

Non-English Department Students Attitudes Toward English Language as a Compulsory Subject: Case Study at Education University in Misurata

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Abstract

Several factors contribute to successful English language teaching and learning, including teachers, students, curriculum, instructional materials, and learning facilities. Among these, students' attitudes have recently gained significant attention, as they influence motivation, orientation, and anxiety toward language learning. In Libyan universities, English is taught as a compulsory subject for all majors, making the investigation of students' attitudes both informative and necessary. This case study investigates the attitudes of 40 non-English department students at the faculty of education, Misurata university toward English as a general requirement, using questionnaire and interviews. Findings revealed generally positive attitudes toward English, particularly because students viewed English as beneficial for their academic and professional futures. Recommendations highlight the need to improve learning environments and address negative experiences from earlier schooling.

Key words: *Compulsory, Non-English department students, GE1, GE2, Education university*

Introduction

English is a compulsory subject in Libyan universities, and students from all majors are required to take it (Elmejie, 2020). This policy aims to prepare students for future academic and professional challenges. However, classroom observations show that a large number of students struggle when instruction is delivered entirely in English, due to limited exposure and practice outside the classroom. A number of students revealed that English is not widely used in daily life, which reduces opportunities for communication and increases difficulty.

Understanding students' perceptions of English language learning at the university level is essential. Basar, Sumardi, and Zaini (2015), explained that attitudes toward English reflect both perceptions of the language and its speakers. The education University in Misurata provides two general English courses (GE1 and GE2) for all non-English majors. These courses aim to equip students with basic linguistic skills. To understand the phenomena, the present study investigates students' attitudes toward English as a compulsory subject, examining their perceptions, behaviors, and motivations.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Despite curriculum changes and new assessment methods, many Libyan students continue to face difficulties in learning English. Research suggests a strong relationship between attitudes toward English and academic achievement (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018). This situation raises concerns about whether Libyan students experience similar challenges and whether attitudes influence their performance. The study addresses the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do the non-English department students understand the importance and purpose of English language?

- 2- What are the attitudes of the non-English department students towards learning English?
- 3- How do the non-English department students behave towards learning English?

Literature Review

Several researchers emphasized the importance of attitude, particularly positive attitude, in language learning. Thus, Inal et al. (2000) state that identifying learners' attitudes is rather crucial for their own benefit as well as for academic programs. Karahan (2007: 84) points out that "positive language attitudes let learner have a positive orientation towards learning English" (p. 84). More importantly, some learners may have started with some negative attitudes; eventually, when they realise the positive sides of knowing the language, the attitudes towards learning a language can change.

According to Wenden (1991), a person's attitude is formed of three aspects including cognitive, affective, and behavioral. He has further added that the cognitive aspect includes someone's opinions and ideas about something, the affective or emotional aspect includes a person's mental state or emotions, and the third one, the behavioral aspect shows his acts regarding the object or idea. Moreover, Kara (2009) has stated that positive behaviors are shown by a person's positive attitudes toward a discipline where the learners are willing to endeavor more in order to learn more. He has further added that consequently, students are interested to be engaged in solving problems and getting everyday life skills. Pabro-Maquidato (2021) has stated that students' participation in language classes is often affected by their mindset.

EFL Students' Attitudes toward Learning English Language

Attitudes are a key component in language acquisition, as they involve learner's feelings, beliefs and behavioral tendencies. Eshghinejad (2016)

has conducted a research on Iranian EFL learners at Kashan University and found that students had positive attitudes toward learning English language. He also stated that students' attitudes varied based on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of attitudes. Orfan (2020) has also studied 210 EFL students' attitudes of Takhar University in Afghanistan, where he discovered that the overall perceptions of learners' toward learning English language were positive, but the levels of students' attitudes were different in terms of affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. These results are also supported by a number of other studies conducted in different countries such as Utami and Husein (2021); Sayadian and Lashkarian (2010); and Siddiq, Miri, and Sarwarzada (2019). However, the research conducted by Abidin et al. (2012) has concluded that the attitudes of secondary school students in Libya had negative attitudes toward learning English language. Students in this study marked different attitudes in terms of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. EFL student's negative attitudes are also supported by some of the other studies such as Abidin et al. (2012) and Al-Zahrani (2008). They have concluded that the traditional techniques and methods used by the teachers caused negative attitudes in students toward learning English language.

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher of the current study employed a case study research design in order to explore the attitudes of non-English department students toward English as a compulsory subject. A case study approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of a particular group within its real context, rather than relying on general assumptions. Through this design, the researcher was able to analyze how students perceive English learning, how they behave in English classes, and which factors influence their motivation and engagement.

