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## Motives for Literacy;

an investigation of adult illiterate students' motives for becoming literate.

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C-essay

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**Abstract:**

The aim for this study was to investigate adult illiterate students' motives for becoming literate. The study was conducted in an adult education institution in Sweden where I interviewed four participants learning how to read and write in a second language. All the informants were illiterate when they started school in Sweden and I wanted to investigate if there were differences in second language acquisition dependent on age, gender, motivation or motive.

Individual qualitative interviews were used in the method, based on grounded theory. The result showed no motive differences and all informants had the same motive as a goal; to obtain a job. Motivation, however, varied depending on age, but no gender differences could be found. According to this study, high motivation and a positive attitude are the most important factors for succeeding in the literacy work.

**Key words:**

motives, motivation, illiterate, literate, Swedish as a second language, gender, age, SFI.

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# 1 Introduction

When people move to Sweden (or a similar country) as adults and they can not read or write in their native language they have to learn to become literate in a second language, and this can be a slow process. An adult student in a new country needs to learn skills to function as parent, caretaker and independent human being, rather than just being dependent on children or others to guide them. Becoming literate is more than just learning to read and write. Among other things, you need to be able to read signs, pictures, function practically and understand the culture. This survey gives an overview of what it means to be literate and reports on a study conducted among illiterate adult students learning Swedish in Sweden. It also investigates what varieties of skills illiterate students need to acquire in order to become functionally literate. All the students in this study, a mix of gender and ages, were illiterate from the beginning. As gender and age differences may impact motivation which in turn can affect language acquisition in a positive way, motivation connected with motives for becoming literate in a new language will also be studied.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

Theories concerning **motivation** explain why people act in a certain way and others do not. As motivation plays an important role in the decision to become literate, the focus in this study is on the students' inner motivation and **motives** for becoming literate, and the reasons the students at SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) give as most important for this.

Research Questions:

- How do students find the motivation to become literate through study for SFI?
- What are the motives dependent on gender and age?
- What is the connection between motivation-motive-result in studying SFI?

## **2 Theoretical Background**

This section firstly defines what it means to be literate. This is followed by a description of the literacy skills required for a person living in a community similar to Sweden or the United Kingdom. Next follows a section on Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). As students learning a new language have many different ways to motivate themselves for studies and have different backgrounds and experiences around school activities, examples will be given of different motivation processes. These will then be mapped to the informants in this study; adult informants who all were illiterate from the beginning from their Swedish studies in Sweden.

### **2.1 Literacy**

Some adult humans cannot read and other people cannot write. The reason for this may depend on learning difficulties or the lack of opportunities to study, due to the financial or political situation in a country. UNESCO (2001:11) makes a distinction between Literacy and Functional Literacy. Literacy, or being literate, means a person is able to read and write a simple text. Functional Literacy, on the other hand, means that as well as being able to read and write, a person is also engaged in practical situations that require the comprehension of written and visual texts in society, for example being able to read a bus time table, signs or a queue ticket. It is this Functional Literacy that is required from students attending Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) in the literacy program in Swedish schools today.

## 2.2 Literacy Practices

Learning how to read and write in a second language means learning the language that is used in the society that one has moved to, but which is not necessarily used inside the home with the family. The new language is consequently a dominant language. This learning process can be through informal interactions in mixed language settings or through formal study in a school, for example. To become literate, students need to know the language, master the structure of texts and be aware of the differences between written and oral language. Students are expected to read a schedule, read a bus list, pay the rent, surf on the internet and interpret pictures in the store. Limited knowledge of vocabulary and differences in culture make the process more difficult.

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009:4) claim that learning a new language means you acquire a number of resources and skills and that language is more than words and sentences. An investment in a target language is therefore an investment in one's own identity. Literacy according to the UK Excellence Gateway (2012) covers the ability to:

- 1) Speak, listen and respond
- 2) Write to communicate
- 3) Read and comprehend

These are the basic abilities needed for becoming literate. In the next section, other definitions of literacy are explained in order to give more complex views of the issue.

### 2.2.1 Other Literacy Practices

In addition to the traditional view of literacy, Franker (2004:680-4) argues that there are other literacy practices, for example:

*Cultural Literacy* - which includes implicit knowledge for the students to active participate in society in order to understand the hidden rules in a society.

*Critical Literacy* - this considers the implicit message in meaning, significance and ideological positions that we are talking about.

*Visual Literacy* - includes coded messages from pictures. It is more difficult to interpret pictures produced in an unknown social or cultural context.

*Pictorial Literacy* - includes reading messages in pictures and is not a skill automatically found in an adult student.

*Prose Literacy* - includes reading texts from everyday life.

*Document Literacy* - covers the ability to use diagram, maps and forms.

*Quantitative Literacy* - is the ability to make mathematical calculations from out of texts.

Each Literacy Practice fills specific needs for the students (Franker 2004). UNESCO (2001:11) also mentions BLC, Basic Learning Competence, which refers to a person's ability to use reading, writing and the four basic arithmetic processes (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) within school activities and in society. For an illiterate adult in a new society, it is, therefore, a complicated road to acquire all literacy skills

## **2.3 Course Participants**

In both Sweden and in the United Kingdom, the participants in the language courses SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) or ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) tend to consist of settled citizens that work long hours and, therefore, cannot attend class regularly, refugees (both asylum-seekers and settled refugees), migrant workers mostly from Europe, and finally partners and spouses. Even if many students are forced to study the Swedish language, the students' purpose of the studies may change over time. Asylum-seekers in Sweden are obliged to attend Swedish language training within a month from arrival in Sweden, and based on conversations with the refugee, the Employment Office will have a plan for how the refugee can find work or further education (Arbetsförmedlingen). Swedish language training (SFI) is voluntarily for migrant workers and partners of Swedish citizens, but if they wish to attend school the education is free of charge.

