

A Study of Attitudes of Kashmiri Learners of English as Second Language

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Abstract

Attitudes in operational terms, an individual's attitude, according to Gardener (1985, p.9) is 'an evaluation reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent.' Attitudes like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings develop early in childhood and are likely to be closely related to the reasons of learning. John Oller (1977,78) and his colleagues conducted several large-scale studies of the relationship between attitudes and language success. The researchers were able to identify a few meaningful clusters of attitudinal variables that correlated positively with attained proficiency. In most part of the study it yielded that positive attitudes towards self, the native language group, and the target language group enhanced proficiency. The aim of the present paper is to understand the nature and effect of attitudinal variables on the English language learning in the multilingual scenario of native speakers of Kashmiri language. English language has a considerable prestige position in every section of Kashmiri society.

Key Words : Stereotype, Variables, Informant, Correlation

Introduction

A learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behaviour which characterize members of another linguistic group. In

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second language learning, learning of language does not restrict itself to the target language and its structure, rather, the importance of a sociopsychological factors in enhancing or inhibiting language learning also plays a major role. In other words there are many affective factors/variables associated with the learner when acquiring a second language. 'Affective' means 'related to feelings'. These affective areas are responsible for the individual differences between learners, which influence their degree of success in foreign language learning and include the influence of family, social group, teachers, and the learning environment, educational institution and so on. The impact of the student's personality and willingness to learn a second language, including his attitude and motivation, is another factor that can either help or hinder his language learning. Accordingly the two most important types of factors, which influence speed/success in L2 learning probably, are: environmental factors such as cultural background, school, etc; and learner factors such as age, motivation, attitude, etc (Johnson and Johnson, 1998). In the 1950s, when scientific research into the role of learner factors /characteristics in L2 learning began, it soon became clear that a whole host of learner characteristics such as age, aptitude, personality, attitude, etc. is responsible for relative success or failure in L2 learning.

These factors show a considerable effect in learning English language in a polylingual state of Jammu and Kashmir. The main mother tongues in the state are Kashmiri, Dogri, Balti, Dardi, Punjabi, Pahari and Ladakhi. Ladakhi, Kashmiri and Dogri hold premier positions in the Ladakh, Kashmir and Jammu province respectively. The official language of the state of Jammu and Kashmir however is Urdu, which according to the 1981 census report, incidentally, has only 6,867 native speakers in the entire state. Kashmiri, which is the mother tongue of an overwhelming part of the population in Kashmir, is not used as an official language and is not used as a medium of instruction in schools. English, however, attracts the most positive attitudes, particularly among the educated.

Positive attitudes are the best supporters of language learning (Gardener & Lambert, 1959; Burstall, 1974; Ollar, 1977). The present study takes the effect of attitudes on language learning into consideration by correlating the attitudes of the informants with linguistic variables. The study involved investigations of 355 informants who were native speakers of Kashmiri. All the informants were undergraduate students from different streams like Science, Arts, Commerce, etc, hailing from different parts of Kashmir. In this study, the following types of attitudes were considered,

- 1. Stereotypes.**
- 2. General attitudes.**
- 3. Preferences.**
- 4. Perceived difficulty in learning skills.**

1. Stereotypes:

The stereotypes which were studied in this work were

V. 77 Stereotypes of English speakers

V.78 Stereotypes of Kashmiri speakers

V.79 Stereotypes of English language

V.80 Stereotypes of Kashmiri language

Out of those 4 variables, only V.78 and V.79 were observed to show significant correlations with linguistic variables.

V.78 ‘Stereotypes of Kashmiri speakers’ :

	V. 112	V. 113	V. 114	V. 115	V. 116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 78	-.153**	-.119*	-.141**	-.140**	-.169**	-.190**	-.196**	-.174**

Table 1.1 Significant Correlations of V.78 with linguistic variables

V.78 i.e. ‘Stereotypes of Kashmiri speakers’ shows a negatively significant correlation with V.112 i.e. ‘Score of Cloze test in Writing’ (-.153**), V.113 i.e. ‘Total Score of Reading skill’ (-.119*), V.114 i.e. ‘Total Score of Writing skill’ (-.141**), V.115 i.e. ‘Total Score of Listening skill’ (-.140**), V.116 i.e. ‘Tested Fluency in English’ (-.169**), V.117 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Usage of tenses’ (-.190**), V.118 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary’ (-.196**) and V.119 i.e. ‘Total Score of Speaking skill’ (-.174**). This indicates that the informants who do not have positive attitudes towards Kashmiri speakers score high in tested proficiency of English language skills.

