

# **ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING ENGLISH AMONG ESP (ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSE) UNDERGRADUATES OF SULTAN AZLAN SHAH UNIVERSITY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In language learning, there are numerous factors that have driven learners to learn the language such as environments, motivations, attitudes and others. Yet, attitudes are believed to be the main contributing factors in learning the language. The purpose of this study is to identify the ESP students' attitude towards learning English. A total of 40 English for Specific Purpose students from the Diploma in Islamic Studies Faculty of University Sultan Azlan Shah which consisted of 17 males and 23 females participated in this study. Responses were gauged using Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire and analysed using IBM SPSS23 software. Results exhibited that the ESP students demonstrated negative attitudes toward learning English as their second language which displayed low overall mean score ( $M=2.82$ ,  $SD=0.32$ ). Hence, the findings from this study will provide some insightful thoughts and ideas to language educators for the betterment of teaching and learning of English in the university.

***Keywords: Attitudes, English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)***

## **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of the English language cannot be denied since it is a Lingua Franca and commonly use as the medium to communicate with people from all over the world. As Ali (2016) suggests that "the reason why English has gained such unprecedented importance is that it has become the global language of information as well as communication and English serves as the gateway to the globalizing world and it is used in different areas of life." Even though the majority of Malaysians being proficient speakers and users of the English language; however, there are others who have not been affected by the positive impacts of second language learning. This situation can be linked to the attitude factors which were frequently used in exploring learners' language learning. According to Brown (2000), "positive attitudes towards the self, the native language group and the target language group enhanced proficiency." This factor can be considered quite crucial in encouraging learners to learn. Vo (2017) also posits that "learner's attitude towards learning languages is one of the crucial factors determining its success or failure"

External factors such as motivations, environments, socio-background, economy status, attitudes are among factors that can influence the learners in second language learning. Nevertheless, attitudes toward second language learning is assumed to be one of the vital

factors in enhancing the learners' motivation in language learning. As Eshghinejad and Gritter (2016) proposes that "learning could not come about easily unless students have positive attitudes toward it on one hand, and attitudes might originate from life experiences, on the other hand." This proves that the existence of attitudes in learning the second language is essential in determining the learners' language development, whether it is growing or decaying.

Additionally, the learners' attitudes might be distinguished into positive and negative. Some learners might be having positive attitudes in second language learning which would leave good impacts on their proficiency while those who have negative attitudes might be unmotivated and lead to language destruction as proposed by Zeinivand, et al.,(2015). Teaching and learning process are interconnected in which it is a process for both parties to learn from one another. Indisputably, during the learning process, the learners' proficiency will be the centre of attention, however, the teachers should also learn by observing the learners' attitudes toward the language learning process. In order to cater to the learners' needs, the teachers have to monitor the learners' attitudes since they might demonstrate different attitudes in class. As a result, it is essential to apprehend the notion of second language acquisition which is the focal of this study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Second Language Acquisition and Krashen's Model Hypotheses (Affective Filters)**

Second language acquisition refers to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children and in the process of learning that language as suggested by Saville-Troike (2012). The additional languages that we learn can be identified as a second language (L2) or sometimes known as target language (TL). The Second language acquisition is based on three main theories which are the Nativist, the Behaviourist and the Interactionist. These three main theories act as the pillars which have great influence on second language teaching nowadays where the educators and learners are depending on these theories to cater the problems in second language learning.

Theories on second language acquisitions were tremendous and all the findings were significant to the development of second language learners. Based on Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD) theory, Stephen Krashen (1982) then came up with the monitor hypotheses theory which comprises of five different hypotheses in second language learning: The acquisition- learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis.

Among the above hypotheses, only affective filter hypothesis focuses on a number of affective variables that accounts for the influence of affective factors on second language acquisition. Among the variables are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety which play a facilitative, but a non-causal role in second language acquisition. As detailed by Krashen (1982), the affective filter "opens" or "closes" according to our mood which acts like a gate controlling the amount of input. When the learners are facing low motivation, low self-esteem, nervousness, boredom and fear in learning the target language, these affective variables will raise the affective filter and form a mental block to prevent the comprehensible input from reaching the language areas of the mind and it will obstruct the second language acquisition process.