### **2.3.1 Policy Documents in Sweden**

When students start Swedish Education for Immigrants (SFI), they start at Entry 1, 2 or 3. Entry 1 is for illiterates, Entry 2 is for students with school background 4-10 years and Entry 3 is for academics. The National Agency for Education recommends 525 clock hours in school for Swedish Education for Immigrants (SFI) which is about a year of study with 15 hours per week. After every Entry level is completed, there is a National Test which covers reading, writing, speaking and listening. The tests are named SFI Test B, C and D. When the students graduate and pass the National Test D the students are free to continue with basic adult education if they wish to. This corresponds with compulsory school up to year 7-9. However, if students do not reach the required aim of the learning outcome within the time limit they have to leave school and are put into training under the care of the Employment Office.

The minimum requirements for many jobs in Sweden are to be able to read and write and also to speak Swedish. Earlier research from Håkansson argues it takes around four years for an illiterate to control Functional Literacy (2007:6). Thus, illiterate students beginning SFI have a tough journey ahead if they are to become functionally literate within the time limit of 525 hours.

Students at SFI (Skolverket 2009) learn how to develop a functional second language. They learn how to read and write, talk with a good pronunciation and to understand Swedish speech. The focus is on the students developing a communicative language skill. In comparison to the United Kingdom and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) SFI in Sweden is a small subject field. For example, the curriculum for SFI consists of six pages while it in the United Kingdom is more than 400 pages long (Excellence Gateway 2012). However, the curriculum in both countries is based on the same system with 3 levels.

### **2.3.2 Policy Documents in the United Kingdom**

In both the United Kingdom and Sweden, there are three entries for adult literacy education, Entry 1, 2 or 3. When students become complete readers and are able to operate the following three skills when they read, they have a chance to graduate from both SFI and ESOL:

- 1) *word focus* – looks at the individual words themselves, their structure, spelling and individual character
- 2) *sentence focus* – deals with grammar and sentence structure
- 3) *text focus* – addresses the meaning of the text, the ability to read critically and write in different styles and forms

These three skills are the aims for students when they graduate from SFI in Sweden or ESOL in the United Kingdom. Since my study concentrates on students from Entry 1, I here will give examples of learning skills at that level, from the English *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* (2012). The skills are also transferable onto skills in the Swedish language:

***Speaking: Speak to communicate*** – Articulate the sounds of English to be comprehensible to a native speaker and use stress and intonation to make speech comprehensible to a sympathetic listener. Make requests, ask for information, directions and location (*Excuse me, what's the time, please?*).

***Speaking: Engage in discussion*** – Take part in social interaction and express feelings and simple views. Indicate broad agreement or disagreement (*You're right.*).

***Listening: Listen and respond*** – Listen for the gist and respond in short conversations and simple discussions. Follow and respond to single-step instructions, directions and simple requests. Follow simple discussions on familiar topics.

***Reading: Vocabulary, word recognition and phonics*** – Recognise and understand a limited number of words, signs and symbols. Recognise words on a very simple form (name, address, telephone number). Identify the letters of the alphabet and use knowledge of basic sound-letter correspondence to help sound out unfamiliar words.

***Reading: Grammar and punctuation*** – Recognise simple sentence structures, use punctuation capitalisation to aid understanding.

***Reading: Reading comprehension*** – Follow a short narrative on a familiar topic or experience and obtain information about familiar topics.

**Writing: Spelling and handwriting** – Spell correctly some personal key words and familiar words. Form digits and the letters of the alphabet.

**Writing: Grammar and punctuation** – Construct a simple sentence, using basic word order and verb form.

**Writing: Writing composition** – Compose very simple text to communicate ideas or basic information and record information on a very simple form (name, address, and telephone number).

(Excellence Gateway 2012:2-20)

## **2.4 Motive and Motivation**

Since my study focuses on illiterate adult students' motives for becoming literate, in this section I introduce the terminology concerning motive and motivation. Longman (1995:929) defines *motive* as the reason for someone doing something, whereas *Motivation* is a word connected to motive but adds more eagerness and willingness to do something, without being forced or told to do it.

## **2.5 Motivation**

Motivation is one of many psychological factors within every human, which affects learning. Motivation can be inner or external. Inner motivation is based on the student's need for competence connected with feelings of interest and joy. External motivation can consist of punishment or rewards, compulsion or social norms. Motivation can promote second language acquisition and success in learning can create motivation. There can be a variety of combinations between inner and external motivation.

### 2.5.1 Inner Motivation

According to Maslow (1987:15-28) there are 7 inner motivators organized in a form of hierarchy: physiological need, safety, affiliation, appreciation, cognitive need, aesthetic need and self-realization, in the following order as shown in the figure below:

