

An Association of Learners' Attitude with Anxiety: Effects and Implications

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Abstract:

Language learning anxiety has got much importance in the recent past decades by the researchers. Many factors have been introduced by the researchers which increase the amount of anxiety in second language learners. It has been investigated that the attitude of the learners is of greater importance in this context. The current study has focused on the attitude of the second language learners in Pakistan where English is taught as a compulsory subject¹ from the very beginning but the results are unsatisfactory. Here, the researchers have focused to study the attitude of the learners towards English language learning at university level. Attitude has got primary importance in any SL learning environment because the negative attitude will never let the students have mastery on that particular language. It is a psychological factor and many researchers have found that it has got direct effect on language anxiety. Therefore, the researchers have tried to find out whether the attitude of the SLLS² facilitate them in language learning or increase their frustration in the remote area universities² of Pakistan. It is a questionnaire based study in which the

¹ Compulsory Subject: English has been taught in Pakistan since 1947 and it has been included in the syllabus of Pakistani schools, colleges and universities. The focus of teaching is to make the students get pass marks in order to be promoted to the next class

² Remote Area Universities. The universities in Pakistan which are established in less developed areas of Pakistan are the universities which do not compete with the universities of developed areas of Pakistan.

students have been asked to opine about their feelings towards English language learning.

Key words: Language Learning Attitude, Language anxiety, Impact of Attitude on anxiety, Attitude a psychological factor. Second language Learners.

Introduction

The language learners have different approaches and attitudes towards language learning and TL Use. These attitudes determine the way for the learner in second language acquisition. Learners reflect different attitude towards second language acquisition, TL use and cultural values of that particular language.

Learners' attitude is positive when the learners are given relax and easy environment of learning. Any psychological factors, which suppress the abilities of language learners, increase the amount of anxiety and the learners depict negative attitude towards the TL use (Krashen 1987).

Spolsky (1989) argues that more exposure and practice of TL (Target Language)³ are indispensable tools for learning a second language. Language learning process is impeded due to less exposure and practice. It means the more exposure and practice will produce proficient language learners. It is further argued by Macaro (2001) that to exclude the L1 from the classroom is impractical because it deprives learners from an important medium for language learning. He has given equal importance to L1 and stated it a useful tool for language learning.

The attitude of the learners influence their TL (Target

³People's Personality. Doughty and Thomson (1973) used this term to describe the personality of the people belonging to different areas and different communities. They described attitude as a main source of personality development in any part of the world.

Language) use in any social environment. The language courses offered to the learners increase their resentment as it becomes difficult for them to develop positive attitude when they are introduced to any second language. It is has been observed by the researcher that the university students feel anxiety in TL (Target Language) use due to their attitudes.

It is the attitude which determines the way for a learner to become proficient language users⁴. In Pakistani context, the learners are exposed to second language without taking their attitudes in consideration and the results are unsatisfactory. This phenomenon is same of school, college and university level students in Pakistan. The teachers observe that the negative attitude of the learners create difficulty for them in TL use. Their negative attitudes increase the amount of anxiety in TL use.

Hence, the researchers have taken this core issue to investigate because it was observed by the researchers (who are English language teachers)⁵ that problem of attitude must be eradicated in order to achieve the set goals and proficient results. It has been observed that the students get good grades in their exams but they are reluctant to use the same language in any gathering or community. Due to this reason, the researchers have taken this issue of attitude to investigate it at university level in order to find the problems which the students are facing and to investigate the amount of anxiety which is increased or decreased by the attitude of the language learners.

⁴ Proficient Language Users. In this research paper the term is used to describe the proficiency of the learners in speaking skills. The researchers have focused on speaking skills because the second language learners have been found good in getting good grades but fail to speak English with fluency. A proficient language user is the one who can speak English with fluency.

