

### *Parental visions of their children's future as a motivator for an early start in a foreign language*

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#### Abstract

This paper reports on the qualitative part of a project investigating parental educational aspirations as manifested by enrolling their children (aged 3-6) into very early L2 instruction. The concept of educational aspirations is widely studied in educational psychology as well as in sociology and pedagogy. In SLA, these aspirations can fit in the new framework of imagery and creating visions as they are a part of an ideal L2 self. Data analysis concludes that parental visions towards their children's achievement reflect self-efficacy beliefs; in other words, those parents who were unsuccessful foreign language (FL) learners themselves hoped that by starting early their children would learn lingua franca English well and this would help them achieve educational and vocational success, which indicates an instrumental motive. By contrast, those parents who were successful language learners were positive about their children's future plurilingual attainment, not necessarily voicing the necessity of "an early start." They believe languages contribute to overall emotional and cognitive growth, which shows more intrinsic and integrative motives. These findings suggest that the differences in ultimate FL attainment may start very early and are rooted in the social (family) context.

*Keywords:* early foreign language learning, visions, educational aspirations, identity

## 1. Introduction

The pursuit of very early learning of foreign languages is extremely prevalent in monolingual settings where foreign language (FL) knowledge is regarded as a gateway to better occupational opportunities, and thus better life prospects. It is particularly notable in countries which are largely monolingual, and where a language of rather small international recognition is spoken, such as Central European (cf. Mihaljevic Djigunovic & Medved Krajnovic, 2015; Nikolov, 2009) or East Asian countries (cf. Park & Abelman, 2004). There, foreign language knowledge is regarded as indispensable in attaining educational and vocational success and partaking in the global labour market. Starting to learn foreign languages early may thus be seen as an important investment towards achieving this goal.

### 1.1. Goals of very early FLL

For many decades, starting to learn a FL early was regarded as an indispensable condition to guarantee success in FL acquisition. This conviction was rooted in nativist theories of second language acquisition which perceived second and foreign language acquisition in early childhood as succumbing to the same laws of Universal Grammar.

However, research on the age factor conducted on child foreign language learning (FLL) in instructional settings (Muñoz, 2006, 2014; Rokita, 2007; Singleton & Ryan, 2004) has unanimously shown that it is untrue that early starters excel at the rate of acquisition or that they reach the same levels of ultimate attainment as later onset learners. The advantage of a later start can be ascribed to greater memory capacities, better developed learning strategies, and also more conscientious study and awareness of the learning goals. Bilingual language competence is likely to be achieved only in naturalistic settings. The fact that the language is acquired differently in naturalistic and instructional settings has led to the acquisition-learning distinction, although the two terms are often used interchangeably. In the case of the latter, what matters most is the social milieu in which learning takes place, from the family of the young child to educational institutions (kindergarten, teachers) to language education policy regulations.

In parallel, an early start in a foreign language has become one of the key concerns of European language education policy. It is argued that the earlier one starts learning a foreign language, the higher the chances that the person will achieve a plurilingual competence, that is, that he or she will become competent, albeit only partially, in a few languages. Plurilingualism is to be an asset of every European citizen, an investment in human capital which aims at raising the competitiveness of the EU economy with reference to the United States

(Williams, 2010). It is additionally assumed that through early FLL experience the learners will develop a stance of openness, curiosity and tolerance, including a positive attitude to other cultures. Furthermore, high quality education is assumed to boost motivation for further language learning in the future. To sum up, the outcome of an early start in a FL cannot be bilingual attainment. Rather, it is to lay the grounds for future plurilingualism.

The goal of this paper is to look at the issue of early FLL from the psychological perspective and to explicate how it can fit in the L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005). It will show what visions parents of very young learners have of their children's future foreign language attainment (their ideal L2 self), how "an early start" (i.e., at preschool age) is going to help to realise this vision, and how the visions themselves are formulated on the basis of the parents' own self-efficacy beliefs.

## 1.2. The place of educational aspirations in educational psychology and sociology

To date, aspirations have been mainly studied in psychology, pedagogy, educational psychology and sociology as the major drivers of human activity. Initially they have been regarded as a purely psychological and individually driven construct. They have been defined as "a desire for change which appears to be beneficial in the mind of an individual. It is not a desire for any change but only that which will enable an individual to improve his/her position on an individual scale of values" (Szefer-Timoszenko, 1981, p. 5).<sup>1</sup> It has long been a feature of psychological research to regard individual aspirations as depending on such internal features as personality, level of neurosis, perception of the self, experience of success and failure among others (Lewowicki, 1975).

