



Researching ESL motivation: Which skill is learners' favorite motivator?

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Abstract

Although a great paucity exists in scholarly studies on education in Somalia, the scarcity is more evident in the English studies area, particularly English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (used interchangeably in this study), where almost none had existed until Mohamed Eno's MA TESOL Dissertation in 2005 and his recent article in the *Journal of Somali Studies* in 2017. Influenced by both the paucity and the latter study in 2017¹, which recommended further examination of ESL/EFL area studies, this research investigates EFL students' perceptions of what they consider as more motivating or most motivating skill among the four second language acquisition (SLA) skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing.² Consequently, the results reveal that learners do not perceive *more listening* as a very motivating factor compared to *more speaking*, identified as the most motivating skill and ahead of *more writing* in the overall ratings. With very low results on the whole, *more reading*, on the other hand, is much below both speaking and writing in significance, though ahead of listening as a potential motivator. Interestingly, the findings also reveal persistent learner misunderstanding of the interlinkedness of the four skills, with a misperception that acquisition of one skill is independent of the others, as captured from an analysis of the vagaries in their responses.

Keywords: ESL/EFL education, ESL/EFL research, extrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, intrinsic motivation, Somalia, Somali education

1. Introduction

1.1 An Overview of Motivation

The development of [the] structure inside our heads comes in part from the exposure to language *and* from significant relationships of mutual respect. Those relationships are the motivation for learning.-Ruby K. Payne 2001:231

In learning English as a Second Language (ESL), or Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in general, motivation is considered a core factor affecting learner's achievement (Scarcella & Oxford 1992; Rehman *et al.*, 2014; Mallik 2017). Gardner (2010) [64, 70, 50, 28] symbolizes motivation as a mental powerhouse that energizes a learner's natural desire to act upon learning for the sake of self-enjoyment or contentment in achieving a goal. This is unraveled in his argument saying "motivation is a multifaceted construct that has behavioral, cognitive and affective components" (Gardner 2010:23) [28]. Yet, due to being "a complex phenomenon," motivation is not an easy variable a teacher can always inculcate in a student or apply to a situation from which an immediate result can be assuredly achieved (Lightbrown & Spada 2001:33) [44]. Although invariably a teacher assumes a great role in creating motivation among the students (Dornyei 1994; Brown 2001; Pae 2008) [23, 9, 60], s/he may not accomplish an astounding result. The reason is because the conundrums underlying motivation are attributed to multivariate factors that influence

it-some of which are personal to the individual learner (Nunan 1989) [57] and therefore beyond the teacher's domain of immediate control.

In contextualizing the descriptive significance of the term motivation, Gardner (2010:8) [28] declares that "a simple definition...is not possible" that rounds up all that entails its function, even though we can visit some of the characterizations offered by a section of the scholars who engaged the subject from theoretical and practical perspectives. Brown (1994:152) [8] relates motivation to the success or failure of any kind of task or activity whose complexity requires necessary attention. In language acquisition, Gardner's (1985:10) [27] explicates motivation as "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."

Motivation is also defined as "some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something" (Harmer 2001:51) [38]. The aspect of drive and resilience for achievement are best explained by Dörnyei (2001:8) [21] who describes motivation as a complex and crucial factor responsible for "why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it." Owing to the fact of motivation involving behavioral and social aspects as well as cognitive mental processes, Pintrich and Schunk (1996:4) [63] emphasize it as "a process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained."

According to researchers, motivation's relatedness to personality, attitudes of learners, individual styles and approaches to learning, in addition to the main reasons behind a learner's need for acquisition, (Ryan & Deci 2000a; Ghaedi, 2014; Ng & Ng 2015; Brown 1994; Cooper & Fishman 1977; Gardner *et al.* 1976) ^[67, 32, 56, 8, 13, 31] expands its reach in depth and breadth. It is from the milieu of its significance in ESL/EFL learning that Chambers (1999:25) ^[13] seems to observe when he states, "[learners] do not come to the foreign language classroom as *tabulae rasae*." Indeed Chambers points to the reality that as human beings, "They bring with them some attitudes born of conversations shared with family, friends, the media and personal experience of the target language community"-experiences beneficial to the classroom culture and context that enrich participation and therefore enhance learning. In effect, Chambers' work validates Williams and Burden's (1997:88) ^[75] insight that "it is undoubtedly true that learners bring many individual characteristics to the learning process which will affect both the way in which they learn and the outcomes of that process." Variation in language use and style of presentation notwithstanding, the scholars demonstrated above tend to agree on the main elements characterizing motivation, specifically the inner desire that develops a person's curiosity to engage in an intricate activity and pushes him/her towards the achievement of a goal. Motivation, as a composite phenomenon, constitutes a myriad of abstract elements and conditions experienced through a process that interlinks the cognitive and the behavioral. It is from the perspective of the interconnection of the multiple variables that Williams and Burden (1997:120) ^[75] attempt to present it as "a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, a state which leads to a conscious decision to act and gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort."

