

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH AND ELT AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN KASHMIR****Dr. Masood Ahmad Malik**

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**Abstract:**

The present paper explores the attitudes of the learners, teachers and parents towards English language and its teaching at tertiary level in Kashmir. The attitudes of the different stakeholders of the learning process do always have a bearing upon the outcomes and operation of any teaching learning programme. Moreover, the study of the attitudes provides incisive insights that are required to make the teaching learning process effective and to tailor the contents of the curriculum with the expectations of the stake holders. Additionally an understanding of attitudes helps in understanding the dynamics of a language classroom and may serve as a guide for upholding those attitudes that help learners and for eradicating the negative attitudes that hamper the learning of language. The other constituents of the language curriculum viz the syllabus, materials, methods and tests also get deeply influenced by the attitudes held by the different stakeholders. In my knowledge, no study has been conducted in Kashmir so far to study the attitudes towards English or ELT at any level. The present study being the first of its kind shall go a long way in making the teaching of English effective at tertiary level in Kashmir.

**Key Words:** Attitudes, Curriculum, Materials, Syllabus Teaching & Learning

**1. Introduction:**

Students and teachers bring their own system of beliefs to the classroom and these beliefs often determine many of the choices made in the classroom. Murphy (2000) defines the beliefs as the representation of "*a complex and inter-related system of personal and professional knowledge that serves as implicit theories and cognitive maps for experiencing and responding to reality. Beliefs rely on cognitive and affective components and are often tacitly held*". Beliefs, often referred to as attitudes, values, opinions, personal theories or conceptions, are not directly observable but can be inferred from the behaviour of the students and teachers in the classroom. The teaching approach preferred in the classroom (learner centered or teacher centered), the choice of materials used and the types of activities conducted in the class often reflect the attitudes held by the stake-holders towards the teaching and learning of languages. The attitudes held by the students influence the learning strategies they adopt for the learning of a second language. For example, if a student believes that learning a second language is not possible without acquiring a large vocabulary; such student shall focus more on words and dictionary than on any other aspect of the language. Likewise, if a teacher believes that learning a language means to translate from one's mother tongue, the belief would get reflected in his/her teaching through translation. The beliefs held by the students and teachers about leaning in general and learning a second language in particular can have varied sources of origin. Both students' and teachers' previous experience of language learning contributes significantly to their beliefs about teaching and learning of a second language. Their past experiences or teaching learning strategies employed in the past have a bearing on their present approach to the learning of a language. The attitude the society in general has about the target language also influences a language classroom.

**2. Background:**

For any language teaching programme to be result oriented, it is important to keep the attitudes of the students into consideration. "*Learners bring preconceptions of what teaching and learning should be like. These constitute a set of learning, which when unrealized can lead to learner confusion and resentment*" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 166). Wen and Johnson (1997: 40, cited in Sheorey 2006: 28) found a strong relationship between beliefs, strategies, and English achievement among Chinese subjects, and they suggest that "*teacher and materials writers need to be aware of, and sensitive to students pre-existing assumptions about the language learning process*". Hence it is imperative to study the attitudes of the students learning English as second languages in order to frame a curriculum that can come to their expectations. It may help teachers to understand why students employ certain language learning strategies, how the beliefs influence their particular attitudes and motivation or what general impact the beliefs may have on their learning of English.

Equally important is to study the teacher's beliefs about English. Teachers play a pivotal role in the delivery of language instruction and have the responsibility of motivating their students. Richards (1998: 66) defines teacher's belief as "*the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom*". It is for this reason that an investigation of teacher's beliefs is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of what goes on in the classroom.

Students and teachers are not the only stakeholders of a language teaching programme. There are teacher trainers, materials developers, families of the learners, administrators, etc., whose beliefs and attitudes influence all aspects of the language teaching professions.

Hence the study of attitudes helps in understanding the dynamics of a language classroom and may serve as a guide for upholding those attitudes that help learners and for eradicating the negative attitudes that hamper the learning of language.

