

Attitudes Towards English Among Bangladeshi Students: College Level Education

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Abstract: There is a continuing debate on the status and use of English in Bangladesh. Historically, English experienced rise and fall of its status and importance here. This is because of the change of attitudes towards the language in the passage of time. Thus, the researcher found it relevant to profile Bangladeshi college level students' contemporary attitude towards English. The purpose of this study was to investigate Bangladeshi college level students' attitudes towards English since this group of people is considered an important source of human capital in the development of the nation. Data for this study was collected through a questionnaire survey administered upon a sample of college level students and analyzed them quantitatively. The findings revealed that the respondents showed positive attitudes towards English. They also felt that Bangladeshi variety of English should be standardized. [Nitish Kumar Mondal. **Attitudes Towards English Among Bangladeshi Students: College Level Education.** Academia Arena, 2012;4(3):24-30] (ISSN 1553-992X). <http://www.sciencepub.net>. 4

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1. Introduction

The issue of English language learning is a very important phenomenon for the Bangladeshi students like non natives (Whose native language is not English) where the students of higher secondary level education in Bangladesh is not far from that purposes. Though English language is taught in the different stages (From the primary level to tertiary level education) of the educational institution in Bangladesh for different purposes, the students of Bangladesh especially at higher secondary level students can not reach their goal. So, there has been a mismatch between English language learning and the students of Bangladesh. But what constrains the mismatch of English language learning? A host of variables come into play an important role in determining the issue, which may vary from one context to another. It may be difficult to make a complete list of the variables, however, some of them are lack of proficiency of the teacher, attitudes of the students, socio-cultural background, and in particular, language learning (As it is not mother language) policy itself.

No doubt Bangladesh is a multilingual as well as multicultural country. But it is expected that students in Bangladesh from primary level to tertiary level will learn English language equally in different domains for different purposes. What are the authentic problems in English language learning of the Bangladeshi students that constitute the main objective of this paper.

2. Background of the study

The history of English may be divided into three periods: Old English from about 700 to 1100 AD, Middle English from 1100 to 1500 AD, and Modern English from 1500 to the present (Thirumalai, 2002). Though the history of English is back dated, it is introduced in the Indian subcontinent long time after which became the dominant language of communication among the educated classes after the famous Minute of Lord Macaulay in 1833. English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in the primary level to tertiary level educational institutions in almost every country on this earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language. Millions more speak it as an additional language. There can be no denying the fact that English is learned everywhere, where Bangladesh is not beyond of them, because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. English is also learned for the literature it possesses, and for the variety and rich experience it provides. In this computer age, English is bound to expand its domains of use everywhere. Everyone wants to appropriate English as their own. Where in Bangladesh, On 19 January 1989, English language was introduced as a compulsory language from primary level education to college level education with students having to qualify in both English and Bengali in the board examinations. Moreover, at the tertiary level, in addition to the regular courses,

English language was introduced as a compulsory subject in many disciplines.

3. Literature Review

Language attitude is very much important for learning and teaching in any language for any country. Many studies are available that conducted investigation into the issue of language and attitude. Hogan-Brun and Ramoniene (2005) showed that the state's inclusive language and citizenship policies in Lithuania have led to the consolidation of society which has positively affected attitudes amongst the minority communities to learn the state language and to integrate. Another study of the same authors (2004) also suggested that in their pragmatic attitude, the parents perceive integrative learning as being of instrumental value and favour their children's accommodation to the majority society as a necessary process for success in life in today's changed environment.

Lanara (1999), similarly, in a study of 90 first-year English major university students, found that there was a negative response to their high school English language classes. Students expressed the view that they had not learned anything of value in high school due to poor teaching methods, which were characterized by monotonous grammar-translation drill practice.

Christensen (1989) reinforced these findings in her study of first year university students, with many subjects indicating they had a negative impression of high school English classes. When questioned regarding weak aspects of high school English, grammar was the most frequently mentioned. Students pointed out that little time was allocated to spoken English, with heavy stress being placed instead on university entrance examination preparation.

Al-Abed Al-Haq (2000) conducted a study to investigate changes in the attitudes of Jordanian university students to the Hebrew language. He found that motivation towards learning Hebrew among the Jordanian university students is apparently instrumentally-oriented, i.e. they are religiously and nationally motivated.

Hohenthal (2003) also found similar result in her study. She identified that attitude to English in India is instrumental: English is perceived as a useful language to know mostly because of job opportunities and for education.

