprises 23.1% of the pedagogues working in special schools, special education centres in Lithuania.

The qualitative case research involved the selected 4 educational institutions dedicated to students with special educational needs. Participants of the qualitative research: heads of educational institutions ($N=12$); pedagogues and providers of educational support ($N=37$); school students ($N=32$); students' parents ($N=45$).

Results of the research

1. *Results of the quantitative research.* Organising the survey of pedagogues and specialists of educational support working in special schools (N=37) and aiming to ensure a representative sample of the representatives in this group, the quantitative research has been carried out. It was found out that pedagogues realistically assessed the perspectives for further teaching and learning, helped students and their parents to decide concerning the further path (M=4.38; SD=0.55); increased motivation of students (M=4.26; SD=0.61); taught children to make decisions, to adjust to changing conditions (M=4.13; SD=0.52) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Creation of the perspectives of lifelong learning

Statement	M	SD
Pedagogues realistically estimate the perspectives of students' further learning, help students and their parents to decide on further path.	4.38	0.55
A school stimulates students' motivation for learning, attitudes towards lifelong learning.	4.26	0.61
Students' abilities to make decisions, adjust to changing conditions of environment are being developed.	4.13	0.52
There is no specialist for vocational counselling (career) in school; however, the classmaster/classmistress or other specialists help a student to recognise his/her vocational interests, aptitudes.	4.04	0.94
A school provides services of vocational counselling, students and parents are consulted on questions of vocational purpose and suitability.	3.62	1.10
Students are provided with mediation services aiming to help them choose a profession, a school of vocational training.	3.62	1.02
Each student of a school has an individual curriculum which foresees the learning aims of all subjects, content of support provided by specialists and adjustments, long-term perspective of child's education in that school or other educational institution.	3.62	0.98
The most important planner of child's perspectives is the Child's Welfare Board in school.	3.53	0.85
After the 10 th form, special schools direct graduated students to centres of vocational training and, if they do not adjust there, they return and until they reach 21 years they learn according to the Programme for Development of Social Skills for Adults.	3.36	1.13
A school has designed/runs a system for student training for a profession (vocational training classes, workshops; specialists of vocational orientation (career), teachers of vocational training etc.).	3.23	1.16

Statement	M	SD
Students of senior forms get individual plans of transition (perspectives of independent living, selection of a profession, development for a profession).	3.12	1.06
Students educated in senior forms have an opportunity to try various work activities in simulated or real work places.	2.99	1.05
Those having graduated from a progymnasium or basic school and having severe and highly severe special educational needs are “asked” to leave and enter a special school.	2.95	0.88
A school mediates for former students by helping to find a job.	2.68	0.93
The state “thinks” of work places for people with disabilities.	2.51	0.97
A specialist of vocational orientation (career) works at school; he/she provides services of vocational information to students.	2.33	0.98

Quite many pedagogues even state that every student has not only an individually designed programme of a subject taught, but also an individualised curriculum which foresees the aims of all taught subjects, content and compatibility of support provided by specialists, long-term perspective of education of a child in our school or other institution of education ($M=3.62$; $SD=0.98$). The respondents hold the opinion that students are provided with poor conditions to test various vocational activities in simulated or real work places ($M=2.99$; $SD=1.05$); the state insufficiently takes care of their employment ($M=2.51$; $SD=0.97$).

Pedagogues of special schools more often than pedagogues of special education centres and multifunctional centres state that a school runs a developed system of vocational training of students ($MR(sm)=165.81$; $MR(suc)=133.54$; $MR(dc)=107.50$; $p=0.000$); a school provides services of vocational counselling ($MR(sm)=168.40$; $MR(suc)=128.15$; $MR(dc)=104,54$; $p=0,000$). Some even state that individual transition plans (independent living, perspectives of the choice of a profession, self-development for a profession) are prepared for students of upper forms ($MR(sm)=165.12$; $MR(suc)=129.99$; $MR(dc)=125.33$; $p=0.002$), which still is not a regular practice in the system of comprehensive education in Lithuania. A similar opinion to that of pedagogues of special schools considering the fostered provisions of lifelong learning and created perspectives in own school is expressed by pedagogues from district centres, too.

