

Attitudes of Foreign Language Teaching Assistants Towards Teaching of English in Pakistani Context

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the attitudes of Foreign Language Teaching Assistants towards the teaching of English in the context of Pakistan. Its importance lies in the fact that it will make the teachers aware of uniquely effective teaching methods. Almost all stakeholders may get benefits from it. The research utilized interview tools. Semi-structured interviews were discussed among the respondents. The results show that the Pakistani teacher assistants view English favorably. They consider it absolutely necessary for employment purpose and professional development. Therefore, they opt for positive attitudes towards teaching English language along with culture in ELT Classrooms. The results also showed that Teaching Assistants after coming back from training, continue to celebrate the value of their own culture too. In the end, the research suggests measures necessary to formulate effective language teaching policies.

Keywords: Attitudes, English Language, Teaching Assistants, Pakistan.

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1. Introduction

The ability to use a language correctly in different cultural and social settings is a sine qua non to learn a new language. This is a unanimous view of language teaching experts belonging to different fields. It highlights the unique significance of the culture of a target language in acquiring adequate knowledge about that language. Shedding light on an unbreakable relationship between language and culture, Kramsch opines that they – language and culture – form a single universe (1993: 217). When it comes to language learning, cultural element is, therefore, singularly important. In this process of learning and teaching, moreover, teacher occupies a paramount place. Beyond any shadow of doubt, teachers act as go-between between local culture and the culture of the target language. This is particularly the case when it comes to the English Language Teaching (ELT). The belief system that the teachers adhere to, actually determines the teaching methods they make use of. This belief system plays a critical role in their learning outcomes. Doubtlessly, an attitude of suspicion towards the target language culture impedes learning, whereas sufficient awareness of it makes learning process smooth and effectual.

1.1 Background

The emergence of English Language Teaching (ELT) as an academic field dates back well-nigh five decades. Since then, a number of programmes calculated to equip teachers with effective English teaching skills, have been launched. The attitude of teachers is instrumental in the effectual teaching of English language (Yashima and Zenuk, 2004). Woods (1996) is of the opinion that the selection of language teaching methodology and theories should be carefully done by the teacher. Undeniably, training of the teachers is indispensable to ensure that foreign languages, especially English, are taught in an effective fashion.

Like Urdu, English is widely spoken in Pakistan. It is the country's official language. However, it is largely confined to elite classes. Conservative elements view this international language through the lens of suspicion. They consider it as a source of inequality in the country (Mansoor, 1993). Over a couple of decades, therefore, efforts have been put it to replace English with Urdu. (Rahman, 1998). In spite of this, English continues to be spoken in not only schools but also in private lives. (Rahman, 1998). Before formulating any language policy, these realities should be painstakingly analyzed.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is observed that teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards English are different in non-native context. Teachers' attitudes either positive or negative may have impact on teacher assistants to behave towards the language in a certain way. Therefore, either failure or success of teaching language is regulated by teachers' attitudes (Darwish, 2017). The present study then intends to discover the attitudes of Foreign Language Teaching Assistants after their professional training towards teaching of English in Pakistani context.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The goal of the proposed study is to discover and explore the attitudes of Foreign Language Teaching Assistants

(FLTAs) towards teaching of English in Pakistani context after teachers' professional development training in United States. Based on this aim, objectives of the study are as under:

- To explore the attitudes of Pakistani FLTAs towards English after their USEFP professional development training.
- To explore the attitudes of Pakistani FLTAs towards English culture after their USEFP professional development training.
- To explore the attitudes of Pakistani FLTAs towards English Language Teaching after their USEFP professional development training.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study aims to examine the attitude teachers adopt towards the teaching of globally spoken language – English – in the context of Pakistan. It also strives to examine the efficacy of professional training programs offered by USEFP. Its significance, therefore, lies in the fact that it will acquaint teachers with effectual teaching skills. The study will also be of critical importance for the organizations as it will help them know whether professional training programmes produce desired outcomes or not. In Pakistan, it will pave the path for effective ELT methodology. The study highlights the role of numerous factors which significantly affect English learning and teaching in the country. Hence, almost all stakeholders may derive maximum benefits from it.

