Learners' Beliefs, Choices, Expectations and Perceptions on Some Important Language Sub-Skills for Improving Their Language Abilities

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Abstract

The research article deals with learners' beliefs, choices, expectations and perception of some important sub-skills for improving their language abilities. The sample consists of 117 learners are : 33 fourth year major English degree, 56 second year English diploma from Eritrea Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi, Eritrea and 28 mixed groups from the University of Nyala, Sudan. A questionnaire that consists of 43 items with five options was prepared, distributed, collected, processed and analyzed. In general the responses are 37.43% extremely important, 35.72% very important, 19.80% important, 4.35% less important, 1.6% least important and 2.16% no response. On the basis of their preferences, the learners also ranked the sub-skills from first to forty-third such 'expressing what you want to say first, knowledge of vocabulary second, listening to pronunciation/intonation/stress patterns of English third, etc. (Please refer to Table 2 and appendix A).

Keywords: English language sub-skills, beliefs, choices, perceptions, Liket scale, ranking

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Unlike the pharmacists who have succeeded in identifying the proportion and types of substances for concoction to cure specific diseases, applied linguists have not succeeded in identifying the proportion and variables of linguistic elements for successful second or foreign language learning. It is true that this may be due to the nature of language, environment, and nature of the learners' mind. Consequently, the search for effective second/foreign language teaching/learning processes continues.

Learners' beliefs, choices, expectations and perceptions are indispensable variables or factors for effective language learning. Learners devote their time, energy, and collective efforts to what they believe, expect and perceive are essential for their lives in terms of local, national and international values. If the curricula, the teaching methods, and instructional materials do not fulfill learners' needs, the teaching/learning processes become ineffective and wasteful. Considering learners' needs and involving them in making decision on their learning may make learning effective and successful. In this connection, Woods (1996) states, we find that it is conceivable to have a situation in which the learner makes all the decisions in learning the language i. e. the learner is the primary manager of his own learning, and makes, acts upon, and evaluates decisions about what to do, who to interact with, what to study, and how to practice. Moreover, one teacher who was interviewed by Woods, 1996 states, "I'm convinced that the more the teaching responds to the needs of the students, the more motivated the student is going to be, and the more motivated and successful he is going to be in learning".

When the curricula responds to the learners' desires and goals, they may demonstrate, attention, commitment, concentrated efforts, devotion, discipline, motivation, perseverance, tolerance, etc. in their language learning.

In reference to listening to pronunciation, Brow (1994) states, "The importance of listening in language learning can hardly be overestimated. Through reception, we internalize linguistic information without which we could not produce language". Moreover, Celce-Murcia (1991) states, "It should be stressed that pronunciation can and should be taught at every level of ESL instruction. The applicability and simplicity of certain general rules offer the beginning learner in particular a welcome pattern and aid. Moreover, pronunciation instruction leads itself to integration with almost any type of activity". In addition to this, referring to Sir Richard Burton who spoke more than 40 languages and dialects, Taylor (1990) states, "When he (Burton) came across new sound not found in

any of the other language he knew, he trained his tongue by repeating it hundred times a day".

Concerning general listening comprehension, Celce-Murcia (1991) states "Listening comprehension is very important and is viewed as the basic skill that will allow speaking, reading, and writing to develop spontaneously over time given the right conditions".

In connection to pronunciation, Celce-Murcia (1996) states, "… focus on language as communication brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation, since both empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a threshold level of pronunciation for nonnative speakers of English; if they fall below this threshold level, they will have oral communication problems no matter how excellent and extensive their control of English grammar and vocabulary might be".

Most learners of English as a second would rather speak English in the manner of their educated fellow countrymen than like an English native speaker (Bright and McGregor: 1979: 178)

With respect to note taking, Phye (1997) expresses his ideas by stating that teaching note-taking is one of the instructional activities employed by teachers to foster encoding and storage of relevant information in long-term memory. It is true that it is useful for comprehending key information presented in the lecture, identifying the topic of the lecture, identifying major themes or ideas of the lecture, identifying supporting ideas and examples in the lecture, identifying relationships among major ideas in a lecture, showing which part of the material the lecturer thinks the most important, writing helps to remember ideas longer. When the students write to accomplish the above mentioned activities, they are likely to improve their writing ability in particular and their ability in second/foreign language in general.

With respect to general listening, listening is indispensable skill because students in academic setting spend most of the time listening to lectures, audio-taped conversation, dialogues, audio-visual materials, etc.

Referring to speeches, Celce-Muricia and Goodwin (1991) state, "Many ESL texts give topics for oral presentations. Anything related to current unit of your course will do as long as the speaker feels comfortable and knowledgeable, and listeners are interested. … Each individual should try to monitor for one particular phonetic feature in each speech-whatever they need to work on most: blending, intonation, stress, individual sounds".

