



Conceptualizing back-row sitters' perceptions: A case study of selected students in three schools in Baidoa, South-West State, Somalia (SWSS)

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Abstract

Focusing on students who consistently sit at the same place throughout the academic year, we discovered that choices vary from one reason to another and even from one situation to the other, hence disagreeing with the dominant perception that back-row sitters have undesirable intentions for selecting their location inside the classroom. Interviews were conducted with thirteen students from four classes in three co-educational schools in Baidoa city, South-West State of Somalia. The aim was to explore the pupils' reasons for their selection of the back-row desks. The findings reveal that while certain students might have ill intentions for keeping their distance from the teacher, others had not even chosen their back desks but were assigned by teachers. The study concludes that students may take their desks at the back of the classroom dependent on context, environment, and perhaps due to a variety of reasons including visibility/lighting problems, timidity, avoidance of physical confrontation with rival classmates as well as considerateness to shorter peers in the class.

Keywords: Baidoa, case study, education, in-service teachers, research methods, teacher-researcher, South-West State of Somalia

Introduction

As teachers, we strive for the achievement of our students in all areas—be them accomplishments in moving from one grade level to the other or attainment of better competency levels. We endeavor to create a classroom atmosphere that contributes to igniting the student's deeper enthusiasm for learning in order to enhance optimization of the student's learning ability. Therefore, our interaction with students facilitates the development of skills for problem solving, the core factor underpinned to the goals laid out in the national education philosophy and policy which are mediated through the curriculum designed to implement those strategies. This wide responsibility makes the teacher not merely a teacher but indeed a learner and a researcher with skills to observe his/her environment—hence the concept of 'teachers as learners' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Kaplan 1998; Maguire *et al.* 2017) [10, 28, 32] and 'teachers as researchers' (Christenson *et al.* 2002; Kincheloe 2003; MacLean & Mohr 1999; Myers 1985; Fareh & Saeed 2011) [8, 29, 31, 34, 20]. It is with regard to these concepts that this study investigates students' perceptions.

It is true that many students prefer to sit in the front-rows of the classroom while others take a desk in the far back. In order to understand the students' perceptions and reasons for their choices, some in-service teachers were guided to conduct a case study on back-row students in the classes they teach, for gain of practical experience "through research engagement" (Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016; Dikilitaş, 2015; both cited in Sonmez & Akyel 2017, p. 737) [45, 12, 38]. As teachers, and even as researchers, we may have our subjective biases and perceptions about lovers of backside chairs and desks inside the class. We may even draw our

assumption from misperceptions that associate them with disruptiveness and characterize them as disengaged learners—as simple as that.

However, when keenly observed and studied, students give different reasons that confirm their perceptions, by expressing facts that we probably might not have thought of. Therefore, for the purpose of clarification, we decided to investigate the matter and provide the students with "means for expressing [their] voices," in Bakhtinian view, (Bakhtin 1999, p. 296) [4]. For, such a view creates a space for dialogue that "awakens new and independent words," to borrow again from Bakhtin (1991, pp. 345-346) [3]. It embraces tolerance and self-assertion, a pedagogic doctrine Ahmed (1995, p. 151) [1] pertinently emphasizes on when he says: "We must teach our people by example. We must by the same token learn from them." Ahmed encourages the creation of a dialogic space that not only cherishes reflection but one that also enshrines substance. More significantly, Ahmed's pronouncement of a dialogic space informs a balanced intellectual discourse which, according to Bakhtin (1991, pp. 345-346), would "... reveal ever new ways to mean."

Therefore, in the quest for "new ways" and the intellectual spirit of educating "by example", we need to consider the fact that not all schools set the classroom layout in the same manner. Although there are institutions where teachers take the responsibility of fixing the seating arrangement in a classroom, students of the three schools in the current study self-select their desks; and where a student chooses the first day or first few days of school will remain his/her permanent geographical location for the remaining months of the academic year. It is worthwhile noting that the

schools in Somalia, particularly in South-West State, and more specifically the schools discussed here, follow the traditional seating arrangement. Rows of desks and their forms are lined up one after the other, with all students facing towards the teacher in front of the class and the blackboard behind him/her.

