

Educational Aspirations of Pupils at Transitional Periods of Croatian Elementary Education: Nature, Determinants and Change

Presentation of the project



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb



Centar za istraživanje i razvoj obrazovanja
The Centre for Educational Research and Development

ABOUT THE PROJECT



- **Croatian Science Foundation** Installation Research Project UIP-2014-09-6757
- **team of 7 researchers** from the Institute for Social Research – Zagreb and the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb:
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- project duration: February 2016 – February 2019

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS (EA)

- among the strongest **determinants of educational and more general life choices and outcomes** of young persons
- pupils with higher EA have **greater motivation and higher educational attainment**, as do those for whom **parents and teachers** hold higher educational expectations and EA (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Gorrard, See & Davies, 2012)
- the importance of EA also extends **beyond the field of education**; related to the formation of **individual identity, personal well-being and a reduced risk for social exclusion** (Bynner, 2000; Kintrea, StClair & Houston, 2011; Sparkes, 1999)

THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

- **causality** between EA and outcomes is difficult to establish; EA are **both a predictor and a product** of one's abilities, personal attributes, socialisation and experiences (Gutman & Akerman, 2008)
- the relationship between EA and outcomes is extremely **dynamic**, **changing throughout the educational pathway** of a pupil as a **result of the interaction** between the development of the individual and the increasing complexity of educational and other contexts (Gottfredson, 2002)
- pupils' EA are extremely **socially contextualised**, shaped by parents and other family members, peers, school practices and the characteristics of the wider community

THE DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

- distinction between **aspirations** (what an individual *hopes* will happen in the future) and **expectations** (what an individual *expects* will happen in the future) (Gorrard, See & Davies, 2012)
 - aspirations can vary in their specificity, expectations are more concrete
 - in aspirations, both present and future perspectives are considered, expectations focus on present
- distinction between **types of aspirations**
 - EA are often related to and conflated with **occupational aspirations**; both are part of an individual's general **life aspirations**

THE DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

- EA have typically been operationalised by considering **the length of formal education one hopes to achieve**
- **narrow operationalisation**
 - focuses exclusively on the **advancement within the formal system** of education and the acquisition of formal qualifications
 - **equating a greater number of years of schooling** and academic titles from institutions of higher education **with qualitatively higher aspirations**
 - **insufficiently discriminative** in light of increasing access to higher education, where 67% of eligible pupils in Croatia enter higher education (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2014)

THE AIM OF THE PROJECT

- to examine the **nature, determinants and change** in pupils' educational aspirations at three transitional periods of Croatian elementary education
- **the nature of educational aspirations** emphasises the need consider the fact that pupils' educational aspirations may qualitatively differ at different periods of their life
- **determinants** emphasise the aim to discover and model factors related to pupils' educational aspirations.
- the examination of **change** deals with both *intra-individual* change (as pupils progress through the educational system) and the *inter-individual* differences of pupils of different ages

TRANSITIONAL PERIODS

- pupil's initial induction to formal education (1st and 2nd grade)
- the transition from class to subject teaching (4th and 5th grade)
- the completion of elementary education (7th and 8th grade)

- at these transitional periods, pupils and their parents are provided with **qualitatively and quantitatively different information** on achievement, relative position of the individual's abilities, work habits and talent within the wider group

- it might be expected that new educational settings and arrangements prompt a (re)evaluation of one's perspectives concerning self-concept, abilities, ambitions and goals

SOME RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the nature of pupils' educational aspirations at three transitional periods of Croatian elementary education?
- How do pupils' educational aspirations develop over the course of three transitional periods of Croatian elementary education?
- How do new circumstances and requirements posed by the educational system at transitional periods affect pupils' educational aspirations?
- In what ways and to what extent do pupils' educational aspirations differ between pupils at different stages of elementary education?
- What are the differences in the patterns of change in pupils' educational aspirations over three transitional periods of Croatian elementary education?
- In what ways and to what extent do individual, parent, class and school-related factors determine pupils' educational aspirations at three transitional periods of elementary education?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

