

## **EFL Teachers with Different Attitudes in One Educational System: Will They Impact Their Learners' Achievement Differently?**

**Mana Esmaili**

M.A. student in TEFL, Department of English language Teaching,  
Science and Research Branch,  
Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran.

### **Abstract**

Despite this widespread acceptance of the important role of effective factors in the field of language learning and teaching, teaching specialists, curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and researchers usually tend to overlook such aspects. One of the most important effective factors is the attitude that teachers have toward the target language. The purposes of the present study are to investigate the relationship between 1) EFL teachers' attitudes and their learners' achievement 2) English teachers' gender and their learners' achievement. To do the study, 30 language teachers involved in teaching at high schools and 90 language learners who were their students, were selected. The teachers filled out a language attitude questionnaire. The students also took the transparent English language test. The result of the investigations of the first concerns of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the variables under investigation. Finally, the analysis of the results with regard to the last hypothesis showed that there is not a significant relationship between the variables.

**Keywords:** attitudes, gender, English proficiency test.

### **1. Introduction**

"Language is the centre of human life" (Cook, 1996, p.1). It is argued that language learning is regarded as the cornerstone of human existence. Knowing the language can help us to express our opinions, hopes, and even our dreams (Tavil, 2009). The ability to do so is more than one language multiplies the opportunities for people to experience all these functions and even master them as well as advancing their career opportunities. In foreign Language learning and teaching context, there are various factors that influence the learning and teaching process such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, aptitudes, age, gender, experience, knowledge, field of study, personalities, etc.

This paper presents a study on variables that influence foreign language teaching and learning; it discusses the impact of different attitudes and gender on the EFL teachers and their students' English language achievement. Attitude has recently received considerable attention from both first and second language researchers. Most of the researches on the issue have concluded that student's attitude is an integral part of learning and that it should, therefore, become an essential component of second language learning pedagogy. There are several reasons why research on students' attitudes toward language learning is important. First, attitudes toward learning are believed to influence behaviors, (Kaballa & Crowley, 1985, as cited in Weinburgh, 1998) such as selecting and reading books, speaking in a foreign language. Second, a relationship between attitudes and achievement has been shown to exist. Schibeci and Riley (1986, as cited in Weinburgh, 1998) report that there is a support for the proposition that attitudes influence achievement, rather than achievement influencing attitudes. How attitudes towards learning are formed, how affect learning has been increasingly interest of language teachers and researchers as well. The reason is that attitude influence one's behaviors, inner mood and therefore learning. So, it is clear that there is

an interaction between language learning and the environmental components in which the student grew up. Both negative and positive attitudes have a strong impact on the success of language learning. The attitude of an individual depends heavily upon different stimuli. Stern (1983) claims that “the affective component contributes at least as much and often more to language learning than the cognitive skills”, and this is supported by recent researches. All studies adduce that affective variables have significant influences on language success, (Eveyik, 1999; Skehan, 1989; Gardner, 1985; Spolsky, 1989). There has been a great deal of research on the role of attitudes in second/foreign language teaching and learning.

### **1.1. Attitude**

In order to be able to evaluate the teachers' attitudes, let us begin with the definition of the term, 'attitude'. There are many definitions of the term. Among them Triandis (1971) accepts that it is a manner of consistency toward an object. To Brown (2001: 61), attitude is characterized by a large proportion of emotional involvement such as feelings, self, relationships in community. Kırımsoy (1997) emphasizes “the power of culture thereby shaping our life and feeling” and therefore our attitudes towards external world.

Based on the theory of planned behavior, Montano and Kasprzyk (2008, p. 71) state, “Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes. Thus, a person who holds strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude toward the behavior. Conversely, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude.” Gardner (1985, pp. 91-93) claims that attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent. Eveyik (1999, p.21) in her MA thesis agrees with most scholars on the definition of 'attitude' that it is the state of readiness to respond to a situation and an inclination to behave in a consistent manner toward an object.

Reid (2003, p. 33) declared that attitudes are important to us because they cannot be neatly separated from study. According to Visser (2008), attitude is considered as an essential factor influencing language performance.

Krashen, Garcia (1981, 1999) claims that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory informs us of the importance of providing a good learning environment for all ESL students. The teachers' attitudes have a direct effect on the students' motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety level.

