

**A COMPARATIVE-CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF
ATTITUDES TOWARD AND MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN GRADE 9
STUDENTS FROM AKHA, BAMAR AND SHAN ETHNIC
GROUPS AT № 2 BASIC EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL, KENG
TUNG, EASTERN SHAN STATE, MYANMAR**

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a significant relationship between attitudes and motivation of Grade 9 students toward English as a foreign language from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups and to compare both variables among three different ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. A total of 199 students participated, and the instrument adapted for this study was the latest version of Gardner's (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between the research variables, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there were significant differences between attitudes and motivation of the participant students. From this study, a positive attitude and high motivation of Grade 9 students toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) were found, regardless of their ethnic memberships. Also, it was found a statistically strong, positive correlation between attitudes toward and motivation for learning EFL of Grade 9 students in each ethnic group. Furthermore, the findings also revealed a significant difference between attitudes toward EFL of the students, but no significant difference between motivations for learning EFL of the students in all three ethnic groups. Finally, recommendations for teachers, students, administrators and future researchers are presented.

Keywords: Attitude, Motivation, Ethnic Groups, English as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

Throughout the British colonial period, Myanmar language became the second language in its own country, displaced by English language, which was used as the language of law, administration, and the medium of education in European code schools and the university (Paw, 2015). The influence of English language has been crucial in Myanmar ever since, even during the post-independence era, and especially in the areas of politics, education, and the social world for a long period (Ireland & Van Benthuyzen, 2014).

Myanmar is a very diverse nation, made up of over 135 ethnic groups with different languages and culture. So, the Myanmar language comes as a second language for those non-Burmese people, being mostly the language used in compulsory education.

Therefore, the CESR (Comprehensive Education Sector Review), which was launched in 2012 as part of the national education reform plan led by Myanmar Ministry of Education in partnership with UNESCO and World Bank, recommended that English language should be taught from Grade 3, after Burmese-speaking children have mastered their mother tongue and other national ethnic groups have mastered their mother tongue and Burmese language (Paw, 2015).

The English language in Myanmar has been on and off during the post-independence era.

However, since 1981, English language was reintroduced and taught in compulsory education starting from kindergarten. Also, as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), people from Myanmar must be able to communicate in the official working language of ASEAN, which is English (Bolton, 2008). Despite this, Bolton (2008) reported that only 5% of Myanmar population can speak English language. Thus, to be able to work collaboratively and effectively with the rest of the ASEAN members, Myanmar requires upgrading and promoting the learning English language.

Regarding learning a foreign language, the rate of success or failure mainly depends on the two affective factors: attitude and motivation (Smith, 1971). For instance, students who hold a favourable attitude and high motivation will tend to do better than those students who hold unfavourable attitude and low motivation.

The attitude of the current generation toward English language could be affected more or less negatively by the senior generation (Paw, 2015).

With that in mind, the researchers developed a comparative-correlational study to the attitudes toward and motivation for learning EFL in the case of Grade 9 students from three different Myanmar ethnic groups, such as Akha, Bamar and Shan, at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.

Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives developed for this study.

1. To determine the level of attitude toward English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 1.1. To determine the level of attitude toward English as a foreign language in terms of attitude toward English speaking people and attitude toward the learning situation in Grade 9 students from the Akha ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 1.2. To determine the level of attitude toward English as a foreign language in terms of attitude toward English speaking people and attitude toward the learning situation in Grade 9 students from the Bamar ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 1.3. To determine the level of attitude toward English as a foreign language in terms of attitude toward English speaking people and attitude toward the learning situation in Grade 9 students from the Shan ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
2. To determine the level of motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 2.1. To determine the level of motivation for learning English as a foreign language in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitude toward learning English in Grade 9 students from the Akha ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 2.2. To determine the level of motivation for learning English as a foreign language in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitude toward learning English in Grade 9 students from the Bamar ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
 - 2.3. To determine the level of motivation for learning English as a foreign language in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitude toward learning English in Grade 9 students from the Shan ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.

3. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between attitude toward and motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
4. To determine whether there is a significant difference between attitude toward English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.
5. To determine whether there is a significant difference between motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from the Akha, Bamar, and Shan at ethnic groups № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.