Similar to other borrowed concepts, approaches and theories, motivation in ESL or SLA derives from psychology; more specifically studies advanced in disciplines such as social psychology, cognitive psychology, and educational psychology. The roots of research on motivation in the process of second language (L2) learning, according to Dornyei (1994:274) ^[23], were laid in Canada—a country "where language learning is a featured social issue – at the crux of the relationship between the Anglophone and Francophone communities." Its adaption to ESL or SLA is attributed to Canadian social psychologists Robert Gardner, Wallace Lambert and others interested in the examination of this complicated construct. Tracing the origins of motivational psychology, Dornyei (1994:273) ^[23] writes:

Much of this research has been initiated and inspired by two Canadian psychologists, Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, who, together with their colleagues and students, grounded motivation research in a social psychological framework.

The social psychologists' interest in motivational studies emanates from their viewpoint of action as "the function of the social context and the interpersonal/intergroup relational patterns, as measured by means of the individual's social attitudes" (Dornyei 1998:2) ^[22]. This probably explains why

Gardner's research on theories of motivation sets its base in social psychology. However, scholars also believe that individual learner's attitudes and levels of motivation might be at variance and dependent upon whether acquisition is occurring as a foreign language or as a second language (Dornyei 1990; Oxford & Shearin 1994) ^[24, 59]; thus adding more nuance to the problematization of motivation from a perspective of applied linguistics.

Exponents of the theory of motivation note the shifts along the knowledge path to the sub-field and the multiple relationships among motivation in SLA, or ESL/EFL and other sub fields of psychology. The relationship characterizes the inseparability of language from cultural, social, and geographical spaces (Gardner & Lambert 1972; Dornyei 2005) ^[20]. An important perspective of the shifts includes the focus of classroom research "from the dominant trend in education psychology" that portrayed learners and teachers as "learning communities" to that of examining the traits of the individual learners as separate units within the context of the "learning communities" as a unitary whole (Dornyei 2005:2) ^[20]. It is through these shifts that scholars became engaged in highlighting the importance of focusing on "individual differences" of the learners within the "collective" (Dornyei *ibid*; see also Alexander & Murphy 1998, 1999) ^[2, 3]. The growing research interest and experts' nuanced observations led to the classification of emergent categories of motivation each of which is classified with its own unique attributes.

1.2 Types of Orientation and Motivation

1.2.1 Integrative Motivation versus Instrumental Motivation

Delving deeper into the subject, scholars have identified different categories of motivation as illustrated by individual learner's desires, attitudes, and motives for learning. Gardner and Lambert (1959) ^[30] introduced the classic theory of integrative and instrumental motivation. Accordingly, Richards and Schmidt (2002:343) ^[65] tend to distinguish "orientation, a class of reasons for learning a language [from] motivation itself, which refers to a combination of the learner's attitudes, desires, and willingness." In Dornyei's (1998) ^[22] view, motivational construct must be comprehended from the relative perspective of both integrative and instrumental motivation. Thus Richards and Schmidt (pp. 343-344) conceptualize the two orientational motivations as:

An integrative orientation, characterized by a willingness to be like valued members of the language community, and an instrumental orientation towards more practical concerns such as getting a job or passing an examination.

In Dital's (2012) argument, students with an appealing attitude towards ESL learning or SLA tend to be exceedingly motivated integratively as well as instrumentally. In this regard, they develop resistance toward succumb to the external culprits that may sway their focus. Dital's view draws a significant contrast with Moskovsky and Alrabai's (2009) observation that learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) is more influenced by instrumental motivation

compared to ESL learning which, according to them, is guided by influences leaning towards integrative motivation. Oxford and Shearin (1994) ^[59] postulate a direct link between learners' motivation and the learning strategies they employ in their second language (L2) learning. In addition, they consider importance to the amount of exposure the learners gain through interaction with speakers of the target language and the quality and quantity of input accessible in the target language. Equally mention-worthy is the high value Oxford and Shearin attach to learners' good performance in the curriculum-based assessments they take, the quality of mastery level achieved, and the duration they take to maintain the acquired L2 skills after completion of their study. Related to these two orientations are two other frequently mentioned types of motivation itself, namely: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

