**ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Rahila Huma Anwar[[1]](#footnote-1) and Muhammad Asim Khan[[2]](#footnote-2)

English has acquired the worldwide status of lingua franca through globalization and is considered the most influential language of the present world. Inner, outer, and expanding circles, well known as Kachru’s (1985) Concentric Circle Model, have acquired a key position in the discussion of the global spread of English. David Crystal (1997) has elaborated in detail on all the factors contributing in giving English a status of a global language since the twentieth century. Through a thorough critical review of the historical and global development of English, Crystal proposed that non-native speakers of English will have more influence on English than the native speakers, reason being that the non-native speakers have already outnumbered the native speakers of English. Widdowson (1994) proclaims that English now belongs equally to both the native and non-native speakers of English. Thus, it is a language that belongs not to one but to all, it is said, “the world is not owned by English; English is owned by the world” (Wang, 2001, p. 23; original in Chinese). This rapid globalization of English as lingua franca and the widespread acknowledgment of World Englishes has fashioned up an entirely new trend of studies focusing on investigating the attitudes of the English language learners toward different varieties of the language and also in learning and teaching of English worldwide.

The ever-increasing relationship between the importance of English language and the nature of the language learners has led to this new trend in the recent research to investigate attitudes of the learners, as these attitudes have direct impact over their learning in different ways. Number of factor, such as attitudes, anxiety, motivation, learning achievements, age, aptitudes, intelligence, personalities, etc., (Gardner, 1960; Lehmann, 2006, cited in Shams, 2008), influence the language learning process. Learner’s language learning attitude is considered as one of the most significant factors that impacts directly on his/her process of learning the language, (Fakeye, 2010). Attitudes towards learning have a great influence on students’ behaviours and consequently on their performance Kara (2009). Recent research is advocating the fact students possessing positive beliefs about language learning have a great propensity to develop and yield significantly positive attitudes towards learning the language. Gardner (1985) was among the pioneers to propose that the attitudes that learners hold towards learning another language have an imperative role in enhancing their learning and performance, and also in motivating them to learn that language.

**Defining Attitudes**

Attitudes are considered to be among the highly distinct and essential constructs in the field of social psychology, Galloway & Rose (2015). Though numerous definitions of attitude are put forward but not even one has been considered as absolute. Sarnoff (1970, p. 279) defines attitude as an outlook to behave favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects. According to Gardner (1985) attitude is an assessable reaction to any attitude object or referent, which could be perceived as per the beliefs that a person holds about this particular referent. Thus Attitude is connected to an individual’s belief and value systems, therefore, it aids to facilitate or impede the selections made in any realm of activity, be it academic or informal.

Gardner (1985 in Abidin et al, 2012, p. 121) provides a general definition of attitude as “Attitude is thus linked to a person’s values and beliefs and promotes or discourages the choices made in all realms of activity, whether academic or informal.” Wenden (1991) later defined the concept of attitude with reference to three interrelated components i.e. cognitive, effective and behavioral. Abidin et al (2012) state that the cognitive component is related to individual’s viewpoint about the phenomenon, the effective component is related to one’s feelings i.e. likes or dislikes and the behavioral component is appended with the person’s tendency to adopt specific learning behavior. Baker (1992) defined the construct of attitude in a similar way as three components: cognitive, affective and conative (i.e. readiness for action). Attitudes are a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioural components as Galloway & Rose (2015) puts it, they are of the view that attitudes are cognitive as they involve believes about the world.

