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## 2 Learning Motivation of 3 Disadvantaged Students

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### 7 Synonyms

8 Academic motivation of at-risk learners; Learning moti-  
9 vation of students with low socioeconomic status

### 10 Definition

11 The phrase *learning motivation of disadvantaged students*  
12 refers to the assumption that learning motivation, being  
13 different from, and usually lower than that of students  
14 from average or advantaged environments, plays a crucial  
15 role in the educational failures of students with low socio-  
16 economic status. On a theoretical basis it is effortless to  
17 verify the motivational deficit of disadvantaged students  
18 that can be traced back, on one hand, to the parents'  
19 influential role in the formation of learning motivation,  
20 and, on the other hand, to school failures evolving as  
21 a consequence of less-advanced cognitive skills. However,  
22 unequivocal empirical evidence supporting the central  
23 role of unfavorable family background in the development  
24 of a lower level of learning motivation is unavailable.

### 25 Theoretical Background

26 The relationship between family background and school  
27 success has been well documented. It is a well-known fact  
28 that disadvantaged children's skills and learning outcomes  
29 are poorer than those of their peers from average or  
30 advantaged environments. One possible explanation of  
31 these differences is the lower level of learning motivation  
32 disadvantaged children exhibit. Theoretically it is effort-  
33 less to verify the association between the unfavorable  
34 family background and the low learning motivation  
35 which is usually traced back, on the one hand, to parental  
36 influence on children's motivation, and on the other hand,  
37 to school failures evolving as a consequence of less  
38 advanced cognitive skills.

39 According to empirical studies parents have a crucial  
40 role in how children approach achievement in the aca-  
41 demic area through (1) parents' practices with children,  
42 (2) parents' thinking about children, and (3) relatedness  
43 between parents and children (Pomerantz et al. 2005).  
44 Research investigating the relationships between socioeco-  
45 nomic status and characteristics of family life has revealed  
46 differences in all three fields between parents with low and  
47 medium or high socioeconomic status (Bradley and  
48 Corwyn 2002). Therefore, the linking of the attributes  
49 of poor families with the role of parental influence on  
50 children's learning motivation supports the view that  
51 learning motivation of disadvantaged students is lower  
52 than that of their peers from families with favorable  
53 background.

54 *Parents' practices with children* exert influence on the  
55 creation of an environment that supports children's com-  
56 petence. It involves offering cognitively stimulating mate-  
57 rials and experiences, as well as suitable information,  
58 guidelines, expectations, and feedback. Children from  
59 poor families have limited access to cognitively stimulat-  
60 ing materials and experiences, for example, in their homes  
61 there are fewer resources that facilitate learning or reading,  
62 and they are less likely to participate in educational,  
63 cultural, and recreational activities. Parents in poor envi-  
64 ronment read to their children and engage in conversa-  
65 tions with their children more rarely, and these  
66 conversations are poorer, and include fewer efforts to elicit  
67 child speech. Another component of parents' practices  
68 with children affecting subsequent learning motivation is  
69 parental support of autonomy. Autonomy support  
70 involves allowing children to explore their own environ-  
71 ment, initiate their own behavior, and play an active role  
72 in solving their own problems. Parents with low socioeco-  
73 nomic status use control strategies and restrictions more  
74 often, and are less likely to encourage autonomous  
75 behavior.

76 One dimension of *parents' thinking about children* is  
77 parental expectations for children's performance. Parents  
78 with high expectations are more involved in their chil-  
79 dren's schooling than are other parents, and in an indirect  
80 way, through parental messages they exert influence on  
81 children's belief systems. However, in case of mothers, 81

82 economic hardships reduce the likelihood of setting opti- 133  
83 mal developmental goals for their children, which entails 134  
84 children's limited involvement in activities fostering skills 135  
85 development.

86 *Relatedness between parents and children* shapes the 136  
87 orientation children adopt toward achievement in aca- 137  
88 demic domains in numerous ways. Optimal attachment 138  
89 and closeness have an effect through children's confident 139  
90 and autonomous exploration of their environment, as well 140  
91 as through a positive internal representation of themselves 141  
92 and their parents who allow them to explore their envi- 142  
93 ronment without having to worry over their relationships. 143  
94 Another form of relatedness between parents and children 144  
95 is children's sense of obligation to their family. Students 145  
96 with a strong sense of family obligation report spending 146  
97 more time studying and having higher educational 147  
98 aspirations and expectations than others. When children 148  
99 define themselves in terms of their relationships with 149  
100 their parents, i.e., children hold parent-oriented 150  
101 interdependent self-construals, they put more effort into 151  
102 realizing the educational goals set for them by their par- 152  
103 ents, and are more likely to internalize these. Stresses, 153  
104 uncertainties, and low social standing can lead to such 154  
105 negative emotional states as anxiety, depression, and hos- 155  
106 tility, all of which negatively affect the relationships among 156  
107 family members. Additionally, harsh and neglectful par- 157  
108 enting, which is also more common among poor families, 158  
109 is conducive to an unfavorable parent-child relationship. 159

