

**Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Attitudes towards the English
Language Community and Culture in Motivating them to learn English
Samira Mohsin Rodhan**

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Abstract:

The current study is mainly devoted to explore whether the Iraqi secondary school students' attitudes towards the English language itself, the English language community and culture plays a significant role in motivating them to learn English. The research sample is a group of 40 5th grade secondary school students. The instrument of the study is a questionnaire that measures the learner's awareness with the declarations of the above variables. To sum up, the findings of the data analysis of given above, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Most of the subjects of the sample are interested in reading about English culture and community, so as to be able to develop their reading and speaking ability.
2. Some of subjects of the sample think that their own morals , specifically the Iraqi ones , can be negatively influenced by the culture and values of English-speaking countries .

key Terms : *Second Language Community, Culture, attitudes and Motivating.*

1. 1 The problem of the study

The main elements that effectively influence the students in language learning are motivation and attitude. Gardner(1985) defines motivation as

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combination of efforts plus desire to achieve the goal of learning process plus favorable attitude towards learning the language. It is important to consider the cultural context which influences people's attitudes and motivation in learning operation. Without learning encouragement, the student will not learn even if the appropriate classroom conditions are available for learning. Motivation is a very remarkable factor for language learning, therefore success of acquiring the language does not depend on learners only. "Teachers' approaches in schooling the language are animated in making helpful practices to learning" (Ellis R. 1994). According to (Iatchanna, 2009) attitude is accepted as an important concept to understand human behavior and is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings. Beliefs about language learning is directly associated with success in language class. Most Iraqi students' motivation for learning English has remained at the level sufficient either to fulfill the course requirements or to pass the entrance examinations to the next level of schooling, therefore pedagogues and tutors should use active delineation and mechanism in classes to create effective motivation and attitude among the learners to learn the language. This research is devoted to explore the role of learners' attitudes towards the English language itself, the English language community and culture in motivating them to learn English as a second language.

1.2 Aim

The study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes towards the English Language itself, its Community and Culture in Motivating them to learn it.

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1.3 Limits

This research is limited to the Iraqi learners at the secondary school level, and more specifically female students of the 5th grade secondary school .

1.4 Procedures

To achieve the aims of the study, the following procedures are adopted:

1. Selecting a representative sample of secondary school students of fifth grade,
2. Designing a questionnaire to be administered on the sample of the study,
3. Exposing the questionnaire to a jury of experts in ELT to ensure its validity and reliability ,
4. Conducting a pilot study to find out the suitability of the questionnaire items and the time required for responding to these items,
5. Using suitable statistical tools to analyze the data ,and
6. Presenting and discussing the results, drawing conclusions and setting recommendations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is supposed to enrich the literature concerning the psychological factors in English language learning in general and the role of students' cultural and attitudes towards the English language in particular.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and Attitudes in Language Learning

Attitudes at language and its culture is critical especially in language classes, and the manner in which the students respond to the English language culture effect their attitudes at the language itself. Khuwaileh (2000:282) characterizes the classroom of English language as a combination of different cultural variables. He claims that culture always manages to become a part of

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the language classroom. Thanasoulas (2001: 121) said that “acquiring the second language basically relates to learning its culture”.

2.2. Motivation in language class

Motivation is a word or term derived from the word 'motive', which means the desire or need that exists within the individual and that drives him to take measures to achieve the goal he aspires to. Educators and researchers have realized that Motivation is one of the important factors that determine the level of success in the English language learning process.

Dornyei (2001:116) said that, “teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness”. Learners' readiness to play a role in the learning process is extremely affected by the factor of motivation . According to Oxford and Shearin (1994:67) there are six variables involved to motivate learners to learn English language (Al-Bustan & Al-Bustan, 2009:S454):

- 1.Tendency at the target language,
- 2.Anticipation about learner's attitudes to succeed, self-efficiency and anxiety,
3. Objectives as source to learn,
- 4.Engagement effectively in learning process,
- 5.Supportive climate (i.e. extent of teacher and peer support) and
- 6.Individual features and readiness to learn.

2.3. Gardner’s Motivation Theory

Interesting in Robert Gardner’s motivation theory is not so much in the specific constructs he proposed because those have been further refined and developed by advances in the past four decades as in the overall system of ID facets in which he has placed the notion of motivation. According to

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Gardner(2010), a motivated individual is someone who sets a goal and perseveres to achieve it. Motivation is also the result of an interaction with the second language culture and the target language. Therefore, considering Gardner's theory, social context and attitudes towards the second language and English language communities constitute the foundation to understanding language learners' motivation. Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the language (Starks & Paltridge, 1996:132). Karahan (2007:84) said that "positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English". Gardner (1985) explains that "motivation is a combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language". He believes that "attitudes are components of motivation in language learning"(ibid). His 'socio-educational model of second language acquisition' (see Figure 1) is a an outline of how learner distinguish and perform the language, is related to attitudes and motivation, and put incentives within a system of the four distinct aspects of the English language learning process (Dorneiy, 2015:75):

1. Previous elements such as gender, age, or learning history,
- 2.Learner variables or individual difference,
3. Contexts of language acquisition,
- 4.Learning achievements.