Attitudes are affective because they involve an emotional response, and they are behavioural as they determine behaviours. They further call attitudes as mental constructs, as attitudes are formed through the positive and negative experiences of the individual or in this context the language learner specifically. These three main components of attitude i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioural, are grounded on the three theoretical approaches of cognitivism, humanism, and behaviourism respectively. The behavioural component of attitude focuses on the way an individual behaves and reacts in a certain situation. It is established that a successful language learner would easily relate himself/herself with the native speakers of the language, and would readily adopt and accept characteristics of behaviour which are attributes of the native speaker community. Beliefs that the language learners have about their own language learning process and knowledge that they receive in this process are attributes of their cognitive component. Emotional component of attitude seconds the fact that the emotions and feelings of the language learner have a great impact on their language achievement. Feng and Chen (2009) stated that, “Learning process is an emotional process. It is affected by different emotional factors. The teacher and his students engage in various emotional activities in it and varied fruits of emotions are yield.” Learners with positive emotions and feelings towards the language learning process would end up in yielding quicker and positive results from the learning process.

**Language Attitude**

Researchers in the field of language learning and teaching have defined the construct of attitude varyingly based on the perspectives within their own contexts (Alhamli, 2007 in Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Alzwari, 2012). Matsuda (2000) further defined language attitude as Yu 2010 puts it:

Matsuda (2000) adopted the definition of Baker (1992) and interpreted the construct with three components: cognitive, affective, and conative (readiness for action). With regard to language attitudes, she explained that the cognitive component refers to the thoughts, beliefs, and values about the language of learners; the affective component concerns their feelings toward the language; and the conative component refers to a behavioral intention of the plan of action (pp. 28-30 in Yu, 2010).

The construct of attitude in second or foreign language learning has been quantitatively well researched in relation to other learner variables such as second language proficiency and ‘cultural distance’ ( Svanes, 1988), gender, motivation and anxiety (Hashwani, 2008), and more recently with gender, field of study, year of study (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Alzwari, 2012), gender, motivation, self efficacy, first language literacy, language learning goals and parental encouragement (Kormos, Kiddle & Csizer, 2011; Courteny, Graham, Tonkeyn & Marinis, 2015), and young learners’ motivation (Linse 2014) in both cross sectional and longitudinal studies. It is interesting to note that studies conducted in English as a second or foreign language learning contexts have reported different findings. For example, two surveys conducted with students at secondary school level in Libya and Pakistan (Abidin et al, 2012; Hashwani, 2008) revealed contradictory results as, on the one hand, the study conducted in a Pakistani city, Karachi (Hashwani, 2008) reported positive attitudes of students towards learning English language and higher extrinsic motivation for learning the language, on the other hand, Libyan school students showed negative attitude towards learning English language. In both studies, females were reported to have comparatively higher level of motivation and attitudes. The researchers emphasized teachers’ role in creating and sustaining students’ motivation and positive attitude towards learning English language as positive attitude of students yields better language learning. They suggest that these goals can be achieved by creating conducive classroom environment, appropriate teaching methods and by consciously considering the factor of gender in language learning.

Language performance is highly influenced by the attitudes held towards that particular language (Visser, 2008). Success in the target language learning depends primarily on the learner’s attitude towards the language learning process along with the intellectual capacity. It is quite evident then and confirms the fact that language learning is not just an academic process; in fact, it is genuinely a social and a psychological process, and depends largely on these constructs for successful language learning. In their research work Kiptui and Mbugua (2009, cited in Tella et al, 2010) explored that poor performance in English of the secondary schools in Kenya was a result of prevailing negative attitudes that these school students had for English. Thus, the negative attitude served as one of the most affective and psychological factor in showing poor performance in language learning. A comprehensive theoretical model was proposed by Baker, which emphasized the importance of extending and doing research on attitudes, specifically to conduct research on language attitudes. Baker (1992, p. 9) states that, “*In the life of a language, attitudes to that language appear to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death.”*

**Factors Influencing Attitudes towards a Language**

***Cultural and Social Groups:***

The way language is placed in the society has a great impact in developing attitudes of the learners whether in academic or informal settings. Individuals in the society are given a status based on the kind of accents they have and it is very well known that some accents have more prestige attached to them than others. Therefore, attitudes could be negative or positive based on the inferences of the users and these attitudes could bias the social interactions. “language attitudes represent important communicative phenomena worth understanding” (Cargile et al., 2006, p. 443).