In general, it was observed that pedagogues of special schools evaluate the situation of pre-vocational training, vocational counselling in school better than pedagogues of special education centres and multifunctional centres.

2. Results of the qualitative research.

The 4 cases of schools are presented in the following order: attitudes of heads of schools, pedagogues, students' parents and school students towards creation of the lifelong learning perspectives in their schools.

Results of the survey of heads of schools (N=12)

Case 1: According to heads of schools, students who successfully graduated from the school enter other educational institutions and continue learning: *all continued learning somewhere: in secondary, vocational schools, and stronger ones even choose higher education institutions; <...> last year majority of our students spread in comprehensive education schools and are successfully learning there [1V2].*

When planning students' career and transition to the adult's life, a school integrates themes on education for career in separate subjects, organises visits to vocational schools. Consultations on these questions are usually provided by a classmaster/classmistress or a school psychologist (see Table 2).

Table 2
Lifelong learning

Category	Subcategory
Planning of career and transition to the adult life	Integration of questions on education for career in separate subjects
	Responsibility of a classmaster/classmistress
	Visits to vocational schools
	Consultations of a psychologist
	Successful transition and further learning
Support during transition	Mediation and consulting for schools
Problems	Quality of collaboration with enrolling institutions

Summing up the obtained research results it can be stated that, while planning further perspectives of learning and transition of pupils to the adult lives, a school integrates themes on education for career in separate subjects, organises visits to vocational schools. Usually, a classmaster/classmistress and a school psychologist provide consultations concerning these questions. Having successfully graduated from school, students enter other educational institutions (gymnasiums, vocational schools) and continue learning. During the transition period, a function of mediation and counselling by the enrolling school is performed.

Case 2: When talking about students' perspectives of further learning, the heads mentioned several examples of successful careers of students: *few chil-*

dren entered a vocational training centre and are learning a speciality of an assistant of a hotel keeper [2V2] (see Table 3).

Table 3
Lifelong learning: the case of a school X2

Category	Subcategory
Career and transition to the adult life	Successful careers of students
	Importance of mediation
Problems	Employment of individuals with disabilities
	Demand for care institutions
	Assurance of further support

These were children from special classes. Nevertheless, in order to be happy about these few cases of success, mediation and endeavours of even several interested sides were necessary: *this enrolment was initiated the Pedagogical and Psychological Service, special education centres and parents <...> earlier there were no such conditions available for them because they did not have such programmes for children with mental disorders [2V3] <...> for several years now two vocational schools have adapted and accredited programmes for such our children <...> this breaks the wall... [2V1].*

Despite positive changes in this field, the heads of schools still notice quite many problems, too: employment of individuals with disabilities, the demand for care institutions, assurance of further support: *if the legal base is not changed (concessions for business enterprises) to promote employment of such children, the employment will not proceed very well <...> actually a low percentage of them are employed <...> another thing is the children who graduated from developing classes <...> first of all, we are an institution of education and not of care... we try to help parents, we wanted to launch such group (of care) but due to some circumstances we did not implement it [2V1] <...> parents undergo stress when institutions for adult care are full [2V3].*

To sum up the research results, further perspectives of learning of the students with mental disorders and complex disabilities as well as their transition to adult lives are usually problematic and only single cases are successful. The offer of professions and accessibility of education in vocational schools are not ensured. Employment of individuals with mental disorders is made more difficult by the lack of the policy which would promote employment of the disabled. The system of social support to the disabled and families fostering them is not created, and this raises fear and anxiety in parents.

Case 3: When talking about lifelong learning, representatives of schools emphasised the relevant issues in the planning of career and transition to adult

lives as well as arising most frequent problems. When planning career of special school students, a school indicated that the group for vocational planning was in charge of it, *each year they go with senior students to the labour exchange office to get acquainted with the opportunities, representatives of various institutions are invited to introduce professions* [3V1].

A school has some cases of successful students' transition: *those who have a mild mental disorder can learn in some vocational schools <...> a part of students apply, though very few <...> two our students left for learning this year; a boy chose a profession of a finisher, a girl has chosen a profession of a cook* [3V1].