1.2.2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

A discussion of the functions and/or processes of motivation leads us to a fine consideration of the self-determination theory incubated by Deci and Ryan (1985, 1991) ^[16, 17]. The self-determination theory examines learners' natural tendencies or intrinsic processes that help shape behavior effectively towards an achievement, a strong and vivid motive to pursue and attain a goal. The broader picture demonstrates that the theory distinguishes three aspects attached to motivation and positioned in continuum in order of their gradual increase: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. When language learners are not convinced of the existence of any relationship between what they are learning and the result to be obtained from that learning, we can attribute that behavior to phenomenon amotivation.

The concern here is that amotivated ESL/EFL learners do not seem to attach any value or appreciation to language learning (Ryan 1995) ^[67]. They perceive any effort they might exert on learning it as merely a waste of time, underpinning signs of incompetence and anticipated failure (Deci 1975; Seligman 1975) ^[15, 72]. In sum, amotivation signifies the absence of motivation which emanates from lack of want or inspiration by an inner motive to realize a goal. It is contrastable to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for it does not trigger a stimulus that would prompt action (Ryan & Deci 2000b) ^[69].

Intrinsic motivation, according to David Fontana (1995:149) ^[26] is developed from "a natural curiosity drive...that does not appear to be directed towards an apparent material end." Fontana iterates that in the case of insufficient intrinsic motivation "recourse has to be made to motivation of an extrinsic kind" (p. 150). As a consequence, the learner can develop "achievement motivation," stimulated by exterior material factors than innately developed natural desires (McClelland 1961; Lynn 1969; Cassidy & Lynn 1989, 1991) ^[51, 45, 11, 12]. Compared to a state of amotivation and that of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is driven by a force external to personal interest, inbuilt desire or self-directed motive to achieve a goal. It is maintained for its instrumental values or gains and contrasts with intrinsic motivation which is executed for the sake of enjoyment. Although both types, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, are useful in their distinct ways, Pintrich and Schunk (1996) ^[63] caution us on the

negative implications associated with external rewards which may impact on learners' self-efficacy when the rewards are no longer available.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Four Communication Skills as Motivators

2.1.1 Writing Motivation

Research has revealed a commonality among most writers, particularly their disobedience to a preconceived plan or strategy to conduct their writing. The general assumption of this situation draws from the writers' notion that as the process of writing develops, it generates the form and content of the final document (Zamel 1983; Silva 1997) ^[76, 73]. It is therefore not quite surprising, according to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983), that many learners encounter content generation as an insurmountable hurdle in their writing assignment. Compounded with the learners' difficulty has for quite some time been, until recently, the lack of appropriated "tools for thinking about second language writing in general" (Silva 1997:11) ^[73].

The primordial quest, in this regard, embraces the production of textual pronouncements that respond to the main objective of acquisition, particularly the writing skill. It should enable the ESL learner to generate "a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader," (Kaplan 1966:15) ^[40] without necessarily compromising the production of a comprehensively written piece of textual work. The hypothesis by Kaplan resonates well with Silva's proposal of an ESL writing curriculum that methodologically fulfills the goal of the writing program. Silva (p. 18) is considering an "L2 writing, characterized here as a purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction" that interlinks "both the construction and transmission of knowledge."

2.1.2 Listening/Aural Motivation

Listening is another important skill without which a discussion on acquisition would remain incomplete or uncultivated. It attracted more attention in the advent of the general technological advancement recently realized in the field of ESL. However, one of the earlier listening methods used to improve listening skills was the audiobook. Although upon its inception in early 1930s the concept of the audiobook was developed within the framework of supporting the blind through "Books for the Blind Project", its impact was extensively cherished far beyond the original purpose. The technology became an effective skills development instrument for the enhancement of children's reading comprehension, as reported by Koskinen *et al.* (2000) ^[42], and later by O'Day (2002) ^[58]. According to Harris (2001) ^[39] and Stone-Harris (2008) ^[74], the strategy of employing the audiobook as a successful device for strengthening the area of reading comprehension was tremendously useful in assisting students suffering from poor reading comprehension skills. Describing the significance, Kartal and Simsek (2017:113) ^[41] state how "audiobooks provide text and audio simultaneously," which suggests that the "tenets of dual-coding theory are well adhered to."

