

## THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE CLASS PERSPECTIVE: THE BULGARIAN CASE

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### ABSTRACT

The main idea of the article is to show the importance of education as a factor in identifying the middle class. The basic issues of the present paper are: 1) Prosperity in society depends on the increased share of the middle class in social context. 2) Education is a prerequisite for individual and social mobility and well-being. 3) Education involved in the reproduction of the middle class.

The people with middle class status are involved in various structures of society and they have reached prestigious positions respectively which in turn affect the extent of their inclusion in society. Middle class representatives have complete and successful career realization, and they are significantly more influential from a social point of view in comparison to other individuals who are less integrated and less successful following the public indicators of personal success: education, income, prestige and power.

The paper is primarily based on the results obtained through the European Social Survey (ESS) under the 2006, 2009 and 2013 carried out in Bulgaria.

Findings of the present article are that quality education is not only a function of effort, ambition and persistence, but also of parental involvement, culture capital and family background. Educational achievements are stimulus for middle class expansion because they present investment in social contacts and competition on the labor market.

**Key-words:** middle class, education, Bulgarian education system, social structure.

Middle class adds stability to social structures and neutralizes inequalities, contributing to guaranteeing sustainability of the society. The growth of middle class could be observed through the 20th century in West European countries (Edgell 1993, 66; Lee and Turner 1996; Li 1997, 2-3). Shortening distances between 'top' and 'bottom' changed *class ratio* in economic and power aspects. Nowadays middle class shows growing proximity between classes in the social stratification (Treiman and Ganzeboom 2000, 126; Domanski 2006, 87-100; Hanhinen 2001, 13-16). 'The middle class is a macro social group, consisting of

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those social strata of individuals, relying on their own resources, qualities, capital – mainly of acquired knowledge and qualification, organizational abilities, property, they rely on their own work, on relatively greater autonomy and personal freedom in their direct activities’ (Tilkidjiev, [http://www.omda.bg/public/institut/niki/Sredna\\_klasa.htm](http://www.omda.bg/public/institut/niki/Sredna_klasa.htm)). The middle class representatives share relatively good material status, prestige, common model of values, attitudes and actual behavior, aspiration to individual acquisition and prosperity in business and profession. All that makes middle class people more active and adaptive to changing conditions, with more rational way of thinking (Ringen and Wallace, 1994). In the present article the accent is put on the value of education as a structure determining factor for the identification of middle class. In that sense the three ‘market qualities’ corresponding to the three basic classes, pointed at by Anthony Giddens in ‘Class Structuring and Class Consciousness’ can be delimited: *ownership* of property or of means of production (upper class), *educational and technological qualification* (middle class) and *work force* (lower class) (Giddens 1984, 158; see also Savage 2000). Middle class was presented as the most active and enterprising in literature and Mike Savage emphasized: ‘The activity of managers and professionals is determined by their ability to be entrepreneurial, while physical workers get a more dependent status’ (Savage 2000, 156). Managers and administrators are valued by employers through authorized responsibility to be in charge, while the specialists (professionals) are valued through their expertise and competence. That special form of employment and work load not only affords them certain autonomy, but puts them in a certain ‘privileged’ position (see for more details Goldthorpe 1996, 1997, 2000).

In the context of middle class the basic issues of present article are: 1) Education is a prerequisite for individual and social mobility and well-being. 2) Prosperity of the society depends on the increased share of the middle class in social context. 3) Education involved in the reproduction of the middle class. Which are the factors often ascribed in modern usage to a ‘middle class’? The most often forwarded indicators of the middle class are: a) completion of tertiary education<sup>1</sup>; b) holding professional qualifications; c) Wealth; d) environment of upbringing; e) social network; f) manners and values.

This means that people with middle class status are involved in various structures of society and they have reached prestigious positions respectively which in turn affect the extent of their inclusion in society. Thus education, and especially higher education, is a significant prerequisite for the formation of a middle class. Middle class representatives obtain complete and successful career realization, and they are significantly more influential from a social point of view in comparison to other individuals who are less integrated and less successful following the public indicators of personal success: education, income, prestige and power.

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<sup>1</sup> The greatest attention to the significance of higher education for the formation of a middle class was paid in the article.

