

The Correlation between Moroccan EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Speaking in the Classroom and their Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract

The present paper addresses the correlation between Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency. It is an investigation of the validity of Gardner's (1985) study, which claims that language proficiency is achieved if learners display a positive attitude towards language learning. Hence, the present study explores Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom, first, and identifies the correlation between their attitudes towards speaking in the classroom and their speaking proficiency, second. The research study is conducted using two major data collection instruments: a questionnaire and a speaking test. The questionnaire generates data about EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom, whereas the speaking test generates data about their speaking proficiency level. The participants of this study are EFL students, belonging to Ibn Abbad secondary high school, located in Kenitra city. The participants, both females and males, are 1st year baccalaureate students majoring Art stream. The total number of the participants is 80 students. Unlike Gardner's study, the present study indicates that the correlation between attitudes and speaking proficiency is negative. As far as the participants' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom, the study findings show that they possess a positive emotional and cognitive attitude towards speaking in the classroom and a negative behavioral attitude towards it. The correlation findings, on the other hand, indicate that the informants' positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom and their proficiency level are negatively correlated. This negative correlation is explained by a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The present study also provides some pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of new teaching approaches, language teaching has witnessed a shift in terms of the approaches and theories used. In line with this issue, educational psychology has suggested different methods to help learners interact with the material to be learned and the learning situation. However, it is claimed that the effect of some psychological factors can prevent learners from achieving success in language learning. One of the common complaints that English teachers make is the fact that students do not speak in the classroom. This, calls

for urgency to examine this phenomenon. Hence, this paper investigates students' attitudes towards speaking, as one factor, so as to enable teachers to understand this phenomenon and help engender learners' positive attitude as well as reduce their negative one towards speaking English in the classroom.

More specifically, this study addresses the concept of attitudes as a socio-psychological factor that affects students' speaking in particular. In doing so, the present study investigates the attitudes of Moroccan EFL students towards speaking. This factor is, hereby, identified and explained in relation to their speaking proficiency. This research paper is motivated by Gardner's (1985) study. He argues that attitudes highly affect language achievement in a second language context. This study aims to examine the extent to which this claim is valid in FL context through investigating the correlation between Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom and their speaking proficiency level, in particular.

The objectives of this dissertation are: (i) to identify Moroccan EFL attitudes (positive or negative) towards speaking in the classroom, (ii) to explore the correlation between their attitudes and speaking, and (iii) to suggest some remedies to develop Moroccan EFL students' positive' attitudes to participate in the classroom. This paper will also provide remedial work that can be implemented to reduce students' reluctance to speak in the classroom.

2. THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Social Psychology: Origins and History

Social psychology refers to "the part of psychology that studies human interaction: its manifestations, its causes, its consequences, and the psychological processes involved" (Hogg and Vaughan, 2010, p. 2). To exemplify, the main focus of social psychology is on human interaction. It emphasizes studying how individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours are constructed, and how they influence people interactions with each other. It also explores the factors that make human beings act in a certain way and the reasons under which particular behaviour occurs.

Hogg and Cooper (2003) have questioned the emergence of social psychology by inquiring: "where does social psychology begin?" (p. 4). To answer this question, they point out that social psychology traced back to Greek philosophy. Aristotle and Plato are considered the first who addressed social psychological issues, historically speaking. Plato, on the one hand, disposed an aristocracy view. He claims that human beings are

interdependent; their goals cannot be achieved without a social organization to help them. On the other hand, Aristotle has a more democratic view. He believes in sociability rather than aristocracy.

Hogg and Cooper (2003) put forward that the birth of social psychology was in 1895 with Norman Tripplet Theory. They postulate that his studies examined how social forces affect bicycle racing. Tripplet (1895), in his experiments, notices that riders' outcomes are faster when individuals race against each other than against the clock. This theory attracted different scholars' attention such as Wheeler (1970) who questions what influences individuals' behaviour.

Accordingly, Allport (1924), who coined the term social facilitation¹, also claims that individuals' performance is enhanced by the presence of others. So, it is obviously clear that the study of social influence was the driven agent for the emergence of this discipline. In 1908, social psychology has had its own body of literature such as Mc Dougglas' *Introduction to Social Psychology*, Ross's *Social Psychology*, to name but few.

During the Second World War, social psychologists' interests diverged to study attitudes instead of interpersonal influence (Allport, 1924, p.7). In this era, the study of attitudes was, originally, emerged in the USA. Various psychologists, led by Carl Hovland of Yale University, explored attitudes by focusing on the US army through examining the issues that affect troop morale. By the time, the concept of attitudes has become the centre of social psychology. Thus, many studies have been conducted as Murphy's *Experimental Social Psychology, Communication and Persuasion* (1953) by Hovland et al. Interestingly, the importance of attitudes has gradually increased (op.cit., p.7).

2.2. Attitude and Language Learning

The present subsection deals with attitudes in relation to language learning. In doing so, attitude definition, components, language attitudes besides the effect of attitudes on language learning are presented and discussed in relevance to the related literature.