With respect to giving formal speech/presentation, students are generally required to carry out research, write papers, and present them in class. So, confidence in manipulating language elements is essential for building self-confidence and become successful communicators. Referring to presentation, Olshtain (1991) states, "A carefully planned presentation which combines the mechanics of writing with the composing process can serve the learner well during the early stages of a language course". In some situations the speaker or presenter may arrange and organize his text in the form of outlines his/her main and supporting ideas and major and minor details. In the outline method, the speaker/presenter speaks spontaneously and informally. The speaker/ presenter also gets the chance to strive for variety of words, to look at the audience without constraint, to adjust to a given time by expanding or condensing materials according to the time allocated. This is the most effective method of presentation compared to other methods.

Referring to participating effectively in discussion, students are inspired and encouraged to discuss in pairs or groups. Active participation in group discussion facilitates learning listening and speaking abilities. In connection to discussion, Riggenbach and Lazaraton (1991) state, "Students in small groups discuss the topic, suggesting possible solutions, resolutions or complications". Similarly, Dubin and Bycina (1991), state "Discussions have also been found to activate what students know and through the exchange of information, to enhance their knowledge of the subject".

With respect to communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out of class study group, students may improve their speaking abilities. Referring to group activities, Stern (1991) states, "Group activities encourage total participation by making each student responsible for facts and ideas to be contributed and discussed. All students are involved and the participation is multidirectional".

As to using correct punctuation, punctuation is essential device to make reading easier and understand better what is written or printed. Abilities in using correct punctuation are highly interconnected with writing abilities. Punctuation cannot be learned in isolation.

Constructing or structuring sentences is the basic requirement for language development. Constructing sentences involves most linguistic elements such as word order, diction, spelling, meaning and pragmatics with special emphasis on structural elements. Moreover, paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships play a vital role in this connection. Paradigmatic relations are concerned with substitutable linguistic elements outside the sentence but present in the language while syntagmatic relations deal with the combination of linguistic units that are present

in the sentence, for example, in the sentence, The baby drinks a cup of milk, the word cup contrasts with words such as bottle, glass, gallon, and sequentially with words such as the, baby, drinks, of, milk, respectively. The correct selection and combination of phonemes, words, derivatives, compounds, phrases and sentences are within the two dimensions of language. So, their semantically accepted selection and combinatorial possibilities are indispensable to language study. In addition to this, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic lexical relations and syntagmatic solidarities depend on the underlying language system.

With respect to using appropriate vocabulary in language learning, Wilkins (1972) states, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed".

Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition whether the language is first, second, or foreign. Although vocabulary has not always been recognized as a priority in language teaching, interest in its role in second language (L2) learning has grown rapidly in recent years and specialists now emphasize the need for systematic and principled approach to vocabulary by both the teacher and the learner. As to the significance of vocabulary in language learning, Seal, (1991) states, "… one effective way to increase students' facility in communicating is to increase their vocabulary".

Organizing paragraphs facilitate the development of writing in general and essay writing in particular. Understanding how introduction, body and conclusion are arranged and what is included in the introduction, body of the paragraph and conclusion are indispensable to writing essays of various types. Appropriate relationships among sentences, including relevant ideas and knowledge of whether the paragraph is fully developed or not, are essential qualities of paragraphs.

Expressing and/or developing ideas appropriately refer to how general ideas are related to details which develop and expand the paragraph adequately and coherently. The strategies of paragraph development on the basis of dominantly chronological order in narration, special order in descriptive, order of importance in argumentative / persuasive, and mixed order in some paragraphs are included under expressing and/or developing ideas appropriately. They also include the idea of whether enough or adequate details are included to explain the topic or topic sentence so as to satisfy the competent reader.

Expressing what one wants to say is the essence of language. The primary purpose of language is for communication. This goes in line with communicative approaches of language teaching which are believed to be comparatively better, innovative and effective methods. Regarding this, this Celce-Muricia, (1996) states, "… using language to communicate should be central in all classroom language instruction". In native language development, a child utters a word or words to express his/her needs or wants. The problem in second/foreign language learning is the primacy of academic language to social language. So, the learners don't develop personal or self-expression. They don't even get the opportunity to write to his/her own satisfaction. They are also demanded to reader-based prose without involving in writer-based prose. Moreover, they may adopt appropriate tone and style when they are in a position to understand their audience's needs. Adopting appropriate tone and style are the essence of reader-based writing or prose. Here, Glenn (1999) states, "Good writing, therefore, is often the cognitively demanding transformation of the natural but private expressions of writer-based thought into a structure and style adapted to the reader".

Following instructions and directions may help second/foreign language learners because they demonstrate how things are done specially in reading manuals and self-help materials.