When talking about problems in this field, a school head indicated insufficient dissemination of information on opportunities to choose a profession, lack of education of parents and their resistance against further plans of child's education (see Table 4).

Table 4
Lifelong learning

Category	Subcategory
Planning of career and transition to the adult life	A group of vocational planning
	Collaboration with vocational schools
	Successful cases of further learning
Problems	Dissemination of information
	Resistance of parents
	Education of parents

To sum up, aiming to help in planning further perspectives of learning and transition to the adult life, a school runs a group of vocational planning, collaborates with vocational schools of a special purpose. Successful cases of students' further learning are rare; more often students who completed the school stay for education in special school's classes devoted to development of social skills or return to their families. The lack of information on possibilities for vocational training for students with mental disorders is felt. Parents' resistance against further learning of their children is also mentioned as an obstacle for further learning.

Case 4: The perspectives of lifelong learning and arising problems expressed by heads of schools are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Lifelong learning

Category	Subcategory
Planning of career and transition to the adult life	Classes of social skills
	Support of a classmaster/classmistress, social pedagogue
	Visits to vocational schools
Problems	Conditions in families and lack of support from family members
	Fear to violate students' rights

Students' career and transition to the adult life is being planned in a special school while continuing education in classes for social skills, being assisted by a classmaster/classmistress and/or a social pedagogue: *in classes for social skills students sometimes stay a little bit longer to learn more. In school, usually a classmaster/classmistress helps to choose further life (speciality). Of course, a social pedagogue is very helpful in choosing a speciality* [4V2]. Collaboration between school and vocational schools is highly important. During visits to vocational schools, students are helped to select a profession: *we closely collaborate with a vocational school (Radviliškis Centre for Technology and Business Training, RTVMC). Our children go there for two weeks to choose a speciality* [4V2].

According to school heads, further education of students highly depends on support of family members. Usually, *students lack care and advice of family members* [4V1]. According to the heads, the role of school in helping to choose further education is limited by the fear to violate students' rights: *we could allow them manage themselves, plan, enhance social skills more but they know their rights very well and we don't want to violate them* [4V1].

Summing up the obtained results we can state that, when aiming to help students plan further perspectives of learning and transition to the adult life, the school develops students' abilities in classes of social skills, students are advised by a classmaster/classmistress and/or a social pedagogue. A school collaborates with vocational schools in organising visits when helping students to choose their professions. It is supposed that further education of students strongly depends on support of family members, too, which is lacking quite often.

Results of survey of pedagogues (N=37)

Case 1: The category of Creation of Perspectives of Lifelong Learning of students with special needs emphasised continuity of education of gifted blind students. The least approval was expressed towards the statement that *having completed 10 forms students enter comprehensive education schools to continue learning* (M=3.36; SD=1.50).

To sum up the results of qualitative research, analysis of the categories of creation of perspectives for lifelong learning for students with special needs and perspectives of inclusive education emphasised the areas to be improved. These are the necessity for SEN individuals to develop and ensure continuity of learning, vocational activities and social support while living independently and to develop competences of comprehensive education school pedagogues in the field of special education, to encourage full-fledged collaboration between institutions of special education purpose and comprehensive education.

Case 2: The category of Creation of Perspectives of Lifelong Learning for students with special needs emphasised three subcategories (see Table 6).

Table 6
Creation of perspectives of lifelong learning

Subcategory	M	SD
Diversity of perspectives of learning after completion of 10 forms	4.85	0.45
Unclear perspectives of activities of students over 21	4.51	0.92
Projection of perspectives of education of students	4.47	0.80

The subcategory ***Diversity of Perspectives of Learning after Completion of 10 Forms*** has it that, after completion of 10 forms, students of developing, special classes can attend a class of social skills if this is wished by parents, and students can attend vocational training centres.

The subcategory ***Unclear Perspectives of Activities of Students over 21*** characterises a certain problem of occupation of individuals over 21 years of age: *we have to wait for several years for a place in the Daytime Occupation Centre; the youth living in districts have no possibility to attend the Daytime Occupation Centres; educational services for individuals over 21 are not available due to disagreement between organisations; a minimal offer of specialities available for disabled youth in vocational training centres.*

Summing up the results obtained during group interview of pedagogues of an educational institution, it can be stated that continuity of education is tried to be ensured by arranging activities helping to prepare for a profession for students who completed 10 forms. Pedagogues emphasise unclear perspectives of activities of students over 21 years of age.