Theoretical Framework

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition

The focus of this model is on the motivation and the constructs that support motivation for learning a foreign language, such as attitudes toward learning situation, integrativeness, and instrumentality. Gardner's socio-educational model is regarded as one of the most long-standing and influential models about foreign language learning, with a large number of studies worldwide for the last 25 years (Au, 1988; Keblawi (2006). Based on this theory, Gardner (1985) developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), whose international version (Gardner, 2004) was used as data collection instrument for this research.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 describes the conceptual framework of this study.

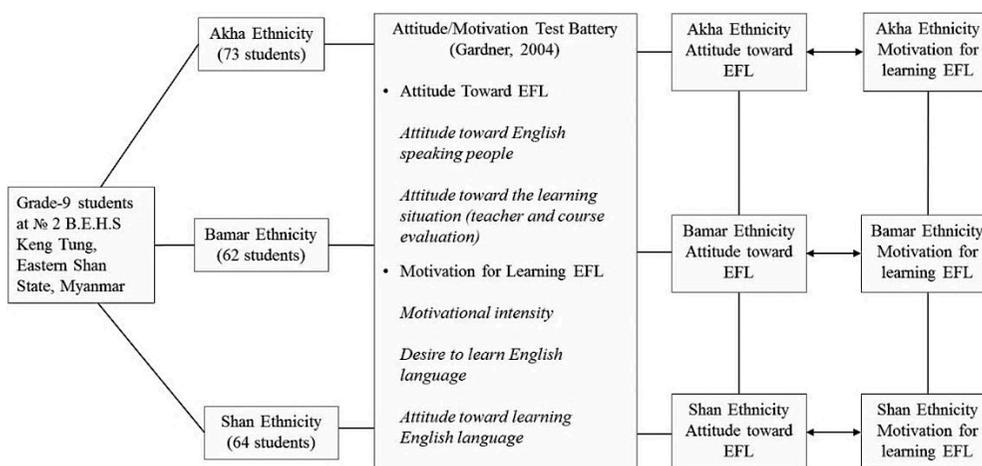


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the current study.

Review of Literature

The Concepts of Attitudes and Motivation

The terms *attitude* and *motivation* have been drawn a major attention of many scholars and researchers as two of the most influential variables in L2 learning, since 50 years ago. Many scholars attempted to define the term attitude, but none alone is entirely satisfactory (Allport, 1935). However, Gardner (1985) defined attitude as an emotional evaluation and reaction toward something based on the knowledge and feeling of the individual, with human behaviors and cognition (beliefs) being reflections of attitude.

Also, motivation is a multifaceted, unique and complex construct (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner, 2005, 2006). According to Gardner (2001), motivation is a driving force regardless of the situation and requires three elements such as motivated individual will expend the effort to learn the language involving persistent and consistent attempt to learn the material, will want to achieve the goal, and enjoy the task of learning the language. Moreover, motivation can be classified into two main groups such as instrumental and integrative (Gardner, 1985). Instrumental motivation refers to acquiring a language as means of achieving goals such as getting a job or fulfilling an academic requirement. Integrative motivation refers to desire or willingness to identify with the other language community which means wanting to be accepted by another community or integrating oneself within a culture to become part of that society.

Previous Research on Attitudes toward and Motivation for Learning EFL

Both Au (1988) and Crookes and Schmidt (1991) claimed that integrative motivation is not strongly supported by empirical evidence. Also, Au (1988) reported that the influence of cultural beliefs on the development of motivation is relatively untested notion since a few attempts have been made to define the constitutions of cultural belief. In addition, Oller (1981) suggested that the correlation between affective factors and motivation are unstable and varies greatly across individuals, contexts, and learning tasks. Regarding to this statement, Gardner (1985b) agreed with the fact that the relationship was relatively unstable among attitude, motivation and outcome that had been resulted in several studies as not everyone has a desire to learn though they value another community.

