

# Defining the Problem of Choosing Extracurricular Activities in Russia

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**Abstract.** The article provides an overview of international studies on parental involvement in extracurricular activities, which identify the major factors affecting the choice of such activities: family income, cultural capital, parental education and habitus, local educational in-

frastructure, and the possibility of making informed choices. The empirical basis of the research was provided by the findings from semi-structured interviews with parents of Moscow preschool and school-aged children involved in extracurricular activities conducted in spring 2017. The study also makes use of the quantitative data obtained by the 2017 Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations. We analyze the frequency of using particular sources of information in choosing extracurricular classes, the criteria of parental choices and expectations, and the types of choice scenarios. The findings call into doubt the feasibility and potential benefits of a number of extracurricular activity initiatives envisaged by the national policy.

**Keywords:** extracurricular activities of children, parental involvement, choice of extracurricular activities, educational goals, national policy in extracurricular activities.

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Extracurricular activities (ECA) of children have been a focus of experts and the public at large over the recent years. Promotion of extracurricular activities is a pivotal item on the national education policy agenda<sup>1</sup>.

On the one hand, families associate extracurricular activities with the opportunity to satisfy the educational needs for which a rather lim-

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 792-r of May 15, 2013 On Approving the State Program "Education Development", 2013–2020.

ited set of options is offered by schools. At the same time, extracurricular activities provide ample opportunities to prepare children for adult life in the new phase of society's technological and socioeconomic development, which implies encouraging 21st-century skills in children, such as critical and creative thinking, sociability and teamwork skills<sup>2</sup>. The government's efforts are focused on increasing children's participation<sup>3</sup> in extracurricular activities by expanding the array of up-to-date learning programs, in particular by creating the Quantorium network of technology parks for children (53 parks in 37 regions)<sup>4</sup> and a network of centers for youth innovation creativity (325 centers in more than 40 regions)<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, extracurricular activities and edutainment become more and more attractive to businesses. According to the Federal Statistical Monitoring, the number of private sector companies offering extracurricular activities increased by almost 78 percent between 2015 and 2017 (from 816<sup>6</sup> to 1,454<sup>7</sup>). Traditionally available courses in foreign languages and child and youth development centers (classes in dance, music, etc.) are neighbored by classes in robotics, programming and sports. A number of Russian cities have seen the spread of such new forms of extracurricular participation as "profession cities" and interactive science museums [Kosaretskiy, Kudryavtseva, Fiofanova 2018]. Dozens of cities have been covered by franchised chains, the most prominent examples being Junior, Chempionika (sports), Liga Robotov ("League of Robots"), ROBBO CLUB (robotics), Amakids, IQ007 (intellectual development), and others<sup>8</sup>. Chempionika and Junior were ranked among the Forbes Top 30 Russian Franchises with the Highest ROI in 2018<sup>9</sup> and the BEBOSS Top 100 Franchises of 2018. The latter ranking also includes Unium, Amakids and Russian Ballet (ballet classes for kids)<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, consumers now have access to a wide variety of extracurricular options, both in terms of form and content. Availability

<sup>2</sup> Executive Order of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1726-r of September 4, 2014 on approving the Conception of Promoting Extracurricular Activities of Children.

<sup>3</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 599 of May 7, 2012 On Measures to Implement the National Policy in Education and Science.

<sup>4</sup> Passport of the national priority project Affordable Extracurricular Activities for Children was approved on November 30, 2016 at a meeting of the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and Priority Projects.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Target Program for Education Development, 2016–2020.

<sup>6</sup> Federal Statistical Monitoring. Extracurricular Activities (form 1-DOP), 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Statistical Monitoring. Extracurricular Activities (form 1-DOP), 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Mordasov M. (2018) Obrazovatel'nye franshizy: energiya i vzryvnoy rost [Educational Franchises: Energy and Explosive Growth]. *EDexpert*, no 4.

