

Relations of Some Socio-cultural Variables and Attitudes and Motivations of Young Arab Students of English as a Foreign Language: A Comparative Study of Gender Differences

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العلاقة بين بعض المتغيرات الاجتماعية والثقافية
واتجاهات ودوافع الطلبة نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية
كلغة أجنبية: دراسة مقارنة بين الذكور والإناث

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الملخص:

تفحص هذه الورقة عدداً من المتغيرات المتعلقة بدور الأوجه الثقافية والاجتماعية للذكور والإناث من الأطفال متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وعلاقتها بنوع الاتجاهات والدوافع التي يملكها هؤلاء الأطفال قبل تعلمهم اللغة. بينت نتائج الدراسة بوضوح أن بعض المتغيرات تميل إلى الارتباط بدوافع الطلبة واتجاهاتهم أكثر من غيرها. فقد وجد بأن متغير الخادمة الأجنبية مرتبط بالمتغيرات اللغوية النفسية للإناث وليس للذكور، ولكن امتلاك القصص والألعاب التي تحتوي على اللغة مرتبطة بمتغيرات الاتجاهات والدوافع لدى الأطفال الذكور. وكما قد نوقشت الدلالات التعليمية المبنية على نتائج هذه الدراسة.

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Abstract:

This paper examines a number of variables pertaining to the role of socio-cultural outlooks of male and female young learners of English as a foreign language and the relationship of these outlooks on the type of attitudes and motivations they possess prior to their learning of the language. Results of the study indicate clearly that certain variables tend to associate with their attitudes and motivations more than others. The variability of the maid tends to associate with most of the females' tested psycholinguistic variables and not with any of males'. However, possession of English stories and having some sort of English games at home tend to associate with most of males' motivational and attitudinal factors. These tend to associate less with females'. The pedagogical implications for these results are discussed.

Background

Attitude is a psychological concept that has been dealt with in various fields of learning. Gardner (1985:9) gave an operational definition of attitude as being “an evaluation reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinions about the referent.” This definition basically includes two major features of an attitude. The first feature is that attitude is an “evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object.” This means that a student reacts to a certain learning situation in a manner that should largely stem from past experience. For example, if students receive an “F” on a foreign language test, their reaction to the new foreign language learning situation most probably would be negative (Oscamp, 1977). This explanation leads to the second feature of “attitude” indicated in Gardner’s definition, “inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinions about the referent.” This means that, for instance, people’s attitudes toward learning a foreign language, English in this case, might be inferred from knowing their views about their experience in learning the particular foreign language.

Educators concerned with students’ personality have investigated the role of attitudes in the learning process. As in other areas of learning, foreign language researchers have tried to determine the reasons behind the success of some learners over others in grasping a new language. Lambert and Gardner are the pioneer researchers concerned with the role of a learner’s attitude in acquiring a second or foreign language (Al-Ansari, 1985). Other researchers (Sposlky, 1969; Wangsotorn, 1975; Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1977; Wimmer, 1981; and Wong, 1982) have conducted a number of studies of the effects of attitudes on foreign language acquisition. Yet, there is no definite answer about the causes of individual differences in acquiring a foreign language. However, all researchers agree that the most crucial factor in learning the new language is the role of the learner (Savignon, 1983).

A foreign language learner might be either integratively or instrumentally oriented toward learning the new language, Gardner and Lambert (1972) provide definitions of integratively and instrumentally motivated students. They (1972) define an integratively oriented student as “... the student who wished to learn more about the other cultural community because he is interested in the community in an open-minded way, to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that group” (132). On the other hand, Gardner and Lambert (1972) define the instrumentally motivated student as “... the person who has a desire to

gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language” (p. 132)

