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**Title:** Developing motivation among Polish learners raised in dysfunctional families

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## Developing motivation among Polish learners raised in dysfunctional families

**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to discuss the issue of developing motivation to learn a foreign language among Polish teenagers who come from dysfunctional families in which alcoholism, domestic violence, drug abuse etc. are present. The first part of the article focuses on theoretical aspects of developing motivation among such learners, whereas in the second part of the article the results of the study conducted amidst the aforementioned learners, as well as their teachers, are presented. Moreover, the article provides a detailed description of various techniques for developing learners' motivation along with the assessment of their effectiveness.

**Key words:** motivation, dysfunctional family, teenagers, alcoholism, domestic violence, drug abuse

### 1. Theoretical background

#### 1.1. Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

Motivation, along with attitude towards language learning, has become one of the key concepts investigated in the field of Second Language Acquisition. Motivation, being deeply rooted in learners' minds, has a profound impact on the outcome of L2 learning. Throughout the years, psychologists and educators have put a lot of effort into defining the concept and determining the way in which teachers can help their students to develop it (GHAZVINI, KHAJEHPUR, 2011).

In the context of a foreign language learning, a person who is actively involved in a particular activity is classified as "motivated", whereas a person who lacks the willingness to complete a task is classified as "unmotivated"; however, the level of motivation may differ among individuals depending on the task they

attempt to complete and because the level of motivation throughout the process of completing a task might change, such classification is not always adequate (RYAN, DECI, 2000). Thus, GARDNER (1985: 10) in his definition proposes that motivation is “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”. Gardner in his model of motivation focuses primarily on the act of learning and the satisfaction one derives from the experience. In contrast, LAMBERT (1963) in his transformative Social Psychological Model views a successful L2 learning as comprising two major factors: cognitive (language aptitude and intelligence) and affective (attitudes and motivation). In Lambert’s model, success in L2 learning relies heavily on ethnocentric tendencies, attitude towards the target community, attitude towards the target language learning and motivation.

The aforementioned views of Lambert and Gardner laid the foundations for research into motivation and led to distinction between two key concepts, namely, between the integrative and instrumental motivation (GHAZVINI, KHAJEHPUR, 2011). Integrative motivation reflects the learners’ willingness to be a part of the L2 community and their personal desire to know the target language, whereas instrumental motivation reflects learners’ desire to gain social recognition and advantages by knowing the foreign language, e.g. in order to get higher wages in the workplace (GARDNER, LAMBERT, 1972). Furthermore, the concept of motivation may also be defined as either intrinsic or extrinsic, meaning that when someone is intrinsically motivated, they do the activity because it is purely enjoyable, and no external rewards are necessary to complete it. Conversely, when someone is extrinsically motivated, they attempt the learning process because it may lead to a separable outcome in the end, for instance a reward (RYAN, DECI, 2000).

In conclusion, motivation plays a fundamental role in learning a foreign language. Although it has been years since the initial research into motivation began, it is still vital to study it from different perspectives so as to enhance the process of learning a foreign language.

## 1.2. The role of a child’s upbringing in developing student motivation

As SŁOMCZYŃSKA (2014) remarks, nowadays an average family must face complex social problems and thus its stability is at stake. Family, which is often referred to as the basic unit of the society, has been widely accepted to be responsible for the considerable part of the child’s development. Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more common that the family ceases to be a source of norms for children and is no longer as safe as it used to be in the past. According

to the recent study, on average, from 20% to 50% of families in Poland have experienced domestic violence. There are plenty of reasons for the phenomenon, but the most common are unemployment, problems in workplace, addictions (mainly alcoholism), emotional problems and an illness of a member of the family. These family problems frequently lead to child's learning difficulties, lack of motivation and bad behavior at school. For this reason, it is necessary to focus more on the needs of learners brought up in such dysfunctional environment in order to help them strengthen their L2 learning motivation (ibid).

