

# Investigation of attitudes and motivation in early foreign language learning

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## Section 2: FOCUSING ON THE YOUNG EFL LEARNER

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### INVESTIGATION OF ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION IN EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The idea that affective variables might play a role in foreign language learning (FLL) is not new. The evidence compiled over the last twenty years or so may be said to include conflicting results (Lambert & Gardner, 1972; Lukmani, 1977), but most authors would agree that affective variables influence FLL and that this influence should be taken into account and studied carefully.

A review of the research literature on early FLL indicates that attitudes and motivation stand out as factors which may help solve the controversy about the optimal age for starting FLL in school.

The NFER study on the teaching of French in primary schools in England and Wales (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen & Hargreaves, 1974) pointed out that early starters declared more favourable attitudes towards speaking French than those who began at the usual age of eleven. The early beginners' keenness to speak French as well as their greater confidence in using the language showed the long-lasting benefits of an early start.

A study of the effects of an early start in French in Scotland (Nisbet & Welsh, 1972) stressed that an early start in FLL can contribute to the development of learners' attitudes towards learning the language and can increase their interest and understanding.

Several other studies on early FLL (e.g., Holmstrad, 1982) emphasized that early starters develop positive attitudes towards other cultures and nations. Vilke (1979) pointed out that the early starter acquires a wider cultural outlook and develops greater tolerance towards other people, thus leading to international understanding.

Studies on early FLL in Croatia (Petrović, 1982; Vilke, 1976) also found that an early start is beneficial to the development of positive attitudes towards learning the FL and to creating a strong and lasting motivation in learners that would make success in FLL possible.

#### **The Zagreb Project 1991**

The assumption underlying the Project is that attitudes and motivation play a role in FLL. This assumption will be studied from several aspects.

The young learners' attitudes and motivation will be examined in order to study their development throughout the process of learning the FL over the period of three years. Investigation will focus on the direction of this development and, possibly, the factors which may be responsible for it.

The attitudes of learners' parents and teachers will also be examined since we assume that, especially in the initial stages of learning, they may exert a strong influence on the young learners' attitudes and motivation. Attitudes of both the general subjects teacher and the FL teacher will be included in the study.

Four FLs (English, French, German and Italian) are included in the study and the findings for each will be compared to the others.

This chapter will focus on the attitudes and motivation investigations carried out during the initial year of the Project (1991/1992 school year).

## **Instruments**

An interview was used to study the young learners' attitudes and a written questionnaire was developed for the parents.

The interview used with the young learners comprised 22 questions. The following attitude objects were included: the FL, native speakers of the FL, the purpose of learning the FL, the optimal age to start FLL, FL lessons in school, the learner's attainment in the FL. The learners were also asked how much of the FL they had known before starting school and which members of their family spoke FLs.

The questionnaire constructed to assess the parents' attitudes was semi-structured. The items focused on the reasons for enrolling the child in the experimental programme, the optimal age to start FLL, the child's attitudes towards FLL, the monitoring of the child's day-to-day studying, the FL as such, FLL in general and native speakers of the FL the child was learning. The parents were also questioned on the family members' knowledge of FLs.

The items assessing the attitudes towards the FL and FLL were taken from a scale developed by Mihaljević (1991), while the rest of the inventory was constructed specifically for the purpose of the Project. The attitudes towards native speakers of the four FLs included were assessed by a specifically constructed Thurstone scale.

## **Sample**

The sample (N=441) included 100 first graders (51 male, 49 female) learning English, 110 (60 male, 50 female) learning French, 126 (56 male, 70 female) learning German and 105 (50 male, 55 female) fourth graders learning Italian. All the learners learned the FL in primary schools in Zagreb.

The learners of Italian were included in spite of the fact that they were older – they are, in this context, considered to be early starters in the sense that there had been no tradition of starting learning this FL as early as the fourth grade.

A total of 465 parents filled in the parents' questionnaire.

## Results and discussion

The descriptive statistical results to be presented in this section are grouped according to the object of the attitude investigated. Data for all the four languages are included.

### LEARNER INTERVIEW

#### *Item 1:*

The purpose of this item was to find out what number of learners would choose the FL as the favourite school subject. The table below shows the four most frequently mentioned favourite subjects by learners of each FL.

Which is your favourite subject in school?

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E: Maths (34.8 %) Croatian (3.15 %) Drawing (14.1 %) English (12.0%)

G: Maths (32.5 %) Croatian (21.1 %) Draw./PT (13.8 %) German (13.0%)

F: Maths (36.5 %) French (26.9 %) Croatian (17.3 %) Drawing (9.6%)

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I: Maths (32.7 %) Italian (20.2 %) Science (13.5 %) Drawing (9.6%)

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As can be seen, none of the four groups had the FL as the most frequent favourite subject. With the French and Italian learners it was the second favourite subject, and it came fourth with the English and German beginners. A possible explanation may be that, as Vilke (1976) pointed out in an earlier study on young learners, the majority of learners at this early age view FL classes as pleasantly spent time in school, not as classes in which they are taught a school subject.