2.2.1. Definition of attitude

It is evident that abstract concepts are hard to define, attitude is no exception. Semin and Fielder (1996) denote that "an attitude is, of course, hypothetical construct in the sense that

¹ A theory coined by Floyd Henry Allport in 1924. This theory addresses the audience effect. It assumes that individuals' performance enhances in the presence of others.

we cannot directly sense or measure it” (p. 4). Broadly defined, attitude is a person’s reaction to his surroundings. Specifically, it is:

“... like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents and peers’ attitudes, of contact with people who are “different” in any number of ways, and of interacting affective factors in the human experience. These attitudes form a part of one’s perception of self, of others, and of culture in which one is living” (Brown, 2007, p. 192-193).

As stated in the quote, attitudes result from the individuals’ social interaction. The social interaction includes the influence of the cultural, psychological and others’ attitudes as parents and peers. This means that parents, for instance, contribute to constructing their children’s attitudes. For example, the fact that parents dislike a football team may highly shape their children’s team first choice; this issue will be more discussed in section six.

These constructed attitudes, which are influenced and shaped in different ways, embody the realization of the self in relation to others as well as the cultural environment in which the self is living. This means that attitudes affect the way individuals perceive themselves, others, and the context in which they live. To put it differently, individuals’ behaviour is also influenced by the people with whom they interact. Ultimately, human behaviour is highly determined not only by a person’s characteristics, motives, personality traits, emotions, desires and interests but also by the social situation in which he lives.

2.2.2. Language attitudes:

Language attitudes refer to opinions people hold towards languages. Languages attitudes can be either positive or negative depending on many factors.

According to Gardner (1985), students’ ability to master a second language is not only shaped by their grammatical and communicative competence, but also by their attitudes towards the target language. He points out that attitudes highly contribute to language achievement, thus attitudes affect students’ beliefs and behaviours towards the target language and its community; speakers and culture.

Within the same framework, Baker (1992) posits that “in the life of a language, attitudes to that language appear to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death” (p. 9). This claim advocates the profound impact that attitudes can have on a language status in a certain country. To simplify, learners who have a positive language attitude contribute in preserving and maintaining that language as long as it is learned and practiced, whereas negative language attitude leads to the death of that language as it is neglected.

Accordingly, Ennaji (2005) claims that choosing a language to communicate with is related to the amount of like or dislike speakers display towards it. This means that the less a language is disliked, the more its use widens and varies. He puts forward that:

“The languages chosen for communication are generally those that people favor. The more a language is liked or appreciated, the more it is used in different domains. Similarly, a language that is disliked by speakers will be used less frequently” (p.157).

These notions of favour and disfavour are closely related to the concept of attitudes.

2.2.3. Attitude components:

Attitude has three components: the affective, the behavioural, and the cognitive. These components are also known as the ABC model of attitudes. First, the affective component deals with a person's feelings or emotions about the attitude object. It presents the like or dislike of the attitude object. Second, the behavioural component refers to the way people react and behave when they are exposed to the attitude object in a particular situation. Third, the cognitive component presents a person's beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge about the attitude object. It consists of four stages: the connection of the previous knowledge to the new one, the creation of the new knowledge, the checking of new knowledge, and the application of the new knowledge (Hogg and Vaughan, 2010, p. 94).

Applied to language attitudes, English language is the attitude object. The “like” of English reflects learners' affective component. The behavioural component can be revealed in many desired acts; reading a lot of English books, attending English classes regularly, and doing homework, for instance. The cognitive component reflects learners' awareness of the importance of English language in having access to the job market.

2.2.4. The effect of attitude on language learning

This section discusses the way in which attitudes can positively or negatively affect language learning. It also reviews previous scholars' work on this issue.

2.2.4.1. Attitudes in language learning:

Previous studies have indicated that attitudes can have a great influence on language learning either positively or negatively. The findings have shown that positive attitude facilitates learning. In general, learners possessing a negative attitude appear reluctant and passive to speak foreign languages in the classroom. By comparison, learners with a positive attitude towards foreign languages are highly motivated and active in the classroom: “...in

comparison with those individuals with negative attitudes, those with positive ones would be more attentive in the learning situation, would take assessments more seriously, would find it more rewarding to simply experience the language, and thus achieve more" (Gardner, 1985, p. 41).

Gardner (1985), as already mentioned, relates attitude to language achievement. He declares that language proficiency can only be achieved if learners have a positive attitude towards the target language. This positive attitude can be observed through students' seriousness and willingness to learn a language.

According to Gardner (1985), there are two types of attitudes that affect second language learning achievement: educational attitudes and social attitudes. The former includes attitudes toward the teacher, learning the language, and the course. The latter, on the other hand, emphasizes on the cultural implication of SLA. It embodies the disposition of individuals towards social groups, i.e., attitudes toward ethnocentrism. Gardner (1985) puts forward that educational attitudes are likely related to language achievement than social attitudes (p.41, 42).

Brown (2007) perceives attitudes from a socio-cultural perspective. Based on previous studies conducted to investigate the relation between attitudes and language success, Brown has indicated that: "it seems clear that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and, in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency" (Brown, 2007, p. 193). This means that the more positive attitudes learners possess, the more they are successful in achieving language proficiency and vice versa.

