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## ORGANISED EXTRA-CURRICULAR AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES PURSUED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS\*

**Introduction:** Authors of numerous publications released over the past several decades have emphasized the increasing importance and significance of different forms of non-formal learning, including extra-curricular and out-of-school activities that are expected to respond to the needs and expectations of pupils, and to promote development of their interests. This paper attempts to examine the currently available offer of complementary classes for primary school pupils and to describe the most frequently pursued ones.

**Research Aim:** The purpose of the study was to learn about activities in which learners engage during their leisure time and to describe the extra-curricular and out-of-school activities addressed to primary school pupils. The study was intended to respond to the question of what extra-curricular and out-of-school activities have been organised and what the level of pupil attendance is.

**Method:** Diagnostic survey was the applied research design. It was addressed to primary school pupils attending grades 6 to 8 and was administered online. Our analyses included 868 questionnaires correctly completed by young respondents from four Polish provinces.

**Results:** The study revealed two more or less equally numbered groups of pupils: active pupils, engaging in different non-compulsory activities and significant number of pupils not using any form of organised non-formal activities. Different types of activities extending the school curriculum as well as sports classes were the prevailing types of activities.

**Conclusions:** The goal should be to make extra-curricular and out-of-school activities more varied to make them refer to formal education to a much smaller extent, and to reveal more areas of human activity.

**Keywords:** primary school, leisure time, extra-curricular activities, out-of-school activities, informal education, activities of pupils

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## INTRODUCTION

**Organisation of education in Poland in the light of the basic terms and key-words**

Education takes place in a broad public space and assumes various forms, defined and described in different manner. On the one hand, they have been codified in authentic acts, laws, regulations and other documents. On the other, these terms have been verified on a regular basis by large numbers of people dealing with educational practice and pedagogy as a science. The concept of “organised extra-curricular and out-of-school activities of school pupils” essentially requires no special explanations – these are non-compulsory pupil activities pursued in their leisure time, at school and outside school (cf.: Okoń, 1996) – however, it would be advisable to incorporate them in the entire spectrum of educational interventions and to investigate the meaning and functions ascribed to this type of activities.

One of the basic dichotomous divisions in the organisation of education and upbringing of humans is represented by formal and informal education. The former is related to activities carried out by different institutions, including by various types and levels of public and non-public schools; that is, it encompasses what comes to be referred to as institutional education, including school education. Importantly, formal education is one that is carried out as prescribed by specific plans, assumptions, on an ongoing basis, resulting in the acquisition of specific qualifications as certified by relevant documents (Stęchły, 2021).

The latter term incorporates a broad spectrum of meanings. Informal (non-formal) education also includes non-school (out-of-school), concurrent, occasional education, and it may be offered in an institutional and non-institutional setting (Stęchły, 2021). Trempała (2011) states that informal education most often takes place outside school, it goes beyond the curriculum and what is important, and it is by nature more sensitive to changes going on in the world. The author continues that besides the versatile and diversified educational offer of different institutions and associations, it also involves any kind of occasional, incidental learning, having fun, working, peer contacts, spending leisure time. Trempała also draws attention to the fact that non-school institutional, as well as non-institutional education attracts children and adolescents with appealing classes and their topicality, as well as with variety of approaches to certain problems and issues, and multiple work forms. For many people, the more short-term forms appear to be more attractive than school classes scheduled over the long-term. Their advantages include voluntary participation, randomness, autonomy, and plurality of actions, which allows for individual approach to every single pupil, fulfilment of their needs and expectations; they are often very novel, topical, and innovative (Trempała, 2011). Scholars investigating the issue of extra-curricular activities comment on it along the same lines. Panek (2002) stated that nowadays school is not able to provide pupils with end-to-end development during school hours and that extra-curricular class-

es may influence children and adolescents more strongly than lessons scheduled in the curriculum. Fatyga (2005) focused on similar characteristics and advantages of informal education. The author claims that contrary to the schooling system based on symbolic violence and compulsion, informal education is primarily about free choice and it offers an opportunity to eliminate inequalities in the access to education. Although Fatyga would not like it to get formalised in any way, the author wishes it remained a pure joy resulting from the fact of gaining new knowledge, new competences, and would not like it to imitate school activities, for instance through different types of certificates. For this type of activities, Fatyga (2005) proposes the term complementary education.