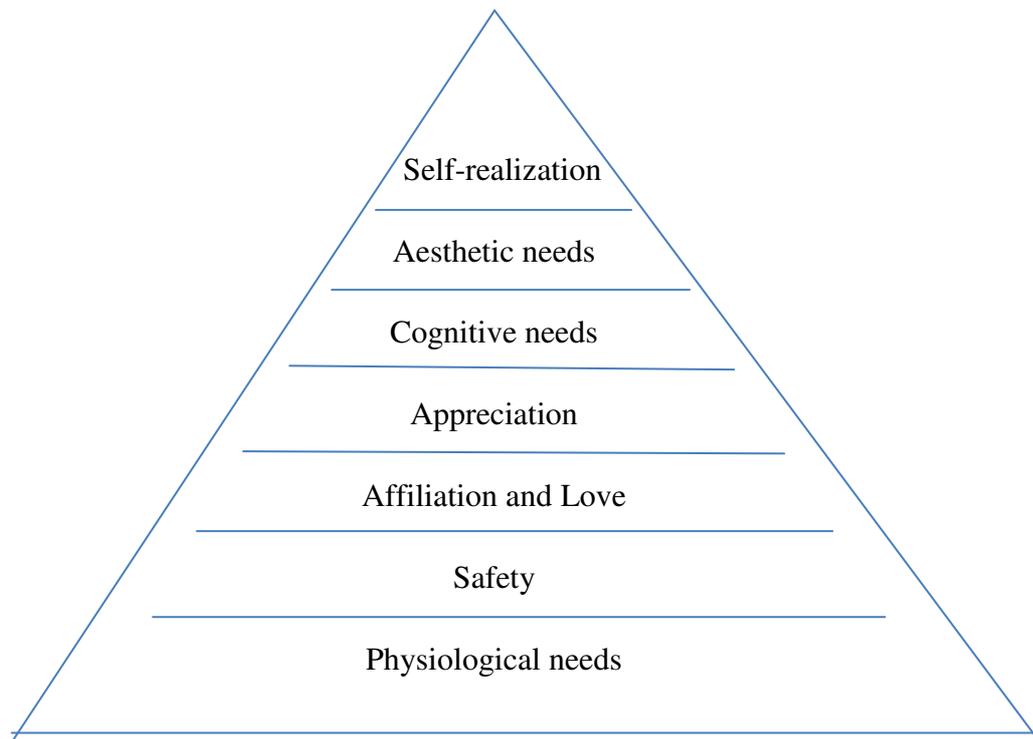


Figure 1. Maslow's Need Hierarchy

From the figure, we see that the most basic needs are at the bottom of the pyramid. *Physiological needs* are those that are required by the body in order to survive; food, for example. *Safety* relates to order, security and calm in life. The third step, *Affiliation and love* symbolize belonging to someone or something. *Appreciation* can be for yourself and appreciation from others. *Cognitive needs* include the need to know and understand things and *Aesthetic needs* go together with cognitive needs in order to keep a system of order. The highest need, *Self-realization*; relates to doing what you are meant to do in life and being true to yourself.

Maslow (1987) argues that there is a difference between the self and society. Motivation is inside humans and manifests itself as different needs. The needs order can be adjusted dependant on external factors. According to Maslow each need does not have to be fulfilled before you aim for next need. When a need is fulfilled it no longer works as a motivation factor and the need disappears as motive to learn something. Motive to learn something new comes from inside, a need to develop as a human.

### **2.5.2 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation**

Gardner (1985:11-54) argues that there are two different varieties of motivation; integrative and instrumental. With regards to language learning, integrative motivation is when the student wants to be a full part of society, and instrumental motivation is when the student uses the language for a specific purpose, for example, to acquire a job. Motivation involves four multidimensional aspects: goal, effort, desire and attitudes. Language attitudes revolve around education in second language acquisition and attitudes toward learning a language. The more motivated you are and the more positive your attitude is, the better you will learn. However, learning another language does not necessarily improve your attitude to the natives of that language. Attitudes only have indirect effects on language learning.

### **2.5.3 Motivation for Studies**

What adult learners want to learn in school is often driven by what they want to use their knowledge for (Alver & Lahaug 1999:18). Adult second language learners often wish to learn things that they can use *here and now* since they are short of time for studies. The new situation in a new country makes many participants vulnerable and unstable but at the same time that exposed situation might be their motivation.

According to Alver & Lahaug (1999) many students name social situations as motives for learning; shopping, transport and contact with the countries inhabitants, as well as health care. Mothers also want to be a part of their childrens' everyday life with activities and school. Dependent on goals, writing or speech is the most important thing to learn for the students.

Cross (1981:138-139) states that attitudes toward education are influenced by two things: the student's own experience and the attitudes from other people. Positive attitudes toward education are contagious: students catch interest from others around them. The closer the contagious person is to the potential learner, the greater the chance is of getting the bug for learning. Another way to look at it is that motivation is not seen as characteristic of the individual but a consequence of every action they have made and the treatment they require through external motivation. Deaux et al. argue that all humans have a common ground concerning communication (1993:118); people want to explain something, influence someone, express feelings and attitudes, make an assurance or accomplish something directly. Language affects mind and culture both consciously and unconsciously.

Wellros (1998:45) argues that being illiterate in a new country and not being able to understand symptoms or reasons for people's behaviour causes a lot of insecurity and can often result in chronic Fatigue Syndrome. This means, according to Rockhill (1993:167-8), that although the cognitive processes are constantly active, no logic is found since all senses are constantly connected and flooded by many impressions.

Refugee women often do the literary work around home and school; shopping, health, homework, etc. Men on the other hand have more contact with the target language through work, practice, social contacts, etc. Many times men also help relatives and friends with business and acquire vocabulary around an area and enough knowledge to later on start an own business within that branch.

## **2.6 External Motivation**

Whereas inner motivation comes from within, external motivation comes from the family, society or from expectations (Zusho & Pintrich 2003:44). Dependent on age, personality, capability and previous knowledge students provide formal or informal learning processes. In the end all of these elements lead to determine if the students have a linguistic outcome or not.

### **2.6.1 Culture Differences in Languages**

Emigrating from a country where the oral word is more common than the written word to a highly technological country like Sweden implies other perceptions about what is knowledge. The larger the difference is between Sweden and one's home country and culture, the more difficult it is to learn (Håkansson 2007:5). The home background may influence success in school as well as socio-economic status (OECD 2000). A human's mother tongue is strongly connected to one's identity and personality. Starting again with a new language might mean losing a part of yourself at the same time as you gain a new skill (ibid). Culture can be seen as a dynamic part of the motivational process and not divide individuals coming from a specific area. Different social contexts lead to different attitudes which appear in the learner as motivation.

### **2.6.2 Social Context**

The social context, according to Spolsky (1989:26-29), is a foundation for the students' attitudes and shows motivation. Spolsky also claims that social factors have more importance in second language learning than in first language learning because of the greater complexity of the social context (1989:131). Motivation together with social factors decides how quickly acquisition occurs. The home background may also influence success in school as well as socio-economic status (OECD 2000).

Boekarets (2003:17) argues that investigations also have shown differences in motivational practices between students originating from East or West. A firstborn Asian student may for example have to live up to the role in the family as a university student and accept the context of school and improve the results in order to avoid bringing shame upon their family.

### **2.6.3 Work as motivation**

Work in itself does not lead to further language acquisition according to Einarsson (2009:110-111) but to qualities for the individual's personal life. Contact with Swedish people outside school and work is on the other hand an important factor for successful language learning.