Furthermore, a mixed-method strategy was used, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The combination of these methods improved the credibility of the findings, as the interview results were used to support and interpret the statistical outcomes. The overall purpose of the design was not to test causal relationships, but rather to describe the existing situation and identify patterns within the students' attitudes. By applying this research design, the study was able to generate a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive English as a compulsory subject and to highlight areas that require further attention in teaching and learning environments.

Setting and Participants

The sample used in this study was limited to non- English department students (who take English Language as a general subject) at education university in Misurata who have been selected randomly. The students who responded to do the questionnaire were 57, but only 40 students completed filling the questionnaire as they were helpful, dynamic, responsive and collaborative.

Research Instrument

To address the inquiries of this study, questionnaire have been used to collect the data. The students' perceptions in this study were evaluated by using questionnaire in both languages, English and Arabic to obtain a validated scale. The questionnaire consisted of 28 items that clarify non-English department students' attitudes toward learning English as a compulsory subject. The students were asked to respond the questionnaire by ticking the answer which is correspond to their opinions. Adding to that, interviews with the participants were done using semi-structured interviews.

Procedures**Data Collection**

Taking into account the importance of the research ethics, a confirmed and detailed consents from the dean and the head of the English department of the education university were obtained beforehand, and assured that the information will be restrictively used for the research only. The researcher smooths the path as telling the students that such study needs joint efforts and honest responses to be successfully accomplished. Participants were informed that they can withdraw without giving any in-advance note or excuse. Also, the researcher has informed the participants that their responses will not cause any harm on their scores. In administering the questionnaire, participants were given sufficient time to respond and were given full and clear instructions on each point of the questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were held based on the convenience of the participants in regard to place and time spots. During the interviews they were given the option to use Arabic or English. Confidentiality were assured to all of the participants that their permission to audio-record was obtained for this study only and will not be published anywhere. All in all, the researcher assures that their confidentiality and anonymity will be taken into consideration.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire of the students' responses have been analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Studies program (IMP SPSS 26). Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution) used to summarize the distributions of each variable, including each item of students' perception of teaching. The interview questions designed to explore the non-English department students' attitude toward learning English language as a compulsory subject in the university. The data from interview was analyzed through coding technique.

Findings and Discussions

1- Questionnaire Analysis

The students' perceptions toward the teaching of English as a compulsory subject in the education university at Misurata have been examined through this research. The questionnaire was successfully administered to the students to gauge students' perceptions toward the teaching of English as a compulsory subject. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions in which were projecting students' perception toward the teaching of English as a compulsory subject.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the questionnaire, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was $\alpha = .701$, indicating acceptable internal consistency for research purposes. A Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.6 is generally considered good, signifying that the respondents' answers are consistently aligned and the questionnaire is a reliable tool for assessing opinions on questionnaire. This high reliability strengthens the credibility of the findings and ensures that the insights drawn from the data are robust and dependable.

	Sentences	Mean	SD	P-value
1	Learning English is important for me because it will help me to get an ideal job in the future.	4.32	0.87	0.000
2	Learning English is important for me because it will help me search for information on the Internet.	4.21	1.17	0.000

3	Learning English is important to me because it will help me when I travel abroad.	4.26	0.5 0	0.000
4	Learning English is important to me because it will make me knowledgeable.	4.45	0.8 0	0.000
5	Learning English enables me to deal with technology.	3.95	1.2 1	0.000
6	I learn English because I like English movies and songs.	2.42	1.4 5	0.025
7	I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question by English in the class.	3.24	1.5 1	0.200
8	I enjoy most of the teaching methodologies used by our teacher.	3.92	1.0 0	0.000
9	I feel happy when the teacher speaks in English language.	3.84	1.4 4	0.003
10	To be honest, I have a lot of interest in my English classes.	3.34	1.4 6	0.091
11	The course book fits our needs.	3.68	1.1 9	0.002

12	Honestly, I study English just to pass the exams and get a B.A. degree.	3.61	1.3 3	0.007
13	In my opinion, learning English is very difficult and complicated.	3.21	1.4 9	0.359
14	I am very interested in studying English as a general subject.	3.89	1.3 7	0.001
15	I am very happy when I do activities in English classes.	3.68	1.2 8	0.003
16	Majority of our general English course book is finished at the end of the semester.	3.29	1.0 6	0.097
17	I feel embarrassed (shamed) when I speak English in the class.	3.45	1.3 9	0.049
18	I want to peruse further in English language after graduation.	3.61	1.0 8	0.003
19	I dislike learning English as a compulsory subject.	2.71	1.3 9	0.213
20	I initiate learning English by myself at home.	3.68	1.4 0	0.005