When the comprehensible input is being blocked by the affective filter, the acquisition will be failed, however, the effect can be minimized by using the second language instruction. Thus, more input will reach the LAD if the learners are relaxed and feel comfortable with the learning environment compare to when they feel tense in the negative environment which will stop the learners from receiving the input. In order to help the learners to acquire more input, the teacher/educator needs to create a proper environment in the classroom, which frees from anxiety and low motivation so they can really acquire the language. On the other hand, further enlightenment on the concept of attitude is necessary.

## **Attitudes**

The learners' attitudes toward language learning is important in assisting them to go through the learning process. The learners will portray either positive or negative attitudes which will influence their desires in learning the language. What is attitude and why is it very important for learners? There are various definitions of attitudes which were suggested by previous researchers. As proposed by Gardner (1985), attitude refers to the sum total of human's incitements and feelings, bias or prejudice, threats, fear, preliminary feelings and condemnations regarding any indicated topic. Meanwhile, Brown (2000) suggests that attitudes are cognitive and affective; they are related to thoughts as well as to feelings and emotions.

A positive attitude is an important contributor in helping the learners to acquire the language. By having positive attitudes, the learners will make efforts to interact with the native speakers and participate in class activities which at the same time will increase the input in language learning. It will also lead the learners to apply a variety of learning strategies in alleviating the development skills. Brown (2000) proposes that positive attitudes towards self, the native language group and the target language group enhanced the proficiency.

There are a number of recent studies which highlighted the influence of positive attitudes on the language learners. For instance, Al Noursi (2013) has conducted a study in investigating the attitude towards Learning English: The case of the UAE Technological High School. The finding of the study suggested that the vast majority of the subjects of the study had positive attitudes towards learning the English Language. Moreover, a current study conducted by Charoensuk and Jaipetch (2017) on attitudes toward English also provides similar results. In this study, the findings revealed that the students from all six faculties had overall positive attitudes towards English.

On the other hand, having a negative attitude towards the language might also influence the learners' learning process. The negative attitudes can impede the process by making the learners anxious, demotivated and not enthusiastic in learning the language. It is supported by a study conducted by Munir and Rehman (2015) Secondary Schools Students' attitudes towards learning the foreign language where the students portrayed negative attitudes. Another study which was conducted by Abidin et al., (2012) also discovered that students' negative attitudes towards learning English were based on three aspects of attitudes; Behavioural, Cognitive and Emotional aspect of attitudes.

Thus, attitudes can be the real obstructions in learning the language, however, it can be changed if the learners received guidance and assistance from the people surrounding them. Attitudes can be modified when the learners experienced success as it will strengthen the

learners' self-confidence and beliefs as suggested by Vo (2017). Next, to further explain about Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) which is vital for the purpose of this study.

### **Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)**

The Attitude and Motivation Test Battery was developed by Gardner (1985) in fulfilling the need to have a test to measure the non-linguistic goals in second language learning. Gardner developed the AMTB test to fill up the need of having a test that can measure the learners' attitude and motivation. Gardner has been directed to investigate on English-speaking students learning French as a second language. Thus, the items comprised in the battery were-focused about French. The Attitude and Motivation Test battery has been developed for over 20 years and until today the test has been used by many researchers from all over the world, especially for those who are dealing with learners' attitudes and motivation in second language learning.

### **Problem Statement**

This study attempts to analyse the attitudes of the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) students towards learning English and majority of them came from religious school background with limited exposure in English language learning. This problem arises due to the different curriculum used in school learning where the religious schools give more focus on Islamic education. The latter emphasized more on relevant subjects with religious themes such as Islamic jurisprudence and other related Islamic subjects. Their exposure to foreign language was more inclined to Arabic since most of the reference books were written in that language. In addition, the Malay and Arabic languages were used as a medium of instructions in class. Hence, the religious school students do have the chance to learn other languages. As quoted by Ahmad et al., (2014):

*“Malaysia’s dualism education system creates a vacuum in the sense that students from religious school background are often associated with low performance in the English language. Despite years of exposure to the English language instructions, students from the Islamic education schooling system are still not proficient in the English language. This is shown when many only managed to get Bands 1 and 2 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET).”*

Due to the above reasons, some of the students have no interest and commitment to learning English as the second language. The majority of them viewed learning English is difficult and not enjoyable which might be influenced by their negative acceptance and attitudes towards the language itself. This is somehow reflected through their performance, participation in class and scores in their tests. However, this situation might be different if the students have positive attitudes in learning the language. This condition is really tormenting since students in the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) classes majoring in Islamic studies have low proficiency and displayed little interest to learn the language. Such patterns are similar to the majority of other learners from religious school background. They often showed negative attitudes in learning the language and can be categorized as low achievers in class. Some even refused to join the class due to the reason that they felt like an outcast since they cannot comprehend the lesson.