Gunduz's (2006:258) observation of the listening skill draws scholarly attention to overuse of material, cautioning us against "the bad habit of using the same listening materials

over and over again.” Thus, when considering new avenues in foreign language education and the different needs of learners, it is essential to explore the use of new learning tools and materials in the classroom. The idea is to curb prominent variables such as inadequate exposure which is featured among the main perpetrators undermining the development of L2 listening comprehension (Rost 2006; Kartal & Simsek 2017) ^[41].

2.1.3 Reading Motivation

The power and significance of reading are elucidated in God’s choice as the first word of the Islamic scripture: “Read!” or “Recite!” (The Holy Qur’an, chapter 96, verse 1). With reading, humans unlock their in-built potential the Almighty has bestowed upon them-not only in knowledge acquisition but also in knowledge production. This means vast creative thinking is applied and exploited that enables humans to make meaning of the essence of their existence. The exchanges among the processes of a knowledge driven world make comprehension an instrumental skill in every consequential reading, hence requiring a high level of motivation.

Scholars have confirmed the essential role of reading motivation, particularly where comprehension stands as the main stake in the reading skill. In his outstanding review article, scholar Ahmadi (2017) ^[1] establishes sufficient cause and effect relationship between reading and motivation, especially comprehension. Seymour and Walsh (2006) ^[71] express the critical impact of motivation on the processes in the reading comprehension. In a similar analysis, Hairul *et al.* (2012) portray that reading motivation substantially affects reading comprehension. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) ^[36] denote how reading motivation is affected by the amount of self-motivation every learner invests in the skill and the effect or ineffect the individual learner takes into account. Studies conducted by Gottfried (1990) ^[33] and Gottfried *et al.* (2005) ^[34] manifest the existence of relationship between reading comprehension and intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, Perfetti (1994) ^[62] conceptualizes comprehension failure from the premise of psycholinguistics. Accordingly, Perfetti postulates that a reader’s deficient acquaintance with the formation and arrangement of the text might occur as a consequence of inadequate encounter with reading (1994).

2.1.4 Speaking/Oral Motivation

Speaking or oral communication is characterized as one of the key motives for learning ESL/EFL. Through verbal communication, a learner can develop a behavior of enjoying the facilitation of personal and cultural communication with speakers of the target language, based on Bandura’s (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory. By self-efficacy is meant “a judgment of one’s ability to organize and execute given types of performances” (Bandura 1997:21). Basically, it is related to one’s personal belief in one’s ability to perform well or enhance performance as guided by one’s orientation in learning. It is a belief that plays a remarkable role in averting learners’ “lack of self-confidence in using the target language” (Hairuzila & Rohani 2008:62) ^[37].

In fact, lack of high aspiration or even low beliefs in self-efficacy may attract factors detrimental to motivation. In retrospect, these negative impacts have a potential that leads

to disengagement from tasks as a result of the accumulated levels of frustration because the learner is unable to contain or endure them. For this reason, achieving a commendable level of competency or proficiency in the oral communication skill, in other words a comprehensible “meaning-focused-output,” demands an enormous commitment in the part of the individual learner (Nation & Newton 2009:x) ^[55].

Furthermore, speaking is claimed to be a skill that provokes the highest level of anxiety among learners (MacIntyre & Gardner 1991a; McCroskey & Richmond 1987) ^[48, 52]. As MacIntyre invoking MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, 1991b) ^[47, 49] sums up, “language anxiety” is a common factor related to “communicative” skills in language acquisition (MacIntyre 1995:91) ^[46]. Yet, an extensive degree of motivation embeds the accomplishment of good proficiency in communication. It also requires a sufficient measure of self-efficacy driven by a learner’s motive and desire that exceed his/her average commitment.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants

The research population in this study consists of 198 out of 200 ESL learners in elementary, intermediate and advanced levels surveyed in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The selection of the subjects was purposive in that they comprised male and female ESL learners who represented the different acquisition levels mentioned. They also hail from various institutions including tertiary as well as main stream secondary schools where English is claimed to be the medium of instruction.

3.2 Research Instrument

The study used a mixed method approach by triangulating quantitative and qualitative research methods “to heighten the dependability and trustworthiness of the data and their interpretation” (Zohrabi 2013:254) ^[77]. To collect data, we used a questionnaire with just two questions. The first one was close ended with four choices of answers. Its aim was to deal with a quantitative measurement of the responses by enumerating or rather comparing and contrasting the frequency of each of the four options provided. The purpose was to determine students’ perceptions of what they considered as a more motivating skill among the four communication skills-reading, speaking, listening and writing-toward ESL acquisition or enhancement of their competency level. The second question basically sought a clarification of the choice of response given in the first question by providing adequate open space for any information the informants could share by further expressing their perceptions and choices. Therefore, under each of the four choices of A, B, C, and D was an open-ended question “why?”-to which the respondent could provide unrestricted responses to support the perceptions indicated in the restricted choice/s they selected. The questions were:

Q 1: Which one among the four skills below motivates you, or would motivate you, more to a better ESL acquisition?

