# Exploring the Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language in Somaliland

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## ABSTRACT

English language learning remains a significant challenge in Somaliland despite years of formal instruction across various educational settings. This study investigates the persistent difficulties experienced by English learners, focusing on students at Moon College, one of the well-known English institutions in Hargeisa. It aims to explore why students continue to struggle with English proficiency even after extended exposure. Using a qualitative research design, the study involved key informant interviews with eight English teachers and four focus group discussions with 24 students. Data were gathered through open-ended questions and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed three main categories of challenges: instructional barriers (such as outdated teaching methods and lack of qualified instructors), environmental factors (including limited English exposure beyond the classroom and weak support at home), and psychological obstacles (low confidence, poor motivation, and cultural reluctance to use English). Students reported difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, listening, and academic writing. Despite these challenges, some learners used platforms like Duolingo, YouTube, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to improve skills. The study recommends curriculum reform, enhanced teacher development, and integration of technology in instruction. It highlights the importance of early English exposure and supportive learning environments, offering guidance for educators and policymakers aiming to improve English language acquisition in Somaliland.

## Introduction

Learning English as a second/third language presents unique challenges across various regions of the world. Globally, studies have shown that the key factors affecting English language acquisition include teaching methods, student motivation, and available resources. For example, research in Iraq reveals that learners require sufficient time and proper management

to successfully learn English as a foreign language. Additionally, the role of teachers and the use of authentic materials play an essential role in enhancing linguistic and communicative competence (Mohammed, 2018).

In Malaysia, free online resources were found to be valuable tools for English learning, particularly in improving reading, conversation, and vocabulary skills. These resources help foster a motivating learning environment and encourage critical thinking, social interaction, and collaborative learning (Nosirova, 2023). Similarly, a study in Iran highlights that despite extensive efforts to promote English in schools, the outcomes have not met expectations. Several factors, such as under-qualified teachers, poor teaching methods, and inadequate resources, have hindered the process of effective English language learning (Akbari, 2015).

In Australia, research among Vietnamese, Thai, and Indonesian students identified significant challenges in adapting to English-speaking environments. The study emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive, learner-centered approach to English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Nosirova, 2023). Another study focusing on Saudi Arabian learners in the UK showed that negative intercultural experiences and fears significantly impacted students' confidence in second language acquisition. The intervention workshop that followed was successful in improving their self-confidence and cultural adaptation (Obaid & Abdullah, 2023).

Regionally, in Africa, various studies have shed light on the challenges faced by learners in different countries. In Sudan, research revealed that issues such as interlingual and intralingual errors and the lack of qualified teachers are significant obstacles in learning English as a third language (Ali Adrob, 2021). Moreover, studies in Sudan have shown that psychological factors and unsuitable teaching methods hinder student motivation and language proficiency (Elbashir, 2022). In Namibia, ESL teachers face challenges like overcrowded classes, absenteeism, and lack of parental involvement, which hinder effective English learning (Haufiku, Mashebe, & Abah, 2022). Similar challenges are present in Kenya, where difficulties in listening and speaking have a strong correlation with poor academic performance (Kithinji & OHirsi, 2022).

In Ethiopia, students struggle with academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking, often due to curricula that do not adequately address their learning needs (Chemir & Kitila, 2022a). Another study indicated that students' motivation to learn English is primarily instrumental, as they view English as a tool for academic and career advancement (Chemir & Kitila, 2022b).

In Somalia, the language of instruction is a major barrier to learning, with Somali and Arabic predominating inside and outside the classroom. The lack of a unified language policy further complicates the teaching of English (OHirsi, Mwirichia, & Kanyi, 2022). In Somaliland, the absence of a national language instructional policy remains a critical issue when the students explained the subjects in English while they cannot understand well (Melesse & Obsiye, 2022).

These studies indicate that while the challenges of learning English are universal, they vary across different contexts and regions. In Somaliland, these challenges are compounded by the lack of formal policies, under-resourced educational institutions, and insufficient teacher training. The need for a more tailored and effective approach to English education in Somaliland is evident.