### EDUCATION AS A CONDITION FOR MIDDLE CLASS

Education is a basic factor for middle class creation because it is connected: a) With acquiring the ‘instrumental culture’ (Bernstein 1975) including instruction knowledge, skills and qualifications, so education is a prerequisite for higher professionalism and better role’ conducting; b) With passing of ‘expressive culture’ (Bernstein 1975) including rules, norms, values, behavior models, being a condition for more strict following the social rules reflecting the fact that more educated people are more socialized (Inkeles and Smith 1974).

Education is related to the transfer of knowledge and norms constructing the cultural basis of society. The connection between dominating values and their internalization by individuals are supported through education introducing actors in a world of publicly spread meanings. Education corresponds to individuals' needs for knowledge about man, nature and society, shaping abilities for their orientation in the world, for their comprehension of his/her own place within public structures, for their inclusion in social relations. Various studies have underlined (Boyadjieva 2012; Milenkova 2010) that education is important in personal and social plan, because people with higher education are:

- More critical
- More open to changes
- More disposed to improvement
- Better professionals
- They have ambition to enhance their qualification<sup>2</sup>
- They have more knowledge for the world and social situation
- They find jobs easier and their incomes are higher than those of the others.
- They have higher political involvement and responsibility.

Criticism of educated people is manifested also by the following question of European Social Survey (ESS) (2006, 2009, 2013). It is noteworthy that in each subsequent year decreased the part of the Bulgarian respondents stating that *people in this country have good opportunities for obtaining education* (Table 1, percent):

Table 1

People have good opportunities for obtaining education

	2013	2009	2006
Fully agree	6.6	9.5	12.4
Somewhat agree	26.1	27.5	26.1
Neither agree, nor disagree	21.1	16.9	17.4
Somewhat disagree	15.5	15.7	15.7
Fully disagree	23.5	20.4	18.7
Don't know	7.5	10.0	9.6

Source: European Social Survey (ESS) (2006, 2009, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> LLL surveys were dedicated to indicating the attitudes and real activities towards continuation of education and to increasing the qualification of higher educated people in the country – Boyadjieva 2012.

In 2013 growing percentage of people who do not have a clear position (“Neither agree, nor disagree”) towards educational opportunities compared to 2009. The obtained results are indicative that respondents manifested doubts in the national educational system. As a matter of fact in a normative perspective several political documents have been adopted concerning increasing educational opportunities for inclusion: National Programme for the development of school education and preschool training and upbringing (2006-2015); Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion, Bulgaria, 2005; Actualized Employment Strategy – 2008-2015; Educational Integration of Ethnic Minorities Children and Students Strategy (2005-2015); National Programme for a Fuller Coverage of Students of Obligatory School Age; National Lifelong Learning Strategy – 2008-2015; National Continuous Vocational Education Strategy – 2005-2010. In reality, however, for a short a period (of several years) those policy documents did not affect the educational environment.

The attitude towards criticism and great expectations among people of higher education (who are mainly representatives of the middle class) was demonstrated through the next question: ‘What is the situation in our educational system?’ The estimation (European Social Survey, 2006, 2009, and 2013) was made on a 10 grade scale from 00 – ‘very bad’ to 10 – ‘very good’ (Table 2, percent):

Table 2

Situation in the Bulgarian education system

00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	don't know	Year/Round
7.8	8.7	9.3	12.9	10.5	19.5	7.4	5.7	2.6	1.6	1.5	12.5	<b>2009</b>
12.6	10.0	9.2	11.5	9.3	13.4	6.5	5.9	9.1	1.2	1.4	15.9	<b>2006</b>
7.8	5.8	9.4	11.9	13.3	19.0	8.0	5.3	2.9	1.4	1.1	13.9	<b>2013</b>

Source: European Social Survey, 2006, 2009, and 2013

Education is evaluated as: process, achievements, institution, rules, norms. One can note from the data that the largest accumulations are in the negative part of the scale. Accumulations in the 2009 and 2013 are similar and they are focused on critical considerations which mean that the educational situation in the country has not changed. In addition 75% of people giving negative estimation have higher education. That means that higher educated people put forward bigger criteria, greater expectations and demands, due to their continued socialization, training and institutional experience, to their more embracing view on things. Their criticism on the situation in education follows the lack of comprehensive vision for reforms in education, insufficient continuity between different teams at the Ministry of Education, leading to randomness and to piece work. In that sense education faces a number of challenges:

1. One of them is the low level of quality of education: significant educational surveys PISA (carried out in different countries) revealed very low scores for Bulgarian students. Another source of information were the external exams after – 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grades and the low results shown by the students especially in some regions of North-Eastern and North-Western Bulgaria.