In this context, Lightbown and Spada's (2006) question the causality relationship between attitudes and language achievement. Despite Gardner's view which embodies that attitudes affect language achievement, the latter is claimed to be also responsible for engendering a positive attitude in learners. As a case in point, it can be stated that getting good marks in a school subject that learners do not feel motivated to study can engender a positive attitude towards learning that particular subject. In this vein, Lightbown and Spada (2006) put that "it is difficult to know whether positive attitudes produce successful learning or successful learning engenders positive attitudes, or whether both are affected by other factors" (p. 63).

2.3. The factors affecting attitudes

This subsection discusses the various factors that affect learners' attitudes towards language learning. These factors are classified as personality, affective, educational, parental and

socio-cultural factors. Accordingly, they will be identified and explained in relation to language learning.

2.3.1. Attitudes and age

Various studies (Jones 1975a; Jones 1950b; Jordan 1941) have shown that attitudes are influenced by age (cited in Gardner, 1985, p. 44). In this context, scholars have claimed that language attitudes become less positive as learners get older. This means that the more learners get older, the less their positive attitude towards learning a second or a foreign language becomes. Similarly, Baker (1992) promotes those studies as he claims that the older learners are, the more their negative attitude becomes (p. 41).

However, this claim is still inadequate for three main reasons. First, the reasons behind such decrease in attitudes are not clear as stated in Brown (2007, p. 44). Second, scientifically proven, the more humans, especially males, get older, after puberty, the more their two brains hemispheres are activated. Consequently, their learning perceptions and abilities develop. Third, this assumption relates attitudes to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which are far from being linked. Hence, age is related more to CPH. In addition, Attitude is a socio-psychological factor that affects language learning, whereas the CPH deals with language acquisition, claiming that native-likeness cannot be achieved after the age of puberty due to the lack of the brain plasticity.

2.3.2. Attitudes and sex differences

The studies of (Brustal 1957, Gagnon 1974, Gardner and Smythe 1975a, and Jones 1950b) (Gardner, op.cit., p. 44), on the relationship between sex differences and attitudes, have concluded that sex differences affect language attitudes. They postulate that girls show a more positive attitude towards language learning than boys do. In the same vein, a growing body of literature and research prove that girls are born with a language head start. In other words, girls' left hemisphere, during infancy, develops before the right one which facilitates foreign language learning. Consequently, they tend to speak faster and earlier. Girls have also a wide memory that enables them to learn vocabulary and spelling faster as they have twenty % of neurons in the Broca area which is responsible for language production. This claim explains girls' success in language learning more than boys.

2.3.3. Extroversion and introversion

Previous research, on the relationship between extroversion and introversion with attitudes, has shown that they are interrelated. According to Strong's study (1983), these personality traits highly influence attitudes toward language learning (cited in Atchade 2002, p. 46). It indicates that extroverted learners tend to demonstrate a positive attitude towards language learning as they learn faster than introverted learners. Taking into account that extroverted learners are always willing to take risks and show a great deal of enthusiasm and motivation, besides being lively, active and sociable, their interaction with the target language may enable them to improve their language input. However, so as to ensure the adequacy of such claim, which assumes that introverted learners have a negative attitude towards language learning, further investigation needs to be carried out.

2.3.4. Motivation

There is no clear-cut line between motivation and attitudes in the literature. Gardner and Lambert (1953), for instance, treat these two concepts as one factor that affects language achievement "...the motivation to learn a second language has been conceptualized as a combination of a positive attitude (desire) to learn the language and effort expended in that direction" (Gardner, 1979, p. 205 as cited in Van Els, et, al, 1984, p. 115).

Recently, the relation between these two aspects has been redefined. It is argued in the wide body of literature that attitudes are directly related to motivation which is in turn related to language learning. In this context, it is claimed that "..., attitudes should be viewed as motivational supports and not as factors which have a direct effect on L2 learning" (Van Els, et, al, 1984, p. 115). In other words, attitudes are no longer viewed as an independent factor in itself, but rather as one of the components or the motivational props that affect language learning. Van Els et al. (1984) go as far as to acknowledge that integrative and instrumental motivation affects attitudes differently. A learner who has an integrative motivation displays a positive attitude towards the target language as a whole, whereas instrumental motivation does not necessarily require learners to have a positive attitude towards language learning. If we postulate the same assumption on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, learners with intrinsic motivation have a more positive attitude towards language learning than those with extrinsic motivation.

By contrast, many studies have argued that instrumental motivation can highly develop language proficiency. Cooper and Fishman (1977) declare that "a basically instrumental view of English proved to be correlated to language proficiency" (p. 272).

Similarly, Gardner and Lambert (1972) reported, on a study conducted in Philippine, that “...students who approach the study of English with an instrumental outlook...are clearly more successful in developing proficiency in the language than are those who fail to adopt this orientation...” (p. 121-130).

In our view, regardless of the types of motivation, attitudes are still affected by motivation. In addition, students with a positive attitude towards language learning show a great amount of motivation in tasks accomplishment than those with a negative one.