⁵ English language teachers. The researchers are currently teaching English in the university and they observed that the students focus to get good grades in the exams but hardly pay attention to improve their speaking skills

Literature Review

Defining Attitude

Gardner (1985) has defined the concept of attitude as the way in which a person thinks, feels and proposes to behave towards something. It is the summary of the three mechanisms that is highlighted to determine the overall attitude and not a particular component. It is very difficult to understand the concept of attitude without considering these three components. Montano and Kasprzyk (2008) described that attitude may be determined by the individuals' thinking and ideas about behavioural beliefs and beliefs are given importance by the evaluations of the traits performed in different situations. In this way, the people who have positive beliefs about anything will definitely end up in positive attitude and positive behaviour and similarly, the people with negative beliefs will consequently have negative attitude and behaviour about anything.

Attitudes in Language Learning Context

Baker (1988) in Gardner (1985) has discussed five main merits of attitudes. Firstly, attitudes have feelings and sentiments attached to them (affective) and attitudes are capable of being thought about (Cognitive). Secondly, attitudes differ in different cases as in case of favorability or unfavourability. Attitudes do possess dimensions and they are not bipolar. Thirdly, the connection between the attitudes is not very strong but a person behaves in a particular way due to the influence of the attitudes. Fourthly, it must not be believed that attitudes are inherited or transformed⁶ from one generation to another

⁶ Inherited or Transformed. Baker and Gardner has used this term to elaborate that the attitudes are not fixed and they do not pass from generation to generation. It is obvious that the children do not possess the same attitude as their parents or their ancestors. It is true that some traits are passed down from the parents to their children but it is also true at the same time that all the traits are not passed down from the ancestors to the

automatically but attitudes are learnt and skilled. Fifthly, it is believed that attitudes are strict and they can never be modified but one may modify his/her attitude by experience and knowledge.

Importance of Attitude in Language Learning

Speakers of different languages have different attitudes towards their own language or others' languages. Positive attitude towards a particular language may result in ease, simplicity, degree of importance and social status. Negative impressions may result in linguistic difficulty, difficulty in learning and degree of less importance. The attitudes of the second language learners depict that what they actually think about the native speakers of that particular language. (*The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* 1992: 199)

Learner can only face the challenges in target language use by the attitude which informs his/her enthusiasm about target language. Second language learners possess various attitudes towards target language, speakers of target language, culture of target language, social values of target language, specific uses of target language and considering themselves as participants of the culture. Learners find themselves in specific social settings which are depicted by their attitudes (Ellis 1994).

It is very difficult for us to completely separate attitudes from studies. Attitudes are vital for good language performance. (Reid 2003). Attitude effect language learning and have deep effect on language performance. Positive attitude will result in good language performance and use (Visser 2008). It is not true that language achievement in the Target Language is based upon the intelligence and intellectual capacity of the learner. The attitude of the learner is equally important towards that

next generation. Same is the case with attitudes; attitudes do not remain same from parents to the children.

language. An intelligent student will not be able to use target language if he/she has negative attitude towards that language. That is why, learning second language should not be considered completely an academic but it must be approached as social and psychological phenomenon.

He further argued that the learners themselves are influenced by the success attained in the level of L2 proficiency. Their attitude has direct impact on this achievement in language learning and target language use. Hence, it can be understood that the learners with high language proficiency will always try to reinforce these attitudes. Similarly, negative attitudes may be strengthened by poor language performance.

Types of Attitude

There are two types of attitudes, which have been given extra importance by many researchers, attitudes towards second language learning and attitudes towards second language community. Attitudes towards second language learning are educationally relevant attitudes and attitudes towards community are primarily social attitudes (Gardner *ibid*).

He further described that the factors like age, sex and upbringing have shown relevance to the attitudes towards second language learning. He explains that gender differences have been acquired on attitudes towards second language learning. He describes that girls are more inclined to show positive attitudes than the boys. In the same way, there are number of factors in the students' upbringing which noticeably influence attitudes in second language learning.

Attitude in Social Context

Social context shape attitudes and these attitudes flourish in the early age of a child. Parents, peers and contact with different cultures contribute to develop attitudes. Practice of target language learning and use by the family members is also

determined by the social context. Socially upgraded⁷ and educated families always try to develop positive attitudes of their children towards foreign language learning (Brown, 2000).