BROPHY (1987: 9) defines motivation as developed "through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others (especially parents and teachers)". This implies that these are mainly parents and teachers who are responsible for the development of motivation among children. That is why, children from a dysfunctional family background in which not much attention is given to their upbringing might not have enough motivation to learn a foreign language. As noted by LUMSDEN (1994), parents have a profound impact on their children's curiosity about the world around them. When babies grow up, they begin to pose questions about the things they encounter on a daily basis. In a nurturing environment, parents tend to trigger their child's natural curiosity by attempting to answer these questions. This generates a strong feeling that learning is fun and may bring about a lot of pleasure. Such families help children to develop self-worth, self-efficacy, autonomy and competence due to which the child is more eager to take the risk and start learning new things. However, when parents do not grant the child's basic wishes it might result in a lack of motivation (ibid).

Furthermore, as observed by GAYTON (2010), the economic status of the family may stifle the learners' motivation as well. In general, children who are raised in middle-class families are more motivated to learn a foreign language than their peers who come from lower-class families. That is because parents from lower-class background appear to be less encouraging since they view education as generally less important. AKRAM and GHANI (2013) point out that a number of studies have already been conducted around the world and the results revealed a remarkable correlation between the socio-economic status of the family and the outcome of child's education.

All that was mentioned above shows how important child's development is when it comes to increasing motivation. However, even though parents may significantly change the way their children approach learning new things, the role of a teacher is also invaluable. When children start their education, they begin to shape their views about learning. Therefore, the teacher may influence the way learners approach the inevitable failure coming from the process of learning a foreign language by giving them enough care and attention. For this reason, teachers must also provide their learners with an appropriate environment in order not to discourage their natural curiosity about the world (AKRAM,

GHANI, 2013). Thus, the subsequent chapters provide a detailed description and the results of the study conducted by the author of the article, the aim of which was to see the extent to which teachers are aware of the techniques for motivating students who are brought up in dysfunctional families and to evaluate the effectiveness of various techniques for motivating such learners.

## 2. Description of the study

### 2.1. Method and tools

In order to investigate the issue of increasing motivation among learners raised in dysfunctional families, two tools were applied, namely a questionnaire with teachers and classroom observations. The aim of the questionnaire was to examine the extent to which the teachers are aware of the issue and whether or not they know how to deal with the problem of motivating the aforementioned learners. The teachers were to answer three questions: whether or not the lack of motivation is an obstacle while working with such learners, what problems the teachers encounter during English classes due to their learners' lack of motivation and if they know any techniques of motivating such learners. Moreover, classroom observation was carried out, the aim of which was to see how different techniques for motivating learners work while teaching learners coming from dysfunctional families. During the observations the learners' participation along with their satisfaction with each technique were measured on a scale from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high). The author of the article conducted the observation on the basis of lessons given by teachers working at the school. For each technique there were three classroom observations conducted; however, the effectiveness of one of the techniques, namely the behavioral contract, was observed during all classes. The study was conducted in a primary school in Poland (Silesia) during the school year 2018/19.

### 2.2. Sample

The sample consisted of:

- ten English teachers working in a primary school with teenagers (aged 11–15);
- 60 learners aged 11–15, among which 20 were defined as raised in a dysfunctional family. The learners were assigned to the category on the basis of a discussion with their school pedagogist, psychologist and form teachers.

The learners' family background was categorized as dysfunctional when the following conditions were met:

- at least one of the parents abused alcohol or drugs;
- domestic violence was present in the family (proved in judicial documents);
- both the parents (or one in case of single-parent families) were unemployed for a long period of time, lived on welfare and completed only elementary education;
- there were other legal or psychological documents about the learners in which any of the dysfunctional family factors were mentioned.

### 2.3. Research questions

- 1) What are the major problems occurring during English classes connected with a lack of motivation of the learners raised in dysfunctional families?
- 2) To what extent are the teachers aware of the problem and the way to develop learners' motivation?
- 3) How effective are various techniques designed to deal with the problem of unmotivated learners brought up in dysfunctional families?