***Standardization:***

Attitudes towards English language specifically are highly influenced by the process of standardization. The term standard is itself a difficult construct to define as language is an unstable construct; therefore, it has made the use of English more problematic globally. Anyhow, the ‘supposed existence of this standard form’ (Milroy, 2007, p. 133) greatly influence the language users and learners attitudes towards the language.

***Levels of Expertise:***

Attitudes towards a language are closely related to the level of expertise and comfort that the learner possesses in that particular language (Baker, 1992). It is assumed that higher the level of expertise, command, and achievement in a particular language, greater the positive attitudes towards the language (Gardner, 1985). It is very obvious that the level of learner and success contributes towards achievement in language learning process as it leads to developing positive attitude for the language.

***Other Factors:***

Along with motivation which is one very significant construct in forming attitudes and achieving success in second language learning certain other factors also play an indispensable role. These include individual differences that result in different attitudes that language learners have about English Language Learning, perceptions and beliefs, language awareness, aptitude, age, gender, race and class, social context, communities, academic discipline, previous academic background, earlier language learning experience, and parent communications/suggestions/ expectations. All these are factors that cannot be ignored and research in these areas have proven their worth and impact in forming attitudes. There is a whole variety of language users with their distinctive identities, attitudes, abilities motivations and access to resources. (Wei, 2011)

**Studies on the Language Learning Process and Attitudes**

A number of studies have been conducted over the years on the attitudes of the learners towards the process of language learning. Abidin, Mahammadi, & Alzwari (2012) studied the Libyan secondary school EFL students’ attitudes towards learning English language. They attempted to analyse the attitudes of the learners in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects, and also investigated the attitudinal differences in language learning based on the learners’ demographic profiles. Analyses of the questionnaire used as measuring tool to investigate the three attitudinal components revealed negative attitudes towards learning English. Significant attitudinal differences were observed between the two genders, males and females, as a result of the statistical analyses of the demographic profile of the learners. Results revealed that female students represented higher positive attitudes showing inclination towards learning English than male students.

Another PhD study conducted by Yang Yu (2010) investigated the attitudes of Chinese college students toward English. Findings of the research confirmed that college students in China displayed positive attitudes for the English language as well as for China English, although mostly students aimed only at scoring high on English exams. Results also revealed that those students who have been exposed to English language learning for a longer period mostly developed positive attitude towards the language. Other factors that impacted their attitudes towards English had been their experience and likeness for the native speaker teacher of English, as well as their main stream courses at college explained their attitudes for English.

Hashwani 2008 concluded that motivational factors and experiences have the potential to influence students’ attitudes and anxiety levels towards English language learning, there conducted a small scale research to investigate gender wise students’ attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English as a second language in the multilingual context of Karachi, Pakistan. Gardner’s ‘Attitude Motivation Test Battery,’ AMTB questionnaire was used to explore attitudes (English language and learning), motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic) and classroom anxiety of grade 8th students in a private secondary school. The survey findings of 77 students (40 males and 37 females) showed a greater level of enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards the language and the learning process of English. The research further revealed a that extrinsic motivation was directly related to the students language learning outcomes, as they take English language as one important factor for future success, regardless of the gender; but it was also concluded that female students displayed higher positive attitudes and better motivation as compared to male students.

System of goals, attitudes, and self-related beliefs in second language learning motivation was researched by Karmos, Kiddle, and Csizer (2011). They analysed the role of language learning goals, attitudes, intrapersonal beliefs, parental support and encouragement work together to inculcate motivation among the English language learners. They applied multi-group structural equation modelling to investigate all this, and also to explore age and differences among the internal structure of each group that impacts language learning motivation.

In her research work Khalid (2016) investigated the attitudes regarding English as second language (L2) of sixteen-year-old students from public sector schools in Pakistan. These students were given questionnaires to respond and were also interviewed for the purpose. The researcher believed that English enjoys a high status in Pakistan and thus the attitudes towards English as L2 greatly impacts language policies formulated in Pakistan. Results of this study confirmed positive attitude for English as L2, especially for instrumental purposes and due to prestige attached to it. It also concluded that despite English is popular in Pakistan but Urdu language (L1) has retained its prominence and enjoys high status in the Pakistani society.