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The characteristics covered by the model are intelligence, language learning strategies, language attitudes, motivation, and language anxiety.

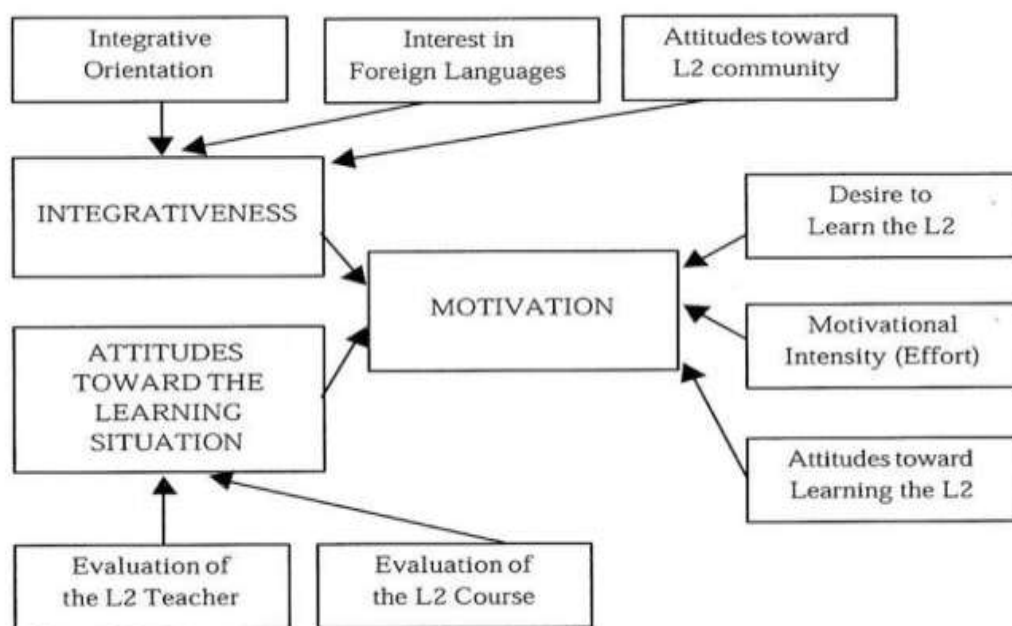


Figure 1

Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition

(Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993:8)

3. Methodology

3.1 The Population and Sample

The sample of this study is a group of 40 students of 5th grad secondary school students of Al Ghad private school in Baghdad out of 78 total number of the students. All the members are female and of the same age. They are chosen according to their desire to participate in the questionnaire and their familiarity with the statements.

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3-2 Description of the Questionnaire

To get information about the students attitudes towards English language community and culture in motivating them to learn English language, a questionnaire has been constructed by the research herself drawing on the following sources:

1. Related literature; They are : books, journals, and articles related to the problem of the study,
2. Ready –made questionnaires available.

The questionnaire that has been used in this research is a rating scales questionnaire. It consists of (30) items built on five- points scale:

strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree and disagree. See table (1)

3.3. Face Validity of the Questionnaire:

Validity refers to “The degree to which the test actually measures what is intended to measure” (Brown ,1987: 221). On the other hand, Harris (1969:19) put his view of validity within two questions: “ (1) What precisely does the instrument measure? and (2) How well does the instrument measure?”. Face validity is determined by expert’s judgment then by using the percentage of agreement among the experts' themselves ,or the Chi-square which is statistically used in this study to determine face validity

Accordingly, an initial form of the questionnaire has been exposed to the experts in the fields of Linguistics and ELT to decide its face validity. The questionnaire consists of (45) items built on five- points scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree and disagree). Each member of the jury was requested to point out his/her remarks and suggestions regarding the suitability of the questionnaire items. Accordingly,

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some items have been modified other have been excluded. The remaining are (30) items which constitute the final version of the questionnaire.

3.4. Pilot Administration of the Questionnaire

A pilot version is administered to a sample of (20) female students of Assma secondary school for girls. Based on the time required for replying the items, it was found that the student's need (30) minutes to reply the items of the questionnaire.

