

Measuring EFL Students' Attitudes Toward Learning English: Evidence from Benazir Bhutto University Lyari, Karachi

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Abstract

The paper attempts to investigate undergraduate EFL students' attitudes toward learning English in terms of cognitive, affective, behavioural and aggregate dimensions. Based on their demographic profile, specifically their gender, the study examined how gender influences and impacts learners' attitudes. Sixty EFL second-semester students participated in this study. The findings of the survey questionnaire revealed that the learners have relatively positive attitudes towards learning English. However, for comparing male and female students, the results showed no significant differences between the two groups. The findings have meaningful implications for curriculum design and policy-making in similar settings.

Keywords: EFL learner, Cognitive Attitude, Affective Attitude, Behavioural Attitude

Introduction

Language learning has long been regarded as a cornerstone of human interaction and cultural exchange. It is more than just acquiring a set of words and grammar rules. It is essential for the transmission of thoughts, aspirations, and ambitions (Tavil, 2009; Abidin et al., 2012). In the context of foreign language learning, multiple factors shape the process, as pointed out Gardner (1960) and Shams (2008) "motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitude, intelligence, age, and personality traits" Among these, learner attitude stands out as one of the most critical determinants of success (Fakeye, 2010).

Attitude has been defined in various ways. Al-Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, and Hossain (2012) describe it as a psychological construct that shapes behaviours.

As reported by İnal et al. (2005), Brown (2001) highlighted that it involves a significant emotional component, including feelings, self-perception, and community relationships. Similarly, Ajzen (2005, as cited in Dehbozorgi, 2012) argues that this psychological construct cannot be observed directly, yet it can be identified through measurable reactions that indicate evaluative tendencies. From this perspective, language learning cannot flourish without positive attitudes, which are often shaped by personal experiences.

Prior studies have shown that attitudes influence a wide range of learning behaviours, such as reading in the target language, engaging in conversations, and participating actively in class (Weinburgh, 1998). Learning outcomes in a foreign language rely not just on cognitive ability, but also on a learner's motivation and attitudes toward the language (Padwick, 2010; Abidin et al., 2012). In simple words, learning a language is not just an academic exercise; it is just as much about the social and psychological journey as it is about mastering grammar and vocabulary. As Tella et al. (2010) point out, a negative attitude can be a fundamental stumbling block, holding learners back, while a positive one can spark better performance and greater

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engagement. That idea still holds today. Xie and Li (2023) observed that students with positive attitudes towards English were ready to initiate their learning and did not hesitate to work collaboratively. Likely, Mahmoudi and Khodabandeh (2022) found that learners' attitudes towards language determine whether they will speak or not in the classroom.

Collectively, these studies suggest that the three dimensions of attitude cannot be overlooked. The present study evaluates the attitudes towards language and examines the role of gender in shaping those attitudes.

Purpose of the Study

The study primarily seeks to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate EFL students toward learning English, with a particular focus on three key dimensions: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional. Specifically, it aims to determine whether learners hold positive attitudes toward learning English or not. The respondents share the same academic background.

Additionally, the study examines whether there is a statistically significant difference in overall attitudes toward learning English between male and female students. By pursuing these aims, this study offers a clear picture of the nature of students' attitudes and any potential differences between male and female learners.

Significance of the Study

Grasping EFL learners' attitudes is essential as they play a decisive role in influencing motivation and learning behaviours (Abidin et al., 2012; Xie & Li, 2023). Research by Xie and Li (2023) shows that learners with positive attitudes are more engaged in self-directed study, and such attitudes strongly forecast language achievement (Abidin et al., 2012). This study provides insights into the existing literature by investigating second-semester BS English students. While assessing attitudes across behavioural, cognitive, and emotional domains, the research delivers an in-depth view of learners' perspectives on acquiring English. The gender-based analysis is helpful for teachers and curriculum planners to implement strategies that promote positive attitudes in diverse student groups. These findings hold significant implications for teaching practices and policy frameworks in similar settings.

