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# Orientation to Learning and Previous Learning Experiences: Are they Factors that Affect Learning in the Distance Mode?

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## Abstract

*This paper is an attempt to investigate whether the outcome of learning advanced language skills through the distance mode is affected by students' orientation to learning and by their previous learning experiences.*

*Motivation or orientation to learning is a factor often used to explain variation in student performance. Motivation is of fundamental importance particularly to Open University students since a) they have chosen to engage in post-compulsory education and, b) because the nature of distance education requires the student to be responsible for steering and maintaining her own learning. Orientation to learning, following Morgan (1993) is broadly categorised as 'vocational', 'academic' or 'personal' and used in conjunction with motivation in language learning defined as 'instrumental' or 'integrative' (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Prior learning was established on the basis of formal education/examinations taken before enrolling at the Open University.*

*A small scale study was carried out using the students registered for the Advanced Certificate in English in 98/99, conducted by the Open University of Sri Lanka, as subjects. A questionnaire was administered at the first day-school to find out the learners' motives for enrolling for the programme and their previous exposure to formal education. The data gathered was correlated with the marks obtained by these students in the continuous assessment assignments for two of the courses in the programme, viz. Advanced Reading and Advanced Writing. The findings reveal that those who are driven to learning for personal enrichment i.e. 'personal' orientation are likely to be better performers in both courses than those who are either academically or vocationally motivated. The study also suggests that although those who have had subject related formal education previously have an advantage initially, they do not outperform others towards the end of the programme.*

## Introduction

An open learning institution by its very definition, admits mature students to its programmes with either no formal qualifications or with diverse qualifications unlike conventional universities which admit students within a particular age group on the basis of a specific formal qualification, (which, in the case of Sri Lanka is the Advanced Level Examination). However, despite the uniformity in prior learning at enrolment found in conventional universities, it has been noted that

*"In cases where students are admitted to college on the basis of A-level performance (or equivalent examination), ..... there is a low correlation between A-level grades and final degree results." (Morgan 1993:27)*

Thus, even a homogeneous group of students (at least in terms of qualification and age) exposed to the same input vary greatly in terms of performance. Morgan's (op.cit.) statement therefore implies that factors other than previous learning experiences may cause this disparity in performance.

Apart from the effects of previous learning experiences, hard work and above average intelligence, educationists have posited motivation or orientation to learning as a factor which leads to disparity in the outcome of learning.

*"students' orientation (to learning) ... .. have a crucial impact on how they actually go about their studies". (Morgan 1993:48)*

Motivation or orientation to education has been defined as all those attitudes, aims and purposes which express a student's relationship with a course and with the university (Taylor, Morgan and Gibbs 1981). At an intuitive level too a desire to learn (and the attendant degree of hard work and application) would seem to be necessary for success in university or any other type of education. However, as teachers and course designers it is necessary to know more about how the aims and aspirations of students affect their learning.

All students who choose to pursue higher studies at tertiary level, unlike students at primary or secondary levels, are not compelled to do so by the state or by any other body. Therefore it can be assumed that those who enter a university have *chosen* to do so and, by implication, are motivated to engage in post-compulsory education and training.

Motivation plays a more vital role in a distance education institution than in any conventional university since distance education engenders a learning context where the learner is separated from the teacher as well as from other learners and, the process of learning takes place in a physical setting e.g. the learners home, which is not geared to learning. Further, it has been said that the distance learning context, in which the motivating, steering and maintaining forces are not controlled by teachers, places a greater demand on the distance learner than the conventional learner (Cropley & Kahl 1983). Thus, the very nature of distance learning requires on the part of the learner a high degree of self-reliance and the ability to be a self-starter and initiator of the learning process (Premaratne, Ratwatte & Perera 1990) and therefore, unlike her conventional counterpart, the learner must take on herself the entire responsibility of learning.

As such, all students who join an Open University, in this case the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), can be assumed to be motivated to study. However, they may have different reasons for pursuing higher studies. Students in different research studies exploring students' views on why they are studying have given a variety of reasons for pursuing higher studies. Wanting to prove their abilities to themselves, finding that they need to achieve something before life passes by, to broaden one's outlook, the desire for qualifications to get a better job, relevance to work or as the next stage in the educational ladder are some of the reasons given for registering in an OU course. (Taylor, Morgan and Gibbs 1981, Taylor 1983, Gibbs, Morgan and Taylor, 1984, Holly and Morgan 1993, Strang, 1987). Although it can be observed from these reactions that students have diverse aims and purposes in taking a course of study we cannot, on the basis of these reasons, say that a certain set of students are either more motivated or less motivated. We can however assume that there is some motivating factor that leads them to engage in post compulsory education. Morgan says that "by exploring students' perspectives for becoming engaged in further education and training, we shall be in a better frame of mind to understand the variations in their performance." (1993:28)

However, Morgan also goes on to say that in distance education research, motivation or orientation to learning is a poorly defined concept and that it is difficult to measure. Further, that *"Attempts to develop measures of motivation and to correlate them with performance have not shown any clear patterns."* (Morgan 1993:27)

Motivation or orientation to learning has been described as an analytical concept by many (Goodyear 1975, Sagar and Strang 1985). For the purpose of this study we shall adopt a classification of motivation set out by Gibbs, Morgan and Taylor (1984:170) who, after conducting a large number of student interviews summarise the variation in motivation as follows.

**Table 1 - Orientation to education**

Orientation	Aim	Concerns
Personal	Broadening outlook/self improvement Proof of capability	Challenge, Passing course, Grades and feedback. Interesting material
Vocational	Training Qualification	Relevance to future career Recognising worth of qualification
Academic	Educational progression. Following an intellectual interest	Academic progress, grades, Stimulating lectures

According to this classification, motivation or orientation to learning has been broadly categorized as Personal, Vocational or Academic<sup>1</sup> together with the aims and concerns of each type.

In the case of vocational orientation, students are said to be concerned about the training or qualification as a means of improving job opportunities or achieving promotion at work. In either case the qualification is seen as a means to an end.

Students with an academic orientation are those who are pursuing the next step on the educational ladder. Students who are oriented in this way according to Morgan (1993) tend to be concerned with success and be 'syllabus -bound'. They are more interested in getting the grades than with scholarship and learning for its own sake.

Personally oriented students are considered to be concerned with the 'broadening' aspects of university education as well as a means of proving their abilities to themselves and to family and friends. These students too

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<sup>1</sup> Goodyear (1975) draws a distinction between 'qualification' and 'compensation', where the former is 'for obtaining a specific qualification in order to achieve some promotion at work' and the latter is where students are 'searching for something to compensate inadequacies in one's existing life'. These can be closely linked to the categories of vocational and personal orientation in the Gibbs et.al 1984 classification.

tend to be very concerned with grades as they see their studies as primarily of personal significance and a measure of their abilities.

## Motivation and Language Learning

Motivation is also a key factor in language learning.