2.3.5. Anxiety

It is argued in the literature that anxiety is one of the factors that influence learners' attitudes towards language learning. As a case in point, if the learning situation causes anxiety, learners are likely to display a negative attitude towards learning the language. To this end, learners become reluctant to speak and view the classroom as a stressful environment for language learning.

2.3.6. Parental influence

As regards to the socio-cultural perspective, it is suggested that parents have a significant influence on their children's attitudes development. Oskamp and Schultz (2005) claim that: “A child's attitudes are largely shaped by its own experience with the world, but this is usually accomplished by explicit teaching and implicit modelling of parental attitudes’ (p. 126 as cited in Bartam, 2010, p. 66).

This means that parental influence can exert an impact on children language attitudes. Within the same framework, Gardner (1985) has suggested that parental influence on children's language attitudes has two main roles: the active role and the passive role (p. 109-110).

The active role deals with the ways in which parents interact with their children in language learning. It is divided into positive and negative active role. The positive active role involves parents' encouragement, rewarding and monitoring to their children in language learning. The negative active role refers to the parents' discouraging behaviours towards the target language; under evaluating the target language, or regarding languages as not essential for their children to learn (Gardner, 1985, pp: 109-110).

The passive role, by contrast, deals with the effect of parents' attitudes towards the target language community on their children. To clarify, a positive parental attitude towards the target language speakers would support their children integrative motivation to learn the

language. A negative parental attitude would inhibit the development of children's positive attitude towards the target language, on the other hand (Gardner, 1985, pp: 109-110).

2.3.7. Educational factors:

In relation to language learning, many studies have shown that a positive attitude makes learning more easy and enjoyable. The learners' perceptions of the classroom, the teacher, and the language are considered factors that affect learners' attitudes towards language learning.

As regards to the classroom, one might suggest that a free-stress classroom environment can highly shape students' positive language attitude to learn. This can only be achieved in a classroom where mistakes are regarded as opportunities to learn instead of being punished. Teachers can create an enjoyable environment where learners can easily and freely express themselves and speak the language. On this view, teachers should consider mistakes as a proof that learning is taking place. In addition, Classroom arrangement can also affect students' attitudes towards language learning. This means that the more the setting arrangement is comfortable the more students will be engaged in the learning process and their positive attitude will be developed.

Additionally, the fact that teachers' attitudes affect students' one is true. On the one hand, teachers' positive attitude displays the feeling of favour that they possess towards foreign language. This inherits and enhances students' positive attitude towards learning foreign languages. On the other hand, teachers with negative attitude may show a feeling of disfavour towards the target language. As a result, students' positive attitude to learning foreign languages can decrease.

2.3.8. Socio-cultural factors

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972, p. 134), ethnocentrism influences language attitudes. They have argued that: "if the student's attitude is highly ethnocentric and hostile, we have seen that no progress to speak of will be made in acquiring any aspects of the language" (as cited in Bartam, 2010, p. 71). To simplify, learners who perceive their language to be better and superior to other languages directly reject learning a foreign language as they exhibit a negative attitude towards the target language. Dissimilarly, students who are aware of the cultural differences, in which language is a part, demonstrate a sense of tolerance and acceptance to learn a foreign language. Thus, they can develop a positive attitude toward foreign language learning. Therefore, the less ethnocentric learners are, the more their positive attitude towards learning the language of other cultures will be.

2.4. Related studies

Azizifar² et al. (2014) conduct a study on EFL learners' adults' attitudes towards learning speaking in Iran. This issue is investigated in terms of its three components: affective, cognitive and behavioural. Surprisingly, the results have shown that while the participants have a negative behavioural attitude towards learning speaking, they have positive cognitive and affective attitudes towards it. In other words, Albeit most of the participants like English and feel excited whenever they hear it or speak it, and find the classroom activities enjoyable, most of them carelessly do their homework. Also, they do not prepare the lesson before attending the classroom and even show no interest to come to their English classes.

This claim is also noticed in Abidin's (2012) study, entitled *EFL Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Language: the Case of Libyan Secondary School Students*. The study shows that the participants hold a negative behavioural attitude as they feel unreleased whenever they have to speak English in the classroom (p. 5). Similarly, Shams' (2008) study, *language attitudes: the case of Jordan*, concluded that the majority of the participants feel nervous and anxious whenever they speak English in front of their classmates (as cited in Abidin, 2012, p.6).

One might suggest that such a negative attitude can result from a variety of reasons. In her investigation about *Moroccan EFL high school learners and teachers' perception of the teaching/learning process of the speaking skill*, Sakale (2012) comes to conclude that speaking is taught: (1) with very limited communication aids; (2) in settings mostly uncomfortable for both students and teachers; (3) with unclear (mostly oral) instructions that students fail to decipher; and (4) with a quite restricted teachers' feedback of being "pushed up" towards speaking (p. 10). All these reasons can deeply affect EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking as well.