Blicharz and Raszewska-Skałeczka (2022) draw attention to the fact that clear-cut assignment of specific forms of education to specific categories has become an increasingly difficult task. This is in part due to the fact that non-public entities have increasingly taken over school obligations, whereas private entities, organisations, and different kinds of institutions have come to issue various informal certificates and educational diplomas. Nowadays, even such obvious terms as school and out-of-school education may be approached differently; this may, for example, involve home schooling or different forms of out-of-school activities carried out at schools. Considering the above-mentioned reservations, in this text organised extra-curricular and out-of-school pupil activities primarily belong to the institutional informal education, or, in line with the term proposed by Fatyga (2005), complementary education. Exceptions include tutoring and a small number of music-centre groups and music schools represented in the author's own research.

### **Organised informal pupil activities in the light of previous research and reflections**

Participation of children and adolescents in extra-curricular activities, and their functioning in the system of schools of general education, has been investigated for many years. This has taken place both in relation to projects related to children's and adolescents' leisure time, as well as to school operations. Research has been conducted on the functions, objectives, and significance of such activities, with the prevailing body of quantitative studies presenting classes carried out at school and participation of children and adolescents, and this analysis shall be focused thereon.

Comparing the results of the above-mentioned studies is not an easy task, as they differ in terms of their methodological assumptions. As shown in the study by Panek (2002), considerable differences have been recorded between specific educational facilities, including in particular across specific school types. Also, available study reports do not always clearly explain the applied research procedures. For example, it is not always clear whether the presented analyses pertained to open-ended questions, single, or multiple-choice questions, whether they describe the status

quo as of the survey date, in a given school year, or for the entire education cycle. Nomenclature changing over the years makes the situation even more complex. One must take this into account when making references to these studies.

Based on the research conducted in the 1980s, the 1990s, and early 2000s, it may be assumed that at that time, depending on the level and type of school, extra-curricular activities were attended by 17% to 32% of pupils, and this did not include after-school club activities or association with school and youth organisations that gathered further 13% to 15% of children and adolescents. Also, it may be concluded that sports or sports and hiking interest groups were the most popular school activities, as they associated from 26% to 36% of all participants of extra-curricular activities, followed by “subject-based” interest groups (18%-34%), and hobby-based groups (about 22%). School-based activities and artistic ensembles were attended by 5% to 8% of active pupils (Korczak, 1986; Lubański, 1986; Łukowska, 1991; Panek, 2002).

In the following years of the 21st century, scholars have become increasingly interested in any pupil activities, including out-of-school activities. Based on available reports, it can be stated that non-compulsory organised activities were attended by 50% to 60% of all pupils. There had been a growing interest in out-of-school activities and a new trend started to emerge. Additional classes devoted to principal school subjects, including in particular English classes, have started to prevail. Some studies have also shown a slightly increasing interest in different forms of arts-related activities (Smolik, 2011; Sobczak, 2018).

Recent years have brought about an increasing body of research on children's attendance in paid out-of-school classes, including tutoring. This, however, is a separate issue. Tutoring reflects parents' beliefs and expectations, their affluence, and it also reveals school's shortcomings. It should be noted that it is parents who are most frequently asked about tutoring and these questions concern both their plans, intentions, expectations, as well as the fact of sending their children to such classes; therefore, it is difficult to compare them. However, periodic surveys conducted in this respect have shown that there has been growing interest in tutoring. Nowadays, about 70% of parents declare to have sent or are planning to send their children to tutoring, whereas twenty years ago approximately 40% of parents declared to do so. (Chmiel, 2018, p. 478; Polaków portfel własny, 2022; Wydatki rodziców, 2023).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

The presented issue of organised extra-curricular and out-of-school activities pursued by primary school pupils was investigated and analysed as part of a larger project describing the status quo of music education in Polish schools of general

education (Grusiewicz, 2025). As part of the project, pupils attending grades 6 to 8 were asked to share their opinions about school and music education. In a specially designed 20-item questionnaire, two questions concerned pupil participation in organised extra-curricular classes. Answers to the questions were expected to provide knowledge about activities pursued by learners in their leisure time and to describe extra-curricular and out-of-school activities addressed to primary school pupils in terms of their quantity, quality, and structure. The research problems were centred around the following questions: What extra-curricular activities are organised at school? What is the level of pupils' attendance in different forms of non-formal education? What does this offer include? And: What forms are most popular among pupils?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The author used a diagnostic survey design and administered an online questionnaire to the participants. A portion of completed questionnaires was obtained via links sent to schools' social networking sites. This method proved to be hardly effective, however. The majority of the obtained study material resulted from engagement of university students who supervised and monitored the process of completing the questionnaires in schools from which they had graduated in their early years.