This is a very relevant correlation which indicates that Kashmiri and English do not in any way share a mutually complementary or beneficial relationship, rather we can say that the relationship is one of competition where Kashmiri is in struggle with English. English occupies the highest place in the language hierarchy in Kashmir, and this language-prestige association is also reflected on the speakers. What we observe is that speakers with greater English proficiency look down upon the Kashmiri-only speakers.

V.79 ‘Stereotypes of English language’ :

	V. 115	V. 116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 79	.105*	.127*	.123*	.128*	.112*

Table 1.2 Significant Correlations of V.79 with linguistic variables

V.79 i.e. ‘Stereotypes of English language’ shows positive and significant correlations with V.115 i.e. ‘Total Score of Listening skill’ (.105*), V.116 i.e. ‘Tested Fluency in English’ (.127*), V.117 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Usage of tenses’ (.123*), V.118 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary’ (.128*), and V.119 i.e. ‘Total score of Speaking skill’ (.112*). This indicates that informants with positive attitudes towards English score high in the English proficiency tests.

This is a self-explanatory correlation where ‘acceptance’ and ‘liking’ for English, the indicators of positive attitude towards English, are observed to be necessary for good English proficiency. This has also been observed in studies like those of Gardner and Lambert (1959) and Oller (1977b).

Graphically, the observations made in this study can be represented as under:

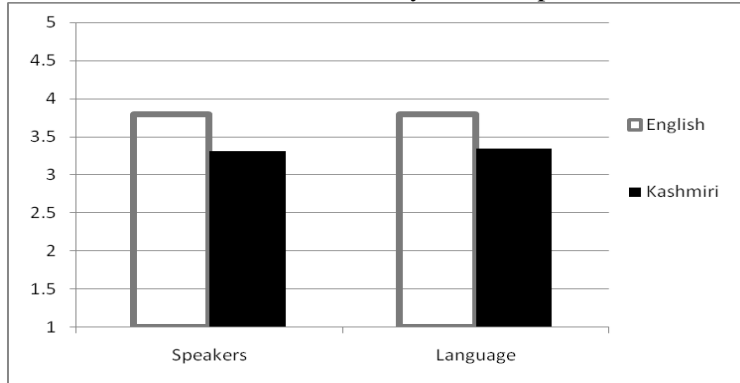


Fig. 1.1 Stereotypes of speakers and languages.

Fig. 1.1 clearly indicates that the informants hold the English speakers in high esteem as compared to Kashmiri speakers. They also hold English on a higher pedestal than Kashmiri. The main reason is the international and global nature of English. Furthermore, as already indicated, the overwhelming presence of English in the curriculum of Kashmir, especially in the higher studies, in all spheres of power and prestige and the economic, political and military power of English speaking nations like USA and UK are the largest contributors of this feeling.

One important point which needs to be mentioned here is that there is a change in attitudes in the past 7-8 years. In a study conducted in 2002 (Kak, 2002) on Kashmiri speakers using English, attitudes towards English and English speakers were considered at that point in time. The comparison in scores in the previous study and the present study is represented in the table below.

	Present study		Previous study	
	Kashmiri speakers	English Speakers	Kashmiri speakers	English Speakers
Young Males	65.6%	74.2%	55%	72.6%
Young Females	67.4%	78.2%	51.3%	75.66%

Table 1.1 Comparison of stereotypes of Kashmiri and English speakers by young males and females in the present study and the study of 2002.

This tabular representation is graphically depicted as under :

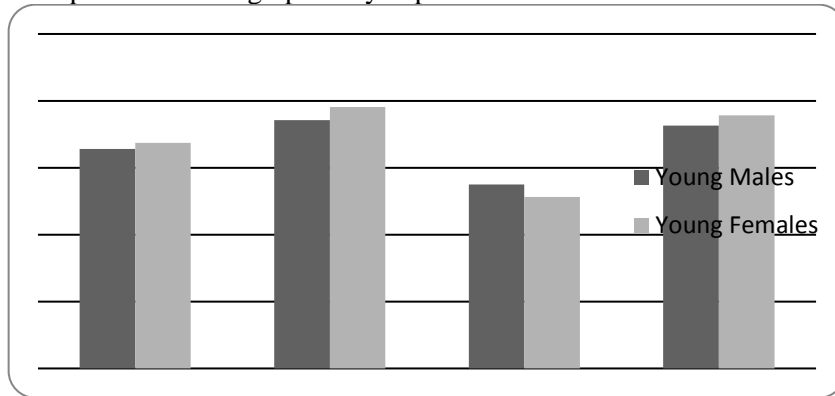


Fig. 1.2 Comparison of stereotypes of Kashmiri and English speakers by young males and females in the present study and the study of 2002.