<sup>9</sup> The Top 30 Russian Franchises with the Highest ROI. <http://www.forbes.ru/rating/363769-reyting-franshiz-2018>

<sup>10</sup> Ranking of Franchises in Education and Learning. <https://www.beboss.ru/rating>

of choice is regarded by the government as a pivotal characteristic of extracurricular participation and as a key prerequisite for improving the quality and accessibility of extracurricular activities [Loginova 2015]. Regional governments have introduced personalized learning grants for extracurricular activities, allowing families to choose classes and schools of interest and attend them using student-specific government-funded scholarships [Abankina, Slavin 2016]<sup>11</sup>. Aggregator platforms containing information on ECA programs and providers are created to make choices more informed.

An increased range of opportunities makes it difficult for families and children to choose from the extracurricular activities available in the market. Research interest becomes focused on family behavior in this situation, i. e. on how families navigate the sophisticated map of offers and what they care about when making their decisions. At the same time, educational, cultural and sports authorities as well as private educational institutions are concerned about solving the rather practical issue of attracting customers and helping families choose classes and clubs in the ever more saturated and competitive ECA market.

The choice of ECA programs in Russia remains understudied. A number of research papers devoted to extracurricular participation have touched upon such specific aspects as the relationship between activity participation and academic achievement or barriers restricting families' access to extracurricular activities [Ivanyushina, Aleksandrov 2014; Sobkin, Kalashnikova 2014; Vakhshayn, Stepantsov 2012]. International research in this field is much ampler and based on solid methodologies, but differences in the systems of informal education (extracurricular activities) and social stratification make it impossible to translate the specific outcomes obtained by foreign researchers directly to the Russian context.

This article aims at describing the process of choosing extracurricular activities by Russian families and identifying the main problems in this domain. An overview of Russian and international studies serves as the basis for systematizing the possible ways of explaining the choice of classes, clubs and other extracurricular activities by parents and children. An empirical survey based on interviews with parents of children involved in extracurricular activities and the 2017 Monitoring of the Education System allowed for a classification of choice scenarios. The findings are used to develop recommendations to adjust the national policy in extracurricular activities.

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<sup>11</sup> Personalized learning scholarships assign a specific amount of funds to a specific child, which is transferred to the selected educational institution (public or private) providing extracurricular activities. The existing model only allows allocating funds to educational institutions under "pre-choice" governmental (municipal) contracts, i. e. the "money follows the student" policy is in place.

**International  
Research on  
Choosing Extracurricular Activities for  
Children**

Researchers around the world usually approach the choice of extracurricular activities from the perspective of inequality. Numerous studies stress the effects of socioeconomic characteristics on the structure of educational preferences. Analysis of relevant literature allows for distinguishing conventionally between two lines of research differing in their rationales and feasibility but complementing each other rather than being in conflict.

The first line of research is focused on the socioeconomic characteristics, studying the differences in ECA choice and the structure of extracurricular participation in the context of families' socioeconomic backgrounds. It has been shown, for instance, that low-income families rely more on school-based options, while middle- and high-income parents are involved more in out-of-school activities, their choice being unaffected by the geographical proximity of ECA institutions [Bennett, Lutz, Jayaram 2012].

Some researchers zero in on the social context in which families make their choices and develop educational strategies. Social context is broader than socioeconomic status as a concept, encompassing neighborhood and community effects as well [Luster, Okagoti 2009]. Living in a safe neighborhood and having an abundance of ECA institutions in the neighborhood are the drivers of higher extracurricular participation rates. Proximity of ECA institutions to home is the reference point in parental decisions on sending their children to extracurricular activities. Parents in safer neighborhoods allow their children to spend more time outdoors and try to involve them in extracurricular activities. Such parents consider various participation options, express interest in the development prospects offered by different institutions, and use the options available [Bennett, Lutz, Jayaram 2012]. Parents living in unsafe neighborhoods stick to the "preventive" policy on their children's education. Being concerned about safety primarily, they normally try to reduce the time that their children spend outside of home and school or even avoid engaging their children in such activities [Furstenberg 1999].

In addition to financial standing and social and community contexts, researchers pay attention to parental education as well. Children of better-educated parents tend to be involved more in extracurricular activities (mother's education being a more significant factor in terms of child development) [Bartko, Eccles 2003; Fredricks, Eccles 2006; Lareau, Weininger 2008; Randall, Bohnert 2009].

