

Multilingual learners' attitudes towards, and expectations of, foreign language instructors

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Abstract

As multilingual education gains traction in Asia, and multilanguage programs continue to develop, further research into multilingual acquisition will be vital. Such programs add a unique dynamic, and a greater degree of complexity to our understanding of English language education in EFL contexts, and call for much of what we know in that regard to be investigated anew. We are fortunate at Kanda to have established programs covering multiple languages that afford us the opportunity to conduct such research.

This study, one of a number of ongoing projects focusing on MLA, investigated a group of university students enrolled in multilingual programs at KUIS. It aimed to assess learner attitudes towards, and expectations of, their foreign language lecturers across the double language major programs. Although studies investigating English language teachers in this construct are abundant, few have focused on multilingual programs and of those, all have been very Euro-centric. This study sought to bridge that gap.

The participants in this study completed a multi sectional survey investigating linguistic and cultural competence, pedagogical skills and styles, and behavioral and attitudinal traits. Their attitudes were then measured through a variation of the Fishbein Model (Fishbein, 1967; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), a weighted additive design, and were compared using inferential statistics. Results indicated some key differences in learners' views of their English and Regional Language instructors, with potential fundamental implications for multilingual education.

Introduction

Kanda University of International Studies (“KUIS”) is one of a select few institutions in Japan with multilanguage programs. There are two separate multilanguage departments at KUIS: The Department of Asian Languages includes Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian majors, and the Ibero-America Department, which is comprised of Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese majors. To further complicate matters, not all students in the departments are enrolled in what we would class as multilanguage programs. Chinese, Korean, and Spanish majors at KUIS are not currently required to take a full load of English courses. Consequently, this study only focused on the students who were double language majors, in that they were studying English (L2) and one of the following regional languages (RL) in equal measure: Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, and Brazilian Portuguese. Most students in this study had no prior formal instruction in their RL (L3), with only a small number of them having familial, cultural or other ties to places or people connected to those languages. They had all undergone a number of years of formal English instruction but were, for the most part, experiencing the L3 for the first time. As programs of this type are rare in Japan and, indeed, any EFL context, it affords us the opportunity to conduct some rather unique research in a fairly new and expanding field. It is also hoped that the results will further inform our program and best practice going forward.

This project was conceived as a pilot study for a much larger, more robust investigation into student attitudes towards, and expectations of foreign language instructors in multilingual constructs. As such, it is quite limited in scope.

However, initial results were encouraging, and warrant discussion in their own right.

Background

Multilingual programs

There is a paucity of research into multilanguage programs, with what little that does exist being very Euro-centric, and/or concerned primarily with multilingual communities in places such as Geneva, Quebec, and the Basque region of Spain. Research over the last 20 years has heralded the emergence of English as a global language, which has raised many questions about the ownership of the language, language variation, and language standards, amongst other things (Crooks, 2009). Debate about the role of English as a lingua franca, and the codification of a new English as an international language (Jenkins, 2000, 2006; Seidlhofer, B., 2004, 2005) rages on. Multilingualism, on the other hand, remains a niche. This is somewhat surprising, as Jessner (2008) notes: The intensification of international and interregional contact, migration, and transnational economic cooperation has made multilingualism a vital component of many people's identity. However, as multilanguage programs, particularly in EFL contexts are still rare, we are only just beginning to grasp the potential implications for the stakeholders involved. With their expansion, focused studies on MLA and multilingual education will be imperative to ensuring that such programs are meeting the needs of students, teachers, institutions, and the global community.

Comparing teachers

There are many studies that focus on the Native Speaker ('NS') vs Non-Native

Speaker (NNS) dichotomy with regard to teachers of English. It is still a heavily researched area, despite findings suggesting a myriad of results and often disparate pedagogical implications (Kachru, 1992; Kramsch, 1997; Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Chueng & Braine, 2007; Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). Much of this research has focused on ESL students, though the number of investigations into EFL instructors has increased (see Crooks, 2009). In the past NS and NNS teachers were viewed as two different and distinctly discernible categories, however recent research in the field has put this notion under increasing scrutiny (Medgyes, 1992). Categorisation of this type is often arbitrary, and increasingly problematic (McKay, 2002). No distinction is made throughout this study as to whether or not a teacher would be considered a 'native' or 'non-native' speaker of the languages being taught. Its aim is not to analyse the degree of an instructor's 'nativeness', but rather to further our understanding of learners' expectations of their instructors comparatively across the languages they are studying.

No studies to date have investigated student attitudes towards, and expectations of their foreign language instructors in multilingual EFL contexts. Research on the 'NS' v 'NNS' dichotomy is perhaps most relevant in its construction, though largely theoretically irrelevant (see Medyges, 1992; 1994). Models are helpful, however, and it is for that purpose that this study has adapted similar instrumentation and measures.

