

## International Arab Students' Attitude towards Learning English

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Saira Maqbool\*

Lubna Umar†

Umaima Kamran‡

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Attitude, English  
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**Abstract** *English is not more the language of few countries it has become an international phenomenon. That's why many types of research all over the world are exploring the attitude of these non-native English learners towards it. The current study explores the attitude of Arab students (studding in Malaysia) towards learning English. This study adopted the methods of descriptive research design. In this approach, quantitative data from questionnaires of 49 respondents, Arab countries' students studying at the University of Science Malaysia was collected. For data analysis, Pearson correlation and multiple recreations were conducted and it was found out that the Arab students with the attitude towards English had a significant correlation with English learning and importance and English language Policy of their country.*

### Introduction

Arabic is the main and the official language of almost 22 countries of the world (Alotaibi, et. Al. 2012). The region of the Middle East and North Africa is called MENA abbreviated for Meddle East and North Africa has a population of about 6% of the world. The term MENA is the other words cover the “ Arab world”, the Arabic regional langue and with the unique Arab regional identity, there are nearly 300 million native speakers who establish their dominance in MENA. Excluding Israel having 8 million inhabitants, 79 million in Iran and 78 Million in Turkey, these are not regarded as Mena Part (Saad & Ashour, 2010).

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\*Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

† Lecturer, Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.  
Email: [umaima@qau.edu.pk](mailto:umaima@qau.edu.pk)

It is very essential in the twenty-first century to understand and study the factors that can have an effect on the learning processes, due to the continual advent of interest and necessity to learn English as a second or foreign language. Attitude for the English language is one of many direct noticeable variables that effect its learning. The attitude term as defined by the Chaiklin (2011) is settled behavior, as an indication opinion. According to Baker (1992), it is an educated guess about the constructs responsible for explaining human behavior's orientation and endurance. That is why the behaviour is strongly tied to attitude because the behavior deeply and strongly shapes and effects our attitude (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that attitude has an effective impact in English learning as predicts individual behavior such as their strategy used for learning, their determination to learn and the process they adopt for learning (Dörnyei, 1990).

Baker 1992 says about the attitude that it is a social phenomenon it is what creates a relationship and may of interaction with one's surroundings and people. it is Active, practical and logical behavior. Baker further says that in the field of education and psychology attitude is the base of constant and established utility which is a verified fact. Similarly, in the field of language learning, many researchers have stressed the significance of attitude (Gardner, 2014; Zheng et. al, 2013; Samimy & Tabuse, 992). One researcher points out that the attitude of learners has a great effect on learning and learning styles (Peker & Mirasyedioğlu, 2008). Another researcher states that although teacher and teaching methodology is crucial for learning if the willingness and the positive behavior of the learner are not there all the efforts are in vain (Abu-Melhim (2009). The same is stated by (Hashwani, 2008) that attitude determines the level of motivation in learners to learn the language. Attitude can be truly called a strong predictor of achievement and it can determine the negative or positive response of learners.

English is an international language that is accepted as ESL or EFL in many countries (Strevens, 1992). In the past, there existed American or British English only. Many studies claim that adult nonnative speakers of English cannot learn to adapt to the same pronunciation like a native speaker. As a result for many years their English though was grammatically correct but was never considered as standard English but in 21<sup>st</sup> century there happens to be many acceptable form of English i.e Englishis, Piglish, Indlish etc as the focus has been shifted from the phonetic learning ability of non-native speakers (Trudgill, & Hannah, 2017).

Several types of research have been carried out all over the world on the auditory properties of accent differences. According to studies taken by Sung (2016). Concludes that even after several years of language speaking experience adults cannot produce sounds like native speakers of English can. Many linguists claim that second language speakers can only make few correct sounds using vowels (Jenkins, 1998; Cutler et, al. 2004; Bradlow & Alexander, (2007). Few of these studies have been conducted on an Arab speaker proving the pronunciation

differences between native and non-native English speakers (Munro, 1993; Jaber, & Hussein, 2011; Buckingham, 2014).