Despite the extensive research on English learning in various contexts, there is a clear gap in studies that specifically address the challenges of learning English as a second language in Somaliland. While existing research has identified general barriers such as lack of resources, inadequate teaching methods, and low motivation, little attention has been given to the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Somaliland.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of learners in Somaliland and the challenges they face in learning English as a second language. It seeks to examine the influence of socio-cultural and educational factors on learners' perceptions and experiences of learning English. Additionally, the study endeavors to understand the role of teachers, teaching methods, and resources from the perspective of learners in enhancing or hindering English language learning. Insights were gathered from students and teachers to identify ways to improve English language education in Somaliland.

*Research objectives:*

1. To explore the experiences of learners in Somaliland and the challenges they face in learning English as a second language.

2. To examine the influence of socio-cultural and educational factors on learners' perceptions and experiences of learning English.

3. To understand the role of teachers, teaching methods, and resources from the perspective of learners in enhancing or hindering English language learning.

4. To gather insights from students and teachers on how English language education can be improved in Somaliland.

*Research Questions:*

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the personal experiences and challenges faced by students learning English as a second language in Somaliland?

2. How do socio-cultural factors (e.g., family, community, traditions) influence learners' attitudes and experiences toward learning English in Somaliland?

3. In what ways do teachers, teaching methods, and classroom resources affect the learning of English from the learners' point of view?

4. What suggestions do students and teachers provide for improving English language education in Somaliland?

## Literature review

*Methodologies and Digital Tools*

Globally, language acquisition is shaped by diverse methodologies and socio-cultural conditions. (Rustamov & Mirza ogli, 2023) highlight the distinction between intensive listening, which emphasizes linguistic accuracy in structured contexts, and extensive listening, which prioritizes immersion and broad comprehension. Building on this methodological perspective, (Prabawati, St Asriati, & St Asmayanti, 2021) demonstrate how digital platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp, widely adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced learner motivation and engagement. More recent studies extend this line of inquiry by showing that gamification and social media improve outcomes across reading, writing, listening, and grammar, while also assisting with vocabulary and speech-related challenges (Dehghanzadeh, Fardanesh, Hatami, Talaee, & Noroozi, 2021) and (Muftah, 2024). Emerging technologies such as ChatGPT have likewise been noted for their pedagogical potential, although concerns remain regarding accuracy and critical evaluation (Madden et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that while technology can enrich the learning process, its effectiveness depends on careful integration.

*English Medium Instruction and Language Policy*

Another major strand of scholarship addresses English Medium Instruction (EMI) and language policy. In Hong Kong, EMI has been associated with improved proficiency through institutional support and effective learner strategies (Tai & Zhao, 2024). By contrast, studies in Ethiopia and Tanzania caution that EMI can impede subject learning where resources and exposure are limited, making mother-tongue instruction more effective in certain contexts (Opare-Kumi, 2024; Roemer, 2024). Similar concerns are echoed in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, where rigid curricula and insufficient emphasis on oral communication reduce learners' motivation and performance (Alawfi, 2022; Alseed, 2022). These findings underscore that the success of EMI depends heavily on contextual, institutional, and pedagogical factors.

*The Interplay Between First and Second Language Acquisition*

The relationship between first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition has also been widely examined. In Pakistan, bilingualism was found to support L2 development by leveraging L1 cognition and identity (Kanwal, Hussain, & Farid, 2022). Studies from Uganda further show that students may transfer decoding and comprehension skills from their mother tongue to English, although the success of such transfer depends on classroom (de Galbert, 2023). At the same time, research in Ethiopia identifies persistent difficulties in pronunciation, writing, and speaking, often linked to motivation, native language interference, and insufficient feedback (Hoque, Oli, Thamarai Selvi, Chowdhury, & Reza, 2024) and (Taye & Mengesha, 2024). These findings suggest that while L1 can serve as a resource for language learning, it may also create challenges if not pedagogically supported.