2. Another problem facing education is connected with the increasing number of drop-outs at obligatory educational age (7–16 years). In the school year 2011/2012 – 14 200 pupils have dropped out from the mainstream educational system, as 12 000 of them were pupils up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, as most of the early leavers seemingly leave school in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Several surveys (Tilkidjiev 2009; Nonchev 2006; Milenkova 2004) revealed the reasons for that situation, differentiated as *educational, institutional, ethnic and cultural, economic, psychological*. The core of dropping out from school is mainly connected with the ethnic deficit of equal education opportunities in national context evidenced by the empirical data for pre-school attendance rate, segregated Roma schools, early school leaving, and the lowest educational status of Roma in Bulgarian society: Equal portions of Roma have completed primary education (33.7%) and lower secondary education (37%). The share of Roma in higher education has continuously been below 0.5%, whereas the portion of Roma with upper secondary education has remained at 6.5%. The share of Roma, who were declared illiterate or have lower than primary degree, estimates of 22.3% (Census 2011).

3. The increase of violence at schools is a serious challenge to education. According to Durkheim (Durkheim, 1956) education aims at inciting and developing of a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral situations of children, representing society in its entity, as well as the specific social environment. In Durkheim's understanding discipline has to be recognized as something good and necessary, and in a long term perspective it creates respect to justice, to impersonal law with its objectivity and comprehensiveness. In that context, in view of the significance of discipline one has to interpret the results of the European Social Survey, 2009. The Bulgarian respondents estimate the statement 'School has to teach children to order and discipline' and the evaluations of that statement were as follows (Table 3; percent):

Table 3

School has to teach children to order and discipline

Fully agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Fully agree	Don't know
71.6	24.7	1.4	1.2	0.1	1.0

Source: European Social Survey, 2009

The perception of school as a disciplining institution is an important and stable aspect of social environment, nowadays however that becomes very topical because in recent years school discipline turned into one of the serious deficiencies of Bulgarian education through the increased aggression at schools, violence, alcohol and drug abuse. In fact deviations cover a very wide range; they include different demonstrations of unacceptable and destructive acts concerning not only children themselves, but the whole school communities and organizational environment. Both parents and teachers, and the whole Bulgarian society share solidarity towards the necessity of stricter rules, establishing order and discipline.

Emphasizing on discipline as a serious problem is also connected with dropping out of education (mentioned above), when the more intensively an individual distances from school, the more he/she becomes isolated and thus *educational exclusion becomes social as well*, meaning non-admission of certain individuals, as bearers of social characteristic features to the environment, to culture, to contacts and to all connected to them implications for community, controlling definite resources and acquiring a prestige level, which are attractive and significant. The active participation of the larger part of the population in the general material culture, connected with the organization of production conditions, based on the differentiation of labor and corresponding markets is also significant. The lesser the possibilities of access to material culture, the more societies lose their integrating power. Thus the precipice between gainers and losers becomes deeper. The disbalance between economic growth and just distribution of wealth gets bigger and the hope that an equality of chances could be attained becomes more uncertain.

In addition to that perspective social viability would depend on degrees of adoption and of inclination to participation in social processes through different types of activities: ‘viewing (listening to) political television (radio) broadcasts’, ‘reading of newspapers’, participation in a political party association, trade union as a part of creation and attainment of a civil society. As a whole, Bulgarian respondents (ESS – 2009 and 2013) are moderately active: on a working day almost half of the sample (47.1%) in 2009 is viewing news and television broadcasts on political and current events ‘between half an hour and an hour and a half’. Based on the data obtained, it can be said that in 2013 the percentage of people who watched political programs (50.8%) increased slightly than in 2009 (Table 4). Overall activities: “newspaper reading” and “listening to radio” show small accumulations (Table 4, percent).

