

## The Language Attitude towards English Learning among EFL Learners: A Case at One Private Islamic Senior High School

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### Abstract

Attitude is one of the considerable factors in learning and plays an essential role since it can influence language learning and performance. This study aimed at investigating students' attitudes towards English language learning. Survey method was used in this study to describe the attitudes of the students at one Islamic private senior high school towards English language learning. The participants involved in this study were 217 students at one Islamic private senior high school in Indralaya. In collecting the data, we employed a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 20 items which were divided into 5 components; (1) attitude towards native English speakers, (2) motivational orientation in learning English, (3) interest in English, (4) attitude towards English class, and (5) attitude towards English teachers. The result of this study indicated that the attitude of the students of one Islamic private senior high school in Indralaya South Sumatera towards English language learning was generally positive.

**Keywords:** English language learning, EFL learners, student's attitude

### Introduction

As a global language, English plays great roles in many aspects of life. According to Mauranen and Ranta (2009), English has set up its situation as the worldwide most widely used language. It has become one of images within recent memory, together with globalization, networking, economic, integration, and the internet. In addition, Herlina and Holandyah (2016) added that English is an international language (Marzulina et al., 2019). It is used by many people in the world for different purposes such as to communicate to other people from different countries and to provide means for exchanging knowledge. In conclusion, it is widely known that English is an international language and it has many interrelations with various aspects of people's life. In teaching and learning English, there are several skills and abilities that influence the success of the English learning process (Astrid et al., 2019; Erlina et al., 2019; Mukminin, Ali, & Ashari, 2015; Mukminin, Muazza, Hustarna., & Sari, 2015; Maimunah et al., 2019; Nazurty et al., 2019). Harmer (2001) mentions that the four language skills are classified as productive skills which include writing and speaking and receptive skills which include reading & listening. Besides, those skills are taught with different methodology and technique since each

skill has different objectives. Furthermore, teaching methodology is not the only factor to achieve the successful in teaching and learning process. Shams (2008) states that factors such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievement, intelligence, personality, and age are also be considered in the learning process. Attitude is one of the considerable factors in learning since it can influence language learning. Attitude plays an essential factor which can influence language performance. This is slightly correlated to the theory of Pickens (2005) that attitudes allow us to see the situation also to behave toward the situation or object. In addition, attitude is the way of someone's thinking and feeling toward something. It is supported that attitude is as set of beliefs that learners have toward the language they learn. In other words, attitude deals with how someone's feeling, thinking, and behaving toward something. In language learning, attitude can be defined as learner's feeling about language learning. Furthermore, attitude is influenced by learning ability. The attitude may be positive or negative towards the language. When someone learns a language and his attitude is positive, the attitude will be followed by a good action and indicate a good result in studying the language. In contrast, the negative attitude is followed by negative action. Thus, the result of language study will be surely unsatisfying. Hence, attitude will be on the list of consideration as a factor affecting language learning.

There are several components that contribute to attitudes. Baker (1992) argues that there are three components of attitude. The first component is cognitive which concerns thoughts and beliefs. For instance, someone learns English because he believes that English is an important language. The second is affective component which refers to the feelings towards the attitude object (e.g English). The feeling may be love or hate to the language. The last component of attitude is readiness for action. It is a behavioral intention. It can be concluded that a person who has a good behavioral intention in English, for instance, will use English frequently in speaking. In this research, we observed the language attitude of students at one Islamic private senior high school in Indralaya towards English. This study was similar to the study conducted by Khoir (2014) who stated that the students seldom used English as a communication tool with their classmates. The statement indicated that the students had problem with the attitude towards the language. Students may have different attitudes toward English. Although, they learn English in school, it does not mean they have positive attitude towards the language. They may have negative attitude. Either it is positive or negative attitude, both will sometimes occur in a teaching-learning process due to some factors toward an object or situation. Linked with the idea stated regarding attitudes, it also can be seen as real phenomenon toward teaching and learning process in the school. Based on our observation, we noticed that some students joined the class enthusiastically and enjoyably which can be proven that the good interaction between the students and the teacher did exist. However, some students also tended to be silent or passive and less of enthusiasm and discipline during learning. With that phenomenon, learning process in class did not achieve satisfying result since students had those kinds of attitudes. Taking into consideration what we have documented and discussed previously, we were interested in investigating the attitudes of the students of one Islamic private senior high school towards English learning.

## Literature Review

### *Attitude*

A lot of definitions about attitudes have been proposed by some experts. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1998), attitudes can be defined as a psychological tendency that is expressed

by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. Besides, Gardner (1985) adds that attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent. Bhaskar and Soundiraraj (2013) also pointed out that attitude is kind of dispositions to approach an object, a person, an institution or can event favorably or unfavorably point of view reflected in their daily life. Furthermore, Montano and Kaspryk (2008) also add that attitude can be different since it is influenced by someone's belief toward something which eventually changes someone's behavior as well. In short, attitude is defined as student's thinking, belief, and perception of learning English.