Attitude and Anxiety

It must be recognized by the language instructors and researchers that proficiency in language may be achieved by positive attitude and high motivation. It will decrease the amount of anxiety of the language learners. Hence, the learner will have a negative attitude and no enthusiasm to learn second language if he/she does not have keen desire to use target language to communicate with others. That is why attitudes must be included in second language learning and its use because the performance in target language is influenced by attitudes. De Bot et al. 2005, Padwick 2010 have rightly described that apart from academic point of view, many social and psychological aspects are involved in language learning and the nature of language learning mainly depends upon the learners' motivation and attitude towards target language.

English language tests like IELTS and TOEFL are conducted for selecting energetic students. These tests are the result of globalization and internationalization. These tests are the main criteria and condition to provide admissions to international graduates. This type of feelings of taking admission in international universities and institutes cause anxiety of the learners when learn English language. Cheng (2008) has observed same kinds of feelings of Chinese students when they try to learn English language having a view in their minds that it is indispensable for them to have mastery over English language in order to survive in future and to get good

⁷ Consistent Anxiety. The students of second language feel frustrated about learning and using that particular language and when the frustration lasts long, it is called consistent anxiety. The second language learners constantly face difficulties to learn that language. Here, the particular language stands for English language which is being taught to the students.

jobs. This pressure of future survival creates anxious feelings of the students in language learning classrooms.

Anxiety and Language Learning

The students of foreign language learning are found to be more anxious in speaking foreign language rather than reading or listening (Kim 2009). It has been suggested by Awan, Azher, Anwar and Naz (2010) that the learners feel higher levels of anxieties when speak in foreign or target language in front of others specially their classmates. It has been noted by Mills et al (2007) that avoidance and nervousness cause the feelings of anxiety of foreign language learners and it affects their performance in academic situations as well daily life conversations. These research results may be implemented to foreign language, second language and target language learning. It is because all these learners of different categories face lot of similar problems of anxiety provoking situations.

Speaking target language is always a hurdle for the learners when they are present in classroom in the presence of the teachers. It is observed that foreign language learners do not feel any problem when talking to the native speakers. It is true that the learners with higher level of self-efficacy feels lees anxious and the learners with low self-efficacy have higher levels of anxieties. It is also observed that the students are always willing to learn and use foreign language apart from the fact that they feel anxiety or not (Cubukcu 2008).

Related Studies about Attitude and Language Achievement

Al-Zahrani (2008) describes that various researchers have tried to investigate the role of learners in learning target language and specially the learning of English as foreign language. For example, a study in which learners' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards English language learning has been explored by Shams (2008).

Momani (2009) conducted a comprehensive study on secondary level learners' attitude towards learning English as foreign language and their attainments in reading comprehensions of English language.

Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) investigated the attitudes and motivation of the students of Petroleum Engineering towards the use of English as foreign language in the social and educational frame work of Yamani students.

Al-Zahrani (2008) carried out a study to investigate the attitudes of the learners of Saudi students. He found that the attitudes of the learners remained same even after passing three years in learning English language.

Fakeye (2010) conducted a study to find a correlation between attitude and proficiency in English Language. He found a considerable relationship between attitude and achievement. He investigated that attitude was not related to gender⁸.

Research Methodology

It has already been explained that the research was aimed to be conducted in the underdeveloped areas of Pakistan. Two major universities of Southern Punjab⁹ are Buzz (Bahaudin Zakryia University, Multan) and the IUB (The Islamia University of Bahawalpur) which have been selected for the current study.

Both the universities are currently offering programs for MA English Literature and linguistics. The purpose of these

⁸ Attitude was not related to Gender. Fakeye (2010) investigated that attitude towards learning second language do not fluctuate in male and female candidates. He explored that if the attitudes are developed positively in the second language learners, the gender difference will be minimum.

⁹ Southern Punjab. It is part of province Punjab which is largest province of Pakistan. This area has been considered as underdeveloped area and the universities present in this area rank below the universities of the developed areas of Pakistan. The two universities mentioned above are getting developed with the passage of time but surely it will take time to become universities of higher rank in Pakistan.

courses is not only to make the students aware from the literature and linguistics of English but to make them good learners of English language. The main purpose is to establish an understanding of the learners from all the four basic skills of English language (Reading, Writing, Listening, speaking). That is why: the participants for the research were taken from these two universities.

