

An Attitudinal Study of English as a Foreign Language in Sukkur Sindh Pakistan

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Abstract

Foreign language learning is a complex process and is influenced by various factors. The attitude of students towards language learning is a major decisive factor in this process; therefore, the current study was carried out to explore this phenomenon. The students of English Works Program Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan were the target population for the current study. The said program was initiated by a Karachi based organization which enrolled fifty students for a 240 hours certificate course in English language. The students already had some formal education ranging from Intermediate to Masters level and belonged to different age groups. The aim of this quantitative study was to investigate their language learning attitudes from three aspects: behavioral, cognitive and emotional. For data collection purposes, a questionnaire comprising 30 closed-ended items was adapted from Eshghinejad, (2016), Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Rermyindee, & Vongchittipinyo, (2004) and Gardner (1985). This was followed by descriptive and inferential statistical analysis by using independent sample t-test (SPSS-22). The results show that the students have positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: attitudes, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, English as foreign language.

Introduction

English language enjoys an unprecedented sway over Pakistan's educational system and indigenous languages. With the rapid development in Pakistan, not only has the use of English amplified, but its significance as a mode of instruction and expression in academic and social domains has increased in recent decades. Despite the fact that English is widely accepted as a major language and even though The National Education Policy (2009) has made the teaching of English a requisite at all educational levels from primary to university, students' proficiency level in this language lags behind. Excluding some extraordinary learners, this weak learning has posed a genuine challenge to the researchers to find the factors that control their learning. Trudgill (2000) considers this educational failure as basically a linguistic failure at a deeper level.

Language learners' attitudes have been under the debate for the last few decades by teachers, educationists and linguists because their attitudes towards English influence the language learning process enormously. In this regard, learners' negative attitudes towards the native speakers of the target language, the target language itself, and the cultural fusion of the target language may affect the language learning process. The learners, who possess positive attitudes towards learning the target language and its culture, are more likely to develop a near native competence in comparison to the learners with negative attitudes (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Unlike adult learners, who might possess negative attitudes towards the target language, young learners generally have positive attitudes, as such they remain very active in speaking interactions (Emmitt, Pollock and Komesaroff, 2003).

During the last couple of decades, the research on attitudes has increasingly grown keeping in view the language use and individual nature of learners, which are significantly connected (Saidat, 2010). Recent research has studied the role of attitude towards foreign language learning across the globe having different cultures, language backgrounds, and standards. One such study was conducted by Shams (2008) who investigated students' English language learning attitudes, motivation, and anxiety, and, the findings indicated that the students possessed positive attitudes towards English language learning which emphasized that English language was important for them.

Regarding the backdrop of the English Language in Pakistan, there has always been a historic tension between Pakistan's national language Urdu and English. There is a historic tension between Pakistan's national language Urdu and its nationally endorsed language English. Mansoor (2004) states that India and Pakistan, "...despite giving English official status, they enshrine a national language above it" (p. 62). On the one hand, Education policies of Pakistan, since 1947 have been trying to replace English with Urdu as an official language (Rahman, 1998) and on the other hand, schools, colleges and universities are teaching English subject(s) and in most cases, the medium of instruction is English. Education policies of Pakistan since 1947 have been trying to replace English with Urdu as an official language of Pakistan (Rahman, 1998) On the other hand, schools, colleges and universities are teaching English subject(s) and in most of the cases the medium of instruction is English. In this English-only environment, the students use English not only in their academic sphere but also in other situations outside school/college (Rahman, 1998). In this context two situations exist in Pakistan whereby some students get plenty of speaking opportunities in and out their school/college life and some remain apprehensive even within their schools/colleges. In this disparate situation, the development of a unified language policy is required because that will determine the role and status of English in the educational context of Pakistan (Rahman, 1999).

The problem that the researchers of this article have raised holds importance for the students, teachers, and policy makers of the English curriculum. Successful language learning may depend on the positive attitudes of the students towards the target language. The current study therefore is an attempt to measure students' attitudes, either positive or negative towards learning English.

Research objective

The research objective of this quantitative study is to uncover the behavioral, cognitive and emotional attitudes of students towards learning English, who were enrolled on a 240 hours English Works course.

Research question

The current study includes the following research question:

How well behavioral, cognitive and emotional attitudes of students of English Works program towards learning English language can be predicted?

Hypotheses

H1: Behavioral attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from female students.

H2: Cognitive attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from female students.

H3: Emotional attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from female students.