**3. Methodology:**

This study has employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative data was collected through questionnaires and qualitative data was collected through classroom observations and interviews. The qualitative data was useful because it enriched the study as a whole and additionally, functioned as a way to cross-check and validate the data collected through the questionnaires.

**3.1. Instruments of Data Collection:**

The main data collection instruments were the questionnaires for students, teachers and parents. A set of three questionnaires was carefully prepared. Questions were framed in such a manner that they were related logically to the problem stated in the study. It comprised structured (closed) question in which an opinion /statement is given with five options, out of which the respondent has to choose one. It also had some unstructured (open) questions where the respondent has to write an answer to the given question. The questionnaire administered to the parents was accompanied with Urdu translation of the questions keeping in view the difficulty which some parents might face in understanding English.

Before administering the questionnaires, I field tested them with a small group of students and teachers in the college where I work and subsequently interviewed some of them about individual items. As a result, some words had to be changed and technical terms that were used earlier substituted with words of common use. I also met a few parents to assess the efficiency of my instrument and as a result of their interaction I included Urdu translation in the parents' questionnaire.

In order to have a comprehensive view of the attitudes which have a bearing on the teaching and learning of English in Kashmir, two separate sections ('Attitudes towards English' comprising thirty statements and 'Reasons for studying English' comprising nine statements) were included in the questionnaire. The responses labeled 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were combined to determine agreement and those labeled 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were combined to indicate disagreement. Only those responses with which the 50% of the respondents had shown either agreement or disagreement were included for analysis.

**4. Results and Discussion:**

**4.1 Attitudes of Students towards English:** The responses of the students to the statements in the questionnaire on 'Attitudes towards English' are presented in the table below:

S.No	Statement	Agree (in %)	Disagree (in %)
1	English should continue as compulsory subject in J&K	100	-----
2	English is an interesting subject.	100	-----
3	English should be a medium of instruction at all levels in Kashmir.	72	12
4	Our local language (Urdu/ Kashmiri, etc) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times.	66	13
5	English is a good choice for teaching B.C.A.	65	10
6	Learning English is an important factor in developing my personality.	96	4
7	My family encourages me to study English.	91	3
8	The development of our country is possible mainly by educated people who know English well.	73	15
9	The use of English in govt. and business offices helps in getting things done easily.	67	16
10	When I hear someone speak English well, I wish I could speak like him.	100	-----
11	I enjoy learning English.	99	-----
12	A good knowledge of English helps in getting more social recognition.	74	16
13	I don't really like English, but I speak it because it is useful.	15	75
14	I will make sure that my children learn English well.	85	5
15	If English was not taught in our educational institutions, I would not try to learn it.	28	69
16	English is superior to Kashmiri.	21	74
17	English has harmed Kashmiri.	24	68
18	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	74	16
19	English is an easy language to learn.	57	41
20	Some people have special ability to learn a foreign language.	77	11
21	Nothing should be said in English until one can say it correctly.	41	54
22	It is important to know the culture of the native speakers of English to be able to speak English.	25	63
23	English can best be learnt in an English speaking country.	67	12

The results in the above table reveal the students in Kashmir have positive attitudes towards English language. All students (100%) want English to continue as a compulsory subject in Jammu and Kashmir and want it to be the medium of instruction at all levels of education in the state. The agreement of 91% students to the statement "my family encourages me to study English" highlights the support that the learning of English receives from the society. Students are sensitive to the important role that English language is playing in the administrative and social realms of the country in general and Kashmir in particular. This fact gets foregrounded with the agreement of 73% students with the statement 'the development of our country is possible mainly by educated people who know English well'. 67% students believe that 'the use of English in government and business offices helps in getting things done easily', 96% believe that the knowledge of English is important for developing their personality and that it helps in getting more social recognition (74%). A majority of students (85%) agree with the statement 'I plan to make sure that my children learn English well'. All these agreements indicate that the students are conscious of not only the functional role of English in the state but also the prestige associated with it.

