

## **Investigating Attitudes towards Studying English as a Foreign Language at the College of Pharmacy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The availability of some already developed physiological and mental abilities forms a source of assistance for the process of acquiring a language other than one's own. Such abilities cause learners to consider, feel, and act in relation to the things or occurrences in their environment, including the learning of a new language. In other words, there are positive and negative attitudes toward such things on the part of the learners. As a result, the current study aims to examine students' attitudes toward English as a foreign language taught in to the first stage at the College of Pharmacy, University of Duhok. It hypothesizes that students exhibit unfavorable attitudes toward learning English. To test the hypotheses, a 20-item questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the related literature and other relevant sources. The items focus on various aspects of learning English, such as the process of learning the language, advantages, learning of various linguistic skills, and factors affecting the learning process, to 91 2nd year students. Analysis of the collected data shows that students have noticeably positive attitudes toward studying English as a foreign language. As a result, the hypotheses are rejected as a student view the study of the subject of English and its other relevant aspects of benefit for the time being and in the future.

### **1. Introduction**

For a long time, psychologists have focused on attitudes as a topic of research. The concept of attitude has been a focal point of both study and research shortly after the introduction of social psychology. Lambert and Lambert (1964, p.150) stated that "the study of attitudes has become a major concern throughout the years since it is a complicated psychological phenomenon with huge societal relevance". This supports the idea that social psychologists are more interested in attitudes than other types of social motives as attitudes play a vital role in directing and channeling social behavior. According to Sherif (1979, p.2), studying attitudes entails discussing what a person has learned as a member of a family, a group, or a society at large, and doing so in such a way that he approaches his social world in a consistent and characteristic manner rather than in a transitory and haphazard manner. It refers to a person who is no longer neutral in assessing the world around him, as they are either attracted or repelled, for or against, favorable or unfavorable, particularly when their behavior toward people,

groups, institutions, ideas, and things in their environment takes on a consistent and characteristic pattern as they become socialized; a point that illustrates how people's attitudes towards any phenomena or thing in the environment drive them to be attracted to or repelled from it, and to adopt a certain way of thinking, feeling, and acting towards it. The current study's problem is represented by the fact that, despite studying English as a foreign language (EFL) for one year at a rate of 2 hours per week, students at the College of Pharmacy, University of Duhok show noticeable weaknesses in their performance on the tests in English subject. This is seen in their failure to master two of the most important productive abilities in English, namely speaking and writing. Such underachievement is thought to be linked to students' negative attitudes towards the language and its various applications, which the current paper tries to analyze. On this basis, it is hypothesized that

- There are negative attitudes toward studying EFL in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage on the part of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students at

the College of Pharmacy, the University of Duhok..

- There are negative attitudes on the part of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students at the College of Pharmacy, the University of Duhok towards studying EFL as a subject they studied in 1<sup>st</sup> stage in terms of
  - a) the difficulty of studying EFL,
  - b) the benefits of studying EFL,
  - c) performance of EFL skills and sub-skills, and
  - d) factors affecting studying EFL.

This study aims at determining 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students' attitudes toward studying EFL at the College of Pharmacy, the University of Duhok during the academic year 2021-2022. It also aims to look into such attitudes in terms of four areas that are important to the topic at hand, namely studying EFL as a required subject, difficulty of studying EFL, benefits of studying EFL, the performance of EFL skills and sub-skills, and factors that may influence the studying of EFL, such as time allotted, tests and the textbook or teaching materials..

## 2. Attitude: Definition

There is no single definition of attitude that may satisfy everyone who is interested in the subject. This is largely due to the breadth of the concept, which allows for a variety of definitions that represent the theoretical perspectives of people who wish to examine it.