Most of the studies in the literature reviewed focus on the relationship between learners' attitudes toward learning English language and their proficiency in English. These studies fall into two categories. One category is studies concerned with learning English as a foreign language while the second category is studies concerned with learning English as a second language. The first category studies contain studies conducted in an Arabic-speaking environment and a non-Arabic speaking environment. Only few studies were conducted in the Arabian Gulf region where the present study was carried out. Two of these studies involved Bahraini participants. Results of Al-Ansari's study (1985 & 1993) on Bahrainis' level of English showed that instrumental motivation tended to correlate significantly with the attainment proficiency of all the studied groups. However, no significant correlation was found among the high achievers. And the other three studies were conducted in Saudi Arabia (Mulla, 1979; Al-Shammary, 1984 and Surur, 1981). Mulla (1979) found that strong relationships existed between students' performance on English proficiency tests and their motivations and attitudes. Al-Shammary's study (1984) investigated the development of six hundred Saudi male intermediate and secondary students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language. His results showed that the attitude toward learning English in the Saudi school context was generally more favorable in the upper three grades (10, 11 and 12) than in the lower three grades (7, 8 and 9). The relationship between attitude and motivation to learn English was not as strong as some previous researchers thought it to be. Surur (1977) found that 77% of the students liked to study English, 76% of the students had the desire to speak the language like a native speaker and 89% of the students enjoyed studying English.

Studies in non-Arabic speaking environments conducted by Wangsotorn (1975), Chihara and Oller (1978) and Jayatilaka (1982) dealt with the relationship between motivational orientation and attained proficiency. Using 120 Thai college students for his study, Wangsotorn (1975) compared the relationships of their affective variables (Instrumental Attitude, Motivational Intensity, Orientative Attitude, Integrative Attitude, and Ethnocentrism), to their achievement in English. The results showed that there were significant relationships between attitudinal-motivational variables and achievement. In another study, Chihara and Oller (1978) studied 123 Japanese adults enrolled in basic, intermediate and advanced EFL classes at the Osaka, Japan YMCA. The researchers

found that a relationship existed between subjects' attitudes and their attained proficiency. Jayatilaka (1982) undertook a multiple correlational study which revealed that instrumentally motivated students (86% of his subjects) performed better on the language proficiency test than integratively motivated students (34% of his subjects). A regression analysis showed that among the best predictors of subjects' scores on the proficiency test are: Desire to live abroad temporarily, desire to live abroad permanently, parental encouragement, authoritarianism, and motivation intensity. Many of these predictors were measured in the present study. Jayatilak investigated these predictors among children who lack the experience of learning English formally while the present study's participants were individuals who will learn English at a later time, whereas; Jayatilak's participants had a lot of experience of learning English.

Studies concerned with English as a second language were done by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Lukmani (1972) and Gordon (1980). Gardner and Lambert (1972:132) assessed the attitude of learners of English as a second language. They studied one hundred and three Philippino senior high school students. The major objective of the study was to test the researcher's hypothesis that integrative motivation plays a substantial role in the acquisition of a second language. The results of their studies indicated that instrumental motivation plays a stronger role than integrative motivation in acquiring English as a second language. The researchers also pointed out that integratively oriented students showed considerable motivation and desire to learn English, expressed an interest in foreign languages, had good study habits, reported considerable parental encouragement to learn English, and appeared satisfied with society and their role in it. Yet, in Gardner and Lambert's study, instrumental motivation appeared to be a stronger force.

Lukmani's study (1972) supported the findings of Lambert and Gardner (1972). She (1972) measured the attitude and the language proficiency of sixty Marthi-speaking high school females to see whether these students were integratively or instrumentally motivated and to determine the relationship between the motivational variable and students' language achievement. A t-test showed that the subjects were instrumentally motivated ($t = 6.20, p < .001$). This type of motivation correlated significantly with their Cloze Test scores ($r = .41, p < .001$).

A study involving Belizian primary school students conducted by Gordon (1980) investigated the relationship among measures of language learning, apti-

tude, social attitudes, their motivation in learning the language and achievement in written English. The results showed a significant correlation between achievement in English and language aptitude ($r = .69$), attitudes toward the learning situation ($r = .38$), and integrativeness ($r = .24$), and degree of instrumentality ($r = .18$). The results showed subjects were both integratively and instrumentally oriented. Gordon (1980) concluded that language aptitude was significantly more accurate as a predictor of English achievement than were attitudes and motivation.