The choice of extracurricular activities is affected by both subjective and objective factors [Bennett, Lutz, Jayaram 2012]. The subjective ones include parents' initial perceptions of the opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities and the types of such education. As a rule, lower-income families have less access to information and communication channels and less developed information skills. In particular, a study of knowledge about college requirements among families from low socioeconomic backgrounds revealed that

such families have inadequate information on the size of tuition and may decide to reject college education because they overestimate the size of tuition. The authors conclude that more effective measures are required to bring adequate information about college tuition to families of low socioeconomic backgrounds [Grodsky, Jones 2007]. Counseling of parents whose children are eligible for government-funded college education revealed the lack of information skills among certain categories of parents: counseling assistance was necessary to make potential consumers seek information on government funding [Bettinger et al. 2012].

Lower-income parents tend to rely less on third-party ECA institutions and follow either the path of avoidance, by refusing to seek any opportunity to involve their children in formal or informal education, or that of least resistance, by making random choices [Chin, Phillips 2004].

The objective factors of choice include availability of social connections, financial resources and having the time to enrich children's lives with extracurricular activities.

The second line of international research on extracurricular activities is focused on the cultural and value characteristics of choice, exploring the mechanisms of inequality reproduction. Emphasis is laid on cultural capital, cultural orientations, family values and parenting practices as the fundamental factors of the strategies for choosing extracurricular activities [Furstenberg 1999; Lareau, Weininger 2003; 2008; Lareau, Weininger, Conley 2015]. Financial standing receives a lot of attention too, but it is not considered the only factor affecting the decision-making process. Differences between lower- and higher-income parents are analyzed first of all in the context of values, cultural patterns and standards that they adhere to.

Among the cultural and psychological factors affecting the choice of ECA programs, it is parent-child relationships and parental influence on children's choices that are of specific interest to researchers. Degree of freedom and parental involvement affect the choice of the type, form and provider of extracurricular activities. For example, parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to let their children decide for themselves which extracurricular activities to engage in and less likely to stress the importance of attending extracurricular classes [Lareau 2002]. Conversely, parents of higher socioeconomic statuses seek to make education-related decisions for their children and attach more importance to the types of extracurricular activities. Middle-class parents see extracurricular participation as a way to make their child's development customized, or personalized [Bennett, Lutz, Jayaram 2012]. They try different things in order to choose the one that their children will be passionate about, and activities are often entertaining rather than educational. As we can see, attitudes toward extracurricular activities differ depending on parents' cultural capital, cultural orientations and social class [Lareau, Weininger, Conley 2015].

To summarize, international findings reveal a few major factors affecting the choice of extracurricular activities by parents: family income, cultural capital, parental education, neighborhood quality, local educational infrastructure, and possibility of making informed choices.

### **Research on Choosing Extracur- ricular Activities in Russia**

No large-scale studies have been dedicated to ECA choice so far. Meanwhile, behavioral patterns of parents and children in choosing extracurricular activities are of interest not only to market participants, i. e. various educational institutions, but also to the researchers and practitioners analyzing changes in the system of extracurricular activities and working to improve it. The existing literature provides no answer to the question of how exactly parents and children get involved in ECAs, or what factors they rely on to make decisions, or whether they remain satisfied with the choices made. Over recent years, meaningful inferences have been made in a number of studies concerning the relationship between parents' socioeconomic background, parental education and participation of children in extracurricular activities [Sobkin, Kalashnikova 2014; Aleksandrov, Ivanyushina 2014; Kosaretskiy, Kupriyanov, Filippova 2016]. It is postulated that the differences revealed cannot be explained by geographical and financial barriers alone but may be related to low levels of parental involvement in learning, low awareness of the opportunities available, and unwillingness to use them [Vakhshtayn, Stepantsov 2014; Kosaretskiy, Kupriyanov, Filippova 2016].