Answer: A: Reading B: Listening C: Writing D: Speaking

Q 2: Why?

Answer: -----

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed by comparing frequencies of responses contained in the data so as to learn the variation in the students' choices of motivators. These are displayed in tables for easy understanding of the counts and their representative percentages regarding the comparative levels and acquisition skills examined. For the qualitative section, a simple coding system was adopted to represent clusters of responses that match in opinion, based on reflective terms learners have articulated in the open-ended segment of the questionnaire. In addition, samples of learners' direct quotations are used verbatim to demonstrate evidence of the qualitative information where necessary.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the data. The respondents were asked about the skill that motivates them more among reading, listening, writing, and speaking. In what follows, the results are presented in tables, analyzed and discussed simultaneously.

4.1 Most Motivating Skill among the 4 ESL Acquisition Skills

When the learners were requested to share their opinion regarding which of the four ESL acquisition skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening motivates them most, they responded as displayed in the tables below.

Table 1: More Reading as a Motivator

| Level of study | More reading as a motivator | | More reading not a motivator | | Total | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---------|------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Count | Percent | count | Percent | count | Percent |
| Elementary | 23 | 36 | 41 | 64 | 64 | 32.4 |
| Intermediate | 9 | 13 | 58 | 87 | 67 | 33.8 |
| Advanced | 1 | 1 | 66 | 99 | 67 | 33.8 |
| TOTAL | 33 | 16 | 165 | 84 | 198 | 100 |

An aggregate of 84% of all the three levels studied do not perceive *more reading* as a core motivator to ESL acquisition; but even so, the discrepancies vary among the groups. While nearly 36% of the elementary learners provide the opinion that reading is necessary to their acquisition, only 1% of their counterparts in the advanced level and 13% in the middle group believe activities in the reading skill would motivate them. This gives the assumption that at their level; the advanced students might have had more exposure to reading, hence its disregard as a favorite motivator. Similarly, the intermediate students seem to agree with their seniors in the advanced English level that 'reading' is not a significant motivator to their ESL competency. The results exhibit a perturbing situation for reading and a serious disengagement between learning and reading.

Further analyzing the variable from the perspective of the qualitative data, learners' most frequently repeated terms in the open ended section of the question include "because the teacher reads the lesson"; and that learner reading takes place "sometimes", but "not every day." They also state that reading opportunities, when available, are usually taken by volunteers who "raise their hand," while the shy and the anxious fall beyond the teacher's attention and motivation for participation. Learners' confession here elucidates the absence of active or systematic encouragement in a teacher-guided in-class reading comprehension. It is also an indication of denial of equal opportunity to learner participation in the reading activity-a reason why it is probably perceived as ineffective as a motivator. Analysis of the qualitative results further demonstrates more probability for concentration on reading for either accuracy or fluency, which is quite useful in developing them as sub-skills of the wider reading skills area, though they should not compromise the focus of the main role of comprehension that seems lacking in this situation.

No mention of reading for interest or self-development was made in any of the studied cases, regardless of level. For instance, a large portion of the qualitative analysis reveals

learners' claim of the ability to "read fast" – which denotes fluency – but without grasping "the meaning of the story," or "the meaning of many words" in a given reading passage. Yet, many of them sound too confident that they "do not...need to spend...much time" on reading despite the evidence of deficiency in dealing with comprehension. The quality of description given about the ESL class, particularly the reading session, indicates excessive attention on fluency in word recognition and decoding. These, despite having a fundamental role in acquisition, are performed probably at the expense of under-performing the core element of comprehension, "a prerequisite for acquiring content knowledge" as well as improving skills in "expressing ideas and opinions through discussion and writing," as discussed online on an interactive educational webpage (www.benchmarkeducation.com).

