INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF URBAN-RURAL DISTINCTIONS AND
HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S AT-
TITUDES

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate young people's attitudes about foreign language learning in Northern Ireland, depending on diverse residential areas and household economic backgrounds. A cross-sectional design was used in this study to conduct descriptive research. The present study uses secondary data from the Access Research Knowledge (ARK) in Northern Ireland's Young Life and Time (YLT) survey, which has been performed yearly since 2003. The survey consists of 103 items that may be completed in two ways: online (15.5 percent) or on paper (84.5 percent). The emphasis of this study was on three variables: young people's home areas (urban and rural); household economic backgrounds; and their educational backgrounds (not very well-off, average, and very well-off); and the attitude to foreign language learning. The outcomes of this study revealed that disparities between urban and rural areas had a major impact on young people's views about foreign language programs. Compared to household prosperity, which did not give strong evidence of disparities in this study, the impact of this problem was considerably more prominent.

Keywords: Attitude, Foreign language learning, Policy, Northern Ireland, Urban-rural.

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have addressed some potential merits of learning foreign languages for personal qualities and careers. For example, Tierney & Gallastegi (2011, p.485) identify that one of the benefits is ‘to develop linguistic competence and awareness pupils might encounter in life, develop cultural diversity through language, de-
velop confidence and transferable skills, as well as develop positive attitude for language learning.' Regarding careers, people with foreign language skills typically benefit from better job prospects and earnings (Aldashev et al. 2009; Berman, Lang, & Siniver, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Paolo & Raymond, 2012) regardless of disciplines (Fernández-Sánchez, Connell 2000, cited in DfES, 2002).

Given the significant advantages to individuals, the British government has adopted a policy which facilitates modern (foreign) language learning from primary level Key Stage 2, aiming to develop people’s attitude and interest in foreign languages (DfES, 2002). Unfortunately, there is limited information available regarding the impact of this policy on people’s attitude, particularly the younger age-groups throughout England, and more specifically in Northern Ireland. However, available literature reveals that the impacts are not yet significant (Diamantatou & Hawes, 2016; British Council & Think Global, 2011; Johnstone, 2001 cited in Hunt et al. 2005, p.384) where the lack of attitudes and interest in foreign language learning is one of the potential barriers.

The important role of the attitudes to personal development in the context of education, and more specifically in the foreign language learning context, has been much underlined in many literatures. The attitude is perceived as an important determinant in the ways people process information, make decisions, and take actions (Boninger et al. 1995, cited in Howe and Krosnick, 2016, p. 330). Thus, improving pupils' attitudes can be a strategic agenda to improve their appreciation and interest in foreign languages. However, instilling good attitudes is a complicated process as many factors can be interrelated between internal and external circumstances. In the context of a heterogeneous community such as Northern Ireland, external factors can play an important role in influencing people’s attitudes to foreign languages, for example, the urban-rural distinctions and the economic backgrounds of family (Schubotz & McCartan, 2016).
In this regard, the aim of the current study is to find out the young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning based on different residential locations across varying household economic backgrounds in Northern Ireland. This study is invaluable in order to evaluate the acceptability of the modern language learning policy among young people from different backgrounds. The study may be of relevance for policy makers in order to accommodate any existing disparities of attitude into policy improvement for accelerating overall impact. Therefore, the study will address the following research questions:

a. Is there any association between urban-rural distinctions and household economic backgrounds?

b. Are there any significant differences between young people's interest to foreign language learning in relation to their residential locations?

c. Are there any significant differences between young people's interest to foreign language learning in relation to their household economic backgrounds?

d. Are there any significant differences between young people's interest to foreign language learning in relation to their residential locations and household economic backgrounds?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The UK government campaigns the important role of foreign language skills for personal and national development by promulgating a policy requiring that students from Key Stage 2 be introduced to a modern foreign language (DfES, 2002). Indeed, introducing foreign languages from primary education level is a worldwide phenomenon (Copland & Garton, 2014; Nguyen, Hamid, & Renshaw, 2014; Bai, R., Hu, G., & Gu, P. 2013; Jones, 2012; Jones, 2011; Mee, 2002; Ali, Hamid, Moni, 2011). In the UK context, this policy is intended not only to provide a wider opportunity for students to access foreign languages in the early stage of education, but more
importantly to prepare and instill them with skills and knowledge to be competitive in a globalized market (DfES, 2002)

This commitment is stated in the National Languages Strategy called Languages for All: Languages for Life which uses languages as 'a lifelong skill' strategy to be used in business and for pleasure, to open up avenues of communication and exploration, and to promote, encourage and instil a broader cultural understanding’ (DfES, 2002; Cable et al. 2012). The government acknowledges that the failure to value the role of foreign languages in society has made British citizens less competitive in a globalized economy (DfES, 2002). Hence, the National Languages Strategy aims to ensure that people's attitudes, all ages but especially younger ages, can be challenged in order to be inspired and interesting in learning languages throughout life (DfES, 2002, p. 10).