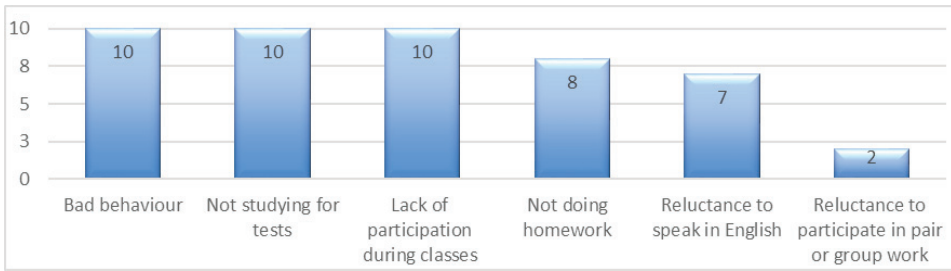
Answers to the aforementioned questions were obtained and analyzed on the basis of the answers to the questionnaire given by the teachers who took part in the study as well as on the basis of the classroom observations.

## 3. Results of the study

### 3.1. Questionnaire results

In the first part of the questionnaire, the teachers were to answer whether or not, in their opinion, lack of motivation among learners coming from dysfunctional families is a problem in a classroom. All the teachers participating in the study stated that such learners are very common in a classroom and they often lack motivation to learn a foreign language. The teachers also pointed out that they would like to know more about the issue in order to help their students to strengthen their motivation.

Then, the teachers were to decide what consequences of learners' lack of motivation during foreign language classes they encounter. Figure 1 presents the problems occurring in class on the basis of the teachers' answers.



**Figure 1.** Teachers’ views on the consequences of learners’ lack of motivation  
 Source: Questionnaire results.

Figure 1 shows that teachers complain primarily about learners’ bad behavior and not studying for tests. They also pointed out that the learners tend not to participate in the lesson, which might be caused by the fact that, for the most part of the lesson, they are disruptive. The figure also shows that the learners do not do their homework and are unwilling to speak English during the class. The reason for that could be that the learners are often deprived of care and attention at home and therefore they do not have anyone who could encourage them to spend time studying and doing homework. Dislike to work in pairs or in groups was not viewed as a common problem.

Finally, the teachers were asked to elaborate on how much knowledge they have in order to deal with the problem of unmotivated students from dysfunctional family background and whether they know any techniques that can be applied to help their students increase their learning motivation. The teachers’ answers were put into three categories and the table below shows the categories along with the number of responses.

Table 1

Teachers’ knowledge of the techniques for developing learners’ motivation

Teachers do not know what to do, they simply try not to pay much attention to the problematic students	7 teachers
Teachers fight with the students (bad grades, extra homework, etc.)	2 teachers
Teachers try to implement techniques which may increase learners’ motivation to study in the classroom environment	1 teacher

Source: Questionnaire results.

The results described in Table 1 suggest that it is imperative to focus on developing teachers’ awareness of how to deal with unmotivated learners who come from dysfunctional families. The majority of the teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the subject, but they do feel that the lack of motivation among the learners in question poses problems during English lessons.



### 3.2. Classroom observation results

During classroom observations some techniques for tackling the lack of motivation among the learners were introduced by the teacher so as to examine their effectiveness in the classroom environment. During the lessons the following techniques were introduced: technology, behavioral contract and giving rewards. In order to do so, during each class, the learners' participation in the classroom along with their satisfaction with the technique were measured on a scale from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high). The results are provided below.

#### Dealing with errors and mistakes

The observation revealed a strong correlation between students' motivation and error correction. Even though the majority of learners do not like being corrected in front of other learners, learners raised in dysfunctional families tend to be even more sensitive due to their low level of self-esteem. Thus, the observation revealed that dealing with errors and mistakes individually with each learner, instead of in front of the rest of the group, influences learners in a positive way. The learners seemed to be far more motivated to participate in the class, speak English and complete numerous tasks when the teacher approached them individually after the lesson had finished. In order to facilitate the process of correcting mistakes individually, the teachers introduced "error boxes". All learners had their own box on the desk. During speaking activities, the teacher noted down on a blank piece of paper the most noticeable mistakes and put them in the box. Therefore, after the lesson, the learners could not only get valuable feedback from the teacher, but the boxes also brought about a lot of fun and excitement in class. Moreover, it helped the teachers to correct learners individually, without disturbing the lesson. Since learners from dysfunctional background are often unwilling to take the risk and use English freely, individual approach strengthens their self-esteem and therefore leads to higher motivation. Learners' participation was assessed as high (7) whereas satisfaction as very high (10).