The traditional setting, which visualizes the pedagogical approach in practice in the country, informs the centrality of a teacher inadequately trained but yet functioning as one (Eno, 2018; Eno, 2017; Eno *et al.* 2019; Eno *et al.* 2014) ^[15, 14, 17, 19]. To a great deal, it explicates the teacher-centeredness of the method of instruction. The rudimentary, obsolete order of the arrangement makes us imagine which strategy or combined strategies a teacher would adopt among Traynor's five strategies: 1. Coercive; 2. Laissez-faire; 3. Task oriented; 4. Authoritative; and 5. Intrinsic (Traynor, 2002) ^[39]—each one existing with its advantages and disadvantages.

Background

In a Research Methodology course to a senior undergraduate class of in-service teachers at the University of Southern Somalia, Baidoa, SWSS, most of the participants were grappling with the theoretical approach to scientific inquiry in general and, in particular, with that of its practical conduct by a teacher as a practitioner in a real world situation. The matter was discussed for some time before coming up with an idea that students (in-service teachers) test their approach to inquiry in their own setting i.e. at the schools in which they teach. For the sake of putting theory into practice, a micro investigation in the area of education was adopted. The aim was to experience how in-service teachers, as professional practitioners in the field of education, could “pose and address new problems and challenges that do not have existing answers,” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007) ^[11]—thereby involving them in research in their own classrooms or in the wider school environment. The in-service teachers selected to investigate the same theme, asking the same question in order to explore the reason behind pupils' sitting at the back-row desks in the classroom.

Literature Review

An Overview of Back-row Sitting

Several studies reveal how educational experts and research scholars covered back-row sitting with a concern. They delved into students' selection of specific geographies in the classroom, providing different opinions. Despite the coverage, Cinar (2010, p. 201) ^[9] claims that “the studies on classroom seating location have not involved personality variables” that would add more significance to the scope of the subject. However, Meek *et al.* (2013, p. 376) suggest that “seating proximity to the instructor can encourage attentive behavior, classroom engagement, and discussion participation.” The attribute inferred here by Meek *et al.* symbolizes the behavior of motivated students who, for reasons of engagement and focus, would value proximity to the teacher.

According to Kaufman, (2005, p. 1), selecting where to sit in the classroom is influenced by “the interest level students have in the subject matter,” which again represents the general belief of many teachers and students. In further elaboration of the matter, Kaufman (Ibid.) draws a comparison by writing: “If students are interested in the

course, they tend to sit closer to the front of the room, and if they are not interested, they tend to sit towards the back.” Note here that, although students' tendency “to sit closer to the front of the room” and “to sit towards the back” are mentioned, the students' perceptions and expressive voices are absent from the discussion.

On the other hand, although Meek *et al.* attach good attributes to students sitting closer the teacher; they nevertheless mention that, “student performance is not significantly altered by seating location or seating type” (Meek *et al.* 2013, p. 375) ^[33]. It apparently means that wherever the student's location in the class, performance is not influenced entirely by sheer selection of a location, be it back-row desk or front-row seat. In their study, Totusek and Staton-Spicer (1982; cited in Minchen, 2007, pp.12-13) acknowledge that “Whether assigned or self-selected, students who sit front and center were generally more assertive, more imaginative and more self reliant.” (See Minchen BJ 2007. “The effect of classroom seating on students' performance in a high school setting science,” MSc thesis; The College at Brockport, SUNY)