#### *Items 2 & 3:*

The learners were questioned on whether they liked their FL classes.

Do you like your FL classes?

|     | E    | G     | F     | I     |
|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 100% | 98.4% | 97.2% | 98.1% |

Do you enjoy your FL classes?

|     | E    | G     | F     | I    |
|-----|------|-------|-------|------|
| YES | 100% | 98.4% | 96.3% | 100% |

When asked directly, the vast majority of the learners expressed very positive attitudes towards the FL as a school subject.

*Item 4:*

This item was aimed at finding out how the young learners perceived what went on in their FL classes. The majority of the answers lent themselves to a classification into three groups. The first group comprises activities that imply teaching/learning elements (e.g., learning new words, learning how to count in the FL). The second one includes activities that imply elements of game (e.g., playing games, singing). The third group comprises answers by those learners who mentioned both types of activities. The ultimate purpose of this item was to see whether those young learners who are conscious from the beginning that they are being taught a FL will be more or less successful than those who are not aware of any teaching going on.

What do you do in your FL classes?

|   | teaching | playing | both  |
|---|----------|---------|-------|
| E | 9.0%     | 23.0%   | 68.0% |
| G | 19.0%    | 13.5%   | 67.5% |
| F | 11.8%    | 24.5%   | 63.6% |
| I | 48.6%    | 0.0%    | 51.4% |

These results show that most learners were aware of some teaching going on. It is interesting to note that none of the learners of Italian mentioned game activities alone: they were three years older and, perhaps, this difference in perceiving what goes on in class may be attributed to the age factor. The different results across languages are difficult to interpret because, although the overall approach was similar, the FL teachers in this project were allowed relative freedom in their teaching methodology.

*Items 5 & 6:*

The learners were asked about the things they liked most and least in their FL classes. Again, the answers obtained could be classified into three groups as in Item 4.

What do you like most in your FL classes?

|   | teaching | playing | both  |
|---|----------|---------|-------|
| E | 14.1%    | 81.8%   | 3.0%  |
| G | 28.2%    | 62.9%   | 6.5%  |
| F | 10.1%    | 79.8%   | 9.2%  |
| I | 61.5%    | 23.1%   | 14.4% |

What do you dislike most in your FL classes?

|   | teaching | playing | both | other |
|---|----------|---------|------|-------|
| E | 41.9%    | 38.7%   | 0.0% | 12.9% |
| G | 43.8%    | 26.6%   | 0.0% | 29.7% |
| F | 33.9%    | 44.6%   | 1.8% | 19.6% |
| I | 54.5%    | 27.3%   | 0.0% | 18.2% |

As expected, most of our 7-year-olds liked most the activities with game elements. The results for the 10-year-old learners of Italian may show that emotional and cognitive maturity influences our likes and dislikes of what goes on in the classroom. It is difficult to think of a plausible explanation for the French learners disliking games in such a high percentage. Maybe the follow-up investigations will enlighten us on the possible causes.

*Items 7 & 12:*

The young beginners were questioned on how they felt about being in the experimental class.

Would you like to continue learning the FL next year too?

|     | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 92.0% | 94.4% | 91.8% | 99.0% |

Would you be sorry if your parents hadn't enrolled you into this programme?

|     | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 91.7% | 97.6% | 89.1% | 98.1% |

A vast majority of the learners seemed to like the fact that they were in the experimental class and wanted to continue learning the FL.

*Item 8:*

This item deals with self-assessment. The learners were asked to evaluate their own knowledge of the FL by assigning themselves a mark on a 1-5 scale (1-insufficient, 5 excellent).

|   | excellent | very good | good  | fair | insufficient |
|---|-----------|-----------|-------|------|--------------|
| E | 72.8%     | 21.7%     | 4.3%  | 1.1% | 1.1%         |
| G | 77.4%     | 16.5%     | 4.3%  | 0.0% | 1.7%         |
| F | 73.0%     | 23.0%     | 4.9%  | 0.0% | 0.0%         |
| I | 24.3%     | 63.2%     | 12.6% | 0.0% | 0.0%         |

Our young beginners seem to evaluate their knowledge of the FL very highly. There are two possible ways to explain these results. It is possible, on the one hand, that what

the learners were supposed to learn during the first few months was easy enough for most learners to master well. On the other hand, learners at this age may be very uncritical about themselves: this may be concluded from the results for Italian learners, who were three years older than the other three groups and who rated themselves over a wider range of marks.