## 2.7 Gender

Gothlin (1999:7) argues that gender does not only concern sexual identity, but also how gender differences are constructed and symbolized and how they are expressed in relation to other humans or in texts, pictures, IT, laws etcetera. Gender differs between cultures, communities and over time and space. It is also a fundamental order of our lives. Sex refers to whether one is biologically male or female, while gender refers to what male or female stands for within different cultures and societies. Gender is a broader and more complex term than sex according to Litosseliti (2006:10-12). A historical background of culture and social conventions form men and women's opportunities in life. Gender research often investigates power relations within society.

Stromquist (1999:273-274) argues that school settings are important areas for gender constuctions as practices, relations, norms and identities. Martin (2004:15-16) notes that women are usually responsible for domestic activities whether it is in the Third World or in industrialized countries. Many women in literacy programs use the setting as a social space that helps them to forget personal problems, make new friends and to find emotional support Stromquist (1999:273-274).

## 2.8 Age

Cross (1981:154-163) argues that when people grow older they also slow down, but the actual age when this process starts varies. Aging need not be considered a major handicap until around 75 years of age. Aging concerns a wide spectrum of physical changes, reaction time, vision and hearing that might interfere with learning. The speed of learning involves reaction time for perception, transmission and response. The time required for learning new skills increases with age (ibid). Intelligence can be seen as a product of learning; it increases from infancy to old age and improves with learning and experience. With regards to immigration, older members are the ones who often preserve the homelands culture. Younger members of a family adjust faster to new situations and may take on the role of the parents and socialize them to the new culture. Martin (2004:15-16) argues that conflicts between younger and older members within a family are therefore not uncommon, especially between women.

Another view is a biological approach; intelligence grows up to the late teens and then remains stable and finally declines. The greatest problems with memory for older people occur with meaningless and complex learning and learning of new things that require reassessment of old learning (Cross 1981). If literacy skills are acquired late in life everyday practice is needed in order to develop literacy fluency. For example, in order to become a fluent reader, constant reading is often more important than attending literacy programs.

### **3 Survey Method and Material**

This chapter explains my survey method and material used.

#### **3.1 Informants**

According to the National Agency for Education (2011) 125 365 students participated at SFI in the year 2010. Around 14 percent of them were illiterate, a few more women than men.

From the recent statistics, in the adult school featured in this survey around 700 students participated in the SFI program in 2010; 300 men and 400 women. These numbers reflect the national statistic. Students starting SFI enter studies at Entry 1-3 and the informants in this study were all studying at Entry 1.

The informants in this study consisted of one younger woman, one older woman, one younger man and one older man. They are separated into these categories in order to investigate if gender or age made a difference when it came to the student's motives for becoming literate. The students were either chosen by me or directed to me by their teachers depending on the students' ability to communicate in Swedish.

Each student has been given a code name to be used in the essay. The younger woman is called Yasemin and the younger man Yahya. The older woman is called Eliza and the older man Ebrahim. Y-names are given the younger informants and E-names for the elderly.

### **3.2 Grounded Theory**

I decided to follow the principles of grounded theory as described by Denscombe (2010:106-124) and Dörnyei (2007:257-262) as a method for my research project. Grounded theory is an approach that emphasizes empirical fieldwork and what happens in the real world. Adopting the grounded theory approach, I undertook data collection in the field. Grounded theory is also characterized by the way it approaches the analysing of data. Rather than starting with a review of literature, the theories developed out of the data through a process of comparing ideas from existing data and improving the theories by checking them against new data collected for the specific purpose. I started out with an open mind and approached the project without knowing exactly what I would discover.

Dörnyei (2007) states two basic criteria should be met in order for a grounded theory: the data analysis follows a specific coding system and the analysis produces some theory as an outcome of the study. Coding consists of breaking up the data into chunks and identifying it more thoroughly, from the descriptive to the abstract (Dörnyei 2007:260). I avoided reading about previous theories when first trying to make sense of the data as I wanted to be able to discover new and relevant factors. The grounded theory offers tools for providing an in-depth analysis of phenomenon. Grounded theory underlines the importance of empirical fieldwork and the need to link explanations to practical situations in the real world; it has become associated with qualitative research.

My aim was to generate a number of categories related to the study and as work progressed certain initial themes occurred; study background, family situation and future prospects. As the study moved on I was able to concentrate on a smaller numbers of categories; the ones more central to my analysis; gender, age and motivation.

### **3.3 Interviews**

I interviewed four students at SFI using a semi-structured format. The interviews were conducted individually and each interview took around 30 minutes. I used a series of questions (see appendix 1) to frame the interviews. However, as the answers were open I needed to ask follow-up questions as time progressed. Many times I had to make the questions easier since the students did not have enough language to understand. I chose in-depth interviews to gain insight into the informants' opinion, emotions, feelings and experiences (Denscombe 2010). Semi-structured interviews made me prepared to be flexible in terms of ordering the questions and allowing the informants to speak more freely and develop ideas. One to one interviews made me sensitive to my informants.

The interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone with the student's consent that I could use the material for this study. I followed the Science Council's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Research (Vetenskapsrådet 2012) and the students' written consent is enclosed in Appendix 2. We were located in an office room in school and before the interview I chatted to the informants to make them feel comfortable since they did not know me. Although I do teach at the school which the informants attend, I do not teach SFI.

### **3.4 Survey Discussion**

At the beginning of the project, the SFI teachers wanted me to interview two older students who were very communicative and good (they were both almost 70 years) but had already left the school. As I felt these would not fit my criteria I chose two students (42 and 66 years old) who currently attend school instead. The two younger students (23 and 26 years old) were also recommended to me from their teachers. I got the feeling that the informants felt relaxed and could give me honest answers, but of course that feeling could be subjective.

Due to using a grounded theory approach, it was difficult to plan the outcome of the essay and also all aspects of the research in advance. My intention to use an open minded approach might well have been influenced by my own gender, social class and education (Denscombe 2010). It was not always so easy to set myself aside as a teacher and step into the scientist role.

When starting my essay, I did not anticipate analyzing the recorded data would be so time-consuming. The answers from my informants can only be related to the specific context and, therefore, may not be generalizable to a wider context.

### **3.5 Presentation of the results**

I transcribed relevant parts of the interviews (see transcription keys in Appendix 3). I describe the informants with the help from quotes from the interview transcriptions. The results are divided into the areas connected to background; inner and external motivation; gender and age.