*"Motivation and attitudes are important factors in SLA (Second Language Acquisition), which help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners" (Ellis 1990:118).*

Gardner and Lambert (1972) after having carried out extensive research in to the role of motivation in Second Language (L2) learning say that in language learning, the effects of motivation and attitude to learning appear to be separate from the effects of aptitude and that the most successful learners will be those who have both a talent and a high level of motivation for learning. Gardner and Lambert go on to draw a basic distinction between an integrative and an instrumental orientation to L2 learning. The former occurs when the learner wishes to identify with the culture of the second language while the latter occurs when the learner's goals for learning the second language are functional such as passing an examination, furthering career opportunities etc. Their findings indicate that in certain contexts where the L2 functions as a 'foreign language' (not used outside the classroom) an integrative motivation may be more powerful in facilitating successful learning while in contexts where the L2 is a 'second language' (used as a means of wider communication outside the classroom) instrumental motivation may count for more.

Their findings reveal that the effects of motivation can be seen on the rate and success of SLA, rather than on the route of acquisition<sup>2</sup>.

If we try to relate the definitions of motivation as given by Taylor, Morgan and Gibbs (1981) with those found in second language learning, a clear similarity can be seen between Taylor et. al's vocational motivation and Gardner and Lambert's instrumental motivation. Both definitions recognize

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<sup>2</sup> They also go on to say that the way in which motivation affects learning is not clear i.e. whether it is motivation that produces successful learning or whether successful learning enhances motivation.

a utilitarian or practical goal. On the other hand the desire for personal development described as personal motivation (Taylor et. al.) shares some qualities with a language learners desire to become more proficient in the language and culture of the second language and thus broaden one's outlook. There is no parallel between academic motivation (Taylor et. al) and the classification suggested by Gardner and Lambert. However, both definitions have drawn a clear distinction between an orientation to learning for functional purposes and learning for personal development (broaden one's outlook).

Since motivation has been identified as a powerful factor in second language learning (Ellis 1990, Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972, Gardner and Smythe 1975) as well as a means to understanding variation in adult learning, (Morgan 1993) this study is an attempt to investigate whether students enrolling for the Advanced Certificate in English at the Open University of Sri Lanka are motivated differently and if so, whether the type of motivation is a factor that affects the outcome of language learning through distance education.

This paper also hopes to examine the role of prior learning experiences on performance for although all students admitted to the Advanced Certificate programme have demonstrated their ability to meet the required academic criteria at entry by successful performance at an Entry Test, given the diversity in prior learning experiences students enrolling in an open university usually possess, it is unlikely that previous exposure to education would not exert some influence on students' performance. The study therefore was also an attempt to understand how prior learning experiences affect students' performance.

## **The Study**

The course of study chosen for the purpose of this research, as mentioned earlier, was the Advanced Certificate in English programme offered by the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) since 1998. The first batch of students who completed their studies in 1999 formed the sample.

The Advanced Certificate in English is of one years duration and is offered as a Level 3 course at the OUSL, that is, higher than the foundation level but lower than the diploma and degree level. It is a programme which bridges the gap between the foundation level courses - the Programmes in General English (offered at levels 0, 1 and 2) and the Diploma in English which

constitutes the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of the Degree programme. The programmes in General English (the Certificate in Basic English (Level 0-1) and the Certificate in Professional English (Level 2)) focus on basic English grammar and take the students from simple reading and writing skills to an intermediate level.

The Diploma in English requires advanced academic reading and writing abilities as it focuses on literature and an introduction to linguistics and teaching of English as a second language.

The Advanced Certificate, while bridging the gap between programmes is also an independent certificate which aims to enhance the students reading and writing abilities. It consists of three courses, viz. Advanced Reading (LSC 3201) Advanced Writing (LSC 3202) and Introduction to Literature (LSC 3301). The Advanced Reading course aims to develop higher order reading skills and the ability to read a variety of text types such as academic discourse, journal articles, literary texts, criticisms, commentaries which contain complex argumentation, syntactic structures etc. The Advanced Writing course aims to develop different writing styles such as descriptive, narrative, cause and effect, process, and argumentation while also training students to write different discourse types such as academic writing, report writing, travel writing etc.

As an open education institution the OUSL cannot demand that all students at entry possess the A-level (or equivalent examination). It cannot stipulate any other formal education qualification/s either since it admits mature students to its programmes with diverse formal qualifications. Thus, in order to see whether prospective students are capable of following the Advanced Certificate programme which requires a certain level of proficiency in English, students are admitted on the basis of an Entry Test which tests their language skills. All students who score within a certain range (40 to 55%) gain entry to the Advanced Certificate in English<sup>3</sup>. In addition, since the Advanced Certificate is the step in the educational ladder that precedes the degree, students who have obtained a 'C' pass in the Programme in Professional English also gain direct entry to this programme<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Those who score above 55% gain direct entry to the Diploma in English.

<sup>4</sup> Since students who enrol for this programme are already competent users of English and not learners of the language, socio-linguistic factors such as attitude to the L2 and its speakers ('kachuwa' phenomenon etc, Kandiah 19..) would not apply and therefore would not affect learning.



We will, in this study, be looking at student performance in the two language courses the Advanced Reading course and the Advanced Writing course. The course material for Advanced Reading consists of one printed course book, reading activities and (8) eight day-schools (face-to-face sessions). The course in Advanced Writing course consists of a printed course book, writing activities and (7) seven day-schools.

The students are evaluated in both courses by means of continuous assessment (CA) consisting of 3 tutor marked assignments (TMA) administered at regular intervals (see table 2 below) and a final project. Students are required to obtain over 40% in the CA component to be permitted to write the final project.

**Table 2: Percentage of work evaluated in the TMA's**

Assignment	Number of day-schools completed	% of work evaluated
Reading assignment 1	4	50%
Reading assignment 2	6	75%
Reading assignment 3	8	100%
Writing assignment 1	3	42%
Writing assignment 2	5	70%
Writing assignment 3	7	100%

The students are first introduced to reading before writing since reception skills precede production skills in language learning. The first assignment test in writing (production skills) is administered only after completion of 87% of the reading course, thus ensuring that the required reception skills are in place prior to production. (For contents of assignments see appendix 2)

## **Research Design**

25 of the 33 students who enrolled in the first batch of the Advanced Certificate in English were the subjects for this investigation. These were the students who were present for the orientation and first day-school session. In order to find out what motivated the students to follow this particular programme and why they chose the Open University a questionnaire was administered at the end of the first day school session.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections, Part A, background information where subjects were required to indicate their age group, sex,

previous educational qualifications, type of employment they were engaged in, marital status and the number of courses taken. This was for the purpose of building up a profile of the type of student who enrolled for this programme. The next section, Part B, contained questions on the reasons for enrolling for this programme i.e. their motives, and why they registered at the OUSL and not at any other institution. Part C was designed to ascertain their perceptions of distance education, that is, the form in which their teaching-learning will take place, the role of the teachers, the role of the student and number of study hours per course, etc. In the present study we will only be considering the data gathered from Parts A and B of the questionnaire.

Performance was assessed on the basis of marks obtained by each student on the three assignments administered for each course of study. This was correlated with previous education and orientation to learning and subsequently, a further examination was carried out where performance was considered in relation to type of employment.

### Student Profile

In order to build up a profile of the type of student who enrolls for this programme we will first consider the background characteristics of age, sex, marital status, and employment status.