Many factors contribute towards the determining of the language education policy of MENA, some of these factors are related to common education problems other are specifically related to complications in language policy. One of these problems that quality education is only in the reach of the elite class (Kirkpatrick & Barnawi, 2017). The rest of the Arab population has been left deprived of English education. Akkari 2004 says that the state of unprofessional teachers has left the students in a state of low-quality compulsory education. The grammar-based teaching method and British textbooks are the traditional teaching approaches of MENA. One of the new efforts towards English language education is making it common, modern and adopting advanced teaching strategies. Such efforts include giving English a compulsory subject status at the primary level, hiring more expert English teachers, and also giving training to the current teachers. Another step for improving English education is by hiring Arabs as English teachers and switching to local English books instead of foreign books that present their culture and society (Alharbi, 2015; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Kirkpatrick 2017). Arabic is a compulsory subject in schools of Palestinian but they also have produced local English books for English language learners (Gebril 2017; Or and Shohamy 2016). According to Davidson & Coombe, C. (2019). Language testing and evaluation are given special importance in MENA countries.

Studies on the learners' attitude importance for language learning have been conducted in many countries (Gardner, 2014; Zheng et. al, 2013; Samimy & Tabuse, 992; Peker & Mirasyedioğlu, 2008). Most of these studies suggest that learners accept and are positive towards American and British English but they don't consider the other variation of English acceptable. Only a few researches have been conducted related to Arab speakers on the given topic (Alharbi, 2015; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2017). Even though the users and importance of English are increasing with time and it is being accepted in most of MENA as compulsory subjects even then the residence of the area have a different attitude about the English language (Kirkpatrick, 2017). A study conducted by Zhao & Thomas (2016) points out that although English has much importance in different spears of life the only reason students tend to learn English is for the sake of passing exams. The study also claims that English is learned by Arab speakers for job attainment purposes (Palfreyman & Al-Bataineh, 2018). Another study by Al Harthy (2017) also suggests that Arab speakers intend to learn English only to improve their social and economic status.

### **Research Objectives**

Below are the three objectives that were extracted for the study extracted from the literature review.

- 1 To examine the relation of Arab countries students' attitudes towards current educational polity about the English Language.
- 2 To find out the relation of Arab countries students' attitudes towards the purpose of the English Language.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was constructed on the bases of the literature review.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

**H0:** No significant relationship exists between Attitude towards Purpose of Learning and Important of English Language.

**H1:** A significant relationship between Attitude towards Purpose of Learning and Important of English Language.

#### **Hypothesis 2**

**H0:** No significant relationship exists between Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language.

**H1:** A significant relationship between Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language.

### **Research Design**

The current study strives to look into the attitude of language education policy and the purpose of learning English of accessible samples and to know its effects on the importance that they give to English language learning. The study was quantitative in nature and the survey method was adopted for data collection.

Data were collected from Arab speaking students through a questionnaire. Frankel and Wallen (1990) while explaining correlational study say it not only describes the attitudes but it also finds out if there exists any relation among different variables, and then Pearson correlation and Multilinear regression were used for data analysis.

### **Population and Sampling Method**

According to the definition of Aron (2008) and Hanlon and Larget(2011) population is the set of individuals having some similarities. It is consists of all the conforms for measurement. But the population that is reachable to the researcher or is realistic in nature is known as the available population (Gay 1990). The

accessible population for the current study is all the Arab countries' students (UAE, Libya, Yaman, Egypt, Iraq and Syria) studying in Malaysia. The sample for the current was selected through purposive sampling techniques. 49 Arab speaking students from the USM were selected.

### **Instrumentation**

An instrument designed by Yang Yu, (2010) was adapted and used for data collection from the sample. It was comprised of 28 Likert-type statements ranging from agreeing on scale 4 to strongly disagree on 1. The instrument was divided into 3 categories. The first category was about the attitude of learners toward English. It consisted of 9 items including; English is an international language, I can speak English and English is not just the language of America and England etc. The second category is about the policies relating to the English language in their respective Arab countries, questions such as English to be used as a medium of instruction, English should be taught at the secondary level and I am satisfied with the policy of my country regarding English education. These were 11 Likert types of statements. Statement 22 to 28 was the third section. It is about the purpose of learning English having statements about the reasons why students wanted to learn English.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data was collected individually from students of different Arab speaking countries including, UAE, Libya, Yaman, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. In this study a total of 49 students took part. Statistical Package for Social Science version 24.0 was utilized for analysis. Three descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode and standard deviation were found out for answering the research questions.

