

Investigating First Year Students' Attitudes to Learning English at Faculty of Science, Azzaytuna University

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Abstract

The objective of this investigation is to assess the prevailing attitudes among Faculty of Science students at Azzaytuna University, Libya, concerning the learning English as a foreign language. The study will also investigate the existence of any significant differences in students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of their gender. The population of the study comprised 200 first-year students enrolled at the Faculty of Science during the autumn semester of 2025. A sample of 80 male and female university students was selected at random to complete a questionnaire designed to reflect their attitudes towards learning English. The data collected were subjected to statistical analysis, which involved the implementation of various statistical methodologies, including the calculation of the arithmetic mean and the execution of a T-test. The T-test was conducted to ascertain whether there were any significant differences in students' attitudes towards learning English due to their gender. The findings indicated that the students exhibited a predominantly positive attitude towards English language learning. The findings further demonstrated that there were no statistically significant differences observed among students' attitudes toward English language learning related to their gender.

Keywords: *learners' attitudes, gender, aspects of attitudes, language learning, EFL students.*

المخلص

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تقييم الاتجاهات السائدة بين طلاب كلية العلوم في جامعة الزيتونة بليبيا فيما يتعلق بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وهذه الدراسة ستبحث أيضا في وجود أي فروق مهمة في اتجاهات الطلاب نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية تبعاً لمتغير النوع الاجتماعي. ويتكون مجتمع الدراسة من (200) طالب من طلاب السنة الأولى المسجلين في كلية العلوم خلال الفصل الدراسي الخريف لعام 2025م، حيث تم اختيار عينة من (80) طالبا وطالبة جامعيين عشوائيا لملء استبيان مصمم يعكس اتجاهاتهم نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. وقد خضعت البيانات التي تم جمعها للتحليل الإحصائي، والذي تضمن تطبيق منهجيات إحصائية مختلفة، بما في ذلك حساب المتوسط الحسابي واستخدام اختبار (T-Test). حيث تم إجراء اختبار T (T-Test) للتأكد من وجود أي فروق مهمة في اتجاهات الطلاب نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية حسب متغير النوع الاجتماعي. وأظهرت النتائج أن اتجاهات الطلاب إيجابية نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. كما أشارت النتائج إلى أنه لم تكن هناك فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين اتجاهات الطلاب نحو تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والتي ترتبط بمتغير النوع الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اتجاهات الطلاب، الجنس، مظاهر الاتجاهات، تعلم اللغة، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

Introduction

Attitude is a subject of interest to numerous researchers in the fields of psychology and the sciences of education. Furthermore, this subject has been extensively researched and studied. Indeed, there has been a rapid increase in research conducted on attitudes in recent decades. A plethora of studies have been conducted in the domain of language learning and attitudes. In summary, studies have indicated a growing interest in the investigation of attitudes' role and significance in the context of language education. Researchers such as Skehan (1989) and Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) posit that attitudes represent one of numerous components of affective variables in the context of language learning. In the domain of English language learning, numerous studies have been conducted that underscore the pivotal function of attitudes in the process of learning a second or foreign language. As Karahan (2007, p. 84) asserts, "Positive language attitudes facilitate a favourable orientation towards learning English among learners." In the same vein, Anuradha and Rengaraj (2017), Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015), and Elrasool (2014) posit that there exists a significant relationship between the attitudes towards learning English and the students' achievements in English language learning. In short, students who have demonstrated positive attitudes have typically exhibited superior outcomes in language learning.

In Libya, English is incorporated into the EFL curriculum as an obligatory component of the preparatory and secondary school education for a duration of six years. First-year students enrolled at the Faculty of Science, Azzaytuna University, are obliged to undertake an English language course as a compulsory element of their curriculum. The purpose of their English studies is twofold: firstly, to acquire an understanding of English grammar rules, and secondly, to familiarise themselves with the scientific terminology used in English. The latter is essential for comprehending the latest English references and research findings in their respective fields of study. This study will entail the conduction of an investigation into the attitudes of first-year students enrolled at the Faculty of Science at Azzaytuna University with regard to English language learning. The researcher will provide a comprehensive explanation of the definition of attitude and its role in the language learning process. Furthermore, this discussion will encompass a review of extant literature pertaining to attitudes towards English language learning. The methodology and analysis of the data collection process will also be presented.

