

Educational Route of Students of Top-Rated Schools Adapted from Family E-Mail Interview

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ABSTRACT

The article provides family implementations of educational routes for children studying in high-rated Russian schools. The difficulties and advantages of the educational path are analyzed in detail. The sociological study used e-mail interviews of parents of students of top-rated schools. Answers to open questions are interviewed using well-known computer programs. The result of the analysis is a classification of the interests of old parents.

Most attention is paid to questions of admission to school and the learning process. Families of students believe that the complexity of a top-rated school education is the large volumes of academic work, distant schools, annual exams, expenses for tutors and other family investments, in some cases the lack of specialized education. The main advantage of training, according to the family, is educational and social capital. The findings of the study indicate the need to support top-rated schools and families of children studying, as well as digital methods for collecting and analyzing sociological information.

Keywords: *sociology of family, sociology of education, educational route, top-rated school, e-mail parents interviewing, family investment in education, educational capital*

1. INTRODUCTION. TOP-RATED SCHOOLS IN RUSSIA

The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation has repeatedly spoken about the role of education in the innovative development of the country. Education is not so much the result of innovations as its necessary condition, personal and social resource. Modern students, according to the developers of educational programs, should have a knack for innovative behavior, the required skills, responsibility and initiative. The mechanisms of the stated attitudes relate mainly to higher education, but in recent years there has been a turn to preschool and school education. Educational capital builds up particularly rapidly in childhood and adolescence. We consider a top-rated school education to be one of the effective factors for creating a high-quality educational asset.

Top-rated schools mean here educational institutions included in the top "500 best schools of Russia"[1]. Strong educational institutions:

- have a profile, preferably physical and mathematical;
- provide students with the best exam rates in grades 9 and 11;
- have a large number of winners of intellectual olympiads;
- learn for free (with payment of a number of extra subjects in the program);

- select students upon admission to secondary school;
- prestigious and attractive in the eyes of the parent community.

Family assistance is necessary to enter and successfully study at a top-rated school. After elementary school, children do not know which gymnasium to go to, and parents make decision. After the seventh grade, children better understand what they are interested in, but the help of the father and mother is still important. Parents provide quality preparation for entering a school. To a greater extent this is possible for wealthy families, where the mother has a higher education, and the father is engaged in highly qualified work [2].

The purpose of the sociological research presented in the article is to study the educational route of the child who was chosen to study in a top-rated school. There are many obstacles on this path that must be overcome by personal and family efforts. It is important to discover the problems associated with studying in strong schools and analyze the quality of educational capital received. The project's methodological objective is to evaluate the relevance of interviews with parents by e-mail. The rapidly developing last decade, digital sociology, in turn, will receive an arsenal of research based on digital technologies for the collection and analysis of information [3].

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY. E-MAIL INTERVIEWING OF PARENTS

The main method of collecting information in the project was the interviewing of parents of children studying in past and at present in top-rated schools. The sample included schools from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and Chelyabinsk. There are no rural schools in the sample, since a different rating was developed for them, taking into account the characteristics of studying in classes with a small number of students. The main characteristic of interviewing is the repeated use of the same informants. We met some parents in 2005-2006, when we collected empirical materials about the development of a preschool educational environment by Russian families [4]. Subsequently, it turned out that the children of several informants entered the gymnasium from the rating of "500 best schools of Russia", and we asked parents to give a second interview.

1.1. Search for informants

At present, 50 stories of children's education in top-rated schools have been selected for analysis. Parents told about each case in several interviews (from two to six times). The search for respondents was carried out using the snowball method, that is, they managed to take advantage of the social ties of families. There is a parent community, ready to give information about top-rated school education to new families seeking to provide children with a quality education. The educational route in top-rated schools is one of the most ambitious and expensive educational scenarios, so that there is a group solidarity between the families of students. Parents support each other with tips, stories about school entrance, teachers, lessons, choice of universities. Parental advice can be found at educational sites and online family forums available on the network. The informants found in the study at the stage of studying preschool education were the first who introduced sociologists to other parents. We note that families had a great interest in research and spoke with pleasure about the stories of children's education in top-rated schools. Informants with the same pleasure told about the further choice of the educational route by graduates of gymnasiums and the benefits of a strong education. The disadvantages and problems of the completed educational path were also discussed.

So the biographical method has effectively fulfilled one of the humanistic tasks of sociology, namely, it gave informants the possibility of biological reflection [5]. It is important for people to periodically conceptualize their life experience and transfer it to the baggage of general knowledge, including sociological.

1.2. Type of informants: individual and collective

The interviews were attended by mothers, fathers, grandparents of schoolchildren. We conducted 38 interviews with an "individual" respondent, that is, with one representative of the family. In 12 interviews, the informant was "collective", that is, different family members gave answers to the interviewer's questions. For example, in case when the awareness on a specific issue of a father or grandmother was higher than the mother's. In such cases, the main informant called for a more competent relative to participate in the interview. We are talking about the first communication with informants in the form of an oral interview via Skype or by phone. Clarifying questions as agreed with informants were asked by e-mail. As a result, we conducted several more full-fledged interviews and received long texts with written answers to the sociologist's questions by e-mail.