**Table 3: Number of students according to age and sex**

	18-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50 years or more	Total
Female	2	3	5	0	10 (40%)
Male	4	5	5	1	15 (60%)
Total	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	10 (40%)	1 (4%)	25

Of the 25 students who participated in this study, as the above table shows, a majority (72%) belong to the 30-49 age group and there are more male students than female. Since a large number of students can be categorised as mature students, i.e. over 30 years of age, to find out their social and domestic contexts we next looked at the information provided on marital status and employment.

**Table 4: Marital Status**

	Single	Married
Female	5 (20%)	5 (20%)
Male	7 (28%)	8 (32%)
Total	12 (48%)	13 (52%)

There are an almost equal proportion of married and single subjects enrolling for this programme. The gender distribution between single and married students too is equal in proportion.

**Table 5: Employment status**

Teaching	Employed In professions other than teaching	Self-employed	Not Employed	Not stated
9 (36%)	10 (40%)	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)

Table 5 shows that 84% of the students who enrol for this programme are employed while only 12% are not. Of those employed, 36 % are teachers while the majority, (40%), are in other employment.

Thus it would appear that students with ages ranging from 18 years to 50+ enrol for the Advanced Certificate in English and that 75% are older than 30 years of age and 84% are working. This shows that as with other open learning institutions, mature as well as employed students are attracted by the opportunity to continue with their education at the OUSL too. Since the data shows that an equal proportion of males and females as well as single and married persons enrol we could assume that there is no other bias towards studying at the OU.

It is however interesting to note that a majority of students (64%) who wish to acquire advanced skills in English and an introduction to literature are not teachers but people employed in professions other than teaching or those who are not in employment. This could be interpreted as an indication that although the Advanced Certificate in English is a rung in the ladder towards the Diploma in English which caters primarily to English teachers, it is also seen as an independent certificate.

Next we will examine the overall performance of students followed by their performance in relation to prior educational experiences and orientation to learning.

## Performance in the tutor marked assignments (TMA)

In order to evaluate performance in the two courses we first considered the overall scores obtained by all subjects in the two courses, viz. Advanced Reading and Advanced Writing.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained in the two courses**

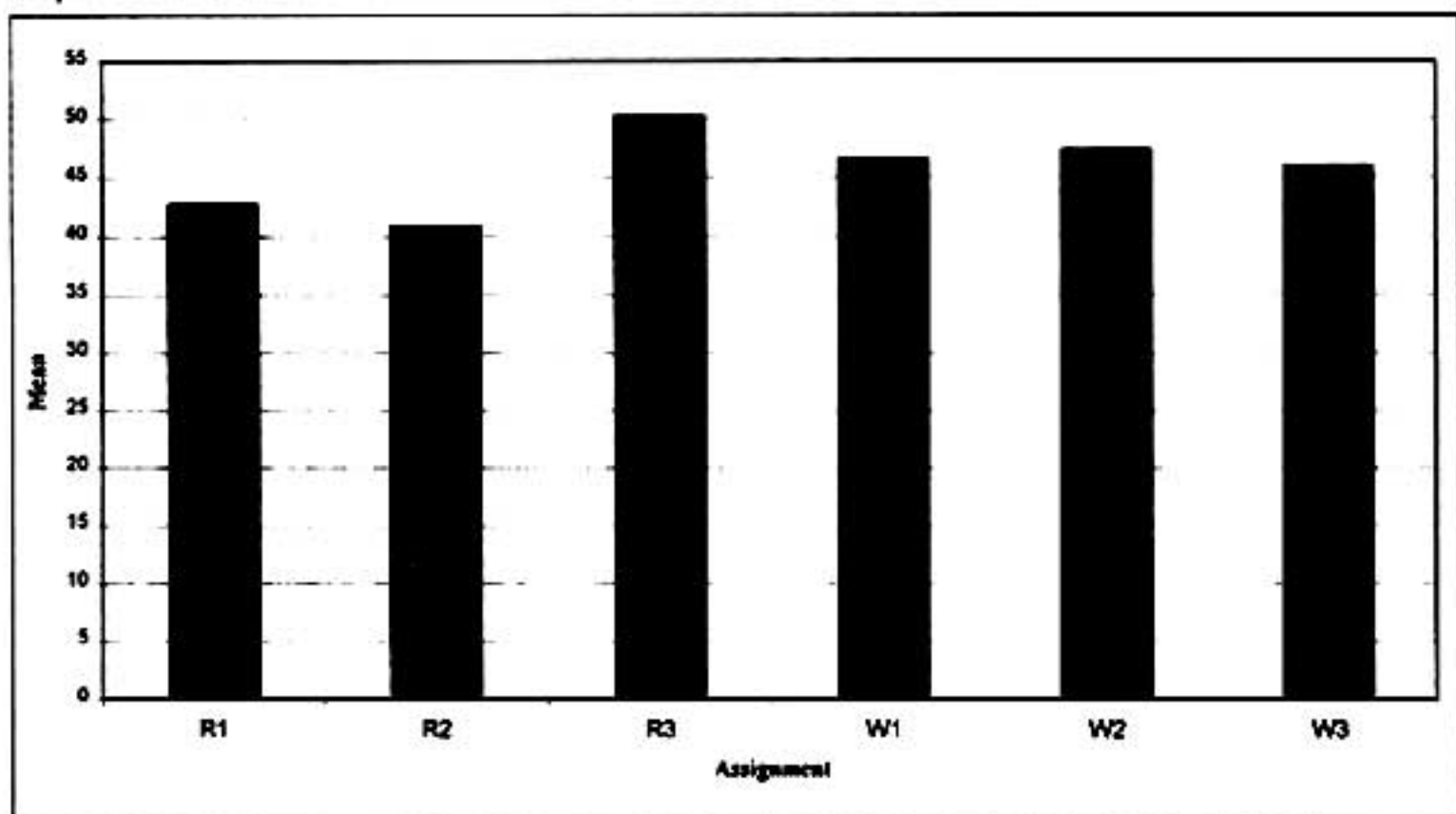
	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max
Advanced Reading	44.67	40	14.23	22	84
Advanced Writing	46.63	48	8.57	18	66

Although the mean scores obtained in the two courses suggest that overall performance in the two courses are comparable, the mode indicates that more students score higher marks in Advanced Writing than in Advanced Reading. Further, the standard deviation shows greater variance in Advanced Reading than in Advanced Writing suggesting greater variation in performance in the Advanced Reading course than in the Advanced Writing course. Thus, the data seems to indicate that overall students find the Advanced Reading course more difficult of the two.

Next we looked at the performance in each of the six assignments (TMA)-three in Advanced Reading and three in Advanced Writing.

**Table 7: Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained for the six assignments (TMA).**

Assignment	Mean	Mode	Std.Dev	Min.	Max.	Range
Reading assignment 1 (R1)	42.75	40	10.74	22	60	38
Reading assignment 2 (R2)	40.92	34	12.28	22	64	42
Reading assignment 3 (R3)	50.33	62	17.50	22	84	62
Writing assignment 1 (W1)	46.58	48	11.52	18	66	48
Writing assignment 2 (W2)	47.33	44	7.19	34	60	26
Writing assignment 3 (W3)	45.90	44	6.28	34	58	24



**Figure 1: Average Marks Scored for each Assignment**

It can be observed from Figure 1 that students perform equally well on all three TMA's in the Advanced Writing course. A comparison of the mode obtained by students in the writing assignments shows (table 7) that the mode is the same for W2 and W3 with W1 only being slightly higher. This further confirms that students performed equally well in all three writing assignments.