More recent research on aspirations looks at the concept as socially driven. In another definition, a famous Polish pedagogue argues that aspirations refer to "the pursuit of reaching intended goals, the realisation of intended ideals" (Okoń, 1998, p. 36). The notion of intention assumes that aspirations can be of various types, depending on the values one has, and also that they can be the motor of an individual's activity. One sets certain goals ahead of himself/herself, and it is these goals that motivate him/her to undertake serious effort to pursue this goal. Only those goals are set which can be plausibly realised in the current socio-political, economic and educational reality. There are many kinds of aspirations, depending on the values to which one subscribes. Educational aspirations are those which place particular importance on achievement in education as a gateway to occupational success.

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<sup>1</sup> All the translations from Polish are by the present author.

In psychology, the study of aspirations found its place in different theories of motivation, such as the theory of needs (McClelland, 1985), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), attribution theory (Weiner, 1972), and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). In all these theories, aspirations are studied as a motor of human activity; they help explain the *nature* of human activity. McClelland (1985) associated aspirations with a need for achievement which can be acquired through socialisation. He observed that certain needs can be aroused in a child through adopting the most appropriate approach, such as receiving praise from an adult. Bandura (1977) proposed similar views, maintaining that a lot of adult behaviour is imitated by children, and so children can also learn that a good way to satisfy needs is to study and to acquire knowledge and skills. According to attribution theory, aspirations are regarded as a sign of a person's sense of causality. Proponents of this theory observed that people of higher achievement motivation are more likely to attribute their success or failure to their own hard work and that only people who have stronger aspirations can form and observe such a causative relationship (Weiner, 1972).

In SDT, aspirations do not occupy such a prominent position, yet they can be associated with intrinsic needs. In a recent study on the relationship of SDT and aspirations Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004) observed that when the realisation of certain intrinsic goals or aspirations is inhibited, people seek to realise their external goals, such as fame or wealth, yet this does not bring them the same feeling of satisfaction that the realisation of intrinsic needs/aspirations would.

In pedagogy and sociology, educational aspirations are seen as *objects* of human activity. They have been found to correlate with high educational achievement and consequently occupational success (Marjoribanks, 2003). This means that the higher aspirations for achievement one has, the higher educational success one obtains. A high level of education, in turn, usually enables obtaining higher occupational positions and, as a consequence, higher earnings, which translate into better material wealth and possibly general well-being. Thus having high educational aspirations can be seen as a gateway to advancement on the social mobility ladder. While this may not always be true in the neoliberal world affected by serious economic crisis, education has been perceived as a means of reaching success and achieving higher social status. In addition, the level of aspirations may be dependent on the type of background one comes from as people can be inhibited from undertaking high effort and achievement by apparent obstacles posed by society, for example the teacher, the school, and even the educational policy. Interestingly, Marjoribanks (2003), on the basis of his studies in Australia, coined the formula for the rise of one's aspirations: aspiration X attainment X background.

It is my belief that foreign language education can be subjugated to the same laws, particularly in largely monolingual countries in which a language of rather low international recognition is used, as is the case with Poland, where the current study was conducted. Thus a knowledge of highly prestigious language(s) can be regarded as a sign of membership in an elite. This certainly was the case, as history has shown, with Latin, French or more recently English. Learning the latter, which has become the global language, can be perceived as the password to entering an international community and participating in the global market. Indeed, it should be admitted that high educational aspirations are a tenet of the aspiring middle class.

This belief is further upheld as, in view of poststructuralist theories, it is accepted that language is not duly and subconsciously acquired but rather strenuously learnt through explicit and effortful study. This is not to deny the possibility of implicit learning of some aspects of language but simply to emphasise the difference between second and foreign language acquisition. In the latter case, the languages are rather an educational subject, and they are thus impacted by various socio-pedagogic factors, from the influence of significant others to the influence of the school (teachers, peers, materials) to the country's education policy.

### 1.3. Educational aspirations and poststructuralist approaches to SLA

Since applied linguistics is a highly interdisciplinary field, it clearly draws on findings in other related subjects such as psychology, sociology and pedagogy. Similarly, the notion of aspirations finds its place in SLA pedagogy, particularly in the now roughly developing strand of research called poststructuralism/postmodernism or simply the social turn (Block, 2003). On the whole, this viewpoint emphasises the importance of the social environment of the learner on his/her learning achievement, starting with the immediate social milieu one lives in and culminating with the wider socio-political context.