Linguistic elements cannot be learned at once. They need repetition. This is generally true in learning to speak. Evaluating and revising one's writing refers to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of one's writing and requires rewriting in a polished manner. This is the modified form of repetition. In revising, the writer eliminates irrelevant ideas, and includes missing details, and follows logical relations by relocating main ideas or supporting details. Referring to Sir Richard Burton who spoke more than 40 languages and dialects, Taylor (1990) states, "When he (Burton) came across new sound not found in any of the other language he knew, he trained his tongue by repeating it hundred times a day".

In reference to completing written tasks (exams, tests within the time available, students are required to be competent in the language. In order to become competent in the language, they need to improve their abilities of using appropriate structures. To finish their written tasks quickly and correctly, they are demanded to concentrate on and work hard in learning the target language.

Understanding the main points or ideas in a text is one of the main purposes of reading. The process of selecting important ideas and deleting unimportant ideas is a complex cognitive process in which the learners need to identify the variables which are helpful to distinguish main ideas, major supporting ideas and minor supporting

details.

Skimming Reading a text quickly in order to establish the general idea of the content of the test is very important skill. It is the strategy of reading in which the reader spreads his/her vision without reading word-by-word and without vocalization or sub-vocalization. It helps to greatly reduce one's reading time per text. It is also useful to decide whether the text is interesting or important to one's needs. Moreover, it helps one to skip less interesting or less useful parts of the text. The process of concentrating on only essential ideas may improve one's overall reading speed significantly.

Scanning Looking through a text quickly in order to locate specific information is vital reading strategy. Scanning is a reading strategy in which the reader takes a quick look at the printed material or text. Here, the purpose of the reader may be to find out specific information such as dates, names, numbers, key word/s, or to check whether the text contains ideas or information relevant to one's course work, topic, heading, sub-heading, etc. in research projects. Here, attention or concentration is scattered and it may not contribute much to understanding, retention, storage and retrieval on the text read. It is not suitable to be followed by subjective and/or objective questions that require general understanding but it may be useful for reading newspapers and magazines. With respect to these strategies, Nuttall (1982) states, "Skimming and scanning are useful skills. They do not remove the need for careful reading, but they enable the reader to select the texts, or the portions of a text that are worth spending time on".

Reading a text slowly and carefully in order to understand the details of the text is related to academic study skills in which the reader is required to do activities such as analyzing, constructing meaning, note-taking, outlining, paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing. With respect to slow reading, Carver (1992) recommends reading rate of 14o words per minute. In relation to the requirements of academic study, referring to one interviewee (teacher), wood (1996) states, "… being able to recognize the structure of a written or oral text, extract the main and support ideas and integrate them into an organized piece of academic writing".

Reading speed is essential in reading comprehension. However, researchers do not agree on effective reading speed for academic purposes, for example, Fry (1978) recommends scanning at about 1,500 words per minute, skimming at about 800 to 1,000 wpm, and slow and careful reading at about 50 to 150 wpm while Carver (1992) recommends slow reading at 140 words per minute, learning at 200 wpm, and scanning at 600 wpm. Referring to reading comprehension, Dubin and Bycina (1991) state, "Typically, students even at advanced levels read English language textbooks at a ponderously slow pace. Contrary to their beliefs, a slow reading rate actually reduces rather than ensures their understanding of the text".

Reading in order to respond critically demands strategies such as active reading which in turn involves marginalia, underlining and circling, linking ideas, and writing comments. It also requires the ability to identify subject/content, audience, purpose, key words or controlling idea, topic sentence, thesis statement, developmental strategies such as comparison and contrast, cause and effect, illustration, process analysis, classification, etc. Moreover, it requires the ability to write outlines which entails selection of main ideas, supporting ideas, major and minor supporting details. In addition to this, it demands the ability to summarize which in turn involves selection, comparison, judgment, evaluation, inference, etc.

Knowledge of vocabulary is indispensable to effective reading comprehension, listening, speaking and writing. With respect to vital importance of knowledge of vocabulary, Dubin and Bycina (1991) state, "At advanced levels, vocabulary building is an important aspect of the reading course since without well-developed vocabularies the process of reading completely breaks down. Often, students themselves are the first to recognize their own needs for vocabulary work".

Guessing the meaning of unknown words in a text refers to second/foreign language learners' ability to infer meanings from the context which provides indefinite knowledge. In order to guess the meaning, the learners need to know the meanings of the words that come before and after the unknown words. No one can guess from the blue and that is why familiarity with the text facilitates construction of meaning. They use context as clue.

Understanding specialized vocabulary is extremely important in academic setting, special at advanced levels. Referring to vocabularies in general, Seal (1991) states, "… Within the domain of teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP), teachers have become increasingly aware that nonnative students are significantly disadvantaged in their academic studies on account of the small size of their second language vocabularies".

Communicating effectively with staff in and out of class exposes students or learners to real or actual uses of language. This kind of exposure helps students to interact and get feedback from the interaction. This type of exposure also helps students build self-confidence and to be encouraged to practice self-expression. This is the

sociolinguistic approach to second/foreign language learning. This approach helps students to move forward from meaning to form.

