

The Relationship between Student's Attitude and English Language Achievement: The Case of Freshmen in a Private Institution

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This study investigates the relationship between student's attitude (affective, behavioral, cognitive) and English language achievement among the freshmen in a private institution. In obtaining data for this research, adapted questionnaires instead of interviews were used to obtain information on students' attitudes in learning the English Language. The total sample size was 175. The sample group of this study was selected using purposive sampling. The findings of this study reveal that there is a positive relationship between students' attitudes and their achievement in English Language. The results also reveal that students, teachers, institutions, government, parents and media should leverage their vital role in improving the English language learning. Therefore, it is necessary for all stakeholders to take further steps to enhance conducive teaching and learning environment for enhanced potential achievement in English Language.

Key words: *Attitude, English language, achievement, behavioral, cognitive, affective.*

Introduction

In Malaysia, English is learned as a second language after Bahasa Melayu as stated in the curriculum for the primary (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) and the secondary school (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah). English is also one of the compulsory subjects for other levels of education. Students have to master this language for various reasons, for instance - obtaining a place in university and also in securing good jobs. There are many factors that influence language learning. One of the factors that is believed to be important is

attitude. Attitude is a belief which develops over a period of time and is reflective of the sociocultural setting of an individual. Attitudes have an impact on life. Investigations have been carried out that research what learning takes place if the learner's attitude is positive. If the attitude towards learning English is more positive, then the student will gain more via the learning process and from their teachers as well. When students' attitude towards learning English improves, the student will experience benefits, and this will help them get more out of learning the English language. In other words, it can be said that learners of the second language would not produce positive outcomes if their attitudes are deemed negative.

Statement of Problem

In May 2010 in a private institution, a report was presented by the course leader at the Board of Examiners Meeting for the paper code ULC0013 (English 1). This paper is specifically tailored for the first semester students and it is a prerequisite before these students can go on to English 2. May 2010's results revealed that only 13.45% of students scored good marks (75% percent and above). A number of lecturers who taught this paper were then interviewed on the issues related to the low achievers in their English courses and the reasons underlying it were discovered. It was found that some of the students had negative attitudes to language learning. They studied the language because it was made compulsory for them and they did not value the importance of learning it except for job purposes. Undeniably, through preliminary observations and interviews with fellow lecturers, some students also showed positive attitudes in learning the target language. They love the language and they found it a must to master the language for various reasons. These students would definitely look upon the learning process as a positive one and realize the importance of it so that they would be proficient in the language. Further, students with positive attitudes were motivated to learn the language as they had set their minds to a positive attitude and high level of motivation knowing this would help them to perform well in the subject. In other situations, students with negative attitudes were less interested and had low motivation levels.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between student's attitude and English language achievement among the freshmen in a private institution. Specifically, this study is conducted to fulfil these objectives:

- a) To examine the relationship between student's affective attitudes and their achievement in English
- b) To examine the relationship between student's behavioural attitudes and their achievement in English

- c) To examine the relationship between student's cognitive attitudes and their achievement in English
- d) To suggest ways to improve freshmen's English language's learning

Research Questions

- a) Is there any significant relationship between student's affective attitudes and their achievement in English?
- b) Is there any significant relationship between student's behavioural attitudes and their achievement in English?
- c) Is there any significant relationship between student's cognitive attitudes and their achievement in English?
- d) What are the ways to improve freshmen's English language learning?

Literature Review

Attitude and Language Learning

First and second language researchers are currently placing greater emphasis on the issue of attitudes. It has been found that a majority of the researchers have concluded that attitude is a vital part of the learning process and it is an important component in the acquisition of second language learning. Several researchers have given definitions related to attitudes in general and the learning process. Cook (2017) in his book entitled '*Second language learning and language teaching*' referred to attitudes as the development of mental aspects and feelings of a human being which begin to develop at the early age. It is also a result of the parents' attitude and their modelled contact with the global environment that links various people around the world and deals with their feelings and emotions which is a fundamental human experience. Thus, it is easy to understand that there are various factors which lead either to positive or negative attitudes in an individual. In language learning, attitudes have been defined by Redzuan et al (2014) as necessary but are of "insufficient indirect conditions for linguistic attainment". Attitudinal tendencies are related to the levels of the students' involvement in language learning and this only happens when motivation is also a component. In second language learning, attitudes refer to the students' belief in English (assuming it is the second language to be acquired) and its influence on them in general. It also refers to the views about the courses they have attended to learn this language Obeidat (2005, cited in Sengkey and Galag ,2018).