Ting (2003) showed that in Sarawak of Malaysia, while people were already embracing Bahasa Malaysia as official language, they still held on to the previous role of English as an official language. Where wider communication was

concerned, the usefulness of English as a common language was clear but other languages were also important. The participants' favourable attitudes to the sharing of language function between Bahasa Malaysia and English indicates that they would still like English to perform the functions officially designated for Bahasa Malaysia.

When we understand that attitude plays a very important role in the life of a language, determinants of attitude to a language are important in the discussion of language and attitude.

There are a number of factors that may be influential in construction and change of attitude to a language. No model or even a list of factors that make up attitude to a language has been drawn up. However, based on the previous studies on attitudes towards language this study considers Bangladeshi college level students' attitude towards English. Gender was found to play significant role in constructing attitude to Welsh. W. R. Jones (1949, 1950), Sharp et al. (1973) and E.P. Jones (1982) all found that girls had more favourable attitudes to Welsh than boys. Like gender, language background also affects language attitude. Sharp et al. (1973) found that the higher the number of Welsh speakers in a neighbourhood, the more favourable the attitude. Effect of proficiency on language attitude has also been studied extensively.

Hakuta (1991) investigated the relationships of language choice, proficiency and attitude in a Puerto Rican bilingual education programme in New Haven, Connecticut. She reported that language shift in the Hispanic communities in the United States is usually characterized by a combination of processes related to proficiency, choice and attitude. Similarly, influences of ethnicity on attitudes was found in a number of study (e.g. Ferrer and Sankoff, 2003; Sayahi, 2005). With reference to influence of ethnicity on attitudes it is stated that people show their preference to languages through the exercise of maintaining, shifting, or switching among languages which can be attributed no less to the ethnic configuration of attitudes towards language use.

4. Research Questions

The study put forward the following specific research questions:

- (1) What are the Bangladeshi college level students' attitudes towards English?
- (2) What are their perceptions regarding the Bangladeshi variety of English?
- (3) What are the effects of class distinction (From Primary to Tertiary level education) and proficiency on their attitudes towards English?

5. Significance of the study

This study has great importance for both the teachers and students in general and for higher secondary (College) level educational system in particular, as this study has collected a lot of information about the attitudes towards English of the college level students, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the English (Specially which is used in their class) will help the various learners learning second language (English is specified here) through their mother tongue transparently. Furthermore, this present study will guide the English teachers in exploring proper way of teaching and learning English which their students demand. The significance of the study will also be for the planners and education managers in policy formulation or revision of teacher education programs at secondary and higher secondary level in the country. It will also help the teachers gaining perfect knowledge about their students both in school level students and college level students where the college level students are more significantly adopted and involved especially at higher secondary level education in Bangladesh.

6. Definition of Attitudes

The term ‘attitudes’ as defined by Sarnoff (1970), deals with a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects. Eagly and Chaiken (1989) expand on this idea by stating that attitude is an outcome of the categorization process, this process being influenced by the social environment. Attitudes can be classed as items of social knowledge that are continually formed, strengthened and modified. They can therefore be defined as mediated reactions that have been strongly influenced by social context (Long & Russell, 1999). Attitudes are a means of adjusting to and making changes in one’s social environment.

Baker (1988) outlines the main features as:

1. Attitudes are cognitive and affective.
2. Attitudes are dimensional, in that they vary in degree of favourability / unfavourability.
3. Attitudes incline a person to act in a certain way.
4. Attitudes are learnt.
5. Attitudes often persist, however they can be modified by experience.

7. Nature of Language Attitude

Language attitude varies in nature. People show attitudes of different nature such as attitude to the variation of language; attitude to minority language and dominant language; attitude to foreign and second language; attitude to a specific language

etc. Whatever the nature of attitude, it has two components: instrumental and integrative (Baker, 1992). Instrumental attitude refers to showing attitude to a particular language for self-achievement and recognition. People favour a particular language when they find that the language is a tool to achieve high status, economic advantage, basic security and survival and matters related to self-orientation. Integrative attitude, on the other hand, concerns someone’s attachment with a particular speech community. People show such attitude in order to be identified as a member of the desired community. However, instrumental and integrative orientation to language attitude are not necessarily opposite and alternatives rather complementary to each other.

A person may be motivated in different strengths by both orientations (Baker, 1992). The present study assumes that attitude of the students (College level) in Bangladesh towards English is instrumental in orientation. It expects that people in Bangladesh show favourable attitude to English and learn and use it for individual development and survival in this era of globalization. This study, thus, aims to investigate attitudes towards English among Bangladeshi college level students.

