

SUMMARY

Education is commonly believed to be an indicator of development success in modern societies. It conditions not only economic, but also social progress, as its quality and level have an impact on reducing social tensions, integration of migrants, strengthening the vertical professional mobility. Contemporary societies dedicate a bigger and bigger part of owned funds on financing education. It is an effort taken both by the private clients (consumers of educational services) and the public sector, who fulfils overarching social objectives with education. Paradoxically, the increase of financial funds is not followed with attempts to measure and assess effectiveness of such financial efforts. The logic of microeconomy prevails, perceiving education in terms of labour market access, and the decision-makers' attention overlooks important external effects of macroeconomic character, such as preparation of educated people to play social functions or active citizenship. The quality of educational services in practice is measured in terms of its technical quality, related to what a pupil receives (knowledge, upbringing, skills), and the functional quality is ignored – related to how a pupil receives all such things. But even the technical quality is usually limited to the level of acquired knowledge.

This dissertation fills a gap in this scope. Its objective is to bring order to notions related to the quality of educational services and proposes to complete the public selection criteria with quality elements that have been disregarded until now. It is of paramount importance not only because of the scale of educational expenses, but also with regards to the existing paradox. The public sector commissions public services without making full assessment of the received product. It is an important limitation in terms of correctness of public selection. Lack of knowledge of the criteria applied to assess educational services by their consumers results in an inability to aggregate individual preferences into collective preferences in the process of public selection. This may lead to suboptimum allocation of public funds. Another result will be a wide gap between private and public decisions, pushing a number of pupils and their families outside the public education sector. This in turn will stand in conflict with the principle of social fairness. It will also strengthen the belief that public education functions mainly for the benefit of its employees, and not the pupils. A flaw in the public sphere will appear, the so-called *governance failure*.

This study has been prepared on the basis of a series of research questions, looking for answers to the following:

- what specific factors (fee, class size, distance from home to school) influence the choice of an educational service provided by a specific entity (public and non-public sector);
- are educational services offered by the public sector more competitive (i.e. provided at a higher level, higher quality) from those offered by the non-public sector;
- what criteria are applied by the public administration when commissioning educational services.

In order to achieve the dissertation's goals the following main hypotheses (no. 1 and 2) and a working supporting hypothesis (no. 3) were verified:

Main hypothesis (v1): In the process of public selection local authorities do not take into account parents' and pupils' preferences regarding the quality of educational services.

Main hypothesis (v2): When financing educational services within the public selection processes, the local authorities underestimate quality criteria that determine the choice of a school by pupils and parents.

Supporting hypothesis: A school's character (public or non-public) has an impact on the quality of educational services. Confirming this hypothesis would mean that paying attention to this fact in the process of public selection would raise effectiveness of public funds appointed to this end in a simple way.

The dissertation's structure and contents have been adjusted to the assumed goals and verification of the theses and the supporting thesis. The paper consists of four chapters.

In the first chapter the contents value and the essence of public services, where education belongs, have been analyzed. Also, the role of the public sector in providing them was presented.

In the second chapter the education system has been presented and the financing sources and scale in Poland have been shown, as well as methods and ways of assessing the quality of educational services. The research was conducted on the basis of secondary materials. It focuses on the third research question. In this chapter, the second main hypothesis was verified.

The third chapter is dedicated to the non-government sector. The main emphasis was put on its role in providing educational services and its capacity to secure a higher level of public services to the public sector entities. The chapter has prepared basis for verifying the supporting hypothesis.

Chapter four presents results of empirical research of the quality of educational services provided by secondary schools in the Pomeranian Province. The research was designed on the basis of the first three research questions. It allowed to identify parents' and pupils' preferences regarding the quality of educational services in Pomeranian Province at the level of secondary education. Also, the first main hypothesis and the supporting hypothesis were verified. At the end, main conclusions resulting from research done referring mainly to the methodological and practical goals have been summed up, and a simple spatial algorithm of contracting educational services by the provincial authority has been proposed.

Literature research, including books and articles in Polish and English on the subject provided a multi-dimensional view of research issue. In phase on a wide literature research on the topic has been carried out. The issue of the public section and services was studied. The topic of the education system and present methods of assessing the quality of educational services have been analysed. The place of non-governmental organizations in the system of social economy entities has been determined and the contribution of this sector in the process of providing educational services has been shown. In order to achieve assumed research goals and to verify hypotheses research had to be done, to fully investigate the issue of the functional quality of educational services among public and non-public high schools in the Pomeranian Province.

