



THE ATTITUDES OF LEARNERS AND TEACHERS TOWARD LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH AT AL-BAIDA'A CITY SCHOOLS

DR. MOHAMMED HUSSEIN AL-ANISI

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Al-Baida University, Al-Baida.
(REPUBLIC OF YEMEN)

ABSTRACT

The present study explores Yemeni EFL learners and teachers' attitudes toward learning and teaching English language at Al-Baida'a schools. In addition, it investigates the factors that influence their attitudes toward learning and teaching English language as well. Furthermore, it attempts to find out the differences between students and teachers attitudes at public and private schools. All the schools, public and private, in Al-Baida'a city have been included in the study. Two instruments were used in data collection, i.e. a questionnaire to students and interviews with teachers. It is found that a majority of students in Al-Baida'a city have positive attitudes towards learning English language. A small number of the participants showed their negative attitudes towards learning English language. The study also revealed that the private school students are more highly motivated and have stronger attitude than those of public ones. In contrast, it is found that there are no significant differences between teachers of English regarding their attitudes to teaching English. Most of the selected teachers showed poor attitudes toward teaching English language stating that it is just a duty and complaining shortage of support. It is also found that there are slight differences due to gender in favor of female student regarding their attitudes to learning English. Finally, the existence of a number of factors that affect both students and teachers' attitudes toward learning and teaching of English has been revealed.

Key words: attitude aptitude motivation SLL FLL effective factors

Introduction

English was first introduced in the schools of North Yemen during the rule of Imam Yahya in 1926 whereas in South Yemen, namely Aden, it was introduced by the British in the early thirties of the 19th century (Ghanim, 2009). The number of schools at that time was extremely

limited and there was no university at all. Nowadays, there are thousands of schools and tens of universities in which English language is taught. The government encourages the private sector initiative to be involved in the enterprise of teaching English. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that several private institutes have been established to teach English, it is observed that they are located in the main cities and only rich people send their children to them. In a previous study it has been stated that English in Yemen has no official status for administrative purposes within the country. It is learnt as a foreign language. At the school level English is taught from Grade 7 to Grade 12 (3rd secondary class) in the government schools (public schools) and from Grade 4 in the private schools (Al-Anisi, 2015).

Explaining the concept of “attitude” is closely interrelated with and must be distinguished from the concepts “aptitude” and “motivation”. As a result, shedding some light on the mentioned concepts is inevitable. “Attitude” according to Business Dictionary is a predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively to a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Attitude influences an individual’s choice of action, and responses to challenges, incentives, and rewards (together called stimuli). Four major components of attitude are as follows:

- (1) Affective: emotions and feelings.
- (2) Cognitive: belief or opinions held consciously.
- (3) Conative: inclination for action.
- (4) Evaluative: positive or negative response to stimuli.

“Aptitude” is the ability that makes things easy for you to do something well. With regard to language aptitude, it refers to one’s ability to learn another language. Skehan (1989) stated that “aptitude is consistently the best predictor of language learning.

“Motivation” refers to a drive that leads a person to do a course of action. It can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Numerous studies have provided statistical evidence indicating that success”. The British studies found that there is an even greater correlation between second language aptitude and social class and parental education. Motivation is a predictor of language learning success. “Motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question” (Gardner, 1985).

The study

In recognition of the importance of English as a world language, it is needed that our students develop communication skills so that they can be proficient users of the target language in professional and academic fields. However, a majority of Yemeni students and teachers in schools tend to use a generous amount of Arabic (L1) in learning and teaching English. As a

matter of fact, English is considered as a foreign language and its use is confined to the classroom. The majority of students learn English because it is a subject put in the curriculum and they learn it for short-term goals. Though Yemeni students learn English for six years at school, a majority of them cannot speak properly and use the language effectively. These observations led to the assumption that there is a negative attitude among Yemeni students toward learning English language. Hence teachers' attitudes toward a second/foreign language have direct impact on the teachers themselves and on their students, it has been decided that the attitudes of the teachers of the selected schools have to be examined. According to (Abiding, 2012) teachers with positive attitude towards second language usually transfer their attitude to learners by exhibiting themselves as ideal models. The opposite is true in case of the teachers with negative attitude towards a target language or those who rely on poor teaching style. In addition, a considerable number of research has been done abroad to explore the role of attitude in language learning. Ellis (1995) points out that "Learner attitudes have an impact on the level of L2 proficiency achieved by individual learners and are themselves influenced by this success". Gardner through his work on attitude and motivation (both alone and with colleagues) since 1973 has strongly advocated their rule in SLL and FLL. His model of SLA as Oller (1981) remarks "this model has undergone more empirical studies than any other in the published literature and it is an explicit attempt to explain the relationship of affective factors to classroom second language learning". According to this model, two sets of attitudinal variables relevant to SLA are: integrativeness, and attitudes toward the learning situation. Other researchers have investigated and examined the role of attitude such as Pierce (1995), Alshaar(1997), (Abiding, 2012), and (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

The present study comes as a reaction to the immense need to explore the attitude of Yemeni students and teachers in Al-Baida city towards learning and teaching English as a foreign language based on the mentioned observations by examining the following hypotheses:

- a) There is a negative attitude among students and teachers towards learning and teaching English as a foreign language.
- b) There are no significant differences between students and teachers due to gender, grade, and type of school regarding learning and teaching English as a foreign language.
- c) There are no factors that affect the attitude of students and teachers towards learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

For the objectives to be achieved, the following questions need to be answered in the study:

- 1) What are students and teachers' attitudes toward learning and teaching English as a foreign language?