It is observed from the table and figure above that there is some level of change in stereotypes towards Kashmiri speakers in the past 7-10 years. The stereotypes of English speakers appear to have remained comparatively unchanged. The change in attitudes towards Kashmiri speakers can be attributed to the current state government policies of ameliorating the condition of Kashmiri. Some of the steps which have been taken include putting Kashmiri in the curriculum, and certain other similar state government policies.

2. General Attitudes:

V.97 ‘English has contributed very much to the richness of literatures in all the genres of world’ :

	V.112	V.113	V.114	V.115	V.116	V.117	V.118	V.119
V.97	- .143**	- .154**	- .122*	- .154**	- .142**	- .178**	- .169**	- .170**

Table 2.1 Significant Correlations of V.97 with linguistic variables

The variable denoted by V.97 i.e. ‘English has contributed very much to the richness of literatures in all the genres of world’ shows a negatively significant correlation with V.112 i.e. ‘Score of Cloze test in Writing’ (-.143**), V.113 i.e. ‘Total Score of Reading skill’ (-.154**), V.114 i.e. ‘Total Score of Writing skill’ (-.122*), V.115 i.e. ‘Score of Listening skill’ (-.154**), V.116 i.e. ‘Tested Fluency in English’ (-.142**), V.117 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Usage of tenses’ (-.178**), V.118 i.e. ‘Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary’ (-.169**), and V.119 i.e. ‘Total Score of Speaking skill’ (-.170**).

This indicates that informants who have a high feeling that English language has contributed much to the richness of literatures in all the genres of world score low in the tested proficiency of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

It is again an example of the recurring feature which has already been observed in communicational needs in variables 28 to Variable 32 and also it again recurs in the following variables.

V.98 ‘The more English grows, the more I want to learn it’ :

	V. 116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 98	.123*	.136*	.129*	.160**

Table 2.2 Significant Correlations of V.98 with linguistic variables

V.98 i.e. ‘*The more English grows, the more I want to learn it*’ shows positive and significant correlations with V.116 i.e. ‘*Tested Fluency in English*’ (.123*), V.117 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Usage of tenses*’ (.136*), V.118 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary*’ (.129*), and V.119 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Speaking skill*’ (.160**). This indicates that the informants who seriously and positively consider the relationship between the growth of English language with a proportionate desire to learn it show a high score in tested proficiency of English.

This is already clear from the stereotypes of languages that English is quite favorably accepted by kashmiris. Furthermore, the growth and expansion of English also appear to be very important factors in the desire for increased English proficiency. In the light of the correlations mentioned above, the variable V.98 includes the relationship of ‘growth’ and ‘learning’, this in a way indicates that the informants who subscribe to this relation, indicate the desire to grow with the growth of language as in observed by their correlations with higher English proficiency..

V.100 ‘My English language aptitude is high’ :

	V. 112	V. 113	V. 114	V. 115	V. 116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 100	.133*	.135*	.177**	.140**	.137**	.175**	.171**	.131*

Table 2.3 Significant Correlations of V.100 with linguistic variables

V.100 i.e. ‘*My English language aptitude is high*’ shows positively significant correlations with V.112 i.e. ‘*Score of Cloze test in Writing*’ (.133*), V.113 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Reading skill*’ (.135*), V.114 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Writing skill*’ (.177**), V.115 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Listening skill*’ (.140**), V.116 i.e. ‘*Tested Fluency in English*’ (.137**), V.117 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Usage of tenses*’ (.175**), V.118 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary*’ (.171**) and V.119 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Speaking skill*’ (.131*).. The correlations indicate that informants who claim higher English aptitude show higher scores in English language skills.

Aptitude for a language i.e. the knack, the talent or the gift for language has been considered an important factor in language learning (e.g. Yorio, 1976; Swain, 1977; Schumann, 1978b, and Brown, 1980). This variable has also been observed to be important as is observed in the devising of MLAT and LAB test. Clearly, this study also endorses the relationship between aptitude and language learning which in this case is English. This positive approach or positive attitude can be considered as an important contributor towards their high tested English proficiency. On the other hand, it can also be inferred that the claimed proficiency of informants is very high which might be assessing their English language aptitude in a positive sense.