Review of Literature

Attitudes, according to Gardner (1985) are thoughts, feelings and behaviors about something and further that this trio of aspects helps in understanding the construct of attitude. Gardner elaborates that language attitudes of individuals are group-specific which in turn are affected by different factors, for instance the language speaking community, ethnic background and mother tongue influence. Eshghinejad (2016) explains the construct of attitude as the behavior of people towards something or someone. In English as a foreign language context, there are various factors which influence students' learning, for example, attitudes, aptitudes, anxiety, motivation, fear, learning objectives, intelligence, personality and age (Skehan, 1991; Shams, 2008). However, Fakeye (2010) is of the opinion that language learning is significantly influenced by the learners' attitudes towards it. Fakeye studied attitudes of randomly selected senior secondary students' attitudes from the gender point of view and found that although attitude and achievement were significantly related with each other, students' gender did not affect the attitudinal difference in results.

Regarding children, Brown (1994) is of the viewpoint that attitudes are developed in children in their early age. A child's attitude is influenced by parental

and other older people's behavior in the family, nearby people who differ in various ways, and the experience that is gained by them through maintaining an interaction in the community. These interactions, which take place in behavioral, cognitive and affective domains, are stimulants for children which further result in positive and negative attitudes. Furthermore, Brown elaborates that behavioral attitudes are an individual's reactions to specific situations and their overall behavior towards that situation. According to Kara (2009), positive attitudes of students make them responsible for learning successfully.

Learning is successful if the learners have positive attitudes towards language; therefore, attitudes play a vital role either as positive or negative influences which impact the language learning process. In addition, attitudes are directly related with the experiences of learners which they undergo in the community. Brown (2001) relates attitude with emotions, feelings and other moods which develop in a community. Attitudes, according to Al-Mamun, M. Rahman, A. R. Rahman, and Hossaim (2012) are related to psychology and represent a particular behavior. However, Ajzen (2005) is of the opinion that attitudes are personality traits which ostensibly cannot be observed, yet positive and negative attitudes can be measured through the responses of the learners.

Additionally, classroom environment is also a feature which influences different activities during the learning process and is termed by Feng and Chen (2009) as an emotional process that is influenced by many factors. The students and their teacher get emotional during this process, which affects the results.

Suleiman (1993) investigated twenty two Arab students' of Arizona State University for their motivation towards learning English as a second language, (ESL) their attitudes about Americans, US culture and their expected education in the future. For this study, attitudes towards ESL were divided into 9 subcategories, from amusement to resentment; seven female and 15 male students with Arabic speaking background participated in the research. The results demonstrated that gender was affecting the motivation of these students.

Empirical research conducted by Momani (2009) further highlighted the role of attitude in language learning. The author investigated secondary stage students' attitudes towards EFL learning and their reading comprehension achievement and

the results indicated that the participants had positive attitudes towards learning English. It was also found that there existed a robust correlation between their reading comprehension performance and attitudes towards English. This has also been supported by Al-Tamimi and Shuib's (2009) study of petroleum engineering students' motivation and attitudes towards English language learning. They also found affirmative attitudes among students who were not only positive towards using English in the Yemeni context but were also positive towards the culture of English speaking countries.

On the other hand, Dehbozorgi's (2012) study of Iranian EFL students' proficiency and the attitudinal effect on language learning demonstrated that EFL learners' attitudes towards English language and their proficiency did not have a significant relationship. It was further highlighted that the positive attitudes were not the only factor to assure proficiency; other factors like intelligence or quest for learning were equally responsible for proficiency. It was therefore concluded that besides positive and negative attitudes, there were other factors involved in language learning.

Moving on to cognitive attitudes, Eshghinejad (2016) defines this as language learners' receiving and understanding of knowledge related to (in this case), the language learning process. Cognitive attitudes can further be subdivided into four steps:

- a) Associating the previous with the new knowledge
- b) Forming new knowledge
- c) Inspecting new knowledge
- d) Putting new knowledge into various situations for practical purposes.

Besides cognitive attitudes, Eshghinejad (2016) also reported that learning was strongly impacted by other factors, such as gender, field and year of study and environment. The study revealed that female students' attitudes were significantly different from the male students' attitudes towards learning English.

Regarding reasons for learning a foreign language, Ahmed (2015) asserts that foreign language is learnt because it aids in the professional growth and better

jobs await those who learn a foreign language, which in his context is English. English is also needed for the purpose of higher education as the most travelled nations (USA, UK, Canada and Australia) in this regard are predominantly English-speaking. He found positive attitudes towards learning English to such an extent that the learners even attended private language centers in addition to their regular schooling because of their need for future direction. This investment in learning English may not necessarily be due to positive attitudes, it could be instrumental.

Methodology

Sample

In this quantitative study, the sample comprised a total of 45 students; out of which there were 25 male and 20 female students, who were enrolled in a short English Language course arranged by a Karachi based organization. This program had a strict policy of enrolling students whose ages ranged between 17 to 25 years. Majority of the participants were between the age bracket of 20 and 21 years. There was only one student who was 25 years old, and only two who were 17 years old. Although the program had an enrollment of 50 students, 5 did not participate in the study.

