

**CONSUMER RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE TEACHING:  
GRADUATES' OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN POLISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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**1. Introduction**

Systematic research into the success or failure of second or foreign language teaching and learning is of fairly recent origin. It began with comparative studies of the effectiveness of different teaching methods and techniques. The first study of this kind dates back to 1948 (Agard and Dunkel), and three of the most representative later ones were: Scherer and Wertheimer (1964), the Pennsylvania Project (Smith 1970), and the GUME Project (Levin 1972). Studies of a different kind, undertaken mostly in Canada and Great Britain, attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of beginning language instruction in primary school (Stern 1967, Burstall et al. 1974). A study of yet another type, one that focussed on success in *learning* (with emphasis on self-instruction) was carried out by the English Teaching Information Centre of the British Council (Pickett 1978).

Yet research on the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language in school, evaluated from the perspective of the educational system of a whole country – or even across several countries – and without commitment to any method, technique, or philosophy of instruction, was first undertaken only in the mid-sixties. The best known are the surveys of teaching English in ten countries and French in eight, undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA); see Carroll (1975) and Lewis and Massad (1975). In terms of soundness of theoretical underpinnings, breadth of coverage and the number of factors investigated, as well as sophistication of the statistical apparatus used, perhaps the most impressive study so far has been that of Komorowska, who evaluated the results of teaching English in Polish secondary schools (Komorowska 1978, updated as

Komorowska 1987). She used research tools of several kinds: language tests, questionnaires for pupils and teachers, and interviews with teachers.

Determinants of success in the teaching and learning of Russian in Polish schools were the subject of a detailed study by Figarski (1984). Success in learning English in Polish secondary schools has recently been investigated in a brief questionnaire survey by Johnson (1989).

The present paper also deals with language instruction in secondary schools in Poland. It reports the results of collecting and analysing retrospective evaluations of the teaching of foreign languages in secondary school (and assessments of success in learning them) presented by young people who left school two years earlier.

## 2. Organization of research

The research tool used was a questionnaire (or, rather, two parallel questionnaires – more about these later). The questions – four in number – were open-ended, allowing the subjects freedom in formulating their answers. This design was intentional: the aim was not to suggest any possible factors potentially contributing to success or failure of language teaching and learning, or any categories for structuring the responses.

The respondents were undergraduates beginning their third year at the University of Warsaw, Institute of English Studies. The questions were presented with the aid of an overhead projector, during the final five minutes of a lecture on language teaching methodology – the first lecture in the academic year and also the beginning of the course on this subject. Each student received a small sheet of paper (size A5) on which to write his or her answers. The subjects were told that it was expected that their replies would reflect their own individual personal experiences of school instruction in foreign languages. They were asked not to sign the answer sheets. It was also made clear that participation in the questionnaire was entirely voluntary.

Originally I intended to present only one set of questions. However, on examining the results obtained I decided to present my informants with another questionnaire; more about which appears below.

## 3. Questionnaire Number One

Questionnaire Number One consisted of the following four questions:

1. Does school teaching of foreign languages in Poland bring positive results?
2. If you think it does, what factors contribute to its success?
3. If you think it does not, what are the main causes of its failure?
4. What should be done in order to improve the results?

There were 36 respondents. Two questionnaire responses were rejected, since they discussed teaching in terms of wishes (what things should be like), and not in terms of facts (what they are). This left 34 responses to be analyzed.

### 3 a. Does school teaching of foreign languages in Poland bring positive results?

Table 1. Answers to Question One of Questionnaire 1.

No.	22 (64.5%)	} 26 (76.5%)
Qualified no.	4 (12.0%)	
Yes, if the teacher and/or school and/or learners' motivation are positive	8 (23.5%)	
	n = 34 (100%)	

There were no unqualified 'Yes' replies. Among the eight respondents who gave a qualified 'Yes' reply, two stated that teaching is successful if the teacher is good; two said that success depends both on the teacher and on the learners (on their motivation and attitude); one listed the teacher, the learners and the school as factors conditioning success; two confined themselves to pointing to the role of the school; and one wrote only "Some people learn a lot".

### 3 b. If you think it [school teaching of foreign languages in Poland] brings positive results, what factors contribute to its success?