Case 3: Three subcategories were emphasised in the category of Creation of Perspectives of Lifelong Learning for students with special needs (see Table 7).

Table 7
Creation of perspectives of lifelong learning

Subcategory	M	SD
Development social skills in the Daytime Occupation Centre	4.92	0.29
Vocational training and perspectives	4.75	0.54
Problems of vocational training and independent living	4.50	0.96

The subcategory *Development of Social Skills in the Daytime Occupation Centre* has it that there is such a centre founded and upon completion of 10 forms students continue their education in a class of social skills. *The subcategory Vocational Training and Perspectives* announces the statements that after completion of 10 forms students can learn in vocational training centres; students of this school usually choose the centre for technology and business.

The subcategory *Problems of Vocational Training and Independent Living* underlines a long distance to reach vocational centres, and this limits students' possibilities to attend them; insufficiency of the system of social security is emphasised: *having graduated from vocational training centres the youth who are not under their parents' care have no place to return to* (M=4.50; SD=1.24). One pedagogue shared her experience by comparing the systems of social security in Lithuania and Great Britain: *Here is no system. Here is no place for the disabled; they become able when they leave for a different country. There (abroad) they manage somehow, but here nobody takes care of them* [3P5].

To sum up the results of the interview, an educational institution ensures continuity of learning in the Daytime Occupation Centre. Also, a long distance to vocational training centres and problems related to independent living after graduation are emphasised.

Case 4: The category of Creation of Perspectives of Lifelong Learning for students with special needs also highlighted three subcategories (see Table 8).

The subcategory *Development of Social Skills in a Daytime Occupation Centre* states that such a centre was founded, and after completion of 10 forms students continue their development in the class of social skills or some of them, aged over 21, attend the occupation centre "Viltis" (*Lith.* A Hope).

Table 8
Creation of perspectives of lifelong learning

Subcategory	M	SD
Development of social skills in the Daytime Occupation Centre	4.77	0.56
Unclear further perspectives of activities of students having highly severe SEN	4.56	0.63
Problems of preparation for vocational activities and gaining a profession	4.27	0.86

Teachers note *unclear perspectives of further activities for students with highly severe SEN* and problems of the search for activities which would be useful to society.

The subcategory *Problems of Vocational Training and Independent Living* emphasises the problems of commute for residents of distant districts, which sometimes limits possibilities to attend these centres. Teachers have it that usually classmasters/classmistresses jointly with a student and his/her family project vocational activities: *Classmasters/classmistresses communicate with children of their class, their parents, discuss and plan* [4P1]. Majority of senior form students continue learning in vocational training centres.

To sum up the data of the group survey of pedagogues, aiming to help plan further perspectives of learning, a school develops students' abilities in classes of social skills, renders advice of a classmaster/classmistress and/or a social pedagogue. A school collaborates with vocational schools in organising visits facilitating students' choice of the profession. Students link their perspectives of further learning to their abilities, regard the advice of their family members. Parents are not sure about the opportunities for further development of students in vocational schools; therefore, they have some alternative plans for the future. Perspectives of further activities for students with highly severe SEN are particularly unclear. School heads tend to relate the opportunities of students' learning to support of family members, which raises some doubts.

Results of the survey of students' parents (N=45)

Case 1: When talking about students' future, the emphasised opinions of parents are illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9
Future perspectives of students

Subcategory	M	SD
Hopes about development of services	4.72	0.52
Unclear perspectives	4.67	0.67
Future plans	4.2	1.54

Hopes about Development of Services (M=4.72; SD=0.52). Parents would like that development of pupils would have continuity, that a school would provide services of care to former students, that Lithuania would develop the communal care; they refer to a situation abroad where various services for former students and their parents are available: *Continuity, any such group after graduation from the school... The director of the school has many plans concerning students of this school* [1T1]. *Communal care is well-developed in foreign*

countries; still, here is no such thing in Lithuania [1T4]. In Western countries support of a psychologist is provided to parents; here no support is provided to parents [1T3].