V.101 ‘It’s a mark of respect, dignity and social recognition’ :

	V. 112	V. 114	V. 115	V. 116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 101	-.157**	-.123*	-.141**	-.120*	-.150**	-.130*	-.132*

Table 2.4 Significant Correlations of V.101 with linguistic variables

V.101 i.e. ‘*It’s a mark of respect, dignity and social recognition*’ seems to show a negatively significant correlation with V.112 i.e. ‘*Score of Cloze test in Writing*’ (-.157**), V.114 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Writing skill*’ (-.123*), V.115 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Listening skill*’ (-.141**), V.116 i.e. ‘*Tested Fluency in English*’ (-.120*), V.117 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Usage of tenses*’ (-.150**), V.118 i.e. ‘*Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary*’ (-.130*) and V.119 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Speaking skill*’ (-.132*). This indicates that informants who consider English language to be associated with dignity, respect and recognition score low in their tests.

English is considered as the most prestigious language in Kashmir. Although prestige of English is a factor for learning English, it is not the only factor and, from a strictly practical perspective, not the most important factor. Other factors and reasons which have a more ‘practical’ utility seem to be the main reasons for learning English. The correlation above is again an indicator of an attitude where informants who have low proficiency seem to look at English not as an instrument to serve practical purposes in the society, but rather as a sort of glorified social fad.

V.102 ‘I wish I could speak another language perfectly’ :

	V. 112	V. 113	V. 114	V.116	V. 117	V. 118	V. 119
V. 102	.143**	.247**	.114*	.137**	.136*	.106*	.133*

Table 2.5 Significant Correlations of V.102 with linguistic variables

V.102 i.e. ‘*I wish I could speak another language perfectly*’ shows positively significant correlations with V.112 i.e. ‘*Score of Cloze test in Writing*’ (.143**), V.113 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Reading skill*’ (.247**), V.114 i.e. ‘*Total Score of Writing skill*’ (.114*) V.116 i.e. ‘*Tested Fluency in English*’ (.137**), V.117 i.e.

'Tested spoken Usage of tenses' (.136*), V.18 i.e. 'Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary' (.106*), and V.119 i.e. 'Total Score of Speaking skill' (.133*). This indicates that informants, who show the desire to speak another language and that too perfectly, show good scores of English proficiency.

The desire and the willingness to learn another language is a significant factor towards learning English. This attitude indicates openness and lack of any specific bias towards second/third languages in general and English (as in our case) in particular. This aspiration is also affecting proficiency whereby the 'desire to speak another language' is translated into the *actual* high proficiency.

V.104 'It's an international language' :

	V.112	V.113	V.114	V.115	V.116	V.117	V.118	V.119
V.104	.118*	.162**	.172**	.200**	.183**	.202**	.184**	.201**

Table 2.6 Significant Correlations of V.104 with linguistic variables

English as a global language is analyzed through variable V.104 i.e. 'It's an international language' which shows positively significant correlation with the linguistic variables as V.112 i.e. 'Score of Cloze test in Writing' (.118*), V.113 i.e. 'Total Score of Reading skill' (.162**), V.114 i.e. 'Total Score of Writing skill' (.172**), V.115 i.e. 'Total Score of Listening skill' (.200**), V.116 i.e. 'Tested Fluency in English' (.183**), V.117 i.e. 'Tested spoken Usage of tenses' (.202**), V.118 i.e. 'Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary' (.184**) and V.119 i.e. 'Total Score of Speaking skill' (.201**). The matrix indicates that informants, who consider English as an international language, show high scores in English skills.

It is observed that almost all the informants give first preference to English learning because it is an international language as was observed in the comments made by the informants in the questionnaire (also indicated later in Fig. 2.1) . The primary reason for this attitude is probably because English helps them to get recognized in the world scenario and makes them well equipped to speak where it matters. All the informants state that English is international, global and a universal language that is why they want to learn it.

V.105 'Attitude (Total)' :

	V. 113
V. 105	.120*

Table 2.7 Significant Correlations of V.105 with linguistic variables

V.105 i.e. 'Attitude. (Total)' shows positively significant correlations with V.113 i.e. 'Total Score of Reading skill' (.120*).This indicates that reading skill always shows high scores in linguistic tests i.e. the informants almost always show good results in reading skill as compared to any other skill in English language.