In total, 868 pupils were enrolled to the study. The sample included 489 girls (56%) and 379 boys (44%) attending three primary school grades: grade 6 (259 pupils), grade 7 (276) and grade 8 (333); and representing four Polish provinces: Lublin (298 respondents), Podlaskie (254), Subcarpathian (208), and Silesian (100). The sample structure in terms of the size of localities in which the schools were operating was as follows: rural area settlements – 377 respondents, towns with the population of under 5,000 – 244, towns of under 50,000 – 88, cities of under 200,000 – 63, city of over 200,000 – 94 (this calculation does not include eight individuals who did not report on the province in which they lived). It may be generalised that the demographic profile of the respondents reflects across-section of children in this period of their lives (*Struktura płci i wieku ludności Polski*).

Two questions in the survey were related to pursuing additional activities organised at school and outside school. They only required circling a “yes” or “no” answer that reflected the true state of affairs, and if the “yes” answer was given, the respondent was asked to note down the type of activity. The answers provided were then grouped into relevant categories for analysis. Because the collected data were compared, in some instances 862 pupil statements providing answers to both questions were qualified for the analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The respondents' choices and participation in various forms of activities were compared in percentage terms. A qualitative description of the causes and consequences of the current situation was also crucial to the research.

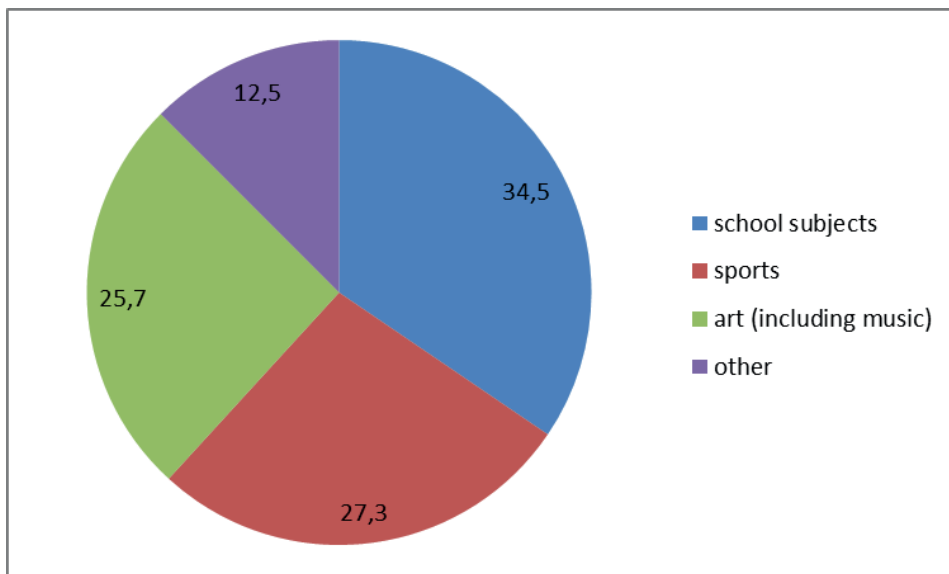
## RESULTS

All respondents answered whether they attended any extra-curricular activities organised at school. Of the 868 pupils, 231 (26.6%) reported to have attended extra-curricular activities of their choice organised at school, 637 (73.4%) reported that they have not done so. It can be stated that nearly three quarters of pupils attend classes prescribed in the curriculum only; of the remaining one quarter, a vast majority, that is more than 70%, declared to have pursued only one form of extra-curricular activities.

Figure 1 presents the structure of extra-curricular activities offered by schools attended by the respondents, including which forms are the most popular.

Figure 1.

*The structure of extra-curricular activities in the study schools (percent values, N=344 activities of choice, 231 pupils)*



Source: Author's own material.