1.3. E-mail interview: methodological developments of B.Z. Doctorov

The methodological analysis of the e-mail interview is carried out by Russian sociologist Boris Zusmanovich Doctorov. The researcher collected 150 expert interviews with colleagues via e-mail. The informants belonged to several generations of national sociologists. They talked about their education, professional and life paths, stories of "entry" into sociological science. The topics of our life and professional route, as well as the high status of the respondent who has specialized knowledge about the object of study assimilate Doctorov to the texts of our interview project. Such respondents can be recognized as co-authors of scientific work.

Doctorov noted the features of the interview by e-mail: easy access to informants, a large amount of information received, well-thought-out answers, active participation in the study by informants, the interest of informants in the results of a sociological project [6].

As you can see, the advantage of the method is the availability of informants, but the remote approach alone does not provide communication with the right person. B.Z. Doctorov was well acquainted with the respondents, and therefore managed to agree on an interview. Access to informants was provided by the social resource of a famous sociologist. Email supported the study technically. Asking respondents for help, we also used our own acquaintances and the social connections of the respondents.

Agreeing with B.Z. Doctorov, we consider the main advantage of an e-mail interview to receive well-reflexed answers from informants. With this method of collecting information, the spontaneity of live communication is lost, but informants have the opportunity to think about the meaning of the interview questions and not limit themselves to the response time: "Having received a certain portion of questions, the respondent can calmly, in

his usual environment, think, remember, turn to documents or diary records, which many have been keeping for decades, clarify something and only then answer”[7]. In our case, the parents of students of top-rated schools spent on answers from two hours to several days.

The interview guide was compiled on the basis of the first oral conversations with informants. Oral interviews tended to narratives, that is, free narration with a minimal list of questions [8]. During the conversations, the most interesting topics for families were identified. Found thematic motifs formed the basis of the list of questions of the e-mail interview. The survey plan is constantly updated, retaining several key content blocks. The questions about the child's preschool education, the choice of primary school, the motives for choosing a top-rated school, the entry of children to a gymnasium or lyceum from the top “500 best schools of Russia”, the advantages and difficulties of teaching a child in top-rated schools, family investments in children's education, educational results obtained choosing an educational and professional career after graduation are necessarily asked.

1.4. A digital approach to the analysis of the answers of informants

B.Z. Doctorov published interviews with colleagues received by e-mail in the magazines Telescope, Sociological Journal and Monitoring of Public Opinion. The texts almost were not needed to be edited, since the informants performed the work on editing the answers independently. In our project, we have no possibility to publish the interviews received. The processing of the informants' answers was carried out using the Discant computer program (Dialogue System for the Analysis and

Classification of Texts). The program was developed by the Russian scientists G.I. Saganenko and E.A. Kanevskii [9]. The system supports quality sociological studies and allows you to work with large arrays of unstructured texts. In particular, work with answers to open-ended interview questions by e-mail. The written form of the answers greatly helped the analysis of stories about the educational path of children studying in top-rated schools.

Within the framework of this empirical project, we created a database and classified the statements of informants. Some of the most frequent topics that appealed to respondents were identified. According to the reflection of informants on these topics, one can judge upon the educational route of students in top-rated schools. The reliability of the obtained sociological information is achieved due to the uniqueness of the primary data, reasonableness and completeness of answers.

3. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY. A VARIETY OF THEMATIC KEYNOTES IN FAMILY E-MAIL INTERVIEWS

During the interview about the educational route of students of top-rated schools, the main subjects were revealed, which parents prefer to talk about. The greatest attention of informants was focused on the difficulties of training in a strong educational institution. Other blocks of answers related to the benefits of top-rated school education, family investments in children's education, parental plans for the educational and professional future of children. After classifying the statements, the following list of the topics most frequently occurred in the interview was obtained:

Table 1 Main interview topics about teaching children in top-rated schools

No	Groups	Typical judgments (elements)	Number of judgments	Attention span (%)
1	Admission to school	the child entered without preparation, preparing for admission with a tutor, visiting circles and excursions, home preparation for entering the school, repeated attempts to enter the school	114	21
2	Hard to study	a large amount of study load, good health is required, annual translation exams, low grades, territorial remoteness of the school, shortened summer holidays, the need for tutors, the refusal of extracurricular activities, no specialization	97	18
3	Advantages of study	high qualification of teachers, advanced teaching technologies, specialization of study, individual approach, lack of extra subjects, foreign language teaching, mathematical training, elective courses, participation in intellectual olympiads, extracurricular activities, classmates, orientation towards higher education	87	16
4	Family investment in education of children	search and payment of tutors, payment of additional lessons at school, payment of trips abroad, payment of language and other educational camps, assistance in preparing lessons, assistance in preparing for exams, organization of extracurricular studies, development and implementation of an educational route after school	76	14
5	Further educational route	choice of college, choice of university, postgraduate studies, education abroad, paid and free tuition	65	12
6	Further professional route	choice of profession, professional-oriented tests, the child's existing work experience, family professional trajectories	54	10
7	School change	transfer to another top-rated school, transfer to a regular school	49	9
	TOTAL:		542	100