Components of attitude

There are three components of attitude; the affective component which deals with the feelings about the attitude pertaining to the object; the behavioural components that are related to the concept of predisposition that causes a behaviour towards an attitude; and finally, the

cognitive component is all about beliefs and the attitude towards a particular object (Abu-Melhim, 2009).

Affective

The affective component refers to the feelings and emotions that one has towards an object, 'likes' or 'dislikes', 'with' or 'against' Wenden (1991, cited in Shi, 2017). It was further explained by Gardner, (1985, as cited in Atchade, 2002) that affective factors can influence learners' attitudes in language learning and can be divided into two categories of factors. They are those which are prior to the learners' approach in second language learning and factors that develop during the process of learning. Learners may entertain different attitudes before being put into a learning situation. These kinds of attitudes will provide either a negative or positive predisposition to the second language learning. Learners' attitudes will be determined by learners' impression about particular second language and the community, as well as the people who speak the language. On the other hand, learners may develop different attitudes towards the learning situation based on their second language learning experiences in the classroom. The attitudes may be useful or harmful and will determine how successfully they have acquired the language. It depends on their affective attitudes or on the way they feel about learning the language in a particular course and from a particular teacher that can lead to the acceptance or rejection of the said learning process. Learners will develop negative attitudes if the learning process causes anxiety.

Behavioral

Wenden (1991) and Al-Mhasnah et al. (2018) defined behavioural as a component which refers to a person's consistent overt actions or intentions towards the object. The way the person feels about something and their belief perceptions will be translated into their actions. A study conducted by Eshghinejad (2016); Garfield, (2018) found that 60% of the respondents strongly agreed that they like to learn English. It can be said that they have positive behavioral attitudes and are confident in learning English. Meanwhile a previous study conducted by Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) titled "Iranian medical students' attitudes towards English language learning" took three aspects of attitude including behavioral into consideration. The findings were that Iranian medical students have a positive attitude regarding English language learning.

Cognitive

According to Wenden (1991), a cognitive component is made up of the beliefs and ideas or perception about the object of the attitude. Furthermore, Verma (2005, cited in Sales, 2016) elaborated that students, whether motivated or demotivated, have different perceptions of

their class, teacher and curriculum. Their perceptions are the reflections of their attitudes (Hye, & Lau, 2015; Afthanorhan, Awang, & Fazella, 2017). The perceptions of the class, teacher, peer group, syllabus and individual awareness does indeed affect the individual's attitude to language learning. This is in line with findings by Basar et al (2006) in their study to investigate the PISMP in IPBA students' attitudes to English Language learning who found that students had moderately positive thoughts regarding the English Language and the culture of the native speaker.

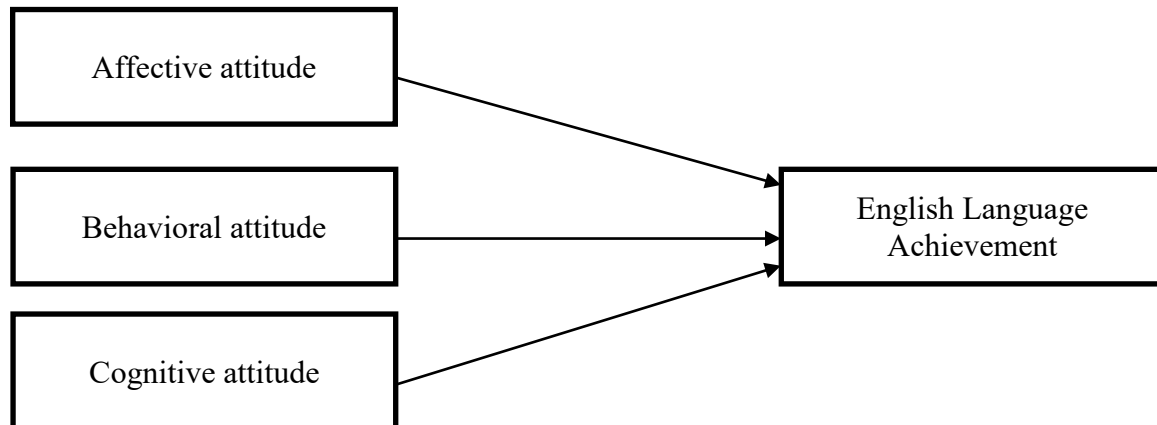
Relationship between the Attitudes and Achievement in English