Definition of attitude

The concept of 'attitude' is a straightforward word to articulate, yet its definition remains somewhat elusive. A plethora of researchers have proposed a multitude of definitions for the concept of attitude. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p.1), the term 'attitude' is defined as follows: "*A psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor*". In a similar manner, Al-Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, and Hossaim (2012) define the attitude as a psychological construct that determines a particular behaviour. In the same context, Davis (2018), Mackenzie (2010) and Walker, Smith and Hamidova (2013) explain that attitude refers to beliefs, emotions, and feelings towards specific concepts or objects. To summarize, the attitude may be defined as

the combination of aspiration and the will to work in order to achieve a given goal. This suggests that an individual's attitude plays a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of achieving a given objective. Furthermore, Abu-Snoubar (2017) defines the attitude as a person's reaction regarding certain things depending on a individual's own standpoint and convictions.

Attitude and language learning

It is evident that an individual's attitude constitutes a pivotal element in the realm of language learning, exerting a profound influence on the efficacy and the ease or difficulty of the learning process. As posited by Alnoursi (2013), Al-Sobhi, Rashid and Abdullah (2018), Belshek (2024), Eshghinejad (2016), Getie (2020), Herwiana and Laili (2019), Parvaiz, Shah and Gul (2025) and Putra and Suparni (2023), attitudes have been demonstrated to play a pivotal role in the learning English as a second or foreign language. Richards and Schmidt (2010) emphasise the pivotal role of attitudes among language learners by asserting that this concept pertains to the attitudes that speakers of different languages or language varieties hold toward each other's language or their own. Evidence suggests that expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may be indicative of that language's perceived linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, or social status.

This finding indicates that an individual's attitude plays a pivotal role in determining the efficacy of their language learning endeavours. In the same context, Masood, Yasir and Saher (2025, p. 253) add that "Language learning attitude has been observed to be a significant factor in successful accreditation. Those who have a well-mannered and organized attitude with regard to learning a language tend to excel more quickly and with greater success than those who do not". The findings suggest that maintaining a positive attitude is conducive to effective learning. According to Dörnyei and Csizér (2002), positive attitudes can facilitate and assist students in their foreign language learning, while negative attitudes have the potential to act as psychological barriers to the process of language learning. It may be posited that an optimistic outlook is conducive to effective language learning. In a similar vein, Abidin, Mohammadi and Alzwari (2012), Al Samadani and Ibnain (2015), and Khan (2016) posit that a strong positive attitude towards English language learning is significantly correlated with favourable learning outcomes. It has been demonstrated that learners who possess higher levels of attitude tend to demonstrate faster rates of learning in comparison to those who exhibit lower levels.

Statement of the problem

Attitude represents an indispensable element within the domain of language education and learning. It is an established fact that students who demonstrate a poor attitude are unlikely to achieve success in their language learning endeavours. It is evident that first-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Science at Azzaytuna University, who have pursued English language courses for a period of six years and have successfully completed the requisite examinations, continue to grapple with the challenge of employing English proficiently in their daily lives and academic pursuits. This deficit may be attributable to

their attitudes towards learning English. The objective of this study is to investigate the participants' attitudes towards English language learning.

Research questions

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the levels of attitudes among the first year students towards English language learning?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences among the first year students' attitudes towards English language learning in regard to their gender?

Aims of the study

The present study fulfills the following objectives:

- 1- To investigate the first year students' attitudes levels towards learning English.
- 2- To scrutinize if there are any significant differences among the first year students' attitudes towards English language learning in regard to their gender.