The students felt that joining sentences is important to improve their ability in English. When students do exercises on joining sentences, they are required to reactivate their knowledge of the types of subordinating clauses such as adjectival, adverbial and noun clauses. They are also demanded to know their functions in complex sentences and how each subordinating clause is introduced, that is, which relative pronouns in adjectival clauses, which subordinating conjunctions in adverbials clauses, and which words and transitive verbs in noun clauses are used. Ability to join sentences requires ability to use correct cohesive devices and transitional words. These cohesive devices include conjunctive adverbs, correlative conjunction, and transitional devices. The students believe that ability to use all the above mentioned devices lead them to improved ability to identify and use effective periodic and loose sentences.

Writing paragraphs deals with the development of a single idea or distinct unit of thought. Basic knowledge or ability to use writing paragraphs requires basic knowledge or ability to identify and use key words or controlling idea, topic or topic sentences, subject/content, purpose, and audience, type of discourses, major and minor ideas and details, developmental strategies for discourses, order of arranging sentences, logical relationships among sentences and effective use of cohesive devices.

Laboratory report writing involves description of the test items, description of equipment and apparatus, description of procedures and processes, data analysis and discussion of results. Moreover, writing on introduction, purpose and objectives, conclusions and summary demands students to know and use the language elements for effective writing. So, practice on laboratory report writing may develop their writing ability so as to make them effective communicators in the field of their specialization. Similarly, describing objectives, procedures exposes students to writing. Thus, improved writing may result in improved second/foreign language use.

The students believe that writing introductions and conclusions may help them improved their ability in English as a foreign language. There are various types of introductions depending on the kind of writing. It is good to familiarize the reader with introductions on essays and journal articles of specific types. According to Connors and Glenn (1999), introductions are useful to inform the purpose of the writing to the audience, and to create relationship of trust with them. Good introduction also familiarizes and induces the text. It also helps to announce topic sentence or thesis statement of the essays. Some introductions inform the order about the writer's approach, a plan of development and style. Referring to argumentative essay, Coors and Glenn (1999) state, "The introduction is the best place to establish "bridges" between writer and reader by pointing to shared beliefs and attitudes – that is, by creating what Kenneth Burke calls identification of the writer with the audience and the audience with the writer." Some introductions may include ideas that stimulate the reader and declares the thesis statement of the essay. Moreover, some introductions may begin with background information, rhetorical question, relevant and interesting quotation, story, description of a scene, etc. Referring to introduction in journal articles, Robert Day (1979) recommends strongly the following four rules: presenting the nature and scope of the problem, orienting the reader by reviewing relevant literature, stating the method of the investigation and stating the principal results of the investigation.

Referring to conclusion, conclusion restates the thesis and finishes with more general statement. It also puts the audience in the proper mood or with something that satisfies them. In connection to this, Connors and Glenn (1999) state, "It refreshes the memory of the audience by summarizing the main points of the argument." Similarly, with reference to concluding paragraph, Langan (1995) states, "The concluding paragraph often summarizes the essay by briefly restating the thesis, at times, the main supporting points of the essay. Also, the conclusion brings the paper to a natural and graceful end, sometimes leaving the reader with a final thought on the subject."

Outlining is one form of note taking. It shows the systematic breakdown of main ideas, supporting ideas, major and minor details, in either Roman number or decimal number systems as shown below. The breakdown of ideas can easily be shown by outlining them. This form of note taking may be effective in long reading materials. In some cases, students may be asked to demonstrate their understanding of the materials taught in outline form.

Roman Numerals	System	Decimal Number System
I., II	main ideas	1., 2
A, B	supporting ideas	1.1, 1.2
1, 2, 3	major details	1.1.1., 1.1.2.
a, b, c	minor details	1.1.1.1

Abilities in writing quotations and references are essential to writing feasibility study, lab. Reports, report writing, and research paper writing as parts of documentation. So, practical uses of writing them may help learners of English as a foreign/second language to improve their English.

With respect to formulating coherent argument, students believe that activities in writing the various divisions and the lines of argument and counter argument help them improve their English. Depending on the purpose and complexity of the thesis statement, argumentative essays may consist of three-part, or four-parts, or five parts: introduction, body, and conclusion or introduction, background, argument, and conclusion or introduction, background, argument, counter-argument and conclusion respectively. When students write on introduction, background which refers to objective facts or conditions under discussion, argument which refers to the major reasons/premises and their minor details, and counter-argument that refers to propositions that show concession/s. Then they finish this part by providing points for or against their argument and demonstrate the superiority of their argument. The above activities help the student to understand the content of what he/she outlines and indirectly helps to improve their ability in using the target language (English).

Summarizing as condensing information from a single source is part of writing from sources because it shares some of the characteristics of writing from sources as selecting ideas, writing coherent text, manipulation of syntactic structures. It does not involve much discourse reorganization and implementation of connecting ideas from other sources.