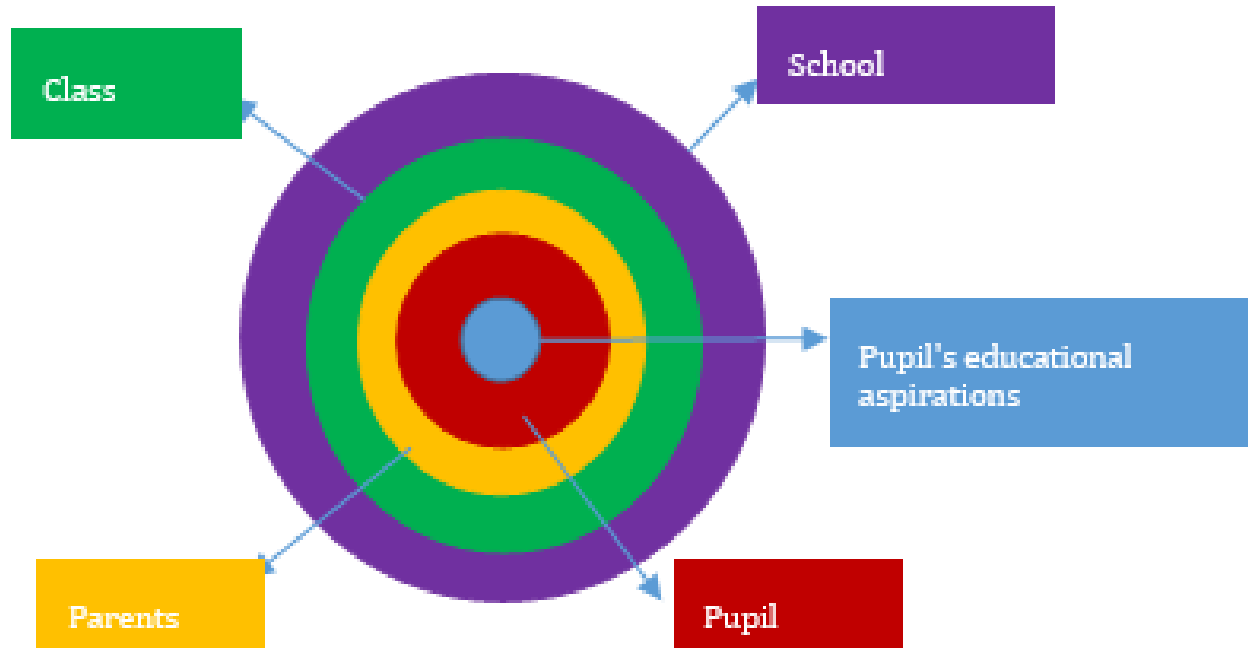


Figure 1. Conceptual framework - Ecological model of pupil's educational aspirations

PUPIL LEVEL

Age; gender; previous school achievement

Pupils self-beliefs, values and expectations: Personal values related to education; Previous achievement-related experiences; Academic self-concept, self-efficacy beliefs and specific competence-related beliefs; Interests; Goal orientation; Causal attributions; Expectation of success

Perception of significant others' support and expectations: Perception of parental support and expectations for the pupil; Perception of teachers' support and expectations for the pupil; Perception of peers' aspirations; Role models

Knowledge of education system: Knowledge of various educational opportunities/ educational pathways

Pupils' practices: Extracurricular activities; Out of school activities; Learning practices

PARENT LEVEL

Education; employment; occupation; income; social background

Parents' general beliefs, goals and values: Socialisation goals/ Child-rearing beliefs; Personal values related to education; Parents' educational biographies; Parenting style

Parents' child-specific perceptions and expectations: Life, educational and occupational aspirations for the child; Perception of child's abilities, interests, aspirations, personality and achievement motivation; Expectations for child's performance and educational pathway; Causal attributions of child's educational achievements; Self-efficacy beliefs

Parents' school-related perceptions: Satisfaction with school; Perception of teacher-parent relationships; Perception of teacher-pupil relationships

