

Factors Affecting Students' Attitudes toward Learning EFL

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the different factors that affect students' attitude towards learning English language, such as the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude. Hence, it aims to investigate the interlaced relationship among those different factors. An adapted questionnaire is employed as a measuring instrument asking the participants about their different attitudes toward learning English language. However, the researcher uses percentages to show the results of the questionnaire. The SPSS16 software is used for the results obtained. The findings indicate that there are multiple factors that affect the students' attitude toward learning English such as the feeling of being more educated is a determining factor in learning English, worrying about the process of learning English is detrimental to the students learning ability, the status of English as the language of science and technology makes learners more knowledgeable, the desire to speak English fluently plays a major role in enhancing the students learning process. In addition to that the difficulty of English could be challenging, having more opportunities inside the class room proved helpful, how the class is conducted is a major factor makes students more or less interested in attending the class. Finally, the texts books taught is also holding a leading factor in affecting the student's attitudes towards learning English either positively or negatively. The study recommends that more studies should be conducted to investigate other variables such as socio-economic and cultural level, income level, and education level of the parents. Also the study recommended that further studies with larger samples be undertaken to develop more understanding of these factors. Furthermore, qualitative studies could be done to find out the factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English. A possible further research topic could be to interview other universities and faculties' students to find out more about their attitudes towards learning English.

Key words: English Language Learners, university students, speaking skills

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة للتحقق من العوامل التي تؤثر في موقف الطلاب تجاه دراسة اللغة الانجليزية ، مثل الجانب السلوكي والعقلي والعاطفي ، وايضاً التحقق من العلاقة المتبادلة بين هذه العوامل المختلفة. حيث تم استخدام الاستبيان كاداة لقياس مواقف الطلاب المختلفة تجاه دراسة اللغة الانجليزية ، كما تم استخدام النسب المئوية لعرض نتائج الاستبيان عن طريق برنامج التحليل الاحصائي. تشير النتائج إلى أن هناك العديد من العوامل التي تؤثر على موقف الطلاب تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مثل الشعور بأنهم أكثر تعليماً هو عامل حاسم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ، والقلق بشأن عملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية يضر بقدرة الطلاب على التعلم والوضع. اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة للعلوم والتكنولوجيا تجعل المتعلمين أكثر دراية ، والرغبة في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بطلاقة تلعب دوراً رئيسياً في تعزيز



عملية تعلم الطلاب. بالإضافة إلى أن صعوبة اللغة الإنجليزية قد تكون صعبة ، فقد أثبت وجود المزيد من الفرص داخل حجرة الدراسة أنه مفيد ، كما أن كيفية إجراء الفصل الدراسي هو عامل رئيسي يجعل الطلاب مهتمين أكثر أو أقل بحضور الفصل. أخيراً ، تمثل الكتب النصية التي يتم تدريسها أيضاً عاملاً رائداً في التأثير على مواقف الطلاب تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية إما بشكل إيجابي أو سلبي. توصي الدراسة بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات للتحقيق في المتغيرات الأخرى مثل المستوى الاجتماعي والاقتصادي والثقافي ، ومستوى الدخل ، والمستوى التعليمي للوالدين. كما أوصت الدراسة بإجراء مزيد من الدراسات مع عينات أكبر لزيادة فهم هذه العوامل. علاوة على ذلك ، يمكن إجراء دراسات نوعية لاكتشاف العوامل التي تؤثر على مواقف الطلاب تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. وتقتصر الدراسة أيضاً كموضوع بحث إضافي محتمل إجراء مقابلات مع طلاب الجامعات والكليات الأخرى لمعرفة المزيد عن مواقفهم تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

Introduction

With the increasing need and ceaseless interest in learning English as a foreign language, it is important to study and understand the factors that can drive the learning process. Many Sudanese learners start learning English during secondary/high school; while others as early as primary school or even pre-school, yet the problem is that most of the students are still far from attaining the desired level of proficiency either in comprehensive or productive skills or in both. Despite being exposed to English instruction for a long time at different levels, the reasons for the poor foreign language skills of students have long been a matter of discussion among educators. Although a huge amount of time and effort are spent, learners either cannot go beyond the basics or they experience difficulty in developing their level of proficiency unless they are individually motivated. However, most students have a positive attitude towards learning English and that they try to improve their English and to use the language even though there

are a lot of demands on their time and few opportunities to practice their English in their daily life.

In the changing scenario of language teaching theories and methodologies, where the learners, rather than the teachers, are gaining a central position, learners' attitude plays a vital role in maximizing learning and teaching output (Shameem Ahmed, 2015). Learners' attitude can be defined as a collection of feelings regarding language use and its status in the society. Even after syllabus, teaching materials, teacher training programmes have been changed and made up to date from time to time, the overall output in the competence of the students has never been improved. Not much research has been directed to the topic of how the local educational/teaching environment has influenced students' learning when the students are not English major, but studying English as non-majors due to educational requirements and professional needs. The notion of attitude, as a strong variable, applies in this situation.