Instrument

This study aimed to investigate the inductee students' language learning attitudes on three sub-levels: behavioral, emotional and cognitive using Likert scale questionnaire adapted from: Eshghinejad (2016), Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Remyindee, and Vongchittipinyo (2004) and Gardner's attitude and motivation test battery (1985). There were 30 statements related to attitudes with reference to behavioral (1-10), cognitive (11-20), and emotional (21-30) facets of attitudes. The questionnaire can be seen in the Appendix-I. The participants responded from a range of strongly disagree to strongly agree responses on a scale of 1 to 5.

Ethical considerations

This program was run by a Karachi based organization. The organization was approached and their permission was sought and detailed information about this research and its purposes was provided to them. It was only after receiving formal consent from the concerned organization that this study was carried out.

Results & Findings

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Male	25	55.6
	Female	20	44.4
<i>Age</i>			
	17	2	4.4
	18	6	13.3
	19	7	15.6
	20	10	22.2
	21	2	4.4
	22	10	22.2
	23	4	8.9
	24	3	6.7
	25	1	2.2
<i>Education</i>			
	Inter	11	24.4
	BA	10	22.2
	BSC	5	11.1
	BCOM	7	15.6
	BBA	10	22.2
	MA	1	2.2
	MSC	1	2.2
	Total	45	100.0

Students' Behavioural, Cognitive, and Emotional Attitude

Table 2

Group Statistics for Students' Behavioural, Cognitive, and Emotional Attitude towards English Language Learning

	<i>GNR</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Behaviour	Male	25	3.61	0.49	0.10
	Female	20	3.76	0.43	0.10
Cognitive	Male	25	3.90	0.43	0.09
	Female	20	4.06	0.49	0.11
Emotion	Male	25	3.98	0.43	0.09
	Female	20	4.01	0.51	0.11

Table 2 displays the difference between male and female students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitude towards English language learning. From this perspective, the mean values of male students are 3.61 for behavior, 3.90 for cognitive, and 3.98 for emotional attitude with 0.49, 0.43, and 0.43 as standard deviation and 0.10, 0.09, and 0.09 as standard error respectively. In order to confirm if the mentioned differences are statistically significant, Independent Samples Test was run to state the status of hypotheses.

Table 3

Independent Samples Test for Students' Attitude towards English Language Learning

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>				<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Behavior	Equal variances assumed	.122	.729	-1.021	43	.313	-.142	.139	-.423	.139	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.037	42.668	.306	-.142	.137	-.419	.134	
Cognitive	Equal variances assumed	.074	.787	-1.158	43	.253	-.160	.138	-.439	.119	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.142	38.352	.261	-.160	.140	-.444	.124	
Emotion	Equal variances assumed	1.481	.230	-.215	43	.831	-.030	.140	-.311	.251	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.211	36.923	.834	-.03000	.14241	-.31857	.25857	

In Table 3, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances determines that the variability in the two different genders of students is about the same, as the sig values for all three types of attitude are greater than .05. This finding of the present study reveals that the three types of attitude towards learning English language do not vary too much among both genders of students. Therefore, the (2-Tailed) sig values are to be considered from the rows "Equal Variances Assumed" rather than the rows "Equal Variances Not Assumed," which show the results of t-test for Equality of Means. From this perspective, the (2-Tailed) sig values for each type of students' attitude are .313 with -.142 as mean difference, and .139 as standard error difference for behavioural, .253 with -.160 as mean difference, and .138 as standard error difference for cognitive, and .831 with -.030 as mean difference, and .140 as standard error difference for emotional attitude. Since all three (2-Tailed) sig values are greater than .05, it is safe to state insignificant difference between the two genders for all three types of attitude. Furthermore, the difference in the mean values mentioned in Table 2 can be stated as based on chance rather than the manipulation of difference of genders of students. As a result, all of the hypotheses, in the present study, are failed to reject.

Table 4

Summary of Hypotheses

<i>No.</i>	<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Sig Value</i>	<i>Status</i>
H1	Behavioural attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from the female students	.313	Failed to reject
H2	H ₂ : Cognitive attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from the female students	.253	Failed to reject
H3	H ₃ : Emotional attitude of male students towards English language learning does not differ from the female students	.831	Failed to reject

Discussion

The behavioral facets had 10 items which included more negative items than positive ones. Out of ten, six were negative in nature and four were positive. Besides, there were very few respondents who remained 'undecided' in terms of their behavioral stance towards English language learning.

The cognitive facets also had 10 items out of which four were negative

and rest of the six items were positive in nature. English language learning, with reference to the cognitive aspects remained predominantly positive with only a few who decided to remain 'undecided' about their responses. To the statement 'English helps me communicate well' 55% and 42 % strongly agreed and agreed respectively, whereas only 2.2% respondents strongly disagreed with this view.