Research Questions (RQs)

RQ1: What behavioural attitudes do undergraduate EFL students hold toward learning English?

RQ2: What cognitive attitudes do undergraduate EFL students hold toward learning English?

RQ3: What emotional attitudes do undergraduate EFL students hold toward learning English?

RQ4: What aggregate attitudes do undergraduate EFL students hold toward learning English?

RQ5: Is there a statistically significant difference in overall attitudes toward learning English between male and female undergraduate EFL students?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Undergraduate EFL students do not exhibit significantly positive behavioural attitudes toward learning English.

H_{a1}: Undergraduate EFL students exhibit significantly positive behavioural attitudes toward learning English.

H₀₂: Undergraduate EFL students do not exhibit significantly positive cognitive attitudes toward learning English.

H_{a2}: Undergraduate EFL students exhibit significantly positive cognitive attitudes toward learning English.

H₀₃: Undergraduate EFL students do not exhibit significantly positive emotional attitudes toward learning English.

H_{a3}: Undergraduate EFL students exhibit significantly positive emotional attitudes toward learning English.

H_{o4}: Undergraduate EFL students do not exhibit significantly positive aggregate attitudes toward learning English.

H_{a4}: Undergraduate EFL students exhibit significantly positive aggregate attitudes toward learning English.

H_{o5}: There is no statistically significant difference in overall attitudes toward learning English between male and female Undergraduate EFL students.

H_{a5}: There is a statistically significant difference in overall attitudes toward learning English between male and female Undergraduate EFL students.

Literature Review

Attitude has long been a pivotal concept across psychology, education, and language learning, with diverse definitions reflecting different theoretical lenses (Alhmali, 2007). According to Montano and Kasprzyk (2008), the Theory of Planned Behaviour views attitude as the combined sum of an individual's outcome beliefs, multiplied by the value the person assigns to those outcomes. That is, favourable beliefs foster a positive attitude, while unfavourable ones foster a negative attitude. Gardner (1985) offers a more direct conceptualisation, defining attitude as an evaluative reaction toward an object, inferred from beliefs or opinions and closely linked with values that guide educational decisions. Wenden (1991), building on Gardner's work, conceptualises attitude as comprising three interrelated components: cognitive (beliefs and thoughts about the object), affective (emotional responses, such as liking or disliking), and behavioural (predispositions to act in specific ways toward the object).

Importance of Attitude in Language Learning

Attitude remains a critical predictor of language learning success. Visser (2008) and Reid (2003) emphasised that achievement in a target language is influenced as much by attitude as by cognitive ability. For example, Kenyan secondary students with negative attitudes toward English displayed poor academic performance (Kiptui & Mbugua, 2009, cited in Tella et al., 2010). Similarly, Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that attitude, together with motivation, significantly shapes learner engagement with a language and its community. Baker (1992) elaborated on the role of attitudes in language maintenance, shift, or decline, while De Bot et al. (2005) highlighted the facilitating role of positive attitudes and high motivation in second language acquisition.

More recent evidence reinforces this: Alsoudi and Al Harthy (2024) found in Omani secondary schools that students with more positive attitudes towards English also achieved higher academic performance. Using brain imaging, Di Lu et al. (2023) revealed that neural mechanisms underlying attitudes toward foreign languages can predict reading performance, thus linking psychological disposition to measurable academic outcomes.

Aspects of Language Attitude

Consistent with classical models, attitude can be conceptualised along cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions (Kara, 2009).

Behavioural pertains to observable actions, such as participation and persistence in learning tasks.

Cognitive encompasses beliefs about knowledge acquisition and practical application.

Affective relates to the emotional states associated with learning (Feng & Chen, 2009).

Methodology

Research Design

This investigation applied a quantitative research framework, integrating both descriptive and inferential approaches. Data were collected using an adapted questionnaire, which served as the primary measurement tool. Participants responded to all items based on their experiences of learning the English language, with responses measured across emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of attitude. The instrument also collected demographic information, including gender, age, and educational qualifications.

