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### Attitudes of High School Students toward Foreign Language Learning in Public and Non-public Education System: A demographic Approach

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Abstract: English foreign language has recently become an obligatory subject in the elementary school curricula since the first grade in Albanian education system. This paper presents the attitudes of high school students towards the context of learning the language, addressed by two scales, according to International Attitude Motivation Test Battery, (Gardner, 2004): foreign language teacher evaluation and foreign language class evaluation. It also aims to find the variances of students' attitudes according to three groups of schools: urban public high school, rural public high school and non-public high school. The subjects in this research are N=1800 high school students from five main districts in Albania, by a random sample selection method. The analysis of descriptive statistics for mean values, frequencies of the variable `attitudes` and a two way ANOVAs procedure to investigate for the variances of attitudes between the groups of schools. It resulted that from a Likert scale from 1-6, the mean value for the variable of attitudes was M=4.5, revealing that high school students have positive attitudes towards English language learning context, though not very highly positive. The research also found significant statistical differences of attitudes between the groups of schools at the value: p = .000 so p<.05, F (2.1798) = 7.789. However the differences between the groups were very low. Post Hoc Tukey HSD procedure found that variances of attitudes for the urban public high school and rural public high school were at the value: .19161, p =.00; for the urban public high school and non-public high school the difference was: .00426, p = 1 and for the rural public high school and non-public high school the difference was: -.14846, p=.09. However, these results are significant only for the groups of urban public high school and rural public high school, p = .00, p < .05.

Keywords: Students' attitudes, Foreign language learning, Urban public high school, Teacher evaluation, Foreign language class evaluation, Rural public high school, Non-public high school

#### Introduction

Given the importance English language has in Albania, due to many factors, primarily for its integrative role that has driven Albanian people to learn it over the last three decades, during post-communist era, the education policy makers have produced many reforms closely related to both formally learning and teaching this language. All the national educational strategies have foreseen that English language should be studied throughout the







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whole pre-university curricula till high education (Strategy for Development of Pre-university Education 2014-2020), and most recently English language class has been added to the core curriculum at first grade, elementary school. From pre-school to grade II children are identified as Pre-A1 language users who are gradually introduced to English language and culture. In other words, English language learning is a national priority in Albanian education system, both public and non-public, in rural and urban areas all over the country.

Thus, this paper 's objective is to investigate the attitudes of high school students towards learning English language in a formal education system, in three groups of schools: urban public high school, rural public high school non -public high school. The attitudes of students are an important indicator to how interested they are to learn the language and at what degree they appreciate the teacher of the English language and evaluate the English class in their education. Albania is a country under progress trying to catch up with highly developed countries in the world. Nevertheless, it lacks many things when education is concerned. Foreign language learning, despite the fact that is taught with the same formal education curricula everywhere in the country, the logistics or educational supplies are different from one region to another, from one school type to another. This is the problem outlined in this paper, which is investigated by finding the differences of high school students' attitudes to learning English language among different groups of school included in this research.

By employing statistical analysis through SPSS 18 and using the Socio Education Model for English language learning (Gardner R. C., 2005), this research aims to present: 1. the mean values and frequencies for the variable of `attitudes`; 2. and, the impact that three different groups of schools: urban public high school, rural public high school non -public high school (independent variable) have on attitudes to learn English, (dependent variable). Gardner R.C. (2009) suggests that one of the key factors in motivating students to learn a second language refers to the characteristic of the educational environment, varying from the policies of the respective education boards and directly the classroom environment where language is learned. The Socio-Educational Model refers to the context of formal and informal learning such as listening to programs in a foreign language, speaking outside of school, communicating with foreigners, etc. " (Gardner, 2001, Public Lecture, p.4). Regarding the research questions and objectives this paper addresses, only the formal context of learning the language will be investigated in this paper.

#### **Literature Review**

One of the earliest researches on the attitudes towards learning foreign languages was conducted by Bartley D. E. (1969), who administered the foreign language attitudes scale in lower secondary schools, specifically with eight – ninth grade students in Palo Alto, California. The results showed that the interruption of the English course was reflected in those students who had less positive attitudes and these attitudes fluctuated in less positive towards the end of the school year, in contrast to this trend were the students who consistently attended the course, who showed consistent results. Empirical research in the field of motivation and attitudes towards for foreign language learning has relied on the updated original test instrument by Gardner and Smythe (1974)