Attitude is one aspect of learning that is very influential in learning English. Attitude has two types that describe students in learning English. Bhaskar and Soundiraraj (2013) state that positive attitude towards second language learning and L2 teachers can improve students' study, while negative attitudes can obstruct it. Students who have positive attitudes can reach their goals successfully, while students who have negative attitudes will feel difficult to reach their objectives in learning or acquiring English language. According to Brown (2000), the negative attitudes can be changed by using appropriate methods and materials to support students to acquire their target language. Students who have negative attitudes can be supported by good learning methods and materials to enhance their ability in target language.

### *Factors influencing attitude*

The first factor which influences attitude is students' perceptions toward English. How the students think about English can also influence their attitudes. When they think that English is important, they will focus on it and vice versa. A research from Shirbagi (2010) in Tabriz and Kurdistan university of Iran figured out that the respondents had spending their time learning English as a subject. Most of the respondents thought that English is important in the curriculum. They also recognized that English is one of the subjects which can help them to find a great job. Then, the other factor is the roles of a teacher. In teaching and learning process, teacher is a facilitator to guide the students. Bartram (2010) said that a teacher could influence learners' attitudes. Learners view a teacher as an agent or a person who has roles in forming their attitudes. Parent can also influence students' attitudes toward learning English. According to Sultana and Rosli (2016), parental involvement has positive impacts on students' accomplishment and abilities in learning English. Clearly, parents give their influences to students on their learning English language in terms of involvement and encouragement to students' learning process.

Moreover, learning activity is also a factor to achieve the success of learning. Bartram (2010) mentioned that students had lack of interest in learning activities such as copying from the board/book, working with partners, group and textbooks, answering questions, listening to explanations and tapes, repeating, doing language exercise, etc. He also mentioned that students preferred popular learning activities such as pair group work than unpopular learning activities such as reading aloud, test of vocabulary, and copying from board/book.

Attitude is considered as one of the factors to succeed student's learning process. Shams (2008) states that there are some factors which can influence students' learning namely motivation, personalities, aptitude, ages, attitudes, learning achievement, intelligence and anxiety. As experienced by the researcher, some students might think that learning English is difficult, and some are not. This opinion or belief will create positive attitude which in the end, it will succeed the students' learning process. However, some students will not think that way, and

as a result, negative attitudes are raised. Therefore, attitude, in this case, will take part as a supportive factor in learning a language especially English itself. Attitude is an important role to make the students encouraged to learn English. Eshginrad (2016) stated that attitude is considered as a vital role to influence the performance of language. In learning process, every student has their preferences or styles to study. By allowing them to do what they want or desire as long as it is still in line with the objective or aim of the learning, they will actively join and participate in the class. At this point, student's behaviour is emphasized since it deals with attitude itself. Attitude in learning can influence student's behaviour like choosing what kind of book to read, styles of language to speak, and types of friends and teachers to study. Thus, attitude is able to influence student's behaviour in learning English

### ***English language learning***

English is as a second language/foreign language. Learning English as second language cannot be separated from the age of the learners. According to Mayo (2003), success and rate of second language acquisition (SLA) appear intensively influenced by age of the learners. The age is an important factor of second language learning. Young learners have positive attitudes toward second language learning, and also get more motivated because the teaching methods applied for the young learning focused on more communicative than formal situations. One of the influencing factors to learning a language is motivation (Mukminin, Muazza, Hustarna., & Sari, 2015). Ebata (2008) stated that motivation has an important role in learning language. She investigated three factors that influence motivation in learning language. The factors are student's self-confidence, student's experience and good connection between students-teacher and students-students. Teachers and students should make a mutual connection. They should know one another. Students should know their teachers, respect them, and give critics politely when their teaching is not understandable. On the other hand, the teachers should also know their students well, appreciate them, and deliver understandable explanations. Besides, the teachers need to know students' aim at learning English, their upcoming objectives, and importantly their personalities.

The other factor is method of learning that can influence someone's attitude. Clearly, appropriate and useful learning method can influence someone's attitude. Research of Ali, Mukundan, Baki and Ayub (2012) revealed that some students' attitudes became more positive during using CALL (computer assisted language learning) in learning vocabulary than using other methods. The students attitudes were influenced by the method that they thought the methods were useful. Clearly, appropriate and useful learning methods can influence someone's attitude.

