Social Factors Influencing non-English Major Professors' Attitude towards Learning English as an Academic Language

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Abstract: *It is argued that language learning is regarded as the cornerstone of human existence. The widespread use of English as an international language makes it highly important in the world. It is no more working as the status of language of the elite class or the educated class of the society such as professors, rather it is working as an instrument to bring success in life. Nowadays, teachers need to learn English language for research works. They may teach different majors but all of them need English Language for their educational improvement. This requires that they have positive attitudes towards English language learning. In this regard, the role of social factors can be useful, too. Hence, this study was an endeavor to examine the social factors influencing non-English major professors' attitude towards English as an academic language. To this end, questionnaire was used as a research instrument. It was administered to 100 non-English major professors of Islamic Azad University (Babol Branch), Babol, Iran. The findings revealed that some social factors can influence on non-English major Professors' attitudes toward English language learning. On the basis of the findings, the study recommended that the university policy should stipulate that English should be strictly used as a language of learning and teaching with the aim of helping teachers because they need English for their academic improvement.*

Keywords: *Social factor, attitude, non-English major professors, English language learning.*

Introduction

The widespread use of English as an international language makes it highly important in the world. English is recognized as the lingua franca for communication across nations and cultures, and is the most desired second or foreign language in most countries in the world. English is used as a second or foreign language in workplace, international trade, global media, tourism, business, education, technology, and on diplomatic occasions. It is no more working as the status of language of the elite class or the educated class of the society such as professors, rather it is working as an instrument to bring success in life. Nowadays, teachers need to learn English language for research works like taking part in conferences of foreign countries and workshops, presenting ISI articles, using world information, etc. Teachers may teach different majors but all of them need English Language for their educational improvement.

In foreign language learning context, there are various affective factors that influence learning process such as attitude and motivation (Gradner, 1960; Lehmann, 2006 cited in Shams, 2008). The matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact on learning language (Fakeye, 2010). Attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent (Gardner, 1985). It is believed that individuals with positive attitudes usually progress more rapidly in foreign language learning. Anastasi (1957) defines attitude as tendency to react in certain way towards a designed class of stimuli. It should be noted the teachers of different majors have different attitudes and perspectives about English language learning (Ibnian, 2012). Generally, it is believed that learners' attitudes, skills and strategies dictate whether or not they will be able to absorb the intricacies of language (Oxford, 1990; Nunan, 2000). In this regard, sociolinguistic research in SLA has documented that social, cultural and psychological factors affect language acquisition. According to some researchers' viewpoint, one of the most important factors is social.

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Learning of the language of the other community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions toward speech community in question. In other words, the interpretation of meaning in all communication is dependent on context, which includes a vast myriad of social factors (Long, 2010). According to some researchers (Giles, 1982; Smith, 1995; Strong, 1983) the social context may, to some extent, account for a learner's attitude towards a second or foreign language learning. Gardner (1988) instances the social status of the target language in relating it to the learner's mother tongue by the way of illustration. Specifically, the main objective of this research is to evaluate the effects of social factors such as age, family and friends' encouragement and support and social class on professors' attitude in successes or failures in English language learning. It is hoped that a research of this nature will enlighten the depth and effects of problems encountered in learning English language as an academic language and also suggest ways of alleviating them.

This research aims to find out and scrutinize effective social factors that influence professors' attitudes towards English language learning. So, the need for accurate information about teachers' attitudes towards English language learning is essential. It also shows that how to determine whether non-English major professors' attitude is negative or positive towards the usage of English as a language of learning and teaching in universities and how to develop the positive social attitudes towards English language learning.

The findings of this study might shed some light on the following:

1. Iranian National Department of Education might need to review their language policy with regard to instructional languages.
2. All non-English major professors might be able to identify the social factors influencing their attitudes and improve them.
3. The result of the investigation might bring about changes in policy making.
4. Iranian educational system might change the strategy and role they are supposed to play in the choice of the most communicative and effective teaching among learners.