There were three earliest definitions of attitudes, all of which can be dated back to the early twentieth century. "The term of 'attitudes' (is) used to indicate the entire total of a person's feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived beliefs, fears, threats, and convictions concerning any specific topic," Thurstone (1928, p.77) wrote. Lickert (1932, p.9) expanded on the above concept by defining an attitude as "a tendency to the attitude objects." According to Allport (1937, p.6), tracing the common thread that runs across the various definitions of attitude is not difficult. Each considers the basic element of attitude as preparation for reaction in some form. He goes on to define

attitude as "a mental and neurological state of readiness that is organized by experience and has a directive or dynamic impact on the individual's behavior to all objects and situations with which it is associated." As a result, rather than being overt and consumptive, 'attitude' is incipient and preliminary. It is the preconditions of behavior, not the behavior itself.

Recently, all definitions of attitude seem to reflect the same meanings referred to in the early definitions. For the time being, attitude is considered as a state of preparedness and inclination to behave and react to some specific stimulus. In other words, attitudes are the predispositions to respond to objects and circumstances in some special ways. Furthermore, attitudes are liable to change, though resistant to it, and their reflection in the ways that individuals think, feel, and behave makes them not susceptible to direct observation (Oppenheim, 1966, p.106; Harpin, 1979, p.38).

## 3. Attitude: Basic Components

Based on the many definitions of attitude, attitudes subsume three basic components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral. These three components are implied in Triandis's definition of attitude (1971, pp. 2-3) as a notion laden with emotion that predisposes a class of acts to a specific class of social situations," and/or from Ausubel & Robinson's definition (1972, p.369) which views an attitude as "a complex of ideas along with diverse affective or emotional components." Based on these affective states, individuals are inclined (motivated) to either approach or keep distant from the object of attitude. First, in terms of the cognitive component, an attitude is defined as one's beliefs about an object. This component varies from one person to another. A person may think many things about an object to be true while knowing very little, if anything, about another object (Triandis, 1971, p.3).

Second, the affective component, it underpins the

emotion that motivates the concept. As a result, we should argue that whether a person "feels good" or "feels awful" when thinking about a category; he has a positive or negative influence on the members of that group. According to Ausubel & Robinson (1972, pp.2-3), "the affective component is sometimes known as the feeling component and refers to the emotions or feelings associated to an attitude object, and is widely addressed by means of bipolar adjectives that connote feelings of favor or disfavor, such as love-hate, like-dislike, admire-detest, etc. The emotional component of an attitude, according to Klausmeier (1985, p. 376), refers to the emotions one associate with an item, person, event, or idea. That is, anything can be gratifying or unpleasant; it can be liked or disliked.

Third, the behavioral component subsumes the individual's behavioral preparedness to respond to the item in specific ways when proper cues are present. For example, a person may have a bad attitude toward a certain school subject, leading to a lack of interest in studying or completing homework. According to Harris (1950, p.130), this propensity can be overtly shown in a variety of ways, or it can be carefully hidden, existing simply as a sporadic tendency to keep distant.

Summers (1977, p. 3) believes that the three components of attitude are interconnected. For example, there may be a relationship between the cognitive component and the readiness to respond to the object, resulting in a high degree of consistency between the evaluative views and the response readiness direction. Similarly, there may be a link between the emotional and action inclination components, probably mediated by the physiological relationship between the organism's emotional states and response readiness.

### **3.1 Attitudes and Studying English as a Foreign Language**

There is a bulk of research information that proves the close and positive correlation between educational

achievement and attitudes. Attitudes are viewed as very crucial due to their noticeable impact on and significant role in the domain of education at large and the teaching-learning process in particular (Russel, 1971, p.18). This is compounded by the fact that learners' development of positive attitudes is the most significant educational outcome due to their influential role in learners involvement in learning beyond their school years; a point that is quite critical in terms of their growth and development (Bernard, 1972, p.125).