The participants were taken from the MA English courses of both the universities including male and female students. Participants were taken randomly and no distinction of gender or age was made at the time of data collection. A total of 400 participants responded to the questionnaire in which 280 were females and 120 males. The ages of the participants varied from 20 to 23 years.

Questionnaire was a five likert scale and it contained 12 items for quantitative data and one question for feedback.

Research Questions

- What is the influence of learners' attitude on their second language learning capabilities?
- How learners' attitudes affect language anxiety inside and outside the classroom?
- What is the relationship of learners' attitude and language anxiety in second language learning?

Research Objectives

- To find out the relationship between attitude and language anxiety
- To study the behaviours of second language learners
- To find out the problems which the second language learners are facing in order to become proficient learners
- To study the anxious feelings of the learners

Research Analysis

Cluster Presentation of Attitude

A=Agree DA= Disagree M= Mean

S.No	Statement	Male			Female			Total		
		A	DA	M	A	DA	M	A	DA	M
		%	%		%	%		%	%	
1	I like to talk about the positive aspects of English language in my community.	74.7	27.3	3.30	73.2	11.8	3.48	74.5	17.5	3.54
2	I feel that I am not a successful English language learner and user.	64.4	26.0	3.30	74.8	18.9	3.48	71.0	21.5	3.42
3	I always have positive views about learning English language.	65.8	16.4	3.62	70.1	14.1	3.72	68.5	15.0	3.68
4	I like my English Language teachers.	56.1	26.1	3.42	53.5	31.5	3.30	54.5	29.5	3.39
5	I get good information about the usage of English language in my University class.	63.0	20.5	3.51	54.3	29.9	3.29	57.5	26.5	3.37
6	I restrain myself to perform in the programs and functions of university which are held in English language.	60.3	24.6	3.40	66.1	21.2	3.45	59.0	22.5	3.44
7	I like to receive worksheets and handouts of English language provided by my university teacher.	65.8	12.3	3.74	69.3	22.8	3.89	64.5	19.0	3.77
8	I hardly use English language at my home.	67.1	16.4	3.52	47.2	33.0	3.15	49.5	28.0	3.29
9	I believe that I am not serious to learn the use of English language.	76.7	5.4	3.86	61.4	21.2	3.44	67.0	15.5	3.60
10	I scarcely speak English language with my friends and fellows.	61.6	17.8	3.56	52.0	32.2	3.09	55.5	27.0	3.29
11	I want to become very fluent in English language.	49.3	36.9	3.04	60.6	25.2	3.47	65.5	29.5	3.24
12	I restrain myself to watch English programs on TV because it bothers me to understand all the programs in English language.	52.1	16.4	3.58	63.5	14.9	3.61	59.5	15.5	3.60

Cluster presentation of the findings has been shown in the above table. The explanation of the findings has been explained below according to the number of items in the questionnaire.

Out of 73 male participants, 56 (66.7%) agreed with the statement. 20 (32.6%) disagreed with the statement “I like to talk about the positive aspects of English language in my community”. and 7 (9.6%) remained neutral. The statement got response with a mean of 3.48. Out of 127 females, 93 (73.2%) agreed with the statement, 15 (11.8) disagreed with the statement and 19 (15.0) remained undecided with 3.64 mean. Overall, 149 (74.5%) participants agreed with the statement. 35

(17.5%) disagreed and 16 (8.0%) remained neutral. The participants opined that they do have positive inclination towards English language which show their positive attitude towards English language. The percentage depicts that the female students have more inclination towards English language than the male students.