8. Overview of English in Bangladesh

Though English language is taught in the different stages of the educational institutions in Bangladesh for different purposes, the role of English in Bangladesh is purely functional as English is used as an international link language where this “English language is introduced through different methods like Grammar-Translation (First introduced in Germany especially in Prussia, But this method was immigrated for teaching language in Bangladesh during colonial period which is being used till today.), Direct method (alternatively called “The Natural Method. This method was introduced in Bangladesh by the hands of the Ministry of Education), Audio-lingual (It was originated in America at the time of World War II), Natural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Though this CLT method was started in England in the early 19th century but it was introduced for teaching English at secondary education in Bangladesh in 2001 and is being continued till today” (Mondal, 2012). It is true that a number of methods have been used for learning and teaching English in Bangladesh but Grammar-Translation method and Communicative Language Teaching are used in Bangladesh alike where CLT gains more application for Bangladeshi context (Mondal 2011). English language is not used as an interpersonal and inter-institutional communication in Bangladesh. But

English has been used for years and for different purposes and gradually it is becoming part of the socio-cultural system. As the use of English language is increasing day by day in different forms, there is significant evidence of use of English along with Bengali. As Bangladesh after birth as an independent country, has evaluated 'Bengali more everywhere' the learning of English language affected and limited more naturally. Though English language was introduced as a compulsory language from primary level education to college level education with students having to qualify in both English and Bengali in the board examinations in Bangladesh alike, because of faulty language policies since 1972, English was set back and English language education suffered tremendously, leaving a vacuum which is yet to be filled. Interestingly, instead of having different political ideologies on the concept of nationalism, all the leaders of subsequent governments of the country, since independence, stress on shedding the so-called dominance of 'imperial English', and assigning new roles to Mother Tongue (Bengali) in public life. But English has continued to be an important part of the communication system, especially of urban educated Bangladeshis. While the government continually tried to establish Bengali everywhere, the space and the role of English, though not defined, could not be ignored due to strong presence of English as the language of international correspondence.

9. Methodology

The methodology of this research describes the location of the study followed by sampling procedures employed in the study, a profile of the informants, and method of data collection, instrumentation, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures.

10. Location and informants of the study:

This research examined Bangladeshi higher secondary (college) level students' attitude towards English language learning and teaching. The students (As samples) were a number of colleges of south-western part of the country like both colleges (urban and rural) in Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat districts. The informants were first year, second year and third year college students. The research had been implemented taking both male and female informants. In the present research, the informants were not taken equally, rather taken randomly.

11. Sampling and instrumentation procedures:

The population of this research was college students. A total of eighty seven college students

were selected as the sample for this research. The respondents were from the different colleges in three districts. The sample was selected through a random sampling method. A total of eighty seven college students were selected as respondents to whom the questionnaire was administered to collect data for this research. This research is descriptive and non-experimental. The research was based on primary data. The data were collected via the survey approach through a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire survey method was preferred because the researcher investigated informant's attitude and use of English language in their class room and out of their class room at higher secondary education. This method was chosen because (i) this method is suitable for empirical research; (ii) the data collected through this method is easily quantifiable; (iii) this method gives informants enough time to provide well thought out answers; (iv) this offers greater anonymity to the informants; and (v) this requires low cost and saves time. The questionnaire was prepared by researcher in connection the research demands where the total questionnaire was prepared through English language. In preparing the questionnaire, caution was exercised to ensure the standard and quality of the questions. The researcher was concerned about the validity, reliability, clarity, practicality, administerability of the instruments. A pilot survey was conducted to study the feasibility of the instruments. The feedback from this pilot survey on the appropriateness of the questionnaire was then incorporated into the questionnaire and approved of administration.

12. Data collection procedures:

Quantitative method was used to collect the data. The data was collected through a survey in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher himself. The questionnaires were distributed to the college students and requested them to return the completed questionnaires after answering. Upon completion of the collection of data, the data was edited, coded classified and tabulated for computation and analysis. The analysis was done using SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) software. This software was used to examine and investigate about teachers' choice of answer through which the percentage values were obtained.

13. Data Analysis

Data collected were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted and presented in Figure 1. Percentage was calculated by using statistical technique for analysis.