## 4 Results and Analysis

In this section, I present my informants and then describe the results connected to my research questions: motivation for studies, motives connected to gender and age, and the connection between motivation-motive-result at SFI.

None of my informants came to Sweden out of a free choice since they all are asylum-seekers. Neither did they come to school voluntarily, at least not in the beginning since Swedish is a small language in a small country and some of the informants did not know if they were able to stay in Sweden for good. Alver & Lahaug (1999) write that what students want to learn in school is dependent upon what they want to use their knowledges for. Students wish to learn things that they can use *here and now* since they have little time for study and whether they choose to focus on reading or speaking depends on their goals.

### 4.1 Informants

In the table below is a summary of the four informants.

Table 1. Informant Summary

Codename	Yasemin	Eliza	Yahya	Ebrahim
Homecountry	Somalia	Tibet	Syria	Somalia
Mothertongue	Somali	Tibetan	Kurmanji	Somali
Age	26	42	23	66
Gender	woman	woman	man	man
Time in Sweden (months)	18	32	36	15

#### 4.1.1 Yasemin

Yasemin, aged 26, comes from Somalia. She has been in Sweden for one and a half years. In Somalia: Yasemin had a long way to go to school and her family was poor and did not have enough money to buy books, pencils and school uniforms. Her older brother was the only one of the twelve children who went to school. Yasemin helped her family at home instead, taking care of her 10 younger sisters and brothers. At the same time she was married and took care of her own house but had no children of her own. After war started in Somalia, her family fled to Kenya so she also speaks Swahili. She now lives in Sweden together with her parents. Her husband is still in a refugee camp in Kenya waiting for a positive answer from the Swedish government for him to join Yasemin in Sweden.

Yasemin likes to do her homework and she really enjoys school. She has a positive attitude and says if one week is bad the next becomes better. She comes to school every day and enjoys meeting other people there.

jag kommer varje dag (.) +allt+ jag behöver komma till skola (.)  
 viktigt att läsa och varje dag träffa andra personen (.)  
 jag tyckte att jobba mycke:  
 -du tycker om att jobba hårt?  
 -mmm

At home she does her homework and watches TV about the situation in Africa. She lives with her parents and some other siblings, none of whom can read or write. As we earlier learnt from OECD (*Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow – Further Results from PISA, UNESCO 2000*) the home background together with the socio-economic status may influence success in school, without a focus on education the prospect for further study for Yasemin is not so promising.

On the other hand, Yasemin is very motivated because she misses her husband and sometimes writes about her feelings for him in her diary. In the community here in Sweden, Yasemin uses her literacy skills for meetings at the municipality, looking at bus timetables, going to the doctor, and sometimes she borrows a book at the library.

.man gå till dokto:r (.) eller .socia:l (.) kommu:n (.) också jobb (.)  
 .man måste lä:sa (.) .vill jobba städa:

She is on her way to becoming literate and can both read and write a simple text. She wants to learn Swedish so she can start a new life together with her husband. He cannot come to Sweden unless she gets an income and can support herself, so her instrumental motivation is high. Gardner (1985) mentions instrumental motivation when a student uses the language for the purpose to attain a job, which is the case of Yasemin.

Of all the different literacy practices explained earlier, Yasemin uses mainly functional literacy for the *here and now*. Alver and Lahaug (1999) also state that adult learners have little time for studies and many students want to learn language to function in social situations such as in a shop, transport and contact with the health care; reasons that Yasemin also mentioned in the interview.

Unfortunately Yasemin will soon be forced to leave school due to having completed too many hours of her 525 hours limit.

### 4.1.2 Eliza

Eliza, aged 42, comes from Tibet. She has lived in Sweden for two years and eight months, and lives here alone. Eliza raised yaks in Tibet and produced milk and cheese from them. She lived alone with two children but when the children were eight and ten years old she sent them to a Tibetan monastery in India so her children would be safe from the threat from China. She then continued to live in Tibet with her mother and sister as her father had left home earlier for a Tibetan monastery as well. The family's yak farm was far away in the mountains. It took three days to walk to the store in a village nearby. Society in Tibet is built on a face to face oral tradition. Citizens in Tibet do not have personal numbers or passport so no papers are required anywhere and people can manage without having a literacy skill. Thus in Tibet Eliza never saw a letter or needed to read anything. Eliza said that China has also decided that no Tibetan child is allowed to go to school. Håkansson (2007) states that emigrating from a country where the oral word is more common than the written word to a highly technological country like Sweden implies other perceptions about what to learn. At the beginning of her stay in Sweden, Eliza was sad and experienced a lot of troubles particularly when she bought food. When buying dairy products, she often came home with milk when she needed yoghurt.

annan problem (.) ja går till affär vill ha yoghurt (.) köpa (.)  
 komma hem (.) öppna (.) mjölk komma (.) (.) kommer lessen  
 tänker mycket (.) lessen (.) kompis hjälpa (.) den heter den heter  
 +ja+ behöver (.) ja förstå inte bild (.) mycke problem

She could not make a distinction between milk and yoghurt since both pictures on the packages were of a cow. When she first learned how to read she got help from the Immigration Service with her letters. She is now very happy to get post addressed to her and feels privileged.

dörren ha namn (.) mycke papper (.)  
 +åhh:+ Mycke bra? Nu ja förstå (.) ahh mycke glad

She uses her literacy skills to read the bus timetable and in the grocery store. In the afternoon, she helps out in the Red Cross second hand store. She comes from a society where literacy skills are not required and she has a lot difficulty with visual literacy when coding messages from pictures (Franker 2004). Eliza will soon be forced to leave school due to having completed too many hours and made too little progress. As Cross (1981) argues the time required for learning new skills increases with age. The greatest problem with memory is that learning new things requires reassessment of old learning. Eliza has no old learning at all to lean upon and her loneliness (Martin 2004) makes it difficult for her to develop literacy fluency since literacy skills acquired late in life need everyday practice to develop.