Analyses carried out proved the assumed research hypotheses. Main hypothesis 2 was confirmed, which assumed that local authorities, when financing educational services in the public selection processes under-estimate quality criteria that determine the choice of a school by pupils and parents.

In Chapter 2 it has been proved that financing services by local authorities is done using technical algorithms that do not take into account the quality of educational services. The collected research material shows that local authorities use the results regarding students performance at most, yet ignore the functional quality aspects.

The main hypothesis no. 1 has been confirmed. It assumed that in the processes of public selection local authorities do not take into account the parents' and pupils' preferences regarding the quality of educational services. The research conducted by the author shows what criteria parents and pupils apply when choosing a secondary school. None of those criteria play a role when contracting services within the above-mentioned algorithms. The local authorities do not apply information coming from consumers (parents, pupils), as they do not have access to research on functional quality of educational establishments. Also, local authorities do not conduct research on their own and do not commission such

research, as they are not obliged to do so by the law.

Also, hypothesis no. 3 has been confirmed, i.e. the assumption that a school's character (public, non-public) has an impact on the quality of educational services. This can be seen mainly in the results of author's own research indicating that there is an advantage of non-public schools over public schools in terms of assessment of functional quality components as seen by pupils. Differences in favour of non-public schools regarded a series of aspects. Some of them can be seen as more technical, such as relations with the library staff, others have a fundamental meaning for the educational process, e.g. respect to other pupils, discipline, security at school or availability of additional foreign language classes. It must be also underlined that non-public schools may dedicate higher funds for their educational activity, as they receive educational subsidies just as national entities, but obtain additional funds from fees, donations, etc. Thanks to such use of financial means non-public entities may extend their educational activity, contribute to achieving better examination results and raising the quality of offered educational services.

Many issues remain open, including the difficulty of the public selection on the basis of opinions of people who, by their choices, confirm their preferences in favour of a specific type of school. It has been determined, though, that pupils attending a specific type of school perceive its functional quality differently. Also, it has been defined which aspects are of significant importance for being satisfied with one's selection of school. Thus, the general conclusion is that local authorities should include this type of segmentation of the educational services market and guarantee access to such services to clients with different preferences. Local authorities should offer access to public funds to non-governmental organizations that what to open non-public schools; should there be no interest – stimulate such efforts within the public selection processes at the level of counties.

The second general conclusion regards the need to continue research undertaken in this dissertation.

The research procedure has exposed the following needs in this aspect:

- conducting further research focusing on the assessment of educational services, not only at the level of secondary schools, but also of elementary education;
- developing a tool assessing quality of a specific educational establishment (i.e. its functional quality), just as the abovementioned existing websites assess knowledge (i.e. technical quality);
- keeping regular research of the quality of educational services at the level of elementary and secondary schools, which would a) contribute to parents' greater knowledge and control, and

on the other hand would force local authorities to increase evaluation in the area of quality and expense efficiency; b) strengthen subjective treatment of pupils by school staff; c) draw attention of decision-makers to the importance of functional quality;

- the research has shown what percentage of pupils thinks of continuing education at the university level (92% public schools, 97% non-public schools). This may be of importance to the labour market and higher education schools. Knowing in advance the intentions of secondary school pupils would allow higher education schools to prepare and open specific fields of studies adjusted to the needs of high school graduates.

Putting the above recommendations to life would make a change in perceiving educational establishments, allowing to choose a school not only on the basis of the pupils' knowledge (technical quality), but also using the criteria regarding the methods of passing such knowledge to pupils (functional quality). Today's choice is made mainly on the basis of one pillar, which is frequently encumbered with flaws of incorrect or intentionally distorted or uncomplete information (rankings built on incomplete or selective data).

The final conclusion is a general appeal resulting from the research done. Verbal declarations that a school teaches and educates are not confirmed in the public selection procedures, which prefer the functions of teaching over the function of educating, yet it is difficult to determine to what extent it is public authorities' intentional activity. It seems that under market pressure private logic (investing in human capital) prevails over public logic (investment in social and relational capital).