Although all of the studies above investigated the effects of attitudes and motivation on foreign language acquisition, there is no definite answer about the causes of individual differences in acquiring a foreign language. However, many educators agree that the most crucial factor in learning the new language is the role of the learner (Savignon, 1983). In this regard, Wongsothorn (1987:31) stated that success in learning a foreign language depends on various identifiable variables. The literature summarizes these variables in two major divisions: language proficiency and learners' attitudes and motivations and learners' background factors (Wongsothorn, 1987; Gradman & Hanania, 1991; Wilhelm, 1995). In a study conducted on 101 students taking intensive English at Indiana University, Gradman and Hanania (1991) found that factors such as previous experience of learning English, exposure to and the use of English inside and outside the classroom influenced students' levels of English proficiency. We have looked at similar background factors. These include exposure to the use of English at home. For example, playing with games containing English words and hearing or reading simplified stories in English- or hearing and reacting to spoken English in places where English is used by people present such as waitresses at fast food restaurants and learners' past formal experience of learning English. We assume that such background experiences might have great effects on children's expectations towards learning English at school.

These background factors not only influence the learning of the language, they contribute also to the learners' motivations and attitudes towards learning the target language. Travelling abroad, watching TV programs, and communicating with speakers of English affect the perceptions of learning English on children. Giota (1995) made a survey about the use of English in a non-academic environment by 318 10-yr.-old Swedish students. The researcher found that 16% of the children visited an English speaking country; they used English differently, speaking, learning, reading and writing in their leisure time. And 89% of the children felt that their parents helped them with doing homework. And

finally, almost all of these children felt that English was important for Swedes to know (Giota, 1995). It was hoped that in this study, such factors would be revealed. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the expectations of both male and female Bahraini nine-year children towards learning English and to establish any differences in such expectations. Furthermore, the correlational relationship between these children's expectations towards learning English and some of their socio-cultural factors has been examined.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and three male students and two hundred and nine female students enrolled in nineteen elementary schools were chosen to participate in this study. Almost all the participants were nine years old attending the third grade. In the third grade, students study all subjects (Arabic, Religious Studies, Social Studies, Math and Fine Arts) except English, which is taught in the fourth grade and upward.

Tests

An attitudinal scale was developed. Most of the items in the developed scale were adapted from Gardner and Lambert's Attitudinal/Motivational Scale (1972). The scale contains 30 items which measure the following six variables: Integrative Motivation, Instrumental Motivation, Desire to Learn English, Motivational Intensity, Parental Encouragement and Attitude Toward Learning English in School. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a three Likert-type like-dislike continuum. Respondents who answered favourably were awarded three while those who expressed unfavourably got one point. Respondents with an uncertain answer received two points. The maximum score on this measurement is 90 points. A respondent with a higher score is identified to be holding positive attitude toward learning English as a foreign language than a respondent with a lower score. The instrument required 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Because of the resemblance between the developed scale and Gardner and Lambert's Attitudinal/Motivational Scale, the reported reliability of coefficient of .85 for Gardner and Lambert's scale (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) will be considered for the developed scale. The Arabic version of the scale has a test-retest reliability of .79, which was obtained by administering the translated questionnaire to fifty Bahraini 3rd graders for the developed scale. As far as the

validity is concerned, four experts in the field of teaching English as a foreign language were asked to comment on the various items. Upon receiving the experts' comments, some items were modified and others were either changed or omitted. A number of 3rd graders were asked about the length, relevancy and the language of the translated scale. Based on the students' comments, some items were reworded.

Procedure

Upon receiving permission from the Bahraini Ministry of Education enabling the researcher to conduct the study in the elementary schools, 19 schools were contacted. Two hundred and three male students and 209 female students were chosen systematically to participate in this study. After the participants were selected, visits to schools were scheduled in order to administer the questionnaire. Schools were arranged for the researcher to meet the selected participants from that school in a private room. In many cases it was the library. Before the participants answered the questionnaires, they were instructed on how to express their attitudes towards the questionnaire items. The participants were asked questions about their academic backgrounds. Before entering the collected data into the computer for analysis, each participant was assigned a number. After that the scores from the attitudinal/motivational questionnaire were computed using the SPSS programme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to measure gender differences, the data were analyzed in an attempt to see if any significant results would come out of such statistical analyses. Table 1 provides results of the mean scores and the standard deviations for the attitudinal/motivational variables.