On the other hand, an examination of the average scores obtained in the reading assignments (Figure 1) shows that students on average performed better in assignment 3 than in the other two. An examination of the mode (table 7) shows that more students scored high marks in assignment 3 (R3) than in the other two assignments and that the least number of students scored high marks in assignment 2. This would suggest that on average all students found R2 the most difficult.

Next we investigated whether those who perform well in one skill e.g. writing, also perform well in the other - reading. The correlation between performance in the two skills is highly significant ( $p < 0.006$  at  $p < 0.01$ ) indicating that those who perform well in advanced reading skills also perform well in advanced writing skills. This is in accordance with previous research in applied linguistics that although performance (or output) of a single individual may vary depending on the type of task and situation

(Tarone 1984, Ellis 1989, 1990), the underlying linguistic competence<sup>5</sup> is independent of situation (Chomsky 1986, 1988).

Next we will consider the effects of previous learning experiences and motivation on performance.

### Performance in terms of Previous Education

Unlike conventional university students who are considered to be more homogeneous since they are admitted to college only the basis of A-level performance (or equivalent examination), the mature students who enter OUSL programmes have different types of formal qualifications. Since some subject had more than one previous qualification the percentage without a particular qualifications was also computed.

**Table 8: Subjects grouped according to previous educational qualifications**

	Possess Qualification	
O/L with Literature	8	(32%)
A/L with Literature	5	(20%)
Advanced level (without Literature)	12	(48%)
Professional English	7	(28%)
Diploma	2	(8%)
GAQ	3	(12%)
TTC (Trained Teachers Certificate)	7	(28%)
Other*	8	(32%)

\* Qualifications in accountancy (CIMA), law (attorney at law), information technology, nursing, business management etc.

The data in table 8 show us that although students are admitted to the Advanced Certificate in English based on marks scored at the Entry Test, students come with diverse prior learning experiences. 52% of all students have had some exposure to English Literature either at the O'Levels or at the A' Levels and a further 28% who have completed the Certificate in Professional English have had exposure to a language course. 40% have also had training in language (and perhaps literature) at post-secondary level such as the GAQ or the Trained Teachers Certificate (TTC).

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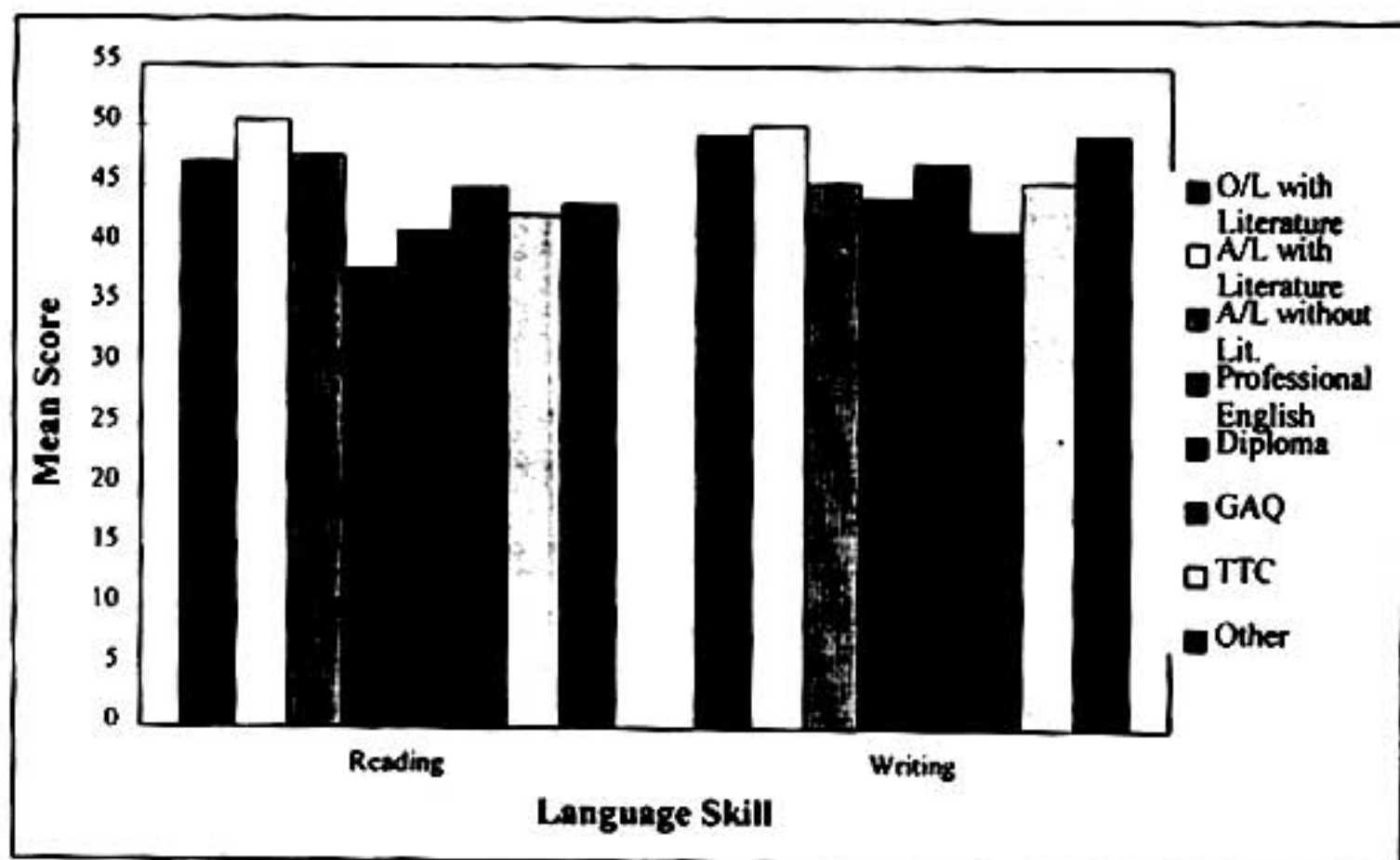
<sup>5</sup> The underlying mental state or the system represented in the mind of a particular individual (Chomsky 1988). The user's knowledge of the language, not the sentences that have been produced.

It is also interesting to note that 32% of the students who enrol in this programme have other qualification such as MBA, CIMA etc.

We will next consider performance in relation to previous educational qualifications.

**Table 9: Performance according to previous educational qualifications**

	Reading	Writing
O/L with Literature	46.95	49.33
A/L with Literature	50.53	50.13
Advanced level (without Literature)	47.53	45.26
Professional English	38.05	44.10
Diploma	41.17	47
GAQ	44.89	41.25
TTC	42.63	45.41
Other*	43.50	49.33



**Figure 2: Performance according to Previous Educational Qualifications**

It can be observed from Table 9 and Figure 2 that subjects with the Advanced Level with English perform better in both courses than subjects with other prior qualifications. On the other hand, students with a

Professional English qualification perform the least well in reading while those with a GAQ perform the least well in writing.