Brown, Day, and Jones (1983) point out that factors such as learning activities that foster direct attention, background knowledge, important ideas and their configuration and criteria for evaluating writing tasks are crucial in summarizing. Hare and Borchardt (1984) point out that identifying and representing new ideas and identifying and eliminating unimportant ideas are required in summarizing. Their findings indicate that the students who were taught macro rules of summarizing improved their summarizing ability in particular and their language ability in general. So, summarizing may facilitate improving the learners of English as a foreign language.

With respect to analysis and synthesis, Gregory and Booth, (1992) state, "We can delve inside something and try to separate its parts, or we can look at two or more things that seem separated and try to fit them together. Some theorists even claim that every new thought consists either of finding a new way of analyzing the parts or elements of the whole or a new way of synthesizing two or more elements into a single thing…. Learning to analyze better as you read and prepare to write will be an essential part of that education to synthesis".

Students analyze ideas at various levels and on different subjects. In reading to write, they need to analyze the chapters, topics, headings, sub-headings, sections, paragraphs, the audience, major and minor ideas and their supporting details, transitional devices, types of subordinating clauses, sentences, phrases, words, etc. They need to discover the relationships among various parts and how they function together when they synthesize them to make a whole. During the processes of analysis and synthesis they the mechanism of the target language and the activities help them improve their ability in the language.

2. Methodology

2.1 Respondents/Students

The sample consist of 117 students: They are 33 Major English Degree Fourth Year students from the College of Arts and social Sciences in the academic year of 2008/09 Eritrea Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi, Eritrea; 56 English Diploma Second years students from the College of Education in the academic year of 2010/11, Eritrea Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi, Eritrea, and 28 (14 at Advanced, 6 at intermediate level and 8 at elementary level) academic staff and administrative staff from the University of Nyala, Sudan in the academic year 2010/11 and 2011/12. They were having various qualifications: some of them had even Ph degrees, some diploma and some certificate but the medium of education was Arabic. They were taking English courses to improve their English. The text books were mostly New Head Ways for Upper Intermediate and Advanced, Intermediate and

Upper Intermediate, and Beginner and Elementary books for Advanced, intermediate and elementary groups respectively.

2.2 Materials and Procedures

The questionnaire consisting of 43 items on English Sub-skills that are believed to improve their English in general was distributed. For the sub-skill that they believed to improve their ability in English, they were requested to indicate their choices by putting tick mark at the end of each statement. On the basis of Likert Scale, they were given the following options: 5 for extremely important, 4 for very important, 3 for important, 2 less important and 1 for least important. Some of the items are adapted from *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* on needs analysis by Richards, 2001.

3. Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is used. Descriptive statistics is used to show the frequency of the importance of the five alternatives believed to improve their ability in English as a second/foreign language.

4. Limitation of the Study

There was no money allocated for this research project. As a result, the researcher could not collect linguistic data on learners' performances on various language sub-skills in order to find the relationships learners' performance and their responses to the items of the questionnaire. It was also good to limit the items on the questionnaire to about thirty items by combing similar items and by eliminating repetitions.

5. Results and Discussion

The distributions of responses to the options are as follows: extremely important 37.43%, very important 35.72%, important 19.80%, less important 4.35%, least important 1.55% and no response 2.16%. The list of preferences on extremely important is given in the appendix because this option received the highest number of responses from among the options. The researcher believes it that this option gives clear picture of the priority of needs of English language sub-skills of the students. They are likely to devote their time and energy accordingly.

Table 1. The extent of the importance of in English language sub-skills in improving learning

Highest responses				Lowest responses		
Options	It no.	No. of St.	Items	It no.	St.	Items
extremely important	14	71	expressing what you want to say	11	27	organizing the overall assignments
very important	34	54	writing paragraphs	14	25	Expressing what you want to say
important	11	37	organizing the overall assignments	1	13	listening to pronunciation…
less important	15	12	adopting appropriate tone and style	4	1	giving formal speech
least important	21	4	reading texts slowly	1	1	Listening to pronunciation/ intonation/ stress patterns

In item one, the students were asked the extent of the importance of listening to pronunciation/ intonation/ stress patterns to improve their English. Their responses are 51.3%, 33.3% and 11.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks third out of forty-three items on extremely important. It seems that the more than half of the students believe that listening to pronunciation /intonation/stress patterns is extremely important and they are likely to devote more time and energy.

In item two, the students were asked the extent of the importance of note-taking including lecture notes to improve their English. Their responses are 37.6%, 35.0% and 16.2% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks nineteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item three, the students were asked the extent of importance of general listening comprehension to improve their English. Their responses are 42.7%, 34.2% and 15.4% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks eighth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item four, the students were asked the extent of importance of giving formal speech or presentation to improve their English. Their responses are 37.6%, 36.8% and 20.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks nineteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item five, the students were asked the extent of importance of participating effectively in discussions to improve their English. Their responses are 40.2%, 39.3% and 17.9% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item six, the students were asked the extent of importance of communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out-of-class study group to improve their English. Their responses are 51.3%, 31.6% and 13.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks third out of forty-three items on extremely important. It seems that the more than half of the students believe that communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out-of-class study group is extremely important and they are likely to devote more time and energy.