However, the attitude of young people having experienced modern language learning at school is still not satisfactory. Indeed, a survey involving UK business leaders indicates that the three-quarters of them assume the country is in danger of being left behind while young people continue to lack knowledge and awareness of global challenges (British Council & Think Global, 2011) where foreign language skill is inclusive. This assumption is based on their experience as professionals in business industries. Furthermore, a high percentage of students in Merseyside terminated a foreign language program prematurely although they had already learnt foreign languages at school. The authors further identify that students' lack of attitude and interest are among the determinant factors to their decision (Diamantatou & Hawes, 2016, p. 100). Another report reveals that almost half of the UK citizens consider the lack of foreign language skills as a significant barrier when considering overseas study (British Council, 2015).

Although there may be a number of contributing factors (Diamantatou & Hawes, 2016; Hunt, 2005), people’s attitude can be a decisive one. Thus, the attitude and interest of young people to
foreign language learning can be a critical indication to the efficacy of this policy, and therefore, measuring their attitude can be a good starting point to policy improvement. In so doing, the views and experience from young people (ex-students) who have experienced this policy in practice are significant. Nonetheless, measuring their attitude can be very complex as many factors can be interrelated either internally or externally. Among the external drivers, the urban-rural and the economic background differences are believed to significantly influence people's attitudes. It is assumed that the urban and wealthy communities are in a more advantageous position due to ease of access to facilities, compared to those living in rural areas and under economic hardship.

The urban-rural issue and its impact on personal and academic development has been the subject of numerous publications, where it has been identified that those living and studying in urban areas benefit in many respects. This is the direct result of a development gap in many countries where the level of investment directed at urban areas is higher compared to rural areas. The impact of the urban-rural divide is therefore more likely to occur in under-developed or developing countries, for example, Ghana, Indonesia, or elsewhere (See. Opoku-Asare and Siaw, 2016; Alordiah, Akpadaka, and Oviogbodu, 2015; Oey_Gardiner, 2000). However, this is not the case in all contexts. A study aimed at identifying students’ achievement in Maths in a number of Nigerian high schools concludes that location differences do not impact upon students’ academic achievement in that context (Igbojinwaekwu, 2015). It is also noteworthy that urban-rural disparities may also occur in developed countries. A study conducted in Northern China has identified that urban-oriented development has exacerbated the gap in academic performance between urban and rural schools (Rao & Ye, 2016).

In the Northern Ireland context, the influence of the urban-rural segregation in academic issues, including the attitudes to study foreign languages among young people (high school grad-
uates), is not often discussed. It is widely acknowledged that Northern Ireland is a highly polarised community in terms of the urban-rural divide, household economic status, ethnicity, religion, and the like (Perry and Love, 2013; Shuttleworth, and Lloyd, 2001; Hamilton et al. 2008). Within the school setting, for example, the differences between urban and rural schools are obvious. A study conducted by Perry and Love (2013) found that rural students are more likely to experience stress and unhappiness compared to their urban counterparts. Furthermore, rural schools are not as attractive for many teachers and principals resulting in potential shortages of qualified teachers and staff. These factors are critical as more than half (55%) of primary schools in Northern Ireland are located in rural areas (Perry and Love, 2013).

Besides urban-rural division, discrepancies in students' family economic status are also reported to play a paramount role in educational contexts (Alordiah, Akpadaka, and Oviogbodu, 2015). Those coming from families facing economic hardship are assumed to have less interest in academic-related activities such as learning languages and rather focus more on employment (Anderson et.al. 2007; Oey-Gardiner, 2000). Although the results are not always consistent and often contradictory, a family's economic status is influential not only in many developing countries, but also in some developed countries such as the UK (Diamantatou and Hawes, 2016; Anderson et.al. 2007). According to PISA 2000 analysis, for example, students from the higher income families perform better academically in some countries with the most notable example being Germany, as indicated by a 67-point lead compared to the average of other OECD countries. However, this correlation is not so evident in other countries such as Brazil, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Korea, Norway, and Sweden (Anderson et.al. 2007, p. 596-7).