Several researchers have found a correlation between attitudes and achievement in language learning. Clement et al (1994, as cited in Liu 2007), conducted a survey to assess students' attitude, motivation and anxiety encountered in learning English. The perception in the classroom atmosphere was that the students' achievement in English was related significantly with their self-confidence, evaluation of the learning environment and the motivational indices available. It was also discovered that attitudes and efforts are the important components related to self-confidence. Abu-Melhim (2009) in his research, discovered that a majority of the respondents had positive attitudes towards English. They liked the language and they believed that choosing English as a field of study would give them a chance to secure great jobs in the future. Attitude has significant relationship with achievement where it was proven that positive attitudes can influence the student's achievement in language learning. Inal et al (n.d) in their studies conducted about the relationship between students' attitude toward a foreign language and their achievement in that language, found that a relationship exists between the students' attitudes and their achievement. The results revealed that there is a positive relationship between the students' attitudes and their achievements in English.

This was in line with the findings by Gardner and Lambert (1985, as cited in Inal et al, n.d), who found that a relationship exists between attitude and achievement. The attitudes of the learner will determine his or her success in language learning. In addition, Clement & Noels (1994, as cited in Ghanbarpour , 2016) found that second language learners of English in Hungary had a positive correlation between their attitudes toward English and their achievement in English. In language learning, the students' achievement can also be measured by assessing their proficiency in the target language. Atchade (2002) went on to state that some researchers have found that attitudes influence second language learning. Scherer and Wertheimer (1964, as cited in Atchade,2002) found that American students in college have positive attitudes towards the German language and towards their ability to speak in German which individually, were highly correlated with their proficiency in German. Hsieh (2008) in her study discovered that students with positive attitudes to

language learning were more successful in academic acquisition of Spanish, German and French.

Figure 1. Proposed Framework



Research Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant relationship between student's affective attitudes and their achievement in English.

H2: There is a significant relationship between student's behavioural attitudes and their achievement in English.

H3: There is a significant relationship between student's cognitive attitudes and their achievement in English.

Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed method design which involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study. The total sample size was 175. The sample group of this study was selected using purposive sampling. Two instruments were used for the purpose of obtaining and gathering data from the respondents. They data instruments are a questionnaire tool and an interview instrument. The questionnaire instrument is divided into two sections. Section A comprised of questions on demographic profile of the respondents. Section B lists the items to uncover students' attitudes towards their achievement in English. The questionnaires were adopted and adapted from previous research and have been divided into the three aspects or domains of attitude, namely affective, behavioural and cognitive. The questionnaires were collected after a three-day session. The interviews were conducted on the third day in class after the English 1 period. Nine of the students were asked to come to class

for the interview session. Each respondent took about 10 minutes to complete the interview session. Statistical analysis of the data was performed through Statistical Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS).

Research Findings

Correlation Analysis

Figure 2. Correlation Analysis

		English 1				
		Marks (first test)	Total affective	Total Behavioral	Total cognitive	overall 1
English 1 Marks (first test)	Pearson Correlation	1	.453**	.477**	.467**	.486**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	168	168	168	168	168

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There appear to be an average and significant relationship between the components of behavioural attitudes and English 1 results ($r=.477$, $p\text{-value}=.000$). With regards to the relationship between cognitive aspect of attitude with the students' English language performance, the data shows an average and significant relationship between these two variables ($r=.467$, $p\text{-value}=.000$). It was then followed by the correlation of the affective attitude component and it shows that there is an average but significant relationship between the component and achievement of the students in a given test ($r=.453$, $p\text{-value}=.000$).