### **1.2. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs**

Attitudes and beliefs are socially and culturally constructed, deeply seated, resistant to change, and central to our way of thinking, doing, and being (Rivalland, 2007). Beliefs are also the end result of an individual's upbringing, life experiences, and in the case of teachers, the result of socialization processes in schools they have attended as students and worked in as teachers (McLachlan, Carvalho, de Lautour, & Kumar, 2006). Wherever they stem from, it appears that teachers' implicit beliefs are enduring and difficult to change (Hall, 2005; McLachlan, et al.; 2006; Sumsion, 2003) and are used to evaluate existing and new ideas about pedagogy. Beliefs, knowledge, and practice are inextricably intertwined (Foote, Smith, & Ellis, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978), acting as a 'contextual filter' through which teachers screen their classroom experiences, interpret them, and adapt their subsequent practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986, as cited in Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Basturkmen et al. (2004), describe teachers' beliefs as a thinking activity in which teachers as people construct their own personal and workable theories of teaching. Once teachers have identified these aspects and how they can benefit from them, it can be easier to build upon their own teaching experiences on a daily basis. The problem with the teachers in this study was precisely the

fact that many of them were not even able to identify the crucial moments within the classroom dynamic i.e. provide proper feedback, praise their students, or perhaps when to introduce a new concept/item. Pajares (1992) suggests that teachers follow their thoughts and act as providers of information and directness to the students, accommodating the changes and modifications in the curriculum with their own personal implicit theories derived from their beliefs. Hence, it is a necessary condition that teachers are willing to use reflection as a tool to enhance their thoughts; the challenge arises when teachers do not know how to deal with these, therefore the importance of training them to do so. The importance of these lies in the fact that teachers are involved in helping individuals make sense of the world, influencing how new information is perceived, and whether it is accepted or rejected (Borg, 2001 pp. 186-187). This principle aroused the interest in incorporating these aspects within the treatment teachers received for this study.

### **1.3. Statement of the problem and purpose of the study**

Attitudes can be positive and negative, and so can their consequences. Since attitude is one of the most influential elements on the performance of teachers, it is regarded as one of the teaching and learning factors. The teacher's attitude affects his performance and consequently the students' learning and even social life. Despite the similarity of school structures, materials covered, and texts books, the tentative evaluations indicate that foreign language learning has not improved much partly due to non-curriculum elements which enhance education and personality of the learners part of which originates from the teachers' attitudes. It has been argued that a good teacher is "the most important factor accounting for the quality of student learning" (Ramsey, 2000, p. 16), a statement which is supported by many authorities (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2004; Australian Labor Party, 2007; Buckingham, 2003; Department of Education Science and Training, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hattie, 2009; Ingvarson, 2001; Rowe, 2003). On the other hand, the effect of poor quality teaching on student outcomes can be "debilitating and cumulative" and "greater than those arise from students' backgrounds" (Darling-Hammond, 2000a, p. 3). When pre-service teachers or teacher candidates are asked, "Why do you want to be a teacher?" The response is commonly, "I want to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of my students." Many teacher candidates continue to say they also want to be an effective teacher who will be remembered fondly by their former students. Some want to have a chance to be a better teacher than the teachers they personally experienced. However, many researchers (i.e., Frank, 1990; Fulton, 1989; Goodlad, 1990; Handler, 1993) state the maxim that teachers usually teach in the way they were taught. This compelling statement highlights the importance of reviewing and analyzing students' prior educational experiences for insight into the effective and ineffective attitudes and actions of teachers. The effective attitudes and actions employed by teachers ultimately can make a positive difference on the lives of their student.

Fostering positive attitudes, establishing a good rapport with students, receiving appropriate feedback, managing the class, and having scientific command enhance the status of the teacher. The teachers enjoying positive attitudes to language have stronger motivations for better teaching, encouraging the learners to study more, and transferring this positive attitude to the learners. On the other hand, negative attitudes lead to a decrease in the quality of education and irreparable harms to the students. Therefore, teachers' attitude influences the acceptance and uptake of new approaches, techniques, and activities, and therefore plays an important part in teacher development.

### **1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The present paper set out to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and their students' achievement?

2. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' gender and their attitude?

On the basis of above question, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: There is a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and their students' success in English language achievement.

H2: There is a significant relationship between teachers' gender and their attitude.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Participants**

The participants of the present study were randomly selected from two groups. The first group was 30 Iranian EFL teachers who were both male and female. The second group was 90 students who were both female and male in the age range of 15 to 18 at some public high schools from different districts of Arak (one of the industrial cities of Iran). They are studying English as a foreign language. Students were homogenous, in terms of their age, gender, and their English proficiency level.

### **2.2. Instruments**

For doing the present study, the following instruments were used:

a) *Language Attitude Questionnaire*: This test focused on the teachers' attitudes towards teaching English. Additionally, it aimed to explore the differences in the participants' attitudes by their demographic information. The items were partly adapted from the attitude questionnaire test. The items were put in a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Strongly Agree.

b) *Language proficiency test (transparent)*: This test was used to determine the proficiency level of the participants in English. This test composed of multiple-choice vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension items. The time allotted was 35 minutes.

c) *A background questionnaire*: In order to elicit information about participants, a background questionnaire was developed. It covered issues such as the subjects' age, gender, experience, academic degree, and linguality status. The subjects were assured that the elicited information would be accorded full confidentiality.