Viewed from another perspective, a section of scholars associates low level motivation with learners who usually show preference of sitting in the back-rows of the classroom (Hillmann & Brooks, 1991; Dykman & Reis, 1979; and Walberg, 1969) ^[26, 13, 42]. As a result of this perceived low enthusiasm, back sitters are accused of having little or no interest in learning, as indicated in the scholars discussed in this section. Waller (1932) discusses in his volume entitled the *Sociology of Teaching* that, in addition to their low desire for learning, clients of back-rows are likely to be disobedient and naughty; and that they habitually disturb a lot—thus neither paying attention to the teacher nor following enthusiastically the learning activities in the classroom. While overall not disagreeing with the scholarly assumptions and their supporting evidence, we argue that a good teacher should understand, more or less, about the behavior of the constituents of his/her classroom community (Eno, 2019) ^[17]. It is with such awareness, caution, and professional ethic and effort that “great teachers” motivate their students to mature into independent learners able to solve problems in their engagements with society (Orlando, 2013) ^[35].

Available literature also indicates that, unlike back sitters, choosers of front seats study better than their counterparts holed up in the back-rows (Holliman & Anderson, 1986; Becker *et al.*, 1973) ^[27, 7]. Nevertheless, despite the lavish praise to learners at the front desks, Vander-Schee (2014, p. 201) declares, “no significant difference in cumulative grade point average (CGPA) based on seat selection,” although the front seat students scored “a significantly higher course grade” for the single course under investigation and not necessarily the overall performance reflected in the CGPA. Other researchers observed the effect of the environment of the classroom i.e. “differences between standard and upgraded classrooms” (Hill & Epps, 2010, p. 65) on students' satisfaction, but not specifically on the impact of the geographical location on students' performance (See Hill MC and Epps KK 2010, The impact of physical classroom environment on student satisfaction and student evaluation of teaching in the university environment. Academy of Educational Leadership Journal 14.4 (2010): 65-79).

Yet, Fernandes, Huang and Rinaldo (2011) ^[21] believe that “the learning experience for students is different for those at the front than for those nearer the back of the room.” In contrast, Holliman and Anderson (1986) ^[27] and Becker *et al.* (1973) ^[7] concentrated not on the classroom environment in general but, in particular, the effect of the seating area, whether back-row or front-row, and its influence on the students’ learning. The seating arrangement, according to Sommer (1977) ^[37], suggests the kind of educational philosophy the teacher is using; while Cinar maintains, “though with exceptions, [that] students sitting at back rows usually have less interest and motivation towards lessons” (Cinar, 2010, p. 211) ^[9].

Locating the Absent Voice

Studies have so far investigated the role and importance of seating arrangement and classroom ecology. The scholarly coverage was mostly related to performance, interaction and communication inside the classroom (Dykman & Reis, 1979; Harmer, 2007; Hillmann & Brooks, 1991) ^[13, 25, 26]. However, it seems that not much substantively exhaustive inquiry has been engaged that investigates the relationship between seating arrangement and learning style of a student since Weinstein’s (1979) work, while a huge corpus of the studies belong to disciplines other than the field of education. That means, most scholars are still grappling with the issue, particularly in the area of education, without providing a consistent and objectively conclusive report on the effect of a student’s sitting area inside the class and his or her academic performance in comparative longitudinal studies—not to mention his/her perceptions on the reasons leading to his/her choice of a back desk.

With the above discourse in mind, we would like to move the discussion to the next level which, logically speaking accommodates the fact that students may prefer to sit in the back-rows not always for disruption, disobedience, or lack of motivation; but indeed for a variety of other reasons. There are those who like there because they are shy; others sit there because they feel intimidated by the teacher’s questions; some are reluctant in actively engaging in the classroom activity; while others position themselves there with low self-esteem and feeling ashamed of their poor performance. Perhaps other students have more personal reasons not yet imagined or spoken of; although they would not discuss them openly until such a time when a concerned teacher approaches them to listen to their story and allows them to “express” themselves from their viewpoint (Ahmed 1995; Bakhtin 1991, 1999) ^{[1] [3] [4]}. In the next section we present the method of study.