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2. Literature Review

Teacher assistants employ different methods to learn a second or foreign language. (Carson and Longhini, 2002). Through his research that he carried out in Thailand, Intaraprasert (2003) also reached the same conclusion. Peacock and Ho (2003) state that age, environment and sex are the factors which determine the methods the teacher's assistants make use of. Moreover, Yang's (2007) study led him to conclude that the use of different approaches makes learning interesting for the assistants. Hence, it is crystal clear that the teacher's assistants employ different strategies to learn a language.

Grammar plays a pivotal role in learning a new language. The 19th century witnessed widespread use of grammatical rules, regulations and translations to teach a second language (Richards & Rodgers 1986:2). In his survey, Paraskos's (1993) found unanimity of opinion among learners and teachers, that grammar was essential for language learning. Some respondents, however, considered learning grammar a highly demanding task.

In social and economic arenas in Pakistan, English occupies a dominant place. (Rahman, 1997). Although Urdu learning is encouraged for its perennial relevance to the ideology of the country, yet the elite class prefers English. English language opens the door of employment. Hence, this language is related to power and position in the country (Ashraf, 2007).

2.1 Intercultural Competence

Culture is a broad term. It is defined variously. To be precise, culture is everything that is divorced from nature. In other words, culture denotes nurture not nature. There are three stages when it comes to learning a culture. These stages are: cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and intercultural competence. Cultural knowledge refers to verbal information; whereas, cultural awareness emerge from directly interacting with the target culture. Intercultural competence is a broader term encompassing both cultural knowledge as well as cultural awareness.

2.2 ELT and Culture Teaching Practices

When cultural objects are leveraged to teach a language, teacher assistants tend to grow more confident in the given language and culture. The availability of these products produce a suitable environment conducive to confident communication by the teacher assistants (Tomlin & Stempleski 1993: 39-40). They also pave the way for effective teaching of intercultural competence. Brooks (1986: 123-129) enumerates some of these products. They include: films, books, literature, music, playgrounds, etc. Further, the awareness of cultural practices of the target culture is very important. The teacher assistant has a great role in developing it (Byram et al. 2002: 4).

2.3 Language Attitudes and Second Language Learning

It is believed by social psychologists that there is an unbreakable relationship between attitude and behaviour. In fact, it is attitude towards a particular thing that determines a person's behaviour in relation to that thing. Triandis (1971) is of the view that cognitive, affective and conative components form attitudes. Moreover, Fasold (1984) opines that attitudes towards the ethnic communities determine attitudes towards their language. Edwards (1982) is also of the same opinion. Gardner's (1985) theory suggests that if a student's attitude towards the target language is favourable, his learning will become easy and productive. Undeniably, learning language necessitates the cultivation of new behaviors, cultural and social. This is the reason that it significantly affects the personality of teacher assistants. It is crystal clear that attitudes are of singular significance when it comes to learning a new language. As Pakistan is rich in lingual diversity, there is need to take account of this universally acknowledged fact.

2.4 Motivation, Beliefs and Language Learning

The role of attitudes in acquiring adequate knowledge of the target language has been sufficiently described above. It is here to mention that the role of motivation is equally important. In other words, motivation and attitudes are absolutely necessary to learn a language in an effectual fashion. Why an individual want to learn that particular language is also a critically important factor (Siguan & Mackey, 1987). At the same time, the analysis of the beliefs held by teachers is very significant (Pajares, 1992). Almost every research underscores the role of teacher and teachers' beliefs in effectively mastering a language. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that it strives to shed light upon the beliefs of teachers in Pakistan.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs qualitative method. It made the use of qualitative methods in order to analyze the research questions appropriately and accumulate information about the problem. It leverages semi-structured interviews online by zoom meetings. The study strived to shed light upon the use of English in both formal and informal settings. Hence, the survey contained statements appropriate for the fulfilment of this purpose. The semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions.