Participants

The respondents are male and female students, second-semester BS English undergraduates at Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi. They have similar backgrounds, and all are enrolled in semester II.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is adapted from Abidin et al. (2012). In fact, the instrument was first applied by Boonrangsri et al. (2004) and was based on Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB).

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (α) was employed to examine the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), an α value of 0.70 or above is considered acceptable for research purposes. In the present study, the computed Cronbach's alpha exceeded this threshold, indicating that the instrument possessed satisfactory reliability and that the items consistently measured the constructs.

Validity

The questionnaire was adopted in its entirety from Abidin et al. (2012), who reported satisfactory validity for the instrument. To further ensure content validity within the present research context, feedback from senior faculty members with expertise in educational research and language studies was incorporated.

Data Collection

Data were collected from 60 respondents, comprising 40% males and 60% females. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used for data analysis. Specifically, t-tests were used both to assess learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes toward learning English and to determine whether gender-based differences in overall attitudes were statistically significant.

Results

Using a one-sample t-test, the study assessed whether students' attitudes toward learning English exceeded the neutral midpoint of 3 on a five-point Likert scale. Results showed that overall attitudes were significantly above neutral, $t(59) = 8.61$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.31$, mean difference = 0.34, 95% CI [0.26, 0.42], indicating generally positive attitudes.

Cognitive attitudes were also significantly above neutral, $t(59) = 7.51$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.36$, mean difference = 0.35, 95% CI [0.26, 0.45], reflecting favourable beliefs and perceptions about learning English. Affective attitudes were similarly higher than neutral, $t(59) = 9.32$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.48$, mean difference = 0.58, 95% CI [0.45, 0.70], indicating positive emotional responses. However, behavioural attitudes did not differ significantly from neutral, $t(59) = 1.80$, $p = .078$, $M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.42$, mean difference = 0.10, 95% CI [-0.01,

0.21], suggesting that engagement in English-learning behaviours was not substantially above the neutral level.

Table 1: One-Sample t-Test for Attitudes Toward Learning English

Attitude Dimension	M	SD	t	df	p	95% CI (LL, UL)
Cognitive	3.3533	0.36428	7.513	59	< .001	[0.2592, 0.4474]
Affective	3.5767	0.47954	9.315	59	< .001	[0.4528, 0.7005]
Behavioral	3.0983	0.42406	1.796	59	.078	[-0.0112, 0.2079]
Overall	3.3428	0.30852	8.606	59	< .001	[0.2631, 0.4225]

Note: Test value = 3 (neutral midpoint on a five-point Likert scale), UL = upper limit, LL = lower limit, SD = standard deviation, M = mean.

An independent-samples t-test (Welch's) was then conducted to compare overall attitudes between male and female students. Findings revealed that the difference was not statistically significant, $t(33.46) = 0.31$, $p = .757$, mean difference = 0.028, 95% CI [-0.156, 0.212], with a negligible effect size ($d = 0.09$).

Table 2: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Overall Attitudes

Gender	N	M	SD	SE M	t	df	p	Mean Difference	95% CI [LL, UL]
Male	24	3.3597	.40084	.08182	.345	58	.732	.02824	[-.13573, .19221]
Female	36	3.3315	.23353	.03892	.312	33.461	.757	.02824	[-.15600, .21249]

Note: According to Welch's t-test, there was no significant statistical difference in the overall attitudes toward learning English between male and female students, $p > .05$.

Conclusion

The study focused on analysing how undergraduate EFL students perceive English learning by investigating their cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses in conjunction with a total aggregated dimension. Gender, as part of the demographic profile, was also analysed to determine whether or not it influences learners' attitudes. Results from the questionnaire suggested that learners hold favourable attitudes towards English language learning. In terms of gender, comparisons revealed no meaningful variation between male and female groups. Students displayed positive tendencies in the cognitive and affective domains, although their behavioural engagement remained close to neutrality. Overall attitudes were not shaped by gender. In conclusion, students exhibited favourable cognitive and affective attitudes towards learning English, whereas their behavioural engagement remained largely neutral. Gender did not appear to influence overall attitudes.

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