TABLE 1: MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR THE ATTITUDINAL/MOTIVATIONAL VARIABLES TESTED (MALES & FEMALES)

Variable	Mean	S. D.
Attitudes towards school	M: 13.66	1.68
	F: 13.70	1.61
Desire to learn the language	M: 13.82	1.59
	F: 13.89	1.37
Parental Encouragement	M: 13.79	1.62
	F: 13.96	1.49
Motivational intensity	M: 14.05	1.45
	F: 14.12	1.38
Integrative motivation	M: 14.09	1.65
	F: 14.12	1.41
Instrumental motivation	M: 14.45	1.09
	F: 14.47	.97
Total	M: 83.82	7.45
	F: 84.28	6.38

The mean score obtained for the tested variables indicates that both males and females Primary school students in Bahrain tend to hold strong positive attitudinal and motivational outlooks towards learning English as a foreign language. A total score of 83, out of a possible of 90 for the males and a total of 84 for the females are a clear indication that both males and females tend to approach their English learning instruction with strong attitudes and motivations while attempting to learn the language.

Table 2 provides the mean scores and the standard deviations for the socio-cultural variables.

TABLE 2: MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR THE SOCIO-CULTURAL VARIABLES (MALES & FEMALES)

Variable	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	T tests	Significance
Maid	<i>F:</i> 1.49	.50	<i>M:</i> 1.36	.48	2.5	.01*
Foreign countries	<i>F:</i> 1.51	.50	<i>M:</i> 1.37	.48	2.7	.00**
Foreign friends	<i>F:</i> 1.45	.49	<i>M:</i> 1.44	.49	.09	.92
P. L. Experience	<i>F:</i> 1.54	.49	<i>M:</i> 1.48	.50	1.06	.28
Fast Food Rest.	<i>F:</i> 1.61	.48	<i>M:</i> 1.54	.49	1.3	.17
Nursery	<i>F:</i> 1.67	.47	<i>M:</i> 1.63	.48	.71	.47
English Stories	<i>F:</i> 1.75	.43	<i>M:</i> 1.66	.47	1.86	.06
English games	<i>F:</i> 1.73	.44	<i>M:</i> 1.74	.43	-1.0	.91

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Here again the mean scores obtained for the variables associated with students' social and previous learning background indicate students' possession of favourable social and academic background which should clearly enhance their learning of English as a school subject. The results of the t tests show that the girls tend to be slightly different from the boys with regard to the variables associated with the maid and with their experience of having visited foreign countries for the purpose of learning the language. The correlational values for both genders have been computed so as to make a comparative study and to see which of these psycholinguistic factors are very much associated with certain socio-cultural variables. Table 3 gives the Pearson-moment correlation matrix for the attitudinal-motivational variables. Results of all the correlation coefficients are highly positively significant for both genders.

TABLE 3: PEARSON-MOMENT CORRELATION MATRIX FOR THE ATTITUDINAL-MOTIVATIONAL VARIABLES (MALES & FEMALES)

variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Desire to learn	_____						
2 Attitudes towards school	<i>M</i> .65 <i>F</i> .54	_____					
3 Parental encouragement	<i>M</i> .58 <i>F</i> .46	.63 .46	_____				
4 motivational intensity	<i>M</i> .50 <i>F</i> .50	.58 .53	.64 .55	_____			
5 integrative motivation	<i>M</i> .57 <i>F</i> .42	.55 .43	.55 .42	.57 .59	_____		
6 instrumental motivation	<i>M</i> .51 <i>F</i> .43	.52 .51	.50 .49	.66 .59	.64 .59	_____	
7 Total	<i>M</i> .80 <i>F</i> .73	.82 .77	.80 .76	.80 .82	.79 .72	.75 .75	_____