As expected therefore, we can observe that previous learning has engendered variation in performance. In order to see the manner in which it affects performance, we next examined student performance in the individual assignments through the course<sup>6</sup>. This would give an indication as to whether the rate of learning is affected by previous experiences.

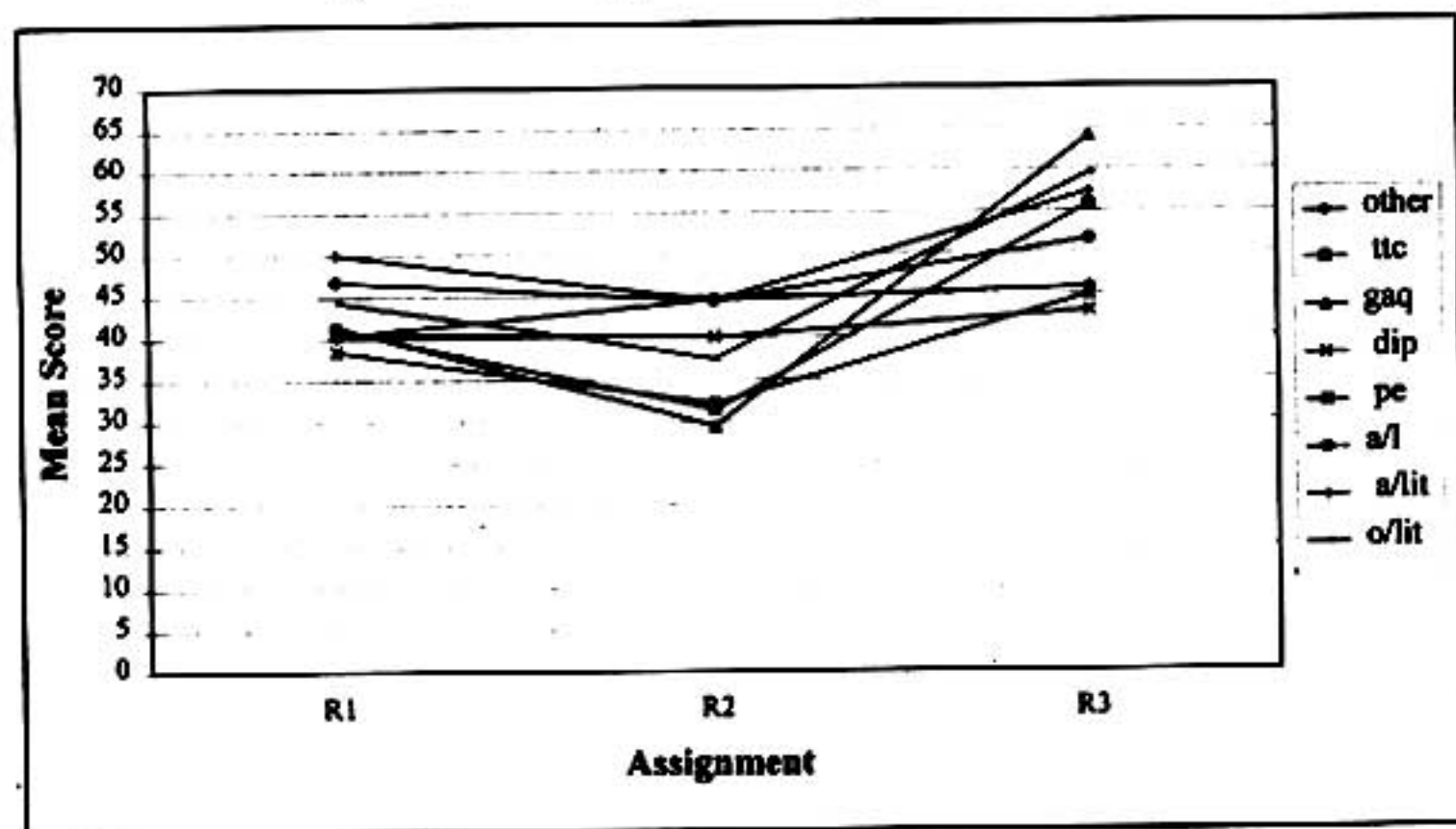


Figure 3: Rate of learning according to previous qualification - READING

It can be observed from Figure 3 that previous learning experiences affect the performance in reading assignment 1 (R1) where subjects who have completed the Advanced Level (with or without English literature) perform better than others<sup>7</sup>. (The correlation analysis shows a high positive the relationship between performance in and A-Level with Literature(0.40\*)). The weakest performance in reading assignment 1 (R1) is by those who possess the Certificate in Professional English (less than 40%) (see table 1(a) appendix 1).

<sup>6</sup> since students who possess a 'C' pass in the Certificate in Professional English gain direct entry to the Advanced Certificate in English, we also wanted to study their progress through the programme

<sup>7</sup> This would account for the performance of those not in employment as they have only the Advanced Level with English.



Figure 3 also shows that regardless of previous learning experiences all students perform better in R1 and R3 than in R2 (see appendix 1, table 1(a)). A computation of frequencies showed that more than 45.8% of students scored less than 40% for R2. This again suggests that all students found R2 more difficult than the other two. If we look at performance in R2 in terms of previous qualifications we can see that those who possess the GAQ score the lowest<sup>8</sup> while those with Other qualifications, A' level with English and without English score the highest. Those with Professional English, TTC and GAQ do not score over 40% for R2.

It is however, interesting to note that in reading assignment 3 (R3) subjects who possess the GAQ, and O' Level literature perform better than those who come with the English at the A'Level. Further, students with the Certificate in Professional English score over 40% in R3.

Thus, the data appears to suggest that initially the subjects with English at the Advanced Level perform better than others but with training in reading skills the other groups, particularly those with the GAQ and the Trained Teachers' Certificate are able to outperform those with English at the A - Level. The data also reveals a progressive achievement by those who gain direct entry to the Programme, i.e. subjects who possess a 'C' pass in Professional English which indicates their ability to meet the required standard with training in advanced reading skills.

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<sup>8</sup> Only teachers possess the GAQ and teachers performed the lowest in R2 (table...)