Northern Ireland is generally assumed to be an equal part of the United Kingdom in terms of income ratio, but its polarization in economic status is
also high (Tinson, Aldridge and MacInnes, 2016; Chambell, 2016). For example, Tinson, Aldridge and MacInnes (2016) identify that Northern Ireland has a lower Gini coefficient at 0.3 compared to the UK as a whole at 0.34, and at 0.28 compared to the Republic of Ireland at 0.30. The authors also report that Northern Ireland has a high proportion of households (45%) with no savings. As a result, many families from lower income increasingly live in private rented housing where they lack security of tenure (Wallace, 2015). This economic inequality has negative consequences in children’s education as a study from the Equality Commission for NI (2007, p3) reported that the children from poor households tend to have poor academic performance (Equality Commission for NI, 2007, p3).

Given that the urban-rural segregations and household economic backgrounds are influential factors on students' attitude in general, understanding the impact of these on young people's attitudes in Northern Ireland is also significant for policy improvement. This is due to the fact that the success of the policy is not only determined by talent but also the interest and attitude of the students regarding learning foreign languages. It is not surprising that these factors are used as pre-requisites for the implementation of foreign language policy throughout the UK as stated in the National Language Strategy that: 'If a child’s talent and natural interest in languages is to flourish, early language learning opportunities need to be provided, and their aptitude needs to be tapped into at the earliest opportunity when they are most receptive (DfES, 2002).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study applied descriptive research with a cross-sectional design (Bryan, 2012; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). The use of this design was aimed at examining the relationships between urban-rural distinctions and household economic status on young people's attitude to foreign language learning.
The study draws secondary dataset from the 2015 Young Life and Time (YLT) survey which has been conducted annually since 2003 by the Access Research Knowledge (ARK) in Northern Ireland. The survey is intended to measure the attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland regarding different social issues such as careers, community relations, sports activities, and internationalization, including their attitudes to foreign language learning (Schubotz & McCartan, 2016; ARK, 2016). The survey comprises 103 items completed by two modes – online (15.5%) and paper (84.5%). For the purpose of this study, the focus of analysis was on three variables namely: the young people’s residential locations (urban and rural); the household economic backgrounds (not very well-off, average, and very well-off); and the attitude to foreign language learning – whether they were willing to learn foreign languages in the future (yes and no).

The 2015 YLT survey involved 16-year-old throughout the Northern Ireland comprising of 1158 participants. The composition of the sample consists of males and females with 42 % and 58% respectively. The sample also came from various ethnic, religious, residential, social, and economic backgrounds. In terms of their residential locations and economic backgrounds, 59.4% of the respondents were from urban areas and 40.6% were from rural areas while 14.8% were from not very well-off households, 53.7% from average households, and 31.5 % from very well-off households. Hence, the participants were deemed to be representative of Northern Irish teenagers as a whole.

Ethics is a crucial aspect in social research activity which mostly involves human beings or their life aspects during the process of data collection (Punch, 2005, p. 276). Most importantly, it is considered a prerequisite for the quality and integrity of any piece of research (Bryman, 2012). The fundamental concern in dealing with ethical issues in social research is to ensure balance between the potential merits of the research and the potential harmful by-product of the research to participants or participants. 
other related parties (The Australian Research Council, cited from Roberts and Allen, 2015, p. 96). There are a number of ethical issues which should be taken into account in social research, specifically relating to harm, concern, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data (Punch, 1994, cited in Punch 2015). These ethical issues apply not only in relation to primary research, but also to social research taking secondary dataset as in the case of this study.

The data used here was gathered from the 2015 YLT survey carried out by ARK as published in the website (http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/datasets/). The survey had fulfilled required ethical guidelines particularly relating to harm, privacy, and confidentiality (Schubotz and McCartan, 2016). The datasets are openly accessible for all researchers and academics so permission for data utilization is not required anymore. In addition, the conversion into SPSS dataset has considered the protection of all respondents from any ethical risks such as the use of gender rather than identifiable information. Therefore, the use of the dataset here is unlikely to provide any potential harm to any participating respondent.

Since the main aim of this study is to measure the association between three nominal (categorical) variables, the main statistical analysis used to test all the hypotheses was the Chi Square test. At the first stage, the analysis was conducted to test if a correlation exists between urban-rural locations and household economic status. This would determine whether further separate analysis was required. When it had been determined that a correlation did not exist between these variables, further analysis was necessary to examine the association, both individually and collectively, in relation to teenagers’ attitudes.