### **Inferential Analysis**

Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression were carried out as an inferential analysis to explain the hypotheses

### **Pearson Correlation Coefficient**

For finding out the degree of relationship between one dependent variable and many independent variables a statistical measurer Pearson Correlation Coefficient can be used. The correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) ranges from -1.0 to + 1.0. If  $r$  is 0, this indicates the two variables have no relationship at all. When  $r$  is -1.0, this indicates

a perfect negative linear relationship. On the other hand, when  $r$  is  $+ 1.0$ , this indicates a perfect positive linear relationship. To know about the direction or the degree of relationship between two variables or to know where there is a positive or negative relationship between these variables linear regression is used. (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2009; Sekaran, & Bougie, 2019). In this research, Pearson analysis was carried out to find out the bond between the independent and dependent variables. Below are the results of the person correlation in Table 1.

### **Hypothesis 1**

**H0:** No significant relationship exists between Attitude towards Purpose of learning English Language and the Importance of the English language.

**H1:** A significant relationship exists between Attitude towards Purpose of learning English Language and the Importance of the English language.

The table of Pearson Correlation illustrates attitude towards the purpose of learning and the importance of the English language showed a significant positive relationship. The Attitude towards Learning has a 0.425 correlation value to the purpose of English Language Learning. This shows that if the personal attitude of purpose towards learning is increasing, the Important of the English Language will increase too because there is a positive relationship between the two factors.

The correlation value is 0.425; it is in the coefficient range of  $\pm 0.41$  to  $\pm 0.70$ . As a result, Attitude towards the purpose of Learning and Important of the English Language showed a good and positive relationship. The relationship depicts the P-value is ( $<0.0001$ ) which is below the alpha value of (0.05) (Sekaran, & Bougie, 2019). Because of its result, the H0 is rejected and H1 which “there is a significant relationship between Attitude towards the purpose of Learning and Important of English Language” is accepted

### **Hypothesis 2**

**H0:** No significant relationship exists between Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language.

**H1:** A significant relationship exists between Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language.

As indicated by the table above, Attitude Towards policy showed a significant positive relationship with Important of the English Language. Attitude Towards policy has a 0.412 correlation value with the Important of English Language. This shows that if the person Attitude Towards policy is increased; they will increase the amount of Important of English Language) (Sekaran, & Bougie, 2019).

The correlation value is 0.412, which is in the correlation range of  $\pm 0.41$  to  $\pm 0.90$ . Therefore, Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language

showed a positive relationship. The relationship of Attitude Towards policy and Important of English Language has a significant effect because of the P-value (<0.0001) being clearly below the alpha value (0.05). Consequently, the Null hypothesis is declined and the H1 is approved.

**Table 1**

Correlations				
		English Important	Attitude Towards Purpose of Learning	Attitude Towards policy
English Importance	Pearson Correlation	1	.425**	.412**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.001	.002
	N	49	49	49
Attitude Towards Purpose of Learning	Pearson Correlation	.425**	1	.351**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001		.007
	N	49	49	49
Attitude Towards policy	Pearson Correlation	.412**	.351**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	.007	
	N	49	49	49
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).				

### Multiple Linear Regressions

The extension of simple regression analysis is multiple regression analysis. Multiple linear regression analysis is a statistical technique that can develop a mathematical relationship between two or more independent variables and interval-scaled dependent variable (Sekaran, & Bougie, 2019). Multiple regression analysis is a more suitable analysis to use in this research, as there are two independent variables that explain the variance of the dependent variable. In accordance, the equation of multiple regressions showed several variables' value and not just one single predictor variable. The general multiple regression models are given below:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + \dots + b_k X_k + \varepsilon$$

Key:

Y= dependent variable

b<sub>0</sub>= constant

b<sub>k</sub>= the regression coefficient associated with the independent variables, X

$X_k$  = the independent variables, where  $k = 1, 2, 3 \dots$

$\epsilon$  = an error term (for purposes of computation, then  $\epsilon$  is assumed to be 0)

**H0:** The two independent variables (Attitude towards Purpose of Learning, Attitude Towards policy) are not significant in explaining the variance in Important of English.