*Sociolinguistic and Socio-Political Dimensions of Language*

Beyond classroom practice, sociolinguistic research highlights how language intersects with identity, power, and social inclusion. (Castillo, 2023), for example, illustrates how the elevation of Lingala as a language of power in Zaire under Mobutu contributed to social fragmentation, while (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1993) argue that English and Kiswahili carry trans-ethnic influence across East Africa in ways that reflect underlying political and cultural dynamics. (Wolff & Wolff, 2016) caution that although language can facilitate social transformation, linguistic imperialism continues to reinforce inequities. Ethnographic approaches have further revealed how multilingual practices in rural African contexts are shaped by spirituality and local culture (Di Carlo, 2018), while narrative analysis has been shown to strengthen cohesion and advocacy among diverse communities (Lumala & Mullany, 2020).Together, these studies underline the inseparability of language learning from wider socio-political realities.

*Pedagogical and Learner-Based Challenges*

From a pedagogical perspective, challenges are also evident in teacher preparation and classroom conditions. Research in Ugandan classrooms shows that competence-based English curricula often falter due to limited resources, time constraints, and cultural mismatches (Atuhura & Nambi, 2024). Learner factors, such as personality, also influence outcomes, with extroverted students tending to advance more quickly in spoken skills (Thach, 2025). At a broader level, (Hillman, Selvi, & Yazan, 2020) emphasize the importance of synthesizing regional English language research, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, to identify persistent gaps and inform policy. Such findings suggest that both systemic conditions and learner characteristics play crucial roles in shaping acquisition outcomes.

### Regional and Local Perspectives (Somalia and Somaliland)

At the regional level, research in Somalia shows that English is typically acquired as a second language after Somali. (Mohamed, 2024) found that the use of short stories improved vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension among students in Mogadishu, although limited exposure outside the classroom remained a major barrier. These patterns resonate in Somaliland, where challenges such as inadequate exposure, weak teaching methodologies, and socio-cultural barriers continue to impede learner proficiency. While some studies highlight the potential of digital tools, recognition of bilingual advantages, and immersive learning environments, little is known about how these approaches have been implemented in Somaliland's unique context.

## Methods

### Study Design

This qualitative study explores the challenges of learning English as a second language among teachers and students at Moon College in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Data were gathered through eight key informant interviews and four focus group discussions, each consisting of six members, offering rich insights into learners' and educators' experiences. This design was chosen to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions of English language learning. Data were collected between January 6th to February 2st 2025, with the research team recruiting 8 English teachers and 24 students through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was conducted in Somali to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, preserving the nuances of participants' responses. Thematic analysis is a suitable approach for examining patterns in experiences, thoughts, or behaviors within a dataset (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). After completing 8 key informant interviews and 4 FGDs, the research team determined that saturation had been reached, with sufficient data gathered to address the study's objectives. For the 8 fluent teachers, whose primary or secondary language was English, analysis incorporated their responses directly in English to maintain accuracy.

### Study Setting

The research was conducted at Moon College, recognized for its unique approach to teaching exclusively in English. Its environment provides a rich context for understanding the dynamics of English acquisition in Somaliland. All interviews were held in a quiet setting at a convenient place to all teachers and students after obtaining their approval.

### Sampling and Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants with direct and substantial involvement in English language learning at Moon College. The sample consisted of eight teachers, who served as key informants and provided insights into instructional methods, classroom challenges, and strategies for improving English acquisition. Additionally, four focus group discussions were conducted with students, each group comprising six participants, totaling 24 students. These discussions explored students lived experiences, learning difficulties, and perceptions of English as a second language through in-depth, open-ended dialogue. In total, 34 respondents participated in the study 12 males and 22 females

### Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with teachers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with students. Eight purposively selected teachers participated

in the KIIs, which explored their teaching strategies, challenges observed in English language learning, and suggestions for improvement. The eight interviews lasted a total of 86 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Four focus group discussions were conducted with students using an open-ended discussion guide. Each session explored students' experiences, perceptions of the learning environment, and the challenges they face in acquiring English as a second language. The aim was to uncover collective insights and shared perspectives. Comprehension probes were used when necessary to clarify responses. The discussions lasted 25, 30, 33, and 40 minutes, respectively, across the four groups, and were audio-recorded for accuracy.

### Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis in three steps: transcription, coding, and theme development. All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, with responses collected in the participants' native language and later translated into English to preserve meaning (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010) A digital recorder ensured high-quality audio for accurate transcription.

