

WHY ARE CERTAIN STUDENTS FURTHER FROM ACHIEVING THEIR DESIRED LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY?



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Article history:

*Accepted 8 July 2020
Available online 31 August 2020*

Keywords:

*Teaching Strategies,
English Language Learning,
ELT,
Proficiency,
Motivation and Age.*

A b s t r a c t

This study deals with proficiency of students towards English Language Learning. It includes ELT strategies that can properly motivate students to learn the language without betraying where they come from. Although many of them are afraid that learning English might assimilate them, therefore, they hesitate to learn English due to their Educational system which makes them fearful of losing their identity.

1. Introduction

One of my concerns regarding certain students relates to their lack of success attaining proficiency of the English language in terms of comprehension, productive skills, or both. Although most students begin their study of the English language in High School, others as early as primary, or even pre-school, the majority still fall short of attaining acceptable levels of fluency. In the context of my pedagogical experience, I found that some students, in a general sense, do not possess a positive attitude towards the English language, often times as a result of the Education System in their countries. This perception and attitude towards the language does not transcend the culture among traditionally English speaking nations, an affect directly related to the globalization of their society. Educators of the English language have discovered that individual motivation of students results in their attainment of higher proficiency levels. This discovery leads us to explore and question whether there are any circumstances which can be introduced into their methodology of teaching that can properly motivate the students to master the English language and truly inspire a desire to learn it.

2. Statement of Purpose

Even though certain students agree that command of the English language is helpful and important to properly understand and interact with expatriates and their cultures, they do not support English as a language of instruction in their schools. Why? Why

aren't they motivated to effectively learn and master the English language? What circumstances may contribute to the motivation of these students to support English as a language of instruction in their schools? What makes these students reluctant to achieve their desired level of English proficiency? Could the Educational System be the central hindrance in the encouragement of students towards learning English?

3. Importance of Study

Examining the relationship between certain students' attitudes towards the English language and its acceptance and the extent of its use in their countries forms the position of the importance of this research. Mastery of the English language assists people of the world in effectively communicating with each other. It is the language of global economy and commerce, of the internet and modern technology. This coincidental fact has inspired citizens of the world to learn English. However, the appreciation for the importance of English as a foreign language in many countries may be deficient in motivating students to take active steps through the learning process and result in their ultimate proficiency in the language. The main incentive that is lacking for these students towards learning English is the infrequency of use and its minimal impact on their daily lives. In fact, learning English is often delayed to adulthood when it becomes a necessity for them to learn in order to successfully function and fulfil their professional needs.

4. Literature Review

There are different aspects of the attitude towards language that have been studied: the relationship between attitudes and motivation (Donitsa-Schmidt et al. 2004, Bernaus et al. 2004, Williams et al. 2002), the relationship between attitudes and learning strategies (Gan2004), the relationship between attitudes and levels of achievement (Graham 2004), beliefs and attitudes about targeted language use, first language use and anxiety (Levine 2003) and also, attitudes towards English language usage among peers (White 2002). According to Gardern (1985: 10), attitudes are a part of motivation in language learning and he defines motivation as the summation of effort plus the desire to achieve the goal of learning language. He declares in 1985, "Learning a foreign language is determined by personality characteristics such as the motivation of knowing foreign people in general and also the motivation to adopt particular factors such as, cultural, contextual, affective and cognitive, among which attitudes have an important place". Based on the above review, it may be determined that attitude is extremely important for certain learners of English to achieve their purpose. The possession of the right attitude may be found in a person, which can be aided in further development by his parents, friends, family, social pressures and perhaps most importantly, by their teachers.

The Aims of this Research are:

1. To perform an investigation of the relationship of attitude to learning a language
2. To determine the optimal age for beginning to learn a foreign language
3. To analyze the effects of the place where the individual started to learn the language within the context of EFL Students in Turkey

5. Research Methods

Data was collected through a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire requests personal information: gender, their approximate age when they started to learn English and the place where they started to learn English. The second part of the questionnaire asks the students about their attitude towards the use of English in their countries.

Participants:

The subjects of the questionnaire were students of primary school where English is taught up to 15 hours per week. 48.5% of the group were female students whereas 51.5% of the group were male students. It was revealed that approximately 40.5 % of participants started learning English when they were between the ages of zero and six, whereas 59.5% began at the age of seven and above.