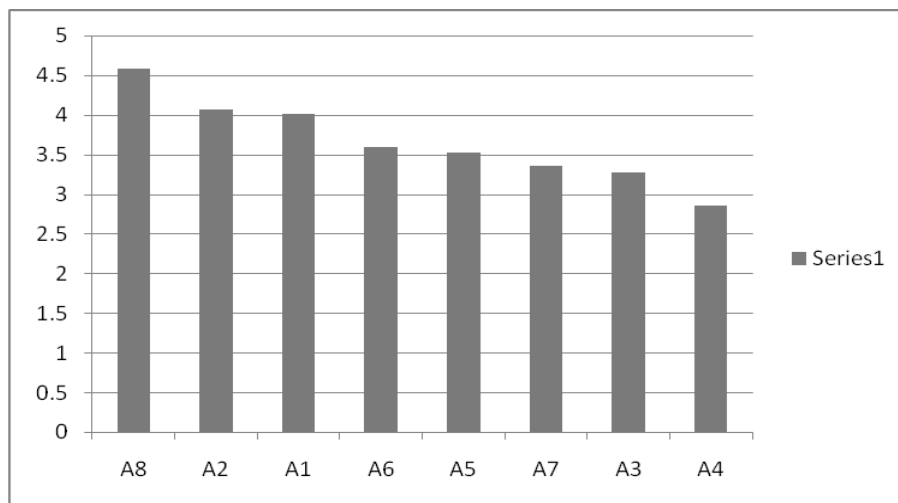


Fig. 2.1 Descending order of Mean score of Attitudes

A1- English has contributed very much to the richness of literatures in all the genres of the world, **A2-** The more English grows, the more I want to learn it, **A3-** I feel I am a good language learner, **A4-** My language aptitude is high, **A5-** It's a mark of respect, dignity and social recognition, **A6-** I wish I could speak another language perfectly, **A7-** I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation and **A8-** It's an international language.

Fig. 2.1 indicates that the ultimate liking for English appears to hinge around its international nature, though growth of English and its contribution to different genres are also important. Language aptitude, interestingly, shows the lowest mean score.

It is revealed that the informant's positive attitude towards their own want or desire leads to successful language learning. The individuality of informants is very important as far as attitude is concerned. Favorite attitudes lead to highest scores in language learning. Attitudes may be positive or negative: someone may particularly value a foreign language (e.g. because of its literary history) or think that a language is especially difficult to learn (e.g. because of the script or syntax). Urban accents generally receive positive evaluation, whereas rural accents do not. Knowing about attitudes is an important aspect of evaluating the likely success of a language teaching programme or a piece of language planning. It is clear that the second language learner benefits from the positive attitudes, and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation, and in all likelihood unsuccessful attempts at proficiency.

3. Preferences:

V.107 'I will prefer to complete my whole course study as all of it is in English' :

	V. 112	V.113	V.114	V.116	V.117	V.118	V.119
V.107	.121*	.147**	.111*	.131*	.167**	.172**	.129*

Table 6.11 Significant Correlations of V.107 with linguistic variables

V.107 i.e. 'I will prefer to complete my whole course study as all of it is in English' shows positive and significant correlations with V.112 i.e. 'Score of Cloze test in Writing' (.121*), V.113 i.e. 'Total Score of Reading skill' (.147**), V.114 i.e. 'Total Score of Writing skill' (.111*), V.116 i.e. 'Tested Fluency in English' (.131*), V.117 i.e. 'Tested spoken Usage of tenses' (.167**), V.118 i.e. 'Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary' (.172**) and V.119 i.e. 'Total Score of Speaking skill' (.129*). The correlations indicate that the informants who preferably want to learn English because the whole course study is in English, score high in tests.

English based curriculum appears to have a positive impact on completion of the course. Furthermore, it is observed that this relationship is appreciated by informants who have high English proficiency. This in a way is an important pointer towards the value of English in the curriculum and the attitudes towards English, and most importantly the relationship of English with the curriculum as observed in the mindset of an English proficient Kashmiri.