As far as the Moroccan context is concerned, previous studies have shown that EFL learners generally have a positive attitude towards the English language. Bziker³ (2014), as a case in point, conducts a study about *The Impact of Moroccan Students' Attitude towards*

² Akbar azizifar is from Iran. He got his B.A in Teaching English Language and Literature in the University of Ilam in 2002. He has M. A in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the University of Arak, in 2007 and Ph. D in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Islamic Azad University, in 2007.

³ Zakaria Bziker is a Ph.D. student at Ibn-Tofail University (Kenitra, Morocco). He obtained his bachelor degree in general linguistics and his master degree in education (TEFL). He is preparing his dissertation on intercultural communication currently.

English on Speaking Skill. The study results reveal that the majority of students, 1st year baccalaureate, possess a positive attitude towards speaking. It is also claimed that about 48% out of 100% of teachers' participants claim that students prefer speaking and find it enjoyable in comparison to other skills.

The absence of a common consensus among the previous findings, about the issue under evaluation, results in making attitudes a debatable socio-psychological field of study. Thus, more research is to be conducted in order to insightfully investigate the correlation between attitudes and speaking in an EFL context. In the few coming chapters, attitude in relation to speaking will be the primary focus. Therefore, this issue will be explored and examined to identify the correlation between Moroccan EFL attitudes towards speaking in the classroom and their speaking proficiency.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research questions:

The present research paper tends to answer the following questions:

- i. What kind of attitudes do Moroccan EFL learners have towards speaking in the classroom?
- ii. Do students who have got a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom are good speakers?
- iii. What can be suggested as remedies to reverse EFL learners' negative attitude towards speaking in the classroom and maintain others' positive one?

3.2. Research Hypotheses:

- i. Moroccan EFL learners have a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom.
- ii. There is a positive relationship between EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom and their speaking proficiency.

3.3. The significance of the study:

The significance of the present study lies in its possibility to provide practical solutions to help Moroccan EFL teachers, specifically, deal with students possessing a negative attitude towards speaking English. Investigating Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes could enable teachers to develop their students' positive attitude to participate in the learning process at the level of speech. Further, conducting such a study will familiarize teachers with the concept of attitudes in relation to attainment in language learning, and speaking in particular. This, therefore, may insightfully help teachers to best select suitable teaching methods and techniques to be used in the classroom to teach speaking.

3.4. Design

The present study is correlational in its nature, and the variables identified are attitudes and speaking. Accordingly, “attitudes” is the independent variables, whereas “speaking” is the dependent variable. The research methods opted for in this study mediates between quantitative and qualitative. Hence, in order to collect ordinal data, a questionnaire is used to generalize responses from the participants using the Likert scale. The means follows an arithmetic average of the responses with: (1) for strongly agree, (2) for agree, (3) for neutral, (4) for disagree, and (5) for strongly disagree. Second, a test is employed to identify the participants’ speaking proficiency level. The rating scale of the speaking test administered for the participants’ oral performance is out of twenty, distributed as follows: (4) for very good, (3) for good, (2) acceptable and (1) for inadequate. The responses will be analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

The correlation coefficient will be analyzed and interpreted using *The Pearson product-moment correlation*. In doing so, the speaking test and the questionnaire results will be calculated to identify the correlation between both variables; attitudes and speaking. To illustrate, if the test results reveal that the participants are good speakers and the questionnaire indicates that they have a positive attitude towards speaking, it can be deduced, then, that there is a significant relationship between speaking and attitudes and vice versa.

3.5. Participants

The target population in the present study is Moroccan EFL learners; 1st year baccalaureate students, specifically. The study follows a convenient selection. The participants will contribute to investigating the correlation of two variables; attitudes and speaking. With no distinction, the entire group has answered the questionnaire and taken the speaking test. The total number of the participants is 80. The target population is taught by a female teacher. The participants share similar features: they are all Moroccans, they all study English, and they are not required to take the baccalaureate exam. As regards to their differences, some of them belong to urban areas while others to rural areas besides their parents’ socio-economic and intellectual backgrounds. The population presents Ibn Abbad secondary high school where the internship takes place. It is a secondary high school located in Kenitra city.

3.6. Instruments

The present study employs three data collection instruments. These instruments are the questionnaire, the test, and the observation. The questionnaire is used to generate data about the participants’ attitudes towards speaking. The test is employed to identify the participants’

speaking proficiency level. The observation is used to generate frequency data concerning learners' behaviour inside the classroom.

The questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section targets Ibn Abbad EFL students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The second aims to determine their attitudes towards speaking in the classroom; only the second section will be targeted in this study as it directly relates to the issue under investigation. The questionnaire items are adopted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Gardner conducts a set of studies on students' motivation and attitudes and their effects on language achievement in a second language context. Some items are modified, added, and deleted.

Taking into account that attitudes cannot be tested but measured, the questionnaire is a reliable instrument that can be used to achieve this aim. Oppenheim (1992) points out that the questionnaire is "...an important instrument of research, a tool for data collection. The questionnaire has a job to do: its function is measurement" (p. 100). It is worth pointing here that one of the advantages of the questionnaire over other data collection techniques is its possibility to be administered to a large number of populations.