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and the socio education model for language learning where 'attitudes' were at the very center of the Model, consequently having the greatest impact on motivation (Gardner R.C. 1985). The conceptual construct 'Attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language' in the Socio-educational Model (Gardner R. C, (2005), refers to students' attitudes towards the educational factor and is expressed through scales: 'Evaluation of a foreign language teacher' (10 articles) and 'Evaluation of the English class', (10 articles). Gardner in his line of study, stated regarding the role of attitudes towards language learning that: "when we focus on language learning in the school context, there is another component, which is educational role. It is clear that reactions to the classroom environment, teachers, materials, etc., have a role in the student's success in learning the material ", (quoted in Gardner, 2009, p.3). The attitudes of students in this study will be observed in the educational context for learning English, with the cultural contexts of attitudes being excluded, considering that the research focuses on formal education for English language learning, (The Socio-Educational Model, Gardner R.C. 2005). This Model was adopted in a research (2001) by placing at the center of the Model the variable of 'integrativeness' as the greatest contributor of impact to motivation for learning the language (Socio Education Model for English language learning, (Gardner R. C., 2005).

Empirical research in the field of motivation and attitudes for foreign language learning has relied on the updated original test instrument by Gardner & Smythe. (1974). The International Test of Attitudes and Motivation towards foreign language learning was adopted from the AMTB Research Project, (Gardner, R.C., 2004, Attitude/Motivation International Test Battery). This instrument has been used, both by the compilers of the test of motivation and attitudes (Gardner et.al., 1975, 1985, 2001), in the state of Canada and elsewhere, but also by researchers independently in some countries in the world like Croatia, Japan, Poland, Romania, Spain, Albania. For these studies, findings have been published which show consistent results in empirical research of the theory of motivation and attitudes towards foreign language learning, regarding the factors that most influence students' achievement in language and their motivation to learn the language (Gardner, 1960; Gardner et al. 1975, 1985, 2001).

The conceptual construct 'Attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language' in the Socio-educational Model (Gardner R. C, (2005), refers to students' attitudes towards the educational factor and is expressed through scales: 'Evaluation of a foreign language teacher' (10 articles) and 'Evaluation of the English class', (10 articles). Gardner in his line of study, stated regarding the role of attitudes towards language learning that: "when we focus on language learning in the school context, there is another component, which is educational role. It is clear that reactions to the classroom environment, teachers, materials, etc., have a role in the student's success in learning the material ", (quoted in Gardner, 2010, p.3). The attitudes of students in this study will be observed in the educational context for learning English, with the cultural contexts of attitudes being excluded, considering that the research focuses on formal education for English language learning, (*The Socio-Educational Model, Gardner R.C. 2005*). In Gardner's (2006) research in Spain, attitudes were poorly correlated with student achievement and ranked penultimate in the model, compared to other socio-educational factors (cited in Gardner, 2006, p.13). The model does not formally refer to the physical environment where the language learning process takes place, at least not directly (Gardner R.C., 2005, p.9).





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Cognitive factors refer to intelligence, language aptitude, and language learning strategies, while affective factors are language attitudes, motivation, and language anxiety. Recently, these factors, particularly affective factors of attitude and motivation, have been a focus of several researches, Carreira, (2005); Cheng & Dörnyei, (2007); Dörnyei & Csizér, (2002), (cited at Fatma Tokoz Goktepe, 2008). Gardner (2001) states that the language learning process is influenced by the current situation and context in which the foreign language is taught. The teacher presents materials, directs questions and asks, etc., and the student responds, but these responses are moderately influenced from the student's own thoughts, needs, experiences and perceptions. Student experiences in the classroom, teacher characteristics, pedagogical procedures, etc., affect the level of achievement and motivation. This hypothesis has also been supported by other researchers.

In a long-term study with high school students on the role of a friendly and caring teacher in student motivation, Wentzel (1997) provided empirical evidence that pedagogical care could predict their motivation, even after performance control, control belief and previous motivation. Conversely, if students have negative attitudes from the beginning, the whole experience will tend to be perceived negatively. However, the combination of an experienced teacher and an informative methodology can eventually evoke positive developments in attitudes and behaviors. As far as learning skills are concerned, several learning styles are known when learning a language, such as: concrete style, analytical learning style, communicative learning style and authority-led style (Haloçi, Delija, & Tabaku, 2008). Attitudes towards the language-learning context (school context) and towards the language-speaking community (cultural context) are related to achievement, (Gardner, 2007).