4. Perceived Difficulty in Learning Skills :

V.110 'Language skill difficult to grasp' :

	V.114	V.115	V.116	V.117	V.118	V.119
V.110	-.158**	-.115*	-.183**	-.178**	-.182**	-.174**

Table 4.1 Significant Correlations of V.110 with linguistic variables

The matrix shows that V.110 i.e. 'Language skill difficult to grasp' correlates negatively in a significant manner with V.114 i.e. 'Score of Writing skill' (-.158**), V.115 i.e. 'Total Score of Listening skill' (-.115*), V.116 i.e. 'Tested Fluency in English' (-.183**), V.117 i.e. 'Tested spoken Usage of tenses' (-.178**), V.118 i.e. 'Tested spoken Choice of Vocabulary' (-.182**) and V.119 i.e. 'Total Score of Speaking skill' (-.174**). This infers that informants who feel all English language skills are difficult to grasp, score low in the tests of writing, listening and speaking skills.

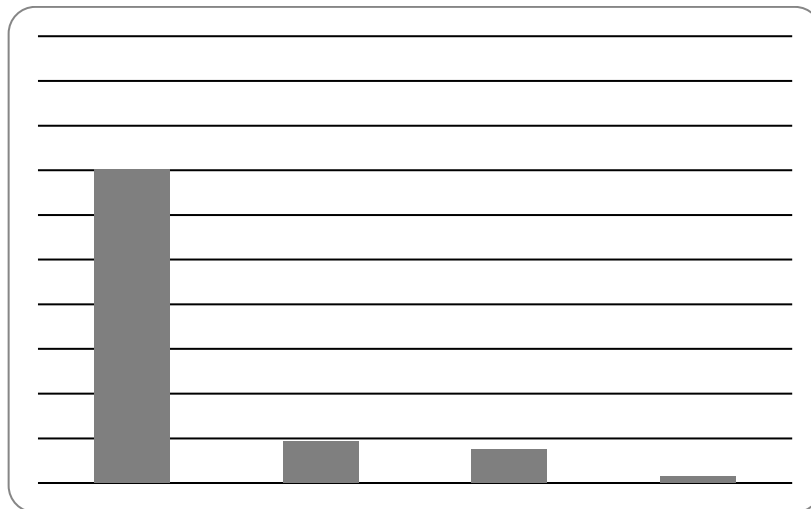


Fig. 4.1 Percentage Scores of perceived difficult skills in descending order.

It is observed that informants in Kashmir generally regard speaking skill very difficult, followed by listening, writing and reading. This sequence is accepted by the maximum number of informants except some informants who feel that the sequence of expertise in skills depends on individual differences, to quote from some questionnaires ‘It depends on nature of the student’. Yet, what cannot be ignored is that listening and speaking skill in Kashmir right from the beginning of education has never received any importance as far as language teaching is concerned. A good number of informants also claimed that there is no link between listening skill and language learning until they were introduced to the listening test in the questionnaire. Almost, all the informants from outside Srinagar accepted listening and speaking skill to be difficult and in need of proper instruction as far as teaching and learning are concerned. In whole valley, only missionary and good private institutes provide teaching for English as far as all language skills are concerned. In government schools, often Kashmiri and Urdu are used as a medium of instruction.

5. Positive and Negative Correlations vis-à-vis Attitudes :

A specific pattern of positive and negative correlations was observed vis-a-vis attitudes. The positive and negative correlations are shown below.

Positive correlations.	Negative correlations.
V.79 Stereotypes of English language.	V.78 Stereotypes of Kashmiri speakers.
V.98 The more English grows, the more I want to learn it.	V.97 English has contributed very much to the richness of literatures in all the genres of world.
V.100 My English language aptitude is high.	V.101 It’s a mark of respect, dignity

<p>V.102 I wish I could speak another language perfectly. V.104 It's an international language. V.105 Attitude (Total). V.107 I will prefer to complete my whole course study as all of it is in English.</p>	<p>and social recognition. V.110 Language skill difficult to grasp.</p>
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Table 5.1 Positive and negative correlations of Attitudes

From the positive correlations, it can be inferred that informants who view the functions of English from a practical perspective prove to be good in tested proficiency. Their positive and practical attitude towards English has helped in their English learning. From the negative correlations it is evident that informants who learn (or try to learn) English because of an over-emphasized and glorified picture of English (and not because of any practical purpose) are not good English learners.

Conclusion

Attitude is a comprehensive factor which in a positive way strengthens learning. In the present study, it was observed that positive attitudes towards English language aid informants to inculcate English language to a great extent, with an increase in their English proficiency. Certain positive attitudes of informants towards the growth of English and its international acceptance are observed to show a great effect on English learning. Moreover, certain 'inadequacies' of Kashmiri language cause the informants to stereotype English language and English speakers more positively as compared to Kashmiri language and Kashmiri speakers. Positive stereotype of English language and speakers also indicated greater English proficiency.

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