In Russia, the problem of choice has been studied in the contexts of preschool, school and professional education. The main criteria for choosing a public (municipal) kindergarten include location, teacher competence, "good care", reputation, and recommendations from friends and relatives [Abankina, Filatova, Mikhaylova (Kozmina) 2017:19]. Recent years have seen teacher competence becoming a more important criterion and convenient location losing its significance. Parents continue to pay attention to recommendations and take into account the school's prestige and social composition [Mertsalova 2015a:4]. Socioeconomic characteristics play a crucial role in choosing a higher education institution. "Financial standing is a significant factor determining academic achievement (candidate's performance in the USE<sup>12</sup> terms), college choice and preparation strategies" [Prakhov, Yudkevich 2012:145]. Therefore, when choosing educational institutions of various levels and types, the decision-making process is affected by location, teacher competence and socioeconomic characteristics of the family.

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<sup>12</sup> Unified State Examination

## **Empirical Basis of Research**

The study is based on the results of a series of semi-structured interviews with parents conducted in spring 2017. The interviews involved parents whose preschool or school-aged children were involved in extracurricular activities. The sample was drawn from middle- and high-income families living in Moscow. The respondents were invited to interviews in crowded places, such as shopping malls. Before being interviewed, they were asked to complete screening questionnaires which allowed for evaluating the compliance of potential respondents to the sampling criteria (based on the information submitted by the respondents). The sample consisted of parents aged from 29 to 55, of whom three were males. A total of 30 interviews were conducted, five for each segment defined by three student cohorts (preschoolers, students of grades 1–6, and students of grades 7–11) and two household monthly income per person categories (<RUR60,000 and ≥RUR60,000).

Having obtained the information on family characteristics and the structure of time devoted to extracurricular activities, the interviewer asked respondents to recall and describe chronologically the process of choosing a specific extracurricular activity and ECA institution. Using their memories, the respondents provided retrospective descriptions of their choices and reconstructed their motivations. In cases where it was hard for respondents to recall the details, the interviewer asked clarifying questions on the sources of information they had used and the specific criteria of choice they might have taken into account. Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. Thematic coding (see, for example, [Flick 2014]) was applied to analyze the interview transcripts. The essential limitations of the data collected are those of the geographic scope (all the respondents live in Moscow) and the absence of low-income parents in the sample.

The quantitative data from the 2017 Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO) was also used to discuss the choice scenarios discovered in interviews. The MEMO, conducted by the Higher School of Economics in cooperation with Yuri Levada Analytical Center since 2002, is designed to systematically gather information on the economic behavior of education market participants. It involves a survey of parents whose children are involved in extracurricular activities, asking about their experience of making choices and uncovering the main criteria of choice and the problems that parents encounter when searching for extracurricular activities, classes or clubs for their children. In 2017, the survey involved 1,669 parents representing families where at least one child attends an ECA institution (whether public or private). The MEMO data does not allow for assessing qualitatively the popularity of the choice scenarios and ECA types reported, but it provides an opportunity to comment on them and complement the interpretations.



**Information on  
Extracurricular  
Activities: Ade-  
quate and  
Accessible**

Chronologically, one of the first steps in choosing an extracurricular activity or an ECA institution is to find out about classes. Parents of Moscow school students report using mostly the following channels of information: school teachers, friends with kids, teachers in ECA classes that the child already attends, websites of ECA institutions, websites providing reviews about ECA providers (including social media), and the Moscow portal of municipal services. Parents of preschool students mention the same sources of information, school teachers being replaced by kindergarten teachers and teachers of extracurricular activities the child is already involved in.

The MEMO findings allow for ranking the popularity of different sources of information in choosing ECA institutions. Informal channels have prevailed over formal ones in the last four years. Over half of the respondents consistently pay more attention to recommendations of their friends and acquaintances whose children attend ECA institutions, voting this factor as the most important one. Only one third of the respondents use the information directly provided by ECA teachers, presented on open days or available on official websites.