Unclear Perspectives (M=4.67; SD=0.67). Perhaps some parents would like that a child attended learning after graduation from the school; however, they lack information about opportunities for these children to learn and they indicate that the state lacks vision of support for the disabled and their parents: *There is lack of publicity, information about where a child could learn, what concessions are applied etc. Information is insufficient in all chains [1T10]. We are talking about an individual plan but there is no common state policy [1T10].*

Participants of the discussion state that they are aware of the capabilities, that their children and they do not foster high plans for the future: *We all are aware that these are our children and they, even after graduation, will stay with us. Majority of us understand that our children will not be independent [1T4]. I do not see any great perspective. We are thinking of the present day only. We are glad for what was learnt to do. Because it is unclear what will come next year [1T10].*

And some parents shared some **future plans** (M=4.2; SD=1.54): *We thought to establish a centre for children who graduated from schools, about support of non-governmental organisations. Parents themselves must be more involved in providing care, consolidate their endeavours to take care of little children [1T9]. A project is being implemented in a comprehensive education school, maybe we will manage on time to take part with our child [1T7]. If we find child's aptitude for something, the universities will accept with open arms. But children must be raised to be geniuses. First of all, they should be able to live at least minimally independently. But if you see that she is capable of doing something, we should try [1T3].*

To sum up the results obtained during the interview with parents, children's future perspectives are unclear to their parents. They have no real plans for the future of their children. They hope that a school or the state will develop services of care; there are also some plans of communities of parents to found a centre providing services of care. The parents almost did not consider any possibilities for further education of their children.

Case 2: The discussion with parents revealed their opinion on future perspectives of students with severe and highly severe special educational needs and emphasised the problems (see Table 10).

Table 10**Learning perspectives for students with special educational needs**

Subcategory	M	SD
Perspectives are discussed at school	4.82	0.39
The state lacks the vision of support to the disabled and their parents	4.60	1.03
The state does not ensure continuity of education of students	4.44	1.21
Doubts about learning a profession	3.89	1.61

All parents who took part in the discussion are very much concerned about *importance of knowing the future of their child* (M=5.00). They asserted that students' future ***perspectives are discussed in school*** (M=4.82; SD=0.39), they stated that *the school does what it can, helps parents* (M=4.88; SD=0.33) and asserted that *the striving of the school to create opportunities to continue communication with their pupils later on* was important to them (M=4.88; SD=0.33).

Parents mostly expressed that they lacked more support from the state ensuring the future of their children. According to them, ***the state lacks the vision of support to the disabled and their parents*** (M=4.60; SD=1.03) and ***it does not ensure continuity to students' learning*** (M=4.44; SD=1.21).

When talking of the future of their children, the parents highly emphasized that *assurance of security for their children is the most important thing* (M=5.00); however, they suppose that *there is no common vision of support for the disabled and their parents and no communication among different departments and ministries* (M=4.55; SD=1.33). The parents hold the opinion that the state should take care not only of children with severe and highly severe special educational needs but also of parents raising such children: *parents of disabled children are a socially sensitive group* (M=4.50; SD=1.41); therefore, *it is important to provide conditions for families to rest and meanwhile have someone to take care of the child* (M=4.55; SD=1.33). According to participants of the survey, the state should *establish community homes for difficult children* (M=4.55; SD=1.33), and/or *a school could provide a service of temporal care, to accept children requiring care* (M=4.50; SD=0.75).

According to all participants of the discussion, the state should *search for possibilities to ensure continuity of support* (M=5.00), *to create a system to continue lifelong learning for everyone* (M=4.66; SD=1.00) because *children undergo regression when they are no longer being educated over 21* (M=4.11; SD=1.76). *When a difficult child is left for the parents to take care of as a burden* (M=4.44; SD=1.33), parents and child will face *sad perspectives because there is no continuity of education* (M=4.00; SD=1.73).

Part of the parents expressed their ***doubts about learning a profession*** (M=3.89; SD=1.61). Parents did not strongly support the statement that *there is*

an opportunity for children to gain a profession in a vocational school (M=3.55; SD=1.66), because in a vocational school proper meeting of the needs is not ensured (M=4.11; SD=1.45). On the other hand, as the parents have it, even these children with disabilities who have gained a profession face difficulties in finding a job (M=4.00; SD=1.73).