Table 4

Time for newspapers, radio and TV news (broadcasts) on a working day

2009	Viewing TV political broadcasts (2009)	Viewing TV political broadcasts (2013)	Listening to radio political broadcasts <sup>3</sup> (2009)	Newspapers reading <sup>4</sup> (2009)
No time at all	10.9	6.5	11.6	12.4
Less than 1/2 hour	25.5	18.5	16.1	28.8
Between 1/2 and 1 hour	<b>34.4</b>	<b>34.8</b>	8.8	10.7
More than 1 to 1.5 h.	<b>12.7</b>	<b>16.0</b>	3.7	2.2
More than 1.5 to 2 h	6.6	8.4	1.8	0.7
More than 2 to 2.5 h.	2.4	3.8	0.6	0.1
2.5 to 3 hours	1.1	2.2	0.6	0.1
More than 3 hours	2.2	6.1	1.5	0.1
Don't know	4.3	3.1	55.4	45.0

Source: European Social Survey – 2009 and 2013

The registered civil and political activity of Bulgarians in 2006, 2009 and 2013 (ESS) is also very low (Table 5, 6, 7 percent)

Table 5

Worked in political party or action group last 12 months

	2013	2009
Yes	3.0	3.6
No	96.7	96.0
Don't know	0.2	0.4

Source: European Social Survey – 2009 and 2013

Table 6

Trade union membership

	2013	2009	2006
Yes, I am a member at present	5.1	4.9	5.2
Yes, I was in the past	43.2	38.8	45.6
No	50.5	55.6	46.5

Source: European Social Survey 2006, 2009, 2013

<sup>3</sup> This question was not included in the round 6th of ESS – 2013.

<sup>4</sup> This question was not included in the round 6th of ESS – 2013.

Table 7

Political party (association) membership<sup>5</sup>

	2009	2006
Yes	5.8	6.1
No	94.0	93.5
Don't know	0.2	0.3

Source: European Social Survey 2006, and 2009

Data quoted here demonstrate that modern Bulgarians – already tired of political events, of promises, are quite disappointed with unrealized expectations of well-being, of justice and of improving of social life. Moreover, a vacuum from the clash of hopes (individual and social) and lack of actual practical changes has appeared. Political activity is dominated by middle class representatives, albeit weakly expressed (ESS 2009):

- 63% of respondents included in political parties have higher education;
- 85% of persons involved in managerial bodies of political organizations are of higher education;
- 89% of people watching political TV broadcasts are of higher education;
- 68% of respondents reading newspapers are of higher education.

In contemporary societies the social position has been described and perceived in terms of meritocracy as a function of personal talent and efforts; and those who deserve to succeed in – they reach it, while the others with lesser possibilities – they failed. And because mobility is a movement both ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’ personal failures are a consequence of the competitive situation and the inability to prove oneself in society. Mobility has different dimensions, but basic abilities necessary to a consolidation in a social plan include mastering of one basic abilities of technological and social nature, which is the possibility for development and actions in a complex and highly technological environment, characterized mostly by the significance of information technologies (Berghman 1995).

In the long run processes of social participation are dynamic and multidimensional by nature; they are connected with work and income levels, with degrees of education and competencies, with citizenship, with participation in local community. Because in order that a community or society to be successful, it is necessary their members to share different institutions – school, health care, public transport. Those shared institutions contribute to the feeling of solidarity in the population, which is why exclusion and inclusion can be considered in *economic, political, social terms* (Giddens 2001, 323).

In that context we can follow the role of education as a factor for mobility and prosperity, as a condition for advancement and stability, because in fact it is not by chance that exactly education and science are evaluated as ‘driving forces’ of the European society, called ‘knowledge society’ and ‘lifelong learning society’.

<sup>5</sup> This question was not included in the round 6th of ESS – 2013.

