



An Evaluation of Iranian ESL Learners' Attitudes towards Social Issues in the West

Pourhassan Moghaddam Mahmud and Lotfi Ahmad Reza
Khorasgan branch, Islamic Azad University, Esfahan, IRAN

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 20th January 2014, revised 6th April 2014, accepted 24th August 2014

Abstract

The present research wants to measure and evaluate Iran private English schools ESL learners' (51 elementary, 223 intermediate and 96 advanced language learners) and their teachers' (19 teachers) attitudes towards social issues such as religious and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance in the West. While using a researcher-made questionnaire to collect data, a K-S test was used to test data distribution normality. As the data did not prove to be normal, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the four groups' mean ranks. The results did not show significant differences among ESL learners' and their teachers' attitudes towards social problems. However, a binomial test showed that ESL learners and their teachers have shown significantly positive attitudes towards power dominance, while at the same time, showing moderate attitudes towards religious and ethnic minorities and social inequality in the West.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Iranian ESL learners' attitudes, power dominance, religious and ethnic minorities, social inequalities.

Introduction

An organization's success will depend, to a great extent, upon understanding organizational culture¹. In every organization, human resource management is an important duty of every manager². Hall et al. note that representations are produced within social systems of unequal power. The people who control the production of images and text create these with the intention that they be read in a particular way in order to advance a particular viewpoint that is in their interest³.

Bloor claims that just as we, as analysts, observe the discourse from our own ideological positions, we need to realize that all speakers and writers take up some position in relation to the propositions they make. We can call it speaker stance or authorial stance. Readers and listeners, as well, take up positions in relation to the discourse⁴. Furthermore, Ackroyd observes that texts may have disorganizing as well as organizing effects on organizations⁵.

The researcher is going to give a CDA-based questionnaire to L2 learners to see if they are affected by that kind of bias (if there is any) or not. The messages must be able to make us think rationally so that we can identify and differentiate what is good for us and what not⁶. Fowler claims, "Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position" (p.101)⁷.

In this regard Weedon observes that no representations in the written and visual media are gender-neutral. They either confirm or challenge the status quo through the ways they construct or fail to construct images of femininity and

masculinity⁸. Fairclough believes that there are relations between discourse and other such complex objects including objects in the physical world, persons, power relations and institutions, which are interconnected elements in social activity or proxies⁹.

These implicit dimensions may affect learners' attitudes towards social problems. The researcher has not come up to any study in Iranian context addressing language learners' critical thinking disposition and attitudes towards social inequalities in the West, as they are in the process of learning English. Therefore, in this study the following research problem are to be addressed:

As the researcher has not found any studies in Iran concerning second language learners' and teachers' attitudes towards social problems in the West while learning English, he attempts to see whether learners' attitudes may change as they are in the process of improving their English or not and if second language learners' and their teachers' attitudes regarding social issues are negatively or positively oriented.

Research hypotheses: The researcher in finding the answer to the above researcher question came to the following null hypotheses: Ho1: There are no differences among English language learners' attitudes that were learning English at different levels and their teachers' attitudes towards social issues such as religions and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance in western countries. Ho2: second language learners' and their teachers' attitudes towards social issues such as religions and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance are neither negatively nor positively oriented.

Methodology

Participants: The study used a cluster sampling method for gathering data. It was conducted in more than ten cities around the country. Three hundred and eighty nine Iranian adolescent or adult English language learners of different grades and their teachers took part in the survey. The study consisted of 51 elementary, 223 intermediate and 96 advanced language learners, and 19 teachers. English language learners were all non-native speakers of English who were learning English all over the country at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels.

Table-1
Number of participants based on their language learning levels

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	elementary	51	13.1	13.1	13.1
	intermediate	223	57.3	57.3	70.4
	advanced	96	24.7	24.7	95.1
	teachers	19	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	389	100.0	100.0	

Instrument: The study wanted to see if there is a difference among the four groups; elementary, intermediate and advanced English Language learners' and their English teachers' attitudes towards social problems in the West. The participants filled in a researcher-made questionnaire whose reliability was assured through experts' checking its face and content validity. Using factor analysis method and piloting of the questionnaire which led to a revised researcher-made questionnaire. It was devised to evaluate participants' attitudes towards social problems in the west. 80 students participated in the pilot study and the reliability was calculated via Cronbach's alpha which proved to be 0.76.

Table-2
Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.765	24

The questionnaire was devised in Farsi (Learners' mother tongue) not English because of misunderstandings which may happen and due to the fact that some of the learners were true beginners and they may not at all understand the material in English. It asked respondents to show their attitudes towards social problems by rating them on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 5.