Data were coded using Dedoose software, combining deductive and inductive approaches. Four themes Challenges in Learning English, Socio-Cultural Influences, Teaching Methods and Resources, and Suggestions for Improvement were developed deductively from the study objectives. One theme, Learner Motivation and Attitude, was developed through both inductive and deductive approaches *motivation* emerged from the data, while *attitude* was explored through pre-set questions. Grouping and refining codes enabled a clear synthesis of patterns and supported meaningful conclusions.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Discipline Committee of Beder International University (Ref: BIU/AC&AS/382/2025). Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures, and were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All interviews were conducted in quiet, comfortable settings with the participants' prior consent. To ensure privacy, all data were anonymized, and identities were protected, with only aggregated findings reported. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives provided, ensuring informed and free consent.

## Findings

### Demographic profile of the respondents

The study interviewed 34 respondents, comprising 12 males and 22 females. Most participants were aged 18-25 (8 males, 16 females), followed by the 26-33 age group (2 males, 3 females). The majority were single (9 males, 19 females), while 6 were married (3 males, 3 females). Regarding education, the largest group had university-level education (7 males, 8 females), followed by those with secondary education (4 males, 10 females). In terms of occupation, students made up the largest group (4 males, 15 females), while 10 were employed (6 males, 4 females) and 5 were jobless (2 males, 3 females). (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Gender (n = 34)

| Category: | Sub-category: | Male (n=12) | Female (n=22) | Total: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age group** | 1 8–25 | 8 | 16 | 24 |
| | 26–33 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| | 34–41 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 42–49 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | 50-57 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | |
| **Marital status** | Married | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| | Single | 9 | 19 | 28 |
| | Divorced | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Separated | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Widowed | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | |
| **Education level** | Primary | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| | Secondary | 4 | 10 | 14 |
| | University | 7 | 8 | 15 |
| | | | | |
| **Occupation** | Employed | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| | Jobless | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| | Student | 4 | 15 | 19 |

## Theme 1. Challenges in Learning English

Learning English in Somaliland presents multiple and interrelated barriers, as consistently emphasized by the respondents. A central challenge is that students often lack awareness of how to learn a language effectively. As Interviewee 1 noted:

*The biggest challenge students face is that they have not understood how to learn a language.*

This was supported by Interviewees 3 and 6, who observed that many learners rely on memorization without practical application, which leads to rapid forgetting. These accounts suggest that ineffective learning strategies remain a significant obstacle, limiting students' ability to develop long-term proficiency.

Environmental constraints were also repeatedly highlighted. According to Interviewee 2:

*The environment avoids them from learning. They do not attack the language on a day-to-day basis.*

Similarly, Interviewee 6 stressed that without consistent use, knowledge is easily lost:

*If you teach them vocabulary or grammar and they do not use it, eventually they would lose that language. It becomes wasted time and effort.*

This indicates that the lack of an English-speaking environment outside the classroom creates a gap between instruction and practice, preventing learners from reinforcing what they study.

In addition, several respondents pointed to specific linguistic difficulties, such as pronunciation and understanding idiomatic expressions. As Interviewee 3 explained:

*Students do not know how to pronounce words properly. They do not understand the difference between phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations. This is actually a challenge.*

Another recurring issue is the tendency to depend on literal, word-by-word translation from Somali to English, which learners find both exhausting and ineffective. As Interviewee 3 observed, these findings reveal that technical linguistic barriers are compounded by unproductive strategies, reinforcing the challenges students face in mastering spoken and written English.

Speaking emerged as the most difficult skill for many learners. Interviewee 20 stated:

*The problem we face is speaking barriers. For example, when teachers speak English, we do not understand, and we cannot translate fast enough.*

The difficulty of speaking and listening reflects a deeper issue of limited real-time processing skills, which are rarely developed in a context where English exposure is minimal. Respondents nevertheless emphasized the benefits of informal exposure through listening and watching English media. For example, Interviewee 23 recommended:

*Listen, try to speak, write it down, and watch people speaking English. That makes it easier to learn.*

Similarly, Interviewee 17 observed:

*Children who watch cartoons can speak English better even if they don't know the meaning of the words in Somali.*

These reflections suggest that informal learning opportunities outside the classroom, especially through media, play a valuable compensatory role in language acquisition.