Of the eight persons who gave a qualified 'Yes' answer to Question One, six expanded their statements by replying to Question Two (the remaining two respondents ignored this question). Aside from pointing again to the factors mentioned in the answers to Question One (and listed in Table 1 above) the respondents emphasized the importance of such factors as: interesting classes, teacher's activities aiming at increasing learners' interest in the language and at encouraging them to seek out-of-class contact with it, good coursebooks, good syllabuses, and good teaching aids.

Question Two was answered also by two out of the four persons who gave a qualified 'No' answer to Question One. One respondent stated that emphasis on written work and on grammar exercises brings some results in these two aspects of language proficiency, but does not result in the ability to speak or understand the spoken word. The other respondent wrote that some progress is achieved, due to motivation generated by video films, computers, etc.

### 3 c. If you think it [school teaching of foreign languages] does not bring positive results, what are the main causes of its failure?



Question Three was answered by all the respondents, even though not all the replies were equally exhaustive. The wealth of observations and opinions contained in the responses is presented in Table 2 – in thematic groups and, of necessity, in abridged form. The numbers indicate how many times a particular cause of failure of the teaching process was mentioned by the respondents, and what percentage of the total number of respondents this number represents.

Table 2. Answers to Question Three of Questionnaire 1

Causes of failure of school teaching of foreign languages.	
1. Relating to the CONTENT of teaching.	
Emphasis on grammar (and vocabulary) and written language at the expense of speaking.	12 (35.0%)
2. Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.	
2a. Relating to methods and procedures.	
Methods traditional/passive/discouraging	7 (20.5%)
2b. Relating to aids and equipment.	
Inadequate textbooks/lack of good books.	12 (35.0%)
Lack of language labs (or tape/cassette recorders) and other a-v equipment; shortage of tapes.	18 (52.5%)
Other.	6 (17.5%)
3. Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.	
3a. Relating to teachers.	
Teachers inadequately trained, unconcerned, following routine and worn-out schemes; teachers badly paid	12 (35.0%)
3b. Relating to learners.	
Language teaching starts too late.	4 (12.0%)
Lack of clear perspective of using the language, or lack of awareness of its importance – hence low motivation.	6 (17.5%)
4. Relating to CONTEXT of teaching.	
4a. Relating to physical (spatio-temporal) context.	
Too large classes/groups.	11 (32.0%)
Too few lessons per week/Not enough time for practice.	4 (12.0%)
4b. Relating to social context.	
Faults of the existing school system; in particular, languages treated as less important subjects.	9 (26.5%)

### 3 d. *What should be done in order to improve the results?*

Anyone expecting the answers to Question Four to be simple converses of answers to Question Three would be disappointed. It is always easier to criticize than to suggest improvements. This age-old truth is reflected in the fact that only 29 out of the 34 respondents answered Question Four, and their responses were more general than the responses to Question Three. They are presented (abridged) in Table 3, arranged according to the same thematic groups as the answers to Question Three.

Table 3. Answers to Question Four of Questionnaire 1

Conditions of improvement.	
1. Relating to the CONTENT of teaching.	
More listening, speaking, discussion; less grammar.	7 (20.5%)
2. Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.	
2a. Relating to methods and procedures.	
Make lessons more interesting/less mechanical; use modern methods and techniques.	10 (29.0%)
2b. Relating to aids and equipment.	
Publish new, interesting and modern books.	8 (23.5%)
Use language labs in schools; spend more money on tapes.	12 (35.0%)
Give access to foreign newspapers, periodicals, films.	6 (17.5%)
3. Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.	
3a. Relating to teachers.	
More teachers; better training of teachers; give teachers more freedom to choose methods and techniques.	9 (26.0%)
Pay teachers better.	6 (17.5%)
3b. Relating to learners.	
Start early/Start in primary school.	4 (12.0%)
Motivate learners: organize student exchange, meetings with native speakers, etc.	5 (14.5%)
4. Relating to the CONTEXT of teaching.	
4a. Relating to physical (spatio-temporal) context.	
Make groups smaller/Max. size of group: 10.	5 (14.5%)
More lessons per week.	2 (6.0%)
4b. Relating to social context.	
Change educational policy; give better status to languages as school subjects; etc.	6 (17.5%)

### 4. Discussion of results of Questionnaire 1

The first thing that strikes one on inspecting the results of Questionnaire 1 is the predominance of negative answers to Question One and the complete absence of fully positive answers to this question. The sum of 'Noes' and 'Qualified Noes' amounts to 76 per cent of the total. However, if we look at the data from a different angle, we shall see that more than 35 per cent of the respondents, ie. more than a third, did not give a clearly negative answer to Question One – and thus expressed the view that language teaching in schools does bring some positive results. This perspective is at variance with the widespread opinion that one cannot successfully learn a foreign language at school.