Moreover, the study utilized the tool of interviews consisted of 8 items. They were so designed as to provide adequate information about the attitude participants adopted towards the target language. Interviews were divided in three sections based on attitudes towards English, English Culture and English Language Teaching.

3.1 Participants

10 young mid-career professionals were selected from different parts of Pakistan who had been on the professional training of Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program by USEFP from the year 2018 to 2020. They all are teaching English in different institutions.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results were made using thematic analysis to create themes and tables for better understanding. The results showed that all teacher assistants came from lower-middle class. They spoke Urdu and mother tongues. Although they spoke both Urdu and English, yet they preferred latter in formal settings. Moreover, the study found that the teacher assistants viewed English and English-speaking classes favorably.

Table 4.1

Theme	Response
Theme 1: Importance of Own Language	
Culture	"My language is important to me because it represents me and my culture". FLTA from Punjab
Comfort	"Yes, my language is important for me as I feel more comfortable with unlimited vocabulary when talking with my friends and family." FLTA from Punjab
Communication	"I agree with the importance of my language. All people do not know English in my family so it is a source of communication with my family and grandparents". FLTA from Sindh

Comparatively, the results indicated that the Urdu-speaking segments were also viewed favorably by the teacher assistants. This finding disproves the notion that Urdu is in a pretty pickle. The same is confirmed by a research carried out by Islam, Martin, and Chambers (2012). Hence, Pakistani teachers can be impeccably

described as additive bilinguals.

Moreover, the findings showed that almost all participants favored the promotion of national language, Urdu, in order to pave the path for progress of the country. The results also made it clear that the teachers had positive attitude towards English language and English-speaking groups. They believed that this international language paved the path for employment opportunities and professional advancement. Nevertheless, they preferred Urdu to English in their daily life. Teachers also view English this way, making it crystal clear that the language is learnt solely for utilitarian aims.

Table 4.2

Theme 4: Teaching Language and Culture Enjoyable	“It is a good idea. My students really enjoy learning about different culture”. FLTA from Sindh
Learning	“It is kind of learning which is important for students because they look for opportunities in foreign countries too and such learning will be useful to them in future.”. FLTA from Punjab

The results clearly showed that the integration of culture and language is deemed valuable by teachers. They consider it important to teach English in an effective manner. The teachers opine that the acquisition of a new language should not only acquaint teachers with their own culture but also culture of that language.

In Pakistan, the importance of English is not overlooked. Yet, the language is not seen as an effectual means to promote cultural exchange. This is the reason that course books are largely devoted to indigenous culture. In a nutshell, the integration of language and culture is deemed important.

5. Conclusion

English is no longer regarded as an unsavory symbol of colonialism in Pakistan. The “colonial hangover” has died out (Rahman, 1999, p. 155). This explains why every language policy designed to get rid of English has miserably failed in the country. The study showed that no teacher assistant loathed this internationally spoken language. Hence, it is necessary that earnest efforts are put in to spread English across the country. Policymakers should strive to create a viable culture of additive bilingualism. Instead of aiming at cultural assimilation, the country should try to establish a solid principle of “cultural pluralism”. In order to pave the path for a highly productive environment of additive bilingualism. In the last, it is suggested that an exhaustive study aimed to examine attitudes, motivations, and beliefs of the Pakistani teachers, is carried out with utmost seriousness and sincerity. Such a study will lead to the formulation of wonderfully effective language policies and other educational strategies.

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Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. Do you think it's important to maintain Urdu/mother tongue to keep the diversity of languages alive?
2. Do you think that the use of English should really be encouraged throughout Pakistan as a whole?
3. Do you identify yourself with modern, western values when you teach English?
4. Do you think in a second language classroom, teaching culture is as important as language teaching? Why?
5. Do you teach your students English songs or poems to let them experience English culture?