Percentage values presented in the diagram show what types of extra-curricular activities attended by the pupils are preferred in schools respondents attended. Based on their declarations, it can be stated that pupils are most willing to attend activities related to primary school subjects. Additional Maths and English classes prevailed over other activities. The second most broadly represented category were sports activities; the pupils most often reported attending a school's sports club or listed specific disciplines, of which the most popular were: football, volleyball, handball. Arts-related activities accounted for about 25% of all activities. This is fewer than the sports activities; however, the differences were not particularly significant. This shows that extra-curricular arts-related activities constitute an important component of school education. Among the arts-related activities, music classes are the prevailing ones (they will be discussed in more detail below). As regards activities other than music, the pupils most often reported on visual arts, they also listed dance activities and physical exercise, as well as drama classes. The "other" category was represented by 43 declarations (12.5%) and it included in particular the "reader's club," "corrective exercises," "school photography club," Polish Catholic Youth Association (KSM), "robotics," "acrobatics," "chess," "creativity classes," as well as "peer mediation." Not a single respondent reported on attending activities related to scouting, defence readiness, patriotism, first aid, and none of the listed activities were related to hiking. Sports classes did not include any water sports or various non-conventional disciplines gaining popularity worldwide that pupils could find attractive.

The analysis of extra-curricular activities listed by the pupils reveals that schools are relatively conservative institutions. Within the frame of extra-curricular activities, schools tend to extend the curriculum of compulsory classes first and foremost and they have been offering exactly the same traditional arts and sports classes for many years now. In quantitative terms, the analysis of the phenomenon allows to state that pupil attendance in extra-curricular activities has not been particularly impressive. The activities that meet the characteristics and determinants of extra-curricular, informal, sports-, culture-, and arts-related classes are attended by approximately 7% of pupils per each category, making it every fourteenth school pupil.

We expected that answers to the next question would determine whether, and if so, then which out-of-school activities are attended by the respondents. This question was answered by 862 pupils. 304 of them (35.3%) stated that they attended organised out-of-school classes and 558 (64.7%) concluded that they had not been engaged in such activities at all.

The comparison of extra-curricular vs. out-of-school activities showed similar interests among the pupils, although more pupils have been pursuing the out-of-school activities. The latter appear to be much more varied and stakeholders can find different forms of arts, culture, sports, and science-related out-of-school classes, including those available outside the commercial market, which is still highly

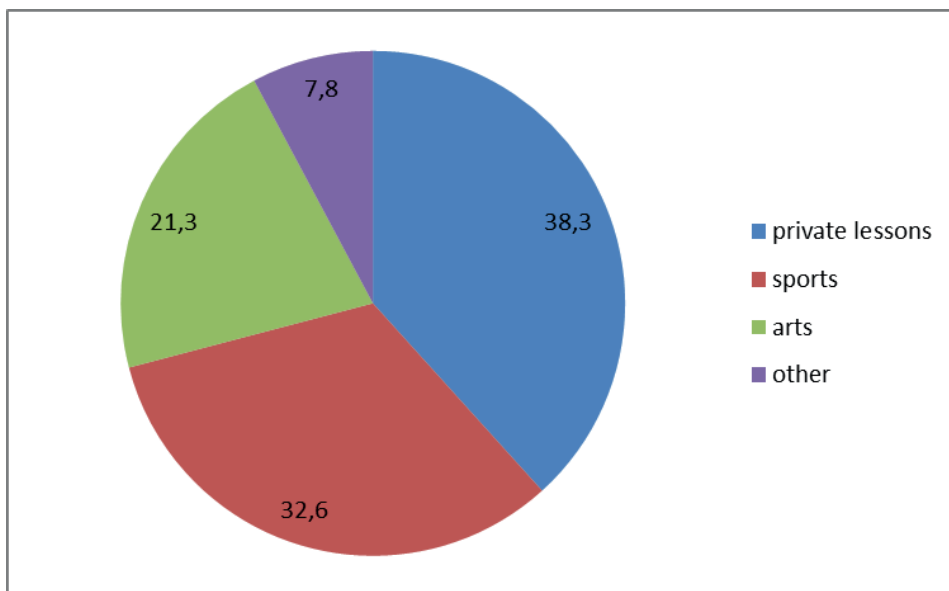


expensive for some individuals. Although, it should be noted, which was already mentioned in the above-listed studies, the share of paid classes has been growing, and they do not only include the so-called tutoring.