As far as the speaking test is concerned, score data is generated. Thus, score data "show **how much** of a variable is present in the data. The data are **continuous** but the intervals of the scale may be either **ordinal** or **interval** measurements of how much" (Hatsh and Lazaraton, 1991, p. 62). In other words, the speaking test is used to generate data about Moroccan EFL learners speaking proficiency level.

As regards to observation, frequency data is generated. Frequency data" show **how often** a variable is present in the data" (ibid.). Simply put, the observation contributes to generating data about students' behaviour in the classroom which reveals their attitudes towards speaking as positive or negative.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom

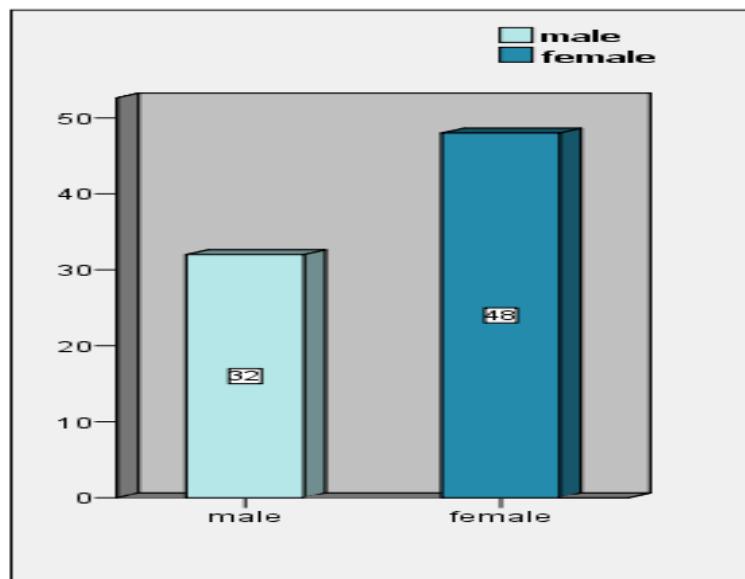
The first research question tends to identify Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes toward speaking in the classroom. In doing so, eight question items related to speaking are investigated and classified as students' attitudes towards (1) speaking English fluently, (2) getting anxious while speaking in class, (3) volunteering answers in class, (4) participating in class, (5) giving opinion in class, (6) the importance of speaking, (7) feeling knowledgeable when speaking English, and (7) classroom speaking activities.

The findings of this research question reveal that the majority of pupils (62, 57 %) have a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom, which might be explained by the

fact that most of them favor participating and giving their opinion in their English class as pointed in *figures 4 and 5*. This result is consistent with the findings of Bziker's (2014) study about *The Impact of Attitude on Speaking Skill*. His study shows that the majority of 1st year baccalaureate students display a positive attitude towards speaking as they find English easier than other foreign languages, namely, French in addition to many other factors such as Media influence, parents, peers, to name but few. Similarly, ALShaar's (1997) study results reflect students' high positive attitude (81%) towards learning English in general.

The present study findings can also be explained by the fact that the majority of students are females as shown in the graph below:

Figure 1: The distribution of students according to their gender



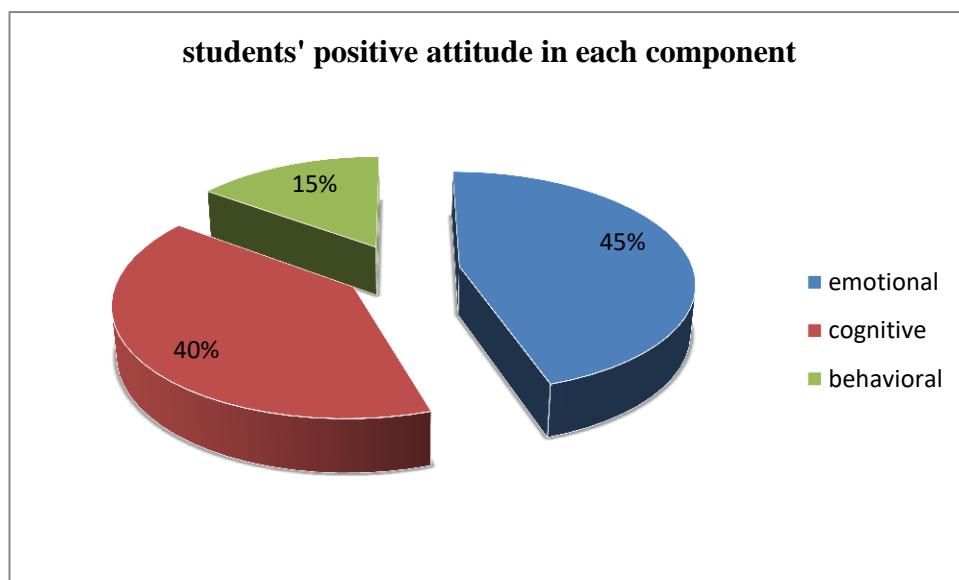
In the same vein, the studies of (Brustal 1957, Gagnon 1974, Gardener and Smythe 1975a, and Jones 1950b) support this claim. Their studies show that females exhibit a more positive attitude towards learning languages than males do which is the case in this study. Ashaar's (1997) study; *Attitudes and Motivation of Second Language Learners in Kuwait*, on the other hand, indicates no significant difference in terms of gender as far as attitudes towards language learning is concerned. This difference can be traceable to a variety of reasons namely context variation; taking into account that the aforementioned study is conducted in a second language context, whereas the present is carried out in a foreign language context.

