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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY AT NONG LAM UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Effective learning a second language is influenced by many factors. Among of those, attitude has been identified as an important one. Better understanding of students' attitude will help language teaching programmers, school managers and educators to develop strategies to improved student's learning outcomes. The objective of this study is to explore students' attitude toward learning English. Data were collected through a questionnaire from a sample of 694 students at Nong Lam University. The results of the study showed that the students have positive attitude toward learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: attitude, student, English.

TÓM TẮT

Thái độ của sinh viên đối với việc học tiếng Anh:

Nghiên cứu tại Trường Đại học Nông Lâm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh

Thành công trong việc học ngôn ngữ thứ hai bị ảnh hưởng bởi nhiều yếu tố. Trong số đó, thái độ được xác định là yếu tố quan trọng. Hiểu rõ hơn về thái độ của người học sẽ giúp các nhà xây dựng chương trình giảng dạy ngôn ngữ, các nhà quản lý trường học và giáo viên phát triển các chiến lược để cải thiện kết quả học tập của người học. Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu thái độ của sinh viên đối với việc học tiếng Anh. Dữ liệu nghiên cứu được thu thập thông qua bảng câu hỏi trên mẫu thuận tiện, 694 sinh viên, tại Trường Đại học Nông Lâm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Các kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy sinh viên có thái độ tích cực đối với việc học tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: thái độ, sinh viên, tiếng Anh.

1. Introduction

English has become a language of international communication, a language of business, banking and finance, science and technology, cultural exchange and international relations worldwide. Many studies have shown that people are interested in a particular second language when they see that the language is a tool to achieving high economic status, ensuring life and satisfying one's life values. Practice has shown that proficiency in English is the key to success in life. Learner's attitude towards learning languages is one of the crucial factors determining the success or failure.

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Attitude is considered as an important concept to understand human behavior and is defined as a mental state include beliefs and feelings (Latchanna, G. & Dagnev, A, 2009). Belief is an important factor determining achievement in language learning. If learners believe that they can not do well, then that belief would be a major obstacle to successful learning a language (Lennartsson, 2008). Negative attitudes can hinder learning. However, a negative attitude can be changed and turned into a positive attitude, a positive outcome. Attitude is considered an important factor affecting language learning. Positive attitude towards learning languages is a good starting point to learn a language. Language attitudes, according to (Crystal, 1997), are the feelings people have about their own language or language of others.

In Vietnam, although English has become a compulsory subject for higher education academic programs throughout the country, but it can be said that the effectiveness of teaching and learning has not met any expectations. How to improve the quality of teaching and learning English is a question of attracting the attention of many researchers, educational administrators. In the context of ongoing changes in the theory and methodology of teaching, learner (not a teacher) has the central role and attitudes of learners hold important positions in improving effective teaching and learning. Understanding the motivation, attitudes of learners will help curriculum developers design programs that meet objectives of learner and improve the academic achievement. From the above situation and context, this study was conducted to explore the attitude of students towards learning English, a survey at Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

2. Methodology

This study used quantitative approach. Primary data for the research was collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two independent sections including demographic profile questions, attitude questions. Attitude items were selected and adjusted from survey instruments developed by Samar Rukh (2014) and Sk. Abdullah al Mamun et all (2012). Participants were asked to rate each statement by their level of agreement in a close ended 5-level Likert scale with 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = Normal, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. Non-Probability Sampling, or convenience sampling has been adopted to select participants for the study. A total of 694 useable questionnaires returned and used for the analysis. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS® Version 22.0 for Windows). Descriptive statistics was conducted to determine the frequency, the mean, and the standard deviation of the demographic profile and attitudinal data.