The information obtained from interactions with school/ECA teachers and other parents is referred to as the “information that found us itself”, while obtaining knowledge from other sources implies active searching. This difference in perceiving information from different sources allows for the assumption that channels of information on extracurricular activities are unequal in their outreach: of all the knowledge that is potentially available to families, that which is communicated at school or kindergarten will be more likely to reach the recipient than, for example, online advertisements.

The interview results also suggest that sources of information are ranked by their trustworthiness. On the whole, parents consider the information obtained via personal interactions more credible than that which comes in from mass or social media. It is likely that the institutional trust, which has been undermined by drawbacks in school education and negative attitudes towards the commercialization of extracurricular activities<sup>13</sup>, is substituted for interpersonal trust. If that is the case, it sheds light on the seeming contradiction when the same respondents criticize the child’s school and report their choice of extracurricular activity or ECA institution having been greatly influenced by the teacher’s recommendations. In other cases, extremely skeptical attitudes toward private ECA institutions’ self-descriptions—“...*many will fall for brands or big names... all this infamous marketing...*”—is compensated for by trust to friends’ reviews about the specific ECA provider. All other things being equal, parents are more likely to trust opinions of real people with whom they interact personally than rec-

<sup>13</sup> Such negative attitudes are manifested by some of the respondents when they compare fee-based sports to publicly funded sports classes succeeding to the Soviet tradition, the latter being idealized.



ommendations coming from institutions when choosing extracurricular activities for their children. Ultimately, this is an advantage for schools as institutions, as personal teacher-parent relationships are hardly avoidable.

Parents' experiences of choosing extracurricular activities or ECA institutions for their children differ by the depth of information analysis. Otherwise speaking, the amount of information perceived as sufficient to make a choice varies across families. However, perceived adequacy of information is not always related exclusively to the level of source trustworthiness. Identical messages may result in making a decision or searching for more details. Such differences can be described using the category "involvement in the choice-making process". Parents who are heavily involved in choosing an extracurricular activity or ECA institution compare information obtained from different sources and try to make sense of nuances by scrutinizing reviews, resorting to additional counseling services (e. g. vocational orientation) and seeking the opportunity to try out various sorts of activities. Under-involved parents accept the minimum amount of information as sufficient, or adequate. These two parenting positions represent extremes of a continuum on which all the empirically observed situations of choice can be placed. To a certain extent, low involvement aggravates the inequality of information channels described above (dominance of teachers' and other parents' recommendations): when the minimum amount of information is considered sufficient to make a choice, the probability of obtaining information that should be actively searched for becomes particularly low.

The MEMO findings indicate that college-educated mothers are more likely to use online resources—both formal (websites of ECA institutions and education authorities) and informal (discussion of ECA institutions on forums and in social media)—when choosing an ECA institution, while less educated mothers are more willing to rely on recommendations of kindergarten and school teachers as well as local print media. As a result, schools and kindergartens enjoy more credibility among families with lower cultural capital, who use recommendations received from school teachers as a guidance in selecting ECA institutions. Representatives of better-educated social classes make more independent choices and use a broader scope of sources, using both formal and informal online platforms.

#### **Choice Criteria and Parents' Perceptions of the Goals of Extracurricular Activities**

Analysis of the interview transcripts allows for splitting the ECA choice criteria into two groups: (i) criteria mentioned by all the respondents, regardless of their informedness and involvement in the choice-making process; and (ii) a wide range of institution characteristics which are only taken into account all together in situations where parents demonstrate high levels of involvement. Such criteria as location, tuition, availability of ECAs of interest, and class schedules were men-

tioned by all the respondents. If an institution does not conform to these initial requirements, the other characteristics may be left unconsidered, so let us refer to these fundamental requirements as “basic”. The other group of criteria includes, depending on the case: teacher competence (expertise, qualifications, personal interest in the subject/activity, and communication style), availability of unconventional activities, group size, assurance of safety during classes and in transit, availability of the try-out period, potential outcomes (progress promised at baseline), overall comfort for the child (decent building, friendly environment, cafeteria), payment scheme, website usability and design, etc. The significance of these criteria depends on a concrete situation, determined not only by the level of parents’ involvement in the choice-making process but also by their perceptions of the goals of extracurricular participation.