Despite the high level of attention paid to "attitudes" in education, the mid-sixties witnessed the emergence of serious unease as an important factor was thought to have been overlooked, namely attitudes toward the teaching and learning of foreign languages among students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the general public. Hermann (1980, p. 247) stated that "Gardner and Lambert (1972) were the first to explore the influence of attitudinal variables on the second language learning process". Gardner and Lambert concluded that mastery of a foreign language is not only based on the learners' mental abilities, but also on the way they view other ethnolinguistic groups and their interest in language study, starting with the question: How is it that some people can learn a foreign language quickly and expertly while others given the same opportunities to learn are utter failures? In other words, students' attitudes toward foreign language study and culture are critical determinants of language achievement because "attitudes as a motivational construct presuppose an intention on the part of students to learn the language with various aims in mind and to pursue their aims with varying degrees of drive strength" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p. 192). This is supported by the fact that students often come to learn a new language with either positive or negative feelings toward the society in which they reside; an issue that undeniably affects their motivation to learn the foreign language. As a

result, "there is a very strong correlation between achievement or success in foreign language learning and the learner's attitude, whether to school subjects, a specific foreign country or any other critical characteristics associated with the language" (Faerch et al., 1984, pp.208-9).

### **3.2 Factors Affecting Attitudes toward Foreign Language Learning**

A number of variables that can have a negative impact on learners' attitudes toward foreign language study will be discussed in this part, with a focus on the learner (personal factors), the school setting (educational factors), and the community at large (social factors).

To begin with, personal factors are reflected in the learner as an autonomous individual with a special way of thinking about, feeling about, and behaving towards persons or objects in the surrounding or wider world. In fact, the learner's attitude toward learning foreign language skills, i.e. whether it is easy or difficult, can have a significant impact on their experience of approaching the language and being engaged in doing its required tasks. Furthermore, practically all of the research tying attitudes to foreign language learning appears to be focused on only one factor, namely the way that learners view the motivational elements in the foreign language learning process. As a result, a learner's perspective on the utilitarian or instrumental goals of learning a foreign language can lead them to take a positive or negative stance, especially given that "some individuals may view the acquisition of another language as an enriching experience, while others may consider it a threat to their very identity, while still others may see it as having no consequences in any way" (Gardner, 1982, pp.143-4).

When it comes to educational factors, almost all experts believe that the teacher is the most crucial factor to consider when dealing with students' attitudes. A teacher's understanding and awareness of

the language course's objectives, as well as the extent to which these objectives will meet the learner(s)' future career needs and what is considered personal pleasure or interest and knowledge, when combined with the use of effective teaching strategies, can promote learners' interest and enjoyment and facilitate much of the learning. Likewise, teaching methods can have an impact on students' attitudes in one way or another. For example, the teacher's avoidance of the student's native language in the foreign language classroom may make the new learner feel as if their native language has an inferior status compared to the new language they are learning without being fluent yet in using or feeling embarrassed because of the mistakes committed. They may consider themselves in a state of no man's land; a feeling that could impact their entire attitude towards the language (Finocchiaro, 1969: 13; Morrison and McIntyre, 1984, p.72). Finally, the positive attitudes of others in the school setting, particularly peer learners and other teachers, have the potential to broaden the learner's perspectives and are intended to make the foreign language learning experience and the educational atmosphere more reinforcing and fruitful.

Finally, social factors refer to those aspects of the larger social context that may influence learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning. In this regard, the learner's attitudes toward the learner's society and how it views foreign language learning may have a significant impact because some cultures consider high levels of bilingualism to be a normal quality of the educated man or woman, while others may regard it with indifference or even hostility, since "it is not possible to separate the attitudes toward the foreign language from those toward the country" (Kharma, 1977, p. 105). This can restrict learners' ability to learn the new language and make it difficult for them to put in the time and effort required to learn a language especially when their native community

consistently exhibits negative sentiments against those who speak the language (Lukmani, 1972, p. 273; Wilkins, 1974, pp.47-9). This is evident in a number of Arab countries, where a hostile attitude toward 'imperialist powers' has harmed learning EFL.

**4. Methodology**

**4.1 Procedure and Data Collection**

A questionnaire of (20) items relevant to the process of studying EFL has been prepared to achieve the goals of the current study. The items were chosen from related literature and after the following pilot request:

Dear 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Student:

Please state your thoughts on the study of EFL in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage including the difficulty of studying EFL, the benefits of studying EFL, your current performance of EFL skills and sub-skills the performance of English language abilities and sub-skills, and factors that may affect the learning process.