The perceptions of the students about the learning of English language are also very positive. 72% of the students find English an interesting subject and 99% enjoy learning it. They have a strong desire to learn English. This is evident in the

agreement of all students (100%) with the statement that 'when I hear someone speak English well, I wish I could speak like him'. They disagree (75%) with the statement 'I don't really like English, but I speak it because it is useful'. The students (69%) say that they would have tried to learn English even if it was not taught in the educational institutions.

Regarding the nature of the learning of English, the students exhibit very favourable attitudes. 54% students disagree with the statement that 'nothing should be said in English until one can say it correctly'. They also disagree (63%) that it is important to know the culture of the native speakers of English to be able to speak English. However, they do believe (67%) that English can best be learnt in an English speaking country. They also believe (74%) that 'some languages are easier to learn than others and 57% consider English an easy language to learn.

In addition to these positive attitudes towards English, the students (74%) disagree with the statement that 'English is superior to Kashmiri'. Moreover, they disagree (68%) that English has harmed Kashmir. However, they do believe (66%) that the local language (Urdu/Kashmir) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times. 65% students believe that English is a good medium for teaching computer application.

#### 4.1.1 Students' reasons for Studying English:

The reasons or needs for which students learn a language have been investigated in many studies, for example by Gardner and Lambert (1972). The researchers in the field have identified two basic kinds of motivations: integrative and instrumental. A learner with integrative motivation has a genuine interest in the second language community. The learner not only wants to learn their language in order to communicate with them but also to gain closer contact with their culture. A learner with instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is more interested in how the second language can be a useful instrument towards furthering other goals like seeking employment or gaining necessary qualifications. The former kind of motivation is called 'intrinsic' and the later is called 'extrinsic'.

The table below presents the reasons for which students in Kashmir learn English

S.No	Reason I study English because,	Agree (in percent)	Disagree (in percent)
1	It will enable me to carry my tasks more efficiently.	81	9
2	It will enable me to get a job easily.	97	3
3	I hope to further my education.	73	6
4	It will enhance my status among my friends.	66	31
5	I want to integrate with western culture.	9	85
6	It will enable me to talk to other speakers of English for educational and business reasons.	90	7
7	It will enable me to talk to other speakers of English about general things.	99	1
8	I want to talk to people in my country whose language is unknown to me.	69	19

Only 9% of the students want to learn English to integrate with western culture whereas 97% want to learn English to get a job, 81% to carry their tasks more efficiently, 73% to further their education, 66% for prestige, 90% for communicating with others for educational and business purposes, 99% for talking to others about general things and 69% want to learn it to talk to people in the country whose language is unknown to them. All this reflects that like their counterparts in the rest of the country (Agnihotri and Khanna, 1997, p.83), the students in Kashmir are instrumentally motivated to learn English. The myriad job opportunities that the knowledge of English language offers in the job market of the country and the social status associated with it is the main driving force for the students to learn English.

An understanding of the English language learning attitudes prevalent among the students can be of great use for the teaching and learning of English in Kashmir. The positive attitude towards English, as shown by the students, should act as a signal to the policy makers in general and teachers in particular, so that a curriculum fulfills the desires, wants and aspirations of the students. An attempt should be made by all concerned to match the English courses with student needs. Though the framing of syllabus, selection of text books and other decisions are beyond the teachers' control, a teacher can contribute significantly by channelizing the strong desire that their students have for the learning of English. They do not consider learning English as difficult and want to learn it well. Although these positive attitudes should hearten a teacher of English language, at the same time a teacher has to neutralize the beliefs that may hamper effective learning of English.