Globalisation requires ambitious individuals to be flexible and mobile, and to speak several foreign languages, one of them being lingua franca English. Thus foreign language knowledge is regarded as an important capital and investment. These terms derived from economics are transferred into the field of applied linguistics and clearly denote the impact of globalisation on all aspects of human life. Hence the poststructuralist approach to the study of SLA highlights the necessity of taking into account the social milieu of the learner.

First of all, it found reflection in the construction of a new model of foreign language motivation called L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005), where the traditional distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation

gains less significance as it is assumed that foreign language learners, especially today, do not aspire to integrate with the community of L2 users but rather want to be a part of global society giving them an advantageous position in the occupational market. Therefore, it is visible that integrative motives mingle with instrumental ones. In this motivational framework, which consists of three components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to self and the learning experience, aspirations can be seen as part of the first component. The ideal L2 self embodies motifs, desires and *aspirations* that one needs to possess when striving to become an ideal L2 user. An ideal L2 self can denote one's vision of desired identity, so aspirations can constitute an important incentive towards its construction. An individual's identity is viewed as unstable and fluctuating, something that can be changed and deliberately created according to how one wants to be perceived by others. These identities are referred to as possible selves.

Additionally, Dörnyei argues (2009) that in order to construct the ideal L2 self which is a self-guide for motivated language behaviour, one must have a vision of what one's life will look like when a particular goal has been attained. It is this vision that motivates an individual to undertake some effort and bear sacrifices towards this goal. To construct one's ideal L2 self, one must first create a vision of his future identity, which undergoes a "guided selection from the multiple aspirations, dreams, desires etc." (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 33). No single vision is stable or sufficient indefinitely. To fulfil its motivating role, it must be continuously strengthened, substantiated, kept alive, operationalised, and counter-balanced with the vision of possible failure (Dörnyei, 2009). This is usually the role of the significant others in the social milieu of the learner.

Another important component of the model is the learning experience, which encompasses "situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). In the case of very young learners, the child's family environment will exert such influence by providing opportunities for L2 use/practice, by providing L2 learning material, by parental involvement in class and home revision activities, by verbal encouragement, and, finally, by acting as positive role models. Learning experience will also include the frequency and quality of L2 instruction provided.

It must be noted that young children do not make educational decisions themselves. Parents are usually the key decision makers, thus placing their children on a path towards achieving success. This was observed by Zentner and Renaud (2007), who found that before mid-adolescence learners are affected by the ought-to selves of their significant others, typically their parents. They project their own beliefs and visions of what they would like their children's future to look like. As Ryan and Irie (2014, p. 109) say, each person is guided by "the story of the self. This story affects how we interpret our pasts, how we see

ourselves now and the paths we envision for our futures." Thus, in the case of very young learners of an L2, it is the story of the parents' self that guides their children towards the future.

In respect to FLL, the goals parents set for their children will depend on their own foreign language experience, whether they have mastered foreign language(s) successfully or not, what educational and occupational position they have, and whether it was obtained owing to this competence. As Dörnyei (2014) posits, having a vision is an important aspect of motivation as it helps to define the goal one is heading for. It allows a person to imagine what his/her future will look like once this vision is realised. Thus vision and imagination are intertwined.

These visions guide very young learners' parents in making all educational decisions, not least regarding foreign language education, including the decision when to enrol a young child into early L2 instruction and what type of institution, language, and the like should be chosen. Initially these are parents' aspirations that they hold for their children's achievement, yet in time they may be adopted as the children's own. Referring to Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self system, it can be argued that initially parents influence their children's development of their ideal L2 self, which subsequently, in the context of a positive and supportive learning experience, may materialise in children's own development of an ideal L2 self. Learning a foreign language may thus become a valuable goal to which the children aspire to large extent of their own accord. Within mainstream psychological research, there is considerable evidence (e.g., Gottfried, Flemming, & Gottfried, 1998) that the family environment plays an important role in the child's cognitive, linguistic and educational achievement. It does so by providing cognitively stimulating activities, overt parental opinions and attitudes, and parents acting as role models. In reference to FLL, it is evident that if children observe their parents using foreign languages for work or social purposes, they will come to regard this as something natural. In addition, these parents will often openly voice the benefits that foreign language knowledge may have brought to them and, by the same token, may bring to the children. Last but not least, it is easier for parents knowledgeable in a foreign language to engage in activities such as reading L2 storybooks, handling games or short conversations, as well as to judge the quality of an L2 course, materials or the linguistic competence of a teacher.