Method of Study

The Case Study Method

This study heavily relies on the case study method using qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. The preference for the method is encouraged by the fact that it is an approach which is “regularly employed,” (Gerring 2007, p. 65) ^[23]. Observed from that point of view, the qualitative case study approach is suitable for gathering information that helps the researcher to explore and understand why a certain situation, behavior, or perception remains to be the way it is (Eno & Damrak 2014) ^[18]. And as Gerring (2007, p. 29) ^[23] explains, “What distinguishes the case study method from all other methods is its reliance on evidence drawn from a single case and its attempt, at the same time,

to illuminate features of a broader set of cases.” We also invoke Hancock and Algozzine who submit, “In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants’ and not the researcher’s perspective,” (Hancock & Algozzine 2006, p. 8) ^[24]. As Hancock & Algozzine illuminate, employing this strategy permits the investigator to explore “the *emic*, or insider’s, perspective, as opposed to the *etic*, or outsider’s, perspective” (Ibid.).

Employing the qualitative research paradigm, the study seeks to unravel the perceptions of students regarding back-row sitting. To know perceptions, emotions and feelings of human beings, qualitative method of research is more useful than quantitative method in that the study does not seek to establish its results on the basis of statistical enumeration of variables under investigation. Instead, it endeavors to establish an understanding of a phenomenon in its real setting. As Aspers and Corte (2019, p. 142) ^[2] citing Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 2) explain:

...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.

In addition to its principally qualitative nature, as teachers and professional practitioners in the field of education, we find it ideal for our current purpose to investigate occurrences in our own work environment so that we understand the behaviors, perceptions, and emotions of the students we daily interact and deal with in our real world situation inside the classroom. To a large degree, available literature on methodology suggests that the case study method and qualitative approach represent, “The hallmark of case reporting,” as illuminated by Gerring (p. 40) citing Vandembroucke (2001, p. 331) ^[40]. What is laudable about these methods and their tools is how they inform and enlighten the researcher “to recognize the unexpected,” (Ibid.). Similarly, the study conforms to earlier scholarly suggestions by Becker (1970, p. 64) ^[5] that:

To understand an individual’s behavior, we must know how he perceives the situation, the obstacles he believed he had to face, the alternatives he saw opening up to him. We cannot understand the effects of the range of possibilities, delinquent subcultures, social norms and other explanations of behavior which are commonly invoked, unless we consider them from the actor’s point of view.”

Data Collection and Sampling

Considering the factors noted above, we selected to interview a small sample size—eleven boys and two girls, purposively selected from a target population of students who entirely constitute learners who regularly position themselves at the back desks inside the class. Although our

initial target was to interview fourteen students, we managed to talk to the thirteen discussed here, while the other one was not comfortable discussing her perception even with the female teachers—despite the long-built rapport and sameness in gender. The student's attitude reminds us of Abdi Kusow's "insider/outsider" dilemma of Somalis declining to participate in his interview because, although he was a Somali and therefore an insider, being a researcher in North America collecting "politically or culturally sensitive issues" about Somalia, his country of origin, made him an outsider (Kusow 2003, p. 594) ^[30].

In fact, a *rejected* Kusow, who was treated as "a suspicious insider" among the Somalis, warns us that, "the insider/outsider distinction is far more complicated" (Ibid.). As Kusow intellectually analyzes: "The process of access and rapport are confounded by multiple issues beyond a simple insider/outsider dichotomy," (Kusow 2003, p. 596) ^[30]. No wonder, therefore, that in the current study in Baidoa, SWSS, the student disregarded even issues of same gender and teacher-student relationship.

We chose the interview because of: A. Rapport: the interviewees were students with whom rapport had already been established; B. Small sample size: with 13 students only, the selected sample group was fairly small; C. Convenience: the interview could be conducted at the interviewees' convenience—either before the start of classes, during the break, or after classes.