### EDUCATION AND THE MIDDLE CLASS EXPANSION

Education has a key role for increasing chances; it is a necessary and important condition for taking a professional position and middle class status, as education is a form of investment in better qualification and level of knowledge. The role of education as a mobility stimulus reveals itself most clearly when it is observed for a longer period of time on the basis of a cohort analysis, allowing for a following up of transitions in the framework of the cohort itself (inter-generation perspective) and in relation to parents, i. e. in inter-generation section. The effect of educational expansion depends on the initial position and class affiliation of individuals, as well as on preferences and the level of 'saturation' of the very educational institutes. In that sense one can state that the dimensions of individual and social mobility are not identical. There are surveys (Shavit 1993) according to which the effect of the social origin is strong at the beginning of the educational career and then it decreases with later degrees of training; there are two possible explanations for the decreasing of the effects of the origin on successful transitions:

– an explanation, depending on arguments following the differences in family life; here the effects decrease through transitions, but they remain constant within the cohorts;

– an explanation, connected with selection process; here social groups become more similar in relation to some variables - abilities, ambitions, motives (Mare 1981), leading to a stronger effect of the observed socioeconomic factors (Shavit 1993, 2-20).

Taken in its entity though, the educational expansion process in all industrialized countries marks a decrease of inequalities in educational opportunities between socioeconomic strata (Shavit 1993, 15), in spite of the existence of surveys showing that the inequality in educational opportunities is almost stable in time (Shavit 1993, 2). That is why it can be maintained that the role of education as a factor of class support is compatible with: the increased entering of children from the working class into higher educational levels and with ascending educational and class mobility (Goldthorpe 2007, 96). Education as a mobility factor in Bulgarian society was presented in other surveys (Mihailov 1988)<sup>6</sup>.

The theoretical works are based on the optimistic view on the potential role of education to improve life chances of individuals from different social strata. However, the formulation of such conceptions cannot be separated from the dominating political ideas of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the most Western European societies beliefs in individuals' rights connected with the "new"

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<sup>6</sup> Data from the survey established that in comparison with 20 years earlier (1966) social groups went through dynamical increasing of their education and status (Tilkidjiev, 1988, 284-6).

place of man in social life are widespread. The ideas of freedom and rights unambiguously define the theses for equality in the access to goods, to educational achievements and to well being. In relation to education, concepts proclaiming it as a condition for the so-called “contest mobility” (Turner 1971, 171-89), presuming to guarantee to individuals a possibility for a sufficiently long training which is not predetermined by social origin, and selection to be realized at a relatively later stage, are becoming popular.

Education obtains a predominant role for individual success and his/her social position. Birth status ceases to be of leading importance in relation to the future and is transformed in merit status, including education level as one of the important indicators (even the most important one).

According to Bulgarian respondents (ESS – 2006) education is important for success in life nowadays in this country (Table 8, percent).

Table 8

To what extent is the education important for success in life nowadays<sup>7</sup>

Exceptionally important	Very important	Important	Not quite important	Absolutely not important	Don't know
42.4	30.4	17.7	5.1	1.6	2.8

Source: European Social Survey 2006

It can be noted that 90.5% of the sample have pointed to education as important condition (“exceptionally important”, “very important” and “important”) for prosperity. In addition the fact that education is evaluated as a significant existential circumstance shows up in the educational profile of respondents and their environment (Table 9 percent).

Table 9

Educational profile of respondents

2013	Respondent	Father	Mother
Lower than elementary	2.1	9.2	12.8
Elementary	3.7	10.4	11.9
Basic	22.3	37.1	35.3
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>27.7</b>
College	4.1	1.7	3.3
<b>Higher</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>6.7</b>
Postgraduate qualification/academic degree	0.4	0.1	0.1

<sup>7</sup> This question was not included in ESS/ 2009 and 2013.

2009	Respondent	Father	Mother
Lower than elementary	2.4	6.2	8.2
Elementary	5.1	12.3	13.7
Basic	22.1	33.1	32.3
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>32.1</b>
College	4.6	1.9	3.8
<b>Higher</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>6.6</b>
Postgraduate qualification/academic degree	1.1	0.1	0.2

  

2006	Respondent	Father	Mother
Lower than elementary	2.4	7.6	9.8
Elementary	6.4	13.1	15.0
Basic	24.3	35.5	34.9
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>25.1</b>
College	6.1	2.0	4.4
<b>Higher</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Don't know	0.2	6.9	5.6

Source: European Social Survey, 2006, 2009, 2013

Compared data about educational profile of respondents and their parents show a change in direction of increase of educational status in absolute expression, which is indicative for: 1) presence of inter-generation mobility; 2) the fact that education is considered and estimated as an important factor for success and individual development; 3) the fact that both secondary and higher education of respondents and their parents has grown up in 2009 compared to 2006; 4) Increasing the share of respondents with higher education in 2013 compared with 2009. All that comes to support the thesis that education is not only a value, it is actually mapped on educational strategies of Bulgarians (although as a matter of fact educational aspirations and realized strategies of Bulgarians are marked with certain modesty, related to a European scale).

