

A STUDY OF EXAMINING THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MAURITIUS

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Abstract

This study discussed in detail the status and role of English in the Mauritian community. It highlighted the fields that mostly use this language and discussed the other languages that are being used in the country. The role of English as a second language in the country has also been discussed in the study. The aims and the objectives have been established thoroughly based on which the analysis has been done. The study, besides concentrating on the Mauritian nation, also discussed the general concept of "attitude of students towards learning a foreign language and the factors impacting their attitudes". The rest of the study has been based on these two variables. Further, the significance and the limitations of the study have also been mentioned with a brief conclusion of the entire study.

Keywords: Mauritian, language, English, foreign, variables

INTRODUCTION

Status and Role of English in Mauritius

In Mauritius, the accepted official language is English, since it is used by the government administration bodies, business sector, and courts. However, the dominant language in Mauritian mass media and business dealing is French. Thus, French and English are widely used in the country as official languages. However, when compared with French, a large portion of the population does not speak English and has limited knowledge about the language (Mauritiusattractions.com 2021).

The country has a diversified ethnicity and culture, with high linguistic diversity as well. Besides French and English, Bhojpuri, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Mandarin are used languages in the multi-ethnic Mauritian region. According to studies, almost **86.5% of the Mauritian population uses French-based Mauritian Creole, also known as Kreol Morisyen, while 12% of the people use Bhojpuri**. Asian languages have a higher prevalence in the country than English though English is generally granted as one of the official languages of the nation (worldatlas.com, 2017). From studies, it has been found out that **English is one of the primary languages of teaching besides French, in Mauritian educational institutions, especially in Secondary schools**. Thus, by Government policies, schools need to enforce English learning among students, with it being the main medium of instruction. The newer generation however is becoming much more open in learning the language because of its high international acceptance and significance.

However, English is not spoken thoroughly by the Mauritian students; it still has a significant position in the Nation since the Mauritian constitution is written in English, and for educational purposes, it is widely considered as the model of cultural interaction action and for intercultural communication. Besides, it is also one of the primary sources of instruction in schools (Mauritiusattractions.com 2021). Almost **21% of Mauritania students use English at their official proposal daily**. It is expected that the language will gain high value and replace some other language in the register in future (worldatlas.com, 2017). English is mostly used for writing purposes compared to speaking. Cultural diversity has a huge role to play in affecting the attitude of students towards learning the English Language.

English as a second language in Mauritius

It has been analysed that English is the second language in Mauritius followed by French-based Mauritian Creole. However, English is widely used in schools, business dealings, and Government works. It is considered a language of Mauritian politics (Nadal, & Ankiah-Gangadeen, 2019).

In primary schools, more than one languages can be employed as a medium of instruction up to standard three, according to the level of understanding of the students. In standards four, five and six, the medium of instruction is required to be English in the educational institutions in Mauritius. Also, the conversation between teachers and students is required to be in English as well (Mahadeo, 2018). From a first-year onwards all school books which are provided to students are in English, however, the main medium of instruction are Creole and French.

Mauritians are well aware of the international importance of English and its role in helping the social promotion of a nation. Therefore, currently, many parents are insisting on using English as the primary medium of language in schools. In view of Mauritian economic development and modernisation, children need to learn English thoroughly at secondary schools, **however, there is a certain level of resistance that is faced by institutions from students due to a variety of influencing factors like community, peer pressure, their perception of a language**.

According to the analysis made by academics and scholars, English as an official language in Mauritius witnessed of having significant growth both historically and politically (Mahadeo, 2018). The dominant group of the Mauritian population is of Indian descent who are very much in favor of making English the recognized official language in the nation. English has been designated as a "neutral" language in the country since there is no particular ethnic group that could be associated with the language.

The functionalists' response to the debate emphasises the inevitability and practicality of using English for its global status and its "affinity" with the inherited school systems (Habók, & Magyar, 2018). Therefore, in most of the **secondary urban schools, English has been adopted as the medium of instruction**, while the rural schools continue to use vernaculars even in the secondary schooling stage.