Research design and procedure: The present study is an ex post facto design in case of the questionnaire used in the study. Best and Kahn (2006) assert that descriptive studies include ex post facto or explanatory observational studies¹⁰. According to Hatch and Farhady¹¹:

Ex post facto designs are often used when the researcher does not have control over the selection and manipulation of the independent variable. This is why researchers look at the type and/or degree of relationship between the two variables rather than at a cause-and-effect relationship. In this kind of design the researcher has no control over what has already happened to the students.

The questionnaire was administered during Language learners' regular class sessions. The questionnaire was given in Farsi and was to be completed anonymously to wash away Language learners' desirability inclination. Instruction as how to complete the questionnaire was given in Farsi and they were reminded that research results will have no negative effect on their final exams, so that they can freely and with no anxiety answer the questions.

Statistic package for the social sciences (SPSS) software for windows version 19.0, Chi-square and K-independent sample or Kruskal-wallis test at .05 level of significance were used to answer research questions. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S test) via SPSS software was used to investigate the normality of the distribution and it was made clear that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, non-parametric statistics were used to analyze variables' mean ranks and a binomial test to evaluate test results. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, and standard deviations) were conducted to have a general picture of research population. While Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data were not normally distributed, K-independent sample test which is a non-parametric counter part of one-way ANOVA was used to compare the ranks of four independent groups.

Results and Discussion

Research question one: The first research question asked whether there were any differences in English language learners' attitudes who were learning English at different levels and their teachers' attitudes towards social problems such as *religions and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance* based on a five-point Likert scale. Table-2 shows the results of the K-S test.

Table-3
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of participants' attitudes variables

		Minorities	Social Inequality	Power Dominance
N		389	389	389
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	5.3625	6.2134	5.7943
	Std. Deviation	2.89235	4.43722	1.65407
	Negative	-.147	-.222	-.118
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		3.758	5.128	2.548
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000

As it can be seen in the above table the mean of variables; *minorities*, *social inequalities*, *power dominance*, is 5.3625, 6.2134, and 5.7943 respectively, and standard deviations of all variables are being identified. The *social inequality* variable standard deviation shows the most dispersion from the mean (4.43722) in comparison to other variables.

Based on the significance level obtained for all language learners' and their teachers' attitude variables (.000) which is less than the critical value 0.05, the normality of data for all variables is rejected. Therefore, the researcher has used a non-parametric approach in analyzing research questions. Kruskal-Wallis test which is known as a non-parametric variance analysis method has been used to compare the mean ranks of all learners' attitude variables in the four groups (elementary, intermediate and advanced learners, and teachers). Chi-square analysis was used to see if the differences among the four groups mean ranks are significant or not. The results of kruskal-Wallis test and Chi-square are presented in table 3 and 4 below.

Table-4
Kruskal-Wallis test results of social problems

	Term	N	Mean Rank
Minorities	Elementary	51	177.87
	Intermediate	223	201.40
	Advanced	96	200.20
	Teachers	19	139.53
	Total	389	

	Elementary	51	199.76
Social Inequality	Intermediate	223	194.91
	Advanced	96	202.51
	Teachers	19	145.37
	Total	389	

	Elementary	51	169.41
Power Dominance	Intermediate	223	199.17
	Advanced	96	205.23
	Teachers	19	163.08
	Total	389	

Table-5
Chi-Square results of social problems

	Minorities	Social Inequality	Power Dominance
Chi-Square	6.986	4.354	5.455
DF	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.072	.226	.141

Concerning religious and ethnic minorities variable, based on Chi-square and Kruskal: Wallis test analysis of groups' mean ranks, the level of significance found was .072 which is more than .05. Consequently, there was not statistically a significant difference among English language learners' and their teachers' attitudes towards *religious and ethnic minorities* in the west

($\chi^2=6.986, p=.072$), with a mean rank of 177.87 for elementary, 201.40 for intermediate, and 200.20 for advanced language learners and 139.53 for teachers. Of 389 participants who took part in filling in the questionnaire, 13.1% elementary, 57.3% intermediate, 24.7% advanced English language learners and 4.9% were teachers.

Based on Chi-square and Kruskal: Wallis test analysis of groups' mean ranks in case of social inequality, the level of significance found was .226 which is more than critical value .05. Consequently, there was not statistically a significant difference among English language learners' attitudes towards social inequality in the west ($\chi^2=4.354, p=.226$), with a mean rank of 199.76 for elementary, 194.91 for intermediate, 202.51 for advanced language learners and 145.37 for teachers.

Based on Chi-square and Kruskal: Wallis test analysis of groups' mean ranks regarding *power dominance*, the level of significance found was .141 which is more than .05, thus the null hypothesis 5 (H05) is not rejected. Consequently, there was not statistically a significant difference among English language learners' and their teachers' attitudes towards *power dominance* in the west ($\chi^2=5.455, p=.141$), with a mean rank of 169.41 for elementary, 199.17 for intermediate, and 205.23 for advanced language learners, and 163.08 for teachers.