As far as the three main components of attitude; affective, cognitive and behavioral, are concerned, the results demonstrate that while students display a positive cognitive (72.4%) and emotional (77.5%) attitude towards speaking in the classroom, they hold a

negative behavioral attitude towards it. Surprisingly, although students display a favorable attitude towards speaking English fluently, enjoying the speaking activities, feeling knowledgeable while speaking English in front of their classmates, most of them (47,4%) get anxious whenever they have to speak in the classroom. Further, students' positive cognitive attitude towards speaking indicates their awareness of the importance of speaking foreign languages, English in particular, in their academic achievement and future career. Similarly, ALShaar's (1997) study reveals that most of the responses have a high level of anxiety (61%) towards speaking English and participating in class.

Generally, the pie chart below shows the percentages of students' positive attitude in each component as regards to the present study.

Figure 2: The percentage of students' positive attitude in each component



These findings are constant with Abidin's (2012) study that targets *EFL Libyan Secondary School Students' Attitudes towards Learning English*. The latter also shows that the participants have a negative behavioral attitude as they feel unreleased whenever they speak English. Interestingly, the same result is indicated in Shams' (2008) study, which also reveals that the majority of the participants feel anxious whenever they speak English in front of their classmates. Similarly, Juhana's (2012) study indicates that students are reluctant to speak because of their high anxiety as most of them feel nervous that what they say may be wrong in addition to their fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence.

This result can be explained by a variety of factors. First, the participants are not exposed to speak English outside the classroom, therefore, their familiarity with speaking

English is only restricted to the learning context. Second, feeling afraid of being punished if they make a mistake can also increase their worry and anxiety whenever they speak in the classroom. Third, being concerned with not losing face in front of their classmates, students get anxious when they have to speak in the classroom. Last, their lack of vocabulary and finding difficulties in conveying what they mean can highly affect their speaking proficiency.

On the basis of what has been said, it seems that the finding of the first research question; *EFL learners' display a positive attitude towards speaking* totally supports the aforementioned research studies.

4.2. The correlation of students' positive attitude and their speaking proficiency

The second research question aims at determining the correlation between EFL students' attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency. In doing so, students' speaking test and their attitudes scores have been computed using the interval scale. The results of the second research question indicate that students' attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency are negatively correlated. This means that the more one variable increases, the other decreases. Implemented to the present case, although students' attitude towards speaking is positive, they lack speaking proficiency. The results show that the two variables are also dissimilar with different *means*; attitudes' $M=12, 01$, whereas speaking $M= 8, 12$.

The study of correlation has been conducted by other researchers. Ashaar (1997) studies the correlation between the affective variables (attitudes and motivation) and learning a second language, as an instance. His findings show that there is a significant positive correlation between the aforementioned variables. Interestingly, the present research findings match with Ashaar's results. It indicates that there is a significant correlation between learners' attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency, but negatively, as noted earlier in *figure 9*. In other words, in spite of their positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom, learners have a low speaking proficiency level.

This negative correlation can be explained by linguistic and non-linguistic factors. As regards to the linguistic factors, learners lack the communicative competence. First, as far as the grammatical competence is concerned, the informants not only lack the rules of the English language but also are unable to use them accurately in oral situations. Second, regarding discourse competence, Moroccan EFL learners, the participants, in particular, are incapable of constructing meaningful conversations to form a coherent meaning. Third, concerning the sociolinguistic competence, the majority of the participants do not use the

English language appropriately; they produce informal language inside the classroom, most of the time. Fourth, the majority of Moroccan EFL learners lack the strategic competence. Consequently, they switch to Moroccan Arabic whenever they feel stuck.

As for the non-linguistic variables, they are summarized as stated by Sakale (2010) in her study about the investigation of *Moroccan EFL learners and teachers' perceptions of the teaching/learning process of the speaking skill*. She points out that speaking is generally taught as an integrated element with other skills, in uncomfortable classroom management, with very limited communication aids and with restricted corrective feedback to students while speaking, among others. The above-mentioned factors minimize EFL learners' opportunities to practise speaking in the classroom which negatively affects their oral proficiency. Consequently, speaking becomes not only a difficult task for learners to accomplish but with a little opportunity to achieve fluency that the majority of learners wish to have, as demonstrated in *figure 1*.

Further, the exclusion of speaking from exams exerts an impact on the students' oral proficiency. Thus, the types of classroom speaking activities that learners are introduced to mediate only between the responsive and transactional, presumably. This means that other classroom speaking activities such as funny stories, poems, role play, songs, etc, which are considered crucial in teaching and improving students speaking skill, are probably almost absent for being employed. This can also negatively affects learners' ability to speak fluently and accurately.