To understand the education system in Mauritius and students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language like English, it is important to understand the **three R's of the system** which is: **"Recipient", "Reputation", and "Recall"**. The 3Rs shows the necessary mechanism of memorizing knowledge and other language materials, which is English; at school required for the students to pass **Cambridge School Certificate of Education**). Besides **the mechanism of teaching** and studying, everyday life has a huge role to play in affecting the attitude of students towards learning English (Habók, & Magyar, 2018). Therefore, **parents and peers** who mainly use vernaculars in communicating have a huge role to play in impacting the attitude of the students

who might even show a relevant amount of resistance at learning a foreign language like English. Thus, the **factors affecting the attitudes are multidimensional. Ideological beliefs in relation to "perception of language varieties", "politics", "economy" and "perception of prestige and power" of the speaker**, here students, is another factor that affects the attitude of students at learning a foreign language (Bissoonauth-Bedford, 2019).

Thus, there are **multi-dimensional factors that affect students' attitude towards learning a subject in general**. However, the scenario is changing and more students and their parents are willing to have their teacher being taught in English (Habók, & Magyar, 2018).

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The research aims to examine the factors affecting the attitude of Mauritian students (mainly of secondary schools) towards learning English.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To analyse whether there is a significant difference in the level of attitude learners towards learning English as a second foreign language.
- To find the significant resistance of a learner's attitude towards learning a Foreign language like English.
- To find the factors affecting the attitude of learners towards learning English as a foreign language in a country like Mauritius
- To analyse the impact of students'/learners' attitudes in learning a foreign language.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Modernization and economic development have a growing impact on the Mauritian secondary schools in adopting English as the main medium of instruction such that they can get increased social promotion in the global platform (Govmu.org 2017). However, the percentage of the population who uses English is very low, and the language is mostly used in writing official documents or articles than it is being spoken, which somehow creates a resistance in the community in using the language extensively in schools (Govmu.org, 2017). Also, since **children are highly influenced by their community, with increased use of vernaculars and lack of usefulness of the language in their immediate community and social framework, they develop a negative attitude** to it, which is most prevalent in the rural regions of Mauritius.

Further **resource constraints and high cultural diversity are the other constraints in using English in secondary schools**. Thus, the study holds a high significance in finding out the gravity of resistance that is being faced by secondary Mauritian schools in making students learn a foreign language like English. This has been a topic of high relevance and debate. Also, there has been an extensive debate over the use of the English language in schools between the nationalists and the functionalists as well. This study will therefore give a deeper insight into the current scenario of Mauritian schools and their status in adopting English as the main medium of instruction. Also, the significance of the study lies in its ability to provide details about whether the situation is improving and if students are willing to embrace English as their primary language in schools.

It is through this study that the significance of using English in a school's curriculum has been

revealed. Increased modernisation and globalisation is making it important for nations like Mauritius to focus on using English at secondary school levels such that the global communication procedure can be secured in the long run. Also, the study has captured the increased changing patterns in language and use of it in younger generations in Mauritius. English learning has been on the rise for two decades now due to its increased significance in the global platform. Thus the study has strategically captured all the important aspects of foreign language learning relative to the attitude of students towards it, making the study relevant.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the research lies in its data collection and evaluation process. Since only secondary data collection has been taken into account the study lacked in collecting fresh data from the direct sources. Also, not much data relating to students' attitudes in learning English in the Mauritian schools could be found. The data available were limited and repetitive. A better study could have been done with the use of primary data sources. Further some of the articles that were found on websites relating to the topic could not be used due to lack of genuineness, taking long to analyse the collected information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitude of students towards language

The learners have a mixed attitude (both positive and negative) towards the English language, and they think that the English language belongs to only the native English speakers. Language attitudes are ideas, prejudices, and opinions which the learner has with respect to the English language. According to Romadloni & Mantasiah (2017), a student has a positive attitude towards the English language before learning the language in a proper way. English is taken as one of the popular and common languages across the world and it is spoken, understood, read in most parts of the globe. In addition, English plays a crucial role in the education system of Mauritius, not only for an important subject but also for communicating or as a medium of instruction. In order to learn the language appropriately, they have to provide a positive attitude towards the language. The parents and teachers of the students also need to encourage them to learn the language more easily and make them understand the importance of learning the English language for their own benefit.