21	I like it when the English teacher doesn't come to class.	2.11	1.2 7	0.001
22	I dislike the class when there is a homework check.	2.53	1.1 1	0.021
23	English is important for my future.	4.11	0.6 5	0.000
24	I think we should have more English classes per a week.	3.32	1.4 7	0.111
25	I am more motivated when the subject is related to my field.	3.95	1.1 1	0.000
26	I feel bored when I don't understand the subject material.	3.53	1.3 3	0.028
27	I feel scared and anxious when learning English.	2.74	1.4 1	0.355
28	It is better to prepare before the time of the lecture.	4.11	0.9 8	0.000

The statistical results of the questionnaire from the non-English department students at education university provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions, motivations, and challenges in learning English as a compulsory subject. The data reveals a strong consensus among students regarding the importance of English for their future careers, with 92.1% of respondents either strongly agreeing or

agreeing that learning English will help them get an ideal job. This is further supported by the high mean score of 4.32 and a low standard deviation, indicating a clear recognition of English as a vital skill for professional success. Similarly, 81.6% of students acknowledged the role of English in accessing information online, reflecting its significance in the digital age. Additionally, 92.1% of students agreed that learning English enhances their knowledge, underscoring its value not only as a practical tool but also as a means of intellectual growth. These findings highlight the instrumental motivation driving students to learn English, as they perceive it as essential for achieving their personal and professional goals.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the importance of English, the results also reveal some emotional and psychological challenges faced by students. For instance, while 34.2% of students reported not feeling anxious when answering questions in English, a significant portion (28.9% disagreed and 13.2% strongly disagreed) expressed discomfort in such situations. Furthermore, 26.3% of students confessed of feeling embarrassed and unstable as trying to speak English in class. These responses suggest that anxiety and self-consciousness are notable barriers for some students, potentially hindering their participation and confidence in using the language. This emotional aspect of language learning is crucial to address, as it can significantly impact students' overall performance and engagement. Teachers may need to lower the barriers and to create a more supportive and encouraging classroom environment to help students overcome these challenges and build their confidence in using English.

Another interesting finding is the mixed attitudes toward English as a compulsory subject and exam-oriented learning. While many students recognize the importance of English, a considerable number (42.1% disagreed and 36.8% strongly disagreed) expressed dislike for learning it as a mandatory subject. Additionally, 26.3% of students agreed and 10.5% strongly agreed that they study English primarily to pass exams and obtain

a degree. This indicates that extrinsic motivation, such as academic requirements, may overshadow intrinsic interest for some students. The pressure to perform well in exams might lead to a lack of genuine engagement with the language, which could limit their long-term proficiency and appreciation for English. To address this, teachers could explore ways to make English learning more enjoyable and relevant to students' interests, such as incorporating multimedia resources like movies and songs, which received mixed responses in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire also sheds light on students' perceptions of the course materials and teaching methodologies. While 63.1% of students agreed that the course book fits their needs, a notable portion (26.3% disagreed and 5.3% strongly disagreed) expressed dissatisfaction. Similarly, 47.4% of students disliked homework checks, suggesting that the current assessment methods may not align with their preferences. On a more positive note, 63.1% of students reported enjoying the teaching methodologies used by their teachers, and 71% felt happy when the teacher spoke in English. These responses indicate that while the teaching methods are generally well-received, there is room for improvement in terms of course materials and assessment strategies. Incorporating more interactive and student-centered approaches could enhance the learning experience and address the concerns raised by students.

One of the most significant findings is the strong desire among students for more English classes per week, with 65.8% agreeing and 23.7% strongly agreeing with this suggestion. This reflects their recognition of the importance of English and their willingness to invest more time in learning it. However, the questionnaire also reveals that only 26.3% of students initiate learning English at home, while 47.4% disagreed and 15.8% strongly disagreed with this statement. This suggests that students may rely heavily on classroom instruction and may not be sufficiently motivated or equipped to engage in independent learning. Encouraging self-directed learning and providing resources for students to practice

English outside the classroom could help bridge this gap and foster a more holistic approach to language acquisition.

In conclusion, the statistical results of the questionnaire highlight a complex interplay of positive attitudes, practical motivations, and challenges among non-English department students. While they overwhelmingly recognize the importance of English for their future careers, travel, and access to information, issues such as anxiety, exam-oriented learning, and dissatisfaction with course materials indicate areas for improvement. By addressing these challenges and building on the strengths of current teaching methodologies, teacher can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment that enhances students' intrinsic motivation and confidence in using English. This, in turn, will enable them to achieve their full potential and reap the benefits of English language proficiency in their personal and professional lives.