*Items 9, 10 & 11:*

These items focused on what benefits the learner saw in knowing the FL.

Is it good to know the FL you are learning?

|            | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES        | 97.0% | 97.6% | 89.1% | 98.1% |
| NO         | 1.0%  | 8.0%  | 5.4%  | 0.0%  |
| DON'T KNOW | 2.0%  | 1.6%  | 5.5%  | 1.9%  |

Why is it good to know the FL you are learning?

|                             | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Communication               | 34.4% | 53.7% | 36.3% | 33.0% |
| Travel                      | 42.2% | 25.6% | 30.0% | 30.8% |
| Good to learn things        | 10.0% | 6.6%  | 13.0% | 9.9%  |
| General knowledge increase  | 4.4%  | 8.3%  | 8.0%  | 13.2% |
| Language features           | 1.1%  | 4.1%  | 10.0% | 8.8%  |
| Education/job opportunities | 7.8%  | 1.7%  | 1.3%  | 4.4%  |

Why is it good for you to know this FL?

|                             | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Communication               | 29.9% | 59.2% | 49.5% | 44.8% |
| Travel                      | 46.0% | 24.2% | 34.1% | 44.8% |
| Good to learn things        | 12.6% | 6.7%  | 4.4%  | 5.2%  |
| General knowledge increase  | 2.3%  | 2.5%  | 4.4%  | 1.0%  |
| Language features           | 1.1%  | 1.7%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  |
| Education/job opportunities | 8.0%  | 5.8%  | 7.7%  | 4.2%  |

As is evident from these results, the vast majority of the young learners thought it was a good idea to be learning a FL in school. The reasons they offered probably reflect the parent's views as well as the value the society places in knowing FLs. As expected, the answers about personal and general benefits are practically identical as learners at this age probably cannot distinguish between personal and general benefits.

*Item 13:*

The young learners were asked about the optimal age to start learning a FL.  
What do you think is the best time to start learning a FL?

|   | pre-school | 7 years | 8 years | 9 years | 10 years | later |
|---|------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-------|
| E | 26.9%      | 58.1%   | 2.2%    | 4.3%    | 4.3%     | 4.3%  |
| G | 19.3%      | 70.6%   | 4.2%    | 1.7%    | 8.0%     | 3.4%  |
| F | 29.4%      | 60.6%   | 4.6%    | 0.9%    | 0.9%     | 3.7%  |
| I | 23.8%      | 28.7%   | 16.8%   | 13.9%   | 14.9%    | 1.0%  |

It is not surprising that the majority of the 7-year-old beginners thought that their own age was the best time to start FLL. The Italian beginners offered a greater variety of optimal beginning ages but, interestingly enough, they also believed that the beginning of school was the best time to start FLL.

*Items 14 & 15:*

The items aimed at finding out whether the young beginners related the FL they were learning to its native speakers and at seeing what kind of idea they had of them.

Three criteria were used in grouping the answers: correctness of the answer, content reference and evaluation.

Who speaks this FL?

|            | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Correct    | 69.5% | 68.3% | 65.5% | 73.1% |
| Incorrect  | 13.7% | 25.8% | 19.1% | 26.0% |
| Don't know | 7.4%  | 0.8%  | 15.5% | 1.0%  |

It seems that most of our young beginners had some knowledge about the native speakers whose language they were learning. As expected, the highest percentage of correct answers was obtained from the Italian beginners. Still, quite a large number of learners did not know who the native speakers are. It may be that young beginners do not need to connect a FL with a culture of native speakers – they may be attaching to it a different kind of reality.

What are they like?

|                          | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Character                | 56.7% | 77.8% | 50.5% | 64.4% |
| Physical appearance      | 14.4% | 3.4%  | 3.8%  | 3.8%  |
| Cultural characteristics | 3.3%  | 4.3%  | 3.8%  | 21.2% |
| Don't know               | 23.3% | 10.3% | 40.0% | 4.8%  |

|          | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Positive | 44.6% | 61.9% | 44.2% | 77.8% |
| Neutral  | 53.0% | 36.4% | 54.8% | 1.0%  |
| Negative | 2.4%  | 0.7%  | 1.0%  | 2.0%  |

The results show that most of the beginners thought of the native speakers in terms of character characterizations. Italian beginners also used cultural characterizations: being three years older they probably knew more about Italian culture and this may have determined their attitudes towards the Italians. A rather high percentage of the French beginners had no idea about the French, which may be explained by the fact that in everyday life they were not as often exposed to the French language and culture as were the learners of the other FLs to the respective cultures.