3.5 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement, i.e., how consistent scores are from one measurement to another. The more the test scores are consistent on different occasions, the more the test is reliable (Lado, 1961:330). However, the questionnaire has been re administered to the same pilot sample after two weeks. The statistical manipulation of the data has been obtained from the two administrations. After using Pearson formula, the result has indicated that the correlation coefficient of reliability is (0.91).

Table (1)

Gardner's questionnaire (interest in the English language, English language culture and attitudes towards L2 community)

No	Statements	Weighted average	Weight percentage
1	I dignify the humanitarian standards and traditions of English people	3.567	65%
2	I esteem the valuables and beliefs of people who speaks English	3.876	67%
3	There is a hardness to communicate with people who have different cultures	3.098	55%
4	I am interested in books of famous English writers, arts magazines and daily English journals	3.123	76%

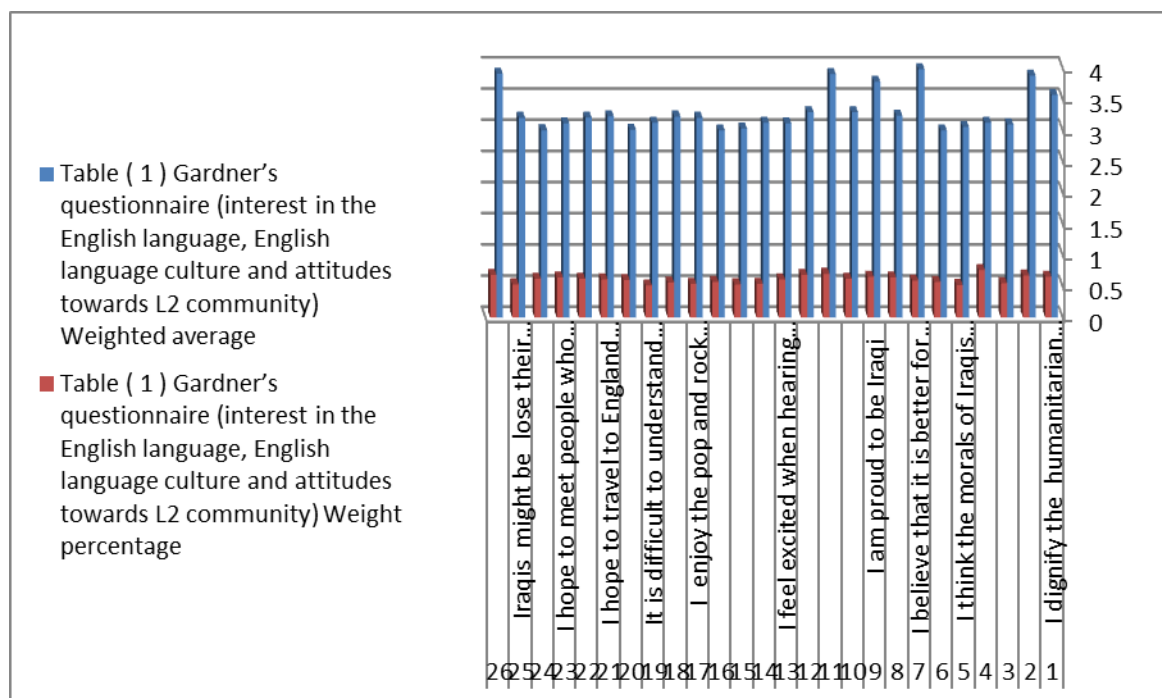
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5	I think the morals of Iraqis will be negatively influenced by the culture and values of English countries.	3.056	52%
6	I think Iraqis would be better if everybody take the good values from other cultures	3.000	57%
7	I believe that it is better to have an interaction between cultures based on give and take	3.980	59%
8	Most cultures are backward compared to my Iraqi culture	3.234	64%
9	I am proud to be Iraqi	3.7783	65%
10	I wish Religions of other people would accept Islam as their best way to salvation	3.2890	62%
11	Iraqis should follow our Islamic rules when they are in foreign countries	3.901	70%
12	I believe Islam is more concerned about human rights according to Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other religions	3.290	68%
13	I feel excited when hearing English spoken	3.111	61%
14	I like to hear English conversation	3.120	54%
15	Learning English helps me to have good friends in the foreign countries.	3.0298	53%
16	I like the rhythm of English.	3.0001	57%
17	I enjoy English rock music.	3.2011	54%
18	I am interesting in watching English films more than films in any other language.	3.222	56%
19	It is difficult to understand the behavior of people from other cultures.	3.1222	51%
20	I am a follower of TV English programs made in countries whose language is English	3.009	60%
21	I hope to travel to England and other countries who speak English	3.2221	61%
22	I love people who live in countries whichits language is English	3.2018	62%
23	I hope to meet people who speak English	3.1109	64%