Learner attitude has an impact on achieving proficiency while learning the English language. Therefore, the learner who has a positive attitude in the learning process of the language experiences success more easily (uow.edu.au, 2021). Similarly, the learner who has a negative attitude in the learning process possesses some difficulty in accessing the general easily rather than face failure. Thus, the students of Mauritius have a positive attitude while learning English in their secondary education, which will help them, absorb and focus on the information which they are getting to learn in the class. However, proper studying the language in the class helps to experience different other skills and also allows the students to identify different kinds of new learning opportunities. Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean and it has English as their language of instruction at their school and also it is the state official language of the country (uow.edu.au, 2021). English is considered as the second language of the country and students have to learn the language properly as it is the instruction language in their school. However, this study discusses the attitude of the students towards learning the English language in school.

The country made its official language English in the year 1810; even though there are 0.3% of

inhabitants who speak the language in their home and 80% of people of Mauritius speak Creole at their home (uow.edu.au, 2021). The language is mainly used by the political person and ministry, different of the country as it is considered as the official language of Mauritius. As stated by Dewaele *et al.* (2018), the country basically uses the English language for government and legal purposes, therefore these students need to learn the language more appropriately. All the students of Mauritius need to learn the English language as it is one of the official languages of the country and the government supplied the English study materials in the school (Semanticscholar.org, 2021). However, students are having different issues while studying English at school. Besides that, two-third of the students pass the English exam in the school. However, it is crucial to provide appropriate support to all the students of Mauritius in order to motivate them to learn English more effectively in school.

As a consequence, the school needs to develop motivation among its students in order to change their attitudes towards learning English. Development of encouragement to learn the English language helps to improve their communication skill and learning opportunities of other different subjects in the school. Besides that, it also enhances the interest among the secondary students to learn the language more effectively. The attitude of the student is influenced by the teachers, parents, and peers; therefore, their attitude needs to develop towards learning the second language in their school. The parent attitude towards the second language contributes to fast learning and quality learning among the students. The parents need to show a positive attitude to English to make their children understand the value of the language (Kostikova *et al.* 2018). However, it helps them to develop their interest to learn the language at school and understand the importance of the language for their future development as well. Similarly, the teachers also need to have a positive attitude towards the second language of their school, in order to teach the language more accurately and invest more time explaining the importance of this language.

Hence, a positive attitude shapes encouragement to learn a second language at the school and affects the language particularly, proficiency as per the requirements. The students get a positive attitude towards learning the English language, as the teachers and parents influence them towards their studies (Semanticscholar.org, 2021). As a result, it influences the learning of the students and makes them understand the importance of learning this second language in school. However, the education system of Mauritius focuses on the learning of a second language in order to reduce the difficulties of teaching a second language at the school for the future teacher. As stated by Ankihah-Gangadeen & Nadal (2017), proper learning of the English language will help them to communicate properly in school or in any official work within the country as well. This is crucial to change the attitude towards learning English for developing their education and enhance the knowledge for learning different other subjects within the school as well. This study focuses on the positive attitude of the students while learning English and it will increase the learning skill and positivity among the students while learning the language.

Though, the students of Mauritius are more focused on learning this language and improving their knowledge and education qualification to focus on this study. Besides that, the support from the Mauritius government towards learning the second language also motivates the students to learn the language at the school (uu.nl, 2021). As a consequence, it allows them to participate in different language programs in the school and improve the communication skill and instruction skills among the students (Jugnauth, 2021). Hence, the country can develop skilled and

knowledgeable students who can teach the language in the future as well. Moreover, the development of a positive attitude among the students is essential to learn the second language at their school and find more opportunities to learn different other subjects of the school in an appropriate manner.

Factors influencing the attitude of students

The students have to develop a positive attitude towards learning the English language as it helps them to improve their learning skills and achieve good communication skills for the future. However, there are different factors that influence the student's language towards learning the language. The factors which influence the learning attitudes of the students are classroom infrastructure, classroom environments, social environments, economic condition, cultural context, parents influence, teachers influence, and teachers' behavior towards students. Here, it discusses the way all the factors influence the learning process of the students and also change the attitude among them to learn English in school.

This is essential to have a ***positive environment in the classroom*** in order to influence the student to learn a new language. Besides that, it will help them to grow a positive attitude among them to understand the importance of learning English at school. According to Leong, L. M., & Ahmadi (2017), a good classroom environment also helps to encourage students to learn a second language and make them improve their language skills in an effective way. Students also get the motivation to come to the class and learn the language appropriately. Therefore, schools need to focus on maintaining a positive classroom environment to influence students to attend the class on a regular basis and improve their language skills as well.