At the same time educational achievements are not only a function of efforts and ambitions, but also of family involvement which means that education attainments and well-being are connected with family environment and its importance for individuals. That is so because high parental status creates conditions for children to attain also high educational achievements and positions.

#### EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND MIDDLE CLASS FAMILY

The role of family and the influence of educational status of middle class parents to generations are expressed through the choice of a school by children. The school choice is actually ruled by specific determinants of parents' social and

educational identity, but it is also dependent on economic and financial living conditions. In that sense, even when there is no expressed partiality to selection of students, its social character is preserved due to social definiteness of educational attainments (Grusky 2008; DiMaggio 1982). I would try to follow up the parents' educational status of students in several Bulgarian foreign languages high schools, supporting the thesis of cultural capital and reproduction (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Cultural capital as a system of implicit and deeply internalized values and resources transferred to generations is influenced by social class, race (ethnos) and parents' education (Lareau and Weininger 2003). Cultural capital examined as particular cultural practices, activities, resources, concerns school results, educational attainments and future social individual choices (Ganzeboom *et al.* 1990; Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp 1996; Dumais 2002).

Educational values, embodied into mechanisms of educational system, urge parents and students to compete for places at high quality elite schools – they choose to take part in that competition and so they become part of the reproduction of the dominant culture when they value one type of education and not another; when they tolerate particular skills and qualification, which actually are artefacts. Following of the dominant culture by families symbolizes gaining mobility resources through access to high status education. And so it turns out that school choice is one of the significant biographical acts, and, as Giddens stated, the choice connects 'power' and 'stratification' (Giddens 1995). It is important to put an accent on diverse institutional nets in which children contact as well as on to the parents' effort to guide their children's success in specific fields.

Through the following analysis I am going to try to show how cultural capital inherited through family and incorporated into children is transferred to respective educational institutions, which tolerate a particular type of cultural profile and socialization, which ultimately leads to the reproduction of the middle class family capital. Important indicator for the definition of school prestige can be derived by the number of candidates for this institution. In the five years (2005-2010), 71 percent of the candidates in the City of Sofia after the 7<sup>th</sup> grade have indicated among their first five preferences several foreign language schools – the German Language High School, the First English Language High School, the Spanish Language High School, the Second English Language High School, and the French Language High School. Subsequently, the entrance grades for those schools were the highest – in that order. For that reason, in the following analysis under the notion of elite schools I shall be bearing in mind foreign language schools in that country. Thus, a selective process becomes possible and standing for meritocracy becomes a reality, just because of the great number of candidates for elite schools and one can select the best among them, in that case, the individuals with the highest grades.

Elite schools show the following important features, which distinguish them substantially from the other secondary educational institutions:

1. High degree of selectivity at the entrance in the choice of pupils;
2. Competitive spirit and great competitive power of graduates of foreign language schools in continuing their education at higher schools;
3. A specific individual profile of teachers, combining high professionalism with higher expectations and demands by their students.

#### EMPIRICAL DATA

As a result of a non-representative survey in 2005 of 360 students chosen randomly from German, English, Spanish and French language high schools in Sofia (90 persons from each school) it was established that for 61.1% persons (220), their parents were also graduates of a foreign language school<sup>8</sup>. In addition to those data I show some results from a survey (following ‘experimental design’ schedule) and carried out in 1996 at three foreign languages: English, French and German schools and at two comprehensive schools – No. 81 and No. 40 (comprising the control-group) in Sofia<sup>9</sup>. The subject of analysis was the surroundings – family and school, as well as its features: education and profession of parents, specific characteristics of educational process and environment, teachers and students achievements.