Significance of the study

The present study constitutes an analytical examination of prevailing attitudes with regard to the learning English language skills. It has the potential to redirect the focus of students towards the significance of attitudes in English language learning, whilst concomitantly aiding English teachers, course designers, students, and decision makers in the selection of superior teaching methods, techniques and strategies that can be implemented within EFL classroom settings.

Previous studies

A substantial body of research has been dedicated to investigating students' attitudes towards learning English as a second or foreign language. Abu Ghazaleh and Hijazi (2011), for instance, conducted a study to examine the attitudes of undergraduate and graduate students at Yarmouk University in Jordan towards English language learning and the impact of their academic specialisation and gender on these attitudes. The study was conducted with the participation of 200 male and female learners of English as a foreign language. The data was collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The findings indicated that the students exhibited favourable attitudes towards learning English language. The findings of the study demonstrated that gender was not a contributing factor in the students' attitudes towards the English language learning process.

Within the same theoretical framework, Almezghwi (2016) examined Libyan students' attitudes towards the learning English as a foreign language in her MA thesis, focusing on the influence of gender on students' attitudes towards the language learning process at Tripoli University in Libya (Almezghwi, 2016). The study's sample size comprised 158 undergraduate students. The instrument of data collection was a questionnaire. The findings indicated that Libyan university students exhibited favourable attitudes towards English language learning, with female students demonstrating a more positive disposition than their male counterparts.

In 2016, Eshghinejad undertook a study to investigate the attitudes of EFL university students and the effect of gender on the students' attitudes toward learning English

(Eshghinejad, 2016). The present study was conducted on a sample of thirty students enrolled at Kashan University in Iran. The data-collection instrument utilised in the study was a questionnaire comprising 30 items. The research yielded findings that indicated the students exhibited a predominantly positive attitude toward the pursuit of learning English. Furthermore, statistical analysis disclosed discernible and statistically significant differences in attitudes toward English learning between the male and female students. A higher level of commitment was demonstrated by female students than by their male counterparts.

Burgos and Molina (2019) conducted a study to ascertain the level of students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in four universities in the south of Chile. The objective of this study was to ascertain the extent of students' attitudes towards English language learning. The data presented herein was collated from one hundred and thirty-one university students, collected via the medium of an electronic questionnaire disseminated online. The findings indicated a favourable attitude towards learning English among the student cohort.

Mutar (2019) conducted a study with the objective of ascertaining whether university students hold a negative or positive attitude towards learning English, and to investigate whether there is a gender difference in their attitudes. The study comprised a sample of 400 male and female students, enrolled at non-major English universities, who were randomly selected from three colleges within the Baghdad University system. The instrument utilised for the data collection process was a three-point Likert scale questionnaire, comprising a total of twenty-seven items. The study's outcomes indicated that the participants demonstrated a favourable disposition toward English language learning, with no significant variations observed among their attitudes based on gender.

Alsubaie (2021) conducted a study to ascertain the attitudes of non-major students towards English language learning at Bisha University in Saudi Arabia. The present study set out with the objective of examining the attitudes of the participants in regard to their English language learning. The study was conducted on a sample of 80 undergraduate students, and the relevant data was collected via a three-point Likert scale questionnaire, the responses to which were subsequently submitted by the participants. The findings of this investigation demonstrated that students exhibited favourable attitudes toward English language learning.

Sharma (2022) undertook a research project with a view to examining the attitudes of first-year university students towards learning English in Makawanpur District, Nepal. A sample of 277 undergraduate students was selected at random in order to elicit the required data. A questionnaire comprising five-point Likert scales was employed as the primary instrument for data collection in this study. The findings revealed that the students exhibited favourable attitudes towards English language learning, indicating their positive stance on the subject.