It is the parents' ability to imagine possible benefits or negative consequences such an investment (or lack of one) will have on their children's future that drives them to bear considerable sacrifices (financial, time, etc.) towards this success. The visions of the child's future are the aspired goals. The terms *visions*, *imaginary goals* and *aspirations* are equivocal. Imagination plays a role in establishing learning goals. It is the imagined learning communities that a

learner's parent aspires to join that motivate him or her to undertake the learning effort. Imagined communities

refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination. . . . A focus on imagined communities in language learning enables us to explore how learners' affiliation with such communities might affect their learning trajectories. (Norton, 2013, p. 8).

What is more, these communities refer not only to local communities (the people one lives close to) but also to national or transnational communities that one prospectively can get to know.

Finally, it must be recognised that imagining future lives is about constructing one's ideal identity. Recent SLA research points out that learner identities in the poststructuralist era are unstable, dependent on social factors, fluctuating and under constant reconstruction. Bonny Norton (2014), a highly influential writer on issues of language learner identity, contends that "identities are contingent, shifting and context-dependent, and [that] while identities or positions are often given by social structures or ascribed by others, they can also be negotiated by agents who wish to position themselves" (p. 66).

One's identity is also the outcome of one's struggle for power and is defined by positioning in reference to others. FL knowledge is the competence that can give a person some advantage over others, and starting to learn a FL earlier can contribute to future success. If FLL is regarded as an investment, then it also expresses desires to belong to some other, better "imagined community." As Ryan and Irie (2014) put it,

imagining themselves belonging to these communities serves as a guide for both the kinds of social situations in which they might envision themselves using English, and the appropriate language to use in those situations. For many language learners, their membership and participation in these imagined communities is an important part of who they are. (p. 118)

Thus we go astray from learning for its own sake; in the FLL process, instrumental motives gain more relevance than purely integrative ones. Integration does not mean aspiring to possess native-like competence of the language but, rather, to join the global community. The social trend affecting language learning decisions is globalisation. On the globalised linguistic market, it still remains to be seen what will give one an advantage: the knowledge of one lingua franca (English) or, rather, plurilingual competence.

Clearly, very young foreign language learners will not have visions of their own until they reach mid-adolescence, as is evident from pedagogical research



on aspirations (e.g., Holloway & Yamamoto, 2008; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Parents, by openly stating the goals and benefits of early FLL, may attempt to project their own aspirations onto their young children; however, it remains to be seen whether they will materialise.

## 2. The study

At the cornerstone of this research lies the assumption that parents of very young language learners can, by their attitude, model a certain type of behavior, for instance, arouse interest in and aspirations for high foreign language achievement. In other words, parents can create a vision for the development of the ideal L2 selves of their children, their future language identities. It is assumed that only plurilingual identities and belonging to a global society will bring the children success and a privileged position on the linguistic market and, as a consequence, on the vocational market. Indeed, languages seem to be one of the keys to mobility and realising vocational opportunities in the globalised world. Positive role models and FLL experiences in early childhood may result, it is believed, in the growth of children's own educational aspirations and eventually the successful mastery of foreign language(s) in adolescence. In other words, parental visions and support can secure the rise of similar visions and outcomes in their children. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are parental visions about their children's future FL identity?
2. What is the "imagined community" the parents aspire to?
3. In what ways do the parents aim to realise their visions?

### 2.1. Method

This section will provide information on the organisation of the research. It provides information on the participants involved, the instrument used and the procedure employed.

#### 2.1.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 15 parents of very young foreign language learners. All of the children were exposed to English as an FL either in their kindergarten or through home tuition. They were recruited from participants in a much larger quantitative study ( $N = 335$ ) (cf. Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013). Of these parents, seven were classified as of higher socio-economic status (SES), four as of moderate (lower middle-class) SES and four as of lower SES. The SES of the family

was established by analysing parental (especially the fathers') occupations, which were judged according to the ranking scales developed by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (1979) for class distinction in postmodern society. The fathers' occupations were diverse and included lawyers (1), academics (3), engineers (2), IT specialists (3), bank/sales managers (1), small business owners (1), self-employed workers (1), office clerks (1), and manual workers (2).