Of the eight respondents who gave a positive but qualified answer to Question One, six consider the teacher to constitute the decisive factor in successful teaching, and one points to the role of the school. An analysis of the replies to Question Two shows that all of the six respondents who commented



on their qualifiedly positive answer to Question One stated that good results depend predominantly on the quality of instruction, and thus also attributed the leading role to the teacher. This finding correlates with the results obtained by Komorowska, who writes that, in tests of speaking, pupils taught by teachers with low professional qualifications scored badly more than twice as often as pupils taught by highly qualified teachers (Komorowska 1987:78).

Four respondents pointed moreover to the importance of adequate attitude and motivation of the learners. Motivation was quoted also (as the sole factor responsible for success) by one of those two respondents who answered Question Two having previously given a qualified 'No' reply to Question One. The other of those two respondents stated that learners master grammar and the skill of writing (rather than the skills of speaking and oral comprehension) because that is what they are taught. This comment, too, can be construed as indirect recognition of the decisive influence of the teacher on the results of instruction.

Thus, from the responses to the first two questions one might draw the conclusion that in the opinion of the respondents success in language teaching depends on just two factors: a good teacher and strong motivation of the learners. In other words, *success is conditioned by the human element*: by the participants in the teaching/learning process. Consequently, lack of success might be explained by lack of competence of the teacher and/or lack of motivation in the learners.

The answers to Question Three give at least partial support to this view. Learner motivation – or, rather, its absence – is mentioned, directly or indirectly, by fifteen respondents: see Table 2, part 3b and 4b. The respondents criticize lack of awareness of the importance of knowing foreign languages on the part of many pupils, no clear perspective of using the foreign language outside the classroom, no access to foreign culture, or low prestige of foreign languages in comparison with other school subjects and over-extended requirements in other subjects. Teachers' qualifications and their performance in class is criticized by twelve respondents, two of whom, however, also draw attention to very low salaries of teachers.

And yet lack of motivation of the learners, and the professional qualifications and performance of the teachers are not the only factors mentioned in the responses to Question Three. Twelve respondents criticize the content of teaching (too much formal grammar, emphasis on written language at the expense of teaching to speak); seven respondents mention inadequate methods and procedures. Twelve respondents blame the lack of results of teaching on inadequate textbooks and the shortage of good books generally. Lack of audio-visual aids or their bad condition is also mentioned by twelve respondents, and shortage of tapes by six. Finally, the physical context of teaching is cited: too crowded classes are quoted by eleven respondents and too few

lessons per week by four. If to all these we add individual comments on other elements of the teaching/learning situation (eg. criticism of late start of language teaching or of the organization of school syllabuses), we get a fairly balanced presentation of a whole spectrum of factors responsible for what the respondents consider to be lack of success of foreign language teaching in Polish schools.

We see a similar picture emerging out of the replies to Question Four: the question about suggestions for improvement of the existing situation. Seven respondents proposed changes in the content of teaching (less grammar, more listening and speaking), ten commented on methods and procedures, eight demanded better books, twelve criticized inadequate equipment. As far as the human element is concerned, nine respondents had something to say about selection and training of teachers, and six demanded better pay for teachers; four stated that language teaching starts too late, and five referred (in various ways) to factors increasing learners' motivation. Finally, seven respondents demanded smaller classes and more lessons per week, and six suggested changes in the whole educational system, which would favour the teaching of languages. Even considering the fact that only 29 (out of 34) respondents answered Question Four, and that their answers were more sketchy than the answers to Question Three, we can say that the results of this part of the questionnaire are consistent with the results of the other parts.

We are now in a position to see how the respondents interpreted Question One: the question about *positive results* of language teaching. It appears that in the opinion of an average educated member of the younger generation of Poles, 'knowledge of a foreign language' means the ability to communicate *orally* in that language. Not a single respondent mentioned reading skill (perhaps because it was taken for granted); and activities aiming at developing the skill of writing were listed among the factors actually *preventing* the achievement of success in teaching.