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24	I have an interest in collecting stamps of English people	3.001	62%
25	Iraqis might be lose their culture, as a result of internationalization	3.2012	53%
26	To communicate and learn more about the culture and art of English people I should learn their language	3.908	68%
27	I think the Arabic language may lose its identity because of the leverage of the English language	3.1902	62%
28	Iraqi values will be influenced by the culture and values of English.	3.091	64%
29	I feel happy when there is similarities between English cultures and Iraqi culture	3.290	65%
30	There is a danger of losing the Iraqi identity because of the internationalization advances.	3.902	56%



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3.6 Statistical Methods

The following statistical tools have been used:

1-Chi- square: It was used to find out the significant differences between the two groups in the questionnaire

$$X = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where : X the value of chi- square

O= frequency.

E= Expected frequency (Best & Kahn,2006:77)

2-Pearson Correlation coefficient formula is used to calculate the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire. The following formula is used:

$$r = \frac{N\sum xy - \sum x\sum y}{\sqrt{[N\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][N\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

(Glass and Stanley, 1970: 114)

Where: x = the first variable

y = the second variable

N = the size of the sample

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4. Results Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Results Discussion

From the analysis of the data, it is found that:

1. Items 4 and 26 which refer to (I am interested in books of famous English writers, arts magazines and daily English journals). (To communicate and learn more about the culture and art of English people, I should learn their language), got the higher percentage; 76% and 68%.

2. Items 5 and 19 which refer to (I think the morals of Iraqis will be negatively influenced by the culture and values of English countries). (It is difficult to understand the behavior of people from other cultures). Have a percentage of 51% and 52% respectively

3. Iraqi learners' attitudes towards the English language itself has a statistically important part in encouraging them to learn English.

4. Iraqi learners' attitudes towards the English-speaking countries culture has a statistically important part in motivating them to learn English.

5. Iraqi learners' attitudes towards the English community has a statistically important part in motivating them to learn English.

4.2 Conclusions

It is clear from the results that each of the component of Gardner's questionnaire (interest in the English language, English language culture and attitudes towards English language community) plays an important role in motivating the Iraqi students at the secondary school level to learn and continue learning the English language. So, three conclusions have been obtained as follows :

1. Most the subjects of the sample are interested in reading about English culture and community and so as to be able to speak fluently in English .

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2. Some subjects of the sample think that their own morals , specifically the Iraqi ones , can be negatively influenced by the culture and values of English-speaking countries .

3. Other subjects tend to prefer to have a study material that contains a mix of both Iraqi and native-speaking cultures .

4.3 Recommendations

1- EFL Teachers should enhance the students' familiarity with the English culture.

2- EFL Teachers should enable the students to read about the history of the English countries in order to get rid of any cultural dogmas and prejudices.

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**بحث اتجاهات متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية العراقيين في المدارس الثانوية نحو
مجتمع اللغة الانجليزية وثقافتها في التحفيز لتعلمها**

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المستخلص:

اهتم هذا البحث لمعرفة فيما اذا كانت ميول المتعلمين العراقيين تجاه اللغة الانجليزية نفسها ومجتمع اللغة الانجليزية وثقافتها تلعب دورا هاما في تحفيز المتعلمين العراقيين في المرحلة الثانوية لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية. تكونت عينة البحث من 40 طالبة من الصف الخامس الاعدادي بمدرسة الغد الاهلية في بغداد جميع افراد العينة من الاناث وذات عمر متقارب. تم اختيار العينة بناء على رغبة الطلاب في المشاركة في الاستبيان وأدراكهم لفقرات الاستبيان.

بعد تحليل النتائج تم التوصل الى الاستنتاجات التالية:

1- يهتم معظم أفراد العينة بالقراءة عن الثقافة والمجتمع باللغة الإنجليزية ، حتى يتمكنوا من التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بطلاقة.

2. يعتقد بعض أفراد العينة أن القيم والعادات ، خاصة العراقية منها ، يمكن أن تتأثر سلبًا بثقافة وقيم الدول الناطقة باللغة الإنجليزية.

واتضح من خلال النتائج ان كل عنصر من عناصر الاستبيان (اتجاهات المتعلمين نحو مجتمع اللغة الانجليزية وثقافتها) تلعب دورا مهما في تحفيز المتعلمين العراقيين في المدارس الثانوية لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية

الكلمات المفتاحية: مجتمع اللغة الإنجليزية ، الثقافة، الاتجاهات، التحفيز.