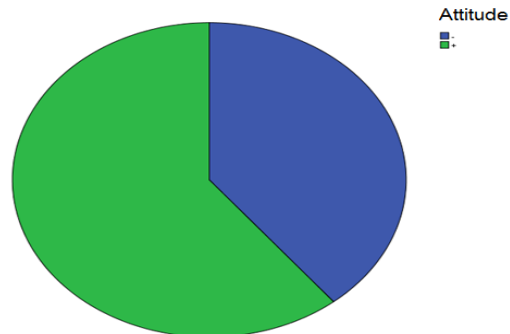
### **2.3. Procedure**

In the process of carrying out the study, the investigator took the following procedures to achieve the objectives of the current study. At the first step of the research, a background questionnaire was developed in order to elicit some personal information about participants such as their gender, age, language status, academic degree and etc. Then, Language Attitude Questionnaire was distributed among 30 English language teachers who were randomly selected from public high school in Arak. After that the General Proficiency Test was distributed among 90 students of this school who were chosen based on final examination score in three levels of high (strong), low (weak) and average. The way of answering the questions was made clear to the participants and in case of any difficulty they were encouraged to ask questions and were provided with help. The subjects were also informed that their performance will be kept confidential and will not have any effect on their final exam scores. Administration of the language proficiency test took 35 minutes. This project was implemented on the basis of an ex-post facto design because there was no pre-test and post-test but no treatment was given to the subjects.

## **3. Result and discussion**

### **3.1. Testing hypothesis 1**

In figure 1, the blue curve represented the negative attitude of teachers. As it is clear, the number of them was less than the teachers with positive attitudes (green).

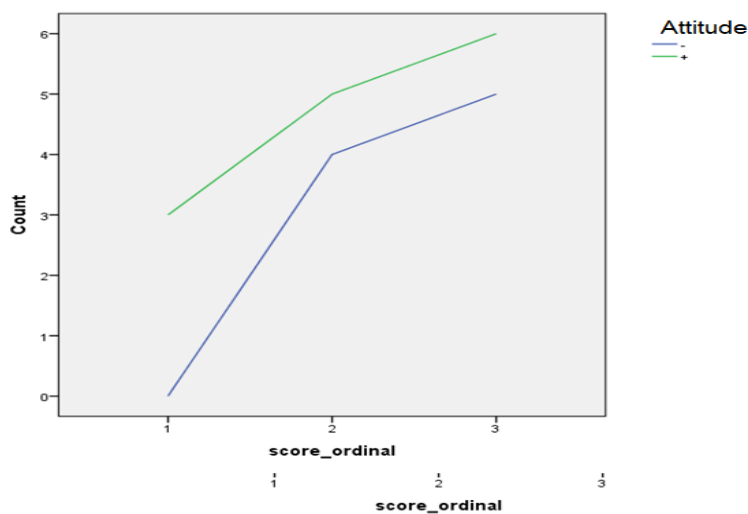


**Figure 1. Teachers' positive and negative attitudes.**

According to Table 1, two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test(1/718) showed that there is no significant difference between teachers' attitudes and students' achievement (P= .96). So, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for relationship between teachers' attitudes and students' achievement**

		Score ordinal
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.073
	Positive	.073
	Negative	-.068
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.498
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.965



The above chart also showed that the teachers' attitude, which were more positive (green line) had more effect on students' scores. Therefore, students' higher scores of teachers with a positive attitude were more than students' higher scores of teachers with a negative attitude (blue line). Also, this was true in all domain scores. In addition, students' scores of teachers with a negative attitude were much lower than the teachers with a positive attitude. However, in the second place, in order to infer whether most teachers have a positive attitude or a negative attitude, absolute maximum difference was applied. The above results also found that the value of this test was negative. It can be concluded that the positive attitude of teachers had a greater impact on students' achievement. Schibeci and Riley (1986, as cited in Weinburgh, 1998) report that there is support for the proposition that attitudes influence achievement, rather than achievement influencing attitudes.