## **Methods**

### ***Research design, research site, and participants***

In this study, a survey with descriptive analysis design (Creswell, 2012) was used. It is a kind of research whose source of data and information are mainly obtained from respondents as research participants using questionnaires as an instrument of data collection to describe the attitudes of students. Asmadialsa (2004) presents a survey or provided a questionnaire or scale to describe the attitudes, opinions, behavior or characteristics of respondents. In short, survey method was selected because this study dealt with describing the students' attitudes toward

English. As such, this was an empirical study of the real life phenomenon particularly in teaching and learning process in the class.

The participants of this study were the students of one Islamic private senior high school in Indralaya. In order to draw the participants of this study, probability sampling was used as the sampling technique. Probability sampling is a probability sample that is each individual member of the population under study must have the same opportunity to be sampled (Creswell, 2012). The total participants of the study were 217 students of that school.

### *Data collection and analysis*

This study used attitude questionnaire Likert scale items for collecting the data, proposed by Asmadialsa (2004). 217 students were required to response to each item of the questionnaire to gain their attitudes towards English learning. The questionnaire consisted of 3 items of attitudes towards native English speakers, 4 items of motivational orientation in learning English, 5 items of interest in English, 4 items of attitudes towards English class, and 4 items of attitudes toward English teachers. The questionnaire was a ready-made one which was considered valid and reliable. The data gained from students' responses towards the questionnaire items were analyzed by using descriptive statistics analysis. The result of the analysis was in the form of percentages that reflected each student's attitude toward English language learning.

### **Findings**

The findings of this study presented the research findings based on the results of the data analysis from students' responses toward questionnaire items. The result of data analysis reflected each student's attitude toward English language learning and presented in the form of tables below.

**Table 1.** Attitudes towards native English speakers

No	Statement	SA		A		Total		D		SD		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I always want to meet native English speakers.	85	39.2	110	50.69	195	89.86	14	6.45	8	3.68	22	10
2	English culture has an important role in modernization	109	50.2	93	42.85	202	93.8	10	4.60	5	2.30	6	2.76
3	Native speakers of English are people who are social and creative.	86	36.6	120	55.29	206	94.93	11	8.14	5	2.30	16	7.37

As shown in Table 1, the result showed that most of students had positive belief in the way of native English speakers. It can be seen that 89.86% of students responded positively that they wanted to meet and to talk to native English speakers. In addition, item number 2 and item number 3 indicated that the students had positive point of view or belief that the way of native English speaker could influence their attitudes towards English.

**Table 2.** Motivational orientation in learning English

Statement	SS		S		Total		TS		STS		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1 Learning English is important to me because it can make it easier for me to speak English with other people	105	43.38	86	39.63	191	88.1	17	7.83	9	4.11	26	11.98
2 Learning English is important to me so I can get a better job	82	37.38	86	38.70	168	77.41	38	17.97	10	4.60	49	22.58
3 Learning English is important to me because I hope to visit a country that uses English	73	33.64	92	42.39	169	76.3	40	18.43	12	5.52	52	23.96
4 Learning English is important to me because people will appreciate me more	77	26.66	131	66.66	208	95.85	8	5.92	1	0.74	9	4.14

Table 2 above presented the result of the orientation in learning English. It showed that most of students had positive attitudes as shown by the students' responses for item number 4, number 5, number 6 and number 7, especially number 5 and number 7. Item number 5 indicated that students felt that learning English was important to them because they thought they can get a job what they desire. Number 7 showed that learning English is important because they assured that people will appreciate them more.

**Table 3.** Interest in English

No	Statement	SA		A		Total		D		SD		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I hope that I can read English magazines	96	44.23	112	51.6	208	95.9	10	4.6	0	0	10	4.6
2	I hope I can speak English fluently	85	39.17	97	44.7	182	83.9	28	12.9	7	3.22	35	16.1
3	Learning English only takes time	20	9.21	35	16.1	55	25.3	102	47.4	60	27.6	162	74.7
4	When I finish school later, I will not learn English anymore	28	12.90	7	3.22	35	16.1	85	39.2	97	44.7	182	83.8
5	Learning English is a pleasant experience	85	39.17	124	57.1	209	96.3	8	3.68	0	0	8	3.68

Table 3 above presented the results of students' interest in English. The result of item number 10 showed that 74.7% of students disagreed if learning English only wasted their time. It showed that they believed that learning English could influence them. From the table 3, it could also be inferred that most of students had interest in learning English as shown as from item number 8, number 9, number 11 and number 12 showed positive responses from the students. In addition, item number 12 showed that the students thought that learning English is a pleasant experience to them.