Research Question

In order to pilot the instrumentation for the larger study, and to test the efficacy of

the Fishbein Model, one largely exploratory research question investigating the cognitive (beliefs) component of attitudes (Weneger & Fabrigar, 2003) was posed:

1. *What are the attitudes of double language majors at KUIS towards their English and Regional Language instructors?*

In other words, what characteristics do multilanguage learners value in their language instructors, and to what degree do they perceive their instructors across language majors exhibit these characteristics?

Methodology

There were 29 participants drawn from a group of students in each of the double language major programs enrolled in a Freshman English course at KUIS. All students were asked to complete a multi sectional survey on Google Forms to assess their attitudes towards their English and Regional Language instructors. Each question on the survey was filtered into one of three sub-categories: *LCC* - linguistic and cultural competence, *PSS* - pedagogical skills and styles, and *BAT* - behavioral and attitudinal traits (see Crooks, 2009). There were 12 questions in total on the survey (see Figure 1), which were categorized as follows: 4 LCC questions, 5 PSS questions and 3 BAT questions.

Figure 1: Characteristics

	Question
1	Is able to communicate well orally (LCC)
2	Has a good knowledge of the rules of grammar (LCC)
3	Teaches about their culture in lessons (LCC)
4	Has a graduate degree (Masters or PhD) in teaching languages (LCC)
5	Is always well prepared for lessons (PSS)
6	Gives clear explanations of language points (PSS)
7	Provides interesting and relevant study materials (PSS)
8	Gives me plenty of feedback on my performance and progress (PSS)
9	Encourages students to become independent learners (PSS)
10	Is friendly and smiles a lot (BAT)
11	Creates a good classroom atmosphere (BAT)
12	Treats students with respect (BAT)

Results were measured using the Fishbein Model (Fishbein 1967; Fishbein & Azjen, 1975), a compensatory model “which is designed to handle multi-attribution and salience within attitude measurement by computing both the factors that are of importance to respondents in determining an attitude towards an object and the degree to which they evaluate the object in terms of those different factors” (Crooks, 2009: 21). Essentially, the Fishbein Model calculates the product of belief (evaluation of the category against each attribute). It is commonly used in consumer analyses, where extended versions of the model are designed to ‘predict’ behaviour. In this study the respondents rated the importance of a number of attributes of a ‘good’ teacher, and indicated the frequency of their observation of those attributes in their lecturers (see Figures 2 and 3). It should again be noted that no distinction was made between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ teachers, since both teach courses in each department, and that no specific teachers or courses were

identified.

Figure 2: Importance scale

Importance 重要性			
Not important 重要ではない	Slightly important 若干重要	Important 重要	Very important とても重要

Figure 3: Frequency scale example

Exhibited by your regional language teachers 専攻言語の担当教員にみられる特性				
Very rarely 滅多にみられない	Rarely 稀にしかみられな	Sometimes 時々みられる	Often とても重要	Very often とても重要

In mathematical terms the Fishbein Model is:

$$A_o = \sum b_i v_i$$

The attitude (A_o) towards an object is equal (=) to the sum (\sum) of the products of the belief about each attribute of the object ($b_i v_i$), weighted by the evaluation of the importance or value of each attribute. This weighted attitude model allows for the investigation of the importance of an attribute, where traditional instrumentation might only be able to tell us how often it is exhibited.

A series of paired t -tests were then conducted to compare the belief/value products for English and RL teachers on each attribute. Further paired sample t -tests were run to compare the English and RL teachers on the three sub-dimensions: LCC, PSS, and BAT.

Results

Initial results indicated that there were indeed some statistically significant differences between the students' attitudes towards the characteristics displayed by the English and RL teachers. In the following tables detailed descriptive statistics for the belief value products for English teachers and Regional Language teachers are shown. The maximum possible mean score for a product, if each of the respondents were to rate the characteristic as very important, and to judge that it was exhibited very often by the category of teacher in question, is 20 (Crooks, 2009). The actual range was between 16.54 for *is fluent in the language*: (RL) and 5.92 for *has a graduate degree (Masters or PhD) in teaching languages*: (EL).

Table 1 shows the 4 highest belief/value product scores for individual attributes/teacher categories:

Table 1: Highest belief/value scores

Rank	Attribute/Teacher Category	Category	Mean/Fishbein
1	Is fluent in the language: RL	LCC	16.54
2	Gives me plenty of feedback on my performance and progress: RL	PSS	16.50
3	Is friendly and smiles a lot: EL	BAT	16.37
4	Has a good knowledge of the rules of grammar: RL	LCC	16.27

Positive evaluations of Regional Language teachers against characteristics deemed to be important accounted for three of the four highest scores. The list also involved more products with LCC traits. For English teachers, participants rated *'is friendly and smiles a lot'* to be both very important, and an often exhibited trait

amongst their instructors.