Yu (2010), who constructed a survey on attitudes of learners toward English in China, surveyed 398 students, with 20 students being interviewed. One of the findings of this study was that the students show positive attitudes toward the English language. The findings of the study conducted by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012) on EFL student's attitudes towards learning English language, indicated that students showed negative attitudes towards learning English. This study was carried out on 180 students in three study year from three specialization programs: Basic

Sciences, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Starron (2008) adopted a study on students' attitudes toward English as a second language in Grade 1 at Puerto Rico. The findings revealed that the levels of motivation overall were slightly high, but the attitude toward the instrumental and integrative value of learning English was neutral. Also, the results revealed moderate positive interest in foreign language, a slight positive desire to learn English and little positive attitude towards Americans, as well as neutral attitude towards foreigners, but the moderate negative affective reaction to learning English.

Hsiang (1992) conducted a study focus on the relationship between attitude/motivation variables and Chinese students' learning English as a foreign language. In the study, 51 participants of graduate Chinese students from Taiwan were subjected by using AMTB. The finding of the study reported that Chinese students' attitudes toward learning English, their desire to learn English and their motivational intensity had a positive correlation to the scores. Also, the results added that the most reliable variable toward English performance was students' motivation, with the support of their attitudes.

Garcia (1997) completed a study specializing in two different ethnic groups to investigate the correlation among motivation, attitude, aptitude, ethnic membership and foreign language achievement. 135 college students (87 European Americans and 48 Hispanic Americans) participated. One of the major findings indicated that attitude operates as a support for motivation. Also, the correlation between language attitudes and motivation were significantly high and motivation is significantly correlated to achievement.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The current research was administered on a population sample of 199 students in total, 73 students from Akha ethnic group, 62 students from Bamar ethnic group, and 64 students from Shan ethnic group at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. Initially, the total number of participants was 199 students; however, only 193 students fully completed the questionnaire.

Research Instrument

Gardner's (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery was adapted to measure attitudes and motivation for learnings EFL of Grade 9 students' from three ethnic groups at № 2 B.E.H.S Keng Tung, Myanmar. Gardner (2004) mentioned that the instrument is designed only for second/foreign language learning and also the 2004 version is latest international version. The questionnaire used a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *partially disagree*, 4 = *partially agree*, 5 = *agree*, 6 = *strongly agree* for positively worded items, and 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 =

partially agree, 4 = *partially disagree*, 5 = *disagree*, 6 = *strongly disagree* for negatively worded items).

The questionnaire consists of twelve scales, but for this study, only five scales will be adopted to measure the two research variables addressed in this study. Regarding attitude toward EFL, the scales *attitude toward English speaking people* and *attitude toward the learning situation* were considered. The latter was comprised of two subscales: attitude toward the English teacher evaluation, and attitude toward the English course evaluations. Regarding motivation for learning EFL, the scales *motivational intensity*, *desire to learn English* and *attitudes toward learning English* were considered. Many previous researchers, e.g., (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Hsiang, 1992; Starron, 2008; Suleiman, 1993) have used this instrument in a different form to identify and compare both attitude toward and motivation for learning EFL. For the current study, the instrument was translated from English into Burmese and back-translated from Burmese into English. To achieve the valid Burmese questionnaire version, the researcher requested three Master's degree holders majoring in English with a strong background in translation from academic English to Burmese language, in order to check, approve and validate the accuracy of the translation.

Findings

The findings of the study, after the descriptive analysis of the participants' responses, indicated that the mean scores of Grade 9 students' attitude toward English as a foreign language from Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups were $M = 4.44$ ($SD = 1.30$), $M = 4.67$ ($SD = 1.32$), and $M = 4.40$ ($SD = 1.37$), respectively. The results suggest that Grade 9 students from Akha and Shan ethnic groups hold a partially favourable attitude toward EFL while Bamar ethnic group hold a favourable attitude toward EFL. Table 1 displays the attitude toward EFL in Grade 9 students according to their ethnic groups.

Table 1: Data for learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | Ethnic groups | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| | Akha | | | Bamar | | | Shan | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> |
| Attitude toward English as a foreign language | 4.44 | 1.30 | Partially positive | 4.67 | 1.32 | Positive | 4.40 | 1.37 | Partially positive |

Note. *I* stands for "interpretation".