In item seven, the students were asked the extent of importance of using correct punctuation to improve their English. Their responses are 31.6%, 37.6% and 18.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-second out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item eight, the students were asked the extent of importance of constructing sentences to improve their English. Their responses are 47.9%, 26.5% and 19.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks seventh out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item nine, the students were asked the extent of importance of using appropriate vocabulary or words to improve their English. Their responses are 38.5%, 41.9% and 11.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks seventeenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item ten, the students were asked the extent of importance of organizing paragraphs to improve their English. Their responses are 29.9%, 38.5% and 24.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-sixth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item eleven, the students were asked the extent of the importance of organizing the overall assignments to improve their English. Their responses are 23.1%, 39.3% and 31.6% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks forty- second out of forty-three items on extremely important.

In item twelve, the students were asked the extent of the importance of expressing ideas appropriately to improve their English. Their responses are 41.9%, 35.9% and 16.2% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks eleventh out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of developing ideas to improve their English. Their responses are 42.7%, 35.0% and 19.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks eighth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item fourteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of expressing what they want to say clearly to improve their English. Their responses are 60.7%, 21.4% and 14.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks the **first** out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item fifteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of adopting appropriate tone and style to improve their English. Their responses are 23.9%, 41.0% and 22.2% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks forty-first out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item sixteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of following instructions and directions communicating to improve their English. Their responses are 35.9%, 35.9% and 19.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-fourth out of forty-three items on extremely important.

In item seventeen, the students were asked the extent of importance of evaluating and revising their writing to improve their English. Their responses are 37.6%, 43.6% and 12.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks nineteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item eighteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of completing written tasks (e.g. exams, tests) within time available to improve their English. Their responses are 40.2%, 36.8% and 19.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item nineteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of understanding the main points of texts

using appropriate vocabulary or words to improve their English. Their responses are 51.3%, 30.8% and 12.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks third out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty, the students were asked the extent of importance of reading a text quickly in order to establish the general idea of the content (skimming) to improve their English. Their responses are 30.8%, 37.6% and 26.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-fifth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-one, the students were asked the extent of the importance of reading a text slowly and carefully in order to understand the details of the text to improve their English. Their responses are 37.6%, 42.7% and 12.0% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks nineteenth out of forty-three items on extremely important

In item twenty-two, the students were asked the extent of the importance of looking through a text quickly in order to locate specific information (scanning) to improve their English. Their responses are 23.1%, 41.9% and 24.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks forty-second out of forty-one on extremely important.

In item twenty- three, the students were asked the extent of importance of reading speed to improve their English. Their responses are 31.6%, 34.2% and 23.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-second out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-four, the students were asked the extent of importance of reading in order to respond critically to improve their English. Their responses are 32.5%, 40.2% and 17.9% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirtieth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-five, the students were asked the extent of importance of understanding the writer's attitude and purpose to improve their English. Their responses are 38.5%, 38.5% and 17.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks seventeenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-six, the students were asked the extent of importance of general reading comprehension to improve their English. Their responses are 40.2%, 33.3% and 21.4% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirteenth out of forty-three items on extremely important.

In item twenty-seven, the students were asked the extent of importance of knowledge of vocabulary or words to improve their English. Their responses are 53.8%, 29.1% and 12.0% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks second out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-eight, the students were asked the extent of importance of guessing unknown words in context to improve their English. Their responses are 31.6%, 41.0% and 20.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-second out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item twenty-nine, the students were asked the extent of importance of understanding specialist vocabulary or words to improve their English. Their responses are 35.9%, 32.5% and 21.4% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-fourth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty, the students were asked the extent of importance of communicating effectively with staff in and out of class to improve their English. Their responses are 41.9%, 32.5% and 20.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks eleventh out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-one, the students were asked the extent of the importance of constructing effective sentences to improve their English. Their responses are 39.3%, 39.3% and 17.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks sixteenth out of forty-three items on extremely important.

In item thirty-two, the students were asked the extent of the importance of using appropriate words in writing to improve their English. Their responses are 47.9%, 27.4% and 19.7% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks sixth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-three, the students were asked the extent of importance of joining sentences to improve their English. Their responses are 37.6%, 35.0% and 20.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks nineteenth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-four, the students were asked the extent of importance writing paragraphs to improve their English. Their responses are 33.3%, 46.2% and 15.4% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-ninth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-five, the students were asked the extent of importance of writing lab reports to improve their English. Their responses are 26.5%, 30.8% and 24.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-ninth out of thirty-ninth on extremely important.