**Table 4.** Attitudes towards English class

No	Statement	SS		S		Total		TS		STS		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	You feel very happy when you are in the English class	78	35.94	56	25.80	134	61.7	44	20.3	56	17.97	83	38.24
2.	I believe that I made the right choice by choosing the English class that I am currently attending	93	42.85	116	53.45	212	97.7	4	1.84	4	1.84	8	3.68
3	I thought the English class would make my English progress	10	48.84	104	47.92	210	96.8	4	1.84	3	1.38	6	3.22

4.	I always prepare myself as well as possible before taking English classes	87	40.9	45	20.73	132	60.8	20	9.21	55	25.34	85	39.7
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Table 4 above presented the result of the students' attitude when they joined English class. This aspect measured students' attitude towards English learning according to their belief. As shown in Table 4, most of students had good perceptions toward English learning class. It can be seen from item number 13, item number 15, and item number 16 from the table. Even, item number 14 showed higher percentage, which 97.7% of students believed that they thought English class was their right choice because by attending the English class, it could influence their achievement. Especially for item number 15 which indicated that English class would influence their English progress in order to get a good achievement.

**Table 5.** Attitudes towards English teacher

No	Statement	SS		S		Total		TS		STS		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	English teachers always encourage me to practice English	80	36.9	124	57.14	204	94.0	6	2.76	7	3.22	13	5.99
2	I feel very upset when the teacher corrects my mistakes	71	32.7	26	11.98	97	44.70	66	30.4	54	24.9	120	55.29
3	English teachers are friendly and kind people	87	40.9	45	20.73	132	60.82	20	9.21	55	25.3	85	39.17
4	Learning English gives me the feeling that I am a successful person.	102	47	94	43.31	196	90.32	16	7.37	5	2.30	21	9.67

As Table 5 above showed that item number 18 showed 44.70% of students felt upset when the teacher corrected their mistakes. However, 55.29% of students accepted if the teacher corrected their mistakes in learning English. It can be inferred that many students thought that teacher's correction was needed, and some were not. However, item number 17, item number 19, and item number 20 showed that most of students had good attitudes towards their English teachers.

Especially, item number 17 showed a good percentage, which is 94.0% of students agreed if their teacher always encouraged them to practice English.

## Discussion

Based on the result of the questionnaire, we found that the attitudes of the students of one Islamic private senior high school in Indralaya, South Sumatera towards English were generally positive. From the result of each component, first, the attitudes of the students toward native English speakers were generally positive. It can be seen that 93.6% of students agreed that English culture has important role for this era modernization nowadays, especially in learning English process. Meanwhile 8.15% of students disagreed. According to Brown (2000) a language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language, the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. It can be inferred that English culture influence students' belief towards learning English.

Second, Table 2 presented that students' orientation in English was positive. Most of students believed that people would appreciate them more if they had good knowledge in English. Students also felt that they enjoyed speaking English with other people when they could be serious in learning English (88.1%). Brown (2001) defines that motivation is an important component or factor in the learning process. This showed that student's motivational orientation has important role in success of learning English. Third, from Table 3 indicating the students' interest in English, the data showed that 25.34% of students thought that learning English only wasted their time. Only a few students from 217 respondents had lack of interest in English. However, 96.31% of students agreed that learning English was a pleasant experience for them. Therefore, the success of learning English will be achieved when they have good interest in English since interest is one of the strongest motivation. It has long been identified as one of the main factors affecting English language learning.

Fourth, the results of the questionnaire indicating the attitudes toward English class showed that students had positive attitude. It can be seen from the highest score from item number 14. In other words, many students believed that by seriously attending English class, they will achieve good achievement in English learning. Kubiato (2013) argued that if attitudes towards subject and school are positive, the achievement of students will get better. By enjoying English learning in the classroom, it makes students have significant results for their study. Fifth, attitude towards English teachers is one of the important roles determining the success of English learning. From the result of this research, the attitudes towards English teachers were generally positive. It was seen that students agreed that their English teachers always encourage them to practice their English. They believed that by mastering English they would become successful. Students will become cognitively engaged when the teacher asks them to deal with new concepts, to explain their reasoning, to defend their conclusion, or to explore alternative strategies and solutions. Students enjoy learning more likely to practice in school task when their teachers employ active pedagogical strategies.

## Conclusion

Based on the research findings of this study and the discussion, it can be concluded that the attitudes of the students toward learning English were positive and their attitudes were shown by positive students' belief, namely (1) students' attitudes towards native English speakers were

positive. It can be seen that students responded positively that they want to meet native English speakers; (2) students' attitudes toward motivational orientation were positive. It can be seen that most of the students agreed that learning English is important to them because they thought they could get a better job; (3) students' attitudes towards interest in English were positive. It can be seen that they agreed that learning English was a pleasant experience; (4) students' attitudes toward the English class at school were positive, it can be seen that most of students agreed and believed that attending English class was their right choice; and (5) the attitudes toward English teachers were positive, it can be seen that most of students agreed if their teacher always encourage them to practice English. Thus, it can be concluded from the data obtained that most students had positive attitudes towards English learning.

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