It is noteworthy that while it is the father's occupation that determines the SES of the family, in the case of very young children it is usually the mother who makes the key educational decisions for her children, fathers being mainly breadwinners. Thus the mothers' level of general and FL education together with their aspirations seem to be more relevant for the study as this is their visions that are instilled initially. Among the 15 parents interviewed 13 were mothers and two fathers. In regards to their level of FL knowledge, it was notable that all the interviewees of higher and moderate SES had a fluent or at least intermediate command of English. Additionally, six of them had knowledge of other languages (Lithuanian, Arabic, Italian, French, Slovak). The lower SES interviewees had only a communicative (basic) knowledge of English or other FLs (usually Russian), which shows that they were failed language users themselves. It can be further speculated that this lack of competence may also account for the lower paid occupations.

### 2.1.2. Research instrument

The research instrument was a semistructured interview; it consisted of 17 open-ended prompting questions concerning such issues as "the place of FLL in the child's education," "future child identity," "educational plans for the future," "parental involvement in FLL," "cultural capital," and "social background/inter-generational transfer of capital." The main objective was to elicit information on the parental visions of their children's FL achievement and their future FL identity. The key issue was whether parents see an early start in a FL as an important positioning tool on the social stratum and what measures they take to secure this advantageous position.

The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each. They were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. All the interviews were conducted in Polish, and all the quotations are the author's translations.

### 2.1.3. Procedure

Data for this study was collected in the years 2012-2013, that is, prior to the Polish ministerial bill lowering the age of obligatory L2 instruction to three years

of age. This bill is to be binding as of September 2015, and as of 2017 all 3-year-olds will encounter foreign language teaching in the public sector. Though this will free many parents from the decision of when to start the child's FLL, it will probably prompt many of them to increase their offspring's learning opportunities by, for example, maximising the amount of language contact by means of additional classes or teaching the child other, rarer but prospectively lucrative languages (such as Chinese?). Thus, it can be seen that even the choice of language to be taught is regarded as a kind of investment. At this point it should be acknowledged that the same tool was used in the project whose partial results were published earlier (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013, 2015), but some of the data then obtained was not analysed. From the previous qualitative and quantitative analysis it was found that the SES of the parents (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013) as well as the parents' own knowledge of foreign languages (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2015) were important distal variables accounting for the differences in early L2 acquisition. Thus, the following data will also be interpreted with reference to these variables.

## 2.2. Data analysis and interpretation

### 2.2.1. Visions of higher SES parents

As predicted, parental visions of their children's future seem to be dictated by their own position in the social stratum. The parents who had achieved a relatively high position (Parents 1-8) did it to a large extent due to their FL knowledge and a high level of education as both the fathers and the mothers performed occupations belonging to the first or second rank in the EGP scales named after the authors: Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarrero (1979). By contrast, those parents who did not possess such linguistic or educational advantages obtained a moderate or even low SES (Parents 9-15). Thus the two factors seem to coincide. Here, it must be remarked that the classes in Polish society were established mainly after the fall of communism (in 1989) and the introduction of a free market which brought advancement opportunities to some and restricted others. It also led to the rise of a middle class. Sociological research (e.g., Marjoribanks, 2003) has shown that it is mainly the middle class that has the high educational aspirations, seeing it as a gateway to occupational success.

A noticeable difference between higher SES and moderate/lower SES parents manifested itself in their perception of FL knowledge as a contributor to success. The former perceived FLL as an important investment towards the child's future but not as an ultimate goal in itself. What is more, they did not expect high outcomes from an early start but rather regarded early exposure to a FL as "something natural" since they used a FL on a daily basis for work and

social purposes. Those parents believed their children are already exposed to a bilingual environment as they hear foreign languages in their surroundings, for example when parents have foreign guests (Parents 6 & 9) or frequently travel abroad (Parents 2 & 7), and when children observe their parents reading/telephoning in English (Parents 1, 5 & 7) or are engaged in listening to storybooks and scaffolded watching of English cartoons on the Internet with their parents. These were particularly parents who were members of prestigious professions. As the mother of Hania (4;0), Parent 5, says, *"it would be strange if I knew English and did not teach it somehow to my child."* Thus, she points out that it is only natural that parents wish to transfer onto their children the skills and knowledge which they possess themselves and expect that it may bring benefits. This indicates that intergenerational transfer of capital, in this case the linguistic capital, takes place.