**4.2 Population and the Sample of the Research**

Students of the College of the Pharmacy / University of Duhok who study EFL in 1<sup>st</sup> stage at the college formed the population of the study. 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students of the college were selected to be the sample of the study. On this basis, the prepared questionnaire was first piloted on a group of 10 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students. In the light of the pilot study, the questionnaire was put in its final version after revisions and adjustments to the items collected and was administered to 40 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students during the first term of the academic year 2021-2022.

**4.3 Data Analysis and Discussion of Results**

Table 1 shows the weighted arithmetic means of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students' responses to the (20) items that represent different aspects related to the process of studying EFL. The highest mean score is (4.63) for the item "I think knowledge of English is important for the educated person", and the lowest mean score is (2.63) for the item "I face many difficulties in understanding English when spoken in the classroom", and the average mean score (3.71) for all items of the

questionnaire indicate that 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students have positive attitudes towards studying EFL in 1<sup>st</sup> stage. Hence, the first hypothesis states "There are negative attitudes towards studying EFL on the part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students at the College of Pharmacy, University of Duhok es towards learning English as a subject they studied in 1<sup>st</sup> stage of study at the college" is rejected:

**Table 1: Weighted Arithmetic Means of Students' 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Students' responses to the items of Studying EFL in 1<sup>st</sup> Stage**

|    | Items  | Weighted Arithmetic Mean |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1  | I am interested in reading materials in English.                           | 3.95                     |
| 2  | Learning to speak English is not my favourite.                             | 4.19                     |
| 3  | I exert much effort to develop my English vocabulary                       | 4.09                     |
| 4  | English grammar is my favourite subject.                                   | 3.53                     |
| 5  | I do not understand spoken English in the classroom.                       | 2.67                     |
| 6  | Listening to programmes in English is not beneficial.                      | 3.69                     |
| 7  | I am interested in writing in English.                                     | 4.38                     |
| 8  | English is not easy for me to learn.                                       | 3.48                     |
| 9  | Learning English is easier than other subjects.                            | 3.16                     |
| 10 | The English textbook I studied was well-organized.                         | 3.79                     |
| 11 | The English textbook I studied was above my standard.                      | 3.00                     |
| 12 | The tests I had in English subject were very difficult.                    | 3.23                     |
| 13 | Teachers did not give us enough time for the tests.                        | 3.78                     |
| 14 | To be educated, a person should have good knowledge of English.            | 4.63                     |
| 15 | English plays an important role in the development of Kurdistan Region.    | 4.10                     |
| 16 | Learning English needs lectures more than the number we had.               | 3.56                     |
| 17 | Learning English does not impact the way I live.                           | 4.20                     |
| 18 | My ambitions cannot be achieved unless I have good knowledge of English.   | 4.26                     |
| 19 | Learning English develops my reasoning abilities.                          | 4.10                     |
| 20 | English is viewed by my classmates as an easy subject. by my classmates. . | 3.01                     |
|    | <b>MEAN</b>  | <b>3.74</b>              |

Since the presentation of the responses and the values in such a holistic broad way may not be meaningful to the level required, the light will be shed on the specific aspects referred to in Hypothesis no.2 in terms of the difficulty of studying EFL, the benefits derived from studying EFL, level of performance of EFL skills and sub-skills, , and features of the process of studying EFL.

Table 2 presents the items related to studying EFL in terms of its difficulty, as well as the weighted arithmetic means of students' responses in this regard. The mean score of 3.22 suggests that students view EFL as an easy subject to study and hence the relevant sub-hypothesis of the second hypothesis related to the difficulty of studying EFL is rejected.