Hypothesis	p-value	Decision
H1: There is a significant relationship between student's affective attitudes and their achievement in English.	0.000	Accept H1
H2: There is a significant relationship between student's behavioural attitudes and their achievement in English.	0.000	Accept H2
H3: There is a significant relationship	0.000	Accept H3

between student's cognitive attitudes and their achievement in English.		
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Interview Analysis

Interviews were conducted with nine respondents on several issues regarding English language learning. The interviewees were chosen based on their performance in the test of English 1. Three students from each category of high achievers, medium achievers and low achievers were selected to be interviewed. A label was given to each interviewee. The high achievers were labelled Student 1, 2 and 3 while the medium achievers were labelled as student 4, 5 and 6. Students of the low achievers were labelled as students 7, 8 and 9. Students had to answer questions pertinent to attitudes in learning the English Language and the main focus of the interview was to discover the students' suggestions on ways to improve English language learning. Based on the interview, it was found that majority of the students stressed the role of certain stakeholders in improving the English Language Learning. The results were discussed as follows:

Interviewee	Theme
Student 1: 'Teacher holds the responsibilities in making the lesson interesting. The more interesting the lesson is, the more motivated the students will be. The lesson can be conducted out of the classroom setting such as having a language camp or English camp'.	Role of Teachers or Educators
Student 2: 'I prefer my teacher to do some in class activities such as movie review session, composing song's lyric, language games and drama'.	
Students 4: 'To make the lesson more effective, teacher should not use 'Bahasa Melayu' in the classroom but he or she should use English and also give encouragement for students to use the English'	
Student 1: 'Students should read more books, magazines, newspapers and internet articles and also watch English's television programmes. Reading is a good habit and it	Role of Individual

can give us many benefits. We can gain more knowledge and at the same time improve our proficiency in the target language’.	
Student 2: ‘I think by listening to English’s songs can help one to improve their language proficiency. With this, they can enjoy the song and at the same time gain benefits from the lyrics’.	
Student 3 and 4: ‘Students should always practice watching English movies without the subtitles. This can help them to improve their listening skill’.	
Student 7 and 9: ‘Individual should do a study group and ask help from friends who are good in English’.	
Student 8: ‘Student should motivate themselves and think of the importance of English for future’.	
Student 3: ‘Television programmes should be improved by adding more programmes on English language learning’.	Role of Media
Student 5: ‘Newspapers should provide more reading articles or stories in the English language, so students can do it as a practice’.	
Student 8: ‘Television should show more movies in English language without the subtitles or using the English subtitles only’.	
Student 2: ‘Parent should use English to communicate with children at home and this should be done since childhood’.	Role of parents
Student 5: ‘Parents should also encourage their child to master the language by giving them sufficient materials such as English’s reference books, English’s magazines or newspapers, English cartoons and other materials in English’.	
Student 9: ‘Parents should send their child to extra classes or tuition classes because	

<p>this can help their child to improve’.</p>	
<p>Student 2: ‘The government should do implement new strategies to help the citizens to master the language’.</p>	<p>Role of government</p>
<p>Student 1: ‘Institution for example universities and colleges should plan several activities for the students such as English day or English festivals’.</p>	<p>Role of institutions</p>
<p>Student 3: ‘University should conduct module which is compulsory for students to attend and the focus of the module is in improving students in English language. This is based on my experience in previous university where we have to attend modules on communication skills, building confidence in English and public speaking’.</p>	
<p>Student 7: ‘Institution should conduct campaign of English language to raise awareness on the importance of English language’.</p>	

Discussion and Conclusion

The Freshmen Attitudes towards Learning English

An adapted version of attitude and motivation test battery was used in this study and it was divided into three sub constructs, namely affective, behaviour and cognitive. With regards to affective sub construct, the learners’ feelings and emotions were considered important in second language learning. The findings of the study indicated that the students enjoy learning English and love the language as well. They also have positive affective attitudes towards their English teacher and look forward to studying more English in the future. In terms of behavioural attitudes, the findings showed that students behaved and reacted positively so far in the English Language learning process. They show good attitude in completing their English homework and also in participating in the in-class activities. Cognitive attitudes were also discussed in the findings. The respondents showed positive responses with respect to their perception and belief towards the teaching and learning of English Language. In fact, the scores that students obtained were high for items that dealt with the learning of English which was viewed as an important part of the institution’s programme. Overall, students have shown positive attitudes in learning English Language and at the same time they are highly motivated to learn the English Language.