#### Methodology

#### **Research Questions and Variables**

This paper addresses two research questions:

- 1. What are the attitudes of students toward learning English language in formal education context, public and non-public high schools, in urban and rural areas on national basis and according to the subscales for the evaluation of English teacher and English class?
- 2. Are there differences of students` attitudes among three groups of schools: urban public high school, rural public high school and non-public high school?

The variables included in the research are: `Group of school` (independent variable); `Attitudes` (Dependent variable).

#### **Procedures**

Sample Size

The sample frame in this study involves public and non-public high schools in urban and rural areas of five biggest districts in Albania: Tirana, Durrës, Shkodër, Vlora and Korçë. To calculate the sample for the research,





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it was provided: the list of grades 10-12 from the whole population that includes all students who studied English as the first foreign language in public and non-public high schools, in urban and rural areas of the country, 2. in relation to the population according to the demographic variable of group of schools, urban/rural public high school / and non-public high school. The technique based on the group, 'Stage and Cluster Sampling' was applied for the selection of the sample.

Table 1 presents the sample distribution of the sample size that derived from the sample calculation technique, N = 1800. It turns out that in this study participated 1144 students from urban public high schools, 414 students of rural public high schools and 242 students of non-public high schools (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Distribution of the Total Sample of Students by Group of School

School Groups	Frequencies	Percentages	Valid Percentages	Cumulative percentages
Valid Urban public high school	1144	63.6	63.6	63.6
Rural public high school	414	23.0	23.0	86.6
Non -public high school	242	13.4	13.4	100.0
Total	1800	100.0	100.0	

Instrument Reliability and Preliminary Data Tests

The overall reliability expressed with Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items coefficient of the Attitude Motivation Test used in this research is .77. As a result it is stated that the model is 77% reliable. The value of Alpha coefficient for internal reliability of the scale: 'Attitudes towards the context of language learning', results with a value at .880. (see Table 2).

Table 2. Alpha Cronbach Coefficients for Internal Reliability of AMTB Scales

Scale	Alpha Cronbach Coefficient
Attitudes towards the context of language learning	.880

The dependent variable of `attitudes`, was subject to preliminary analysis to meet the condition of variance homogeneity, Pallant J.(2010). Levene test for homogeneity of variances showed that the dependent variable is homogeneous as the statistical significance for the variable of `attitudes` was: p = .35. p > .05 (see Table 3).

Table 3 . Homogeneity Test of the Variables of the Study Variables

Dependent Variabe	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Attitudes	1.051	2	1800	.350





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#### **Data Analysis**

The Descriptive Statistics analysis was conducted for the first research question. Based on all the preliminary analysis and their results, as explained above, some preconditions for the realization of the two-way ANOVA analysis were met for the second research question. The post-hoc test, Tukey HSD, was used to determine which groups of schools differences were found at, and to examine the statistically significant differences between the means of each subgroup. The sum of squares, degrees of freedom, distribution F and level p = .05 of statistical significance were used.

#### **Results**

The descriptive data at the national level for the scale 'Attitudes towards the context of foreign language learning' includes a total sample of N=1800 students. Scores from 1-3 indicate negative attitudes towards the language learning context and scores from 4-6 indicate positive attitudes. In a rating system from 1-6, the mean value of the Attitudes' scale is: M = 4.28 and SD = .08. The minimum value of the scale is 1 and its maximum value is 6. High school students (N = 1800) at the national level, have shown positive attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language, but somehow at a low level (see Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Data for the Scale: Students' Attitudes towards the Context of Learning a Foreign Language

	N	Min Value	Max value	Mean value	Standard deviation
Students' attitudes					
towards the context of	1800	1.00	6.00	4.2867	0.85
learning a foreign	1000	1.00	0.00	4.2007	0.63
language					

Only 0.1% of high school students, at the national level, have completely negative attitudes towards the English language learning context, 1.7% of students have moderate negative attitudes and 16.9% have slight negative attitudes. In total, a minimal figure of 18.7% of students at the national level, have negative attitudes towards the context of language learning. 35.7% of students have low positive attitudes, 42.2% of students have moderately positive attitudes and 3.5% of them have highly positive attitudes towards the language learning context. In total, a great majority 81.3% of students turn out to have positive attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language (see Table 5).

The mean values for the subscales which comprise the scale `Attitudes toward language learning context': 1. `the evaluation of the foreign language teacher`, M = 4.3, SD = 961, and, 2. `evaluation of the language class`, M = 4.1, DS = 884. Students have positively evaluated the English language teacher and the English language class (see Table 6).