A related study was undertaken by Bufarwa (2024), investigating the attitudes of first-year non-English-major learners towards learning English at the College of Education, Omar Al-Mokhtar University, Libya. The sample population of students comprised 170 participants selected on a random basis from first-year students. The questionnaire was utilised as a data collection instrument. The results indicated that the participants exhibited favourable dispositions towards learning English language. The findings of the study

demonstrated that female students exhibited more positive attitudes in comparison to their male counterparts.

A study was conducted by Masood, Yasir and Saher in 2025 to investigate students' attitudes towards English language learning in the colleges of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan. This study also sought to ascertain any discrepancies in attitude towards the learning of the target language between male and female students. The present study utilised a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection, with this questionnaire having been administered to seventy students. The findings of the study demonstrated that the majority of students exhibited a favourable attitude towards learning English. No significant differences were observed in attitudes towards English language learning between female and male students.

Methodology

Participants

The subjects involved in the present study comprised (80) undergraduate first year university students at the Faculty of Science, Azzaytuna University, Libya. They were (33) males and (47) females who were selected randomly. The ages of participants ranged between 18 to 20 years old and all of them have studied English as a compulsory course for six years: three years in preparatory schools and three years in secondary schools. They have nearly the same background of English language.

Instrument

The present study employs an empirical approach, utilizing a questionnaire comprising five scales that focus on English language learning attitudes. The questionnaire was based on Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (1985). In order to circumvent any potential misinterpretation of the items by the participants, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Arabic. The questionnaire under review comprised twenty items, which were evaluated using a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The five-point Likert scale has been developed for the purpose of measuring the level of participants' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. Participants were invited to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting one of six possible options: strongly agree, agree, moderate, disagree and strongly disagree.

Data collection

The researcher requested a authorization from the Dean of the Faculty of Science to distribute the questionnaire. A written clearance was given to the researcher. The questionnaire was distributed to the 80 Learners enrolled in English language courses in October 2025. The subjects were instructed to choose only one item from the given options, and they were informed that their responding would be kept in strict confidentiality and would be used for research purposes only. Also, they were invited to respond to each item. of the questionnaire on the five-point Likert scale according to their own feelings.

Results and discussion

Students' attitudes level towards learning English.

The subsequent analysis was conducted by means of the SPSS program. The arithmetical mean of the students' responses was employed in order to analyse the students' attitudes level towards English language learning. The present study made use of descriptive statistics in order to respond to the initial research question. This was achieved by means of an analysis of the arithmetic means and standard deviations of students' opinions with regard to English language learning in each item of the questionnaire. The method under discussion can be utilised in order to ascertain the overall level of students' attitudes towards English language learning. Once this data has been collected, the students can then be classified according to the arithmetic mean values as indicated in Table 1 below. This classification can be made into five distinct categories, namely 'very high', 'high', 'moderate', 'low', and 'very low'.

Table 1: Mean scores of attitudes items and their level of attitude

N.	Attitudes Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of Attitude
1	I like my English classes.	4.81	0.576	Very high
2	I feel comfortable when I study English.	4.61	0.787	Very high
3	I like to do extra English language home assignments.	4.54	0.885	Very high
4	Learning English threatens the Islamic and Arab identity.	4.51	0.711	Very high
5	I look forward to learn more English in the future.	4.44	0.809	High
6	I like to speak in English with my friends outside the university.	4.38	0.862	High
7	When I miss the class, I always ask my classmates or English teacher about what has been taught.	4.29	0.874	High
8	I study English just to pass the exam.	4.19	0.843	High
9	I want to study English even if it is not a compulsory subject within the faculty curriculum.	4.14	1.088	High
10	Learning English language as a foreign is difficult.	3.93	0.978	High
11	Learning English is a significant for my future career.	3.78	1.136	High
12	English classes are boring.	3.78	1.222	High
13	I like reading English stories, novels and newspapers.	3.71	1.093	High
14	I think that learning English language is a waste of time.	3.70	0.999	High
15	Speaking English fluently is an important goal in my life.	3.66	1.252	High
16	I find learning English language is interesting.	3.60	1.051	High
17	I like learning English because it helps me to know more about English culture.	3.53	1.147	High
18	I rarely miss English classes.	3.39	1.392	Moderate

