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Investigating Afghan students attitude and motivation toward learning English language at Shaheed Rabani Education University

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Abstract

English as a foreign language has been taught from school level up to university classes in all academic institutions of Afghanistan. As an English teacher I have experienced different levels of students who are learning this language for various purposes. For most of students English is still a challenge to learn and speak. The main purpose of this study was to investigate about attitude of students toward learning this language. This paper will discuss on discovering what Afghan students at Shaheed Rabani Education University think about English language and how their attitude affect their learning process. Finally, it was found that however of the negative stereotypes regarding English language that it is the language of western countries and Afghan students are not interested to learn it, it was found that students are passionate enough and interested enough to learn and communicate through this language. It means it was finally found that most of students at Shaheed Rabani Education University had a positive attitude and motivation toward learning English language. also the majority of students who does not have the necessary facilities, money, and security to go private institutions and learn this language, still they are struggling and are interested to find a way for joining any kind of programs to learn this international language.

Keywords: Attitude, motivation

Introduction

As we know every action we do is a command of our mind. The word attitude means our perception or belief about something and this issue has got an influential role in everything we do in life. Learning a language also needs more attention, motivation, and practice. The word attitude can be defined as 'a psychological tendency to view an exact thing or behaviour with a degree of favour or disfavour. Attitudes are defined as being specific to an object or behaviour while beliefs are more generic, relating to a wider worldview, and tend to be more stable (Hosseini and Pourmandnia, 2013). The main problem is that a large number of students at Kabul Education University have problem and are not able to have basic communication in this language. Although they study English as a foreign language from 4th grade at school but still they have low competence and weak input in this language. There may be several reasons such as lack of professional teachers, security, lack of facilities, and other issue behind it but this study will focus on a different perspective of language learning which is, what students have in their mind about English as a language. The issue of attitude in English language learning is considered to be an effective factor that should be considered. Since English is a foreign language in the Afghan context, it is the only language taught at schools of Afghanistan. Recently, new edition of English text books published for schools by ministry of education which can be adequate enough for students to improve their language skills. Similarly, some students take English language private classes too. But there are still some challenges which prevent students from improvement. As students come to university after passing entrance exam they study English for two semesters in all different faculties of Shaheed Rabani Education University and as teacher, I found out that their English language skills are weak and not enough to solve their problems at university. This problem creates an obstacle for teachers of English to complete their course syllabus and deal with students who have a lot of problems in English language. This study will discover the motivation and attitude of students at university regarding English language learning.

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Literature review

Different research has shown that people's purpose of doing something directly influence their response to a task (Lamb, 2004) ^[4]. According to Brown (2000) ^[1], second language learners, use from their mindset and beliefs therefore, positive attitudes motivate them, and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation. Nevertheless, he believes negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality for example, by encounters with actual persons from other cultures. Positive attitudes on the part of language learners can be the reason for development of an integrative motivation and this can therefore facilitate second language learning progress. Furthermore, Attitudes, behaviour, and feelings are interrelated with each other and they are presented in such a way that people's attitudes presents their behaviour towards things, conditions, and people. A person belief and perception also influence their relationships with people and society. Syyeda (2016) ^[7], stated that attitude is multidimensional phenomenon because It is consist of three components: which are affect, cognition, and behavior. The first dimension of attitude is affect which is part of our emotions, beliefs, and vision toward something. Emotions are the feelings of favor or pleasure in learning something or thinking about something as boring, difficult, and dry. In addition, student's ability and self-confidence is closely related to their beliefs and it has an important impact on learning procedure. Vision represents students' perception toward any subject and Cognition represents the students' perceived usefulness of the subject. Conversely, behavior is connected to students' motivation to learn that is reflected with student's actions, commitment, and performance in class.

Using these components to understand the students' attitude towards any subject, we measure the following aspects:

- Self-confidence, anxiety, enjoyment (affect)
 - Intrinsic motivation (behaviour)
 - Perceived usefulness (cognition)
- (Syed, 2016) ^[7].

In short, it was claimed that Attitude is usually defined as a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing such as an idea, object, person, or situation. Students have positive or negative attitudes towards the language they want to learn or the people who speak it. Attitude can alter every aspect of a person's life, including their education. Student attitudes on learning determine their ability and willingness to learn. If negative attitudes are not altered, a student is unlikely to continue his education beyond what is required

Why is attitude important in learning language?