In addition, the mean scores of the students' motivation for learning English as a foreign language from Akha, Bamr, and Shan ethnic groups were $M = 4.45$ ($SD = 1.25$), $M = 4.57$ ($SD = 1.28$), and $M = 4.38$ ($SD = 1.38$) respectively. The results revealed that the Grade 9 students from Bamar ethnic group express high motivation

for learning English as a foreign language, while the students from Akha and Shan ethnic group show a partially high motivation for learning EFL. Table 2 shows the results regarding motivation for learning EFL in Grade 9 students from three ethnic groups in this study.

Table 2: Data for learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | Ethnic groups | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|-----------|----------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| | Akha | | | Bamar | | | Shan | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>I</i> |
| Motivation for learning English as a foreign language | 4.45 | 1.25 | Partially high | 4.57 | 1.28 | High | 4.38 | 1.38 | Partially high |

Note. *I* stands for “interpretation”.

One of the major findings of this study was the statistically significant, positive and strong correlation between attitude toward and motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from Akha ($r = .71, p < .001, N = 72$), Bamar ($r = .78, p < .001, N = 60$), and Shan ($r = .73, p < .001, N = 61$) ethnic groups at the target school. Also, the findings indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between attitude toward English as a foreign language in Grade 9 students from Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Kent Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar ($F(2, 190) = 4.96, p = .01, N = 193$). Table 3 shows that there was a significant difference between Akha and Bamar ethnic groups students’ attitude toward EFL. Similarly, the analysis indicates that there was a significant difference between Bamar and Shan ethnic group’s students’ attitude toward EFL. On the other hand, the result indicated that there was no significant difference between Grade 9 students’ attitude toward EFL from Shan and Akha ethnic groups.

Table 3: Results of Post Hoc Test

| Between-group comparison | Sig. | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| Akha | | |
| Bamar | <.001 | There is a significant difference |
| Shan | .88 | There is no significant difference |
| Bamar | | |
| Akha | <.001 | There is a significant difference |
| Shan | <.001 | There is a significant difference |
| Shan | | |
| Akha | .88 | There is no significant difference |
| Bamar | <.001 | There is a significant difference |

Note. Statistical significance level set at $p = .05$, two-tailed.

However, the one-way analysis of variance performed failed to reveal a significant difference between Grade 9 students' motivation for learning English as EFL according to their ethnicity ($F(2, 190) = 2.37, p = .09, N = 193$).

Discussion

The following discussion is intended to highlight a number of key features regarding the attitude toward and motivation for learning English as a foreign language at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.

Attitude toward English as a foreign language. The findings of the current study align with those from the study carried out by Yu (2010), in which it was also reported that students' attitudes toward English language learning were favourable. In other words, an individual with positive attitudes toward EFL would have a potentially higher rate of success, compared with an individual who has a negative attitude, as Smith (1971) claimed. However, in one of the findings reported by Starron (2008), it was found that Grade 9 students from Puerto Rico showed a neutral attitude towards foreigners and learning English, but they expressed slightly favourable attitude toward Americans. This result concurs with one of the results from the current study, specifically that Grade 9 students from three different ethnic groups evidenced a positive attitude toward English speaking people. On the other hand, what Abidin et al. (2012) have found in their study on 180 secondary school students from Libya, majoring Basic Sciences, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences, seems to contradict the findings of the current study, by indicating that non-native English speaking students showed negative attitudes toward EFL.

Motivation for learning English as a foreign language. One of the studies conducted on 51 graduate Chinese students from Taiwan by Hsiang (1992) revealed that a high motivation was the most reliable variable toward English language learning, with the support of the attitude toward EFL. This aligns with the findings of the current study, in which partially high to high motivation for learning EFL were found in the target ethnic groups. However, this finding seems to oppose to the real situation of Myanmar educational contexts as the English language is one of the most failed school subject across the nation year by year. Students are under-performing in English language despite the findings of the current study indicated partially high to high motivation for learning EFL, despite Hsiang (1992) claims about the crucial influence of motivation for learning English on the EFL subject performance. There could be many reasons involved, but one of them would lie on teaching and learning situation. For instance, the English language is not taught as a language, rather taught as a subject like other school subjects, emphasizing mostly on reading and writing through traditional teaching approach such as teacher-centred and rote learning (Sein, 2015).