It is interesting to note that the majority of English and French beginners made neutral qualifications about the respective native speakers, while the characterizations of German and Italian native speakers were mostly positive: a possible explanation may be the fact that the investigation was carried out during the raging war in Croatia and that the political situation was being reflected in the learners' attitudes. Generally speaking, our young beginners seemed to start learning the FL with attitudes towards the native speakers that cannot be considered negative.

*Items 16, 17 & 18:*

These three items focus on the learner's environment, languagewise. The learners were asked about the FLs used by parents, friends and relatives.

Do your parents speak the FL you are learning?

|             | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Father only | 6.1%  | 23.0% | 16.5% | 8.6%  |
| Mother only | 16.2% | 17.5% | 11.9% | 9.5%  |
| Both        | 37.4% | 16.7% | 5.5%  | 11.4% |
| Neither     | 40.4% | 42.9% | 66.1% | 70.5% |

These results reflect the trend in FLL in this country in the last few decades, Italian being the least frequently and English the most frequently taught FL in school.

Do your parents speak any other FL?

|             | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Father only | 17.4% | 12.2% | 11.1% | 14.3% |
| Mother only | 18.5% | 20.3% | 17.6% | 11.4% |
| Both        | 28.3% | 31.7% | 38.9% | 67.6% |
| Neither     | 35.9% | 35.8% | 32.4% | 6.7%  |

In a way, these results also reflect the FLL policies in this country. However, it is also possible, as can be seen from the Parents' Questionnaire results, that 7-year-olds do not know whether or which FLs their parents speak. This may also be concluded from the very low percentage of Italian learners' answers – being 10 years old they may be more aware of what FLs their parents speak.

Do any of your relatives or friends speak the FL you are learning?

|          | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| None     | 38.0% | 26.6% | 53.6% | 32.0% |
| Relative | 24.0% | 38.7% | 28.2% | 19.4% |
| Friend   | 22.0% | 17.7% | 11.8% | 29.1% |
| Both     | 16.0% | 16.9% | 6.4%  | 19.4% |

Apart from the French beginners, it seems that most of the learners taking part in the Project had someone in the close environment that spoke the FL they were learning in school.

*Items 19, 20 & 21:*

The young learners were asked about whether they had known the FL before they started school. They were also questioned on what they had known of the language as well as where they had learned it.

Did you know this FL before you started school?

|     | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 58.0% | 31.7% | 17.4% | 28.6% |

More than half of the English beginners knew some English before starting school. Compared to others, the French beginners least frequently entered the learning process with some kind of pre-knowledge of French.

What did you know in this FL?

|           | E     | G     | F     | I      |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Words     | 71.7% | 84.8% | 68.0% | 100.0% |
| Sentences | 28.3% | 15.2% | 32.0% | 0.0%   |

In all the four groups the majority of learners had learned words. The knowledge of a third of French “false” beginners extended to the sentence level.

Where did you learn it?

|                     | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Kindergarten        | 32.8% | 4.3%  | 33.3% | 3.6%  |
| Parents             | 26.2% | 37.0% | 29.2% | 28.6% |
| Siblings            | 16.4% | 4.3%  | 0.0%  | 10.7% |
| FL course           | 9.8%  | 19.6% | 0.0%  | 0.0%  |
| Grandparents        | 1.6%  | 10.9% | 4.2%  | 17.9% |
| Relatives & friends | 4.9%  | 15.2% | 25.0% | 14.3% |

The parents seemed to be an important source of pre-knowledge for all of the four groups of the learners. English and French seemed to be popular with pre-school learners in kindergartens.

*Item 22:*

The item deals with the learner's perception of the parents' attitude towards their learning of the FL.

What do your parents think about you learning this FL?

|               | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Like it       | 89.9% | 87.3% | 83.6% | 92.4% |
| Don't care    | 2.0%  | 4.8%  | 5.5%  | 1.0%  |
| Don't like it | 2.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  |
| Don't know    | 6.1%  | 7.9%  | 0.0%  | 6.7%  |

A vast majority of our young beginners reported that their parents were happy about their FLL. In a very small number of cases the English beginners reported that their parents would prefer them to be learning another language.

## **PARENTS QUESTIONNAIRE**

*Item 1:*

This item aimed at finding out the reasons for the parents' enrolling the child into the class with the experimental programme in FLL. With the first generation of young beginners, the parents could choose whether to enroll the child into such a class or not, which was not always the case with the following generation of beginners.