19	I like to speak in English during English classes.	3.28	1.031	Moderate
20	Learning English makes me feel more confident.	2.88	1.151	Moderate
Over all mean score		3.96	0.99	High

The above table indicates that the students' attitudes towards learning English ranged from very high to moderate as follows:

- The highest averages were for statements reflecting positive attitudes towards English language learning, such as "*I like my English classes*" with an average of 4.81, followed by the statement "*I feel comfortable when I study English*" with an average 4.61, This finding indicates an extremely favourable level of attitudes among students in relation to learning English.
- In the same context, some statements indicated that the learners exhibit a strong commitment to the learning English language skills, such as "*I look forward to learn more English in the future*" with an average 4.44.
- The lowest average of attitudes can be seen in the statement "*I rarely miss English classes*" with an average 3.39, indicating moderate students' level of attitudes towards learning English.

As demonstrated in Table 1, the mean score of the participants' responses, which pertains to the students' attitudes toward learning English language, was (3.96). The findings of this statistical study demonstrated unequivocally that the study participants exhibited a profound desire to acquire proficiency in the English language. It has been hypothesised that this phenomenon occurs because students are acutely aware of the significance of proficiency in English for future employment opportunities. This finding is in alignment with the results of numerous studies, including those by Almezghwi (2016), Alsubaie (2021), Bufarwa (2024), Burgos & Molina (2019), Mutar (2019) and Sharma (2022), which demonstrated that students possess a strong desire to learn the English language.

Students' attitudes toward learning English language in regard to their gender.

As demonstrated in Table 2 below, the descriptive results pertaining to the second research question indicate the impact of gender on the attitudes of students towards the learning of English as a language.

Table 2: The descriptive statistics of the students' attitudes toward learning English according to gender variable

Gender	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Df	Sig
Male	33	0.7100	0.1236	-0.884	78	0.337
Female	47	0.4838	0.0705			

In table 2, the analysis of the findings indicated that the standard deviation of female students' responses was (0.4838), whereas, the standard deviation of male's responses was (0.7100) and the result of T-test was (-0.884). The statistical test results showed that the statistical significance value (Sig = 0.337) is greater than the significance level (0.05), which

indicated that there were no statistically noteworthy differences in the attitudes of the study participants towards learning English language in regard to their gender variable. In other words, the results revealed that the gender was not a significant variable on students' attitudes towards learning English. On the one hand, this result is in agreement with the findings of previous studies conducted by Abu Ghazaleh and Hijazi (2011), Masood, Yasir and Saher (2025), Mutar (2019) and Parvaiz, Shah and Gul (2025) indicated that there were no significant differences among male and female learners' attitudes towards learning English. On the other hand, this result contradicts with the studies' findings of Almezghwi (2016), Bufarwa (2024) and Eshghinejad (2016) which showed that there were statistically significances between female and male students' attitudes towards learning English language. The female students' attitudes were higher than male students' attitudes. Such different results could be rendered to the variation in samples aims or the instruments of the studies or both of them.

Conclusion

The present study constitutes an endeavour to investigate first-year students' attitudes towards learning English at the Faculty of Science, with a view to ascertaining whether there are any significant differences in students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of their gender. The results indicated a clear overall positivity amongst the students in regard to English language learning. It is hypothesised that high attitudes are attributable to the perceived significance of English as a fundamental element of academic pursuits. It can thus be posited that students are likely to assign considerable importance to their attitude when participating in the English language learning process.

In addressing the impact of gender on students' attitudes towards English language learning, the study revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the attitudes of male and female students towards English language learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1- Course designers should pay more attention to the students' interests when designing English courses.
- 2- English language teachers should introduce different language classroom activities to their students in a relaxed atmosphere.
- 3- Future researches are suggested to investigate the factors that influence university students' attitudes towards English language learning

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