Out of 73 male participants, 47 (64.4%) agreed with the statement "I feel that I am not a successful English language learner and user". 19 (26.0%) disagreed with the statement and 7 (9.6%) remained neutral. The statement got response with a mean of 3.30. Out of 127 females, 95 (74.8%) agreed with the statement, 24 (18.9%) disagreed with the statement and 8 (6.3%) remained undecided. The statement got response with a mean of 3.48. Overall, 142 (71.0%) participants agreed with the statement. 43(21.5%) disagreed and 15 (7.5%) remained neutral. The female language learners have shown more interest to become proficient second language learners as a high percentage of females have depicted that they feel themselves not successful English language learners. As a whole, the participants have suggested that they have lack of knowledge of English language which ultimately creates negative attitude among them and their language anxiety is increased.

Out of 73 male participants, 48 (65.8 %) agreed with the statement "I always have positive views about the importance of English language in the world". 12 (16.4%) disagreed with the statement and 13 (17.8%) remained neutral. The statement got response with a mean of 3.62. Out of 127 females, 89 (70.1%) agreed with the statement, 18 (14.1%) disagreed with the statement and 20 (15.7%) remained undecided. The statement got response with a mean of 3.72. Overall, 137(68.5%) participants agreed with the statement. 30 (15.0%) disagreed and 33 (16.5%) remained neutral. The students are well aware from the importance of English language and its importance in Pakistan because they cannot manage to have good jobs without having sufficient knowledge of English

language. The positive attitudes of the students make them less anxious in learning English language.

Out of 73 male participants, 41 (56.1%) agreed with the statement "I like my English Language teachers". 19 (26.1%) disagreed with the statement and 13 (17.8%) remained neutral. The statement got response with a mean of 3.42. Out of 127 females, 93 (73.2%) agreed with the statement, 15 (11.8%) disagreed with the statement and 19 (15.0%) remained undecided. The statement got response with a mean of 3.48. Overall, 109 (54.5%) participants agreed with the statement. 59 (29.5%) disagreed and 32 (16.0%) remained neutral. This statement was inserted in the questionnaire to know about the feelings and inclinations of the language learners towards their language teachers which have received positive attitude of the learners. The anxiety of the learners is not increased due to their language teachers as the collaboration between the students and the teachers create positive among the learners which ultimately reduce their anxiety in language learning class.

Out of 73 male participants, 46(63.0%) agreed with the statement "I get good information about the usage of English language in my University class".15 (20.5%) disagreed with the statement and 12 (16.4%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 69 (54.3%) agreed with the statement, 38 (29.9%) disagreed with the statement and 20 (15.7%) remained undecided. Overall, 115 (57.5%) participants agreed with the statement, 53 (26.5%) disagreed and 32(16.0%) remained neutral. The participants seemed to be satisfied with the teaching methodologies and the material for learning English language. This creates positive attitude among the students as they believe that the material provided to them by their teachers is sufficient for them to become good English language learners and users.

Out of 73 male participants, 44(60.3%) agreed with the statement "I restrain myself to perform in the programs and

functions of my university which are held in English language". 18 (24.6%) disagreed with the statement and 11 (15.1%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 84 (66.1%) agreed with the statement, 27 (21.2%) disagreed with the statement and 26 (20.5%) remained undecided. Overall, 118 (59.0%) participants agreed with the statement, 45 (22.5%) disagreed and 37(18.5%) remained neutral. Almost all the functions are held in English language in Pakistan in the universities because English is official language in Pakistan. The participants have shown their concerns about their confidence level by telling that they are least confidence of themselves when they try to perform in any program held in English. Usually they isolate them to perform in such functions. This lack of confidence increases the amount of anxiety when they try to speak in English language. This lack of confidence create negative attitude in them which ultimately create feelings of anxiety in them.

Out of 73 male participants, 48(65.8%) agreed with the statement that they are always keen to receive the worksheets and handouts provided by their teachers. 9 (12.3%) disagreed with the statement and 16 (21.9%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 129(64.5%) agreed with the statement, 29 (22.8%) disagreed with the statement and 17 (13.4%) remained undecided. Overall, 129 (64.5%) participants agreed with the statement, 38 (19.0%) disagreed and 33(16.5%) remained neutral. The participants' seemed to have positive attitude about the syllabus which is provided to them by their language teachers as a high percentage of the students have shown their consent in favour of the handouts and worksheets provided to them.