Time commitment and historical factors were also cited as critical barriers. Interviewee 12 admitted:

*The biggest problem is that we do not give it time. We do not immerse ourselves in the language.*

Meanwhile, Interviewee 10 highlighted the long-term effects of disrupted education systems since the 1980s:

*Students now start learning English at an older age, often taught by instructors who lack proficiency.*

Interviewee 9 further summarized these systemic issues:

*Many learners do not have clear goals. They follow friends. There are few trained teachers, and there is no English-speaking environment.*

Together, these perspectives demonstrate that both individual and systemic factors such as lack of practice, insufficiently trained teachers, and the legacy of weak institutional structures continue to shape learners' struggles.

Finally, respondents pointed to psychological barriers that make the learning process more daunting. As Interviewees 1 and 3 expressed:

*Learning a new language feels like being deaf; you hear but do not understand. Growing up speaking Somali makes it harder to learn English.*

These accounts highlight the emotional weight of learning a foreign language in an environment where opportunities for reinforcement are scarce.

## Theme 2. Socio-Cultural Influences

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in either supporting or hindering students' efforts to learn English. Several respondents highlighted that family and community dynamics can discourage language learning. Interviewee 1 noted that many families resist the use of English at home:

*Parents often urge their children to speak Somali, reminding them not to pretend to be someone they are not because they are not foreigners. This attitude seriously affects students.*

Similarly, Interviewees 5 and 18 emphasized that when students return home, there is no one to practice English with. As Interviewee 18 shared:

*At home, people speak Somali. Even if I listen to English for 20 or 40 minutes, I cannot respond because no one speaks the language with me.*

Interviewee 16 added:

*You cannot apply what you learn. Wherever you go home, the market everyone speaks Somali. It is only when you leave the country that you can practice.*

Many learners reported being teased by family members or others for speaking English. Interviewee 10 explained:

*If students try to read or listen to something in English, others may ask what they are doing, which can make them stop. Providing encouragement would help students perform much better.*

This sentiment was echoed by multiple students (Interviewees 25, 27, 29 and 30), who described how speaking English is sometimes seen as showing off or even as something "against religion." Interviewee 25 stated:

*When students try to speak English, people sometimes question why they are not speaking Somali and accuse them of showing off. As a result, students often cannot get a response because others do not understand English.*

Interviewee 24 summarized this challenge clearly:

*When I speak English, people think I am mocking them or trying to avoid my culture. That is the biggest problem I face.*

On the other hand, some students reported positive family support. Interviewee 27 shared:

*We get encouragement. Learning is for ourselves, our family, and our community.*

Similarly, Interviewee 28 explained:

*Our parents support us. There are no challenges from their side.*

However, even in supportive families, older members may not understand what their children are learning. Interviewee 21 stated:

*If I ask for something in English, my mom may not understand. That is why we must teach our younger siblings.*

Religious and cultural misunderstandings also add to the burden. Interviewee 5 addressed a common misconception:

*Some think English is a Christian language. But all languages are created by Allah. Language is just a tool for communication.*

## Theme 3. Teaching Methods and Resources

Teaching methods and access to resources were consistently highlighted as major influences on English language acquisition. While technology offers valuable tools, poor teaching practices and lack of structured instruction remain significant barriers. Interviewee 8 acknowledged the benefits of online resources:

*We have good internet service. Students can listen to English online, which, though not part of the culture, is a great opportunity to learn.*

However, the lack of trained English teachers continues to hinder learning. Interviewee 7 explained:

*Teachers are hired based on their ability to speak the language, not to teach it. Students often do not get proper instruction because the teachers have not been trained to teach languages.*

Interviewee 6 emphasized the importance of student-centered teaching:

*Teachers need to observe students' strengths and weaknesses and track their progress. That is how real improvement happens.*

Similarly, Interviewee 3 highlighted the value of visual and auditory materials:

*If students get access to listening, videos, pictures, and reading materials, they can make progress, especially with pronunciation and comprehension.*