In school, Eliza is very social but at home she is very lonely. From Stromquist (1999) we learn that many women in literacy programs use the setting as a social space that helps them to forget personal problems. In the beginning of her stay in Sweden, Eliza could not sleep because she enjoyed the electricity in her apartment so much. She did not want to turn the light off because she enjoyed the “sun” inside. It made her worries disappear;

komma ljus (.) åhh mycket bra:  
 tänka på barn (.) inte veta något  
 .åhh (.) ljus komma som solen på natten  
 åhh (.) mycket lycklig ändå

As Alver and Lahaug (1999) argue the new situation in a new country makes many participants vulnerable and unstable, but at the same time that exposed situation might be their motivation. Also Wellros (1998) and Rockhill (1993) state that not being able to understand reasons for people’s behaviour causes a large amount of insecurity and often leads to chronic Fatigue Syndrome since the cognitive processes are constantly working despite no logic being found.

### 4.1.3 Yahya

Yahya, aged 23, comes from Syria and has been in Sweden for three years. Yahya's family grew vegetables in Syria and sold the products to other villages. They are Kurdish and Kurdish people have no rights to go to school in Syria so he was very sad because he had to stay at home. If his family received a letter they got help from their neighbours with reading it. He has now been in Sweden for three years and although he was initially afraid of starting school, he has now got the taste for it and does not want to stop. He has been in school for one and a half years now. In the afternoon he attends a training program in a supermarket store in order to practice the language. As Rockhill (1993) states many men have more contact with the target language through work or practice and consequently learn the vocabulary around an area or branch. Einarsson (2009) argues for the importance of contact with Swedish people outside school and work as an important factor for successful language learning.

Yahya reads commercials and newspapers; for example, when he is at the dentist. He keeps a diary at home and he writes personal letters for job applications. He believes that without language he has no future in Sweden since Sweden is a society built on information gathering.

om man vill (.)  
om man vill hundra procent (.)  
då man kan:  
man måste kämpa vilken nivå kan man bli bättre

Yahya is the only one of my informants that reads Swedish newspapers on a daily basis and absorbs prose literature. He has a positive attitude that helps him in his literacy work.

jobb e inte allt (.) ja vill lära mer och jobba (.)  
ja vill nu lära mej(.) lära mej

He wants to educate himself as well as get a job; he does not know which he wants most of them. Education is for himself and his inner motivation but at the same time work symbolizes independence and gives him the standing in society he did not have in Syria. Martin (2004) states that younger members of a family adjust faster to new situations and can take on the role of the parents and socialize them to the new culture and here Yahya is the one bringing the family's honour forwards.

Gardner (1985) claims that the more a student is motivated and the better the attitude is, the better a student will learn. Yahya has a will and an inner force that propels him to use all the other literacy practices explained earlier in Franker (2000). Yahya participates actively in society and, therefore, is obtaining cultural literacy. He uses critical literacy since he is always asking questions to find out more about a matter. He uses prose literacy and document literacy in his everyday life when reading newspapers and watching news on a daily basis. He also uses quantitative literacy together with visual and pictorial literacy when he is working at the supermarket.

Håkansson (2007) argues that it takes four years for an illiterate to control functional literacy but here we find Yahya being the exception from that rule. Gardner (1985) claims we need four multidimensional aspects for motivation: goal, effort, desire and attitude. Yahya's goal is to learn the language and makes a huge effort to do so. He has a desire to be a part of Swedish society (in contrast to Syria) and he has a positive attitude towards the learning process as well as towards life itself. Yahya is soon ready to graduate from SFI and ready to continue with basic adult education after the holidays.

#### 4.1.4 Ebrahim

Ebrahim, aged 66, comes from Somalia. He has now been in Sweden for one year and three months. He lives here in Sweden alone and his wife and children are left behind in a refugee camp in Yemen. Instead of going to school in Somalia, Ebrahim played football and learned how to sew clothes. He became a tailor, first in a big company and later at home due to the war. He had the opportunity to go to school but did not take it; he preferred to play football with his friends instead. Girls from his generation, on the other hand were not allowed to go to school in Somalia. As a tailor he could read the numbers on a measuring tape when he measured customers but he got the customers to write down their names themselves. By doing so no one would know that he was illiterate and he was ashamed of letting other people see his ignorance. He wants to learn Swedish so he can manage to buy things by himself and find his way around in the city where he lives.

go hemma (.) alone (.) vill förstå people:  
go köping in supermarket (.) köping kläd

His friends help him with the Swedish language but he also understands and can talk a little bit of English. School is a way for Ebrahim to meet friends and leave home for a couple of hours.

inte kul school (.) inte kul <hemma> (.)  
äter mat (.) soffan äter mat (.) soffan  
>prata kompis<

He does not want to be home alone all the time. Therefore, school is a better alternative, even though he does not find that option particularly adequate but it allows him to keep his thoughts on something else for a short period of time.

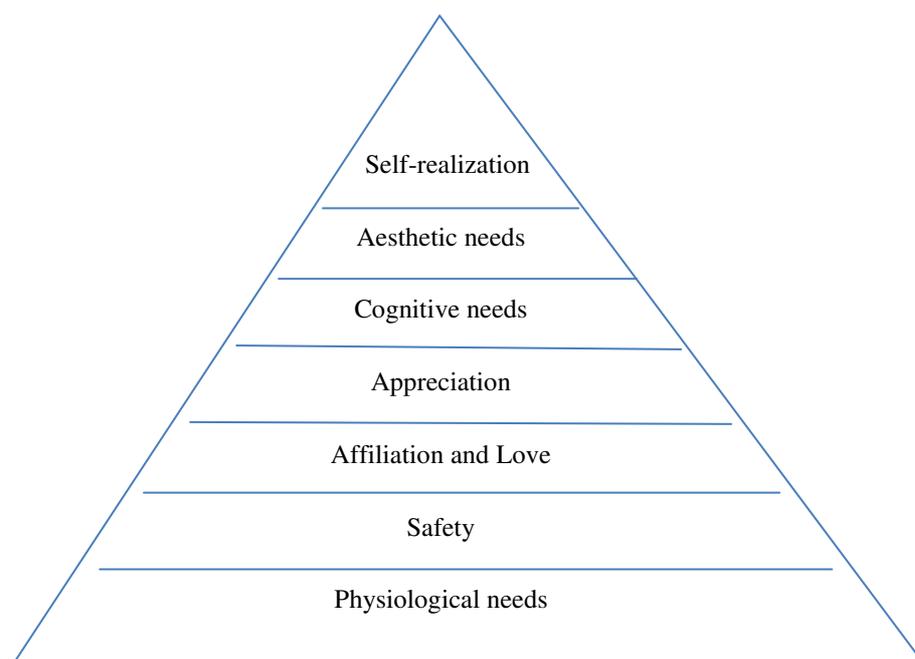
slow slow in school (.) <not kul>  
kompis kul (.) hello how are you?  
Hello hello \*hello\*