To sum up the data obtained from educational institution's students' parents, future perspectives of students are discussed at school; however, parents lack stronger support of the state to the disabled and their parents. They state that continuity of education of students is not ensured. Parents have doubts about the possibilities for their children to learn a profession and be employed.

Case 3: The opinions of parents who took part in the survey concerning future of their children are reflected in Table 11.

Table 11
Future perspectives of students

Subcategory	M	SD
Planned learning of a profession	4.04	1.62
Lifelong care is necessary	3.90	1.75
Unclear perspectives	3.50	1.73

The parent's ideas demonstrate that part of them, even though having some doubts, plan the future of their children while relating to **the learning of a profession** (M=4.04; SD=1.62): *I was told that there is a school for children with special needs, to enter after graduation from a special school. They learn there, then they find a job [3T2]. A teacher recommends for a child who still is under-matured to attend the course on preparation for living for 3 years more, then maybe it will become clearer what he wants. At least he will be able to peel potatoes. He still has not made up his mind. Maybe during these three years his aptitudes will become clear. Later maybe a centre for vocational training will suit [3T7].*

On the other hand, parents not unanimously suppose that their children **require necessary lifelong care** (M=3.90; SD=1.75). They hope that in the future they will find an institution which will be able to take care of their child: *I heard that a centre for disabled adults is being founded, will be able to leave for a full day for learning... that would be good if such centre appeared (M=4.42; SD=1.51).*

The following opinions are not strongly supported: *There will be a need to take care of the developed until the end of days. All life long. I will take care of him; he has a brother, the brother will take care of him. I have foreseen who will take care of him because he will not be able to live alone. And to think of any specialities means to deal with the fantasy world. The parents are disabled, he*

inherited from both mother and father, the innate disability. To think that he will do something in his life... just for the sake of a joke. Foster parents are not given neither record of service nor sufficient salary. Now they say they have no means. We should scream and shout, but who will hear us... I would make an exhibition of government's promises... I have a desk drawer full of these promises... We try to get the disability status for our child via a judicial procedure, it already lasts for the second year in a row [3T1]. To suppose that one will do anything in life... just for the sake of a joke <...> We try to get the disability status for the child <...> [3T9].

The parents said they did not even think of the future of their children: *it seems that the time is quite in a distance to come (M=4.00; SD=1.67); they lack information: The most frequent question: where will it be available to continue learning [3T5]. It's not clear what kind of certificate will be issued. Nobody explains [3T4]. We have no clear perspectives, we need somebody to help us. [3T1].* Thus, the parents consider that **future perspectives** of their children **are unclear** (M=3.50; SD=1.73).

Summing up the data of the interview of special school parents, they plan the future of their children quite vaguely in relation to the learning of a profession; part of the parents consider that lifelong care is necessary for their children. In general, future perspectives are not clear to their parents.

Case 4: Most of the doubts for parents of the fourth institution's students were related to the future perspectives of their children (see Table 12).

Table 12
Perspectives of children's future

Subcategory	M	SD
Planned learning of a profession	3.67	1.59
Alternative future plans	3.67	1.82
Care at home	2.98	1.78

Ideas of some of the parents show that they have not decided about the future of their children yet, but **are planning the learning of a profession** (M=3.67; SD=1.59): *I was interested in further proceeding if the education will be continued. There is a school in Radviliškis. I have not searched in detail yet, but was interested in it (M=4.00; SD=1.67). There is a school of agriculture, but a long commute will be required [4T12] (M=3.33; SD=1.50).*

Some parents have **alternative plans for the future**: *a class of social skills or home [4T8]. Either to prolong here for additional three years (a class of social skills) or to go to a vocational training centre. My friend's girl is attending it and informed me that there are specialities of woodworking, metalwork, cooking [4T13].*

Part of the parents stated they had not thought of their child's future yet, but

they tended to suppose that after school their children would stay at home, be fostered at home: *We have not thought about it yet [4T1]. He will stay at home. There's no other place for him to be [4T6].*

To sum up the data obtained from the parents, the future perspectives of their children are not clear; basically, their further education is not being planned.