Based on the lecturers' observation during English lessons, the students with negative attitudes tend to be reluctant and unenthusiastic in participating with the class activities especially when it comes to English subjects. Moreover, they are also unable to perform in their class assessments and score low marks. Nevertheless, there are some students who portrayed positive attitudes by showing good performances and participation when they encountered with any of the skills in the English language. Likewise, it can be assumed that the only reason that motivates the students to attend the class is to get the Diploma certificate. As Falita and Faizah (2017) believed that the English language will help them in getting a better job, making them appear more knowledgeable and also enable them to secure a better paying job with the English language they have mastered."

### **Research Objective**

The research objective of this study is as follows:

1. To identify the positive or negative attitudes portrayed by the learners towards learning English among ESP undergraduates of USAS

### **Research Question**

The research question of this study is as follows:

1. What is the attitude portrayed by the learners towards learning English among ESP undergraduates of USAS?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the fact that irrefutably there were tremendous studies on the second language learners' attitudes. However, there are not adequate studies have been done on this particular participant and context. It somehow sparks some ideas for dealing with Islamic Studies students which are facing severe difficulties in learning English as a second language. Du (2009) suggested few methods to make use of affective filter hypothesis in second language teaching, such as to analyse students' learning motivation, motivate them, help them possess a positive attitude as well as to boost up students learning confidence and lower their language anxiety.

By having this present study which focuses more on the learners with an Islamic education background, it will shed lights to the educators when facing the same obstacles and challenges in dealing with learners from this kind of educational background and experience. Additionally, it will also benefit the English Language Department by providing possible solutions in assisting the Islamic Studies students with low language proficiency. Thus, by studying this issue, the educators will be able to cater to the needs of USAS students and in producing more proficient speakers and users of the English language. Last but not least, findings in this study are motivating and offered a significant contribution to the field of research.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the quantitative analysis using a questionnaire survey in gathering the data for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire items measured the perception of the Islamic Studies students' towards learning English. The research was conducted at the Sultan Azlan Shah University, Kuala Kangsar, Perak. This university caters students from various backgrounds where the majority of them came with religious school education background in which used Malay and Arabic languages in most of their learning materials. The main target participants were chosen from Islamic Studies courses. They were final semester students in English for Specific Purpose classes for their respective semester.

There are several reasons for choosing the target participants. Firstly, they are the most suitable target group to be studied based on their secondary educational background was from religious schools and were exposed to limited use of English. Secondly, majority of the diploma students from this Islamic studies faculty are having difficulties in learning English since it is a compulsory subject to graduate. Thirdly, based on the lecturers' observation, the majority of these participants has low proficiency in English especially in writing and speaking skills. This is supported by their previous results in other English subjects. Last but not least, they are registered students in the English for Specific Purpose subject.

Thus, it is very interesting to explore their attitudes towards English language learning. In order to answer the above research question, a total of 40 students consisted of male and female were selected to participate in the survey. These 40 students were selected from ESP classes in semester 3 2018/2019 based on the purposive sampling method.

They came from different nationalities and races such as from Vietnam, Syria, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand. Their proficiency levels varied from beginner, intermediate to advanced learners. The main purpose of this study is merely to identify their attitudes in learning English among English for Specific Purpose students and not to generalize the finding for the whole population of Islamic Studies undergraduates in USAS.

The 10 questionnaire items were adapted from Gardner and Lambert's Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) 1985 to measure students' attitude and motivation in learning English as the second language. The 5 points Likert's scale was used to measure the students' attitudes in language learning. The scale ranged from (1) one (for strongly agree) to (5) five (for strongly disagree) in gauging for all responses. The data were analysed using both inferential and descriptive tools. Data were collected, gathered and analysed using IBM SPSS23 software and presented in graphs to identify percentages of positive and negative attitudes of the learners.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Table 1 below represents the results of the respondents' responses on the attitudes toward learning English section. All the data are presented using percentages and mean scores. The results are extracted from the responses based on the 5 Likert's- scale.