Problem Statement

Nowadays, English which is an international language is not used to the fullest extent in the schools and universities of some countries. What seems common among non-English major teachers is the use of mother tongue in classroom as well as outside classroom contexts. Some teachers use their native language even when they teach content subjects, however, at the end; learners are expected to answer the test and examination question in English. The other problem is that some teachers are from disadvantaged school backgrounds where there are no libraries and they are not expected to read. Not only is English not used in their homes, but also they are not exposed to television and newspapers which can help to increase their English vocabulary. Most teachers are only exposed to English when they are at world conferences and workshops. Hence, they are thus deficient in English because of using weak grammar in sentence construction and communication. Unfortunately some teachers are born in the families with low social class and there has not been a marked growth in attempts to incorporate information regarding the effect of positive attitude and social norms of language behavior into educational teaching practices. According to some researchers (Starks and Paltidge, 1996), learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards languages. Maybe, there are some efforts to develop social attitudes about learning English, but much work remains to be done. Two evidences to such efforts are the fact that often times social factors influencing attitudes and the amount of benefit from English language are unknown. The other is the fact that the process of English language learning in educational system of Iran is not very dynamic. This study, therefore, attempts to shed light on what and how social factors influence Iranian non-English major professors' attitudes English language learning.

Literature Review

A. Background of the Study

Based on Adler (1973), social psychology is a science that aims to accurately, objectively, open-mindedly and continuously research why and how people are in social settings. Social psychology safeguards experiments by using informed consent and meticulous debriefing. To conclude, this science is cutting edge and one of the major areas and subfields of its interest is attitude (Zhou, 2002). One hypothesis on how attitudes are formed, first advanced by Abraham Tesser in 1983, is that strong likes and dislikes are rooted in our genetic make-up. De Bot, Lowie and Versoor (2005, p.72) claimed that "teachers, learners and researchers will all agree that a high

motivation and a positive attitude towards a second language and its community help second language learning". Baker (1988) believed that attitudes are not subject to inheritance because they are internalized predispositions.

B. Related Studies

Many studies have been conducted to explore the nature of learners' attitudes towards learning foreign language in general and EFL in particular. ZainolAbidin (2012) also investigated Libyan secondary school students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspect. He also explored whether there is any significant difference in the students' attitudes towards English language based on their demographic profiles i.e., gender, age, field and year of study. The results show that the respondents' obvious negative attitude towards English may lead to conclude that they are not well aware of the importance of English and learn it as a compulsory subject. Chalak and Kassain (2010) investigated the various socio-psychological orientations of Iranian undergraduates towards leaning English. It focused on attitude orientations of the students and their attitudes towards the target language and its community. The results revealed that these Iranian Non-native speakers of English learn the language for both "instrumental" and "integrative" reasons and their attitudes towards the target language community and its members were generally found to be highly positive.

Munuz (2010) indicated that the effects of age on second language acquisition constitute one of the most frequently investigated and debated topics in the field of Second Language Acquisition. In his study he presented an analysis of symmetries and asymmetries that exist between a naturalistic learning setting and a foreign language learning setting with respect to those variables that are crucial in the discussion of age effects in second language acquisition, among them ultimate attainment, length of exposure, initial age of learning, age of first exposure, significant exposure, aging effects and maturation effects. On the basis of the differences observed, he argued that the amount and quality of the input bear a significant influence on the effects that age of initial learning has on second language learning. Momani (2009) also investigated the learners' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the respondents that had neutral positive attitudes towards learning English. Also, there was a strong correlation between the students' attitudes toward leaning English and their performance in reading comprehension.

Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate learners' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined the learners had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. De Serf (2002) did a research about the effects of family, social, and background factors on children's English educational attainment. He suggested since the results of his study showed that background, family and social factors affect children's English educational attainment, the government should explore developing policies to improve background and socioeconomic factors and to lessen the educational gap among different racial groups.

Research Hypotheses

In this study, there are 3 null hypotheses as follows:

1. Age has no any effect on non-English major professors' attitudes towards English as an academic language.
2. Social class has no any effect on non-English major professors' attitudes towards English as an academic language.
3. Family and friends' encouragement and support have no any effect on non-English major professors' attitudes towards English as an academic language.

Research Method

In this investigation a survey research methodology was used to gather information about the social factors influencing opinions and attitudes of non-English major professors about the usage of English as an academic language in the universities. The participants are all professors of Islamic Azad University (Babol Branch), Babol, Iran. The number of professors was 370 in 2014 (130 faculty members and 240 tuition teachers). It should be noted that, a simple random sampling technique was used to choose 100 samples for this study. Also, it is worth mentioning that the sample size is considered based on Morgan and Kerjcie Table. Questionnaire was used as data collecting instrument in this research. The first part of the questionnaire related to the individual information of the respondents. Questions are about age, gender, and marital status, major, economic status of the respondents' parents, social class and their level of English language proficiency. In the second part, questions related to the components of the dependent variable. The professors were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert (strongly

agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree) so as to determine their level of agreement with each item statement. Higher scores corresponded to greater agreement with each statement. After pilot testing the questionnaire was given to the samples to gather information. It should be mentioned that analysis of data is done by SPSS software. Statistics of this study includes one-dimensional tables, mean, mode, standard deviation, variance and standard error of mean, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation coefficient and Spearman correlation coefficient.