On the other hand, one of the findings reported by Starron (2008) on Grade

9 students from Puerto Rico, indicated a moderately negative attitude toward learning English. The findings of what Starron (2008) contravene the findings of the current study, which claimed positive attitude toward learning the English language regardless of ethnic membership. In the case of Myanmar, this could be due to the recent political changes that would affect the country largely, followed by many educational reforms which activate an opportunity to access the variety of educational institutions and university in both domestic and international. Also, the country opens to the interest of foreign investment and companies which will create a number of job opportunities. Thus, English language competency will be critical for the purpose of continuing further study or getting a good job and Myanmar people will have great interest and positive attitude toward English language learning.

Nonetheless, the motivation of Grade 9 students toward EFL has no difference in general regard to their ethnic memberships. However, Bamar ethnic group tends to do slightly better than the rest by indicating high motivation for learning EFL while others showed partially high. According to the first author's experience, most senior generation of Akha and Shan ethnic groups did not seem to receive proper education as most of their job titles are listed as non-professional. Thus, they would not be able to provide better suggestions to the youth regard to English language learning and opportunities. However, some Bamar ethnic group who live in Shan State seem to be having professional jobs. Thus, they are more exposed to English language, which could be an advantage for members of Bamar ethnic group to be more motivated than the rest to learn EFL.

Attitude and motivation toward English as a foreign language. According to Garcia (1997), who conducted a study on 135 college students from Southeast Texas, specializing in two different ethnic groups to investigate the correlation among motivation, attitude, aptitude, ethnic membership and foreign language achievement, there was a significantly high correlation between attitudes toward and motivation for learning EFL. The findings of Garcia (1997) align with the findings of the current study, illustrated that the correlation between attitude toward and motivation for learning English as a foreign language was found significantly high, regardless of the ethnic membership.

Moreover, the results of the current study suggested that the students, on average, showed a positive attitude toward and high motivation for learning EFL, which seems to align with Gardner's socio-educational model, where attitude serves as a support for motivation. In other words, if one had a positive attitude toward EFL, one would have high motivation for learning EFL. In this study, Grade 9 students showed favourable attitudes and their motivation indicated high toward EFL. Furthermore, one of the findings of this study revealed that there was statistically difference between neither attitudes nor motivations regard to three different ethnic groups in Grade 9 students at № 2 B.E.H.S, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State,

Myanmar. They are totally three different ethnic group with different cultures and languages. But for one reason why they share the same perspective toward EFL could be because most of them live in the same city for the reasonable amount of time and some of them are the neighbourhood.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of Grade 9 students' attitudes toward and motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar, the following recommendations for teachers, students and administrators at the target school, as well as for future researchers, are provided.

Teachers. The findings of the current study have suggested that Grade 9 students showed a positive attitude toward and high motivation for learning EFL regardless of their ethnic membership and both variables have positive and strong correlation in each membership. In general, students reacted favourable attitude toward the learning situation which is English teacher evaluation and English course evaluation, however, some items received negative response (e.g., "to be honest, I don't like my English class" and "I don't think my English teacher is really good"). Students agreed to both items and thus, teachers should take this into account seriously.

They should find out the level of each student by having a test and then use the differentiation methods to keep all the students learning together. But they should prepare and organize the lesson in order, interesting and fun, meanwhile try to get students attention almost all the time during the class. Also, they should be able to find a way to motivate students to learn English.

Students. The findings of the current study would lead the students to know their own perspectives toward EFL in which they might have never thought before. With the help of teachers and school, they would come to realize the possible reasons why they succeed or fail in second/foreign language learning. Then, they would be able to make a change to be success in learning English as a foreign language.

Administrators. To be able to deliver interesting, interacting lessons, the school administrators should consider sending the teachers to professional development training after having a carefully designed evaluation. From that, teachers would gain new knowledge and hopefully be able to utilize different approaches effectively. Also, the school should support teachers by providing all the materials they require in order to have effective teaching and learning process.

Future Researchers. This current research was designed to investigate the relationship and comparison between Grade 9 students' attitudes and motivation for learning EFL in Akha, Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups at № 2 Basic Education High School, Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. However, it was expected that the

findings of the project would be supportive to the future researchers with a similar context but in large scale. It is recommended for the future researchers to do the mixed methods research to get more reliable and valid outcomes as well as expand the target schools and the audiences to increase the reliability of the results.

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