We next examined the rate of learning in Advanced Writing

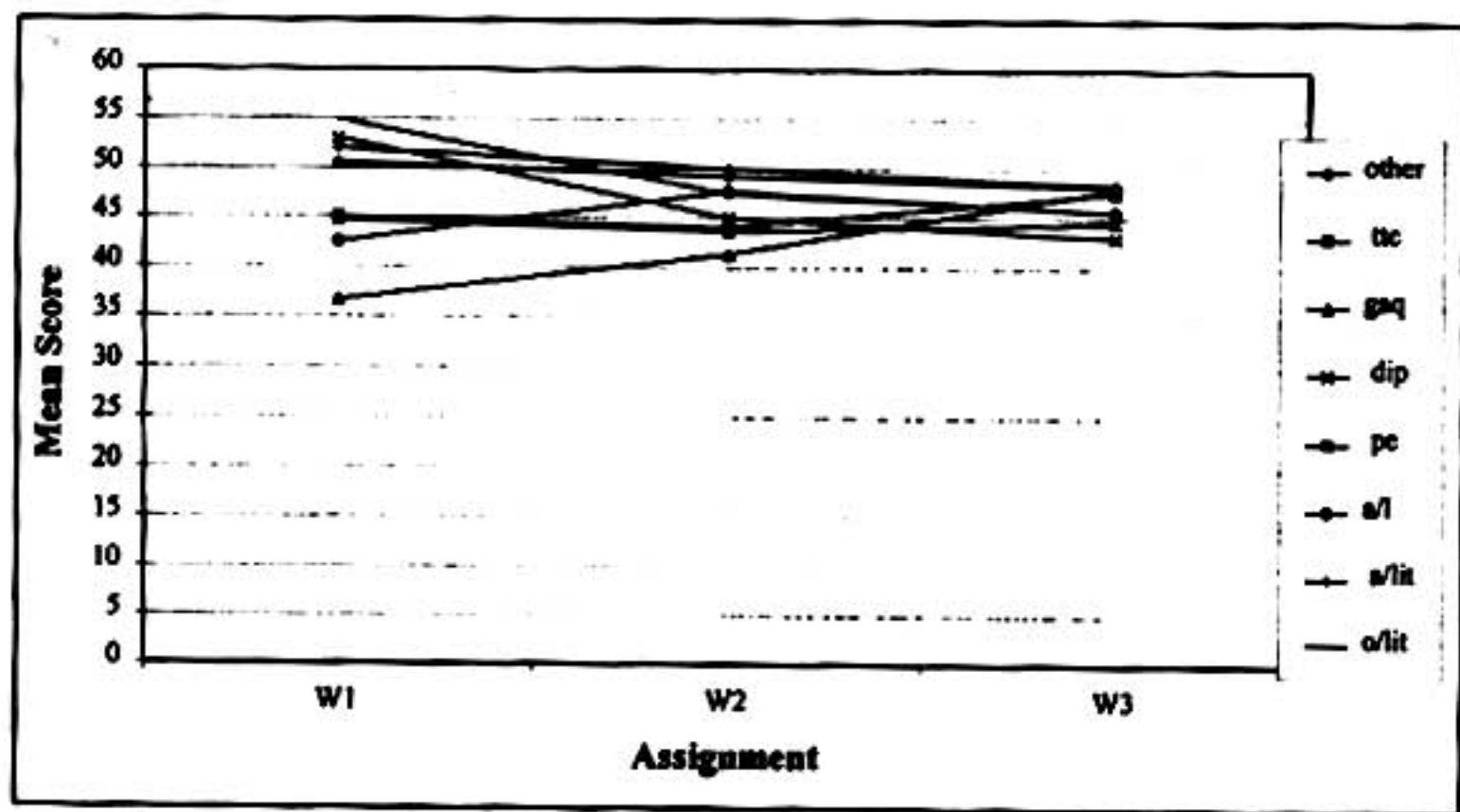


Figure 4: Rate of learning according to previous qualification - WRITING

Figure 4 shows that there is greater variation in performance in W1 than in the other two. It also shows that all groups except those who come with the GAQ score above 40% with those who have the Literature for the O' Level scoring the highest (see table 1(b) in appendix 1).

In assignments 2 & 3 (W2 & W3) the variation between students with different previous learning experiences decrease although those with English for the Advanced Level score slightly higher than others in W2. The performance between groups is most alike in writing assignment 3 (W3). It is also interesting to note that unlike in reading, the scores obtained by those who are admitted to the programme on a 'C' pass in the Certificate in Professional English are neither higher nor lower than those who are admitted through the Entrance Test.

It can be observed that although the initial performance in writing of students who have English for the Advanced Level is better than that of students who possess other previous learning experiences, as the course progresses the performance of students become more homogeneous.

From the examination of the data we can make several observations - first that previous learning experiences have a bearing on learner performance particularly at the initial stages. However it can be seen that not all types of

previous language/literature learning experiences have such a bearing. Some, such as the A' Level with literature aid at the early stages in both courses, but others such as GAQ or TTC appear to help advanced reading in the latter stages. On the other hand, a progressive development can be observed in both courses with those who have Other qualifications. Further, that although students who are admitted on the basis of a 'C' pass in the Certificate in Professional English do not perform well on reading initially, they are able to meet the demands of the Advanced Certificate with training.

An examination of the rate of learning also reveals that student performance in both skills, especially in writing, become more homogeneous as the course progresses.

The data therefore seems to justify the admittance of students through an Entry Test, for by the end of the programme, students, despite diverse prior learning experiences, seem to have achieved a similar competence in advanced writing skills and achieved the required level in advanced reading skills.

### **Performance in terms of Orientation to Learning**

The data so far has revealed that people with varying educational qualifications as well as those engaged in different types of employment enrol in the programme. This leads us to the question as to *why* they are following this programme, i.e. what has motivated them to join a programme that would enhance their reading and writing skills in English and obtain an introduction to the appreciation of literature in English.

The options given in the questionnaire in answer to the above question were, for career advancement (vocational), to obtain a higher qualification (academic), for personal development or for any other reason (to be specified). Since learners could have more than one reason for pursuing higher studies the subjects were allowed to select more than one option. The selections were as follows:

**Table 10: Subjects grouped according to motivation or orientation to learning**

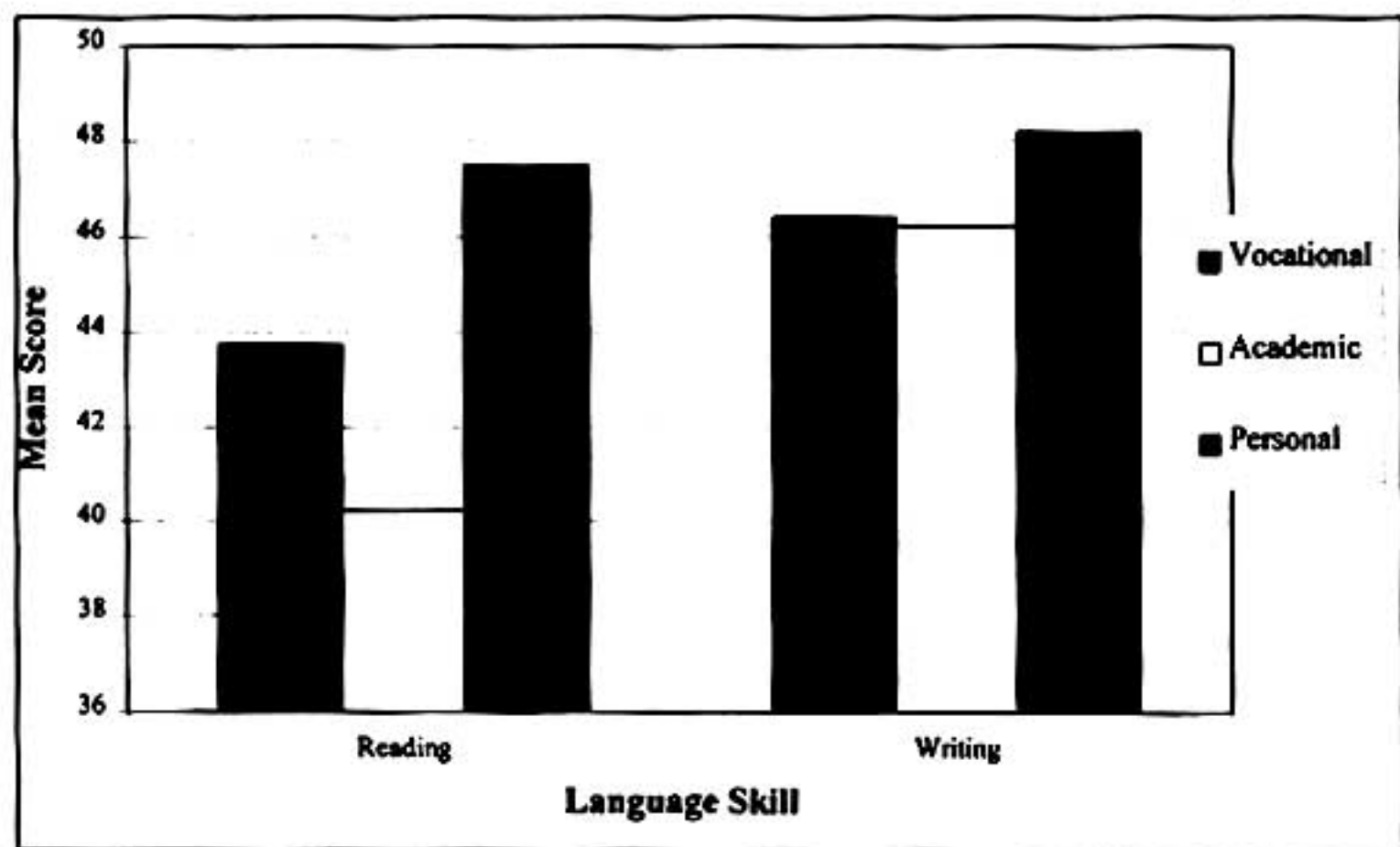
<b>Vocational</b>	<b>Academic</b>	<b>Personal development</b>	<b>Any other reason</b>
12 (48%)	4 (16%)	13 (52%)	0 (0%)

Three subjects who had selected 'academic' had also selected 'personal development' as a motive for following this course while one subject had ticked all three options. If we exclude the subject who had selected all three options it could be said that 44% followed this programme purely for functional reasons. If we broadly categorise 'academic' and 'personal development' under integrative motivation (especially since three out of the four have selected both options) it could be said that (48%) have enrolled for the purpose of broadening their outlook.

We next looked at performance in terms of orientation to learning

**Table 11: Performance according orientation to learning**

	Vocational	Academic	Personal development
Reading	43.76	40.22	47.49
Writing	46.40	46.22	48.18



**Figure 5: Performance according to Orientation Learning**

It can be observed from table 11 and Figure 5 that in both reading and writing subjects are personally oriented perform better than subjects who are either vocationally or academically oriented. The correlation between scores obtained by subjects who are motivated for personal development and performance is statistically significant (reading .54\*\*  $p < 0.01$  and writing

.53\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation between performance and the other two types of orientation was low. This indicates strongly that those who are following the programme for personal advancement significantly outperform the other two groups.

Thus, contrary to Morgan (1993) where no clear relationship emerged between performance and motivation, the data in this study suggests that orientation to learning does affect student performance in both Advanced Reading and Advanced Writing and that students who enrol in the programme with an 'instrumental' or 'vocational' purpose perform less well than students who join the program to broaden their outlook (i.e. integrative motivation).

### *Motivation and employment*

In order to build up a profile of the students who are differently motivated in terms of employment, further exploration of the data was carried out. The correlation between motivation type and employment revealed a significant correlation coefficient (.42\*\*)'. An examination of the raw data showed that seven of the nine teachers (i.e.78%) were 'vocationally' motivated while only two were 'academically' motivated. On the other hand, seven of the ten subjects (70%) in employment other than teaching as well as all (100%) of those not in employment said that they were following the programme for personal development.

We next considered the performance of students engaged in the different professions.

**Table 12: Performance according to employment status**

	Average mark obtained for reading	Average marks obtained for writing
Teacher	40.64	45.48
Profession other than teaching	46.17	46.34
Self-employed	33.67	47.67
Not employed	51.56	49.78
Not specified* (*one subject only)	50.00	46.67

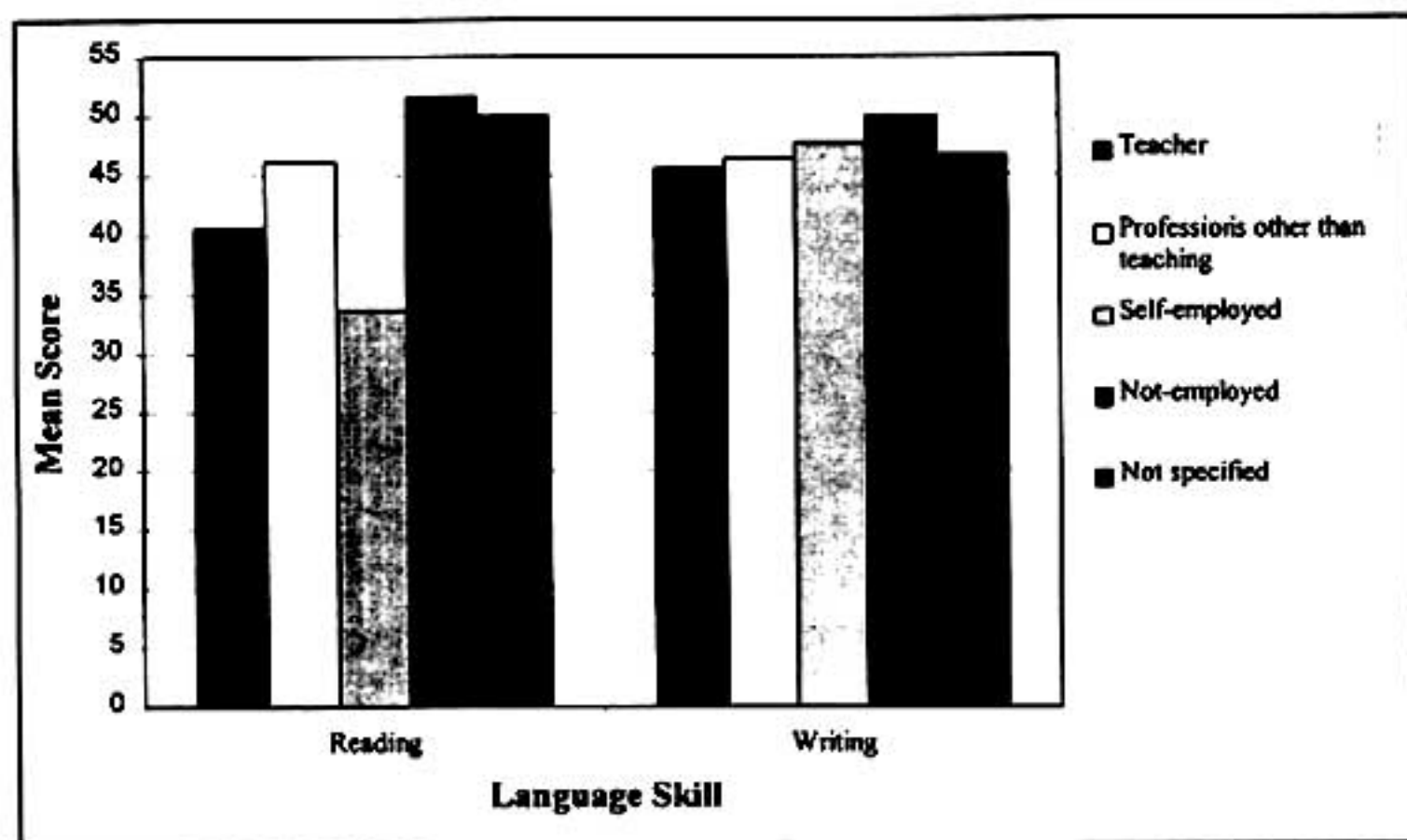
(For marks obtained for the individual assignments see appendix 1 table 3)