Even though some parents are planning that their children will be learning a profession, still they are not firmly sure of it; therefore, some parents have alternative plans for the future: a class of social skills or care at home; a class of social skills or learning of a profession. Part of the parents stated they were not thinking of the future, but in general they tended to think that their children would stay in home care.

Students' (N=32) responses concerning the lifelong learning of students with special educational needs.

Case 1: Students of senior forms purposefully think of the perspectives of further education. According to them, further education is not being discussed at school. Education perspectives are usually discussed with family members, but mostly they are related to student's decision with regard to one's abilities and likes: *my mother often talks with me. She says, "what will be, will be", however, she would like most that I would be a singer. I attend a music school and perhaps I will continue studying music after graduation from school [1M1]. I would like to be a travel agent because travels attract very much; or I would like to be a barman <...> I like socialising with people. Now I'm only thinking about it myself, and later I will discuss with my brother [1M3]. I will go learning the speciality of confectionery. I have already made my decision. I enjoy accuracy. My father is cooking since childhood. I would watch and learn [1M5].*

To sum up the data of the interview of the students, students of senior forms, with regard to their abilities and likes, purposefully consider the perspectives of further education, usually discuss them with family members. The students do not reveal the activities of vocational orientation or other cases of support offered by pedagogues while considering the possibilities for future development.

Case 2: The students of senior forms more purposefully consider the perspective of further education, whereas opinions of other students are less realistic (see Table 13).

Table 13
Perspectives of further education

Category	Subcategory
Consideration of perspectives of further education	Importance of support from teachers, relatives and decision of a student himself/herself
A little realistic, unsubstantiated opinion	An example of authorities imagined by students

The students hold the opinion that they are discussing the opportunities for their further education at school with teachers and at home with family members; nevertheless, they emphasise that their own decision is important, too. When choosing further activities, it is necessary to assess their abilities: *we are talking a little bit. I am asked but I have not made my decision yet. First, I must finish here. Then I will need to think and discuss with my mother, brother. It is impossible to make a decision alone. I would like to work in the field of photography. I have never done this before. I have some fears. If I fail I will do something easier* [2M5]. *I should finish education here first, and then enter a college; though I'm not sure if they would enrol me. Not only teachers should help me but also I should make a decision myself* [2M6].

Another part of students are planning to gain various professions; however, the opinion is not substantiated, little realistic and it is obvious that it is related to the authorities imagined by the students: *I would like to be an officer. In police. If a person would take part in fighting, call me, I would arrive, arrest and bring to court, to jail* [2M3]. *When I grow up I want to be big, strong. I would attend boxing. I would like to work* [2M8]. *When I grow up I will be like my father. I will work in the city. I will build houses* [2M1]. *I wanted to be a singer or a model in a fashion agency. The mother says: "If you succeed, why not."* [2M6].

To sum up, students of senior forms regard their abilities and purposefully consider the perspectives of their further education which usually are discussed with family members. The students do not single out the activities on vocational orientation being organised at school, with the exception of practical activities during lessons. Thoughts of some of the students are little substantiated and realistic.

Case 3: Students of senior forms more purposefully consider the perspectives of their further education, opinions of other students are less realistic (see Table 14).

Table 14
Perspectives of further education

Category	Subcategory
Consideration of perspectives of further education	A considered decision related to abilities, advice of relatives
	Vocational orientation organised by the school
Possibilities for further education are not being considered	Search for a job
Little substantiated explanations	An example of authorities imagined by students

Several students express their perspectives of further education relating them to recommendations of relatives or student's abilities: *I would like to be a cook <...> I learnt from my mother and we cook at school together with our classmistress <...> I will be learning in Radviliškis vocational school <...> the mother helped me to make a decision* [3M3].

Vocational orientation conducted by a school in collaboration with Lithuanian Centre for Vocational Training aiming to help students choose their profession is emphasised: *at school we talk during lessons (technologies, the Lithuanian language). Next year we will visit a vocational training centre and decide which profession we want to choose. We will be there for two weeks* [3M3].