Although the same single question was asked to every respondent among the selected 13 students, different approaches were used to record the data during the interview: some of the researchers conducted the interview in Somali Maay language, the indigenous medium dominantly spoken in Baidoa and most regions in southern Somalia, but wrote the answers simultaneously in English; others preferred to write it first in the Maay language and then translate it later into English for convenience. The question that was uniformly asked is: Why do you sit in the back-row of the classroom?

Participant Schools

The learning institutions in the study are three schools namely: (A) Hawl-Wadaag Primary and Secondary School in Hawl-Wadaag sub-district in Baidoa; (B) Arafat Primary and Secondary School in Salaameey sub-district, Baidoa, and (C) Ma'ruf Primary and Secondary School, Isha sub-district (2nd branch, adjacent to Shariff Gacameey Mosque), Baidoa. These are co-educational institutions where boys and girls are given equal opportunity to education. They were selected because some of the teachers-researchers co-authoring this report work in the institutions; thus, investigating a phenomenon in the context of their school environment.

Validity and Reliability

Data is validated by presenting respondents' quotes verbatim. That strategy is considered to be among the significant measures for validating qualitative case study data. Commenting on validation of the case study data, Eno & Dammak (2014, p. 4) ^[19] elucidate Peattie's (2001, p. 260) hypothesis that summarization of the detail in data may compromise the "mutually exclusive concepts" embedded in the study. Furthermore, data redaction may be useful in cases unlike this study where large amounts of data are involved in the qualitative analysis, although that may lead

to the risk of losing "the very value of the case study, the contextual and interpenetrating nature of forces," (Ibid, p. 260).

On validity and reliability of data, Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 238) ^[22] argues that the case data is best presented in its entirety so that "[r]eaders will have to discover their own path and truth inside the case." Flyvbjerg connotes that "Case stories written like this can neither be briefly recounted nor summarized in a few main results,"—meaning, "[t]he case story itself is the result" the readers need to interpret and digest, each according to his/her own observation (p. 238) of the facts and results presented. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names of the participating students are kept anonymous. However, for purpose of clarity and convenience of distinguishing each respondent's answer from the others', we assigned an alphabetical letter to each respondent. In what follows, we present the analysis and discussion.

Results

When asked why he prefers to sit at the back, Student A replied it is because he "enrolled late to the school and found all the front seats occupied." He added, "The back desk is not my favorite place but I had no other alternative." Student B chose the back row saying: "If I sit in the front I can't see the blackboard well because the reflection of the light from the front window and from the door affects my eyes." Student B also said that "the back row seats are cool because the class has a big window at the back and a lot of air enters from there." Student C, the first female of two in this study, mentioned a problem similar to that given by Student B. She complained about "visibility and reflection of sunlight." She said, "I don't see the blackboard well from the front desks." The second reason for her liking her place is that, as she puts it, "the back row is less noisy compared to the front part of the class." Student D did not select his back row location. One of the teachers advised him to move there after "some short students complained about me that they could not see the blackboard because I am taller than them and I have a long neck."

Student E purposely positioned himself in the back row because of his expertise in the art of cheating. According to him, "The teachers are mostly at the front of the class," during invigilation; so Student E takes advantage of the distance as well as the teachers' less frequent visits to the backside of the class. Comparatively, Student F replies, "I hate the teachers' questions." As he perceives, "Usually students who sit at the front are the ones targeted with the questions." His second motive is, understandably, "fondness of conversing with back-row friends." Student G is the second female in the study. She responds, "I feel intimidated by the teachers' questions." Yet, she admits, "But I would like to sit at the front and try to answer the questions whenever I can." She feels uneasy about her "peers laughing" at her and "increasing her anxiety"; thus discomfiting her emotionally. In the back row, Student G admits, "My emotions are controlled; I feel good here."