#### Making learners participate in class

During the interview with the teachers, many of them pointed out that learners raised in dysfunctional families tend not to obey rules during lessons and are reluctant to do what the teacher asks them to. Thus, in order to encourage learners to participate in class more eagerly, one of the learners was made responsible for the lesson by being given his teacher's speaker so as to turn on and off the recordings for the rest of the class. This was observed to have had a very positive impact on both the behavior and the motivation of the



learner. The student not only felt that he was needed in the classroom, but he also started to complete all the tasks the teacher asked him to complete. The technique might come in useful while raising the learners' awareness of how important and responsible they are for the learning process, and at the same time it makes them behave far better. The teacher might do various things in order to encourage learners to be part of the class community, such as: wiping the board, playing the recordings, writing things on the board. Learners' participation and satisfaction were assessed as very high (10).

### Technology and motivation

In the modern world, technology plays a significant role in teenagers' lives. Teens use technology almost all the time, therefore, it seems reasonable to make the most of it during foreign language classes. Unfortunately, some learners, especially those brought up in dysfunctional families, do not have access to modern devices or the Internet. Moreover, even parents who are very caring and supportive, sometimes cannot afford to buy their children modern devices. For this reason, during the observations modern technology was introduced, such as interactive whiteboards, smartphones and computers, in order to examine their effectiveness in learners' motivation and to boost their digital competence. As a result, it was noticed that technology may increase all learners' motivation and encourage them to participate in lesson; however, learners from dysfunctional family background appeared to be even more satisfied with the usage of the devices since they were able to work with technology they do not possess in everyday life. Furthermore, for the learners who asked the teacher if they could use the devices again during subsequent classes, the implementation of technology seemed to have a long-lasting effect. This shows that using technology during language classes strengthens students' motivation and makes them willing to participate actively. Learners' participation was assessed as high (8) and satisfaction also as high (9).

### Assigning homework and giving rewards

During the interview some of the teachers reported that learners who are raised in dysfunctional families are almost always unprepared for the lesson and as a rule they do not do their homework. In order to encourage learners to be more engaged in the learning process, the teacher chose to introduce a system of punishments and rewards. Therefore, each time they did not do their homework, the teacher put "crosses" next to the learners' surnames, and "ticks" each time they did. After a week the teacher counted the crosses and ticks. If the number of ticks of all learners was more than a hundred, the learners received one point. For gaining five points, the learners received a reward, e.g. they could go to a pizzeria or the cinema with the teacher. As

a consequence, the learners became very motivated to do their homework on time; however, it was observed that learners from dysfunctional families became extremely discouraged each time they were given a cross for not having done their homework. Now and again such learners after having been given a cross stopped doing their homework completely. Thus, during subsequent classes the teachers decided not to use the “crosses” system and gave only ticks if the learners had their homework. This had a very positive effect on students, which shows that rewards had a way better effect on learners than punishment. This phenomenon was particularly noticeable among learners raised in dysfunctional families. Therefore, it might be concluded that punishing such learners may lead to a lack of motivation and that is why it is necessary that the teacher provides their learners with a sufficient number of rewards. After the teacher had stopped giving the learners punishment, their participation was assessed as high (9) and satisfaction as very high (10).

#### Behavioral contract

At the beginning of the school year, the learners were asked to become familiar with and sign a behavioral contract designed by their teacher. The contract was signed between the learners, the teacher and the headmaster of the school. Unfortunately, due to the difficult situation of the learners, it was not possible to involve parents in the contract. During the classes that followed, the contract appeared to have quite a positive effect on the learners, even though they had to be reminded of the rules constantly. However, at times, the learners raised in dysfunctional families did not obey the rules at all, even after being reminded about them by the teacher. That was probably due to the lack of support on the part of the learners’ parents. As a consequence, their children often felt that there were no consequences of not obeying the rules the contract contained. Hence, the results show that such a contract may have a slight impact on the learners, especially when the learners are constantly reminded about its rules, however, the lack of parents’ support weakens its effectiveness. Learners’ participation was assessed as relatively high (6), whereas satisfaction as rather low (3).