Interviewee 5 added:

*Watching is the best method. Students should also focus on reading books.*

Technological innovations such as artificial intelligence were also praised. Interviewee 4 remarked:

*There are applications that chat with you like a real person. You can ask for meanings and get help with vocabulary. Most people do not know this exists.*

Interviewee 25 added:

*Online learning is useful. You can find native speakers to learn from.*

Interviewee 21 reflected on her personal improvement:

*I could not understand spoken English before. But after listening and watching more, I improved.*

Students noted differences in institutional approaches. Interviewee 11 praised her college:

*I studied in many colleges, but when I came to …, the teaching method was different, especially the focus on listening. I felt the change.*

In contrast, Interviewee 27 criticized inconsistency:

*Teachers' methods are poor. A teacher should not move on to a new topic before checking that students understood the previous one.*

Motivation was also highlighted by Interviewee 33:

*When a teacher persuades a student, they might stop their old behavior and make more effort.*

Independent learning strategies were emphasized by Interviewee 2:

*What teachers give is just a little. Students should expand it themselves, listen to motivational speakers with subtitles, watch conversations and films. These improve fluency and pronunciation.*

Many students reported using tools like Duolingo, YouTube, and Google. Interviewee 11 said:

*Duolingo is good. I tried it, and it helps.*

Interviewee 31 added:

*We need to do dictation and practice daily.*

Interviewee 6 emphasized vocabulary:

*We should learn daily vocabulary and phrases. Words have different meanings, so we must explore extra information.*

Interviewee 10 reinforced these points:

*With social media and YouTube, you can learn anytime even offline. The internet is full of materials. Use your time wisely.*

Interviewee 18 suggested more formal structures:

*Teachers should give quizzes every two weeks and have one day a week for writing. Many students can read, but they struggle to write.*

Interviewees 3 and 9 noted the use of Telegram, Google Translate, and Daris for language support. Interviewee 10 praised AI tools:

*ChatGPT helps a lot. It can translate any language with 90% accuracy, though it may have some errors.*

Additional recommendations included full English immersion and foundational mastery. Interviewee 8 advocated:

*Students should speak only English in class. That is the way to improve.*

Interviewee 3 emphasized basics:

*Without a strong foundation, students will struggle with upper-level concepts. Teachers must ensure full understanding before moving on.*

Interviewee 2 recommended regular assessments:

*Teachers should evaluate students regularly. Weekly quizzes help identify issues early and track progress.*

### Theme 4. Learner Motivation and Attitudes

Learner motivation and mindset emerged as critical factors in English language acquisition. Many respondents described how negative beliefs about English shaped by cultural and social pressures discourage learning. Interviewee 2 noted:

*Students believe English is difficult or even impossible to learn. That belief becomes a barrier in itself.*

He further emphasized that teasing and cultural attitudes in Somaliland undermine students' confidence:

*There is a culture of making fun of others who try to speak English. It causes shyness and makes students afraid to practice.*

This discouragement often leads to frustration and, for some, withdrawal from learning. Interviewees 3 and 4 explained:

*Students often procrastinate because they feel that English is too difficult to learn. When they realize they cannot speak well, they lose motivation and sometimes give up entirely.*

Fear of being mocked was one of the most frequently cited barriers. Interviewee 5 observed:

*Most students are shy. They think they speak broken English, so they are afraid others will laugh. That fear holds them back.*

Even families can unintentionally demotivate learners. Interviewee 27 shared:

Sometimes they tell you that the language is difficult. Those words are demotivating and make you want to quit.

Shyness and social anxiety were repeatedly mentioned by respondents, including Interviewees 23 and 11:

*We cannot stand and speak in front of others. Speaking is hard, and shyness is our biggest challenge.*

Religious and cultural misconceptions also limit students' confidence. As Interviewee 5 clarified:

*Some think learning English is linked to Christians or foreign values. But language is from Allah it is just a tool. All languages are equal.*

## Theme 5. Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents provided a range of thoughtful recommendations to enhance English language learning in Somaliland. The most frequently mentioned suggestions focused on curriculum reform, early intervention, increased practice, and supportive policies.