Other students have it that after graduation from school they do not consider any possibilities for further education and plan to search for a job: *when I turn 18 I will start working straight away <...> I will enter the labour exchange which will appoint me to a work place <...> I will not enter anywhere for learning after graduation from this school* [3M4]. *I will start working: I will chop wood, mow grass, gardens <...> while driving a tractor, plough ground. I will search for a job* [3M8].

Selection of a profession for some students attending a special school is little substantiated: *I would like to be a truck driver. I must get a driving licence <...> a good job* [3M1]; *I still don't know what I will do. I would like to be a civil constructor <...> I need to be able to measure* [3M2]; *when I graduate I will be learning until the 12th form. I would like to be a fireman. I want to rescue people, one must be capable of dressing up fast, to hold a hose* [3M5]; *I will be a policeman. I need to learn how to catch thieves. The job is easy* [3M6]; *a policeman. I like it. To catch thieves. To put them in jail. They check driving licences* [3M7].

Case 4: Students of senior forms more purposefully consider the perspectives of further education, whereas opinions of other students are less realistic. Like in other schools, students' considerations concerning perspectives of further education depend on the level of students' abilities (see Table 15).

Majority are purposefully oriented to selection of particular professions, with regard to their abilities.

Table 15
Perspectives of further education

Category	Subcategory
Consideration of perspectives of further education	A considered decision related to abilities, recommendations of relatives and support of school
	“I will go to work”
Little substantiated explanations	Authorities imagined by students

Students’ opinions are grounded on recommendations of relatives (parents, friends): *I talk to my mother or father* [4M1]. *Sometimes I talk to my parents. More often I talk to my friends* [4M2]. *Members of my family give me advice* [4M3]; as well as knowledge obtained at school during vocational orientation: *we were having a conversation in the tenth form. We explore what professions are available. I suppose I will be a cook* [4M3]. *What will I do? I will enter a vocational school to learn. I will be learning woodwork or metalwork* [4M2]. *I don’t know, I will enter learning any profession. Perhaps a tractor driver. A driver needs a driver’s licence, I need to get a truck driver’s licence. I’m not sure if I will manage* [4M7].

Some students share experience of unqualified work that would satisfy them: *I wish to work most often. In a forest or visit farmers. I would chop wood. I would sell and obtain 25 Euros.* [4M2]. *I like chopping wood in village the most...* [4M7]. Nevertheless, thoughts of majority of students concerning perspectives of further education are little realistic: *I would like to be a doctor. I want to treat children. I should ask a medical sister to hire me. I could work as a doctor. I am learning well. I was talking to my mother <...> I wish to be a firewoman* [4M4].

Having generalised the data obtained during interviews of students attending the third and fourth schools we can state that students of senior forms, regarding their abilities, purposefully consider their perspectives of further education, usually analyse them together with their family members. Students share examples of activities on vocational orientation being organised in school. Part of students do not consider any possibilities for further education but rather think of job search. Ideas of some of the students are little substantiated and realistic.

Conclusions

Generalisation of the results of both quantitative and qualitative research allows drawing the following **conclusions**:

- The pedagogues suppose they help school students and parents decide concerning future perspectives, support student's motivation for learning, develop the competences required for lifelong learning; they even state that they design individual curricula for the pupils (even though this is not the established common practice in Lithuanian schools).
- In comparison with others, pedagogues of special schools more tend to emphasise their role in pre-vocational training. Nevertheless, almost all participants of the education process agree on this question and express the opinion that pre-vocational training, possibilities to learn a profession, to gain certain work skills are insufficient.
- In general, parents are not aware of what perspectives are available for their children after graduation from the institution of special purpose education, the limited opportunities to gain the skills required for a specific occupation, especially without travelling long distances from home.
- Students are thinking of their life perspectives after graduation from school, discuss them with family members; however, they lack support of pedagogues in order to adequately assess their abilities, possibilities to choose a profession.
- School heads tend to emphasise endeavours of pedagogues in students' pre-vocational preparation and while training for a profession; they underline the cases of successful employment; however, usually the biggest part of responsibility for child's transition from the comprehensive education system to preparation for a profession and later integration in the labour market are attributed to the family.

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