In item thirty-six, the students were asked the extent of importance of describing objects and procedures to improve their English. Their responses are 27.4%, 36.8% and 26.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-eighth out of forty-three items on extremely important.

In item thirty-seven, the students were asked the extent of importance of writing introductions and conclusions to improve their English. Their responses are 35.9%, 35.9% and 24.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-fourth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-eighteen, the students were asked the extent of importance of writing outlines to improve their English. Their responses are 32.5%, 36.8% and 24.8% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirtieth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item thirty-nine, the students were asked the extent of importance of writing quotations and references to improve their English. Their responses are 24.8%, 35.0% and 29.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks fortieth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item forty, the students were asked the extent of importance of formulating coherent argument to improve their English. Their responses are 28.2%, 32.5% and 28.2% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks thirty-seventh out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item forty-one, the students were asked the extent of importance of summarizing factual information to improve their English. Their responses are 34.2%, 38.5% and 20.5% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-eighth out of forty-three on extremely important.

In item forty-two, the students were asked the extent of importance of analyzing written texts to improve their English. Their responses are 42.7%, 29.1% and 23.1% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks third out of eighth on extremely important.

In item forty-three, the students were asked the extent of importance of synthesizing information from more than one source to improve their English. Their responses are 35.9%, 35.0% and 21.4% to 'extremely important', 'very important' and 'important' respectively. This item ranks twenty-fourth out of forty-three on extremely important.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Ranking the language sub-skills entails choice, comparison, discrimination, inference, foreign/second language learning experience, judgment, preference, prior linguistic knowledge, selection, uses of the target language and its value. It also includes belief in specific language sub-skill performance capabilities that play significant role in accomplishing relevant task. For instance, the language sub-skill which ranked first is 'express what you want to say clearly'. This reflects the primary role of language-communication. Similarly, the one which ranked second is 'knowledge of vocabulary.' This also reflects what Wilkins (1972) states, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". The learners' rankings also demonstrate what have been emphasized in the target language curricula. Moreover, some of the rankings may respond to learners' needs which motivated them to learn.

It seems good to recommend that collecting data on learners' needs and considering them during the processes of developing or designing foreign/second language curricula. Involving learner's needs in decision making may make the instructional materials motivating and interesting. This may lead them to become successful learners of English as a foreign/second language.

Table 2. The extent the learners consider important sub-skills to improve their English: on extremely important

S. No.	It No.	Rank	Type of Sub-skill to important for improvement	No. of St	%
1	14	1	Expressing what you want to say clearly	71	60.7
2	27	2	Knowledge of vocabulary	63	53.8
3	1	3	Listening to pronunciation/intonation/stress patterns of English.	60	51.3

4	6	3	Communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out-of-class study groups	60	51.3
5	19	3	Understanding the main points of text	60	51.3
6	32	6	Using appropriate words in writing	56	47.9
7	8	6	Constructing/Structuring sentences	56	47.9
8	3	8	General listening comprehension	50	42.7
9	13	8	Developing ideas	50	42.7
10	42	8	Analyzing written materials.	50	42.7
11	30	11	Communicating effectively with staff in or out of class	49	41.9
12	12	11	Expressing ideas appropriately	49	41.9
13	5	13	Participating effectively in discussions	47	40.2
14	18	13	Completing written tasks (e.g. exams, tests) within the time available	47	40.2
15	26	13	General reading comprehension	47	40.2
16	31	16	Constructing effective sentences	46	39.3
17	9	17	Using appropriate vocabulary	45	38.5
18	25	17	Understanding a writer's attitude and purpose	45	38.5
19	2	19	Note-taking including lecture notes	44	37.6
20	4	19	Giving formal speeches/presentations	44	37.6
21	17	19	Evaluating and revising your writing.	44	37.6
22	21	19	Reading a text slowly and carefully in order to understand the details of the text	44	37.6
23	33	19	Joining sentences	44	37.6
24	16	24	Following instructions and directions	42	35.9
25	29	24	Understanding specialist vocabulary	42	35.9
26	37	24	Writing introductions and conclusions	42	35.9
27	43	24	Synthesizing information from more than one source	42	35.9
28	41	28	Summarizing factual information	40	34.2
29	34	29	Writing paragraphs	39	33.3
30	24	30	Reading in order to respond critically	38	32.5
31	38	30	Writing outlines	38	32.5
32	7	32	Using correct punctuation	37	31.6
33	23	32	Reading speed	37	31.6
34	28	32	Guessing unknown words in a text	37	31.6
35	20	35	Reading a text quickly in order to establish a general idea of the content (skimming)	36	30.8
36	10	36	Organizing paragraphs	35	29.1
37	40	37	Formulating coherent argument	33	28.2
38	36	38	Describing objects and procedures	32	27.4
39	35	39	Writing lab reports	31	26.5
40	39	40	Writing quotations and references	29	24.8

41	15	41	Adopting appropriate tone and style	28	23.9
42	22	42	Looking through a text quickly in order to locate specific information	27	23.1
43	11	43	Organizing the overall assignments	27	23.1

Total number of students is **117**. August 26, 2013.