Just like in the preceding question, we are looking at the structure of the out-of-school activities attended by young respondents. This is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

*The structure of out-of-school activities attended by pupils (percent values, N=478 activities of choice, 304 pupils)*



Source: Author's own material.

Percentage values refer to the number of different pupil activities (which totalled 478), not to the number of pupils attending the out-of-school activities. Here, the object of our interest has been the structure of activities pursued by the pupils. When we compare this diagram with the preceding diagram presenting extra-curricular activities offered by schools, it can be concluded that pupils pursue similar activities outside school to those pursued at school.

Tutoring is the prevailing out-of-school activity. This category embraced 183, that is 38.3% of all statements (extra-curricular equivalent classes or extensive compulsory classes were attended by 37.5% of the respondents). In this category, by far the highest number of pupils replied that they attended tutoring in English, a considerable number of pupils mentioned Mathematics, but there were also general statements about “tutoring” or “significant tutoring.” The collected data showed that of the total of 868 respondents, every seventh primary school pupil



(nearly 14%) has used out-of-school tutoring and it has prevailed in out-of-school activities as well.

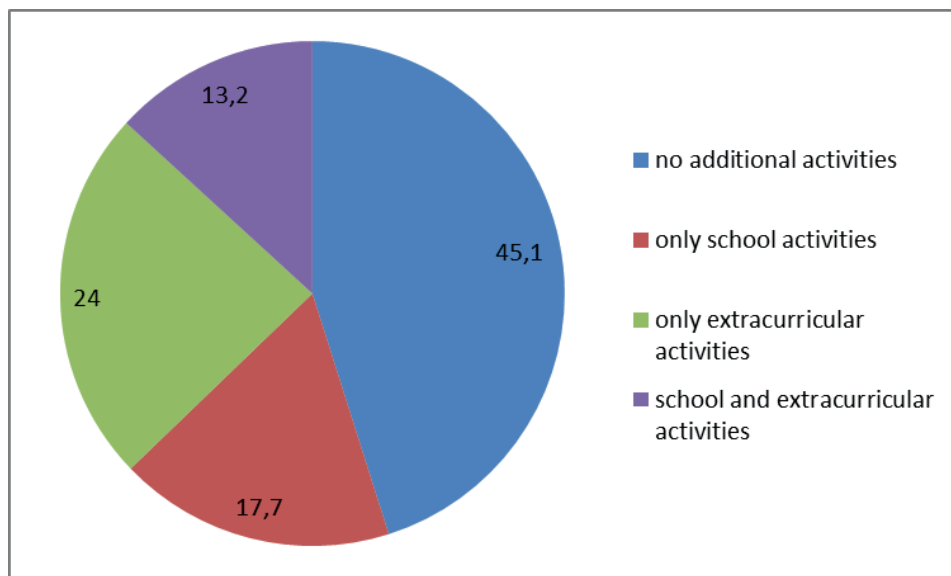
Sports classes were the second category of out-of-school activities. This category was embraced by 156, that is 32.6% of all statements. In this category, general statements, such as “sports classes”, “sports club” or “municipal sports club” were quite numerous. According to pupils’ declarations, the most frequently exercised disciplines were football, swimming, martial arts, boxing, volleyball, and different forms of acrobatics.

Arts-related activities were another largely represented category. They were attended by 102 pupils, which accounts for 21.3% of all declared school-based activities. In this category, dance classes would dominate. Music classes were the second largest type of activity; pupils declared to be members of music ensembles/groups, choirs, taking private lessons, or attending music centre groups, music school, or church choirs. The “other” category of out-of-school activities included 37 statements (7.8%). Scouting and chess were among the most often reported ones.

It appears interesting to compare and summarize all answers to the two preceding questions and respond to the question of how many pupils do not engage in extra-curricular and out-of-school activities at all, how many are only using the school offer, how many are using the out-of-school activities only, and how many have been using both options. The Figure 3 presents answers to the above questions.

Figure 3.

*Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities pursued by pupils (percent values, N=862 pupils)*



Source: Author's own material.