Table 2 shows the 4 lowest belief/value scores.

Table 2: Lowest belief/value scores

Rank	Attribute/Teacher Category	Category	Mean/Fishbein
1	Has a graduate degree (Masters or PhD) in teaching languages: (EL)	LCC	5.92
2	Has a graduate degree (Masters or PhD) in teaching languages: (RL)	LCC	8.94
3	Encourages students to become independent learners (EL)	PSS	9.87
4	Treats students with respect: (RL)	BAT	11.05

English and Regional Language teachers shared the lowest belief/value scores. It is interesting to note that the LCC trait had both the lowest belief value scores, and the highest. That is, the linguistic and cultural competence of the teachers was deemed both the most and least important characteristic trait, which may indicate that this category needs to be split into more distinct sub categories in future studies so as to highlight which attributes are or are not important. Interestingly, results indicated that it wasn't very important for either English, or Regional Language teachers to hold a graduate degree. Results for English teachers also show that participants did not believe that this trait was often exhibited, meaning they did not believe their English teachers possessed the qualifications in question. Given the relatively well-qualified members of the ELI at KUIS delivering these lessons, this shows that students are largely unaware of their instructors' qualifications. Even if they were, however, they still note that it is of little importance. Further research into these results is required.

A series of paired *t*-tests were conducted to compare the belief value products for English and RL teachers on each attribute. Results are exhibited in Table 3.

Table 3: Belief/value scores for attributes

Characteristics	Category	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>d</i>
Has a graduate degree (Masters or PhD in teaching languages)	LCC	-3.19	5.36	-2.73	.013	0.54
Is friendly and smiles a lot	BAT	2.62	4.70	2.57	.019	0.67
Creates a good classroom atmosphere	BAT	2.43	4.74	2.35	.029	0.56

Three of the pairs revealed statistically significant variation, with medium effect sizes (Cohen's *d*). The results indicated that there was a difference in whether or not it was important for teachers to have a graduate degree. Participants indicated that the RL exhibited this trait and that the English language teachers did not. However, the students also rated this trait as being of little importance in either their English or Regional Language teachers. The other two characteristics with statistical significance were *is friendly and smiles a lot*, and *creates a good classroom atmosphere*. Results indicated that these were important characteristics that were exhibited more frequently by the English Language teachers.

Table 4 shows the paired sample *t*-tests for the three sub-dimensions, LCC, PSS, and BAT. They were run to compare the English and RL teachers in each category.

Table 4: Belief/value scores for Categories

Categories		Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>d</i>
Linguistic and Cultural Competence	LCC	-6.57	14.26	-2.11	.048	0.47
Pedagogical Skills and Styles	BAT	-4.67	11.53	-1.85	.079	0.26
Behavioural and Attitudinal Traits	BAT	6.76	11.94	2.60	.017	0.59

Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in favour of RL teachers in the belief/value product scores on LCC attributes. Differences for PSS were not statistically significant, however BAT was significant in favour of English teachers. These results warrant further, and more robust statistical analysis, with allowances for larger sample sizes and necessary statistical adjustments, as well as triangulation in data collection and methodology.

Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the efficacy of the Fishbein Model and test the instrumentation for a larger project. In so doing, it also provided a useful set of data from which we can draw inferences about student attitudes towards, and expectations of foreign language instructors in multilanguage programs. It highlighted a number of key differences between English and Regional language instructors, all of which warrant further investigation.

Although initial findings indicate that there were indeed some statistically significant results, there were limitations due to the nature of pilot studies with limited cohorts. Only the *cognitive* construct of attitude was investigated. *Affective*

factors must also be considered, as they are essential in any research conducted on attitudes. Furthermore, quantitative analyses of attitudes are, on their own, limited. They can easily tell us *what* is happening, but are often wholly inadequate when we want to know *why*. Qualitative measures will therefore also need to be considered in future research designs. However, despite these limitations it is evident that multilingualism and multilingual education are gaining traction, and that projects aimed at furthering our understating of their unique constructs warrant further study. Our preliminary investigations indicated some variation between students' attitudes towards their English and Regional Language teachers. Stage two of this study will attempt to shed more light on these findings. Further research into multilingualism and multilingual education is key to understanding our program, and our students at Kanda University. Furthermore, studies of this nature will also hopefully have positive pedagogical implications for other multilingual programs.

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