Interviewee 2 underscored the need to revise the English curriculum:

*The curriculum is poorly developed. It is not comprehensive or well-designed. Each grade level should have a unique focus. Teachers need to use student-centered methods to help students practice and engage with the language.*

Similarly, Interviewee 5 highlighted the need for government-level intervention:

*There should be a national plan to enhance English learning. This could include rigorous language assessments to motivate students and improve standards.*

Interviewee 3 drew attention to the disconnect between years of study and learning outcomes:

*Students spend eight years in primary, four years in secondary, and additional years in college yet they still struggle to speak or write. That shows the system is not working.*

A more interactive and practical approach to teaching was also recommended. Interviewee 4 explained:

*Teaching should be practical. For example, when giving instructions such as sit down or close the door, teachers can use gestures. This helps students learn in context.*

Other respondents emphasized the importance of patience, early exposure, and group learning. One student noted:

*Learning English takes time. Students should be patient and keep practicing even when it is hard.*

Interviewees 10 and 8 stressed the value of early exposure:

*Students should start learning English at a young age. There should be an intensive English course before university to prepare students better.*

Interviewee 1 advocated for group learning and daily practice:

*Study groups help a lot. Set aside time daily to listen, watch, and speak English. Call groups and daily exposure improve fluency.*

Respondents also highlighted the empowering role of English proficiency. Interviewee 9 remarked:

*Knowledge is power. Most things like the internet and medicine are in English. Without it, people can mislead you. Learning the language protects and empowers you.*

Finally, Interviewee 23 proposed regular speaking practice to overcome persistent barriers:

*Students can read, but writing is hard. And we often skip letters when speaking. That is why regular speaking practice is so important.*


## Discussions

### *Instructional Barriers*

One of the most persistent obstacles in Somaliland's English education system is the prevalence of outdated teaching methods and underqualified instructors. As Interviewee 7 noted, "*Teachers are hired based on their ability to speak the language, not to teach it,*" highlighting a systemic issue where language proficiency is mistaken for pedagogical competence. This mirrors (Ghaffar, Abdellatif, Almusharraf, & Imran, 2024) findings, which underscore the need for teacher training, innovative methods, and technology integration to enhance teaching quality in under-resourced contexts.

Other respondents noted the lack of structured instructional methods. Interviewee 27 stated, *"Teachers' methods are poor. A teacher should not move on to a new topic before checking that students understood the previous one."* This aligns with (Azim, 2025), who emphasized that teacher training and curriculum development are key in overcoming instructional challenges like large class sizes and multi-level classrooms.

Moreover, many students pointed out the lack of visual, auditory, and interactive materials. Interviewee 3 mentioned, "*If students get access to listening, videos, pictures, and reading materials, they can make progress."* (Sultana & Imran, 2024) identified similar barriers in Pakistan, where inadequate materials and poor administrative support limited learning outcomes.

Instructors also rarely tailor instruction to student needs. Interviewee 6 emphasized, *"Teachers need to observe students' strengths and weaknesses and track their progress. That is how real improvement happens."* These challenges persist largely due to systemic neglect of teacher preparation and curricular reform, confirming (Khoeroni, Wahyuningsih, Afandi, & Kasriyati, 2023)conclusion that non-native English teachers require substantial support in training and resources.

### *Psychological Barriers*

Psychological barriers such as low confidence, anxiety, and poor motivation were repeatedly mentioned by both teachers and learners. Interviewee 5 remarked, *"Most students are shy. They think they speak broken English, so they are afraid others will laugh. That fear holds them*

*back."* This aligns with (Gobena, 2025), who identified shyness, low motivation, and fear of mistakes as major deterrents to speaking performance.

Anxiety and self-doubt were also common. Interviewee 2 stated, *"Students believe English is difficult or even impossible to learn. That belief becomes a barrier in itself."* Similar observations are noted by (Jelokbuso, 2025; Rosita, 2024), who found that anxiety and fear of making mistakes significantly undermine classroom participation and long-term engagement.