**Recommendations**

Teachers should encourage positive learning environment in order to develop positive attitudes towards the language. Therefore, teacher’s role within the classroom cannot be overlooked when it comes to forming positive attitudes towards language learning. To achieve this, teachers should adopt effective teaching methods supported with activities to enhance the language learning experience. This could also be attained by integrating new teaching material and supplementary resources along with the core books selected for teaching. Teachers of English must think through the role of gender perception in language learning, exposing different approaches to enhance the English language learners’ attitudes, motivation and language performance at the same time.

Adopting CLT approach to teach language as this method encourages the learner to learn successfully as it helps in collaboration and discussion. Learners share their experiences and other matters concerning language learning with each other as well as with the teachers. This in turn leads to developing a positive attitude and increased enthusiasm and motivation for successful learning to take place.

Further research in all these dimensions is also recommended to understand the impact of attitude on language learning and also to develop strategies to develop positive attitudes of the learners in order to accelerate the language learning process. In our context teaching strategies should be researched, student motivation and reasons for negative or positive attitudes should be explored. All this should also be collaborated with the context i.e. the society and its impact on the attitude formation.

**Directions for research in this area**

In this scenario there is a need to investigate teachers’ role as a significant variable in shaping attitude i.e. cognitive, affective, and conative (readiness for action) towards English language learning in Pakistani context because English language is taught differently in different education systems or schools i.e. government, private and elite schools. Since teachers employed in those schools are different in terms of their educational background, trainings and have different classroom resources, it is important to research the variables teacher and teaching in shaping students’ attitude towards English language in different types of schools in Pakistan.

Most studies on language learning attitudes have relied on quantitative data through questionnaire. There is a need to further investigate language learning attitudes through qualitative interpretivist stand point. Therefore, a mixed method research to be carried out in Pakistani context that not only quantitatively measures English language learner’s attitudes but also is explanatory about the reasons and perceptions behind those attitudes is worthwhile. All these studies focused on attitude of learners towards English while attitudes related to other local languages have not received due consideration. Hashwani (2008) points out that students showed greater preference for learning English language over other languages and local languages. She accentuates that

“The teachers and educationists must be very careful as this is a very sensitive sociocultural issue which needs to be addressed in such a way that the respect and value of other local languages is not damaged and disregarded by the upcoming generations.” (p. 137)

The above statement indicates at the importance of attitudes towards foreign and local languages in education. The language in education policy is generally developed by the people in power usually government officials while the perceptions of actual language learners and language users including students, parents, and communities are not given importance in developing language in education policy. Their attitude and perceptions are extremely important to inform the policy makers for such a policy development which is successful as it will be in accordance with the actual data on language attitudes about different languages i.e. English, Urdu and local/mother tongues in the multilingual setting of Pakistan. Mehboob (in press) clearly emphasizes towards this research gap in higher education as he states,

“At this time, there appear to be no studies that provide a comprehensive review of attitudes towards EMI [English Medium Instruction] and other MOI [Medium of instruction] in HE [Higher education] in Pakistan. This is a gap that needs to be addressed as this research can provide a broad-based analysis of people’s beliefs and attitudes towards languages across Pakistan and help develop a stronger language-in-education policy.” (n.p)

Although Mehboob (In press) highlights need of research on attitudes towards medium of instruction in higher education, a more comprehensive picture of attitude would be visible if research is carried out on MOIs at all levels of education with respect to attitudes.

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1. *PhD Fellow, Applied Linguistics, and Lecturer, in English at Humanities Department, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi – Pakistan. Email:rahilaanwar@live.com* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *PhD Fellow, Applied Linguistics, and Lecturer, in English at Humanities Department, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi – Pakistan. Email:asimwakeel@hotmail.com.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)