2- Interviews Analysis

The interviewed students were nine (the ones who agreed to be interviewed), only six responses were useful for the clarity of research's questions about the students' attitudes towards English language as a compulsory subject. These interviews were held in Arabic and little use of English language, and took around 20 minutes each. The interview analysis was thematically analyzed and the sequential order of these themes is random from the students' interviews' responses. They are:

Future Intention

One of the participants claimed that "Since English is an international language so I think it is important for my future as English allowed me to communicate easily with people when I travel abroad", another participant also stated that "English language is an international language. If I have the basics of the English language skills, I will communicate easily when I travel abroad".

Exam-oriented learning

Most of the participants argued that they "learned English to fulfill the academic requirement only to graduate". One of the participants stated that "I like English because learning English is much needed in this time as it can enrich my vocabulary and my knowledge as well. Besides, I study English also to pass the examination." Another participant also asserted that "There are some lessons that I eager to learn from and other lessons just to pass the examination. For example, I focus much on grammar lessons as I think grammar is much needed than other skills. But if the lesson is about reading or phonetics, I studied it just to pass the examination because I don't know when I need it again".

Language skill difficulty

Although some students claimed that English was an easy subject, some of them believed that some English skills were much difficult for them to acquire. One participant, for example stated that "I do not fully understand, because in English there are several skills. The most difficult skills for me are grammar and reading which make me confused sometimes. I feel afraid that what I said is wrong and my friends will comment about it". Additionally, one of the participants added that "I can't understand well during English lessons because of the lecturer and his teaching method. Some teachers want their students to be able to comprehend the lesson the way they want. For me, it is difficult to follow them. The other students might be able to follow, but I am definitely cannot follow it" It was understandable that students' learning of English was very much dependent on the teachers' instructional approaches.

Lack of learning Interest

Some students argued that their passion in learning language reduced because of their teachers' instructional approaches. One of them comment "It depends on the lecturer. Last semester, I didn't have a spirit in learning

English because the lecturer does not come to the class very frequently, so I dropped the course". Another student comment that "learning also is not in accordance with the course. For instance, in the previous course of general English, the lecturer always tells the story about his life and do not cover material that is related to the subject. So, I feel annoyed and bored". Another student suggested that students sometimes get bored in a language learning due to teachers' ineffective approaches. One of them stated that "sometimes, I feel bored because of the lack of cooperation between us and the teacher. The teacher only explains the material without asks the students to participate. So, it makes the class is really boring".

Learning Anxiety

Another learning attitude appeared in the study was that the students experienced learning anxiety. One of the students said that "I feel fearful to speak in English because I'm not confident with my English words and I am scared if my friends laugh at me when I have to speak in the class to answer any exercise". Another student comment that I don't like to participate. I'm not confident with my ability to speak in English in the class, because I feel my English still bad. So, I prefer to be silent rather than participate in class". Another student also admitted that he chose to just keep quiet in the classroom, rather than expressing herself in front of the student, as she said "I choose to be silent and sit down on my chair."

Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to investigate the non-English department students' attitudes towards English Language learning who take the English as a general and compulsory subject in the university. The study has come up with the following main findings:

- 1- Majority of students have positive attitudes towards learning English language

- 2- Majority students are aware of importance of English language and its role-plays in the world. The result shows that most of students are instrumental.
- 3- Majority of students are motivated toward learning English but they need more activities, appropriate methods and teachers' cooperation in order to enhance their motivation toward English language.

In this study, the researcher presents some recommendations and suggestions it is useful to learners whose learning English as foreign language. However, the researcher is confident that the findings are useful and will attribute to other related studies and be value to educators or researchers whose interest focuses on learning motivation and attitudes. Moreover, the research exposed that motivation and attitudes, and how they effected and play vital role in the foreign language acquisition. Finally, the researcher hopes that the motivation and attitudes of students towards English language learning should be improved. In addition, researcher hopes that the present study may encourage future research in the area of EFL learners' motivation and attitudes towards English language learning.

Recommendations

To create a comprehensive and engaging learning experience, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Integrate technology-focused content: Language instruction should reflect the increasing importance of digital literacy, incorporating technology-driven materials and activities to prepare students for a rapidly changing world.

2. Adapt teaching strategies: Educators should strive to create a diverse array of instructional approaches, taking into account the varied needs and learning styles of their students.
3. Cultivate cultural exploration: By incorporating authentic materials and promoting cross-cultural discussions, teachers can help students appreciate the rich diversity of the English-speaking world.
4. Foster immersive experiences: Regular opportunities for students to engage in English language activities, such as role-plays and presentations, will enhance their confidence and fluency.
5. Regularly assess and adapt instructional materials: Course books, textbooks, and supplementary materials should be evaluated regularly to ensure they align with students' diverse interests and expectations.
6. Promote supportive classroom dynamics: Educators should prioritize creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere that encourages student participation, mitigates anxiety, and fosters a sense of community among learners.

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