Cultural attitudes further compound psychological reluctance. Interviewee 27 reported, *"Sometimes they tell you that the language is difficult. Those words are demotivating and make you want to quit."* According to (Wisrance & Kristanti, 2024), cultural reluctance and fear of peer judgment can severely impair language performance, particularly in communities where English is viewed as foreign or pretentious.

*Environmental Constraints*

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom and weak home support were consistent findings in the study. Interviewee 2 highlighted, *"The environment avoids them from learning. They do not attack the language on a day-to-day basis."* This reflects (Cohen & Quirk, 2025),work, which showed that cumulative language exposure at home strongly correlates with higher grammatical accuracy and fluency.

Most learners reported that no one at home spoke English. Interviewee 16 noted, *"Wherever you go home, the market everyone speaks Somali. It is only when you leave the country that you can practice."* (Mandal, 2024) similarly found that unsupportive home environments, low parental involvement, and socioeconomic hardship directly reduce students' English proficiency.

Even when family members supported education, many could not engage with English content. Interviewee 21 shared, *"If I ask for something in English, my mom may not understand. That is why we must teach our younger siblings."* These patterns confirm (Zhang, Lau, & Su, 2021), who argued that family language practices and parental attitudes are among the strongest predictors of children's English literacy and engagement.

Moreover, some students face active discouragement from using English due to cultural misinterpretations. Interviewee 5 stated*, "Some think English is a Christian language. But all languages are created by Allah. Language is just a tool for communication."* Cultural misconceptions such as these, as (Garaeva, 2024), explains, can cause learners to internalize resistance and limit their own progress.

The study reveals that English language learners in Somaliland face a combination of instructional, psychological, and environmental barriers. These challenges persist due to outdated teaching methods, low teacher qualifications, social stigma, anxiety, and a lack of exposure outside the classroom. The findings are consistent with international studies conducted in similar contexts, reaffirming the global nature of these challenges. Addressing them requires multi-level interventions, including teacher training, curricular reform, community sensitization, and the creation of English-speaking environments inside and outside schools.

## Conclusion and recommendations

This study explored the challenges English language learners face in Somaliland, revealing key barriers such as outdated teaching methods, limited English exposure, socio-cultural resistance,

and psychological obstacles like low confidence and motivation. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated strong motivation by adopting digital tools and self-directed strategies. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, including upgrading teacher training, leveraging digital tools, creating English-friendly school environments, reforming the curriculum, promoting early English exposure, and launching community awareness campaigns, all directly addressing the barriers identified in this investigation. While rooted in Somaliland, the insights carry broader relevance for similar multilingual, post-colonial societies facing comparable educational challenges, offering practical implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders seeking to strengthen English language acquisition and expand learners' academic and professional opportunities.

To improve English language learning in Somaliland, this study recommends a targeted set of short and long-term interventions, directly aligned with the challenges identified through interviews and focus group discussions.

*Short-term interventions*

**Upgrade teacher training and pedagogy**: To address outdated teaching methods, teachers should receive training in communicative, student-centered approaches that emphasize speaking, listening, and real-life interaction. *Stakeholders: Ministry of Education, universities, language training institutes.*

**Leverage digital tools and platforms**: In response to students' limited classroom exposure and high motivation, integrating language-learning apps, online resources, and AI tools like ChatGPT can enhance learner autonomy. *Stakeholders: School administrators, education NGOs, tech partners*

**Create English-friendly school environments**: Schools should introduce clubs, debate groups, and speaking corners to provide regular practice and combat socio-cultural resistance. *Stakeholders: Schools, local education offices, student associations*

*Long-term interventions*

**Reform the national curriculum**: Curricula should prioritize practical language use over rote learning by embedding listening, speaking, and writing skills into early and secondary education.
*Stakeholders: Ministry of Education, curriculum developers, teacher colleges*

**Promote early English exposure**: Introducing English from preschool will build a stronger foundation, improve motivation, and reduce psychological barriers over time. *Stakeholders: Early childhood centers, parents, education ministries*

**Launch community awareness campaigns**: To shift cultural attitudes and reduce the stigma around English use, nationwide campaigns should highlight the value of English for education and employment. *Stakeholders: Local government, media outlets, civil society organizations.*

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## Biodata

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