Results and Discussion

To test the first hypothesis that is related to the age, it was used Pearson Correlation Coefficient. A survey on the following table shows that correlation between the age and professor's attitude is – 0/102. Hence, Sig from Pearson Correlation is more 0/05. So, this test is not meaningful and H_0 is confirmed.

Table (1): Pearson correlation coefficient related to the age of the respondents

Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Sig
0.311	0.102

In the following analysis that is related to the second hypothesis, the first and second class are considered as just one class, as stated in Table 2. Because there is one respondent in the first class and as a result, analysis of Duncan's test is not well done.

Table (2): Analysis of Duncan's test

Social class	N	Subset for alpha= 0.5	
		1	2
2.00	8	79.0000	85.2292
3.00	41	82.4390	93.0000
4.00	48	85.2292	.054
5.00	3	.144	
Sig			

Hence, The Spearman's correlation method was used, in this study, to analyze this hypothesis.

Table (3): Effect of social class on attitude based on Spearman's correlation

Spearman's rho	Social class	Attitude
	1.000	0.285
Sig.	0	0.004
N	100	100

Table (4): A survey on the Difference between social class and non-English major professors' attitude towards English as an academic language

Spearman Correlation Coefficient	Sig
0.285	0.004

Based on Spearman correlation coefficient (0.285) and sig (0.004) which is less than (α=0.05), it can be resulted that H_O is rejected and H_1 is accepted. To analyze the final hypothesis, based on table 5, it was used Pearson Correlation Coefficient, too. According to the following table, correlation between family and friends' encouragement and attitude towards English as an academic language is 0.564. So, sig is less than α=0.05. Hence, this test is meaningful and H0 is rejected. And there is a meaningful and reverse relationship between family and friends' encouragement and support.

Table (5): Effect of family and friend's encouragement on Professors' Attitude

Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Sig
0.564	0.000

In general, considering the value of the standardized regression coefficient, it can be seen that the role of family and friends' encouragement and support (0.316) is more prominent than other variables. The high value of β indicates the relative importance and the highlighted role in forecasting the dependent variable of professors' attitude. Hence, the family and friends' encouragement variables has greater role to predict the professors' attitude variable.

Table (6): Regression coefficient of independent variables (social factors) with professors' attitude

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Age	-0.609	0.081	-0.070	0.855	0.395
Social class	0.025	0.994	0.002	0.026	0.980
Family and friends' encouragement & support	0.754	0.264	0.316	3.060	0.000

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research shows that, concerning the notion of English as an academic language, participants held different attitudes towards different issues of social factors relating to English language learning. In this study we have seen some social factors affect non-English major professors' attitude. In this regard, it was tried to show these effects by considering some variables such as age, social class and family and friend's encouragement and support. As you know, based on the study findings, there is no meaningful relationship between the age and non-English major professors' attitudes towards English as an academic language, but there are meaningful relationships between social class and family and friends' encouragement and support with non-English major professors' attitude towards English as an academic language. In other words, social class and family and friend's encouragement have a positive influence on non-English major professors' attitude.

The attitudes towards English and its use in Iran, supports the general contention partially that the positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English. The recognition of the importance of English as a foreign language in Iran society may not, interestingly, lead learners to have active steps in learning process. One of the reasons behind this result may be the fact that they do not have positive attitudes towards the English language – which may be an outcome of the education system of Iran - but the English based culture – which can be considered to be a result of social tendencies affected by globalization. Another reason may be that they do not feel the need of the English language in their daily life yet, and they delay learning the English language until adulthood when they become to be forced to learn English due to, say, professional needs. Therefore, the level of awareness is not enough on its own; it needs to be turned into action.

Therefore, strategy-based learning and teaching in Education Organization in Iran might be a solution for this type of learners who have positive attitudes towards the culture and high level of recognition of the importance of the language but low level of orientation towards learning the English language. It should be stipulated in each and every university policy that English should be used as one of the important language of learning and teaching in universities with the aim of helping learners because they need English for purpose of being useful and up-to-date in the future.

English language learning might be as a culture in the families. They should motivate children to learn English from childhood. It can be said to be an important factor is to establish the cool environment to encourage teachers and students to practice speaking English with other Iranian learners. Social factors should be recognized and increased. We should improve the policy in the society that English language learning can be the factor of our advancement in the world.

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