Student H reveals, "I did not choose to sit here; it is the front desks—which is the place I like. A student and I had a fight because he was really too bothersome. The teacher intervened to solve the problem by distancing us from each other." Student I gave his reason admitting, "I just like to sit near my friend. I feel comfortable here." However, Student J believes he is "lucky to get this back chair." Drawing a

comparative view of his front and back-row locations, he explains: “In my old position, students behind me were hitting me in the back head, and I didn’t know who was doing it.” It happened several times, “but they didn’t want to say who did it; so I decided to sit very far from them.” As for Student K, “It’s my own arrangement and my choice.” Similar to Student D, Student K responds, “I am tall and I can see the blackboard well from here, from the back of the class. If I sit in front of my shorter peers, it won’t be convenient for them. They will keep complaining about my height.”

Student L explained, “I like the back seat because in the front rows, when the windows are open, I can’t see well the writing on the blackboard. And if the windows are closed the class becomes dark.” To reiterate his point, Student L added, “But here from the back I can see everything on the blackboard.” Responding to the same question, Student M replied frankly by saying: “I love the back desk because I am a sleepy person. Back-row helps me to hide myself away from the teachers. When I am sitting far, they cannot see me like they can see students in the front rows. That is why I always like to sit in the back chair.”

Discussion

The responses of the thirteen students, as demonstrated above, vary significantly, providing us with almost two dozen reasons vis-à-vis their perceptions for sitting in the back-row of the class. They expressed their feelings and reasons: some direct, others expressed as indirectly caused by or associated to the reasons initially perceived. The variances of the students’ motives, regardless of their degree of seriousness, are evident from the responses. While some, such as Student C, relate their problems to visibility and the effects of light to their eye-sight, others raise completely divergent reasons. For example, Student A had no choice but to take a back seat because he joined the class late and at a time when all the front-row desks had already been occupied.

Vander-Schee (2011) writes that there is no strong relationship between a student’s performance and the place he/she chooses in the class, a reason why we cannot suggest that Student A’s choice relates to either poor performance or disruptive behavior. According to the findings, Student D’s height became an issue after shorter students accused him of obstructing their view. Unlike his peers who selected their places voluntarily, it was the teacher who assigned Student D to a back-row desk. The strategy behind the assignment was to give relief to the shorter classmates who complained of inconvenience in seeing the blackboard. Student D’s response seems to challenge Kaufman’s (2005, p. 1) assumption of relating a student’s “interest level [...] in a subject” to his/her selection of where to sit the classroom (See Kaufman R. 2005. [9 February], “Classroom seat location preference differs for SUNY-Binghamton students.” *The America’s Intelligence Wire*).

Other reasons for preferring the back-row included the effect of “noise” and “cool” temperature as compared to the front-rows where students were perhaps noisier and the class warmer. By describing the back-row as “cool”, the student seems to give us an indication that this part of the classroom is cooler probably due to having a bigger window or less direct heat from the sun. Student B complained about the reflection of light into the classroom that discomforts his visibility. His complaint reminds us of the comment by

Meek *et al.* that “Seating type may also influence the learning environment by providing more comfort, better visibility, or improved movement” (P. 376).

Unlike the four students above, the findings show that certain members of the classroom community accommodate themselves in back-rows for fear of the questions. Although this may suggest a behavior in avoidance of effective participation of classroom activities, it is also assumable that perhaps this is not always the case. For instance, the two students who mentioned questioning as an issue, have provided two distinct perspectives for their reasons: while Student F *hates* the questions, Student G would like to *try* whenever she thought she had the answer. The indication is that the teacher has a duty to discover the two factors and deal with each according to its merits and feasible remedies. The study shows that there are those like Student E who have bad intentions of cheating and therefore sitting in the back-row to exercise their craft without being noticed by the sharp eye of the proctoring teachers. Whether proctors are aware of the student’s ill intention or not is outside the scope of this study, but altogether an interesting matter to be brought into the limelight for further discussion. Taking appropriate action on cheating behavior depends as well on the immediacy of the teachers’ discovery of the students’ strategy so as to relocate such culprits and dishonest young scholars to the front chairs, especially during the exams.