Another noteworthy factor lies in the fact that those few speakers in the classroom are found to participate only for grades and teacher impressing. Similarly, Bziker's (2014) study, as a case in point, shows that the majority (64%) of the informants, teachers, who are inquired about students' concern when they speak in class indicate that students do not listen for the sake of understanding what is said by the teacher, but rather to respond quickly and to be the first who gives an answer before others too. Interestingly, the same informants agree that another concern of their students is to try to impress them although they are not good at English. Significantly, the present study findings demonstrate that albeit the participants possess a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom they are not good at it (speaking test $M= 8.12$).

The observed correlation between students' positive attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency in the data is not in the expected direction as *table 13* demonstrates. This means that the data findings are inconsistent with the present research hypothesis and even claim the opposite. This indicates that the positive correlation between these two variables that the study aims to prove to be correct is wrong. Differently put,

although students favourable attitudes towards speaking in the classroom, most of them are not consistent with a good level of English. Consequently, the correlation is unidirectional as it is one tailed hypothesis.

Figure 2: The expected result concerning the correlation between students' attitudes towards speaking and their speaking proficiency

| | | Speaking test | attitudes |
|---------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Speaking test | Pearson Correlation | 1 | ,243* |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | ,028 |
| | N | 62 | 62 |
| attitudes | Pearson Correlation | ,243* | 1 |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | ,028 |
| | N | 62 | 62 |

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).**

This means that displaying a positive attitude is not enough to be a good speaker. Thus, there might other factors that relate to speaking more than attitude. However, students' positive orientations provide an optimistic view towards the English language in the Moroccan context.

Generally, the second research result contrasts with that of Gardner (1985) who postulates that language proficiency, in general, can highly be achieved if learners possess a positive attitude towards the target language; French as a second language in that context. Other studies, on the other hand, indicate that language achievement is related to other variables mainly motivation, age, gender, to name but few.

All in all, these findings reject the second research hypothesis: *EFL learners possessing a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom are good speakers*, and prove it to be wrong.

4.3. Pedagogical implications and remedial work

In an answer to the third research question, a set of remedies is provided in what follows. Although students' emotional and cognitive attitudes towards speaking in the classroom are positive, they possess a negative behavioural attitude towards speaking. Based on the

research findings, there are many ways in which teachers can contribute to reverse students' negative attitude in the classroom as well as maintain the positive attitude of the others.

First, teachers can reduce students' anxiety by creating a free-stress environment in which students oral mistakes are regarded as opportunities for learning rather than a lack of competence. Second, the creation of a cooperative environment inside the classroom rather than competitive environment can also reinforce students' self-confidence to speak without feeling afraid of being laughed at. Thus, group and pair work can positively shift students' negative behavioural attitude. Third, reducing the teacher talking time and increasing student talking time can indeed improve their ability and familiarity with using the language inside the classroom. This can be achieved by diversifying the classroom speaking activities including role play, dialogue, storytelling, poetry, etc.

Further, teachers' attitudes can highly affect students' attitudes. In this regard, teachers should also display a positive attitude towards what they are teaching so as to motivate students to speak. They can also adopt new teaching approaches mainly student-centred approach in order to engage students in all the steps of learning FLs, English in particular. Additionally, teachers should change their mind about the fact that students are all the same, therefore; the same approach will work with all learners. Hence, teachers should take learners' differences into consideration while teaching speaking besides other language skills. This can be done, for instance, by asking extroverted learners to perform a speaking task before shy ones. By doing so, shy learners will get familiar with the situation and, therefore, feel released while accomplishing the activity.

Moreover, taking into account that some have a negative cognitive attitude towards speaking English, teachers should highlight its importance as a language in their further studies and future career. Besides, changing the classroom arrangement during speaking activities; debates, discussions, can refresh students desire to learn and speak inside the classroom as the majority favours to voice their opinions and interests. Thus, teachers can even participate in different speaking activities to motivate students to speak without worrying about their competence in English.

As far as curriculum makers and textbook designers are concerned, learners' perceptions and attitudes about learning foreign languages should be taking into account while designing textbooks. Also, speaking should not be taken as a part of communication in textbooks, but rather as an independent skill that has to be targeted in the classroom separately. Curriculum makers and textbook designers should also get insights from previous research conducted on learners' personalities and its effect on language achievement in order to put the findings into practice through setting new learning situations, updated topics, issues

related to learners in the first place without neglecting their affective factors and cultural background.

5. CONCLUSION

This research studies the correlation between Moroccan EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking in the classroom and their speaking proficiency. The results of the descriptive analysis, of EFL students' responses about their attitudes towards speaking, show that the majority possess a positive attitude towards speaking in the classroom, in general. It is found that most of them have a positive emotional and cognitive attitude towards speaking as most of them favour speaking, enjoy the classroom speaking activities, like to participate and give opinion as well as aware of speaking importance. Unlikely, the majority of them as well hold a negative behavioural attitude towards speaking in the sense that they feel anxious whenever they have to speak in the classroom. As far as the correlation between their attitudes and speaking proficiency is concerned, the findings indicate that the correlation between students' attitudes and their speaking proficiency is significant. However, the correlation reveals to be negative due to a variety of factors; linguistic and non-linguistic.

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