

Relationship between the way of learning a foreign language and results

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ABSTRACT

This article comprises a review of the literature on the relationship between the way students approach foreign language learning and its outcomes. It allowed to find that students' attitudes are widely analyzed from various perspectives, but still with deep gaps to be filled. The researchers came to the assumption that students' attitudes towards foreign language learning is not a closed issue and that it is necessary to pay attention, while developing the curriculum, not only to students' attitudes, but also to teachers' attitudes.

Keywords: Students' attitudes; Foreign language learning; Motivation; Curriculum.

Introduction

This article presents a literature review on how students' attitudes toward foreign language learning as a support for understanding the possible relationships between students' attitudes and English language learning outcomes.

Although students' attitudes have been studied from a variety of perspectives, few studies have been found on the correlation of this variable with a curriculum that incorporates students' input in the area of second language learning. Before mentioning

studies conducted in English as a foreign language (EFL) context, the researchers established a consensus when defining attitudes from the literature review to anchor them in the context of study.

A person's level of interest is a powerful influence on learning. These hypotheses could help teachers create the reasons or incentives for learners in a non-native language environment to feel the need to study it. Then, the language learning environment could also be a challenge for teachers and foreign language curriculum development.

Learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning are considered possible causes of their lack of positive motivation. In different fields, attitudes are considered to be part of students' learning behaviors (Rahimi and Zhang, 2019).

There are important research works on students' attitudes towards foreign language learning (Gomez & Sandoval, 2020) and others have reported that in order to learn a language, it is essential to develop a positive attitude towards it. Yukselturk (2018), for example, considers attitudes to be a crucial determinant in predicting students' academic performance and achievement in foreign language learning.

At the same time, these authors assert that students can acquire positive attitudes as long as they are exposed to opportunities to use the language in the classroom setting. Some claim that attitudes, in combination with motivation play a key role in language learning and teaching, asserting that students' attitudes are closely linked to students' previous experience as language learners, predisposing them to success or failure (Abdelkader & Amine, 2017).

Similarly, Merisuo-Storm (2007) relates attitudes to motivation, stating that negative attitudes toward learning can weaken learners' motivation and hinder learning, while positive attitudes can do the opposite. Supporting the influence of this relationship on students' foreign language learning outcomes, Jorquera et al. (2017) found positive reactions toward speaking tasks if students are motivated by collaborative activities.

In similar efforts, some studies relate attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs as factors influencing students' foreign language learning outcomes: students considering themselves as language learners, students considering the language learning process, and students considering the learning community.

Sewbihon (2020) considers the teacher to be one of the most important variables in whether learners develop a positive or negative attitude toward language learning. This depends on the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, his or her own attitude towards

learners, personality, professional knowledge, enthusiasm, commitment and classroom management skills.

Most of the studies consulted agree on the existence of a close relationship between student attitudes and learning outcomes. Following these ideas, students' results in the learning process will depend, in one way or another, on their attitudes. Consequently, their goals in language learning will be influenced by what they think of the need for and role of language in their lives.

The aim of this article is to conduct a review of the literature on the relationship between the ways in which learners approach foreign language learning and their outcomes.

Development

Attitudes are a complex and difficult concept to measure. Brecler (2014), as part of a study on the functions of attitudes argues that attitudes:

- Guide people's behavior toward valuable goals and away from adverse ones (utilitarian function).
- Help manage and simplify information-processing tasks (knowledge or economic function)
- Enable people to communicate their personality and values (expressive or self-realization function).
- Protect people from unacceptable or threatening thoughts, impulses and emotions (defensive function of the self).

Several researchers agree on the directive or dynamic influence of attitudes on behavior. Highly associated with attitudes is motivation, linked to people's goals, needs, among others. Brousmiche et al. (2016) explain attitudes as composed of a cognitive component, or beliefs, thoughts and attributes associated with the object; an affective component, or feelings and emotions linked to the object; and a behavioral component linked to the person's past or future actions.

It is assumed then that, in educational processes, it is significant to take into account the concepts of response - reaction, evaluation and disposition - predisposition, behavior and beliefs as referents that positively affect students, who are usually affected by other variables such as family, friends, teachers, classmates, methods and curriculum.

In order to delve deeper into the topic of study, specifically in the field of foreign language learning, other authors were taken into account. Richards et al. (2006) defined language attitudes as the attitudes people have about a language other than their own.

How people feel about a different language, whether it is a negative or positive feeling, can influence people's perceptions of the degree of simplicity or complexity of the language system, thus facilitating or hindering their learning. At the same time, the degree of importance that a language has for the learner, for his or her social status, can also influence the degree of acceptance of the language and its learning.

There is consensus regarding the existence of a close relationship between the level of proficiency achieved in a foreign language and the linguistic attitudes generated towards the language and its culture. However, little has been explained about this relationship. At the same time, many defend the importance of the curriculum and its influence on students' attitudes throughout the learning process (Janés, 2006). Others claim that the school can influence language attitudes through the formal curriculum or through the hidden curriculum and different activities.

Based on the different conceptions and findings on attitudes, and specifically on attitudes towards second language learning (Figure 1) as a key concept in this research, the authors mapped out the most important variables extracted from the literature review taken into account in the study (adapted from Janés, 2006).