To increase effectiveness of the instructional method and participation, teachers should be able to identify introvert learners like Student G during the first few days or weeks of the semester in order to encourage and attract them appropriately into the frame of the tasks in the class. Much the same way, Student F needs consideration for counseling and motivation to help him overcome any timidity toward activity participation. It is indeed testing situations like Student G’s and Student F’s that call for a well conceived as well as well concerted efforts to help them understand that question-and-answer is a natural approach to the process of learning, and that missing a question is part of that same process.

Student H reminds us of Student D’s situation as Student H’s location of back-row desk came as a result of the teacher’s recommendation so that she (the teacher) could enhance the strategy of her classroom management. It was a deal negotiated in order to stop further fighting between Student H and a rival classmate. The solution, as smartly devised by the teacher, informs teachers’ concern about student safety. Secondly, the reconciliatory role played by the teacher portrays the teacher’s superb skills in classroom management, particularly in an atmosphere of conflict. The teacher’s prompt intervention of distancing belligerent students from each other must have changed the classroom temperature into a calm environment between the two students. A further analysis of the responses shows that Student I does not have a problem sitting anywhere in the classroom. The only reason why he chose to sit at the back was to be close to his friend. That said; whether he joined his friend to tackle cumbersome tasks through collaborative class-work or whether he had distractive intentions are not clear. However, he feels happy and comfortable in his position near his friend—a trend commonly shared by many students including those at the front desks.

The other interviewee, Student J, had a front-row desk which he later decided to abandon because of problems he had been encountering. Similar to Student H’s case

discussed above, Student J's situation raises another serious concern, although it did not rise to the level of physical fist-fighting. Student J vacated his front-row desk because he was suffering; he could not tolerate the distractive actions of his classmates in the front-row area hitting him in the back head. His decision of transferring to a back desk without engaging in further problems not only represents maturity in decision-making but indeed a remarkably wise move. The nature of the very reason for relocation contradicts, albeit at various degrees, reports such as by Meek *et al.* (2013, p. 376) ^[33] categorizing front sitters as engaged, focused and motivated to learning. Student J's case for relocation did not occur as a cause of his demotivatedness, disengagement, unmotivatedness or disruptiveness (considering that he had relocated from a front desk).

Although seated among the so-called "engaged", "focused", and "keen" sitters in the front-rows, Student J was sufficiently disengaged, disturbed and many a time derailed from the focus of his activities by learners presumed to be the best in performance and in behavior. In fact, students reputed to have "attentive behavior" and "classroom engagement" are behind the problem that compelled Student J to shift from his self-assigned seat in the front-rows. Furthermore, Student J had to tolerate for some time the unruliness of those front-rowers until he found their action of disengagement intolerable, deciding as a result to move to a far back desk distantly away from them.

Complaint about height returns as a cause for rearrangement to the back-row. Because of that, Student K chose his current back desk. His action shows how he considered the problem of his shorter classmates, thus reminding us of Student D who was repositioned in a back seat to address a similar situation. As his height was discomforting the shorter students behind him, interfering with their view of the blackboard, he found a desk at the back to improve the situation. Student K's action tells us about his thoughtfulness of his classmates and how he accommodates their wish—ushering in a good climate of amicable classroom environment. Again, we see here another reason for choosing a back-row desk which is unrelated to either poor performance or bad behavior.