As a consequence, the ***social environment*** is also one of the important factors for influencing the students to learn their second language in school. The students of Mauritius come from different backgrounds which also create a major impact on their study as well. Different students come from different social cultures and their learning attitude also depends on the social environment (Гофурова, 2020). Students who come from a good society are very much focused on learning English rather than the one who comes from a low-class society. Therefore, all the students need to be treated equally in the class to improve their English learning skills in the classroom and achieve the learning ability of the language.

The ***parents' attitude*** also influences the learning attitudes of the students and it helps them to develop their learning ability on their second language at the school. Therefore, this is essential for the parents to enhance encouragement among their children and help them to learn the language also. Besides that, parents need to help the students in their study, which motivates the student to learn their language more and solve any issue which they cannot ask for at their school.

A ***good classroom infrastructure*** is necessary for the students to improve their performance along with improving their schooling system. As stated by Jaekel *et al.* (2017), flexible classroom infrastructure allows students to make choices along with doing experiments with different learning techniques. In addition to this, flexible classroom infrastructure provides the teachers the capacity to respond effectively to the various students' learning needs. In contrast, poor infrastructure such as dilapidated classrooms, damaged school infrastructure along pit toilets has major impacts on the student's attitude and their academic performances. In relation to this, the poor structure provided in the classrooms demotivated the students and changed their attitudes towards learning which ultimately leads to an increase in the tendency of dropouts along with

low-student retention rates.

Good culture also influences the attitude of students towards learning the language. The students who come from cultural background can adopt new things faster, which help them to improve their learning ability and opportunities to learn different other things more accurately. Besides that, culture helps the students to socialize more easily in the school and helps them to improve their learning ability in the school (Li *et al.* 2020). As a result, it helps them to achieve their learning ability more easily and develop their positive attitudes at the school also.

Socioeconomic factors like income level of a family, race, gender, and education level of parent's, all having a direct influence on the availability and quality of the education along with the ability of education to enhance the circumstances of life. As influenced by Denis (2020), poor financial conditions impact the students' attitudes as low-income level leads them to admission in low-level schools and allow them to access less academic resources than the students who have strong financial backgrounds. A higher level of income impacts the students' attitudes to acquire more knowledge as they are able to gain more valuable resources and support from the experts.

Teachers are the most influential person at the school as they help the students to develop their learning abilities in the school. Supporting the attitude of the teachers is also one of the important factors for the students' learning attitudes. Students always want their teachers to help them with any kind of issues which they are facing at the schools and achieving support from the teachers motivates them to come to school and learn the English language. In addition, teachers need to have proper knowledge about the subject which they are teaching at the school. Teachers' positive attitudes toward the students are also required to motivate all the students at school and improve their knowledge regarding the English language (Jaekel *et al.* 2017). Moreover, proper cooperation from the student is very much required to improve the English language skill among all the students of Mauritius.

The factors need to be identified properly in order to improve the language skill among the students of Mauritius and increase positive attitude to learn the English language at school. In addition, the Mauritius government also took some initiatives to enhance encouragement of all the secondary students to learn the language more seriously and improve the ability to learn different other subjects at the school also. However, it develops the English speaking number in their country and makes the people do all the official work of the country in a proper way.

CONCLUSION

The study has emphasised on the fact that even though English is considered to be one of the official languages of Mauritius, it is not widely used as a daily communication medium by the population. The Mauritian population is highly diverse with several vernaculars being spoken by the Mauritian people, which the Nationalists support. However, with modernisation and economic development, it has been stated that the country needs to be adaptive to the language and must embrace the foreign language to teach its students. The study also highlighted the potential factors that have for so long acted as an impact on the attitude of students in learning a foreign language like English in the Mauritian schools.

It has also been concluded from the study that though the parents mainly in the urban region highly supports the idea of schools using English as a medium of language some degree of resistance is being faced by student's attitude towards learning a foreign language like English that is being caused by factors like use of vernaculars, students ideology about a language, peer

and parental influence, usefulness of the foreign language in the immediate community of the students. Thus the study helped in highlighting all these issues and the impact that they have on students' attitudes influencing their acceptance of learning a foreign language like English.

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