Although tremendous efforts have been exerted to improve the teaching-learning process of English, EFL programs still fail to deliver as expected. In spite of good language planning, curriculum design, appropriate textbooks, infrastructural facilities, effective and qualified teachers, the performance of the students is not up to the mark. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate into the learning difficulties and related factors that contribute to learning. Hence, the study in its effort to cope with aforementioned problems attempts to investigate and see if students' characteristics could prove helpful in this regard.

The aim of this study is to investigate the different factors that affect students' attitude towards learning the English language, such as the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude. This study also aims to investigate the interlaced relationship among those different factors. The significance of this study stems from the fact that, the results of the study are expected to be useful information for educators especially English lecturers/teachers in evaluating and encouraging attitudinal factors in Learning English as a Foreign Language. This will aid them to make the appropriate choices with regard to teaching English to university students. So, they can manipulate certain instructional practices to enhance students' motivation in studying English. It is hoped by reading the results of this research, English lecturers/teachers can determine what type of instructional practices they should use in attempting to give students more autonomy or control over their own learning.

2.1 Questions of the Study

1. What are the different factors that affect students' attitude toward learning English?
2. What are the reasons that promote the students to learn English?
3. To what extent does these different factors are interlaced?

2.2 Hypotheses of the Study

1. There are different factors that affect students' attitude toward learning English.
2. There are different reasons that promote students to learn English.
3. Factors affecting students' attitude are interlaced.

2. Literature Review

Attitude is one of the fundamental issues in determining the success of students. It is related to a person's values and promotes or discourages the choices made in both academic career and social life. Some of the factors that influence students' attitude could be gender, motivation, age, socio-economic status, self-esteem, family expectations or may be the easiness of the language. However, Kazemi (2018) concluded that there is no significant difference between females and males in terms of the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude. The learning process is an emotional process affected by different emotional factors and attitude can help the learners express whether they like or dislike the objects or surrounding situations. Shameem Ahmed (2015) asserted that people involved in language teaching often say that students who really want to learn will succeed whatever the circumstances in which they study are whether detrimental or beneficial.



In general, strongly motivated students with long-term goals are probably easier to teach than those who have no such goals and therefore no real drive. For such students short-term goals will often provide the only motivation they feel. Some students study a language because they have an idea about something which they wish to achieve.

H. Herman Mustafa et al (2015) advanced the interplay of students' attitudinal factors (*attitude, motivation, achievement motivation, interest, perseverance, and self-esteem*) in learning English as a foreign language. The study asserted that, there is a positive correlation between attitude and motivation; and that the students' enthusiasm, commitment and persistence are the key determinant of success or failure, the more favorable the attitudes the students have the higher the motivation the students possess. Karatas H. et al, (2016) stated that gender, preparatory training and language level do not influence the attitude of students at Istanbul Technical University towards learning English.

In a more recent attempt by Vo Van Viet (2017) to explore the attitude of students towards learning English, at Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. The study concluded that most students are aware of the importance of English in their studies and in future career development.

Mehmet Nuri Gömleksiza (2010) explored students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of gender, grade level and department variables.

The results of the statistics revealed significant differences between the attitudes of students in terms of gender, grade level and department variables. Students' attitudes towards learning English differed significantly in terms of gender of the students. Female students had more positive attitudes in interest, usefulness and teacher subscales. This current study aims to investigate the different factors that affect students' attitude towards learning the English language, such as the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude. This study also aims to investigate the interlaced relationship among those different factors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is quantitative in nature. Hence, an adapted questionnaire is employed as a measuring instrument asking the participants about their different attitudes toward learning the English language. However, the researcher uses percentages to show the results of the questionnaire and the descriptive statistics in testing the hypotheses. The SPSS16 software was used for the results obtained.

3.2 Participants, Instruments & Procedures

The population of the current study is first year students at Alneelain University, Faculty of Arts, English Language Department. The sample which is 60 is selected randomly with no preferences from a population of 144. Hence, the sample is 28 males and 32 females.



The instrument used is a close-ended questionnaire composed to find out the different attitudes that students of English possess toward English language. The instrument composed after the researcher reviewed different related previous studies that played a major role in developing the instrument for the current study.

The researcher handed the questionnaire directly to the sample of the study in which they are given time fill it. The participants were required to answer all the items of the questionnaire honestly, giving their own perceptions about their attitudes toward learning English language in terms of the emotional, cognitive, as well as their demographic profile i.e. gender. Where

necessity require, the researcher interpreted some of the questionnaire items for the sample in their mother tongue language that is Arabic Language.

3.3 Validity & Reliability of the Instruments

For the process of validity, the instrument was showed to a number of experts and specialists in this area mostly university lecturers. After taking their notes, the instrument was modified and adopted as a final copy.

Reliability was checked using internal consistency, which measures the correlation between items of the instrument using Cronbach's α equation. Table (1) represents reliability statistics of the instruments.

Table (1) Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.681	30

3.4 Limits of the Study

One of the primary objectives of this study is to investigate the factors that affects students attitude toward learning English. The study is limited to the students of Alneelain University, Faculty of Arts, English Language Departments in the academic year 2020.