The key information presented in this diagram is the fact that more than 45% of all respondents (389 pupils) do not attend any extra-curricular activities at all, and nearly 55% (473 respondents) have attended only some sporadic activities. It can be said that a significant number of pupils had not been interested in any additional activities and classes. This, of course, does not mean that they do not have any specific interests, passions, of that the group does not include individuals pursuing one or another hobby. Nowadays, the world offers numerous possibilities of pursuing individual focused interest activities. Although it should be noted that when responding, the pupils wished to pride themselves on what they were doing. They wrote about activities they pursued on their own, such as learning to play an instrument, swimming, going to the gym. They also wrote about their plans of starting an activity and earnestly listed different activities they were pursuing.

What is more, it was observed that more pupils would use out-of-school activities than extra-curricular activities organised at school. Pupils' responses and other previously discussed studies have shown that extra-curricular, school-based activities are not particularly interesting; they are very traditional and follow patterns and models valid many years before. It can also be assumed that this has been the main reason why children and adolescents are more willing to use out-of-school activities. It is true that in many areas it is very hard for schools to compete with specialised institutions and centres, but in other, quite numerous areas and in some music-related activities, this is definitely possible.

The third observation made during the analysis was the fact that the sample also included quite a large group of active consumers of extra-curricular activities. Of the 473 individuals declaring attendance in additional activities, only 81 pupils (17.1%) listed only one activity. The remaining 82% (392 respondents) listed many different activities they pursued, and these were often quite varied areas of activity. The multitude of different declarations were primarily related to the out-of-school activities.

What is more, it is quite possible to state that the group of individuals pursuing a number of different extra activities is larger than the one determined here, for as it has been mentioned before, some pupils' statements were very general. Pupils wrote that they were using tutoring, attended additional subjects, private lessons, trainings, which was qualified as a single activity but it may in fact be related to many different ones. Similarly, declarations concerning attendance of a music school or music centre group were treated in the study as one and the same activity, although we know that they may involve many different classes.

It is clear that pupils can be grouped in terms of the additional activities they had pursued. In simple terms, it can be said that both groups are more or less equal. About one-half of the pupils do not pursue any organised, regular, cyclical activities; except for the compulsory school classes, they do not pursue any other activities. The other half engage in extra-curricular activities and very often to

a significant extent. Most of them attend many different forms of science-, sports-, and arts-related activities. What should be made very clear here is that these individuals primarily pursue out-of-school activities.

## DISCUSSION

The introduction section of the present paper makes references to select research on children's and adolescents' attendance of various extra forms of organised classes. This perspective allows to get a more informed look on the results of this author's own research. but it also makes it possible to present the enduring problems of the Polish system of education, as well as to outline certain new trends and transformations. Attention should be paid to the fact that the difficulty in comparing the results stems from the equivocal, non-homogeneous terminology, different methodologies, including single or multiple-choice questions, questions about the status quo, but also about expectations and/or intentions.

Despite these limitations, a probability statement could be made that since the 1980s, the number of pupils attending extra-curricular, school-based activities has been a constant value. This number ranges from approx. 20% do 30% (Korczak, 1986; Lubański, 1986; Łukowska, 1991; Panek, 2002) and a slightly greater number of individuals has attended different organised out-of-school activities (Smolik, 2011; Sobczak, 2018). Holistically, it can be stated that approximately half of the pupils pursue some extra-curricular activities. Among these, there prevail sports classes and those mirroring school subjects offered at schools and in form of tutoring, with, English and Maths as the most popular examples. Based on author's own research and studies previously referred to, it can be stated that children's and adolescents' attendance in different forms of out-of-school activities is more or less the same. However, it has been growing in terms of paid offers, to the detriment of widely available free-of-charge offers, which fact, however, is accepted by the parents. As regards this issue, we are of a similar opinion to that of Fatyga (2005) or Trempała (2011) that attendance is not prevented by the lack of access but by the lack of interest on the part of the pupils or their parents.

Attention should be paid to the fact that among school-based extracurricular activities, music-related activities are the most often pursued ones, whereas among out-of-school ones – dance activities are most widely attended, although neither of them has been particularly popular. There is a significant number of robustly operating community centres, foundations, and associations promoting various culture- and arts-related activities for children and adolescents. However, statistically, it turns out that their reach is not significant. What follows from the presented analyses is that approximately 11% of the responding primary school pupils had some contact with extra-curricular music-related activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reflections presented in the introduction section of the present paper show that the key difference between the institutional organised formal and informal education lies between their voluntary and compulsory, systematic and occasional character, between the degree of their formality, consistent requirements, learning outcomes and freedom in this respect. Trempała (2011) noted that even in the centralised Polish schooling system, informal activities have been gaining more and more significance. These transformations got inhibited after 2015.