Findings:

Table 1. Result of Descriptive Statistics

Attitudes towards English in general	Gender		The age of starting to learn English		The place of starting to learn English	
	Female	Male	0-6	7+	In school	In preschool
Beautiful	4.25 %	3.22 %	4.34 %	2.45 %	2.55 %	2.58 %
Musical	5.72 %	4.12 %	5.52 %	3.35 %	3.23 %	4.5 %
Important	6.15 %	5.72 %	5.9 %	4.71 %	4.76 %	4.83 %
Rich	8.44 %	6.43 %	8.25 %	10.54 %	10.61 %	10.47 %
Interesting	9.72 %	8.33 %	9.31 %	13.45 %	13.53 %	13.67 %

Regarding gender differences female students were found to have a more positive attitude toward English than male students. The students who started learning English between the ages of zero and six in pre-school possess an attitude towards English as a beautiful, more musical language and important as a language of culture, but students who started to learn English from the age of seven and above found it more interesting and rich. Both groups were shown to have more supportive attitudes towards the general value of English, however, they did have a more negative attitude toward having course books written in English.

6. Result and Discussions

Regarding the observed negative results found in the Turkish students' attitude towards the English Language in Turkey, EFL teachers must come up with new ideas to inspire these students to be more accepting towards English as a language of instruction in their schools. This can be achieved by implementing appropriate methods and activities of teaching English effectively. Certain students wish to have more fluent and accurate English speaking skills in order to help them to understand other cultures.

This is also a good indication for EFL Teachers to use the communicative approach in their classrooms to encourage students to collaborate and discuss their experiences regarding language learning. It will also improve their attitude, passion and enthusiasm to properly acquire their desired fluency in the English language. Furthermore, Educators should meet the needs

and consider the interests of their students so as to adapt to their different perceptions about learning second languages.

Differences in gender, age of exposure to the English language, etc. Additionally, motivations should be encouraged based on the students' needs, or reasons for learning a language. Following the pragmatic values of learning a new language can be conducive to formulating a genuine and special interest among students for a targeted language and the culture of those who speak it.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study show that although the students have a slightly positive attitude towards the English language, they do not have a positive attitude towards speaking English to one another. An example of one of their greater oppositions is, "If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic". It is very strange that students are not tolerant of each other speaking English. The role of the educator must be that of establishing an environment where students are encouraged to practice speaking English with each other. It becomes noticeable that in different EFL contexts, certain students want to learn English to find a well-paying job and earn more money, have a higher social status and be well connected to the global community, but they do not accept practicing English with one another. As the Internet is increasingly diffusing the boundaries on maps, even the smaller businesses in different places are selecting more bilingual employees. If students want to attract attention in today's job market, if they want to be significant, an International perspective is critical. When students speak two languages fluently it opens immensely more doors to opportunities for jobs domestically and abroad. Regarding their attitude towards Western cultures, the findings indicated that more than half of them displayed an interest in the culture of the English speaking world as represented through film.

These results might be further characterized by the students' desires to experience and understand the culture of the West, but not to fully integrate into that culture. Analysis of the data collected shows the majority of students did not feel that learning the language was submitting to biculturalism, or an acceptance of the cultural practices of the English speaking world. A significant amount further articulated their wish to learn about Western culture and broaden their horizons through familiarizing themselves with that culture. Positive attitude and motivation share a connected role in the acquisition of a second language. Despite the fact that there was no direct influence found that attitude contributed to the learning process, it does occupy an important role in the development of motivation. So, a positive attitude should be viewed more as a catalyst to language learning.

When a student possesses an enthusiastic attitude towards learning a language, their motivation for learning that language tends to increase and simultaneously decrease when the attitude towards learning that language is more negative thus making the process of learning more demanding for them. All EFL teachers should take into consideration their students' perceptions, beliefs and behaviour prior to assessing their cognitive abilities. The English syllabus and classroom activities should be formed upon effective purposes according to their students' needs and their individual differences in order to strengthen, among some, and create, among others, a positive attitude towards English. It is crucial to study and account for learners' personalities. Increased performance and proficiency will be accomplished if these students maintain a positive attitude and appreciation for mastery of a targeted language. This is the basis for reaching the conclusion that proper perspective and inspiring a positive outlook towards language learning should be considered when implementing curriculums among educators.

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