#### 4.2 Attitudes of Teachers towards English:

The responses of the teachers to the statements in the questionnaire on 'Attitude towards English' are presented in the table below:

S.No	Statement	Agree (in percent)	Disagree (in percent)
1	English should continue as compulsory subject in J&K	100	-----
2	English is an interesting subject	100	-----
3	English should be a medium of instruction at all levels in Kashmir	93	2
4	Our local language (Urdu/ Kashmiri .etc) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times	23	62
5	English is a good choice for teaching B.C.A	81	5
6	Learning English is an important factor for the development of personality	75	20
7	The development of our country is possible mainly by educated people who know English well	53	23
8	The use of English in govt. and business offices helps in getting things done	54	41

	easily		
9	When I hear someone speak English well, I wish I could speak like him	73	13
10	I enjoy teaching English	91	1
11	A good knowledge of English helps in getting more social recognition	64	14
12	I don't really like English, but I speak it because it is useful	21	74
13	I plan to make sure that my children learn English well	93	4
14	English is important only because of the political, economic and social power of United States and Britain	24	63
15	English is superior to Kashmiri	20	71
16	English has harmed Kashmiri	61	32
17	Some languages are easier to learn than others	84	11
18	English is an easy language to learn	56	23
19	Some people have special ability to learn a foreign language	94	3
20	Nothing should be said in English until one can say it correctly	15	76
21	It is important to know the culture of the native speakers of English to be able to speak English	41	53
22	English can best be learnt in an English speaking country	71	26

The attitudes of the teachers towards learning English as indicated in the above table match those of the students. They want English to continue as a compulsory subject and want it to be a medium of instruction. Like students, they also believe that English speaking people have a role in the development of the country. They endorse the opinion of students that English helps in gaining social recognition and in personality development. Teachers consider English an easy language to learn and enjoy teaching it. An overwhelming majority of the teacher (76%) disagree with the statement that 'nothing should be said in English until one can say it correctly', a belief that is in consonance with the research in effective teaching of languages.

There are, however, a few beliefs among teachers that do not match with those of students. While 66% students agree with the statement that their local language (Urdu/Kashmir, etc) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times. 62% teachers disagree with the same statement. Similarly, 68% students disagree with the statement that 'English has harmed Kashmiri; while 61% teachers agree with the statement. This difference in opinion can be taken as a pointer to the fact that students are less possessive about the local languages than teachers.

The belief of the teachers (94%) that some people have a special ability to learn a foreign language is a matter of concern. Such a belief can undermine the value of practice, persistence and hard work for the learning of a language. It can create a negative atmosphere in the classroom. The belief needs to be neutralized especially during teacher training programmes or other courses organized for faculty development.

#### 4.2.1 Reasons for Studying English:

The opinions of the teachers about the reasons for which students learn English are presented in the table below:-

S.No	Reason Students study English because it will enable them to	Agree (in percent)	Disagree (in percent)
1	Carry their tasks more efficiently.	100	-----
2	Get a job easily.	100	-----
3	Further their education.	100	-----
4	Enhance their status among friends.	83	9
5	Integrate with western culture.	33	64
6	Talk to other speakers of English for educational and business reasons.	94	3
7	Talk to other speakers of English about general things.	87	8
8	Talk to people in the country whose language is unknown to them.	92	5
9	Understand English films, music and programmes on TV and radio.	95	3

Here also the opinions of the teachers and students match each other. Teachers believe that students have instrumental motivation for learning English. All teachers (100%) believe that students learn English for getting jobs, to further their education and to carry their tasks more efficiently. They also believe (80%-95%) that students learn English to enhance their status, for talking to others for educational and business reasons, for talking to other speakers of English about general things. Although the opinion of the students regarding the statement that English is learnt for enjoying English films and music on TV and radio was divided, 95% of teachers consider it one of the reasons for which students study English.