#### 4. Answers to research questions

The results of the questionnaire with teachers revealed that the teachers participating in the study are aware that the lack of motivation among learners from dysfunctional background is a great problem and they would like to learn more about the issue and the techniques for increasing motivation. The teachers who took part in the study did not know any techniques for improving

learners' motivation, engagement and participation, whereas they pointed out numerous obstacles they had to handle during English classes, caused mainly by the learners' disruptive behavior and their not being prepared for the lesson.

During classroom observations, each technique for developing motivation introduced in the study appeared to have a positive impact on the learners. However, it must be kept in mind that due to various personal problems of the learners some of the techniques should address the learners' specific needs, e.g. it is difficult to construct a behavioral contract in a situation where parents are not involved in the process of enforcing the rules, therefore the teacher must take the responsibility and be extremely consistent and involved in order to show learners that the rules must be obeyed. Moreover, during the observations it was noticed that such learners need a lot of attention from the teachers, therefore it is crucial that the teacher devotes some time of the lesson to communicating individually with the learners. What is more, all of the techniques that encouraged the learners to actively participate in class by making them responsible for at least a small part of the lesson increased their motivation. Finally, rewards seem to influence learner's motivation in a positive way whereas punishment tends to do the opposite, for it hinders learners' participation in class and, consequently, decreases their motivation.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the study presented various techniques that the teachers of learners who are brought up in dysfunctional families may successfully use during foreign language lessons. Since the study revealed that the teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of how to deal with the lack of motivation and participation in classes, the article provides some useful knowledge of which techniques will help the teachers encourage their students to participate in class. On the whole, it is crucial to provide such learners with a lot of care and attention which they usually lack in their family home. Moreover, it is vital to provide such learners with as many rewards as possible instead of punishing them due to the fact that their parents hardly ever focus on giving them rewards for good behavior, therefore they are very often overwhelmed by punishment. Furthermore, the teachers of such learners should also consider using technology during classes, because it appears to have a positive impact on their motivation. Finally, constructing a behavioral contract with such students at the beginning of the school year may also come in useful while developing their motivation, especially when the teacher wants to discourage disruptive behavior in class; however, such contract must be wisely constructed by all

of the teachers in association with the school principal and, if possible, with parents so as to enhance its effectiveness.

Even though the article provides a detailed description of numerous techniques for developing learners' motivation and assesses their effectiveness, it is still necessary to carry out further research which would include more learners and teachers and which would investigate the effectiveness of other techniques that are used to strengthen learners' motivation. Moreover, it is vital to provide teachers and student teachers with the knowledge of how to deal with such students both at the university level and during teacher training courses.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Questionnaire

Do you think that learners who are raised in dysfunctional families (alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence etc.) are particularly unmotivated to learn foreign languages?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comment ..... .....
Which of the following problems caused by learners raised in a dysfunctional family do you encounter during lessons?	Bad behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Not studying for tests <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of participation in class <input type="checkbox"/> Not doing homework <input type="checkbox"/> Reluctance to speak in English <input type="checkbox"/> Reluctance to work in pairs or groups <input type="checkbox"/> Comment ..... .....
Do you know any techniques for developing motivation of the aforementioned learners?	Comment ..... .....

**Appendix 2 Classroom observation sheet**

Name of the technique –									
Date –									
Learners’ satisfaction from the technique (e.g. showing interest in the technique)									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Learners’ participation in class.									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other .....									
.....									

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Budowanie motywacji wśród polskich uczniów  
wychowywanych w rodzinach dysfunkcyjnych

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy kwestii budowania motywacji do nauki języka obcego wśród polskich nastolatków wychowanych w rodzinach dysfunkcyjnych, w których można zaobserwować m.in. alkoholizm, przemoc domową czy przyjmowanie narkotyków. W pierwszej części tekstu opisano teoretyczne aspekty pojęcia motywacji wraz z badaniami przeprowadzonymi w tej dziedzinie, natomiast drugą część poświęcono szczegółowemu opisowi badania przeprowadzonego wśród polskich uczniów wychowywanych w rodzinach dysfunkcyjnych i ich nauczycieli. Ponadto w artykule przedstawiono różnorodne techniki budowania motywacji wraz z opisem ich efektywności w pracy z uczniami wychowanymi w rodzinie dysfunkcyjnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** motywacja, rodzina dysfunkcyjna, nastolatki, alkoholizm, przemoc domowa, uzależnienie od narkotyków