### Why did you want your child to attend this class?

|                                  | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| The child's wish                 | 7.1%  | 3.4%  | 5.3%  | 42.9% |
| The child's aptitude             | 4.1%  | 9.9%  | 6.7%  | 4.4%  |
| Advantages of the programme      | 41.8% | 26.1% | 30.7% | 1.1%  |
| Knowledge of a FL                | 30.6% | 37.8% | 40.0% | 19.8% |
| Characteristics of <i>the</i> FL | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 7.7%  |
| General knowledge                | 9.2%  | 12.6% | 16.0% | 22.0% |
| No special reason                | 7.1%  | 9.9%  | 1.3%  | 2.2%  |

The majority of the parents, except for the parents of the Italian beginners, thought that it was a great advantage to be able to start learning a FL at an early age, that it was easier to learn a FL if you started this early, that it was a good opportunity to continue learning the language the child already learned in the kindergarten and that it was a good chance for their child to learn something as useful as the FL in question. The parents of the Italian beginners, however, seemed mostly to have acted on the child's wish to start learning Italian in the fourth form, and believed that the knowledge of Italian would contribute to the child's general knowledge.

#### *Item 2:*

The parents' views on the optimal age start to learning a FL was investigated too.

What do you think is the best age to start FLL?

|   | pre-school | 7 years | 8 years | 9 years | 10 years | later |
|---|------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-------|
| E | 65.0%      | 34.0%   | 0.0%    | 0.0%    | 1.0%     | 0.0%  |
| G | 55.1%      | 37.3%   | 5.1%    | 1.7%    | 0.8%     | 0.0%  |
| F | 62.8%      | 37.2%   | 0.0%    | 0.0%    | 0.0%     | 0.0%  |
| I | 48.5%      | 18.8%   | 12.9%   | 10.9%   | 8.9%     | 0.0%  |

The majority of the parents seemed to believe in a very early start. It is interesting to note that none of the parents opted for a later age than 10. It seems to be a common belief that the earlier one starts the easier and better one learns a FL.

#### *Items 3 & 4:*

The parents were also questioned on the knowledge of the FLs in the child's close environment.

Who in the family speaks the FL your child is learning?

|                 | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Father only     | 9.8%  | 13.7% | 11.3% | 7.5%  |
| Mother only     | 15.7% | 14.3% | 11.3% | 6.5%  |
| Siblings        | 2.9%  | 1.7%  | 3.8%  | 3.2%  |
| Both parents    | 25.5% | 16.2% | 0.0%  | 4.3%  |
| Other members   | 2.0%  | 7.7%  | 8.8%  | 5.4%  |
| Several members | 27.5% | 18.8% | 0.0%  | 6.5%  |
| Nobody          | 16.7% | 27.4% | 53.8% | 66.7% |

The percentage of families in which nobody spoke the FL the child was learning in school reflects, again, the FLL policies in the country: the highest percentage in the Italian column, the lowest in the English column. It is also noteworthy that the largest percentage of families in which several members spoke the FL in question was in the English column.

*Items 5 & 6:*

These two items focused on the active role the parents may play in the child's learning of the FL.

Do you monitor your child's learning of the FL?

|     | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| YES | 95.2% | 98.3% | 82.7% | 89.9% |

How?

|                                | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Check the child's knowledge    | 24.7% | 19.8% | 16.4% | 40.4% |
| Talk to the child              | 28.9% | 31.1% | 41.0% | 13.6% |
| Learn or revise with the child | 20.6% | 29.2% | 19.7% | 35.8% |
| Play in the FL                 | 2.1%  | 4.7%  | 3.3%  | 0.0%  |
| Talk to the teacher            | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 1.6%  | 0.0%  |
| Combinations                   | 22.7% | 15.1% | 18.0% | 9.9%  |

The majority of the parents did take an active role in their child's FLL. Most parents seemed to resort to checking the child's knowledge of the material taught in class, learning the FL with the child or simply talking to the child about what went on in the FL lessons. It is instructing to note that almost none of the parents thought it necessary to get direct information about the child's progress from the FL teacher. It is

possible that the parents found it too early, at this stage, to expect any important opinion on the part of the teacher to be formed about the child’s progress. The follow-up investigations might be enlightening on this point.

*Item 7:*

The parents were also questioned about their perception of the child’s attitudes towards learning the FL in school.

How would you estimate your child’s attitudes towards learning the FL?

|              | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Enthusiastic | 91.3% | 89.7% | 85.4% | 92.1% |
| Indifferent  | 7.7%  | 8.5%  | 14.6% | 7.9%  |
| Dissatisfied | 1.0%  | 1.7%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  |

The majority of the parents saw their child as enthusiastic about learning the FL in school. This corresponds to the learners’ answers in the interview about liking to be in the class with the experimental programme (Interview Items 2 & 3.).

Enthusiasm about learning the FL at the very beginning is certainly a good basis to build on in the learning process that is going to last up to at least the end of the learner’s schooling. It would be of great interest to follow the intensity of the learner’s enthusiasm throughout the entire process of formal learning.

*Item 8:*

The parents’ views on the best way to learn a FL were questioned in this item.