Malallaha (2000) ^[6] investigated the attitudes of Arab learners towards English language and discovered that they have positive attitudes towards the English language and their proficiency in tests was positively related to their attitude towards English. In a study conducted by Novianti (2006) on the correlation between students' attitudes in language learning and their achievement implies that attitude towards learning a language has relationship with students' reading comprehension. Although the study only focused on attitudes during the learning, assumingly it can be regarded as a representation that the students' attitude towards language learning consisting of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects has an effect on their

reading comprehension. Attitude refers to a learned tendency of a person to respond positively or negatively towards an object, situation, a concept, or a person. It is also regarded as a belief held by individuals that reflects their opinions and feelings and can be sometimes manifested in behaviour (Joseph, 2013) ^[3].

According to (Lennartsson, 2008) ^[5], students' beliefs can be an obstacle if they believe that they cannot learn the new language successfully. Negative attitude and lack of motivation can lead to obstacles in learning a language. But a student's negative attitudes can be changed and turned into positive ones and facilitate getting a positive result. Having positive attitude towards learning a language is a good start to learn a language. The study calls the attention of the teachers to the fact that language learners are not only communicators and problem-solvers, but whole persons with hearts, feelings, beliefs, identities. Motivation has a direct effect on learning a language as well.

Motivation plays a significant role in the process of learning a language. Language teachers cannot effectively teach a language if they do not understand the relationship between motivation and its effect on language acquisition. The core of motivation is what might be called passion, which relates to a person's intrinsic goals and desires. Successful learners know their preferences, their strengths and weaknesses, and effectively utilize strengths and compensate for weaknesses. Successful language learning is linked to the learner's passion. And instructors should find ways to connect to this passion. Learners need quality instruction, input, interaction, and opportunities for meaningful output, not only to make progress, but also to maintain motivation for language learning. A good teacher, then, must tap into the sources of intrinsic motivation and find ways to connect them with external motivational factors that can be brought to a classroom setting. This is especially significant when English is not seen as important to the students' immediate needs, other than to pass exams. Because learners have different purposes for studying a language, it is important for instructors to identify students' purposes and needs and to develop proper motivational strategies. Students should understand why they need to make an effort, how long they must sustain an activity, how hard they should pursue it, and how motivated they feel toward their pursuits. Motivation fluctuates, and it is challenging to keep language learners' motivation at a high level all the time. When designing a language course, teachers must take into consideration that each learner has different interests and expectations.

Differences between attitude and motivation

At this point, we must talk about two initial distinctions: the literature on attitudes and that of motivation that are sometimes close, so we need to be clear how attitude and motivation differ as concepts. An attitude is a set of beliefs and motivation is a reason for doing something. This can be confused because a set of beliefs can be a reason for doing it. So you may be motivated to learn English because your attitude towards English culture, or towards your teacher. It is a common belief that you will not learn English if you dislike the English teacher. There is, however, a small amount of research which suggests that learners can in fact distinguish the messenger from the message. The second distinction is one made in much of motivation literature. It is between integrative and instrumental motivation. The former is related to the desire to learn more about a culture,

its language and people – to integrate more within the target language society. The latter relates to achieving some other goals. So if you learn English because you will get a better job if you speak this language, then your motivation is instrumental. The literature on motivation states that persons who are instrumentally motivated are more successful in acquiring the second language.

Method

In this study I used interviewing procedure in order to collect the data needed.

Participant: The participants were university students from different faculties and I used purposive selection of participant. 10 Students who are studying English for two semesters at Shaheed Rabani Education University were interviewed for completing this research. I also interviewed two professors who teach English language for students of Islamic Studies, computer science, natural science, and physical education at this university.

Material

The research was based on interviewing to collect the data. I made interview questions and used a voice recorder to record their interviews.

Procedure: First, the permission and confidential letter were submitted to the teachers and students. Then they assigned a day for interview. 10 students were asked from Islamic studies faculty, Natural Science, social Science, Computer science, physical education, Educational psychology faculty to have an interview regarding this research. Students were discussed regarding the importance and need of this research and questions were clarified then interview started. The interviews were recorded which lasted 10 minutes for each of them. After listening to interviews it was scripted to analyse and discuss on their ideas.