4. Results

As pinpointed by the SPSS statistics (*cf. Appendix*); item one table one shows that, 90% agreed on the item, "Studying English is important because it will make me more educated". Item two, Table two displays that 89.9% agreed on the item "Being good at English will

help me study other subjects well." Item three, Table three displays that, 86.7% agreed on the item "I feel proud when studying English language". Item 4, Table four displays that 85% agreed on the item "I feel excited when I communicate in English with others". Item 5, Table five displays that 89.9% agreed upon the item "Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried". Item 6, Table six displays that 47% agreed on the item "Studying English helps me to have good relationships with friends". Item 7, Table seven displays that 78.4% agreed on the item, "I like to give opinions during English lessons".



Item 8, Table eight displays that, 75% agreed on the item “I have more knowledge and more understanding when studying English”. Item 9, Table nine displays that 93.3% select the option strongly agreed on the item “I look forward to studying more English in the future”. Item 10, Table ten displays that 55% agreed on the item “I don’t get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class”.

Item 11, Table eleven displays that 83.3% agreed on the item “Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable”. Item 12, Table twelve displays that 81.7% agreed on the item “I am able to make myself pay attention during studying English”. Item 13, Table thirteen displays that 66.7% agreed on the item “To be inquisitive makes me study English well”. Item 14, Table fourteen displays that 75% agreed on the item “Studying English makes me have good emotions (feelings). Item 15, Table fifteen displays that 81.7% agreed on the item “Studying English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself”. Item 16, Table sixteen displays that 80% agreed on the item “Studying English helps me to improve my personality”. Item 17, Table seventeen displays that, 25% agreed on the item, “Frankly, I study English just to pass the examinations”. Item 18, Table eighteen displays that 36.7% agreed on the item “I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students”. Item 19, Table nineteen displays that 95% agreed on the item “I wish I could speak English fluently”. Item 20, Table twenty displays that 83.3% agreed on the item, “In my opinion, people

who speak more than one language are very knowledgeable”.

Item 21, Table twenty one displays that 85% agreed on the item “Studying English subject makes me feel more confident”. Item 22, Table twenty two displays that 78.4 % agreed on the item “Studying English makes me able to create new thoughts”. Item 23, Table twenty three displays 31.6% agreed on the item “In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn”. Item 24, Table twenty four displays that 80% agreed on the item “Knowing English is an important goal in my life”. Item 25, Table twenty five displays that 55% agreed on the item “I look forward to the time I spend in English class”. Item 26, Table twenty six displays that 86.6% agreed on the item “I wish I could have many English speaking friends”. Item 27, Table twenty seven displays that 41.7% agreed on the item “To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class”. Item 28, Table twenty eight displays that 25% agreed on the item “I do not pay any attention when my English teacher is explaining the Lesson”. Item 29, Table twenty nine displays that 80 % agreed on the item “I like to practice English the way native speakers do”. Item 30, Table thirty displays that 40 % agreed on the item, “The books taught are boring in English classes”.

The aim of this study is to investigate the different factors that affect students’ attitude towards learning the English language, such as the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects of attitude.



As it is pinpointed earlier that, this study in its effort to cope with the aforementioned problems (good language planning, curriculum design, appropriate textbooks, infrastructural facilities, and effective and qualified teachers) attempts to investigate and see if students' characteristics, classroom design and the text books used could prove helpful in this regard.

5. Findings

The findings have indicated that there are multiple factors that affect the students' attitude toward learning English as following:

1. The feeling of being more educated is a determining factor in learning English.
2. Worrying about the process of learning English is detrimental to the students learning ability.
3. The status of English as the language of science and technology makes learners more knowledgeable
4. The desire to speak English fluently plays a major role in enhancing the students learning process.
5. The difficulty of English could be challenging for the students to learn English.
6. Having more opportunities inside the class room proved helpful in learning English.
7. How the class is conducted is a major factor makes students more or less interested in attending the class.
8. The texts books taught is also holding a leading factor in affecting the student's attitudes towards learning English either positively or negatively.

6. Conclusion

The overall results reveal that the students have different attitudinal factors in

learning English as a foreign language. Thus we can conclude that all of these factors are interlaced together as they cannot be separated from one another. However, the role of the teacher is an important factor to develop positive attitude towards learning English. So the teachers should provide a more active, free learning environment for their students. Poor attitudes towards learning English prevent students from participating classroom activities actively. So it is important to understand how negative attitudes to learning English can be avoided to develop students' interests, self confidence and positive attitude towards learning English. To do that, teachers should be aware of the factors affecting students positively or negatively and should take the needs of students into consideration.

7. Recommendations

Studies should be conducted to investigate other variables such as socio-economic and cultural level, income level, education level of the parents, locations that may influence the attitudes. Due to the sample size of the study, it is recommended that further studies with larger samples be undertaken to develop more understanding of factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English. Furthermore, qualitative studies could be done to find out the factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English. A possible further research topic could be to interview other universities and faculties' students to find out more about their attitudes towards learning English. It would be interesting to know whether or not they have similar attitudes.



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