These findings are supported by the results obtained by Johnson, who writes, "Half of the subjects in this survey considered the development of all language skills as equally important while others considered listening comprehension and oral production as more important" (Johnson 1989: abstract). Put another way, *all* the subjects considered the aural-oral skills to be important, and half gave them absolute priority.

Both in Johnson's survey and in mine the respondents were students of English, which at least partly explains why they attached such importance to the aural-oral skills. English has become the most important international language – the *lingua franca* of the world on the threshold of the twenty-first century – and, on the whole, people are not satisfied if they can only read in it: they want to be able to use it in face-to-face communication. And yet it seems that fascination with the spoken word has deeper roots, and that the answers



would not be significantly different if we were to present my questionnaire to students of German or French. The view that success in language learning is measurable in terms of the success in the acquisition of *oral* competence is probably the consequence of thirty years of domination of the audio-lingual and audio-visual approach to language instruction. The public has become brainwashed into believing that learning a language means learning to speak it, and that the written word is somehow secondary and less important. This attitude coincides with the ascendancy of television and the video-cassette in mass culture, accompanied by a fall in the popularity of reading. It should perhaps be added that the importance of the written word for computer users does not change the overall picture, since the commands used in interacting with the computer constitute a highly restricted code.

All this allows us to venture an explanation of the low estimate of success of school teaching of languages presented by the informants: only 23.5 per cent of qualifiedly positive opinions. The objective picture, obtained by Komorowska, is much more optimistic, both in relation to the linguistic competence and to the communicative competence of the learners: between 48 and 68 per cent positive results. However, as Komorowska herself writes,

"In the subjective opinion of the pupils, even if language teaching results in some success, it is success in skills which they consider less essential, while in the really important skills they only see failure". (Komorowska 1987:120).

If we accept these comments on the respondents' views on language teaching and learning, the interpretation of their answers to all the four questions becomes easy. First, if it is believed that the primary goal of learning is mastery of oral interaction, then the teacher, as partner and as coordinator in dialogues, is very important. Hence there are so many comments on the role of the teacher.

Secondly, the critique of passive, textbook-bound teaching and the demands for more listening and talking are an obvious result of equating competence in a language with oral competence. When the respondents express dissatisfaction with their coursebooks, they are often unfair to the authors: very often it is not the book itself, but only the way it is used by the teacher that provokes criticism of the learners.

Thirdly, the amount of attention devoted by the respondents to audio-visual aids and materials is another reflection of the importance attached to the spoken word. Some respondents go as far as demanding that new language laboratories should be set up in schools (and, of course, the existing ones should be made proper use of). This perspective is anachronistic: when the teacher has only three hours per week for language instruction (as is the case in Poland), putting the learners in the booths of a language lab even for one hour a week would not promote the cause of developing competence in oral interaction! The (relative) decline of audiolingualism in the world in the last

two decades brought about a decline in the popularity of the language laboratory in many countries; witness the publication in Britain in 1984 of a book entitled *Bring the lab back to life*. Recordings are nowadays used mostly in so-called listening labs, where they can serve as excellent aids to developing listening comprehension – outside class time. Yet the magic of the language lab still persists in Poland – and allows commercial language schools to advertise "laboratory-method courses".

Fourthly, demands for smaller classes and more lessons per week are also understandable if the principal goal of instruction is supposed to be competence in oral interaction. One can learn to read and translate on one's own; but speaking and understanding speech can only be learnt effectively in small groups, which meet as often as possible.

### 5. Interlude

Our discussion of the results of Questionnaire 1 has made clear what the respondents meant by 'positive results' and 'success' (as opposed to 'failure') of teaching foreign languages in Polish schools. Yet a careful analysis of their responses leads to a suspicion that we have overlooked something. We have talked about the results of teaching and learning foreign languages, assuming that the phrase 'languages' was understood as 'languages other than mother tongue' – which seems to be its obvious meaning. It appears, however, that the majority of the respondents took the term 'foreign languages' to refer to English, French and German (and perhaps other languages of Western Europe) – but not to Russian! When they postulate easier access to books, newspapers, and magazines in the foreign language, they cannot have Russian in mind since there has always been an unlimited supply of inexpensive Russian publications available in Polish bookshops. When they demand more time for foreign language teaching, it cannot be Russian that they have in mind: one of the popular demands of the political opposition movements of young people has recently been the abolition of compulsory teaching of Russian in the Polish school system. When the respondents state that language teaching in Polish schools starts too late, they quote the age of 15 (the first year in secondary school) or, exceptionally, 13 or 14 (the last two years in primary school). This clearly refers to English, French, or German, since Russian starts at age 11.