Motivation can promote second language acquisition and success in learning can create motivation. Ebrahim wants to work in Sweden as a tailor if he finds an opportunity for it. His motivation to go to school is not a priority and he does it mainly to occupy his head with other thoughts than his concern for his family in Africa. His chances of finding a job here in Sweden as an illiterate 66 year old man are seen as unlikely. According to Cross (1981) attitudes toward education are influenced by two things; the student's own experience and the attitudes from other people.

Cross (1981) also states that the speed of learning involves reaction time for perception, transmission and responds. The time required for learning new skills also increases with age since when people grow older they also slow down.

## 4.2 Inner Motivation

Having described and giving an overview of the informants, I now analyze the results in greater depth. From Maslow's Need Hierarchy (1987) we find the basic physiological need as most essential.



All the informants are now secure and safe, but not all of their families. Many of them have family members left in their home countries and even though the informants themselves feel safe they might experience concern and guilt for the ones left behind, hence the need of love is not fulfilled. At the same time that longing to meet the family again might serve as motivation to become literate. Without being able to read and write, many of the informants stand no chance of getting a job. Without a job they have no income and cannot support their loved ones. Without being economically independent, they are not allowed to bring their family members to come and live here in Sweden. The prospect of having a job works both as inner motivation from Maslow (1987) to fulfill the informant's inner need, as well as external motivation as shown in Zusho and Pintrich (2003) generated by rules set by Swedish society.

Inner motivation ought to be better for the student since it gives increased creativity and the student feels better and learns more. Integrative motivation (Gardner 1985) is when a student wants to be a part of society, and instrumental motivation is when a student learns the language for a purpose; for example, for a job. Yahya attends a training program in the afternoon in a supermarket. The training program is arranged through school and is voluntary in order to encourage the learners to socialize and practice language. He is the only participant from my interview group who attends this program. Since he did not have the chance to go to school in his home country, he now takes that chance. In the beginning, he was afraid but now he is intensely curious. His teachers says that Yahya is an extremely quick learner and he told me that if he does not understand something, for example when he is out training at the supermarket, he asks *two* times what things mean, what they are used for, how they are pronounced etc. He wants to acquire knowledge about society as well as language. Language for him is the key to the Swedish society. The other three informants have not got that inner positive motivational influence that Yahya possesses.

Cross (1981) writes that attitudes toward education are influenced by two things; the student's own experience and the attitudes from other people. Positive attitudes toward education are contagious: students catch interest from others around them. The closer the contagious person is to the potential learner the greater the chance is of getting the bug for learning. In this study the bug is "Yahya" and everyone else ought to be near him.

My informants all show great appreciation for Sweden and the school for having given them the chance to become literate. The reasons why they never have gone to school themselves are political or because of poverty. Eliza and Yahya come from countries oppressed by other countries. The oppressive states prevented them from attending school and instead they helped their parents who were farmers.

### **4.3 External Motivation**

Learning can be informal or formal with teachers playing a big part in the formal learning. Regardless of how we learn, we need understanding and motivation to increase our results and lifelong learning is something we often hear of. It is a learning that never ends.

The feeling of a constant threatening cognitive chaos caused by a lack of fixed reference points is called culture shock (Rockhill 1993). Everyone who moves away from the familiar might experience this feeling more or less strongly. Moving to a new country can also mean people become deaf and dumb by not being able to understand or make themselves understood (Wellros 1998).

All four of my informants now enjoy school, but in the beginning when they started they experienced chaos. The social context (Spolsky 1989) is seen as a foundation for the informant's attitudes which are manifest as motivation. Spolsky also argues that dependent on age, personality, capability and previous knowledge students provide formal or informal learning which leads to a linguistic outcome, or not. All four informants come from illiterate families. No one of the four informant's parents was able to read and write. The opportunity the informants now experience as adults to get the chance to acquire literacy skills is seen as a second chance.

In the literature provided by the Swedish Employment Services we can read that as an asylum-seeker you need to learn Swedish and support yourself as soon as possible ([www.arbetsförmedlingen.se](http://www.arbetsförmedlingen.se)). You can obtain this information in many different languages. During the asylum period, the Swedish Migration Board will work with you to map your professional and academic background. One of my informants, Eliza from Tibet; says:

nu jag glad (.) jag kan prata (.) jag kan läsa (.)  
 jag kan skriv (.) jag kan nummer (.)  
 om jag förstå bra kanske komma jobb (.)  
 ja vill ha jobba (.) jag vill ha jobba stark (.)  
 jag vill inte sitta (.) tjäna pengar också(.)  
 måste lära mig svenska jag vill ha: i sverige

Many politicians claim that the best way to learn Swedish is through work but it might actually be the other way around. The language level students have achieved in school may drop when students get into work where they do not have to use their language. Many immigrants are offered jobs where the communication level is low. Therefore, the workplace can be an obstacle for further language development. During the coffee break many workers need to relax and do not talk about subjects that might cause language complications and, therefore, the language is kept at a basic level. Work in itself does not lead to further language

acquisition according to Einarsson (2009) but to qualities for the individual's personal life. Contact with Swedish people outside school and work is, on the other hand, an important factor for successful language learning.