The short terms which are used in the chart are described below:

- SA = Strongly Agreed
 A = Agreed
 UNC = Uncertain
 DA = Disagreed
 SDA = Strongly Disagreed

Figure 1

Questions	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Do you think your current text book of English is apt?	9 10.3 %	15 17.2 %	13 14.9 %	33 37.9 %	17 19.5 %
2. Should your English book be changed?	10 11.5 %	31 35.6 %	14 16%	11 12.6 %	21 24.1 %
3. Is grammar-translation method apt for learning English?*	48 55.1 %	23 26.4 %	9 10.3 %	5 5.75 %	2 2.3%
4. Is communicative language teaching apt for English learning?*	41 47.1 %	21 24.1 %	10 11.5 %	9 10.3 %	6 6.9%
5. Is reading helpful for English learning?*	34 39.1 %	26 29.9 %	4 4.6%	17 19.5 %	6 6.9%
6. Is speaking helpful for English learning?*	31 35.6 %	21 24.1 %	5 5.75 %	13 14.9 %	17 19.5 %
7. Is writing helpful for English learning?	11 12.6 %	9 10.3 %	7 8.0%	31 35.6 %	29 33.3 %
8. Is listening helpful for learning English?	43 49.4 %	23 26.4 %	2 2.3%	13 14.9 %	6 6.9%
9. Is English newspaper helpful for this?*	41 47.1 %	22 25.3 %	4 4.6%	7 8.0%	13 14.9 %
10. Is English movie needed for learning English?*	38 43.7 %	31 35.6 %	3 3.4%	9 10.3 %	6 6.9%

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Opinions toward the English (N = 87)

14. Findings

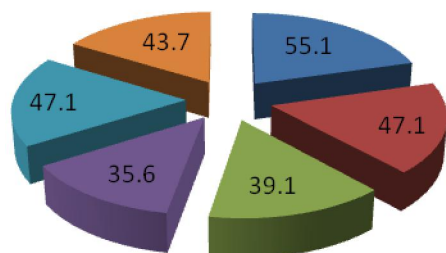
Following findings were drawn on the basis of question analysis of the questionnaire:

- Majority of 37.9 % respondents disagreed with the statement that their current text book of English is apt used in teaching English at the Higher Secondary education in Bangladesh which has been expressed through their agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 35.6% respondents agreed with the statement that their text book should be changed which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 55.1% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that grammar-translation method is essential for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 47.1% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that communicative language teaching is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 39.1% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that reading is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their statement.
- Majority of 35.6% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that speaking is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strongly agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 33.3% respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that writing is helpful for learning English at the Higher Secondary education which has been expressed through their strongly disagreement with the statement.
- Majority of 49.4% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that listening is helpful for learning English at the Higher Secondary education which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.
- Majority of 47.1% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that English newspaper is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong disagreement with the statement.
- Majority of 43.7% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that English movie is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

15. Results and Discussions:

The result is drawn up through data analysis and findings of the research. When designing the attitudes of the college level students towards English, the present research could address the focal evaluation questions, so it designed corresponding questions to obtain information about that theme desired. The questions the study implemented were highly structured and the students' answers and responses to the questions helped to continue the research effectively. When analyzing the data, it also obtained a clearer picture of the implementation status of the current research.

On the basis of the results and discussions (where ten questions are structured) a pie chart can be drawn in the following way through taking the highest percentages of star (*) marked questions-



16. Conclusion

Though English is not the official language of Bangladesh, it is used in every purposes of life of Bangladeshi people from the primary education to tertiary level education where college level students play a vital role. Bangladeshi students learn English from different sources. As they learn English from different sources, their attitudes are not the same towards English language.

Majority of the respondents realized the necessity of learning English in this era of globalization and they reported their strong positive attitude towards English. They were of the opinion that those who speak English create good impression and get advantages in seeking good jobs. They felt that their current text book of English is not appropriate and it should be changed partially for learning English well. They also felt that English language teaching methods like grammar-translation and communicative language teaching should be used at college level education in Bangladesh. Side by side four skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening are more helpful for this purpose. As a whole they wanted an increase use of English in education where English newspaper and English movie play a vital role for learning English at this stage.

The findings indicate that respondents were found to be loyal to their own language at one hand; on the other hand they showed the positive attitudes towards English. This could be attributed to the fact that respondents were instrumentally motivated.

Their motivation is so positive that a sizeable majority of the respondents desired

standardization of the Bangladeshi variety of English. It indicates that the college level students of Bangladesh want to increase their linguistic repertoire adding English to the list of commonly used languages in Bangladesh.

Though respondents have no high proficiency in English showed more preference for English, in fact a positive attitude towards English as a whole was found among the respondents irrespective of grammar-translation method and communicative systems. Findings of this study can be concluded saying that when a number of methods of English are used for learning English and different varieties are shown for learning English, then the college students (Respondents) showed positive attitudes towards English declaring their views and opinions of English, the respondents of this study felt and desired an increase use of English in different domains of life which marks their positive attitudes towards English.

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