These observations, and a few others, convinced me that the majority of the respondents must have taken the questionnaire to refer to the teaching of so-called 'western' languages. Consequently I decided to present to (roughly) the same audience another questionnaire, which related overtly to the teaching of Russian.



## 6. Questionnaire Number Two

Questionnaire 2 was the same as Questionnaire 1, with the exception of Question One, which read, "Does school teaching of Russian in Poland bring positive results?". It was administered a week after Questionnaire 1. This time the audience consisted of 50 students, 45 whom submitted responses.

### 6 a. Does school teaching of Russian in Poland bring positive results?

Table 4. Answers to Question One of Questionnaire 2.

No.	31 (69.0%)	} 37 (82.0%)
Qualified 'No'	6 (13.0%)	
Qualified 'Yes'	6 (13.0%)	
Undecided	2 (4.5%)	
n=45 (100%)		

Again there were no unqualified 'Yes' replies. The percentage of qualified positive replies was considerably lower than in Questionnaire 1 (13%, as against 23.5%) and their authors expressed in their comments mostly a minimalist attitude (considering that the school course of Russian lasts eight years – as compared with (the usual) four years of English, French, or German); eg. "Everyone understands basic Russian, knows the letters", "Pupils sometimes master this language", "Any result that gives an impression that people know more than they did before I consider good and positive". If we were to adopt some statistical technique for weighting the figures against the length of the course, the answers to Question One in Questionnaire 2 would turn out to be absolutely damning for the process of Russian language teaching in Poland.

This finding is in agreement with the results obtained by Figarski in his study of success of teaching Russian in Poland in primary and secondary schools. Figarski (1984:62) writes that research has shown a very low level of phonological and grammatical competence in spoken Russian even after eight years of instruction – accompanied by a fairly high level level of communicative competence (a fact which can presumably be explained by similarity of the two languages, a similarity commented upon by some of the respondents).

### 6 b. If you think it [school teaching of Russian in Poland] brings positive results, what factors contribute to its success?

This question was answered by the six respondents who gave a qualified 'Yes' reply to Question One, and by four others (two qualified 'Noes' and two 'Undecided'). Two respondents quoted similarity of Russian to Polish as

a factor conditioning success, two pointed to the ease of getting textbooks of Russian, one said that lively lessons can bring good results. The human element was also mentioned: two respondents emphasized the role of the teacher (particularly if she is a native speaker), two said that success depended on the pupils' willingness to learn, and one pointed to the availability of scientific books in Russian as a motivating factor. Lastly, two respondents drew attention to the fact that teaching of Russian starts early in the pupil's school career, and three commented on the sheer volume of teaching (over the eight years of the course).

### 6 c. If you think it [school teaching of Russian] does not bring positive results, what are the main causes of its failure?

Question Three was answered by all the respondents.

Table 5. Answers to Question Three (Questionnaire 2)

Causes of failure of teaching Russian.		
1. Relating to the CONTENT of teaching		
Emphasis on reading and writing instead of on speaking/conversation.		4 (9.0%)
2. Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.		
2a. Relating to methods and procedures.		
Methods and programs obsolete/boring/monotonous/rigid/ineffective.		14 (31.0%)
2b. Relating to aids and equipment.		
Obsolete/boring/inadequate/propaganda-ridden textbooks.		11 (24.0%)
No labs or language rooms; no tapes.		3 (6.5%)
Other.		2 (4.5%)
3. Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.		
3a. Relating to teachers.		
Inadequate qualifications and work of teachers;		
political views of (younger) teachers.		3 (6.5%)
3b. Relating to learners.		
Negative attitude to/Prejudice against the Russian		
language and/or the Soviet Union.		30 (66.5%)
Russian considered useless in the world outside Poland		
("No point in learning Russian").		8 (18.0%)
Lack of interest in Russian language and Soviet life.		4 (8.5%)
Other factors negatively affecting attitude.		3 (6.5%)
4. Relating to the CONTEXT of the teaching/learning process.		
4a. Relating to physical context.		
The course is too long.		1 (2.0%)
4b. Relating to social context.		
Compulsory character of Russian as a school subject.		17 (38.0%)

### 6 d. What should be done in order to improve the results?

43 out of the 45 respondents replied to Question Four.