- 2) Are there significant differences between students and teachers due to gender, grade, and type of school regarding learning and teaching English as a foreign language?
- 3) What are the possible factors that can affect students and teachers' attitudes learning and teaching English as a foreign language?

To examine the above hypotheses and answer the raised questions, Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery has been adopted, modified and administered to the selected subjects. The questionnaire consists of twenty items which reflect their perceptions about their own attitudes as well as the possible factors that might affect their attitudes. The items of this instrument were translated in to Arabic and checked by the researcher to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. The subjects (male/female) were chosen randomly from all the schools in Al-Baida city both public and private and were asked to respond to each item on a three-point scale (completely agree, agree to some extent, completely disagree). The other instrument used to collect data was conducting interviews with the teachers of the selected schools who were asked ten questions regarding their attitudes to teaching English and some related aspects that affect their attitudes as well as their students'. The sample consists of (50) female and (70) male students, (7) female and (7) male teachers during the academic year 2015/2016. In Al-Baida City, private schools teach up to Grade 9 and for this there were no students to be selected as representatives of the private sector. The sample of study is shown in the table below.

Study sample

Students N =120

teachers N = 14

	Students						Teachers		
Public	Gender		Grade				Gender		
	M	F	Grade 9		Grade 12		Total	M	F
			M	F	M	F	M		
	35	30	15	15	20	15	65	5	3
Private	35	20	35	20	-	-	55	2	4

To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews tabulation was used. The responses were classified into categories according to their frequency of occurrence. Then, a percentage was given to each category. The responses come under 4 categories as follows:

- a) Attitudes of students toward learning English.
- b) Attitudes of teachers toward teaching English.
- c) Attitudes of community in Al-Baida toward learning English.
- d) Other influencing factors.

The percentages (78% to 55%) have the most effective factors in students' and teachers' attitude towards learning and teaching English as a foreign language. The percentages of (55% to 30%) have effective attitude and the percentages of (30% to 5%) have less effective attitude.

Findings

The analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire administered to students and the interviews with teachers revealed the following findings:

1. A majority of students in Al-Baida'a city have positive attitudes toward learning English language. The mean of percentage of the items belonging to this category is 78% for the alternative "completely agree", 12% for "agree to some extent" and 10% for "completely disagree".
2. The private school students have stronger attitude than those of public ones. 60% of the responses that indicate positive attitudes are given by students of private schools (Grade 9) whereas 40% are given by students of public ones.
3. There is a slight difference in the mean of percentage of students' attitude regarding "grade". A comparison between the responses of Grade 9 and Grade 12 students (at public schools) shows a difference of 3% in favor of Grade 9 students.
4. There is a significant difference in the mean of percentage of students' attitude regarding "gender". A comparison between the responses of male and female students shows a difference of 30% in favor of female students.
5. There is no significant difference in the mean of percentage of teachers' attitude towards teaching English.
6. Most of the selected teachers (80%) show poor attitudes toward teaching English language stating that it is just a duty.
7. Factors that affect students attitudes toward learning English are:
 - a) Parental and community attitudes toward English and English speakers.
 - b) Exposure to English language.
 - c) Teachers' attitude, methods of teaching, and feedback.
 - d) Anxiety and lack of interest.
8. Factors that affect teachers' attitudes toward learning English are:
 - a) Teacher beliefs.

- b) Job satisfaction.
- c) Teacher training.
- d) Rewards and governmental support.

To conclude, discussing the findings in details is out of the scope of this study particularly when we talk about the factors that affect students and teachers' attitudes toward learning and teaching English as a foreign language. To do that each factor needs to be studied separately. However, shedding some light on certain aspects is crucial as it enables stakeholders to come up with immediate remedies. First of all the hypothesis that there is a negative attitude among students and teachers towards learning and teaching English as a foreign language was not supported in case of students as a majority of them show a positive attitudes and this leads to other assumptions of the reasons beyond inefficiency of students in using English effectively. However, the hypothesis was supported in case of teachers which is a marker of severe factors encountered and need to be taken into account. Secondly, private school students' positive attitudes might be resulting from the fact that they study English at Grade 4. As stated by Larsen-Freeman & Long, (1994) "One of the most obvious potential explanations for the comparative lack of success of second language learners is that SL learners begin acquiring the language at a later age than do first language learners". Thirdly, attitudes toward the speakers of English language have been proved to be effective. This supports Spolsky's (1969) claimed that "One of the most important attitudinal factors is the attitude of the learner toward the language and its speakers". Fourthly, the significant difference in case of female students comes to support previous researchers in this respect. Considerable research supports the generalization that girls tend to demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes toward learning a second language than do boys (Alshaar, 1997). Finally, it is worth mentioning that Grades 10, 11, and 12 are not found at private schools and the number of students is few in each school in comparison with public schools so it can be claimed economic factors attribute to attitudes of students.

Finally, it can be assumed that if the findings of this study are to be taken into consideration, the implications provided might be of a great value for students, parents, community in Al-Baida City, teachers, and administration

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