Globally, such terms as *patchwork* or *agile learning* have been gaining more and more significance, yet it was quite on the contrary in Poland. Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities to a significant extent duplicate school's institutional work. Extra-curricular activities have been dominated by extended science classes (primarily Mathematics) and humanities (primarily foreign languages and Polish); a substantial number of adolescents have also used out-of-school tutoring for those subject areas. Nowadays, it is not formal education that adopts the characteristics of non-formal education, but different forms of voluntary education start to resemble the compulsory school education.

Within the frame of issues discussed in this paper, a school of the future should be seen as a specific meeting spot, in specific time, for a competent teacher and eager pupils. It would be one of many ways of obtaining education, similar in its assumptions to additional extracurricular and out-of-school forms. For the time being, though, a Polish school is focused on implementing old patterns and schemas, and implemented reforms do not affect its core. The author of the present paper does not see any indications or conditions for this *status quo* to change any time soon.

## LIMITATIONS

Despite the extended efforts that resulted in the collection of nearly 900 questionnaires from pupils coming from different settings and different regions of Poland, this non-homogeneous sample undoubtedly constituted a weak point of the presented study. In the overly regulated reality, also in science and education, even the advanced technology, including online contacts, are not helpful in conducting this type of research; in fact, it becomes even more problematic. The second shortcoming that should be borne in mind is the fact that specific results are to a certain extent determined by the manner, form, and content of the asked questions and the recruited study group, and this problem is conspicuous when we compare different types of surveys. There are no perfect solutions in this regard; there will always be some doubts concerning appropriateness of the applied procedures.

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## POZALEKCYJNE I POZASZKOLNE ZORGANIZOWANE AKTYWNOŚCI UCZNIÓW SZKÓŁ PODSTAWOWYCH

**Wprowadzenie:** W wielu różnych publikacjach, które ukazały się na przestrzeni ostatnich kilkudziesięciu lat autorzy podkreślają stale wzrastającą wagę i znaczenie różnych form pozaformalnej nauki, w tym rolę zajęć pozalekcyjnych i pozaszkolnych, które mają odpowiadać na potrzeby i oczekiwania uczniów, wpisywać się w rozwój ich zainteresowań. Niniejszy tekst jest próbą przyjrzenia się obecnej ofercie zajęć uzupełniających dla dzieci szkół podstawowych oraz opisanie najczęściej podejmowanych.

**Cel badań:** Przeprowadzone badania miały na celu poznanie aktywności uczniów w ich wolnym czasie, opisanie oferty pozalekcyjnych i pozaszkolnych zajęć adresowanych do uczniów szkół podstawowych. Badania zmierzały do odpowiedzi na pytanie, jakie zajęcia pozalekcyjne organizowane są w szkołach i poza nimi oraz jaka jest w nich skala uczestnictwa uczniów?

**Metoda badań:** Badania miały charakter sondażu diagnostycznego adresowanego do uczniów szkół podstawowych z klas VI–VIII przeprowadzonego za pomocą ankiety internetowej. Do analiz zostało zakwalifikowanych 868 prawidłowo wypełnionych ankiet młodych respondentów z czterech województw.

**Wyniki:** Badania ukazały dwie mniej więcej jednakowo liczne grupy uczniów: aktywnych, angażujących się w różne działania pozaobowiązkowe oraz niekorzystających z żadnych form zorganizowanych zajęć pozaformalnych. Dominującymi aktywnościami badanych w ich czasie wolnym okazały się różne formy rozszerzające szkolne przedmioty obowiązkowe oraz zajęcia sportowe.

**Wnioski:** Należy dążyć do tego aby oferta zajęć pozalekcyjnych i pozaszkolnych była bardziej różnorodna, aby w mniejszym stopniu nawiązywała do edukacji formalnej, a w większym ukazywała różne inne obszary działalności ludzkiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** szkoła podstawowa, czas wolny, zajęcia pozalekcyjne, zajęcia pozaszkolne, edukacja nieformalna, aktywności uczniów