



ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

English has acquired the status of a link language all over the world and the importance of being educated in English cannot be denied. The main challenge is that students from both English and vernacular medium schools face difficulties in acquisition of the English language which often acts as a barrier to higher education and better career opportunities. Researchers in Second Language Acquisition have developed many theories about the process of Second Language Acquisition and enquired about the various causes facilitating and retarding Second Language Acquisition. It has been observed that apart from learning strategies, individual learner differences such as attitude, motivation and exposure to the language are also of great relevance to Second Language Acquisition research. In the present study an attempt has been made to find out the influence of the medium of education at the secondary level on the attitude towards English language. A sample of 100 college students has been selected purposively. Standardized tool has been administered to assess the attitude. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA have been computed and the results suggest that medium of instruction has significant influence on 3 dimensions of attitude towards English learning. The findings imply the importance of exposure to the language and attitude towards the language in Second Language Acquisition research.

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INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the study of how students learn a second language (L2) in addition to their first language. Although it is referred to as second language acquisition, it may be the process of learning any language after the first language. English, despite being a foreign language, has evolved into a second language for a vast majority of Indians and the predominant factor behind this unique status is India's colonial legacy. The British colonisers originally wished to introduce English education in India to create an educated section of upper middle class 'babu's who would be able to look after English administration and governance efficiently. The English Education Act, 1835 and the establishment of the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 in which English was the main medium for imparting higher education gave further impetus to the introduction of English language and learning in the education system and ultimately English was retained as an associate official language even after Independence. In the present day

where English has acquired the status of a link language and is the most popular second language to be learnt in all corners of the world, the importance of being educated in English cannot be denied. At present, India is the third largest English speaking country after the USA and the UK. Despite our colonial past and relatively early introduction to the English language we find that competence in the English language is not a common occurrence. Students from both English and vernacular medium schools face difficulties in acquisition of the English language which often acts as a barrier to higher education and better career opportunities. A major challenge is to find means and ways to discover the factors that retard and facilitate SLA so that everyone with access to education may be competent in the English language.

In our country, in vernacular medium schools English language and literature are taught as separate subjects while all the other subjects are taught in the mother tongue whereas in the English medium schools all subjects are taught in English.

The exposure to English language is thus far greater for students from English medium backgrounds. However, the syllabus, textbooks, time allotted for teaching and evaluation are the same for both the medium (in the case of schools belonging to the same board of education). In spite of the similarities, there is a difference in the achievement in second language between the students of the two mediums. Further, there is a difference between individual learners belonging to the same medium of instruction. Perhaps, in addition to their inherent aptitude for language acquisition, their socio-cultural backgrounds and their exposure to the target language within and without the school have a role to play in their SLA. R.C. Gardner's work in second language learning provides an insight into this matter. A considerable research investigating the role and nature of attitude and motivation in the second language learning process was initiated by Gardner and Lambert in 1985. Their attention was directed mainly at two classes of attitudes, the educationally relevant 'attitude toward learning the language' and the more socially relevant 'attitude toward the community'. This focus on relevance led to a consideration of the specific roles played by attitudes and the conclusion that they are important primarily as supports for motivation. An in-depth analysis of the motivational construct helped them to clarify the processes by which attitudes and motivation influence second language acquisition, and led to the generalization that a complex of attitudes and motivation, referred to as an integrative motive, underlie the successful acquisition of a second language.

In recent studies Nada Al Rifai (2010) investigated the student's attitudes and their integrative and instrumental motivation towards learning English. Findings revealed that "attitudes and motivation (both integrative and instrumental) towards learning the language were positive and that there was a positive correlation between attitude and integrative and instrumental motivation and vice versa. It was also found that higher grades had a positive impact on attitudes and motivation. Xiang Yang (2012) investigated the role of attitude and motivation in successful second language learning among students of the University of Malaya. The results confirmed that learners with a positive attitude and high level of motivation, be it instrumental or integrative, will be successful in developing proficiency in the language. E.G. Stefansson (2013) analyses how motivation and exposure to the target language seem to play a more important role in the learning process than the age factor and therefore it is extremely important to implement motivation and provide sufficient language exposure to the learner right from the start of the learning journey regardless of how old the learner is. Against this backdrop, the present study attempts to examine the importance of attitudes and motivation and the exposure to

the second language (medium of instruction followed in school) in English language acquisition in the case of college students from Kolkata. The objectives of this study were to find the attitude of students towards English language acquisition and to see if there is any significant influence of medium of instruction followed in school on the different factors of attitude.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample: For this present study 100 college students from various parts of Kolkata were selected purposively. They were aged between 18-20 years and belonged to the middle income group. All the participants were females.

Tools: A General Information Schedule was designed to gather the respondent's personal information, name of the college, medium of schooling etc. A separate questionnaire based on Gardner's Attitude Motivation Test battery (1985) was administered to them which consisted of ten sub tests using a Likert seven alternative response format. Thus each statement was followed by the seven alternatives. The sub tests included - Interest in foreign language, Attitude towards Learning English, Integrative Orientation, Instrumental Orientation, English Class Anxiety, Parental Encouragement, Attitude towards English Class, Attitude towards English Teacher, Desire to Learn English and Practical Application of the Language.

RESULTS

Since the present study was of an exploratory type, the data were analysed by using descriptive statistics and ANOVA. The results suggest that medium of instruction has significant influence on three dimensions of attitude towards English learning. These are Integrative Orientation, Parental Encouragement and Practical Application. The other dimensions do not show any significant influence. These dimensions are Interest in Foreign Languages, Attitudes towards learning English, Instrumental Orientation, English Class Anxiety, Attitude towards English Class, Attitude towards English Teacher and Desire to Learn English.