Table 6. Answers to Question Four of Questionnaire 2

Conditions of improvement.	
1. Relating to the CONTENT of teaching.	
More conversation; more interesting topics; more culture and literature, less politics.	7 (15.5%)
2. Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.	
2a. Relating to methods and procedures.	
Introduce modern, lively methods/Improve teaching/Make lessons more attractive/Encourage, not punish.	8 (18.0%)
Change programs/Avoid boredom in syllabuses.	2 (4.5%)
2b. Relating to aids and equipment.	
Write new (better) handbooks/Make handbooks and courses more authentic, interesting, practical, apolitical.	11 (24.0%)
Use labs, tapes; improve equipment.	4 (9.0%)
Use films.	1 (2.0%)
3. Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.	
3a. Relating to teachers.	
3b. Relating to learners.	
Convince learners that Russian is useful/Show the importance of Russian /Develop interest in Russian.	5 (11.0%)
Change in attitudes is a precondition of improvement.	5 (11.0%)
4. Relating to the CONTEXT of teaching.	
4a. Relating to physical (spatio-temporal) context.	
Smaller groups/Better conditions/More intensive courses	3 (6.5%)
4b. Relating to social context.	
Make Russian optional/Introduce free choice of language.	23 (51.0%)
Replace Russian with a West-European language.	1 (2.0%)
Change essential political factors.	4 (9.0%)

## 7. Discussion of results of Questionnaire 2

The differences between the results of Questionnaire 2 and those of Questionnaire 1 are striking. The answers to Questions One and Two have already been commented on, but it is the answers to Questions Three and Four that are most significant.

Question Three was about causes of failure. In their answers to this question in Questionnaire 1, the respondents gave fairly good coverage to all aspects of the teaching/learning process. The four aspects they gave particular attention to were: content of teaching (not enough spoken language), aids and equipment (inadequate books, lack of labs and tapes), teachers (their qualifications and performance in class), and physical conditions (crowded classes). Moreover, four respondents to Questionnaire 1 thought that language teaching started too late (implying presumably that the course should be longer), and four complained that it was not intensive enough. If lack of learner's motivation was

alluded to in Questionnaire 1, it was only in the context of limited opportunities of using the foreign language outside class and the low status of foreign language in the school curriculum.

The answers to Question Three in Questionnaire 2 are quite different. Aside from critical remarks about methods of teaching (cited by a higher proportion of respondents than in Questionnaire 1) and about books, hardly any of the aspects of the teaching/learning process commented on in the answers to Questionnaire 1 get more than a passing mention here. Some are not mentioned at all: nobody demands a longer or more intensive course of Russian (in fact, one respondent stated that it is too long), and no one complains about the low status of the language in the school curriculum. The main causes of failure are seen to lie elsewhere: in motivation, or rather its opposite – anti-motivation. As many as two-thirds of the respondents stated that the teaching of Russian is unsuccessful because of a negative attitude, or prejudice, among the learners towards the Russian language or towards the Soviet Union. Some mentioned other factors which negatively affect learners' motivation. Almost 40 per cent of the respondents declared that the learners refuse to learn because they resent the fact that learning Russian is compulsory.

The answers to Question Four in Questionnaire 2 present a similar picture. As far as the teaching/learning process is concerned, the respondents again commented mostly on the need for better methods and better books, virtually ignoring other aspects of the process. In ten responses the importance of changing the attitudes of learners was considered crucial. The main thrust of the respondents' remarks, however, was again directed against the obligatory character of Russian as a school subject: more than half the respondents demanded free choice of foreign language in schools, and another 13 per cent suggested changes in sociopolitical factors affecting the teaching of Russian.