##### *Education of respondents’ parents:*

Fathers: 91.8% from the English language school were with higher education, 96.6% from the German language school and 91.2% from the French language school, while 45.7% from School No. 81 and 43.9% from school No. 40 *were with higher education;*

Mothers: with higher education – 87.6% from the English language school, 90.9% from the German language school, 90.2% from the French language school as opposed to 46% from School No. 81 and 41.7% from School No. 40.

##### *Profession:*

Respondents from foreign language schools parents were mainly middle class statuses over 85%: doctors (25%), teachers (4%), engineers (7%), diplomats (3%), lawyers (21%), economists (9%), scientists (5%), journalists (11%), 12% ran their

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<sup>8</sup> Using as a main research technique a standardised interview with respondents, I shall focus on the education and profession of parents in more detail later on.

<sup>9</sup> Control-group was important for results. There were 100 students and 10 teachers from each school to be surveyed. The methodology included standardised interview with teachers, group inquiry with students, information of the state of the school given by schoolmasters, expert opinions from experts from Regional Inspectorate in Sofia on 10 school subjects. The survey ‘Socialisation at the elite foreign language schools was carried out by a team from the Institute of Sociology: V. Milenkova (team leader), R. Stoilova, M. Molhov; consultant – P. Boyadjieva. The National Scientific Research Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science financed research work (Milenkova, Molhov, 2011).

own business; compared to less than 30% of the middle class representatives from the control-group of schools No. 81 and 40 (Sofia).

It is clear from those data that individuals coming from the middle class were not only eventual candidates, but also the most frequent users of elite school training. And that is so, because middle class representatives in any case guarantee a greater proximity to those linguistic and social practices supporting them, while generation traditions and life styles affordable to those families gave significant advantage to their representatives. Foreign language secondary schools to a greater extent than general education schools are identified as places for confirming meritocracy standards, supported by teachers' demands as well. Of course I cannot idealize, but in general, on the background of the decreasing quality of education, and that was shared by all the Inspectorate experts, as well as by the interviewed teachers, foreign language schools were to a lesser extent influenced by devaluation of educational grades and marks.

In the process of thoughts, I somehow get lost in what is prerequisite and what is a consequence, what is cause and what is the result, as able students demand and suppose highly qualified teachers, and the latter stimulate the intellectual development of their disciples, their aspirations and ambitions. But that is only on the first glance because within the framework of an elite school predominant place and sensible role is given to selection, starting at the 'entrance', passing through the training process and at the 'exit'. Language schools can support a definite element of continuity between parents and children, in this country, as well. I especially emphasized on the fact that 61% of students from the non-representative sample had parents who graduated from a foreign language school. That fact in itself is demonstrative of raising language school in rank as a recognized institutional mechanism of socialization being nearest to family expectations and aspirations. In that aspect, we have followed up cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989) including educational and professional profile of parents, cultural practices, and tastes, valid both for families and for children as well.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the following basic issues, connected with the significance of education to middle class can be brought out:

- Key factor for the establishment of the middle class is education (higher education). Representatives of the middle class have bigger demands to active school involvement in pupils' actions and life.

- Respondents say that reducing good opportunities for education in the country. In addition, the educational system is not highly valued by the people that have a critical point towards education and education process.

- There is a real process of increasing the educational level (secondary and higher education) in the country. That is an indicator of intergenerational mobility.
- Education is an important factor for success in society: high social statuses and political culture of people confirm that.
- Personal ambitions for education are also important but necessary: investments and employment market.
- Family and its resources have relation to educational achievements of pupils.
- Education is ‘important for the success in life today’ under respondents’ views.
- Educational achievements are a stimulus for middle class expansion because they present investment in social contacts and competition of labor market.
- Education supports continuity between middle class parents and children, expressing schools as an institutional mechanism of social reproduction.

Along with all that was said, one has to underline the great significance of the presence of individual educational aspirations, but an environment is also necessary, where those ambitions to be realized and which to support the realization of those intentions. This means that personal aspiration towards education is not a sufficient condition for individual and social mobility. Because in order to create successful persons, investments have to be put in education, there are necessary training conditions to be supplied by a successful economics, stable bank system, opened work places, sustainable political system, only then middle class statuses will be filled with personal satisfaction. Because education action is complex, manifold and controversial it is connected with all the other social actions and institutions.

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