**Table 2: Weighted Arithmetic Means of Students' Responses in Terms of the Difficulty of Studying EFL**

| Items   | Weighted Arithmetic Mean |
|---|--------------------------|
| 8 English is not easy for me to learn.  | 3.48                     |
| 9 Learning English is easier than other subjects.                             | 3.16                     |
| 20 English is viewed by my classmates as an easy subject. by my classmates. . | 3.01                     |
| <b>MEAN</b>   | <b>3.22</b>              |

Table 3 shows students' responses in terms of the benefits of studying EFL, which have been presented as a package of instrumental (utilitarian) and integrative benefits. The weighted arithmetic means of students' responses to the items specific to this area is (4.30). This indicates very positive attitudes in terms of studying EFL. As such, the sub hypothesis that students negatively view the benefits of studying EFL is rejected. Consider Table 3:

**Table (3): Weighted Arithmetic Means of Students'**

| <b>Responses in terms of the benefits of Studying EFL</b>                   |  | <b>Weighted Arithmetic Mean</b> |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| Items   |  |                                 |
| 14 To be educated, a person should have good knowledge of English.          |  | 4.63                            |
| 15 English plays an important role in the development of Kurdistan Region.  |  | 4.10                            |
| 17 Learning English does not impact the way I live.                         |  | 4.20                            |
| 18 My ambitions cannot be achieved unless I have good knowledge of English. |  | 4.26                            |
| 19 Learning English develops my reasoning abilities.                        |  | 4.10                            |
| <b>MEAN</b>   |  | <b>4.30</b>                     |

Table 4 shows the weighted arithmetic means of students' responses in terms of their performance of EFL skills and sub-skills. The value (3.78) indicates noticeable positive attitudes in terms of the students' performance of EFL skills and subskills, and hence rejects the sub hypothesis posed in this respect.

**Table (4): Weighted Arithmetic Means of Students' Responses in Terms of Performance of EFL Skills and Subskills (Mean Scores)**

| Items   | Weighted Arithmetic Mean |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1 I am interested in reading materials in English.      | 3.95                     |
| 2 Learning to speak English is not my favourite.        | 4.19                     |
| 3 I exert much effort to develop my English vocabulary. | 4.09                     |
| 4 English grammar is my favourite subject.              | 3.53                     |
| 5 I do not understand spoken English in the classroom.  | 2.67                     |
| 6 Listening to programmes in English is not beneficial. | 3.69                     |
| 7 I am interested in writing in English.                | 4.38                     |
| <b>MEAN</b>   | <b>3.78</b>              |

As shown in table 5 , students' responses to the various aspects of the English learning process, such as time and lectures allotted, textbooks, and assessments, have a mean value of (3.47). This value is consistent with those observed for other aspects of the English studying process, as learners favor the aforementioned aspects to a very reasonable positive

level. Again, the sub-hypothesis of hypothesis no.2 relevant to this aspect has been rejected.

**Table (5): Weighted Arithmetic Means of Students' Responses to the Varied Aspects Related to Studying EFL**

| Items   | Weighted Arithmetic Mean |
|---|--------------------------|
| 10 The English textbook I studied was well-organized.           | 3.79                     |
| 11 The English textbook I studied was above my standard.        | 3.00                     |
| 12 The tests I had in English subject were very difficult.      | 3.23                     |
| 13 Teachers did not give us enough time for the tests.          | 3.78                     |
| 16 Learning English needs lectures more than the number we had. | 3.56                     |
| <b>MEAN</b>   | <b>3.47</b>              |

As a result, both hypotheses that 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students at the College of the pharmacy / University of Dohuk have negative attitudes toward learning EFL are rejected, because the relevant weighted arithmetic means of students' responses show very high and reasonably positive attitudes in this regard.

### 5. Conclusion

The current research stands for a two-fold study on students' attitudes regarding EFL taught to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at the College of the Pharmacy/University of Duhok. There has been a discussion of attitude as a psychological concept in terms of its definition, components, role in education in general and foreign language learning in particular, and the factors that influence attitudes toward foreign language learning in the theoretical section. This section also includes the problem to be investigated, the research objectives, and the hypotheses. In the practical part, a 20-item questionnaire, which focuses on the process of learning English in general and on some areas that are particularly relevant to such a process, has been constructed and administered to a sample of 40 2<sup>nd</sup> stage students who studied English as a subject in 1<sup>st</sup> stage. The data collected via the questionnaire have been analyzed so as to find out the Weighted Arithmetic Means for students' attitudes

toward learning EFL. The findings show generally positive attitudes towards the study of EFL as a subject and in terms of many aspects that are very closely related to the study of EFL.

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