What is the best way to learn a FL?

|                               | E     | G     | F     | I     |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Living in the foreign country | 57.7% | 53.8% | 65.9% | 67.6% |
| At school                     | 21.2% | 16.8% | 9.8%  | 18.6% |
| In a FL course                | 1.9%  | 2.5%  | 1.2%  | 2.0%  |
| Private lessons               | 0.0%  | 1.7%  | 2.4%  | 2.9%  |
| Combinations                  | 19.2% | 25.2% | 20.7% | 8.8%  |

More than half of the parents believed that the best way to learn a FL is to go and live in the foreign country. The percentages were high for French and Italian – these languages were not as present in mass media in this country as English and German. It seems that few parents believed in mastering the FL through formal teaching. These views would be interesting to follow up as the beginners progress in learning.

*Item 9:*

It was considered relevant to question the parents’ attribution of success or failure in FLL to the teacher.

To what extent does success in FLL depend on the teacher?

|   | not at all | a little | fairly | a lot | totally |
|---|------------|----------|--------|-------|---------|
| E | 0.0%       | 0.0%     | 10.6%  | 56.7% | 32.7%   |
| G | 0.8%       | 0.8%     | 12.6%  | 60.5% | 25.2%   |
| F | 0.0%       | 0.0%     | 8.5%   | 72.0% | 19.5%   |
| I | 1.0%       | 0.0%     | 8.9%   | 72.3% | 17.8%   |

The majority of the parents believed that success in FLL depends to a large extent on the teacher. It is interesting to note that about a third of the parents of the English beginners opted for the total responsibility of the teacher.

*Item 10:*

The item deals with the good language learner characteristics.

Rank the following characteristics of the good language learner.

(The table shows the average rank of the five characteristics.)

| E            | G            | F            | I            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Aptitude     | Aptitude     | Motivation   | Aptitude     |
| Motivation   | Motivation   | Aptitude     | Motivation   |
| Diligence    | Diligence    | Diligence    | Diligence    |
| Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence |
| Perseverance | Perseverance | Perseverance | Perseverance |

The majority of the parents seemed to connect success in FLL with aptitude and motivation. It is noteworthy that, except for the parents of the French beginners, most parents attributed success to aptitude, which is, according to common belief, a characteristic that is not under the control of the learner. Aptitude is also considered to be a stable characteristic. Since the majority of the parents connected success with the teacher as well, it may be possible to conclude that the teacher could influence the learner's motivation and was in this way responsible for success in FLL.

*Item 11:*

The parents were questioned on the importance of the four basic FL skills.

Rank the skills according to their importance.

| E         | G         | F         | I         |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Listening | Listening | Listening | Speaking  |
| Speaking  | Speaking  | Speaking  | Listening |
| Reading   | Reading   | Reading   | Reading   |
| Writing   | Writing   | Writing   | Writing   |

The majority of the parents viewed the oral skills as the most important. This is in accordance with the common belief that knowing a language means being able to speak it. The oral aspect is also considered a constituent element of the modern approach to FLL.

**Part B**

The results for the 21 Likert-scale items of agreement will be presented in groups according to the object of the attitude measured. The tables contain the means for the scales, which ranged from 1 (total agreement) to 5 (total disagreement).

*Items 18, 19, 20 & 21:*

The items focus on the attitude towards the FL in question.

- (18) It is important to know this FL.
- (19) This FL is beautiful.
- (20) This FL is difficult.
- (21) This FL is interesting.

| Item | E | G | F | I |
|------|---|---|---|---|
| (18) | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| (19) | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| (20) | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| (21) | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

It seems that our beginners’ parents considered the FL their child was learning fairly important, beautiful and interesting. While English and Italian were also considered fairly easy, German and French were viewed as rather difficult by the parents.

The parents’ attitudes towards the FL are important from two points of view. On the one hand, they may influence the learner’s attitudes. On the other hand, they may determine the extent to which parents are going to play the active role in the child’s learning. If, say, the parents believe that the FL the child is learning is difficult, they are likely to help the child more with learning it or, at least, urge the child to put in more effort into learning it.

*Items 1, 2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16 & 17:*

These items focus on FLL aptitude and its possible connections with gender, talent and intelligence.

- (1) Children learn a FL easier than adults.
- (2) A talent for FLL exists.
- (3) People good at maths are also good at FLs.
- (8) Girls can learn a FL better than boys.