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Table 5. Frequencies for Scale: Students' Attitudes towards the Context of Learning a Foreign Language

		Frequencies	Percentages	Valid	Cumulative
				Percentages	Percentages
Valid	Absolutely disagree` (1),	1	.1	.1	.1
	Moderately disagree (2),	31	1.7	1.7	1.8
	Slightly disagree (3)	304	16.9	16.9	18.7
	Slightly Agree (4),	642	35.7	35.7	54.3
	Moderately Agree (5),	759	42.2	42.2	96.5
	Absolutely Agree (6)	63	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	1800	100.0	100.0	_

Table 6. Descriptive Data for Subscales: 1.` Evaluation of the Foreign Language Teacher` 2. Evaluation of the Language Class

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard
	IN	IVIIII	IVIAX	value	Deviation
Evaluation of the foreign language teacher	1800	1.00	6.00	4.3111	.96166
Evaluation of the language class	1800	1.00	6.00	4.1312	.88451
Valid N	1800				

# Mean and Standard Deviation Values for the Scale: `Attitudes towards the Context of Foreign Language Learning` according to Groups of Schools

The mean values of the scale: `Students' attitudes towards the foreign language learning context ` for each group of school are: urban public high school students is M=4.33, rural high school is M=4.1 and non-public high schools the average value is M=4.29 (see Table 7).

Table 7. Descriptive Data on Students' Attitudes towards the Language Learning Context in relation to Groups of School

			Confidence						
		Interval 95%							
		N	Mean	SD	Std.	Lower	Upper	Min	Max
		IN	Mean	SD	Error	Bound	Bound	IVIIII	Max
Students'	Urban	114	4.336	.83	.0245	4.2884	4.384	1.0	6.00
attitudes towards	Rural	414	4.1449	.85	.0422	4.0619	4.228	2.0	6.00
the foreign language	Non- public	242	4.2934	.90	.0580	4.1791	4.407	2.0	6.00
learning context	Total	1800	4.2867	.85	.0200	4.2474	4.326	1.0	6.00





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#### Differences of Attitudes according to Groups of Schools

The procedure of two way ANOVA for the `attitudes of students` according to the groups of school found that between the groups there is a statistical significance value p = .000, so p < .05, F(2.1798) = 7.789 and degrees freedom, df = 1800 (see Table 8).

Table 8. ANOVA Results on Students' Attitudes towards the Language Learning Context

	ANOVA								
		Sum of	Degrees of	Mean					
		squares	freedom	Square	F	Sig.			
Attitudes	Between groups	141.968	2	5.587	7.789	.000			
	Within groups	1499.112	1798	0.717					
	Total	1641.08	1800						

Post Hoc comparison procedure, Tukey HSD indicated that the difference for urban public high schools and rural public high schools is: 19161, p = .00; the difference for urban public high schools and non-public schools is .00426, p = 1; for the rural public high schools and non-public high schools the difference is -.14846, p = .09. The results of the differences are significant for the group of public schools in the city and public schools in the village p = .00, p < .05 (see Table 9).

Table 9. Results of the Post Hoc Procedure for Differences between the Three Groups for Attitudes

						Confidence Interval 95%		
Dependent Variable	(I) School group	(J) School group	Mean Differences (I- J)	Std Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
	Urban public	Rural	.19161*	.04857	.000	.0752	.3080	
	high schools	Non- public	.00426	.05992	1.00	1004	.1867	
Attitudes	Donal mobile	Urban	19161*	.04857	.000	3080	0752	
Attitudes	Rural public high schools	Non- public	14846	.06853	.091	3127	.0158	
	Non-public	Urban	00426	.05992	1.00	1867	.1004	
	schools	Rural	.14846	.06853	.091	0158	.3127	

#### **Discussion**

The finding that Albanian students have positive attitudes towards the foreign language learning is similar to the findings in the study of Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic (2004), who concluded in their research that





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students in Canadian high schools had positive attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language, but in contrast, their attitudes were more positive with a mean value for the scale M = 5.1, whereas Albanian students rated the foreign language context less than students in Canadian high schools at a mean value M=4.2.

The context of the foreign language, in this study, was measured by the subscales: evaluation of the English language teacher, M = 4.3 and the evaluation of the English language class, M = 4.1 (see Table 4). These values explain that students in high schools in Albania have positive attitudes towards foreign language teacher and foreign language class, but their evaluation of these two components is low. Almost the same conclusion was reached by Gardner & Bernaus (2004) in their study with high school students in Spain. The mean values for the attitudes of Spanish students towards the foreign language class was, M = 3.96 and the evaluation for the foreign language teacher was, M = 4.04.