Research Question Two: Because the normality of data distribution was rejected by using a K-S test and acceptance of a non-parametric method, a binomial non-parametric test has been used to evaluate and to analyze language learners' and teachers' attitudes towards social problems such as *religions and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance* based on five-point Likert scale. Table 5 shows the results of binomial test for *religions and ethnic minorities, social inequality and power dominance*.

Table-6
Binomial test results of social problems

Category			N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
minorities	Group 1	≤ 5	204	.52	.50	.361
	Group 2	> 5	185	.48		
	Total		389	1.00		
social inequality	Group 1	≤ 5	189	.49	.50	.612
	Group 2	> 5	200	.51		
	Total		389	1.00		
power dominance	Group 1	≤ 5	168	.43	.50	.008
	Group 2	> 5	221	.57		
	Total		389	1.00		

As it is shown in the above table, respondents' responses for *religious and ethnic minorities* variable have been divided into

two groups. Group one are those responses whose average have been less than the mean i.e. 5 (average of two 5+5 answers based on Likert scale), and group two are those responses whose average have been more than the mean i.e. 5.

In case of *religious and ethnic minorities* variable we have 204 responses in group 1 and 185 responses in group 2. The observed proportion for group 1 is .52 and .48 for group 2. The exact significance level obtained for *religious and ethnic minorities* variable is .361 which is more than the critical value .05, while the test proportion value was .50. Therefore, the four groups show a moderate view towards *religious and ethnic minorities* variable.

In case of *social inequality* variable we have 189 responses in group 1 and 200 responses in group 2. The observed proportion for group 1 is .49 and .51 for group 2. The exact significant levels observed for learners' attitudes towards *social inequality* is equal to .612 which is more than the critical value .05, while the test proportion value was .50. Therefore, the four groups show a moderate view towards *social inequality* variable in western countries.

In case of *power dominance* variable we have 168 responses in group 1 and 221 responses in group 2. The observed proportion for group 1 is .43 and .57 for group 2. The exact significant levels observed for learners' attitudes towards *power dominance* is equal to .008 which is less than the critical value .05, while the test proportion value was .50. Therefore, the four groups show a positive view towards *power dominance* variable in western countries.

Conclusion

The data suggests that even though there were no significant differences among the four groups (elementary, intermediate, and advanced English language learners and their teachers) who participated in the study regarding their attitudes towards social problems in the west, by using a non-parametric binomial test it was significantly obvious that the participants (the four groups) showed some positive attitudes towards *power dominance* and some moderate attitudes towards *religious and ethnic minorities and social inequality* in case of social issues in the west. As there have not been any significant differences among the four groups in this research, it can be concluded that ESL learners' attitudes towards the above-mentioned issues in the West did not change from the beginning to the end of their endeavor in improving their English. In other words, ESL learners at least in Iran context have got the same views towards those social issues in Western countries which may be a typical characteristic of all EFL learners around the world. However, the participants' age, gender, race, cultural and social backgrounds, motivation, personality traits, etc. have not been taken into consideration. Therefore it is suggested that further research may take these factors into consideration.

References

1. Akhtar Shoaib Ch., Naseer Zainab, Haider Maqsood and Rafiq Sana, Impact of Organizational Culture on Organizational Commitment: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Organizations, *Res. J. Recent Sc.*, **2(5)**, 15-20 (2013)
2. Nabizadeh Tahere, GharibTarzeh Zahra., Dorbanai Fateme and YaghoobiJami Asma, Investigating the Effects of Job Experience, Satisfaction, and Motivation on Organizational Commitment Case Study:(The Nurses of Ghaem Hospital in Mashhad, Iran), *Res. J. Recent Sci.*, **1(7)**, 59-67 (2012)
3. Hall S., Hobson D., Lowe A. and Willis P. (eds), Culture, media, Language, London: Hutchinson, (1980)
4. Bloor, M. and Bloor, T., The practice of critical discourse analysis. An Introduction. London: Hodder Arnold (2007)
5. Ackroyd, S., Connecting organizations and societies: A realist analysis of structures. In S. Ackroyd and S. Fletwood (eds), 87-108 (2000)
6. Bora Abhijit., International Science Congress Association, Science Communication through Mass Media, *Res. J. Recent Sci.*, **1(1)**, 10-15 (2012)
7. Fowler R., Language in the News discourse and ideology in the press. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1991)
8. Weedon C., Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory (2nd Edition), Oxford: Blackwell, (1997)
9. Fairclough N.L., Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language by Discourse in late modernity: rethinking critical discourse analysis, London (2010)
10. Best J.W. and Kahn J.V., Research in education, United state of America: Pearson, (2006)
11. Hatch E. and Farhady H., Research design and statistics: For applied linguistics, Tehran: SAMT (1981)