- (11) People who speak more than one FL are very intelligent.
- (12) Anybody can learn a FL.
- (15) People in this country are very talented for learning FLs.
- (16) Only a talented person can learn a FL.
- (17) Motivation for learning is more important than talent.

| Item | E | G | F | I |
|------|---|---|---|---|
| (1)  | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| (2)  | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| (3)  | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| (8)  | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| (11) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| (12) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| (15) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| (16) | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| (17) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

The results show that, although the parents believed there existed such a thing as talent for FLL, it was less important than motivation for learning and, thus, most people can learn a FL. It is also interesting to note that, while the parents considered children to be better learners of FLs than adults, they seemed to disagree with the other commonly held belief that girls are better FL learners than boys. Several studies carried out in this country (e.g., Mihaljević, 1991) and elsewhere (e.g., Ostojić, 1980) indicated existing correlations between gender and FL achievement: in these studies girls consistently had higher grades than boys.

While the parents seemed not to have strong feelings about their compatriots being particularly talented for FLL or about possibilities of increasing general intelligence through FLL, they seemed to disagree that there could be any connection between being good at mathematics and FLs. Although this is still to a large extent an unexplored area, the research done so far (e.g., Mihaljević, 1991) actually points to correlations between achievement in maths and FLs. A possible assumption may be that similar cognitive processes take place in these two types of learning: in maths the learner handles abstractions in the forms of formulae and in FLL the learner has to deal with abstract rules of grammar.

*Items 6, 7, 9 & 14:*

The items investigate the attitudes towards the nature of FLL.

- (6) The most important thing in FLL is to learn the words.
- (7) Practice is the most important thing in FLL.

- (9) The most difficult thing in FLL is mastering its grammar.
- (10) Errors ignored at first are hard to correct later.
- (14) It is easier to read in the FL than to understand speech.

| Item | E | G | F | I |
|------|---|---|---|---|
| (6)  | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| (7)  | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| (9)  | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| (14) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| (10) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

The parents seemed to be unanimous in believing that practice is the most important thing in FLL. In their view, knowing words seemed more important in learning German than in learning the other three FLs. Italian grammar was viewed as more difficult than the grammar of the other three languages. It is interesting to note that the parents did not seem to feel strongly about the importance of the receptive FL skills (reading and listening comprehension).

*Items 4, 5 & 13:*

The above items deal with FL teaching and concern the parents' attitudes towards FLL in the formal school setting.

- (4) It is possible to master a FL in school.
- (5) Five hours per week is enough to learn a FL.
- (13) It is impossible to master a FL without good textbooks.

| Item | E | G | F | I |
|------|---|---|---|---|
| (4)  | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| (5)  | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| (13) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |

The results show that the parents seemed to be fairly optimistic about mastering a FL in school, provided enough time was spent learning it. It also seems that the parents of our young beginners did not believe that good textbooks were a necessary prerequisite for success in FLL.

**Part C**

The results to be presented here refer to Thurstone scales developed specifically for the purposes of the Project. The scales were used to measure the parents' attitudes towards the native speakers of the FL their child was learning.

The English beginners' parents were asked to deal with two separate scales: one describing the British and the other describing the Americans, since we felt that both could be considered native speakers of English by the parents.

| The British.... |                                    | (%)   | Rank |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------|------|
|                 | have a rich tradition.             | 70.1% | 9    |
|                 | are conservative.                  | 43.0% | 4    |
|                 | are cold.                          | 35.5% | 3    |
|                 | have a highly developed culture.   | 29.0% | 10   |
|                 | are very polite.                   | 28.0% | 8    |
|                 | have a sense of humour.            | 23.1% | 7    |
|                 | like hunting.                      | 14.0% | 6    |
|                 | talk about the weather.            | 12.1% | 5    |
|                 | have no respect for other nations. | 8.4%  | 2    |
|                 | are thrifty.                       | 8.4%  | 2    |
|                 | have violent youth.                | 5.6%  | 1    |
| (M=7.096)       |                                    |       |      |

| The Americans.... |                                 | (%)   | Rank |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------|------|
|                   | have a hectic way of life.      | 63.9% | 5    |
|                   | are good businessmen.           | 56.5% | 9    |
|                   | are open & communicative.       | 34.3% | 10   |
|                   | think too much about money.     | 31.5% | 4    |
|                   | are the most democratic nation. | 25.0% | 11   |
|                   | always want to lead.            | 14.8% | 3    |
|                   | are very alienated.             | 14.8% | 2    |
|                   | love hamburgers.                | 13.9% | 6    |
|                   | are poorly educated.            | 11.1% | 1    |
|                   | are the best sportsmen.         | 6.6%  | 8    |
|                   | are very hospitable.            | 3.7%  | 7    |
| (M=6.586)         |                                 |       |      |