In their answers to Questions Three and Four of Questionnaire 2, the respondents give open and emphatic expression of what they consider to be the principal cause of the failure of teaching Russian in Poland: anti-motivation, arising from political factors. Veiled expression of the same view can be found in Figarski (1984). For example, he states that learner motivation depends, among others, on "the place and role of the foreign language in the national consciousness [of the learners]" and on "the international prestige of the language and the country in which it is spoken" (ibid. 107). He goes on to explain that "these factors shape the learners' attitude towards the language", that they have their roots in historical events which happened centuries ago and that they are influenced by the current political situation. The impact of these factors can be modified "to a certain extent" by the teacher, who can try and



develop positive motivation in the learners. Figarski wrote before the age of *glasnost*, hence the euphemisms and circumlocutions; but it is obvious that both the poor results of teaching Russian and the principal cause of this state of affairs have been well known to the teaching profession for quite some time.

### 8. Comparison of results of Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2

Tables 7 and 8 present a partial comparison of the results of Questionnaires 1 and 2: namely a comparison of responses to Questions Three and Four.

Table 7. Comparison of responses to Question Three

Causes of failure of language teaching.	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2
Relating to the CONTENT of teaching.		
Grammar and writing instead of speaking.	12 (35.0%)	4 (9.0%)
Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.		
To methods	7 (20.5%)	14 (31%)
To aids:		
Books.	12 (35.0%)	12 (27.0%)
A-v equipment, tapes, and other facilities.	18 (52.5%)	3 (6.0%)
Other.	6 (17.5%)	2 (4.0%)
Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.		
To teachers.	12 (35.0%)	3 (6.5%)
To learners:		
Late start.	4 (12.0%)	—
Lack of awareness of importance of knowing L2 or perspective of using it outside the classroom; little contact with L2	6 (17.5%)	—
L2 considered useless in the contemporary world.	—	8 (17.5%)
Lack of interest in L2 and its culture	—	4 (8.5%)
Negative attitude towards or prejudice against L2 and/or the country in which it is spoken.	—	30 (66.5%)
Other factors negatively affecting attitude.	—	3 (6.5%)
Relating to the CONTEXT of teaching:		
To physical context:		
Crowded classes.	11 (32.0%)	—
Too few lessons a week	4 (12.0%)	—
The course is too long.	—	1 (2.0%)
To social context:		
Faults of the school system (and low status of languages in it).	9 (26.5%)	—
Compulsory status of L2 as a school subject.	—	17 (38.0%)

Table 8. Comparison of responses to Question Four.

Conditions of improvement.	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2
Relating to the CONTENT of teaching.		
More teaching to speak; more interesting topic; more culture and literature.	7 (20.5%)	7 (15.5%)
Relating to the PROCESS of teaching.		
To methods.	10 (29.0%)	10 (22.0%)
To aids:		
Books.	8 (23.5%)	11 (24.0%)
A-v. equipment and tapes.	12 (35.0%)	4 (9.0%)
Other.	6 (17.5%)	1 (2.0%)
Relating to the PARTICIPANTS in the teaching/learning process.		
To teachers.	15 (44.0%)	2 (4.5%)
To learners:		
Early start.	4 (12.0%)	—
Motivation: language camps, student exchange.	5 (14.5%)	—
Motivation: changing learners' attitudes.	—	10 (22.0%)
Relating to the CONTEXT of teaching.		
To physical context.	7 (20.5%)	3 (6.5%)
To social context:		
Better status for foreign languages in the school; changes in the educational system.	10 (29.5%)	—
Free choice of L2.	—	23 (51.0%)
Changes in certain political factors.	—	6 (13.0%)

### 9. Conclusions

The answers to the questionnaires lead to four conclusions. Firstly, it seems that among factors conditioning success in language instruction *motivation* is absolutely decisive. And it is not only the case that positive motivation makes it possible to learn a language even in difficult circumstances; it turns out that negative motivation – anti-motivation – may entirely vitiate the efforts of the teacher – unless he or she finds a way of changing the learners' attitudes.

Secondly, the respondents' answers show that "knowledge of a language" has come to be understood as tantamount to the ability to communicate *orally* in that language. This is a view which has to be seriously taken into account in planning and evaluation of language courses – whether we agree or disagree with it.

Thirdly, it seems that the learner who wants to achieve oral fluency in the foreign language considers the *teacher* – his or her personality, knowledge of the language, and professional ability – to be very important.

Fourthly, it appears that the public has been made to believe that effective teaching of a language must involve *technical aids*; optimally, a language laboratory. This is another opinion that educators have to reckon with in planning language courses.



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