In another case parents proficient in English (6) decided to establish "non-native bilingualism." One of the mothers justifies it like this: *"From the beginning I knew my husband would speak to the children only in English, . . . I had no choice but to agree."* She adds:

*Even living here in Poland we have had so many foreign guests visiting, and we also travel to friends abroad, for example to Germany, that for our children it is even more important to have English as their first language. Besides, it is very likely they will study or live abroad. (Parent 6)*

Another multilingual parent (Parent 9) believed that *"knowledge of other FLs is a key to getting to know other cultures, which enrich one's personality and make one open to other cultures."* He would like his daughters *"to have international friends, not to be prejudiced against people of other colours and races."* He acknowledged he often took them to meetings with his international friends as he believes the experience of being in an international community enriches one's personality.

Some other parents working in international corporations point to instrumental benefits of knowing the foreign language. Parent 7, for instance, says:

*I think we would like children to know various languages because it is extremely important at work. I know a lot of time passes before they start working, but for now they do not have to speak fluently. They only have to be confident enough to use them . . . we often travel abroad. When we are abroad on holiday, for example in Italy skiing, I draw my children's attention to different languages, and I tell them that if they want to communicate, they have to learn their languages. (Parent 7)*

It is noteworthy that this comment was made by an ambitious mother who knew three other languages herself and who believes that it is thanks to this competence that she managed to obtain a well-paid job.

All the parents cited above belong to the higher SES groups. They have high FL competence themselves, which helped them achieve their social position. It is noticeable that the parents point to both instrumental and integrative motives when projecting the children's future and the use of FLs. The instrumental ones refer to practical utility, obtaining high status, and a well-paid job. The integrative ones mean joining the broadly understood international society in which their offspring would function without complexes, competing for the best jobs, having international friends, being a citizen of the world, and, employing Byram's (1997) words, having a bicultural identity, that is, an international one on top of the national one.

It is characteristic of these parents that they acknowledge the necessity of knowing several languages in the future in order to function effectively in an international society. Thus, they have a vision that their children will function within that global society, have foreign friends, travel widely, and probably perform white collar jobs which will require foreign language competence. Multilingualism will be a part of their "international" identity. One parent (Parent 7) emphasises that foreign language experience, just like any other additional classes, will add to the development of the child's self-esteem.

In regards to the second research question, it is also evident from the above discussion that these parents perceive "the imagined community" as global society. The parents wish their children to function in the global society without complexes, looking for jobs globally, which will allow them to reproduce the same SES and for which they will need to be plurilingual.

However, it is noteworthy that some parents held the conviction that this kind of investment is not a goal per se. While they acknowledge they value FL knowledge, they realise the uncertainties of today's life. There are no skills/knowledge that will guarantee the children success in life. The one area in which they feel they can influence their children is instilling Christian values and ethics as they believe this brings a stable canon and can bring self-fulfillment to their children and a stable support to themselves.

Thus in times of heightened anxiety and apprehension about the future, when an individual has little control over his or her life (as many careers in fact result from coincidence or luck rather than thorough planning) and is dependent on global institutions (banks, transnational corporations/global policies), the highly conscious people revert from the ideology of global expansion and consumerism to the local values, where they find stability and security. This marks the reversion to humanistic values, which might be a new trend in life. As Parent

2 acknowledges, *“the most important value is family and this is how I want to bring up my kids.”* This parent adds: *“Language is only an additional tool that helps us to realise our other skills; it is something that enables the exploitation of our basic knowledge more efficiently.”*

Regarding Question 3, the higher SES parents seem to deliberately plan their children’s career, for which, it must be admitted, they possess appropriate resources. They aim to realise their aspirations in reference to their children by sending them to additional classes, often with a native speaker (Parent 3), maximizing home exposure to L2 via, for instance, watching English-speaking cartoons, sending the child to a foreign language course abroad (Parent 3), choosing private schools for further education (supposedly with a higher level of linguistic and general education) or even, in the more distant future, sending their child to study abroad (Parent 6). They also point to acting as positive role models themselves, during holidays or in social events, which are supposed to show children the utility of knowing foreign languages. Three out of these 7 parents have already decided to speak a foreign language at home at least occasionally, thus establishing a form of artificial bilingualism. Therefore, in the case of these parents we can talk of intergenerational transmission of linguistic capital taking place.