**H1:** The two independent variables (Attitude towards Purpose of Learning, Attitude Towards policy,) are significant to explain variance in Important of English.

Table 2 demonstrates the significance of F- Statistics the value of  $p$  ( $<0.001$ ) should be less than the alpha value 0.05. The predictor of this study shows a perfect relationship with the dependent variable. Therefore, the  $p$ -value ( $<0.001$ ) clearly shows that the Attitude of the purpose of learning English and the attitude towards policy significantly explains the variance in Important of English

Table 3 illuminates the R-square of the independent variable (Attitude towards the purpose of Learning and Attitude Towards policy) which explains 25.9 % of the variations independent variable (Important of English). Whereas, this research could not explain the rest of 74.1 % left. This indicates that many other variables may be causing the effect on Important of English. These variables are not part of the current study.

**Table 2**

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.509 <sup>a</sup>	.259	.227	.55554	2.075
a. Predictors: (Constant), Attitude Towards Purpose of Learning, Attitude Towards policy					
b. Dependent Variable: Important of English					

Table 3 shows that Attitude towards Purpose of Learning has a significant role in predicting the dependent variable that is Important of English in the current study. This is because the P-value for Attitude towards the purpose of learning (0.032) is lower than alpha value 0.05.

**Table 3.** Multiple Linear Regression: Parameter Estimates

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations	Collinearity Statistics



	B	Std. Error	Beta		Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF	
1 (Constant)	1.577	.414		3.806	.000					
Attitude Towards policy	.316	.142	.301	2.218	.032	.412	.311	.281	.877	1.140
Attitude towards Purpose of Learning	.245	.104	.319	2.355	.023	.425	.328	.299	.877	1.140

a. Dependent Variable: Important of English

With the increase of 1, the unit of Attitude towards learning in the regression equation may increase 0.316 units in the importance of English. Whereas the addition of each 1 unite increase of Attitude towards policy will result in an increase of 0.245 units in Important of English.

### Regression Equation

$$\text{Important of English} = 1.577 + (0.316) \text{ Attitude towards Learning} + (0.245) \text{ Attitude Towards policy}$$

### Conclusion

From the data analysis, it can be concluded that the importance of English can greatly be affected by both factors. The education policy of a country is the most important predictor of its future in a similar way the language education policy decides the future survival rate of a particular language in that country as well as answering any question related with education. Such a question can be about medium of instruction adopted by a country, English as a compulsory subject, English for communication purpose and English for elite or common people etc. all these questions are deeply linked with the language education policy of a country.

Arab speaking countries are bringing change in its language education policy as it has realized the importance of the English language for survival as countries and as individuals. The public of these countries through government policy has realized how significant it for them is to learn English. The attitude towards language policy can influence or strengthen the nature of the value or importance of the English language.

Different people learn English langue for different purposes the attitude towards the purpose of language can also affect the importance given to that langue

by individuals. It has been noticed that most of the students are interested in learning English for the sake of passing exams, so that either they should be promoted to another level or have admission in a high-ranked institute. The other category of Arab speaking students gives importance to English who wants to have a job in an international organization. They are well aware of the importance of English in the workplace. The reason they want to learn English is they are seeking good jobs both within and outside the country.

### **Recommendations**

The current study has numerous implications in Arab Speaking countries and can also be in other countries where English is taught as a second language. The most important is that basically, the policymaker decides what should be the level of importance of learning given by the individuals of a country to a particular language. Through the policy, they will know if they are to learn American or British English. On the other hand, if the policy of a country is more modern and dynamic the public will know that their local accent is not a problem. They will accept the fact that as long as they can convey their message to others it is good enough.

This study is limited to Arab speaking students only and the sample is also very limited. Such a study can be carried out with a different and larger sample so that the results can be more significant. There are many nations in the world which use English either as the second or foreign language they can carry out a similar kind of study in their country in order to know about how much importance do their students give to the English Language.

These are a few of the attitude factors that can affect the importance of the English language by students there are many other factors that can be studied. That will prove to be more strong predictors of it. These unknown factors of attitude can be deeply analyzed through the qualitative method. Interviews or group discussions can be a good source to find out other attitude factors that can lead to the importance given by students to the English language.

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