There are 10 items presented in the questionnaire under the attitudes toward learning English. Table 1 depicts the respondents' responses on each of the questions. As for Q1, 55% of the respondents (22 students) disagree that they hate the English language while only 2.5% (1 student) strongly agree with the statement. Followed by Q2 which receives 70% (28 students) agree responses that they really enjoy learning English and zero for disagree and strongly

disagree options. Besides that, for Q3, 40% of the respondents (16 students) is not sure whether they feel anxious to answer a question in English class or not. The data for Q4 shows that 52.5% of the respondents (21 students) answers agree with the statement where they never feel quite sure to speak in English class. In the meantime for Q5, 42.5 % (17 students) agrees that they feel very much at ease when they do not have to speak in English class.

As for Q6 where the respondents are feeling confident when being asked to speak in English class indicates that 35% of them (14 students) is not sure. Q7 illustrates 40% (16 students) agreed when honestly, they have little interest in English class. Moreover, almost half of the respondents (20 students) which equivalent to 50% agreed with Q8 that it is worrying them to see the other students in the class to speak better English. Despite that, 52.5% of the respondents (21 students) chooses to disagree with the statement that English is dull in Q9. Last but not least, Q10 records that 37.5% (15 students) agreed that it embarrasses them to volunteer in giving answers during English class.

Furthermore, the two last columns of Table 1 also display the mean scores and standard variations for every item of the respondents' attitudes toward learning English. The findings indicate that out of ten items, item number two (*I really enjoy learning English*) receives the lowest mean score for the attitudes toward language learning with (M=1.85 SD=0.89) preceded by item number four (*I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class*) with (M=2.10 SD=0.84). Meanwhile, item number nine (*I think that learning English is dull*) acquires the highest mean score with (M=4.02 SD=0.80) follows by the first item (*I hate English*) of the questionnaire with (M=3.85 SD=0.89). Finally, Table 1 displays the overall mean score for the respondents' attitudes toward language English is 2.82 while 0.32 for the standard deviation.

Table 1: Attitudes toward learning English

Attitudes toward learning English	1	2	3	4	5	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
	Percentage (%)						
	Frequency						
1. I hate English.	2.5	5.0	17.5	55.0	20.0	3.8500	.89299
	1	2	7	22	8		
2. I really enjoy learning English.	22.5	70.0	7.5	0	0	1.8500	.53349
	9	8	3	0	0		
3. I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class.	5.0	27.5	40.0	25.0	2.5	2.9250	.91672
	2	11	16	10	1		
4. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.	22.5	52.5	17.5	7.5	0	2.1000	.84124
	9	21	7	3	0		
5. I feel very much at ease when I don't have to speak English in class.	15.0	42.5	20.0	22.5	0	2.5000	1.01274
	6	17	8	9	0		
6. I feel confident when being asked to speak in my English class.	2.5	27.5	35.0	30.0	5.0	3.0750	.94428
	1	11	14	12	2		
7. To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class.	7.5	40.0	20.0	27.5	5.0	2.8250	1.08338
	3	16	8	11	2		
8. It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.	17.5	50.0	20.0	12.5	0	2.2750	.90547
	7	20	8	5	0		
9. I think that learning English is dull.	0	5.0	15.0	52.5	27.5	4.0250	.80024
	0	2	6	21	11		
10. It embarrasses me to volunteer in giving answers during our English class.	7.5	37.5	22.5	32.5	0	2.8000	.99228
	3	15	9	13	0		
Overall Mean Score/ Std. Deviation						2.8225	.32065

Table 1.1 displays the respondents' attitudes towards each of the items presented in the questionnaire. Respondents depict positive responses for Q2, Q4, Q5, and Q8 with mean scores below 2.5. Whereas, another six items from the questionnaire obtain negative attitudes from the respondents. They portray negative responses for Q1, Q3, Q6, Q7, Q9, and Q10 with mean scores above 2.5. Majority of the respondents demonstrates positive attitudes toward Q2 where the mean score is 1.8500 and negative attitudes on Q9 receives the highest mean score which is 4.0250.