In this table correlations of $\pm .15$ or higher are significant at $p < .05$; correlations of $\pm .19$ or higher are significant at $p < .01$; and correlations of $\pm .2$ or higher are significant at $p < .001$. (**The significant results are in bold type**)

All the tested attitudinal-motivational variables tend to correlate highly with each other. Such striking results clearly indicate the significance of English as a foreign language in the Bahraini milieu and the type of positive attitudinal-motivational presuppositions that young learners hold before even they commence to learn the language. One reason for the above high correlation values is that these young learners of English are surrounded by ample opportunities which probably enhance their appreciation to the value of learning the language. It is likely the dominance of English as a compulsory school subject that acts a driving force by which learners embark on the language with high expectations and motivation to do well in school. Furthermore, English is seen to be a communicative tool by which a better prestige in life can be reached.

Table 4 gives the Pearson-moment correlation matrix for the socio-cultural variables. Although the correlation coefficients in most cases are low, they are significant. It is interesting to note that the correlations obtained for variables 1, 4, 6, 7 and 8 are significantly high. A possible explanation for this is that these three variables all reside in learners' family milieu and thus share a common concept.

TABLE 4: PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX FOR THE SOCIO-CULTURAL VARIABLES (MALES & FEMALES)

variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Maid									
2. Foreign countries	<i>M</i>	<u>.24</u>							
	<i>F</i>	.25							
3. Foreign friends	<i>M</i>	.24	<u>.24</u>						
	<i>F</i>	.15	.26						
4. P. L. experience	<i>M</i>	.32	.32	.27					
	<i>F</i>	.25	.27	.12					
5. Fast food Res.	<i>M</i>	.32	.20	.20	<u>.19</u>				
	<i>F</i>	.42	.30	.12	.33				
6. Nursery	<i>M</i>	.33	.15	.15	.18	.21			
	<i>F</i>	.48	.26	.14	.54	.35			
7. English stories	<i>M</i>	.19	.20	.26	.27	.20	.20		
	<i>F</i>	.20	.17	.12	.16	.29	.11		
8. English games	<i>M</i>	.26	.24	.18	.32	.32	.23	41	
	<i>F</i>	.25	.15	.17	.15	.28	.35	.20	

In this table correlations of $\pm .15$ or higher are significant at $p < .05$; correlations of $\pm .19$ or higher are significant at $p < .01$; and correlations of $\pm .2$ or higher are significant at $p < .001$. (The significant results are in bold type)

Results of the Pearson Product-Moment intercorrelations of the two sets of factors are given in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SETS OF FACTORS (MALES & FEMALES)

