

Relationship between the attitude of students towards English and their achievement at Higher Secondary stage

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Abstract

Applied linguists have often correlated achievement with attitude towards language. A study aimed at testing the validity of this claim was carried out. Two instruments - a 5– point Liker type summated rating scale and an achievement test- were developed. Both the tests were administered to 154 A-Level and Intermediate male/ female urban/rural students. The significance of difference between mean performances of different pairs of samples was statistically computed through z – test. Although the overall value of “r” i.e. 0.25 is low, yet the positive value indicates that magnitude of attitude does affect the achievement of Higher Secondary students in the subject of English.

Introduction

A language test is a device that aims at assessing how much has been learnt in a foreign/ second language course or some part of it. Within educational context, the domain of foreign language teaching and testing is a special case of interest. According to Oller (1979, P. 3):

“Language tests may be administered as tests per se, and secondly, to investigate learner’s characteristics using language tests as elicitation procedure”.

Achievement testing plays a dominant role in all types of instructional programs. An achievement test is a systematic procedure for determining the amount of knowledge a student has learnt. Achievement tests are directly related to language courses, their purpose being to establish how successful individual students, or the courses themselves, have been in achieving objectives. Validity of tests depends upon identifying and achieving instructional objectives. Hughes (1996, P.11) believes that

“To base test-content on course objectives, is much to be preferred. It will provide more accurate information about individual and group achievement, and it is likely to promote a more beneficial back-wash effect on teaching”

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Attitudes are not directly observable but are inferred from a person's overt behaviour either verbal or non-verbal. On the basis of observation of a person's consistent behaviour pattern to a stimulus, we may conclude that s/he displays this or that attitude. Attitudes are relatively stable especially in adults. According to Mehrens and Lehmann (1978, P. 238):

“Attitudes are descriptions of how people feel and typically behave rather than description of what they know or can do.

Attitudes are predispositions to respond overtly to social subjects”.

Attitudes vary in direction. Students, who have a favourable attitude towards a school subject, are positively directed. Students who avoid a certain subject or any school – related activity, are negatively directed. Attitudes differ in intensity or strength. One might have a slightly favourable attitude where as another might be strongly against any subject, object or policy. Some information concerning attitudes can be discovered by observation but a more complete assessment requires that observation be supplemented by reports of the students' feelings and opinions. The simplest and widely used method of measuring attitude, is through attitude scale i.e. to list clearly favourable or unfavourable attitude statements, requiring the students to respond to the same.

There is considerable evidence that attitudes may be more closely associated with second language attainment or achievement. According to Oller (1979, P. 138):

“Attitudes are merely one of the types of factors that give rise to motivation which eventually result in attainment of proficiency in a second language. By this line of reasoning, attitudes are considered to be causally related to achievement in a second language, even though the relationship is not apt to be a very strong one”

Score on an English attitude scale could be correlated with ultimate success in the subject of English as measured by an achievement test and may be assumed that if the resulting coefficient is high, the attitude test would be considered as a good predictor.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims at determining the relationship between the attitude of students towards English and their achievement in the subject of English at Higher Secondary stage.

Hypothesis

Attitude towards the subject of English does not have any impact on the achievement in the subject.

Method

A 5 – point Liker type summated rating scale was developed. Out of 30 statements, 11 were stated in the negative form. The second research instrument was an Achievement Test for which maximum marks were 40. Keeping in view the standard of achievement of students of Higher Secondary Classes and after seeking expert advice from six specialists in the field of testing and measurement, the draft of the achievement test, was finalized. Both the tests were administered on 154 students. The sample included three pairs of sub – samples ——— A – level students (60) and Intermediate (94); Male students (71) and female (83); Urban (94) and rural (60).

Both instruments were scored with the help of scoring keys. For both tests, the significance of difference between mean performances of different pairs of samples was statistically computed by using z – test.

$$z = \frac{M1 - M2}{\sqrt{\frac{(SD1)^2}{N1} + \frac{(SD2)^2}{N2}}}$$

Results and Discussion

Mean performances were compared and inferences were drawn and recorded in the form of the table:

Table: 1 Comparison and inferences

Comparable Sample	Construct	Critical Ratio (CR)	Table Value at 0.05	> or <	Inference	Nul Hypothesis
A-Level and Intermediate	Achievement	5.67	1.96	>	Difference Significant	Rejected
	Attitude	0.53	1.96	<	Difference Insignificant	Accepted
Male and Female	Achievement	1.11	1.96	<	Difference Insignificant	Accepted
	Attitude	0.3	1.96	<	Difference Insignificant	Accepted
Urban and Rural	Achievement	4.38	1.96	>	Difference Significant	Rejected
	Attitude	1.19	1.96	<	Difference Insignificant	Accepted

The mean performance of A – Level students was significantly better than that of Intermediate group on Achievement test. Moreover, students from urban area had performed on achievement test, distinctly better than the group from rural area. In case of male and female groups, both performed similarly. For Attitude Scale, all the three pairs of samples showed almost similar performances.

30 – item rating scale was used to determine the attitude of the students. Four factors – nature of the subject; confidence in the subject; intrinsic interest; External pressure – were identified. Score of each student in the sample, was separately recorded under each factor and multiple correlation coefficient between all the four factors, was computed and recorded in the form of Factor – matrix.

Table 2: Correlation of Coefficient – Factor Matrix

Factor	F₁	F₂	F₃	F₄
F₁	1	0.37	0.42	0.48
F₂	0.37	1	0.53	0.23
F₃	0.42	0.53	1	0.46
F₄	0.48	0.28	0.46	1

Table shows that all factors were positively correlated with one another that indicated that there was a reasonable level of harmony and internal consistency within factors. All factors were contributing towards measuring students' attitude in an almost equally effective way. This internal consistency and coordination ensured the validity of the attitude scale.

Correlation coefficient between students' achievement and attitude, for all the three pairs, was also computed. For A – level and intermediate, the values of “r” were 0.36 and 0.22; for male and female, these were 0.31 and 0.21 and for urban and rural, the values were 0.33 and 0.20. For the whole sample, the value of “r” was computed to be 0.25. Although, it was low, yet the positive value indicated that the level and magnitude of attitude does affect the achievement of Higher Secondary students in the subject of English.

References

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