The second analysis was carried out to test whether an association existed between the urban-rural distinctions and the teenagers’ attitude to the foreign language learning. When an association was confirmed, the Phi value was used to measure the degree of this association, accompanied by the contingency
table and the cluster bar chart in order to depict teenagers’ attitude according to urban and rural setting. The same analysis was carried out for the third hypothesis measuring the association between the household economic backgrounds and the young people’s attitude. The final analysis was carried out to examine the association between these two variables collectively – the urban-rural and households – in relation to the teenagers’ attitude to learning foreign languages. Since an association was identified, further analysis was conducted using the cross-tabulation table and the Cramer’s $V$ value in order to investigate the degree of this association.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 Results

Table 4.1 presents the results of Chi-square test of independence between the residential locations and the household economic backgrounds. The table shows that there was sufficient evidence to reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null-hypothesis as indicated by $X^2 = 2.909$, $df = 2$, and $p > 0.5$. Therefore, there was no association between the residential locations and the household economic backgrounds, so both variables are independent of each other. In the other words, the probability distribution of each variable does not affect the distribution of another one as shown from the converted contingency table where the distribution of the not well-off family is independent either from urban or rural cases with 15.3% and 14.1% respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not well-off</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Very well-off</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>1072</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically not significant at $p>.05$
Meanwhile, Table 4.2 presents the summary of Chi-square test results which shows the differences of the attitudes to the foreign language learning among the 16-year-old people in Northern Ireland. As can be seen, the different attitudes to the foreign language learning were found between the young people living in urban and rural areas as indicated by $X^2 = 9.075$, $df = 2$ and $p < 0.05$. Accordingly, there was sufficient evidence to reject the null-hypothesis, and thus accept the alternative hypothesis that “There were differences between the young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning in relation to the differences of their residential locations.” The table also shows that the 16-year-old people living in urban areas tended to have better attitude to the foreign language learning with 61.4% compared to those living in rural with 38.6%. Although the relationship between urban-rural residential differences and the young people’s attitudes on the foreign language learning existed, the strength of this relationship was relatively weak as indicated by the Phi value at 0.090 (Field, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant at $p<.05$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9.075</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hands, Table 4.3 summarizes other results of Chi-square test indicating the extent the household economic backgrounds were associated to the attitudes to the foreign language learning among the 16-year-old. The
table shows that there were no significant differences in the attitude to the foreign language learning in relation to the disparities in family’s economic status as shown by $X^2 = 1.801$, df $= 2$, and $p > 0.05$. Thus, there was sufficient evidence to accept the null-hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis that: “There were no significant differences between young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning in relation to their household economic backgrounds.” The results of the Chi-square analysis were strengthened by the data from the crosstab table where the young people from the average economic background had more proportions not to have the attitudes to the foreign language learning with 57.7% compared to those to have attitudes with 53%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not well-off</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well-off</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>1078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically not significant at $p > .05$

Having identified the relationships of each independent variable, further analysis was conducted to find out of whether these two variables collectively leaded to the differences in the attitudes to the foreign language learning. Table 4.4 presents the results of this analysis showing that both variables in combination were associated with different attitudes to the foreign language learning as indicated by $X^2 = 12.903$, df $= 2$, $p < 0.05$. Thus, there was strong evidence to reject null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis that: “There were significant differences between the young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning in relation to different residential locations and household economic backgrounds”.

Table 4.3

Proportion of household’s economic backgrounds leading to attitudes of FL learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not well-off</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well-off</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>915</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>1078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically not significant at $p > .05$
However, the association was considered weak as shown from the Cramer’s V value at 0.110 (Field, 2013).

### Table 4.4
Proportions of urban-rural locations and household economy leading to attitudes of FL learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban-rural / Household economy</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Not well-off</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Average</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Well-off</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Not well-off</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Average</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Well-off</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Cramer’s V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.90</td>
<td>0.024*</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant at p<.05

The purpose of this study was to find out the associations between the urban-rural residential locations and the household affluences on the teenagers’ attitudes to the foreign language learning in Northern Ireland. The study addressed four hypotheses which were discussed in order below.

The study found that there was no association between the urban-rural distinctions and the economic backgrounds at home. As shown from Table 4.1, each variable—the residential locations and the household economy backgrounds—was independence of each other; thus, the probability distribution of one variable did not influence the presence of another. Accordingly, further analysis involving these variables became relevant to do in order to investigate whether the variables either individually or collectively led to different attitudes among the 16-year-old teenagers to the foreign language learning.