110 Motivational weaknesses deriving from family back- 160  
111 ground might be intensified by the school. Students whose 161  
112 skills necessary for school-based learning are underdevel- 162  
113 oped, and have unfavorable motivational patterns, which 163  
114 are both highly probable in case of disadvantaged stu- 164  
115 dents, are prone to long-term motivational disadvantages 165  
116 right in the first years of schooling. This phenomenon is 166  
117 experienced in the case of learning to read, which is the 167  
118 core achievement context for school beginners. Low- 168  
119 achieving students without sufficient instruction fall 169  
120 increasingly behind their normally achieving peers. They 170  
121 often feel that they are being compared to their classmates 171  
122 with optimal reading trajectories, experience loss of per- 172  
123 sonal control, and feelings of inferiority. Consequently, 173  
124 students at risk fall back upon maladaptive motivational 174  
125 reactions, such as passivity, task-avoidance, acting-out, or 175  
126 dependency. Although low-achievers are given more help 176  
127 and incentives than normal achievers, they also have to 177  
128 face more direction, criticism, reprimands, and rejection. 178  
129 Maladaptive motivational patterns stabilize rapidly after 179  
130 school start, and are likely to contribute to resistance to 180  
131 subsequent teaching and treatment (Vauras et al. 2001). 181  
132 Teachers' expectations, that can be different for students 182

with favorable and unfavorable family backgrounds, are 133  
regarded as an additional element in the intensification of 134  
the motivational deficit (Bradley and Corwyn 2002). 135

## 136 **Important Scientific Research and Open** 136 137 **Questions** 137

138 Although theories about the motivational deficit in low 138  
139 social class school populations have long been present 139  
140 (e.g., Lawton 1968), the number of empirical studies 140  
141 focusing on the relationships between motivation and 141  
142 disadvantaged status is relatively small. In case of some 142  
143 motivational constructs, these empirical investigations 143  
144 have revealed a connection with socioeconomic status, 144  
145 while in case of others no such relationship has been found. 145

146 The survey including the largest sample size, on which 146  
147 we can rely in the investigation of relationships between 147  
148 family background and learning motivation, is linked to 148  
149 The Programme for International Student Assessment 149  
150 (PISA) 2000 data collection (Artelt et al. 2003). Out of 150  
151 the 32 countries participating in PISA 2000, students from 151  
152 26 countries completed the questionnaires. Nationally 152  
153 representative samples of 15-year-olds consisted of more 153  
154 than 120 thousand students. Constructs investigated are 154  
155 primarily linked to the theory of self-regulated learning, 155  
156 from which instrumental motivation, interest in mathe- 156  
157 matics and reading, persistence and effort, self-efficacy 157  
158 and reading (verbal), mathematics and academic self- 158  
159 concepts can be regarded as variables describing learning 159  
160 motivation. Students were ranked by their parent's occu- 160  
161 pational status. Analysis compared the top quarter and the 161  
162 bottom national quarter of the student population in each 162  
163 country. Whenever significant differences were found in 163  
164 motivational variables, those usually meant the advantage 164  
165 of top quarter students. The difference between the two 165  
166 groups is the most remarkable in the case of self-efficacy. 166  
167 Students with disadvantaged background are less likely to 167  
168 believe in their capacity to face learning challenges. This 168  
169 difference was present everywhere with the exception of 169  
170 one country. Children of low occupational status parents 170  
171 are less confident regarding their skills in mathematics, in 171  
172 reading as well as in learning in general (academic self- 172  
173 concept). There are also significant differences in interest 173  
174 in reading in most countries. Results regarding interest in 174  
175 mathematics and learning stimulated by external rewards 175  
176 such as grades (instrumental motivation) are the least 176  
177 consistent. In some countries these motivational con- 177  
178 structs show more favorable characteristics in case of 178  
179 students belonging to the top quarter, while in others 179  
180 these more advantageous profiles were reported by stu- 180  
181 dents in the bottom quarter. Although significant differ- 181  
182 ences were found in more variables describing learning 182

183 motivation, it is not evident, to what extent the family and  
184 to what extent the school is responsible for the emergence  
185 of these differences, since the study does not discuss effects  
186 of selective education.

187 In the school systems of numerous countries students  
188 are sorted into separate schools, classes, or groups in their  
189 early school years on the basis of their past school achieve-  
190 ments or abilities. As opposed to the originally declared  
191 goals, in many cases the decision to assign a student to  
192 a low ability group, a low prestige school or training  
193 program tends to be based on their socioeconomic status.  
194 Students in lower ability groups or in low prestige envi-  
195 ronments usually perform far below expectations, which is  
196 partly attributable to motivational reasons. Selective  
197 schooling has an adverse impact on self-esteem, and it  
198 can lead to anti-school attitudes and alienation from  
199 school in case of pupils in the lower groups or in low  
200 prestige environments. The negative impacts of selectivity  
201 on motivational variables may be mediated by stigmatiza-  
202 tion and teachers' expectations (Ireson and Hallam 2001).

203 Although according to some studies the motivational  
204 level of disadvantaged children is lower than that of their  
205 peers from privileged backgrounds, there is no clear  
206 empirical evidence that disadvantaged background itself  
207 plays a crucial role in the development of learning moti-  
208 vation, and through this, in the school failures of disad-  
209 vantaged students. This situation may be attributable to  
210 the relatively small number of studies concentrating on the  
211 relation between family background and learning motiva-  
212 tion, to the lack of a coherent theoretical foundation of  
213 learning motivation, and as a consequence, to the various  
214 operationalizations of motivation existing in the litera-  
215 ture, and finally, to the fact that the negative effects of  
216 selectivity based on socioeconomic status are hardly

separable from direct effects of socioeconomic status. 217  
Moreover, there is a wide variability in the definition of 218  
disadvantaged background in studies, which also hinders 219  
the synthesis of available results. 220

## Cross-References 221

▶ Achievement Motivation and Learning	222
▶ At-Risk Learners	223
▶ Family Background and Effects on Learning	224
▶ Interests and Learning	225
▶ Motivation and Learning: Modern Theories	226
▶ Motivation to Learn	227
▶ Motivational Variables in Learning	228
▶ Self-concept and Learning	229
▶ Self-efficacy and Learning	230
▶ Self-regulated Learning	231

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