Further inference from the data findings suggests that Student L sits at the back owing to lighting or poor visibility problem, as was also complained about by a couple of the students discussed earlier, namely Student B and Student C. Seemingly, the reflection of light from the front windows bothers his view. And in the case that "the windows are closed" according to his statement, "the class becomes dark." In order to solve the persistent problem of this unfriendly environment, he found it more convenient to take a desk at the back of the class. From back there, he could see the blackboard better and avoid the distracting light that caused him discomfort during his study. Whether the teacher assigned him the seat or whether Student L himself made the rearrangement with a classmate to exchange positions, the overall assumption is that there is a serious lighting problem in these schools as concerned respondents from each institution mentioned lighting and visibility issues as obstacles to their learning inside the class.

In contrast to Student L, who is positioned at the back due to distraction by the sunlight affecting the front-row, Student M honestly reveals a personal secret, one which many a teacher has witnessed. Student M's preference for the back desk is an intentionally devised move influenced by his

sleepiness. His statement: "I am a sleep person," denotes his lethargy as well as strategy of distancing himself from the teachers so he could enjoy some minutes of needed doze. From the meaning of his unconcealed words, we can realize that Student M's decision was driven by a desire to camouflage his improper behavior from the teachers. Knowing well that sleeping in the class is impermissible and in some cases 'punishable', Student M finds the back seat a safe haven for hiding the improprieties of his action and behavior. The concern over Student M's behavior grows more in the situation of an overcrowded classroom of 70 or more students, where the teacher may not often reach the back rows. In this case, Student M's sleeping behavior may remain incessant for a while if it is not discovered promptly and a subsequent intervention adopted.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The current study investigated 13 students in three schools in Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia, and their reasons for sitting in the back-rows of their class. The answers were as diverse as they were interesting. The study realized that a student's placement in a back-row does not necessarily warrant his preference or choice. Based on the findings we have in this study, learners have portrayed different reasons why they were seated in the back of the classroom. Furthermore, the study uncovers that although some learners may be scared of the teachers' questions, others may have corrupt reasons like cheating or factors related to disruptive behavior.

Interestingly, the results expose that placement in front-rows does not necessarily occur as a result of being engaged or motivated in that Student J, a front-row student, had to seek relocation to the back due to disorderly behavior by his "front-row" peers. In specific terms, the study demonstrates how fighting, friendship, considerateness, and individual physical features (student's height; students' eyesight; physical structure such as lighting) can be factors contributing to repositioning to a back chair or even front desk for that matter. Thus, the results strengthen our argument that the students' reasons for choosing the back-row may vary from one individual student's view to the other's; just like the seating assignment itself might be influenced many a time by a multitude of circumstances which at times rule out the student's desire. We also claim that not all lovers of back-rows are dull, unmotivated, disruptive, disobedient, or disengaged from the classroom activities.

Contrary to the misperceptions, misassumptions and widely circulated mischaracterizations, this study demonstrates how lovers of front-row desks were assigned to back-row seats by their teachers for different reasons—if at all choosing front is intelligible with motivatedness, engagedness, and smartness. The current study, therefore, though not claiming to provide a consistent and objectively conclusive report, aims to add at least some insights to the debate over students' preference of the back-rows in view of their perceptions as well as expressions. However, given the serious problems that can occur in the classroom setting, and owing to the importance of understanding the behavior of the students, we recommend the following:

Recommendations

- Train teachers to enable them conduct research so as to

explore more about the schools and/or classroom environment and the behavior of their students;

- Advise teachers to allocate seats, whenever necessary, to their students in order to maintain high-quality classroom management;
- Identify immediately and encourage shy/timid students who need help and motivation for more effective participation in the classroom interactions and activities;
- Encourage/counsel students as much as possible to develop self-reliance so they refrain from cheating and other types of academic dishonesty and undesirable behavior;
- Recommend students to see an ophthalmologist in case lighting and visibility problems arise—in order to ascertain whether the problem is related to visibility deficiency or whether it is just about reflection or inadequacy of lighting inside the classrooms;
- Consider availability of adequate lighting in the classrooms as poor lighting obviously affects learning;
- Make sure ventilation is sufficient in the classroom;
- Develop safety mechanism as it is a key factor in the learning environment.

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