Out of 73 male participants, 49(67.1%) agreed with the statement "I hardly use English language at home". 12 (16.4%) disagreed with the statement and 12 (16.4%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 60 (47.2%) agreed with the statement, 44 (33.0%) disagreed with the statement and 25 (19.7%) remained undecided. Overall, 99 (49.5%) participants agreed with the

statement, 56 (28.0%) disagreed and 37(18.5%) remained undecided. The participants whose parents are uneducated do not speak English at home but those having educated ones speak English at home. The later are observed to be less anxious and more pro proficient English language users because they get an opportunity at their homes to overcome their feelings of anxiety and get5 an opportunity to become more fluent in English language.

Out of 73 male participants, 56(76%.7) agreed with the statement "I believe that I am not serious to learn the use of English language". 4 (5.4%) disagreed with the statement and 13 (17.8%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 78 (61.4%) agreed with the statement, 27 (21.2%) disagreed with the statement and 22 (17.3%) remained undecided. Overall, 134 (67.0%) participants agreed with the statement, 31 (15.5%) disagreed and 35(17.5%) remained neutral. The participants have opined that they themselves are not serious to learn the use of English language in their daily conversations. It is because the students do not face any serious difficulty to speak in English language in their own country because they do not have to speak with their country fellows with fluency. They believe that a little knowledge of English language is adequate for them to survive. This negative attitude makes them anxious when they are asked to speak English language. This non serious attitude develops due to the examination system of the country because the students are only asked to write in the exams whatever has been mentioned in the books and get good grades. It seems to create a negative attitude in the learners in their speaking skills. Their anxiety is increased in such a situation.

Out of 73 male participants, 45(61.6%) agreed with the statement "I scarcely speak English language with my friends and fellows". 13 (17.8%) disagreed with the statement and 15 (20.5%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 66 (52.0%) agreed with the statement, 41 (32.2%) disagreed with the

statement and 20 (15.7%) remained undecided. Overall, 111 (55.5%) participants agreed with the statement, 54 (27.0%) disagreed and 35(17.5%) remained undecided. Language is best learnt when the learners speak target language with their fellows and friends but the participants have opined that they do not speak English language with their fellows. It restrains them to get fluency in English language.

Out of 73 male participants, 36(49.3%) agreed with the statement "I want to become very fluent in using English language". 27 (36.9%) disagreed with the statement and 10 (13.7%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 77 (60.6%) agreed with the statement, 32 (25.2%) disagreed with the statement and 18 (14.2%) remained undecided. Overall, 113 (56.5%) participants agreed with the statement, 59 (29.5%) disagreed and 28(14.0%) remained undecided. The response show that the students are well aware from the importance of English language. Majority of the students have opined that they want to become fluent in English language. It is a positive attitude which reduces the amount of anxiety when they learn or speak English language.

Out of 73 male participants, 38(52.1%) agreed with the statement "I restrain myself to watch English programs on TV because it bothers me to understand all the programs in English language". 12 (16.4%) disagreed with the statement and 15 (20.5%) remained neutral. Out of 127 females, 81 (63.5%) agreed with the statement, 19(14.9%) disagreed with the statement and 27 (21.3%) remained undecided. Overall, 119 (63.5%) participants agreed with the statement, 31 (15.5%) disagreed and 43(21.5%) remained undecided. The attitude of the students is not positive to watch the English programs broadcasted in English language which keeps them at an arm's length to listen and understand the fluency of the native speakers. This attitude creates feelings of anxiety in the learners when they try to speak with any native speaker through internet.

Conclusion

It can be assumed from the above results that there are many students who are unaware from the fact that their own attitude is a real hurdle in their way to get mastery on English language. Attitude is a factor which has direct association with language anxiety. Sometimes, the students show negative attitude towards second language without knowing it and they get the unsatisfactory results. The female language learners feel less anxious and more inclined towards English language learning and its use than the male students. The students of less developed or underdeveloped areas feel anxious in language learning and its use. A lot of research is required in underdeveloped areas to make a hypothesis about the attitudes of the second language learners and the amount of anxiety which is directly affected by the attitude of the learners.

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