variable		Att /sch	Desire to learn	Inst. Mot.	Integ. Mot.	Mot. In	Par. Enc.	Total
1. Maid	<i>M</i>	.09	.06	.05	.13	.08	.13	.13
	<i>F</i>	.07	.15*	.06	.21**	.15*	.17*	.17*
2. Foreign countries	<i>M</i>	.11	.15*	.02	-.00	.08	.26**	.10
	<i>F</i>	.07	-.03	-.02	.09	.13	.07	.08
3. Foreign Friends	<i>M</i>	.01	.09	.00	.12	.04	.08	.04
	<i>F</i>	.08	.10	.04	.08	.06	.03	.08
4. P. L. Experience.	<i>M</i>	.17*	.12	.12	.18*	.08	.19**	.17**
	<i>F</i>	.06	.05	.11	.15*	.18**	.11	.14*
5. Fast Food Rest.	<i>M</i>	.08	.05	.08	.07	.07	.12	.09
	<i>F</i>	.04	-.04	.06	.17*	.12	.12	.09
6. Nursery	<i>M</i>	.08	.00	.01	.06	.07	.15*	.08
	<i>F</i>	.01	.06	.04	.13	.17*	.14*	.13
7. English stories	<i>M</i>	.17*	.20**	.20**	.15*	.20***	.26***	.26***
	<i>F</i>	-.00	-.12	-.05	.09	.06	.13*	.03
8. English games	<i>M</i>	.19**	.19**	.15*	.18**	.17*	.38***	.26***
	<i>F</i>	.03	.15*	.03	.19**	.17*	.19**	.17*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Some very interesting results concerning gender differences emerged in Table 5. The most interesting result is that the presence of a maid factor is not seen to be associated with males' attitudinal and motivational pre-dispositions while it tends to associate with somewhat three of females' ones. There is a low but very significant correlation between the maid factor and females' degree of integrative motivation. An explanation for this correlation is that females normally tend to be more socially attached to their housemaid than males. Visits to foreign countries do not appear to be associated with both males and females' attitudinal and motivational pre-dispositions apart from a slight association with the males' desire to learn the language ($r = .15, p < .05$). Males' parental encouragement is also seen to be associated with their visits to foreign countries. The variability of having foreign friends does not have any association with both males and females' attitudinal and motivational pre-dispositions. As far as learners' previous learning experience is concerned, it is seen to somewhat associate with males' attitudes towards school and their integrative motivation to learn the language. This factor is also slightly more significantly associated with the degree of encouragement they receive from their parents. However, females' integrative motivation and the motivational intensity they show in learning the language are seen to be associated with their previous learning experience. The fast food variability is not found to exert any association with the attitudinal and motivational pre-dispositions of both males and females apart from a slight association with the integrative motivation of females ($r = .17, p < .05$). The variability of both English stories and games has been found to be associated more with males' attitudinal and motivational variables and less with females'. Parental attitudes of support and encouragement and possibly their own educational backgrounds would be involved in the exposure of these children in Grade 3 to preschool English stories and English games, all of which involve more active use of English. These may be expected to facilitate motivation to learn English as the children might well acquire some knowledge of the English alphabet, basic lexical and structural items, together with simple arithmetic. Such experiences might increase openness to reading and learning about another culture.

Pedagogical implications

The potential pedagogical implications of the results of the study are clear and straightforward. Young EFL learners appear likely to develop positive attitudes and motivations toward the language when they have an early introduction

to the language through a number of visual and cultural representations of the language, mainly through simple stories and games. The earlier they embark on essential basic lexical and structural forms of the language, the more chance there is for certain psychological factors to develop positively and encourage success in learning the language.

Early exposure to the language helps in the development of positive attitudinal and motivational outlooks. These psycholinguistic variables have often been seen to be associated with differences determining success in the language. Focusing our attention on the principles that lie behind the psychological process of foreign language, we appear to find a strong influence of family milieu

As educational practitioners, we need to understand the social educational background of the young foreign language learners in order to be in a better position to provide for their pedagogical needs. Harden (1995) suggested the importance of reading in second language learning. He sees that in order to fulfill a more useful function in language, reading should be considered a truly creative rather than basically receptive process. Carbo and Cole (1995) addressed the issue of how to prepare students to competent lifelong readers. Hood (1996) evaluated a number of strategies that foreign language readers need to undertake in order to improve their overall competence. He suggested focusing on the ability of pupils to cope with reading texts containing unknown vocabulary. In order to achieve this, we need to increase their motivation to overcome difficulties in comprehension. Teachers in the kindergarten and early stages of primary schools should understand the nature and process of reading in a foreign language and its implications of instruction and teacher training. They should familiarise themselves with both the theoretical and practical bases of planning reading processes. Some of the practical approaches of teaching strategies include understanding the content of reading texts, differences between first and foreign reading stages and incorporating extensive reading programmes into the school syllabi. The implication for teacher training may include the preparation of reading materials, the teachers' own foreign language reading pedagogical skills, organising workshops, setting up resource facilities and improving the role of the foreign language advisor. (For further ideas on these issues please see Hood, 1996; Kellermann, 1981 and Kim & Krashen, 1997.) In conclusion, young foreign language learners should be encouraged to engage themselves in numerous foreign language reading activities for their attitudinal and motivational outlooks to be enhanced positively in favour of succeeding in the language at later stages.

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