The Relationship between Students' Attitudes and Achievement in English Language

The finding has proven that there is a positive relationship between students' attitudes and achievement in English. This result shows that good attitudes do contribute to better scores in English Language. Interview data also lends support to the findings obtained from the questionnaire. Students from the high-performance category did highlight the efforts they engage in to improve English proficiency, which amongst others include taking extra classes, meeting the lecturer when they do not understand and reading as well as finding other materials that could enhance their reading comprehension skills as well as the ability to speak proficiently. Those who did not view English as really important and did not put much effort and energy into learning the language did not fare as well as those who went the extra miles to learn the language. These results are significant and interrelated with the previous research.

Makrami (2010), in his study about motivation and attitude of Saudi University's Learners of English for Specific Purposes found that the students with good attitudes in language learning scored better in the test. In other words, attitudes are correlated with achievement. Clement and Noels (1994, as cited in Makrami, 2010), discovered that second language learners of English in Hungary had a positive correlation between their attitudes towards English and their achievement in English. Inal et al (n.d), in their study of the relationship between students' attitudes toward a foreign language and foreign language achievement found a relationship between the students' attitudes and achievement. This result revealed that there is a positive relationship between the students' attitudes and achievements in the English Language. In addition, Malallah (2000), discovered that there exists a relationship between academic achievement and attitudes in the learning of English. It was found that the higher the grade obtained in the English test, the greater the need to learn English and the students' attitudes towards learning English will also become even more positive.

Implications for teaching and learning

The findings of the research have some implications to English language teaching and learning. Positive attitudes contribute to positive achievements in learning the English Language. Thus, it is important for the learners to embed positive attitudes in learning the second language. Learners should motivate themselves to love the language and enjoy the process of learning the second language. Efforts such as attending extra English's classes, reading more English materials, practicing the language through online language activities and many other options to improve their proficiency are worthwhile in that they build positive attitudes. It is imperative to suggest that in building these positive attitudes, teachers should play their role in guiding students towards this goal through co-construction of conducive learning environment. This can be achieved by making the lesson as interesting as

it can be and also by using the appropriate teaching techniques in the classroom which result in effective teaching and learning.

The objective of teaching is to ensure effective transition of knowledge and skill which can later influence students' attitudes in learning a language. Further, teachers can also motivate students by putting more attention to their identified needs in improving their proficiency in the target language. This situation can help the students to realize that there is a place for them to refer to whenever they have problems with the language learning. Learners' positive attitudes are also influenced by other factors such as their parents. The important role of parents in educating the child are undeniable. Parents hold the responsibility in guiding the child towards positive attitudes to learning which can be achieved by educating them with this mind-set from early childhood.

Institutions need to state their vision and action plans that differentiate for student improvement in the target language so that they can maintain the existing language programmes and at the same time add and adapt other effective programmes as modelled by other institutions. For instance in several universities, the intensive language programmes are completed with outdoor activities where students can learn about the culture of Malaysia and at the same time learn to improve their language proficiency. Through this activity, students also get the chance to stay with a host family with the intended objective of personal experience of Malaysian life. There should also be short courses and training for students to attend to supplement course work, for instance 'Effective Technical Writing', 'Successful job interviewing' and 'Achiever's English'

Recommendations for future research

In this research, several areas for improvement were identified: This research was only limited to only one private university. It would be better if further study involved more than one private university or if there was a comparative study conducted between private university and public university providers. This research focuses on students' attitudes in learning the English Language, future research could investigate other factors that influence language learning such as: motivation, learning strategies and other factors. This research focuses on students' attitudes in learning the English Language and it would be interesting if future research explored the teachers' attitudes in teaching English Language and also investigated the relationship between teachers' attitudes and students' achievement in learning the English Language

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