### 2.2.2. Visions of lower/moderate SES parents

In regards to moderate or lower SES parents, their visions of their children’s future, achievement goals and investments are probably much constrained by material means as well as by their own experiences as language learners. These parents express instrumental motives for their child learning a FL, such as getting a better job in the future or even emigrating. One of the parents (Parent 8) gave birth to her daughter in the US, and, since the child has American citizenship and spent time in an English-speaking environment for some time before arriving in Poland, the mother wants to maintain this language expecting the language will turn out useful when the child wishes to go back to the US at some point in the future. A similar perception of an “imagined community” associated with a concrete nationality was expressed by Parent 12, who also has family members in the US and expresses hope for emigration or preparing the children to move out in search of better life prospects. Thus, early FLL is regarded as an investment towards achieving higher status, yet these parents perceive this possibility only through looking for better job prospects outside their country. Historically, the US has been always regarded as a “promised land” and a site of emigration. This indicates that the parents would have no problem in abandoning their national identity and they would not mind adopting a new one if that meant better living standards. Other parents have not set any learning goals for

themselves or for their children. The children attend FL classes simply because they are offered to them in the kindergarten and also not to stand out from others, which might happen if a given child is the only one in the group who does not attend the classes. The effect of group pressure is quite evident.

Also, rather than plurilingual achievement, they clearly point to the necessity of knowing English as a lingua franca. Here it must be recognised that many of these parents (except Parent 11) are unsuccessful language learners themselves, and the lack of this capacity may have inhibited them from achieving higher SES; thus, they still perceive it as a minimum and yet a sufficient tool in achieving a well-paid job. Some of these parents do not deliberately invest in the child's achievement, saying that they do not want to impose anything on their children, just as their parents did not on them (Parents 11, 13, 14); it thus seems that some negative intergenerational impact is visible. This apparent advocacy for freedom may in fact denote a lack of high aspirations or goal-mindedness. Since they have not developed aspirations themselves, it is unlikely they will instill them in their children.

With regards to future L2 identity, they either point to the national one or sometimes do not even seem to understand the question. It is evident they have not given much thought to that issue and it indicates poor educational awareness on the part of these parents. Their goals seem to stay in the sphere of dreams. As Parent 15 says: *"I know I should start teaching my 4-year-old child some English. I am worried he will have problems at school later. But for now I cannot afford it."*

When it comes to parental support (Research question 3), it is not considerable for the reasons mentioned above: The parents either do not have the material resources or they are not aware of the necessity to increase the amount of L2 input. As Parent 10 believes optimistically, *"future school education will do."* Parent 11, despite being an English teacher herself, also imagined English would be acquired incidentally and through school education. In addition to these deficiencies, the majority of the parents do not know FLs well themselves. Thus, they cannot help the children in revising class material or show them where to look for additional contact with the language.

### 3. Conclusions and implications for further research

The major purpose of this study was to shed light on the social determinants of a successful early start in a FL and the development of possible multilingualism in later life. It is the social milieu of the child, as described by its distal and proximal factors, that determines goals and opportunities for this development. The educational aspirations of parents, if aroused in children early, may result in educational success.

Yet the study also revealed that differences in educational opportunities and parental aspirations can be observed in the early stages of the child's life, which may also account, at least partially, for differences in subsequent achievement. It has been observed that in lower SES families, parents prefer to deter investments into later childhood or adolescence, first waiting to see how well the child does at school and then supporting the child financially if there are prospects that this investment may pay off. They do not aspire to the cosmopolitan world as they do not have any experience of living in it themselves. This is beyond the reach and imagination of less educated and less well-to-do parents. By contrast, in families who hold high aspirations there is a strong awareness of the necessity of investing in the child from the early start, for which they also have finances.

The study was not free from flaws such as the relatively small number of respondents and their self-selection (as only those who volunteered took part). Therefore, the majority of the respondents were those who found the topic appealing, with a consequent bias towards representatives of the middle class. Less is known about the goals of FLL among lower class parents.

However, it must be recognised that the study is one of the few investigating the process of very early FLL and probably the first one interpreting the educational and social phenomena within the poststructuralist SLA framework, thus leaving scope for improvement and further investigations. Consequently, it is suggested that the long-term impact of parental educational aspirations is further explored, perhaps in a longitudinal study. It would be worth investigating whether parental aspirations and investments in an early start in a FL result in the actual growth of children's own high aspirations towards FLL and lead to linguistic/plurilingual achievement, and/or bring any other advantage to the early starters over later starters, also in the affective domain, such as developing an international identity, attitudes and motivation.

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