Parental practices: Parental involvement and monitoring; Support in making educational and career choices; Provision of support for participation in activities/ for fostering child's interests and aspirations

CLASS (PEERS) LEVEL

Size; composition of class with regard to pupils' abilities/ school achievement/ social background

Attitudinal and behavioural norms

Peer pressure

Classroom goal structure

Social comparison

SCHOOL LEVEL

Size; location/ social-demographic composition of neighbourhood

Teachers' general beliefs, goals and values: Personal values related to education; Pedagogical goals (beliefs about the purpose or goals of instruction and learning in school); teachers' self-efficacy beliefs; Perceived responsibility for pupils' educational aspirations and achievement; General expectations for pupils; Perception of teacher-pupil relationships; Perception of teacher-parents relationships

Teachers' child-specific perceptions and expectations (for each pupil): Perception of child's abilities, interests, aspirations, personality and achievement motivation; Perceptions of parental aspirations and expectations for the child; Expectations for child's performance and educational pathway; Causal attributions of child's educational achievement; Perception of quality of co-operation with child's parents; Perception of parental involvement

School practices: School climate; Educational and career guidance; Provision of extracurricular activities; Provision of support in transitional periods

METHODOLOGY

- fully integrated **mixed model design**, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather necessary data
- first systemic **longitudinal examination** of this topic in the Croatian context

QUALITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH

- **in-depth exploration** of educational aspirations
- series of staged **semi-structured interviews** conducted with participant triads made up of a pupil, his/her parent and teacher
- **five schools** will be purposively selected (with an aim of maximum variation)
- data collection will occur at **four time points** (t1-t4)
- transitional periods: **12 triads (1st and 2nd grade), 6 triads (4th and 5th grade, 7th and 8th grade)**
- around 120 triads over two academic years
- Criterion sampling: gender and teachers' estimation of previous school attainment
- t1 precedes A

QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH

- **repeated administration of a pupil questionnaire** at three different time-points (A-C) over two academic years (core + variable part)
- transitional periods: **4th and 5th grade, 7th and 8th grade** – all pupils
- stratified random sampling based on school location - **20 schools** in the City of Zagreb will be selected
- final targeted sample - **approximately 800 participants** that participated at A, B and C

PROJECT TIMELINE

	2016												2017												2018											
	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL-AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL-AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL-AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN			
QUAL									T1					T2							T3					T4										
QUAN													PILOT	A							B					C										

Legend:

QUAL - qualitative phase of the research

QUAN - quantitative phase of the research

T1-T4 - data collection points in the qualitative phase of the research

A, B, C - data collection points in the quantitative phase of the research

DATA ANALYSIS

- use of varied and **diverse analytical procedures** in examining the nature, determinants and change in pupils' educational aspirations over time
- The results from both research phases will be integrated through a **concurrent examination of individual perspectives over time** and the use of statistical modelling from the large samples
- **QUAL: twelve tactics for generating meaning from interview data** (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and a **constant comparative approach**, combining elements of inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of data with that collected from other sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

DATA ANALYSIS

- QUAN:
 - **Structural equation modelling** aimed at modelling relationships between variables related to pupils' educational aspirations at different points of education and at three different research time-points
 - **Multilevel modelling** aimed at determining the contribution of variables at different levels (individual, class, school) on educational aspirations
 - **Latent Curve Growth Modelling** aimed at examining intra-individual change and trajectories at three transitional time-points

CHALLENGES

- Access at different levels
- Preventing attrition
- Extensiveness of the research design
- Ethical questions (related to the age of participants and longterm cooperation of researchers and participant triads)

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

- an original contribution to existing knowledge by examining the educational aspirations of pupils at a very young age
- more complex conceptualisation and operationalisation of EA
- new methodological perspectives on research into educational aspirations
- a more complete understanding of the interactions between pupils, parents and teachers that influence pupils' educational aspirations
- developing practical recommendations for fostering the development of pupils' educational aspirations (Educational Aspirations Network)

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