The continuum of such attitudes reconstructed from the interviews is defined by control orientation, on the one hand, and the belief that the freedom of self-determination and all-round development are what matters the most in extracurricular activities, on the other hand. Control orientation manifests itself in the following parental motivations: (i) keep the child engaged and supervised, *“involved in something useful instead of being a couch potato watching TV or playing computer games”* (more typical of parents choosing ECA for younger children); (ii) achieve success in a predetermined educational and (prospective) career trajectory. For instance, one of the respondents told the interviewer that their goal was to get the child admitted to a specific university and work as a financial director in the future. Emphasis on freedom finds expression in parents’ desire to make their children’s lives more enriched and fulfilling and encourage them to be active (more typical of parents choosing ECA for younger children) as well as to help them develop professional self-determination skills and *“find their true self”*. In the latter case, extracurricular activities may be opposed to school education: *“...I saw a video on education saying how everything’s changed and how schools just go on producing factory workers, that “bell-to-bell” instruction... these <extracurricular activities> are, in fact, opportunities to find one’s true self.”* Differences in perceptions of the goals of extracurricular activities entail differences in preferences. While some parents associate a good teacher with unconventional approaches and the ability to engage students and inspire their interest in the first place, others value affiliation with the university of choice most of all.

The MEMO results show that freedom orientation in choosing ECA institutions slightly prevails over control orientation among Russian parents, terms of instruction being ranked second as a criterion of choice. The child’s desire to participate in a specific activity was reported to be the reason for choosing a particular ECA institution by about half of the respondents (42%). Parents also seek to help their children achieve personal fulfillment (50%, according to the MEMO 2017), im-

prove their physical development and health (37%) and engage them in communication (34%). Only a small proportion of the respondents regard extracurricular activities as an opportunity to prepare their children for exams, pull up their grades in specific school subjects or promote civic consciousness and patriotism in them (less than 4% each).

Motivations differ across social classes, too. According to the MEMO 2017 findings, control orientation is typical of low-income parents, who are more likely to want their children to stay supervised (this response was provided by 46 percent of the lowest-income parents, as compared to 12 percent among the wealthiest ones). Intellectual development and aesthetic education are valued more by high-income families. Middle- and high-income parents are also somewhat more likely to see the goals of extracurricular participation in personal development and self-determination of their children (on the whole, this was a popular response among half of the parents whose children were involved in extracurricular activities).

### **Types of Choice Scenarios**

The interviews focus on the situations of choice in which parents were informed to different degrees and pursued different goals. Each situation, if analyzed through the variety of specific aspects described by the respondents, may be represented as unique. Nonetheless, the situations of choice can be classified using the categories “level of involvement” and “perceived goals of extracurricular activities”<sup>14</sup>, which yield four generalized choice scenarios.

*Scenario 1. Low involvement, control orientation.* This scenario is characterized by strong influence of school on the decision-making process. “*Information that found us itself*” is sufficient to make a choice. Terms of instruction and potential outcomes are the characteristics that are taken into account most often, while everything else may be left unconsidered due to the lack of information. Preference is given to conventional activities over innovative ones (e. g. robotics), because parents may have little knowledge of the new technology and be skeptical about future applications of such education.

*Scenario 2. Low involvement, freedom orientation.* In this case, the process of making a decision to engage in extracurricular activities is either initiated by children (the child’s opinion plays a greater role than in any other scenario) or prompted by school teachers’ recommendations. Random ECA institutions may be selected, the most important thing being conformance to the basic requirements (affordable price, convenient location, etc.), while the other characteristics may be completely disregarded, as in scenario 1. Decisions on the types of activities are made by children.

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<sup>14</sup> This is a classification of choice scenarios, not parents. The same family may follow different scenarios in different situations.