| The Germans.... |   | (%)   | Rank |
|-----------------|---|-------|------|
|                 | are very industrious.                         | 83.8% | 9    |
|                 | are pedantic.                                 | 77.8% | 8    |
|                 | are good organizers.                          | 73.5% | 7    |
|                 | are thrifty.                                  | 16.2% | 2    |
|                 | made a major contribution to classical music. | 12.0% | 10   |
|                 | are fair-haired.                              | 9.4%  | 6    |
|                 | are unsociable.                               | 5.1%  | 3    |
|                 | are the most capable nation.                  | 5.1%  | 11   |
|                 | have no sense of humour.                      | 3.4%  | 4    |
|                 | are not good-looking.                         | 3.4%  | 5    |
|                 | are pro-fascist.                              | 9.0   | 1    |
| (M=7.61)        |   |       |      |

| The French.... |                              | (%)   | Rank |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------|------|
|                | have an excellent cuisine.   | 71.8% | 9    |
|                | are famous in science & art. | 65.4% | 11   |
|                | are reluctant to learn FLs.  | 52.6% | 4    |
|                | are good diplomats.          | 29.5% | 10   |
|                | can't stand foreigners.      | 16.7% | 1    |
|                | are temperamental.           | 16.7% | 8    |
|                | are bohemians.               | 14.1% | 6    |
|                | are very talkative.          | 11.5% | 5    |
|                | are conceited.               | 6.4%  | 2    |
|                | like to flatter.             | 3.8%  | 3    |
|                | are good lovers.             | 2.6%  | 7    |
| (M=7.58)       |                              |       |      |

| The Italians.... |                                 | (%)   | Rank |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-------|------|
|                  | excel in culture & art.         | 79.4% | 11   |
|                  | are temperamental.              | 65.7% | 7    |
|                  | have a strong sense of fashion. | 44.1% | 9    |
|                  | talk too much.                  | 41.2% | 5    |
|                  | are very friendly.              | 17.6% | 10   |
|                  | have a famous cuisine.          | 37.3% | 8    |
|                  | are very patriarchal.           | 7.8%  | 3    |
|                  | easily fall in love.            | 5.9%  | 6    |
|                  | are cowards.                    | 2.0%  | 1    |
|                  | are notorious for crime.        | 1.0%  |      |
|                  | are very religious.             | 1.0%  | 4    |
| (M=8.18)         |                                 |       |      |

On the whole, it can be noted that the parents held fairly positive attitudes towards the native speakers of the languages their children were learning in school. The most positive attitudes were held about the Italians, the least positive about the Americans. Having in mind the time the investigation took place, this is in accordance with the general feeling the people in this country had about the nation in question. The follow-up investigations on the same attitude objects will show whether this explanation is viable.

## Conclusion

The investigations described in this chapter offer a picture of the learners' and their parents' attitudes towards some of the relevant factors in early FLL.

As far as the young beginners are concerned, the results indicate, on the whole, a fairly promising basis for early FLL. Most beginners seemed to like learning the FL, enjoyed the FL lessons and wished to continue learning the FL. It seems that at age of 7, FL learners do not always connect the FL to its native speakers or culture. When they do, they mostly think of the native speakers in question in terms of character characterizations. Their attitudes towards the native speakers seem to be a reflection of the current socio-political situation in the society as a whole and correlate with the parents' views. These were found to be neutral or positive in this study.

The extent to which young beginners may be acquainted with the FL culture seems to be also dependent on the exposure they get to the FL and culture, through mass

media and the like. Most beginners in our study believed that their own age was the best time to start FLL. Most of them also seemed to be aware of at least some teaching going on in the FL classes. The fact that some of young learners disliked activities with game elements may be very instructive for both the teachers and researchers.

The young beginners seemed to think very highly of their FL achievement. They also think it was good to know the FL they were learning. The motives for FLL they offered probably reflected their parents' views.

As far as the learners' parents are concerned, the situation seems to be equally promising. The parents were happy to have their child learn a FL from the first form because they saw many advantages in early FLL. Most parents believed that children were better FL learners than adults. Although most of the parents thought that the best way to learn a FL was to go to the foreign country, they seemed fairly optimistic about the possibilities of mastering a FL in school, provided enough time was devoted to FLL. The parents attributed success in FLL largely to the teacher.

Most parents held very positive attitudes towards the FL their child was learning. As far as the native speakers are concerned, the parents' attitudes may be characterized as fairly positive. These two types of attitudes refer to the so-called passive role of the parent, which was shown to be highly important in various studies (e.g., Gardner, 1985). The parents we investigated seemed to be taking an active role in the child's FLL as well.

The follow-up studies of attitudes and motivation will focus on the changes that may occur in both the learners' and their parents' attitudes towards FLL and on the implications these changes may have on the other factors relevant to FLL. At the same time, comparisons of these initial results to the results obtained from subsequent generations of young beginners will be made. It is hoped that these studies will eventually offer some evidence for a clarification of the role of attitudes and motivation in FLL at an early age.

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