Finding and Discussion

The data I received from my participants showed that students have got different beliefs regarding learning English language. Students are learning this language for various purposes. For most of students English is still a challenge to learn and speak. The main problem is that a large number of students at Kabul Education University have problem and are not able to have basic communication in this language. Although they study English as a foreign language from 4th grade at school but still they have low competence and weak input in this language. There may be several reasons such as lack of professional teachers, security, lack of facilities, and other issue behind it but this study will focus on a different perspective of language learning which is, what students have in their mind about English as a language. To clarify my findings more it is a need to categorize students based on the nine faculties because students from each faculty had separate perspectives.

First, the students from computer science department had a positive attitude and motivation for learning English language. The reason was their field of study, since they study information technology and without learning English developing professionally in their field was not possible. So

these students had a main purpose which was motivating them to have appositive attitude to learn English.

Second, the natural science department students found English language interesting and wanted to learn but due to their load of main subjects which are tough for them to study English language has become a far-away goal to achieve. For example, in chemistry department, one of the students explained that they only learn terminologies of chemical materials in English which is a need for them but communicating in English and learning to have adequate competence was not their main goal of study.

Third, students of physical education had a positive attitude toward English language because most of students wanted to learn English because they wanted to attend international competitions in the future therefore English is a must for their profession. Some of students came from provinces of Afghanistan and there was lack of professional teachers and even no English teacher at all in their school due to security reasons.

Fourth, the students from social science department was also interviewed and most of them believe English can be a tool for conveying and expressing their beliefs, ideas and opinions regarding several issue globally. They were interested to learn English if they had the chance and most of them explained that there were several reasons for not learning English properly during school. Some of students came from provinces of Afghanistan and there was lack of professional teachers and even no English teacher at all in their school due to security reasons.

Fifth, psychological faculty students explained about their own field of study which is very broad and they already ready so many books in their own language so some students did not want to learn English but some of them who set high missions in their life had positive belief regarding English language. They stated that we want to become international experts of psychology so we want to write articles and books in English language and even translate books from English to Dari language because they lack updated materials. So these students were very excited and eagerly wanted to learn English and even most of them were following English language institutions outside University by paying money.

Sixth, the students who study Dari, Pashto, Russian, Turkey, Arabic language literature in faculty of languages were also interested to learn English. However, some of students in Pashto department thought English is not the primary goal in their educational journey. Some students from Arabic department believed English is a difficult language to learn so it takes so much patience to learn it.

Seventh, special education faculty is a unique faculty in Shaheed Rabani Education University because some of students are blind and deaf and still they are so excited and interested to learn English. They have a positive attitude toward learning English because they think it's an international language and can help them to have better jobs in Kabul.

Eight, in vocational education faculty students had different perspective regarding learning English language. Some of them were very interested and said English is an international language and we want to learn it but in private institutions where they pay money for it and learn through different programs. Learning English at university is difficult for them because they only studied English two

credits per week and for learning a language they should have one hour per day to practice it more.

Ninth, the Islamic studies faculty is a place where interesting answers were found regarding students attitude toward learning English. Most of the students paid fee and studied English in private institutions, they believed English is a tool that they can spread Islamic message to the world. According to their perspective, if they can speak English then it will be helpful for them to communicate with non-Muslims and convert them to Islam religion by expressing the real face and truth of Islam to the people of the world.

On the other hand, two of the lecturers who teach at these departments were also interviewed and it was found that however of the negative stereotypes regarding English language that it is the language of western countries and Afghan students are not interested to learn it, it was found that students are passionate enough and interested enough to learn and communicate through this language. It means it was finally found that most of students at Shaheed Rabani Education University had a positive attitude and motivation toward learning English language. As it was found that majority of students who does not have the necessary facilities, money, and security to go private institutions and learn this language, still they are struggling and are interested to find a way for joining any kind of programs to learn this international language.

Furthermore, Afghan students face various challenges related to education such as lack of professional teacher, security problems, and poverty but still they are trying to continue their education, and continue learning which is a great pride and achievement for our country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main purpose of this study was to investigate about attitude of students toward learning this language. It was found that students are passionate enough and interested enough to learn and communicate through this language. also the majority of students who does not have the necessary facilities, money, and security to go private institutions and learn this language, still they are struggling and are interested to find a way for joining any kind of programs to learn this international language.

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