When developing a classification of parents' answers, we relied on the methodology of qualitatively-quantitative measurement of youth values proposed by the Russian sociologist A.E. Geger [10]. In the course of the analysis of the texts, we received seven groups of statements. The rating of semantic blocks was built depending on the frequency of mentioning the topic in the interview texts. One of the problems of the analysis was that the same statements applied to different groups. For example, stories about the costs for tutors were included in three groups - "Family Investments" and sections on the difficulties of studying in top-rated schools. Another methodological difficulty in analyzing texts was the diversity of opinions about top-rated schools. In particular, informants positively evaluated the profile of education and at the same time talked about its lack. The case touched schools of various types - specialized or with emphasis on the study of all subjects at a high level.

4. THE DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS. DIFFICULTIES AND BENEFITS OF STUDYING AT A TOP-RATED SCHOOL

4.1. Answer Groups 1-2 and 7

In the story about the educational path of the child in a top-rated school, informants paid the most attention to admission to the educational institution and the problems of passing the chosen route. 19 children of 50 were able to pass the entrance test to the gymnasium or lyceum without resort to the help of tutors. In all cases, preparation for admission was complex and implied the active participation of parents in the education of the child. In addition to primary classes, children who entered top-rated educational institutions attended classes, went on excursions, and were engaged in general cultural training. Children with mathematical abilities had a great advantage at admission.

Not everyone succeeds in going to school after the fourth grade on the first try. After grades 5-10 it is necessary to take subjects whose teaching level is higher than in the regular school curriculum. Or take subjects that are not in the program, for example, Latin. Tutors are needed. It becomes more difficult to enter a top-rated school every year due to a lag in the program, so in high school, an exchange of students from top-rated schools begins. These stories are presented in the seventh group of answers. It is interesting to note that even children who did not cope with difficult education do not seek to return to a regular school, but are looking for another highly rated educational institution.

Parents named the main problems that children face while completing the educational path in a top-rated school. As a rule, such schools are far from home; children spend up to three hours of travel time a day. Not all families can afford to move closer to school. The program in strong gymnasiums is advanced for all subjects, so there is no

way to focus on interesting for the student subjects. Specialization appears in grades 8-11, and not in all schools. A large studying load impedes sports activities, recreation, declines health, prevents visiting to interest clubs and even reading books.

The annual exams in May and June prepare students for the final exams in grades 9 and 11, but are very stressful and shorten their summer holidays. Almost all of the children in the sample retake exams, what severely affects peace of mind and summer vacation. The family catches the child's feelings and turns to the help of tutors. Among the parents we interviewed, 11 people said that their children cope with the program completely independently. In 39 families of informants, children were supported by tutors in 1-4 subjects. For the unified state exam in the 11th grade all the graduates who were in the sample prepared with tutors.

4.2. Answer Group 3: about the benefits of learning

The second place in the list of thematic keynotes of the interview was taken by the advantages of studying in top-rated schools. It should be noted that the informants did not regret the educational route chosen for children, despite the difficulties of studying. Parents highly appreciate the qualifications of teachers, excellent mathematical and language training in strong schools. In high-ranking behaviors, an individual approach to students is practiced, in most schools there is a specialized education, especially in high school. A system of additional classes for the choice of students is developed, interesting events are held.

In particular, a lot of time is put into theatrical productions in order to support the creative activities of schoolchildren. According to informants, the advantages of top-rated education are free access to intellectual olympiads and acquisition of social relations. Useful social capital is formed through communication with classmates, their families, as well as with teachers.

4.3. Answer Group 4: family investments

Informants gave information on the expenses, time and effort to support the educational route of children. Admission to a top-rated school in most cases requires training with a tutor. Later, in high school, tutoring services are needed to improve academic performance in several subjects, as well as to successfully pass a unified state exam and enter a university. Moreover, additional lessons at school, summer educational camps are paid. Parents spend their own time teaching a child in primary and secondary school.

4.4. Answer Groups 5-6

In these thematic blocks, parents talked about developing an educational and professional route for children after graduating from a top-rated school. We revealed the family orientation to receive high-quality higher education, including admission to foreign universities. Parents who want children to inherit family careers have sought to provide children with early professional experience. 11 informants spoke about a scientific career for children. The rest considered humanitarian specialties with a predominant choice of linguistics, as well as technical and medical professions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed thematic keynotes relevant to students of top-rated schools and their families when they talked

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