Having conducted the analysis, the results also showed that there were
significant differences between the young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning in relation to their residential locations. As many discussed in literature, the urban-rural divisions have been reported to have impacts on people’s performance in academic contexts with those residing in urban area deemed to be more benefited due to easy access to public facilities and services (Opoku-Asare and Siaw, 2016; Alordiah, Akpadaka, and Oviogbodu, 2015; Oey-Gardiner, 2000). In the context of young people in Northern Ireland, this study provided confirmatory evidence that the effect of urban-rural divisions was also a significant case here.

These results were not surprising to happen pertaining that the rural schools particularly the primary levels have encountered some challenging issues in regards to students, teachers, and schools (Perry & Love, 2013). The authors reported that the students schooling at rural areas tended to be more stressful and unhappy compared to their urban counterparts. The unhappiness they experienced at previous school was presumably linked to their lack of attitudes to learning foreign languages. This was in line with the facts that the attitudes to study foreign languages was determined not only by the ability to foresee their future prospect of language usage, but also influenced by their ability in reimagining their past learning experience (Tin, 2013).

As a result, the young people from urban areas tended to have better attitudes to the foreign languages compared to the urban as indicated in Figure 5.1 where the urban teenagers tended to have higher proportions with 87.54% in their attitudes than those from urban on average with 81 percent.

![Figure 5.1](image)

Proportions of urban-rural to foreign language attitudes

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However, another finding showed that there were no significant differences between the young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning in relation to their household economic backgrounds. There was no sufficient evidence that the disparities in economic backgrounds at home led to the differences in their attitudes to the foreign language learning. Unlike the urban-rural distinctions, the result relating to the economic status at home was contradictory to many preceding studies (Alordiah, Akpadaka & Oviogbodu, 2015; Anderson et.al. 2007; Oey-Gardiner, 2000). The fact that economic status at home did not work for young people in Northern Ireland might need more scrutiny considering it was in opposition to the case of the UK and other countries (Anderson, 2007). More interestingly, Northern Ireland was economically considered low compared to the UK as a whole and the Republic of Ireland in relation to Gini coefficient (Campbell, 2016). Northern Ireland was also experiencing high economic inequality in term of saving at 45% compared to the Great Britain as a whole at 33% (Tinson, Aldridge, & MacInnes. 2016).

Figure 5.2
Proportions of urban-rural and household economy to foreign language attitudes

When the urban-rural divisions and the household economic status were analyzed collectively, the results showed that there were significant differences between young people's attitudes to the foreign language learning. In this case, the teenagers from both urban and advantaged family tended to have better attitudes to the foreign language learning compared to other cases. Figure 5.2 summarizes the proportions of each case to the teenagers' attitudes. As can be seen, the urban teenagers from the well-off background had the highest proportion in their attitudes at 89.47%, while
those from the rural areas with the economic hardship at home was considered the lowest proportion at 78.33%.

4.2 Discussions

Generally speaking, the research identified two forms of findings. The first findings were in line with many previous studies (Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2016; Alordiah, Akpadaka & Oviogbodu, 2015; Oey-Gardiner, 2000) where the distinction of residential locations was also associated with the young people’s attitudes in the foreign language learning among Northern Ireland young people. Similarly, the combination of the urban-rural distinctions and the household prosperity was also associated with the teenagers’ attitudes. However, the study found that the household affluence alone was not found any association with their attitudes which was, in this case, contradictory to some previous research (Alordiah, Akpadaka & Oviogbodu, 2015; Anderson et.al. 2007).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the findings of this study identified that the urban-rural differences were of significant relations on the young people’s attitudes to the foreign language program. The importance of this issue was even more prevalent in comparison to the household prosperities which, in the case of this study, did not provide significant evidence of differences. Other findings showed that the combination of both residential locations and family affluences were significantly related to the teenagers’ attitudes. These results are, thus, expected to provide informative feedbacks for the government in regards to the areas of attention for further improvement in the foreign policy program in the UK as a whole and Northern Ireland more specifically.

Irrespective to these results, this study has principal shortfalls especially in measuring the attitudes of the respondents to the foreign language learning. Accordingly, this study leaves some avenues for further scrutiny, for example, by considering better and more accurate measurement. Instead of applying simply ‘yes-no’ categories, the questionnaire can be expanded into other forms.
of measurement such as ordinal and scale measures in order to provide more definite depiction of their attitudes.

REFERENCES