The minimum role or absence, one could argue, of reading activities for comprehension purposes characteristic in this kind of classroom situation points to a lack of energy that would generate discussion and consequently arouse engagement and learner motivation for participation. Further deterioration of the situation occurs when, more often than not, comprehension "questions are for homework" or usually as part of the "writing task" and not necessarily for interactive reading aimed at developing and/or ameliorating comprehension strategies. The sort of confusion dominating in this circumstance gives us the assumption that every member among the community of such a reading class has been caught up in a tricky situation. That is, the failure to distinguish among the various sub skills forming the global web of the broader skill of reading; and that reading speed and fluency are sub skills among several others that consolidate as part of the process to acquiring an admirable level of reading comprehension skill.

Learners also seem unable to differentiate between basic skills in attacking a word or a group of words via good connection of the morphemes, words, and basic decoding skills of phrases

and sentences and that of reading for comprehension. The insufficiency in comprehension certainly inhibits the development of a learner’s higher skill of interrogating the text as a mode of interlocution with the author. As a result, very little impact may be realized in cognitive processing; especially the necessity of integrating previous experiences with the present task and text (Chambers (1999; Williams and Burden 1997) ^[13, 75].

Perhaps missing from this classroom context is the general understanding that one of the attributes to good reading concerns the reader’s ability to comprehend the broad aspects of meanings embedded in the text one is reading and the meaning-making via the interlocution with the author. One can suspect a prevalent disregard for comprehension in the part of the teachers that is noticeable from the little value accorded to reading. The neglect therefore indicates insufficient interlocution in the reading comprehension as facilitator of the dialogue between the reader and the writer, not to overemphasize its worth in ESL and SLA, particularly its contribution to speaking.

The problem tied to unsatisfactory reading skill, among others, is succinctly expressed by Davis (2003:422) ^[18]: “No other inadequacy in the learner creates so great a sense of frustration and failure as a reading difficulty.” Albeit majority of the learners’ poor consideration for reading as a motivator, the current study has found some inspirational learners who believe: “It depends on your decision,” in the sense that “if you work hard” or as a few of them assert, “if you like to read, you can learn English.” These learners consist of a small number who exonerate teachers from any shortcomings in the learners’ achievement. According to them, “When the teacher does his part...the student must do his part.” This group believes that “if the student does not work hard,” then such a “problem [rests with] the student himself” and not necessarily a burden of blame the teacher should shoulder.

Table 2: More Writing as a Motivator

| Level of study | More writing as a motivator | | More writing not a motivator | | Total | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---------|------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | count | Percent | count | Percent | count | Percent |
| Elementary | 62 | 97 | 2 | 3 | 64 | 32.4 |
| Intermediate | 63 | 94 | 4 | 6 | 67 | 33.8 |
| Advanced | 56 | 83 | 11 | 17 | 67 | 33.8 |
| Total | 181 | 91.4 | 17 | 8.5 | 198 | 100 |

Eighty-three percent of the advanced students consider *more writing* as a motivator to ESL learning compared to 94% of their intermediate compatriots and almost 97% of their juniors in the elementary section. “Writing” is conceived as an important motivator and that more tasks in the skill would enhance learners’ potential and level of competency. The study is consistent with the results of Eno’s (2017:181) study where learners had expressed extensive weakness in the same skill. A large majority of the three levels of learners unanimously respond that *more writing* should be considered as a tangible motivating factor compared to reading.

The inconsistency of the decrease in the numbers among the three levels, though not significantly great, particularly between the middle and the lower level, could be attributed to the former’s longer contact with and experience in the

acquisition process compared to the latter’s possibly shorter duration of study. Some of the students have shared the perception that writing “is the most important” of all the skills although the rating puts it in second place and after “speaking”. More learners interpret their extrinsic motivation by saying that “same as speaking”, writing is essential “for working in the offices...of the big organizations” such as the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and agencies of the United Nations.

The appreciation for *more writing* as a motivator sounds tremendous because learners express a want to be writers who can use the skill like the “English people” and other non-native speakers who “write well in English.” But success cannot be achieved easily in a classroom situation where “no much practice” is a common trend; or when all that is done is “only little practice”; or where “if you don’t do the homework” you can refrain from submitting your book because “the teacher doesn’t ask.” This bit of information presents a new case for further observation since the lack of serious follow-up remains one of the perplexities the education/school system needs to deal with and make teachers accountable for any unethical, unprofessional practice.

However, it is interesting that a few respondents have a different opinion by declaring that “in most cases, it is students [who] don’t do the composition” or “don’t work on their own.” Others point an accusing finger at their peers because “they don’t [submit] their homework” to the teacher and therefore it is “their [students’] problem.” In some of the responses the accusation takes the dimension of academic fraud: “they copy from each other”; thus defying the teacher’s “[disapproval] of the act.”