#### 4.3 Attitudes of Parents towards English:

The responses of the parents to the statements in the questionnaire on 'Attitudes towards English' are presented in the table below:

S.No	Statement	Agree (in percent)	Disagree (in percent)
1	English should continue as compulsory subject in J&K	100	-----
2	English is an interesting subject.	91	-----
3	English should be a medium of instruction at all levels in Kashmir.	74	17
4	I would prefer if our mother tongue (Kashmiri) rather than English is used as the language of instruction in our schools, Colleges and universities.	41	50
5	I would prefer if our second language (Urdu) rather than English is used as the	8	67

	language of instruction in our schools, Colleges and universities.		
6	Our local language (Urdu/ Kashmiri .etc) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times.	14	57
7	Kashmiri/Urdu should be used for the teaching of English.	58	41
8	English is a good choice for teaching B.C.A.	67	11
9	Learning English is an important factor for the development of personality.	91	2
10	The use of English in govt. and business offices helps in getting things done easily.	58	17
11	When I hear someone speak English well, I wish I could speak like him.	83	17
12	I enjoy speaking English.	66	16
13	A good knowledge of English helps in getting more social recognition.	75	17
14	I plan to make sure that my children learn English well.	91	2
15	English is important only because of the political, economic and social power of United States and Britain.	53	34
16	English is superior to Kashmiri.	41	50
17	English has harmed Kashmiri.	71	22
18	English is an easy language to learn.	61	34
19	Some people have special ability to learn a foreign language.	58	17
20.	Nothing should be said in English until one can say it correctly.	64	17
21	English can best be learnt in an English speaking country.	66	17

The parents' response to most of the items in the questionnaire is the same as that of students and teachers. They have positive attitudes towards English as they believe that English should continue as a compulsory subject (100%) and that it should be a medium of instruction at all levels (72%). They also think that it is important for the development of personality (91%), it gets things done in offices (58%), and it is a good choice for teaching BCA. The parents (91%) agree with the statement 'I plan to make sure that my children learn English well'.

There are, however, a few beliefs of parents which are different from those of either students or teachers. While most of the students and teachers were not sure in responding to the statement that 'Kashmiri/Urdu should be used for the teaching of English, parents (58%) agree with it. The belief probably emanates from their own experience of learning English as a second language where extensive use of other tongue is made in the classroom. Like teachers, but unlike students, parents (57%) disagree with the statement that 'our local language (Urdu/ Kashmiri) is incapable of handling the needs of modern times. They also feel like teachers that English has harmed Kashmiri.

#### 4.3.1 The Reason for Studying English:

S.No	Reason Students study English because it will enable them to	Agree ( in percentage)	Disagree ( in percentage)
1	Carry their tasks more efficiently.	99	----
2	Get a job easily.	100	----
3	Enhance their status among friends.	99	----
4	Integrate with western culture.	44	52
5	Talk to other speakers of English for educational and business reasons.	91	----
6	Talk to other speakers of English about general things.	91	----
7	To talk to people in the country whose language is unknown to them	83	8
8	Understand English films, music and programmes on TV and radio.	83	8

The parents also feel that the students have instrumental motivation in learning English. They emphatically agree (83-100%) to all the statements in the questionnaire except statement number 4 with which 52 % parents disagree.

#### 5. Conclusion:

An analysis of the attitudes that are held by the students, teachers, and parents towards English language presents a very healthy picture. All research participants want English to continue as a medium of instruction. They believe that the knowledge of English is important for the development of the country and that it helps in getting things done in government and other offices. Students love to learn English and believe that it is a very useful language. Although they do believe that some languages are easier to learn than others and consider English an easy language to learn, but they simultaneously consider their local languages (Urdu/Kashmiri) as incapable of handling the needs of the modern times. All students have got instrumental motivation for the learning of English. Teachers and parents also hold the same attitudes towards English language but they do not consider Kashmiri/ Urdu as incapable of handling the challenges of modern times, .Additionally, parents want Kashmiri to be used for the teaching of English. Teachers differ from students to some extent regarding the nature of language learning, but on the whole the positive attitudes held by all the stake holders can be of great help in improving the quality of English language teaching in Kashmir.

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