Source: Self elaboration

Factores a tener en cuenta en las actitudes hacia una lengua extranjera		
Personalidad	Experiencia	Contexto
interés,	El aprendizaje de idiomas,	Uso del idioma en el entorno social, en los medios de comunicación, necesidades de comunicación,
motivación,	profesores,	relaciones familiares con el idioma, amigos,
necesidades,	métodos,	actividades escolares relacionadas con el uso del idioma
antecedentes culturales	currículo	

Figure 1. Factors shaping student attitudes

Since learners, as individuals, have different cognitive experiences throughout their lives, their attitudes toward language will vary. These experiences influence their feelings and emotions, which are also affected by the contexts in which learners have grown up and lived. Such contexts include language teachers and school social

environments. From that point of view, teachers need to take into account learners' individual attitudes when stating their approaches and learning outcomes.

At this point in the review, the researchers consider the analysis of attitudes in three groups: one describing studies relating students' attitudes to their language learning outcomes; a second group relating students' attitudes to outcomes; and a third group bringing together studies examining how foreign language (FL) programs affect students' attitudes.

The first group addresses its analysis toward learners as language learners, learners looking at the language learning process, and learners looking at the target community. Attitudes toward the learning situation: the teacher, the course, the classmates, the course materials, the extracurricular activities associated with the course, etc. Some will have more positive attitudes than others. This has to do with people's motivations in different situations.

In learning a second language, effort is required, a persistent and constant attempt to learn the material by doing homework, looking for opportunities to learn more, doing extra work, and so on. There will also be a desire to succeed and, therefore, the learner will strive for success. At the same time, there is a need to enjoy the learning activities. The degree of effort, desire and enjoyment will determine the degree of motivation of the learners. Often, these three elements are directly related to learners' performance in the language.

A study developed by Picker & Sachi (2018) provided positive attitudes related to school, language acquisition, perceived desirability of learning a foreign language, cultural views, and students' levels of self-esteem and confidence, in relation to their academic performance.

A change in the attitudes of students who studied a foreign language was evidenced. In that research, students and teachers consider that the cultural aspect in the English class is important, with interesting pedagogical implications.

Other studies more focused on perceptions of the learning situation link corrective feedback to students' desire to participate. Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) state that motivation and attitude help learners initiate second language learning, and these factors remain the driving force throughout the long and tedious process of learning a language. Thus, motivation has a direct effect on learning. In that sense, positive attitudes increase learners' motivation towards language. Following this point of view, it becomes an objective to work on the development of positive attitudes through

effective strategies and techniques in language classes.

This analysis allowed us to orient perspectives on how attitudes are linked to the outcomes of English language learners. Most of the studies consulted agree on the existence of a close relationship between learner attitudes and learning outcomes.

Following these ideas, learners' outcomes in the language learning process will depend, in one way or another, on their attitudes. Consequently, their language learning goals will be influenced by what they think of the need for and role of languages in their lives.

Some research focuses attention on the influence of specific teaching practices on learners' attitudes. Picker & Sachi (2018), for example, assert that students' perceptions of their experiences in the foreign language learning classroom have important pedagogical and programmatic implications.

In planning classroom activities, students' perceptions of teachers' instructions, students felt that lessons did not focus enough on oral communication, as well as, their proficiency level was not taken into account.

As for the reasons why university students enroll in foreign language courses, some authors asked teachers to pay attention to aspects of language and culture that could attract students' interests, and to select materials that could promote language use in relation to students' major studies. They took their students' comments into consideration in adjusting the language curriculum to respond to the students' goals. In their studies, these authors incorporated new readings related to students' interests and goals.

At the same time, they adjusted teaching techniques, such as individual or group projects that allowed students to relate their reason for study to their project work. In some cases, they are called upon to integrate cultural learning into their language courses at all levels, providing students with examples of possible career paths.

Such efforts require instructors to engage in curricular and lesson planning toward multiple objectives, with the need to be aware that students come to language classes to fulfill a degree requirement.

Attitude change throughout an EL class has been shown not to be uniformly positive. Teachers who involve their students in curriculum design should be familiar with the linguistic and didactic components associated with curriculum planning and program articulation. Thus, instructors should be trained on the significance of classroom culture and experiences that may affect student learning.

The knowledge gained empowers learners to participate in curricular change (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). Learners' participation encourages them to take responsibility for program issues. Relying on the constructivist approach, this author attempted to determine the roles that students can play in relation to the content and to the structuring of the curriculum in the classroom through participatory design projects.

He concluded that giving students the opportunity to express their ideas about learning, teaching methods and materials helped to improve teachers and learning, teacher-student relationships, students' engagement with their learning, and increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy. In short, what learners think about themselves, teachers, and their language learning can influence their learning strategies and language outcomes.

Conclusions

The relationship between attitudes and the ways in which students approach foreign language learning and its outcomes has been extensively analyzed in the literature from various perspectives, yet there is still a long way to go in its study and research. However, there seems to be a general consensus on the need to discover what learners believe about their learning process, the language itself, and how they approach that process (attitudes).

According to some authors, attitudes towards the target language are a crucial factor in the development of learners' language skills. They also indicate that attitudes change, depending on sociocultural aspects, students' professional and personal goals, family perceptions and experiences towards the language; as well as the teaching methods they have faced during their school life, among others.

Learners' attitudes towards language learning play an important role for teachers to find different ways to motivate learners to learn the language.

From the above review, the authors assume that learners' attitudes are closely related to the language curriculum and learners' language outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to teachers' attitudes and curriculum development.

Studies on students' attitudes toward foreign language learning can help teachers to look for their students' attitudes as a basis for adopting specific approaches to language teaching and student motivation.

Since learners' attitudes have to do with their needs, preferences, beliefs, learning styles, and educational backgrounds, it would be useful to begin the teaching process by learning about learners' language learning experiences and their assumptions about language learning. This knowledge can help build an affective bridge between the learners and with the teacher