Integrative orientation or Integrativeness is defined as "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language group" (Lambert, 1974, p. 98). Integrative orientation implies that a learner wishes to learn the language because he or she is generally interested in foreign languages and has a positive attitude towards the particular language speaking community. The four items in this scale emphasize the importance of learning English in order to permit social interaction with people who speak English.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the different dimensions of attitude towards second language acquisition

Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interest in Foreign Languages	23	66	51.35	8.688
Attitude towards learning English(positive)	15	35	32.22	3.954
Attitude towards learning English(negative)	5	14	7.67	2.470
Integrative Orientation	17	28	25.98	2.411
Instrumental Orientation	14	28	22.59	3.973
English class anxiety	10	32	21.59	5.838
Parental Encouragement	20	56	46.61	7.834
Attitude towards English class	37	74	50.24	8.489
Attitude towards English teacher	22	48	37.24	4.948
Desire to learn English	18	59	45.47	6.922
Practical Application	14	28	19.73	3.309

Table 2. Representation of the mean values of different dimensions of attitude according to medium of instruction followed in school

Dimensions	Mean (English Medium)	Mean (Bengali Medium)
Interest in Foreign Languages	59	51
Attitude towards learning English(positive)	35	32
Attitude towards learning English(negative)	5	7
Integrative Orientation	26	25
Instrumental Orientation	18	22
English class anxiety	26	21
Parental Encouragement	47	46
Attitude towards English class	50	50
Attitude towards English teacher	36	37
Desire to learn English	47	45
Practical Application	19	15

Table 3: ANOVA results including medium of instruction as the independent variable and different dimensions of attitude as dependent variables

Dimensions	F-ratio	Significance
Interest in Foreign Languages	.117	.734
Attitudes toward Learning English(positive worded)	.135	.715
Attitude towards learning English(negative)	.000	.993
Integrative Orientation	4.095*	.049
Instrumental Orientation	3.380	.072
English class anxiety	.421	.520
Parental Encouragement	3.856*	.055
Attitude towards English class	.019	.891
Attitude towards English teacher	.210	.649
Desire to learn English	.419	.520
Practical Application	5.069*	.029

A high score on this scale (maximum = 28) indicates that a student endorses integrative reasons for studying English. Findings of the present study reveal that students from English medium schools have a higher Integrative orientation than their counterparts from Bengali medium schools. The items on Parental Encouragement assess the extent to which students feel their parents support them in their English study. A high score (maximum = 56) indicates a high level of perceived parental encouragement. It is seen that students from English Medium backgrounds enjoy more parental encouragement than their Bengali medium peers. The items on Practical Application assess the extent to which students are confident in using English in practical situations. A high score (maximum = 28) indicates a high level of confidence. Again the difference in practical application is significant for English medium students indicating that they are more comfortable in using English in practical situations than students from Bengali medium schools.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that students from English medium schools have greater integrative orientation, their parents are more encouraging and they have greater confidence while speaking in English in real life situations. It can thus be said that the medium of instruction is vital which is why Bengali medium students are at a disadvantage. The findings are consistent with that of earlier researches. Gardner's studies (2005, 2009) assert that integrative orientation is more important than instrumental. Jamila (2014) has emphasised how lack of confidence of students studying English as a foreign language in Bangladesh acts as a barrier to their language proficiency and the main reason behind this is lack of communication within the classroom. Hosseinpour *et al.* (2015) in their study on the impact of parent's involvement in the English learning of Iranian primary school students indicate that students whose parents are more involved in the learning process tend to do better than those who receive less

parental support. Nair *et al.* (2014) have also reported a significant effect of parental encouragement on the students. The importance of these three dimensions therefore is undeniable and this study emphasises that English as a medium of instruction is beneficial for the student's acquisition of the language. This view finds support in much other research carried out in various parts of the world. Komba and Bosco (2015) in their study on Tanzanian secondary school students from both Swahili and English medium schools have found that secondary schools students with English as medium of instruction at primary school, have performed better in form one annual examinations than their counterparts who have used Swahili as well as in form two national examinations. Moreover, different studies have also revealed the efficacy of studying in English medium schools on not only the English languages but in studies in general. Pardeep Kumar's (2014) study on post graduate management students stresses that those who are more proficient in English fare better than weaker students in management examinations even though English proficiency is not a criteria for admission.

However, this does not imply that students from vernacular medium schools cannot gain proficiency in English. Of the ten dimensions tested in this study, only three have been deemed as significant. The other seven, are not significantly affected by the medium of study. Thus, if the three significant dimensions are emphasised it may be possible to improve the proficiency of vernacular medium students in English.

Increasing proficiency in English language learning is not an easy proposition and second language researchers from all over the world are continually searching for solutions. The present study implies that the three dimensions of Integrative Orientation, Parental Encouragement and Practical application of the language have a positive effect on English language proficiency. Thus it may be concluded that despite the dismal performance of our students in both their college examinations in English as well as in their interactional capabilities

(communicational skills), if a positive form of intervention is introduced at the primary level and continued at the secondary level by emphasising these significant dimensions the situation will improve considerably. English Language Acquisition is a complex process and only three factors will definitely not bring about a miraculous change. Many other factors such as exposure to the language and socio-cultural factors also have to be considered. However, this little step will definitely help us to improve the English language proficiency of our students and enable them to establish a better grasp over the language. The present study further implies that the teachers should be trained in ways that they can increase both the Integrative and Instrumental orientation of the students. This should be implemented from the day that students start learning the language. In order to increase integrative orientation, students should be introduced to the culture and lifestyle of the target language community in a way that they develop a favourable attitude towards it. As parental encouragement boosts motivation, parents may be advised to give as much encouragement, help and concern as far as possible. The syllabus may be modified as to include a communicative way of teaching so that students get to interact in the classroom which will thereby increase their confidence in real life situations.

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