Table 3: More Speaking as a Motivator

| Level of study | More Speaking as a motivator | | More speaking not a motivator | | Total | |
|----------------|------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | count | Percent | count | Percent | count | Percent |
| Elementary | 64 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 64 | 32.4 |
| Intermediate | 62 | 93 | 5 | 7 | 67 | 33.8 |
| Advanced | 60 | 90 | 7 | 10 | 67 | 33.8 |
| TOTAL | 186 | 94 | 12 | 6 | 198 | 100 |

One hundred percent of the lowest level of ESL learners interviewed believe *more speaking* or oral communication practice as a good motivator toward acquisition. A comparative analysis of the next upper level, namely the intermediate group, scores 93% in favor of the same variable as most preferable motivator. The high interest remains resilient also among the most senior group, the advanced learners, at 90%.

Oral communication, similar to ‘writing’, is presented as another skill area that carries a high potential of motivation for learners. The results demonstrate a desirable overall average of 94% who think *more speaking* would boost their motivation to better acquisition. The learners’ view regarding oral communication grants reassurance to experts’ earlier emphasis on the importance of more oral practice as a motivator; and especially in the case of this study, when speaking is measured against other variables such as reading or listening. Note that in an earlier study (Eno 2017:179-180, 183-184) learners did not consider themselves as having a weakness in both reading

and listening skills, because these were perceived as the dominant methods of their seemingly teacher-centered ESL classroom. Beyond the dominance, though, students highlight how “good English speakers are independent” in their communication when “they are traveling in the world.”

Participants acknowledge the place of English in international business: “someone who cannot speak English...cannot do business in the world.” Some of the learners believe that “speaking English is the key” to opportunities such as “studying in a university or college” and “to work in the UN offices.” Other learners state the yearning to speak and practice the target language but that they “have no one to speak to” in English among the Somali speaking society. Those who might attempt to speak may not do so due to being “afraid” because the listeners might “laugh at me.”

Learners are aware of the advantages associated with the English language in employability in the private sector including International NGOs which “pay a lot of money” to

candidates highly competent or proficient in English. Comparable to these extrinsically focused, materially-oriented learners, we also viewed another section of learners whose engagement in acquiring the language is intrinsic and driven by self-motivation. Their comments demonstrate their desire: “It is not for money but for me to learn.” A number of learners would “like to write and to talk to people,” while others’ motive is simply “to speak the language well,” and “to talk to people speaking English.”

Some of the students emphasize that the desire for “learning must come from the person’s heart,” while another tiny section believes studying a language should “not be for the money” but “to build the mind.” Therefore, according to this category of students, good oral skill is very necessary “to connect with people” so you can tell them about “your life”, “the life your people”, “your country”, “your culture” and “many things [but] not always for money”.

Table 4: More Listening as a Motivator

| Level of study | More Listening as a motivator | | More listening not a motivator | | Total | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | count | Percent | Count | Percent | count | Percent |
| Elementary | 7 | 11 | 57 | 89 | 64 | 32.4 |
| Intermediate | 5 | 7 | 62 | 93 | 67 | 33.8 |
| Advanced | 1 | 1 | 66 | 99 | 67 | 33.8 |
| TOTAL | 13 | 6 | 185 | 93 | 198 | 100 |

The score for *more listening* as a favored motivator stands as the lowest among the four skills, with 11 % of elementary students, 7% of the intermediate group and only 1% of the advanced learners suggesting it as a useful motivator. A sizeable number of 93% of the entire population portrays listening as an insignificant skill not too crucial as an ESL motivator. The number of respondents highlighting *listening* as a motivator is larger in the elementary level but only 11% of the group. In an analytical observation, the low rate of listening as a mode of motivation may be attached to the paradigmatic influence of the method of teaching the learners experience, a classroom practice in which they listen most of the time as the teacher “reads and explains” in a direct L2 to L1 translation approach (Eno 2017).

A student claims that in of one semester of study, “we listened only one time” to a recorded voice in the class. The most common listening activity occurs while the teacher is reading or when volunteers take turns to read; and that it happens “when the period is about to finish.” With the exception of this type and time of listening, students confirm that they “don’t speak to one another in the class in English,” meaning they do not hear themselves participating in teacher guided speaking or listening activity to improve acquisition. From their responses, some learners indicate the skill as important and “same as reading and writing” but because the activity is not emphasized in class would suggest it as “not important; at least now.” One group among the learners is not discouraged by the shortage in listening practice in the class; to make up for the deficit, they “listen to CDs” and watch “English film” in the house as well as “English TV channels.”