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\* \*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Overall performance in reading, according to type of employment engaged in, shows that those who are not employed score the highest and that those who are self-employed the least. It is interesting to note that the performance of teachers in reading is poorer than that of the not employed and those engaged in professions other than teaching. It can be observed from figure 6 that in writing too those who are not employed perform the best while teachers score the least well.

Thus, from an examination of student performance according to employment status it can be said that students who are not employed perform the best overall in both reading and writing and that teachers do not perform highly in either course. It can also be seen that those who are in employment other than teaching are more skilled than teachers in reading.



**Figure 6: Performance According to Employment Status**

The data examined has revealed that, contrary to expectations, performance in the language skills are at variance with professions with teachers performing less well than non-teachers. The data has also revealed that a large majority of teachers were following the course for functional purposes while most of those in other employment and all of those not in employment had enrolled to broaden their outlook. In the light of our findings that students who were instrumentally motivated were less successful than students who were integratively motivated, it could be inferred that teachers were poor performers because they were instrumentally (or functionally) motivated.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Although the limited sample size in this study warrants caution in generalizing, the results seem to point to some interesting insights with regard to learning advanced language skills at the Open University. The findings indicate that in the particular learning situation investigated, orientation to learning and previous exposure to learning affect student performance.

The performance patterns revealed that some types of previous exposure to language learning affects student performance in the acquisition of advanced language skills, the effect however, is mostly seen at the initial stages with little or no observable difference towards the end of the programme. The data therefore seems to justify the admittance of students through an Entry Test, for by the end of the programme, students, despite diverse prior learning experiences, seem to have achieved a similar competence in advanced writing skills and achieved the required level in advanced reading skills.

The study also seems to suggest that, in general, students who are personally oriented are better overall performers than students who are vocationally oriented.

It has been said that a vocational orientation leads students to do the minimum to pass in order to obtain a degree and that some students decide that grades are not particularly important since they require the qualification to achieve promotion at work (Morgan 1993). This could perhaps be a possible explanation for the relatively poor performance of teachers for it was seen that a large proportion of the teachers were vocationally motivated. Since most of them also possess the GAQ and TTC as well, the Advanced Certificate in English could be another qualification that would lead to career advancement and therefore, the grades that they obtain would not affect their overall functional goal. So we can understand how these students come to be doing little beyond the minimum requirement of the assessment system, given that their aim is to obtain a pass in the Advanced Certificate.

In contrast, to students with a personal orientation who want to prove their abilities to themselves, grades are important, because for them, it is an assessment of their own capabilities. In the present study, all of the subjects who were not in employment and many in professions other than teaching had enrolled for personal development. Given that the highest qualification possessed by subjects who were not employed was the A Level, it is possible

that they wanted to prove their abilities to themselves as well as to family and friends while subjects who were in employment other than teaching, although they had proven their abilities in other fields, may have wanted to assess their capabilities in the language skills and therefore, that to these two groups, grades were important, hence the better performance in both courses.

The study seems to suggest that, in general, students who enrol in the Advanced Certificate in English with the purpose of broadening their outlook and acquiring new knowledge tend to be better performers than students who enrol with a functional purpose with the intention of obtaining a qualification. Thus, the findings of the present study implies that in the case of distance learners where 'steering and maintaining forces' are largely controlled by the learner, that orientation to learning, (together with the attendant attitudes, hard work etc.,) clearly impinges on performance.



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## Appendix 1

**Table 1 (a): Average marks obtained according to previous educational qualifications - Advanced Reading**

Qualification	Assignment		
	R1	R2	R3
Other	40.25	44.5	45.75
TTC	41.14286	31.33333	55.66667
GAQ	41.33333	29.33333	64
Diploma	40.5	40	43
Prof. English	38.45299	32.08484	44.83258
A' Level without literature	46.75	44.33333	51.5
A/L with literature	50	44.4	57.2
O/L with Literature	44.375	37.42857	59.42857

**Table 1(b): Average marks obtained according to previous educational qualifications - Advanced Writing**

Qualification	Assignment		
	W1	W2	W3
Other	50.5	49.25	48.25
TTC	45	44	47.6
GAQ	36.66667	41.33333	48
Diploma	53	45	43
Prof. English	44.66742	43.62443	44.50641
A' Level without literature	42.5	47.66667	45.83638
A/L with literature	52	50	48.4
O/L with Literature	54.85714	47.42857	45.71429

**Table 2: Average marks scored for the different TMA's according to orientation**

	Writing			Reading		
	W1	W2	W3	R1	R2	R3
Vocational	48	46	45.09	43.92	37	50.33
Personal development	47.33	50.27	46.86	43.93	45.87	52.67
Academic	43.67	48.33	46.67	37.67	38	45

**Table 3: Average marks obtained for individual assignments according to profession**

	Reading			Writing		
	R1	R2	R3	W1	W2	W3
Teacher	40.00	33.50	52.50	45.50	44.50	46.57
Profession other than teaching	42.50	44.80	51.20	44.60	48.00	46.44
Self-employed	37.00	36.00	28.00	56.00	43.00	44.00
Not employed	46.67	53.33	54.67	46.67	58.00	44.67
Not specified*	60.00	34.00	56.00	56.00	40.00	44.00

\* one subject

## Appendix 2

Reading assignment 1 tests students' ability to identify the main points in the development of the plot of a short story in relation to time sequence.

Reading assignment 2 tests students ability to read and understand a discursive essay and to identify the main ideas discussed (summarise) and assignment 3 tests the students' ability to pick out the main points, sub points and examples supporting each of theses points in a text written in the style of a report. (An extract from an UN report on *Global Responsibility and Human Rights for Women*)

Writing assignment 1 tests students' ability to write an essay using the problem-solution organizational pattern.

Writing assignment 2 is an essay writing task using the general - specific organization pattern on either *The usefulness of English*, *Education in Sri Lanka* or *Responsibilities of the Press*.

Writing assignment 3 is writing the introductory chapter for the final project report students have to submit for the final evaluation. Here they are required to underline the thesis statement, i.e. the statement that states their opinion on the subject/topic concerned and which guides the report.