*Table 1.1 Positive and Negative Attitudes toward Learning English*

<b>POSITIVE ATTITUDES:</b>		
Attitudes Towards:		Mean Scores:
Q2	I really enjoy learning English.	1.8500
Q4	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.	2.1000
Q5	I feel very much at ease when I don't have to speak English in class.	2.5000
Q8	It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.	2.2750
<b>NEGATIVE ATTITUDES:</b>		
Attitudes Towards:		Mean Scores:
Q1	I hate English.	3.8500
Q3	I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class.	2.9250
Q6	I feel confident when being asked to speak in my English class.	3.0750
Q7	To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class.	2.8250
Q9	I think that learning English is dull.	4.0250
Q10	It embarrasses me to volunteer in giving answers during our English class.	2.8000

## **Discussion**

### **Research question: What is the attitude portrayed by the learners towards learning English among ESP undergraduates of USAS?**

According to the findings of the study, the outcome for research question one is that the English for Specific Purpose students portrayed negative attitudes towards learning English. It can be seen from the analysis that the overall mean score of the question one to ten is 2.82 with a standard variation of 0.82. This finding is aligned with the previous study conducted by Munir and Rehman (2015) on the Attitudes of Secondary Schools Students towards English as Foreign Language: A case study at Lahore, Pakistan where the students displayed negative attitudes towards English language with (Mean= 2.60 SD=0.58). Additionally, Abidin et al., (2012) also demonstrate the students' negative attitudes towards learning English based on the behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspect of attitudes with overall mean score (M= 2.6167

SD= 0.59177). On the other hand, there are also few studies which have contradict results and findings to this current study. However, Al Noursi (2013), as well as Charoensuk and Jaipetch (2017), have conducted studies on students' attitudes and both exhibited similar results where the students displayed positive attitudes towards learning the language.

Despite the negative attitudes portrayed by the students, the researcher has spotted that the respondents really enjoyed learning the language which can be proven with the 70% of the respondents who agreed with the statement. Whereas, 55% disagreed with the statement that they hate English. It can also be concluded from this study that, the majority of the respondents really enjoyed and liked learning English, however, due to some conditions and situations, they felt lack of confidence to participate in the class activity. For instance, afraid of being judged by fellow classmates when they committed mistakes.

This can be proven from the results of the questionnaire where Q4, Q5, Q8, and Q10 recorded the highest percentage for 'agree' option. As Nazir et al., (2014) indicated in the study that the students suffered anxiety from different dimensions which led to communicative anxiety and fear of negative evaluation which later hampered their classroom speaking skills. Majority of the students did not feel comfortable while expressing in English and learners get nervous while responding to questions. Hence, the attitudes portrayed by ESP students toward learning English can be classified as negative due to some circumstances as mentioned.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

One of the limitations of the study is that, it should not only be focusing on the ESP students' attitudes in learning English by giving them the questionnaire to be answered but also to include an observational study to present more detailed findings in this niche of the study. Furthermore, in order to generalize the findings of the study, the target group should be varied and not only focusing on ESP students because the number of registered students for every semester is very limited. Moreover, the number of ESP students is inadequate to represent the population in USAS. The number of participants can also be increased by including more undergraduates from the Islamic Studies faculty in generating extensive results and findings.

In order to produce more significant findings on the attitudes of ESP students in learning English, the study should also focus on the relationship between the students' attitudes towards learning English with the Continuous Assessments Marks (CAM) or examination scores. Furthermore, the study can also explore the factors that affect the students' motivation in learning the language such as socio- background, economic status, education background and etc. An extensive study should be done on students from Islamic school background due to the deficient number of past studies with this kind of target group. Such an investigation will obtain rich information whether the students' attitudes and motivation in learning English can be influenced by other factors or correlated with their performance in class.

In future research, more profound understanding on the ESP students' attitudes and types of motivation in learning English could be generated by including more respondents from Islamic studies fields and making comparisons with various universities, thus the findings will be more substantial. In addition, different studies on attitudes and motivation can also be conducted to explore different findings and possibilities. For instance, a study on how genders can affect the attitudes and motivation in learning English and many more.

## Conclusion

In this study, the phenomenon of ESP students' attitudes toward learning English was analysed using the quantitative method. Findings show that the students portrayed negative attitudes towards learning the language. The attitudes towards learning English were identified and classified according to the Gardner's (1985) - Socio- Educational Model on Second Language Acquisition and measured by using questionnaire adapted from the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed by Gardner (1985) to measure the non-linguistic goals in second language learning. Findings of the study indicated that the majority of the ESP students delineated negative attitudes towards learning English in USAS.

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