The undesirable situation of listening not being a good motivator makes material and method the prime suspects of

this looming neglect. The function of listening is not an isolated skill but rather one that integrates several other skills whose interconnectedness serves high stakes for the learners. According to Rost (2006:47) ^[39], listening instruction must be concerned with tackling the improvement of learners including “face-to-face communication”, their “comprehension of spoken language”, enhancement of their methods for improved “understanding of spoken discourse”, and expanding the worth of their “intake from spoken input.” Neglecting this vital practice, from Rost’s perspective, causes more damaging consequences to other areas of acquisition than listening viewed as an alienated skill. On the contrary, listening includes a web of intricately interwoven activities in which each of its separate stages and sub skills is vital to acquisition.

More importantly, listening is the basis for communication in the sense that, according to Larsen-Freeman (1986:123) ^[43], “It is through interaction between speaker and listener that meaning becomes clear.” In other words, no matter the eloquence and gist of the speaker’s language, without an audience, an active one to make sense of those words, interlocution cannot be realized to its intended function. That is why Gillian Brown (1990:171) ^[7] reiterates on students’ significant participation-without which the classroom atmosphere will suffer from lack of energy, which practically “leads rapidly to boredom on their part and often, failure to learn much from the class.”

The analysis takes us to the next peak, that is, as Byrne (1988) ^[10] envisages, “the length of time we are required to listen for, without participating.” According to G. Brown, even an improperly scheduled listening duration has the negative consequence of causing “memory problems or even fatigue, so

that in the end we simply no longer listen with understanding” (p. 13). These realities make listening a skill that shares numerous things in common with other communication skills than consider it either as isolated or insignificant. More focus needs to be put on strengthening the practice of the skill in order to enhance learner’s cognitive power and comprehension skills.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated ESL/EFL learners’ perceptions regarding what they consider would motivate them more among the four acquisition skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Using mixed methods of data collection and tools, the results revealed the vagaries in students’ interests in the four skills. More importantly, a great interest in oral communication as the ESL learners’ primary motivator towards acquisition was expressed by a high rate of 94% of the overall responses returned. Similarly, learners underscored eagerness for more writing practice to enhance acquisition, rating it with an astounding 91% and as an ideal motivator next to speaking/oral communication skill.

What remains more disturbing, however, is that reading and listening, two major contributors to acquisition and to cognitive development through comprehension and interlocution, returned only 16% and 6% as favorites respectively-far below any perceivable estimate to consider them as possible motivators towards acquisition. To say the least, the diminished appearance of interest in the reading skill predicts a handicap in which learners may find themselves inadequately prepared for coping with high academic activities in later stages of learning. Even at the current stage, the risk of unresearched predicaments causing serious aggravation to learning and, subsequently, massive setback to academic achievement, seems to remain undiscussed in the education policy of the war ravaged Horn of Africa nation. However, it should be treated as a major policy concern, one that deserves urgent solution; particularly when it involves mastering the medium of instruction and more specifically reading for academic success. Disregarding the importance of reading and listening by learners supposed to be in pursuit of academic excellence raises high suspicion over a number of issues, among them: suitability of instruction, method of teaching applied, institutional evaluation processes with regard to both instruction and method, and a review of the quality of TESOL training, to mention but just a few possible culprits.

The implication is that a convoluted situation of this nature invites the conduct of further investigation on many related factors to determine the nature of the problems before formulating a viable solution to each one of them. It will involve a lot of effort, hard work, and a patiently executed research, an in-depth investigation that would help identify the nature of the problem/s and assess the magnitude of the predicaments. As a suggestion, the primary variables to focus on would be an assessment and evaluation of instruction and method, policy issues, and TESOL teacher training, among the many topics for further interrogation. Results from any of these areas would set a new course for primarily understanding the source/s of the dilemma. It would then lead to developing a framework for finding a strategic solution and

consequently a common approach for implementing a remedial process to address the predicaments. This concern should be considered within the national education strategic plan in the quest for preparing professionals with good mastery of the medium.

Notes

1. This study is part of a broader research on the practice of ESL/EFL in Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu. The first part, which focused on learners’ perceptions on their areas of weakness among the four acquisition skills, was published in the *Journal of Somali Studies*, Volume 4, Numbers 1 & 2, 2017. The current study is a follow-up investigation that seeks to highlight learner’s favorite skill that could motivate them more toward acquisition. Also, the study can be used, along with the earlier work, as the basis to formulate remedial approach to the weaknesses highlighted in the previous study.
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