The third and the last attitudinal facet was emotional, this too had 10 items. This strand had 10 research items out of which only two were negative and rest of the eight were positive in nature. Respondents' emotional attachment with the target language could be gauged from their response to one of the statement i-e knowing English is the goal of my life; 48% and 37 respondents strongly agreed to this view followed by 0% response to strongly disagree.

The results of the t-test illustrate that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females about their attitudes (behavioral, cognitive and emotional) towards the learning of English. It was found through the calculation of independent sample t-test which showed that the calculated p value for the three attitudes i-e BH# .068, COG# .974 and EMO# .731 was greater than .05 level so the hypothesis that 'there is no difference between language learning attitudes (behavioral, cognitive & emotional) and gender of the English Works students' failed to reject.

This study was similar to that of Eshghinejad (2016) which used the same questionnaire and found positive attitudes in his research findings. The results of this study are in accordance with those of Al-Mamun et al. (2012). Their study too showed their students had positive attitudes towards learning English for speaking purposes as they thought speaking English made created a sound impression on others.

Unlike the studies referred to in this article, this study was important because the research respondents were of diverse backgrounds in terms of age and their qualifications; therefore this is a unique attempt to study the attitudes of EFL students' attitudes because:

1. The respondents' ages ranged from 17 to 25 years.
2. The respondents' qualifications ranged from Intermediate to Masters.

The colleges and universities in Pakistan normally enroll students in the degree programs who more or less fall in the same age group, for example, the students of Intermediate in Pakistan, normally fall within the age bracket of 17-18 years. Similarly, the students enrolled in degree programs at different universities belong to almost the same age group. However, the more important aspect of this study was that respondents varied in their ages; moreover, academic degrees of the students were also different, for example, some of them were college students, while others were university students who just wanted to satiate their thirst for learning language.

Conclusion

In the process of learning, attitudes of learners play an important role, as such, their learning is affected by various factors. This study tried to investigate the behavioral, emotional and cognitive factors which may leave an impact on learner's attitude towards learning English language and found that participants possessed positive attitudes towards it. Despite acknowledging the worth of English in society, other factors create an element of tentativeness and indecisiveness in the behaviors of the students who seem to be in a state of uncertainty whether to go for the target language or not because of the dual schooling systems being implemented in the country. By dual schooling system the researchers are referring to the English and Urdu medium of instruction being used in the educational sectors.

The willingness to learn something new without apprehension is key to developing a positive attitude. Similarly, for proficiently learning English, or any other language, it is highly relevant and significant to have a positive attitude towards that particular language. Learners' attitudes determine the success or failure of the process of the attainment of any skill; likewise for language learning because at the end of the day, it is the inclination of an individual towards something which makes a difference.

Attitudes are seen as the most vital factor in successful foreign language learning. In this study, the researchers have tried to uncover the participants' attitudes in three domains: behavioral, cognitive and emotional. The results have shown that the students predominantly had positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. Keeping in view their positive attitudes, it can be deduced that their language learning is successfully carried out. As a whole, it is expected that

students in Pakistan are committed to English language learning. This is based on the fact that the students who were either already qualified or were studying for formal education somewhere in Sukkur, viewed English Works certificate course as an opportunity to improve their English language skills. This also shows their commitment and an overall positive attitude towards learning the English language.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Part-1 Demographic Profile

Your Gender: a) Male b) Female

Age (in years): 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Education: _____

Part-II

No	Item	SDA	DA	U	A	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried					
2	Studying English helps me to have good relationships with friends					
3	When I hear a student in my class speaking English well, I like to practice speaking with him/her					
4	Studying English helps me to improve my personality					
5	I put off my English homework as much as possible					
6	I am not relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class					
7	I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students.					
8	I like to practice English the way native speakers do					
9	When I miss the class, I never ask my friends or teachers for the homework on what has been taught					
10	I do not feel enthusiastic to come to class when English is being thought					
11	Being good at English will help me study other subjects well					

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12	I have more knowledge and more understanding when studying English					
13	Frankly, I study English just to pass the exams					
14	In my opinion, people who speak more than one language are very knowledgeable					
15	Studying English helps me communicate in English effectively					
16	I cannot apply the knowledge from English subject in my real life					
17	Studying English makes me able to create new thoughts					
18	I am not satisfied with my performance in English subject					
19	In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn					
20	English subject has the content that covers many fields of knowledge					
21	I prefer studying in my mother tongue rather than any other foreign language					
22	To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class					
23	I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class					
24	Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable					
25	I feel proud when studying English language					
26	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident					
27	I am interested in studying English					
28	Knowing English is an important goal in my life					
29	I look forward to the time I spend in English class					
30	Studying English makes me have good emotions (feelings)					

This questionnaire is adapted from: Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Remyindee, and Vongchittipinyo (2004) and Gardner (1985).