The findings in this study, that high school students positively evaluated English language class and the language teacher are in line with the results of research by Nikolaou A. (2007) conducted with high school students in Greece, but with the difference that the mean values for students` attitudes in this research were lower than that in Greece (M = 80.48; M = 81.41). The fact that Albanian students had positive attitudes towards the context of language learning goes in line with the study that Nikolov M. (2001) conducted in Hungary, which found that high school students while learning a foreign language had positive attitudes towards the study of foreign languages, especially very positive ones towards German and English. In her study of unsuccessful foreign language learners in Hungary, Nikolov M. (2001) showed that 'negative classroom experiences greatly influenced respondents' motivation. Unsuccessful students, who have generally had positive feelings about learning foreign languages, attribute their lack of success to non-motivational classroom practices, particularly students assessment, focus on form, and memorization skill of learning. Respondents believed that despite their persuasion and insistence on learning foreign languages, motivation, aptitude and enthusiastic approach to the language ensure success, despite the fact that they lacked the first two factors' (Nikolov, 2001, p. 167).

In the nationwide study in the state of Canada, conducted by Masgoret and Gardner (2003) with 10,489 participants on the role of motivation and the integrative role of language in student achievement, they found that the factor of students' attitudes towards the learning context of language, relates to foreign language achievement, to the value of correlation (r .24), (cit. in Gardner RC, 2005, pp.12-13). In relation to this research it could be said that the more positive students' attitudes are, as this study reveals, the higher their achievement in language will be.

But, these findings do not go in line with the research on students 'attitudes towards the context of foreign language teaching in Lebanese schools, where it was found that students' attitudes were negative towards the traditional way of teaching, Zainol A., Pour A., Mohammadi M. (2012). In another research, students indicated that teachers must improve the contents, teaching methods, and classroom activities to facilitate effective language learning ( Tokoz F. G., 2008).





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The findings in this paper show that the foreign language class and the English language teacher's activity do not differ much in public and non-public high schools, except for the group of urban public schools and rural public schools, where it turned out that students attending public schools in urban areas have more positive attitudes toward the education context of learning English than the group of students in public schools in rural areas. Despite the fact that students in non-public schools were expected to have more favorable attitudes towards the context of foreign language teaching, because the conditions for the process of a foreign language lesson are better and the language teacher is more committed, this result is explained by the increase in the quality of teaching and the somewhat greater interest of foreign language teachers in urban public schools in, as well as by leading an interesting and interactive way of the foreign language lesson.

#### Conclusion

This research was conducted nationwide, with a sample of N=1800 high school students, divided in three groups: urban public high schools (1144 students), rural public high schools (414 students), and non-public high schools (242) in five main districts in Albania. The attitudes of high school students towards the formal educational context are reported favorable and positive, but at a rather low level, with mean value M=4.28 in a Likert scale at a range 1-6. High school students evaluated positively English language teacher, M=4.3 and the English language class, M=4.13. In total, 81.3% of students turn out to have positive attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language. Only 18.7% of students have unfavorable or negative attitudes towards language learning and towards the context where the foreign language is taught.

This paper concluded that the mean value for the students` attitudes in the group of urban public schools is: M = 4.3, in rural public schools: M = 4.1, and in non-public schools is M = 4.29. The results of two way Anova procedure for the differences between groups of school related to their attitudes towards the educational context, showed that between the groups there is statistical significance value p = .000 so p < .05, F(2.1798) = 7.789. The Post-hoc comparative test of Tukey HSD procedure, found that the differences between school groups regarding students' attitudes towards the context of learning a foreign language are very low. The difference for the group of urban public schools and for the group of non-public schools is 0.004, p = 1; the differences of these groups are statistically not significant, as the significance value is: p > .05. The differences are significant only for the group of urban public schools and group of rural public schools, p = .000 in the value of .19.

Overall, the attitudes of high school students towards the educational context are reported positive and favorable, but at a rather low level. Students in urban public high schools have more favorable attitudes towards the context where English is taught and they evaluate the English teacher and the foreign language class more than students in rural public high schools. Also, students in non-public high schools have more positive attitudes to foreign language learning compared to the students in rural schools, even though this result was statistically insignificant. No significant differences in attitudes were found between the attitudes of students in public high





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schools and non-public high schools. In conclusion it was found that school groups, divided by demography and public/nonpublic criteria have a small impact on high school students` attitudes toward learning English language in a formal context.

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