*Scenario 3. High involvement, control orientation.* When parents are control-oriented and heavily involved in the choice-making process, potential outcomes become the decisive choice criterion. All the other characteristics of ECA institutions are only considered in the context of their effectiveness, being actively compared to those of the competitors. Attractive institution characteristics include strict but progressive teachers connected to or affiliated with the universities of potential choice. Importance is attached to the performance monitoring system (e. g. mid-term tests) and maximum “targetedness” of the payment scheme (per-class rates being preferred). When choosing activities, parents are guided by whether the knowledge obtained can later be used in college or capitalized when entering the labor market.

*Scenario 4. High involvement and freedom orientation.* In this situation, parents want to make sure that the terms of instruction are in line with the requirements imposed on the ECA institution, provided that the institution is attractive in every other aspect. They see the goal of extracurricular activities in gaining experience (educational and social) that cannot be provided by schools and deepening children’s knowledge in the school subjects of their interest. In some cases, extracurricular activities may be considered to be a less standardized alternative to school. Teachers must be passionate about what they teach, likeable to children and able to inspire their interest. Parents seek innovative learning formats, new types of activities, vocational orientation tests and try-out periods allowing children to make their choice as consciously and independently as possible.

The above classification of choice scenarios is consistent with Annette Lareau’s ideas of cultural capital affecting parental involvement in schools [Lareau, 2002]. Low-involvement scenarios correspond to the strategy of natural growth in Lareau’s system, and high-involvement ones to that of concerted cultivation. Scenarios 1 and 4 show the differences in perceived goals within the two strategies. In scenario 1, parents seek to organize their children’s everyday life, which is typical of the concerted cultivation strategy, but they retain a directive style of communication with their children, which is a feature of the natural growth strategy. Scenario 4, where high involvement is combined with freedom orientation, may be considered the result of some parents’ ambition to enrich their children’s experiences while avoiding helicopter parenting, which is criticized by the proponents of slow parenting and the slow movement<sup>15</sup>. Along with parenting strategies, scenarios of choosing extracurricular activities are important for understanding the mechanisms of family influence on educational trajectories. If the revealed types of scenarios are used to different extents by families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, they can also be studied

<sup>15</sup> See, for example: <https://slowparentingmovement.wordpress.com/welcome-to-slow-parenting/>

as a mechanism of inequality reproduction. Further research is needed to provide quantitative assessment of the popularity of the scenarios described in this study across different categories of families.

**Conclusion** The findings of this study suggest that the widespread idea of extracurricular activities providing a greater freedom of choice than in school cannot be considered implicitly correct. In fact, freedom of choice is available to families with specific levels of cultural capital and socioeconomic resources. Parents' attitudes towards extracurricular participation are determined more often by their cultural orientations and value systems than by the amount of social and financial resources that they have access to. The process of choosing an ECA institution requires time and information skills, in the absence of which choices tend to be much more stereotypic and dependent, primarily on the school environment. The idea of active and rational parental choice of ECA programs/institutions should be promoted with due regard to the educational strategies and the types of scenarios pursued by families at different levels of the education system.

The aspects of ECA program choice identified in this study question the feasibility of some national educational policy initiatives.

First of all, doubt is cast on the system of information distribution in education. The government has lately been focused on online channels, i. e. promotion of ECA-related information through websites of educational institutions, municipal services portals and dedicated aggregator platforms. However, the interview results show that the use of online channels by parents choosing ECA programs should not be overestimated. Quite the contrary, it appears necessary to make active use of the potential of interpersonal trust that develops in personal interactions between parents and, for example, school teachers. Development of the online infrastructure of raising awareness should go hand in hand with measures to develop trust in such information among parents. Efficiency of the national policy on transparency in education is largely debatable [Mertsalova 2015], so research on information and communication interactions in the domain of extracurricular activities may contribute to its improvement.

Second of all, the findings of this study indicate that, while upgrading the content of extracurricular activities and the technology that they employ, one should avoid being too optimistic about the readiness of families to involve children in science- and technology-related ECA programs. In the control-oriented choice scenarios, parents tend to select activities that they can "understand". Traditionally popular activities (dance, sports, foreign languages) are preferred to innovative types of classes, where the benefits of participation may seem unobvious to parents, especially if they are little involved in the choice-making process and do not scrutinize all the pros and cons of specific ECA options.

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