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Appendix

Appendix A. The extent the learners consider important sub-skills to improve their English

It. No	REI	Type of Sub-skill to important for improvement	Ext Imp		V Imp		Imp		Less	Least
			No.	%	No	%	No	%	No	No
1	3	Listening to pronunciation/intonation/stress patterns English	60	51.3	39	33.3	13	11.1	1	3
2	19	Note-taking including lecture notes.	44	37.6	41	35.0	19	16.2	9	2
3	8	General listening comprehension.	50	42.7	40	34.2	18	15.4	8	1
4	19	Giving formal speeches/presentations.	44	37.6	43	36.8	24	20.5	1	3
5	13	Participating effectively in discussions.	47	40.2	46	39.3	21	17.9	1	2
6	3	Communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out-of-class study groups.	60	51.3	37	31.6	16	13.7	2	2
7	32	Using correct punctuation.	37	31.6	44	37.6	22	18.8	7	5
8	7	Structuring sentences.	56	47.9	31	26.5	23	19.7	2	3
9	17	Using appropriate vocabulary.	45	38.5	49	41.9	13	11.1	7	5
10	36	Organizing paragraphs.	35	29.9	45	38.5	29	24.8	6	2
11	43	Organizing the overall assignments.	27	23.1	46	39.3	37	31.6	5	1
12	11	Expressing ideas appropriately.	49	41.9	42	35.9	19	16.2	4	1
13	8	Developing ideas.	50	42.7	41	35.0	23	19.7	3	0
14	1st	Expressing what you want to say clearly.	71	60.7	25	21.4	17	14.5	3	0
15	41	Adopting appropriate tone and style.	28	23.9	48	41.0	26	22.2	12	1
16	24	Following instructions and directions.	42	35.9	42	35.9	23	19.7	5	1
17	19	Evaluating and revising your writing.	44	37.6	51	43.6	15	12.8	3	4
18	13	Completing written tasks (e.g. exams, tests) within the time available.	47	40.2	43	36.8	23	19.7	1	2
19	5	Understanding the main points of text.	60	51.3	36	30.8	15	12.8	5	0
20	35	Reading a text quickly in order to establish a general idea of the content (skimming).	36	30.8	44	37.6	31	26.5	6	0
21	19	Reading a text slowly and carefully in order to understand the details of the text.	44	37.6	50	42.7	14	12.0	5	4
22	41	Looking through a text quickly in order to locate specific information (scanning).	27	23.1	49	41.9	29	24.8	8	2
23	32	Reading speed.	37	31.6	40	34.2	27	23.1	10	2
24	30	Reading in order to respond critically.	38	32.5	47	40.2	21	17.9	6	2
25	17	Understanding a writer's attitude and purpose.	45	38.5	45	38.5	20	17.1	1	3
26	13	General reading comprehension.	47	40.2	39	33.3	25	21.4	4	1
27	2	Knowledge of vocabulary.	63	53.8	34	29.1	14	12.0	4	0
28	32	Guessing unknown words in a text.	37	31.6	48	41.0	24	20.5	4	2
29	24	Understanding specialist vocabulary.	42	35.9	38	32.5	25	21.4	7	2

30	11	Communicating effectively with staff in or out of class.	49	41.9	38	32.5	24	20.5	3	2
31	16	Constructing effective sentences.	46	39.3	46	39.3	20	17.1	3	0
32	6	Using appropriate words in writing.	56	47.9	32	27.4	23	19.7	5	0
33	19	Joining sentences.	44	37.6	41	35.0	24	20.5	5	1
34	29	Writing paragraphs.	39	33.3	54	46.2	18	15.4	3	1
35	39	Lab report writing.	31	26.5	36	30.8	29	24.8	14	3
36	38	Describing objects and procedures.	32	27.4	43	36.8	31	26.5	4	5
37	24	Writing introductions and conclusions.	42	35.9	42	35.9	29	24.8	2	1
38	30	Writing outlines.	38	32.5	43	36.8	29	24.8	6	1
39	40	Writing quotations and references.	29	24.8	41	35.0	34	29.1	6	3
40	37	Formulating coherent argument.	33	28.2	38	32.5	33	28.2	9	0
41	22	Summarising factual information.	40	34.2	45	38.5	24	20.5	7	1
42	8	Analysing written materials.	50	42.7	34	29.1	27	23.1	5	1
43	24	Synthesizing information from more than one source.	42	35.9	41	35.0	25	21.4	7	2
		Total: 117 x 43 = 5031 (No response =2.16%)	1883	37.43	1797	35.72	996	19.80	219	78

Total number of students is 117, Feb. 12, 2014.