**Table 3. Correlation between teachers' and students' attitudes.**

Correlation		Value	Approx . Sig.
Nominal	Phi	.674	.028
Nominal	Cramer's V	.755	.032
Interval	Pearson's R	.624	.018
Ordinal	Spearman	.598	.019
N of Valid Cases		23	

**Table 4. The degree of relationship between teachers' and students' scores.**

		attitude		Total
		+	-	
score_ordinal	Count	<5	<5	<5
	Expected	n<5	n<5	<5
	Count	n<5	n<5	n<5
	% within Attitude	n<5	n<5	n<5
	Count	9	8	17
	Expected	8.9	8.1	17.0
	Count	75.0%	72.7%	73.9%
	% within Attitude	75.0%	72.7%	73.9%
	Count	<5	<5	<5
	Expected	n<5	n<5	<5
	Count	n<5	n<5	n<5
	% within Attitude	n<5	n<5	n<5
Total	Count	14	9	23
	Expected	12.0	11.0	23.0
	Count	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within Attitude	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

According table 3, the value of Cramer’s coefficient is equal to 0/755, indicating the intensity of the high correlation between these two variables. Also, the significance level (.032) indicates that the coefficient is significant. However, in order to show high or low scores for teachers or students with positive and negative attitude, the following table was used.

As shown in table 4, totally, teachers had more positive attitude. Thus, students’ score of teachers with a higher attitude was more than teachers’ with low attitude.

**3.2. Testing hypothesis 2**

To perform this test, the t-test for independent samples were used. The mean and standard deviation of the results are summarized in the following table.

According to the table 5, having a small amount of Fisher test (276/1), assuming equal variances of two independent groups was accepted. In other words, both male and female teachers had the same distribution.

**Table 5. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
Attitude	Equal variances assumed	1.276	.271
	Equal variances not assumed		

Now, to test the second hypothesis, the following table was used.

**Table 6. Independent sample test for male and female teachers’ attitudes.**

t-test for Equality of Means						
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
.087	21	.931	.00929	.10651	-.21222	.23079

As it is clear from table 6, there is no significant difference between male and female teachers’ attitude (t= .087). Therefore, the second hypotheses hypothesis is accepted.

**4. Conclusion**

Data analysis indicates that there is a significant relationship between different teachers’ attitudes and learners’ Achievement. In other words, the teachers’ positive attitude had more effect on students’ scores. Thus, the first hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between differently teachers’ attitudes and learners’ achievement. On the other hand, this research indicates that there is no significant relationship between teachers’ gender and their attitudes.

Consequently, teachers who have positive attitude toward English language learning and teaching are better able to effect on their students’ achievement. Attitude to English learning should be paid attention so that positive attitudes are formed and negative ones are altered since when positive attitudes are cultivated in teachers, learning will be facilitated for the students while negative attitudes hamper learning. An awareness of such attitudes and studying the strategies in

teachers will enhance their performance and strengthen their motivation, which consequently leads to better learning by learners. The literature on social psychology also indicates that constant relationship with learners correlates with positive attitudes. A study of the teachers' understanding of what they do and why they do so lead to contradictions between the theoretical concepts of second or foreign language learning and class activities. Like many other researchers, Venoda (2004) holds that in addition to the multi-cultural skills and capabilities required for a high quality training for different groups of learners, the attitudes of the teachers to the learners as well as to bilingual education is of prim importance. As Guttiars (as cited in Garcia Noars, Standfors and Arias, 2005) states, research shows that the attitudes of the teachers to language might affect their assessments of the students' performance as well as their language abilities.

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**Appendix: Attitude Questioner**

**Name: Gender: Age: Experience: Academic degree: : Number of language you use**  
**1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4= agree 5 = strongly agree**

		1	2	3	4	5
1	I like English language.					
2	Learning English is an enjoyable experience.					
3	English can help me to understand Western culture.					
4	English can help me to understand native speakers of English.					
5	English can help me to appreciate English literature.					
6	English can help me to appreciate English films and talk shows.					
7	English can help me to appreciate English music.					
8	English can help me to understand sports channels.					
9	English can broaden my vision and outlook.					
10	English can make me more confident.					
11	Learning English can offer a new challenge in my life.					
12	English can increase my social prestige.					
13	Learning English will please my parents.					
14	My teachers will respect me more.					
15	My friends will respect me more.					
16	English is an international language.					
17	English is a university requirement.					
18	English is the language of instruction at my college.					
19	English can help me to score more marks in the Examinations.					
20	English can help me to participate effectively in classroom activities.					
21	English can help me to communicate effectively with my teachers.					
22	English can help me to study my textbooks effectively.					
23	English can help me to read reference material.					
24	English can help me to get a good job.					
25	English can help me to get better salary.					
26	English can help me to use the internet for educational Purposes.					
27	English can help me to talk with native speakers of English for educational purposes.					
28	English can help me to know more people from different parts of the world.					
29	English can help me to keep in touch with foreign friends and acquaintances.					
30	English can help me in my travel to other countries.					