All four informants want to work here in Sweden. Ebrahim, the 66 year old tailor, wants to work. Eliza who raised yaks wants to work hard with her body; she wants to feel tired in her muscles, not her brain. Yasemin wants to become a cleaner and Yahya wants to study and work. If the attitude towards working comes from freedom and the desire to be independent or from the Employment Office's eager message is difficult to say. Probably every human being wants to have their own income rather than depend on the social services.

#### **4.4 Gender**

School settings are important settings for gender constructions (Stromquist 1999) as practices, relations, norms and identities. Many women in literacy programs use the setting as a social space that helps them to forget personal problems, make new friends and to find emotional support. Both women I interviewed are quite lonely and school is their only occupation during the day. Both women also find school essential. They participate in the Swedish programme 3 hours a day, and that is almost the only contact they have with the Swedish language and the Swedish society. As seen in Rockhill (1993) women often do the literary work around home and school, shopping, health, homework, etc. while men have more contact with the target language. My opinion is that the two men have a social network while the two women are very lonely.

Integrative motivation is more important for the women, who both share a wish to be part of the Swedish society. Instrumental motivation is important for all four informants; they all want to get a job.

## 4.5 Age

Older people are the ones who often preserve the culture of the homeland (Martin 2004). Greatest problems with memory for older people occur with meaningless and complex learning and learning of new things that require reassessment of old learning (Cross 1981). My older informants (Eliza and Ebrahim) find it difficult to practice the Swedish language. They practice writing at night time, alone, and their minds are often on other personal issues so they find it difficult to concentrate.

Literacy skills acquired late in life need everyday practice to develop literacy fluency Stromquist (1999) argues. Constant reading to become fluent readers is more important than literacy programs. When you are 66 years old as Ebrahim and you want to work within your branch the motivation to study in school is very low. He attends school as a social arena for meeting friends.

Studies have indicated that attitudes involved in learning a second language become less positive the older the students are. However, a reason for this is not clarified according to Gardner (1985). Motive is the same for all four of my informants; to get a job. The age factor does not count as a major factor for motive difference. When it comes to motivation the attitude towards learning decline the older the informants get and my oldest informant, Ebrahim, settles for being able to buy things in the supermarket. He thinks a job is difficult to get since he is 66 years old, but his dream of a job still lives on!

## **4.6 Method and Material Discussion**

I used grounded theory for my project, a theory emerged from the data and it had therefore more credibility. The theory was shaped by the facts and was well suited to my small-scale research. It also had a focus on human interaction and pragmatic philosophy grounded in reality and based on a solid foundation of evidence, it kept in touch with reality. It was, on the other hand, difficult to specify how much research was enough before analysis no longer contributed to anything new.

By focusing on motivation among the informants, there was a danger of ignoring the influence of social, economic factors, political factors and the historical background to events, since SFI and migration are complex situations with many different operators. Also students at SFI are not a homogenous group of people; each one carries a complex background. Even though some of the informants in this study are of the same gender and age, they are still very different from each other. Both of the women I interviewed are single here in Sweden and do not have children at home. I think the study might have had a slightly different outcome if the women had had their own families here in Sweden.

## 5 Conclusions

The motive the informants themselves give as most important for becoming literate is to get a job and to become self-sufficient. Becoming independent is a goal for every one of the informants in this study. The Employment Office has done a thorough marketing job in encouraging the students to want to work in Sweden. Work, rather than school, is seen as a social driver for meeting new friends and starting to become acquainted with Swedish people. No gender or age differences occur between my informants; they all want to find a job as a long-term motive for studying how to read and write. An intermediate goal is to manage independently in society.

Students have many different ways of motivating themselves for studies. They have different backgrounds and experiences around school activities. High motivation and a positive attitude are the most important factors of succeeding in the literacy work according to my study and motivation promotes second language acquisition.

My informants all have the same motive for becoming literate, but the motivation varies dependent on age. Issues of gender were, however, not to be found among the informants. Discussions about lifelong learning are here synonymous with the students' own motivation, positive attitude and ability to seek information in order to become self-sufficient in Sweden.

## **Future Research**

There are a variety of different ways to proceed with research concerning this area. A larger amount of informants could be interviewed in order to ensure a greater reliability. A comparison could be made between the three levels at Swedish for Immigrants in order to analyze the motivation-motive angle. Another interesting view would be to do a follow up on the students leaving SFI for a job and look if the language skills they learnt in school were compatible with the skills required in real life.

## **Thanks**

Finally I would like to thank my supervisor Veronica Brock at Halmstad University for patience and for having guided me on to the right path.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Interview Questions

- 1) Where do you come from?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your mother tongue?
- 4) What other language can you eventually talk?
- 5) How long have you been in Sweden?
- 6) What was your primary occupation in your home country? (in work, at home, in school)
- 7) What are the reasons for you not having had the possibility to read and write in your home country?
- 8) How did you have help to read and write in your home country?
- 9) What do you want to use your Swedish for?
- 10) How were your thoughts concerning reading and writing when you first started SFI?
- 11) Have your thoughts changed regarding reading and writing now?
- 12) When do people use reading and writing in Swedish in Sweden today?
- 13) Mention situations when it is comfortable not being able to read and write in Swedish?
- 14) In what situations in life do you use reading and writing in your everyday life?
- 15) What makes you motivated to practice Swedish?

## **Appendix 2 Written Consent**

### **Written Consent**

My name is Agneta Jonasson and I make these interviews for my C-level essay on Högskolan Halmstad. I make the interviews in order to look at the reasons students learn how to read and write. With this paper you consent me to record the interview and use it in my essay. I will only use the material for my essay.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Codename: \_\_\_\_\_

*/2 2012*

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Student's signature

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Agneta Jonasson

### Appendix 3 Transcription Keys

(.)	short pause
Yes:	an extended sound
<u>Yes</u>	additional emphasis
[the	overlapping speech
[[the	two statements simultaneously
+yes+	a stronger voice
ǃyesǃ	a weaker voice than normal
*yes*	a laughter in the voice
.hjes	a loud inhalation
=yes	no pause before the latter spaker
De-	interrupted word
The?	Rising tone
>yes that's right<	a word in a faster pace
<yes I know>	words in a slower pace than normal

(Norrby & Håkansson 2007:243).