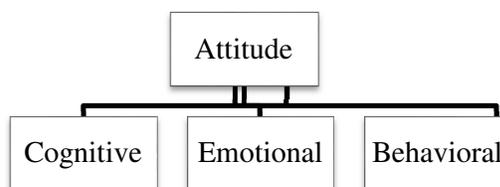
Because the study was conducted only at the Nong Lam University-Ho Chi Minh City, so the research findings provide only partial pictures about the students' attitudes toward learning English. Furthermore, data for the research based mainly on respondents'

opinion about the statements in the questionnaire, so the assumption is that students have answered honestly and forthrightly.

3. Definition of language attitude

Attitude is main concept of social psychology. Attitudes towards language are the feelings about one's language and the languages of others (Crystal 1997). Linguistic behavior can be explained by language attitude. According to Baker (1992) the restoration, preservation or death in the life of the language depends fundamentally on the attitudes of people towards that language.

Many studies have focused on the three components of attitude include cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Component "cognitive" refers to any information, fact or knowledge relevant to a attitudinal subject includes the thoughts, beliefs and values of a language. Component "emotional" or "feelings" is comments (positive or negative) about the language (Baker, 1992; Rajecki, 1982). Third component is "behavior", a behavioural intention or the action can be done (possible acts) for the language (Rajecki, 1982). These three components have a reciprocal influence (Wenden, 1991)



Source: (Hilgard, 1980)

4. Result and discussion

Demographic profile

Table 1. Demographic profile of the sample

	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	422	60,8
	Male	272	39,2
Year of study			
	Freshman	121	17,4
	Sophomore	259	37,3
	Junior	248	35,7
	Senior	63	9,1
	Others	3	,4
Time began to study			
	From primary school	227	32,7
	From secondary school	438	63,1
	From high school	9	1,3
	From college	20	2,9

Taking extra English courses		
No	434	62,5
Yes	260	37,5
Self- Assessment of English Skill		
Very bad	85	12,2
Bad	236	34,0
Fairly Good	347	50,0
Very good	24	3,5
Excellent	2	0,3

The total number of respondents of this study was 694. The distribution of sample of the study is shown in Table 1. The profile of respondents was described as follows:

Gender: Respondents were asked to state their gender. The analysis of the demographic variables indicates that there are more female than male respondents. The numbers of male and female in the sample were accordingly 272 (39.2%) and 442 (60.8%).

Years of study: Respondents were asked to indicate their year of study. There were 17.4% freshman (n=17,4), 37.3% Sophomore (n=259), 35.3% Junior (n=248), 9.1% senior (n=63) and others 0.4% (n=3).

The questionnaire also inquired about the time began study English of each student. 227 respondents (32.7%) have been studying English from primary school; 438 respondents (63.1%) from secondary school; 9 respondents (1.3%) from high school; 20 respondents (2.9%) from college. Two hundred sixty respondents (37,5%) said that they are taking extra English courses besides the college curriculum. 434 respondents (62.5%) are not taking any extra English courses.

Respondents were also asked to assess their English skill. Half of respondents, Fifty percent (n=347), have classified as fairly good at English; 321 respondents classified as bad and very bad.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Factor analysis is used to identify latent constructs or factors. It is commonly used to reduce variables into a smaller set to save time and facilitate easier interpretations. In this study, EFA have been conducted in 22 items (observable variables) to be reduced to three latent variables that share a common variance and are unobservable.

The example is suitable for EFA as the KMO is $0.883 > 0,5$. Noted that, The Kaiser Criterion is said to be reliable when: a) the averaged extracted communalities is at least more than .70 and when there are less than 30 variables, or b) the averaged extracted communalities is equal or above .60 and the sample size is above 250 cases (Field, 2009).

The result of EFA with Principal Components analysis is used to extract maximum variance from the data set with each component thus reducing a large number of variables into smaller number of components and Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization

resulted in three factor with extracted variance is 50,02% > 50%. The first factor includes 9 items named emotional factor. The second factor includes 9 items named cognitive factor. The last factor includes 4 items named behavioral factor. The result of final EFA was presented in table 2.

<i>Table 2. EFA</i> Items	Factors		
	1	2	3
You like to learn English	0,767		
You like someone else speaking with you in English	0,760		
You like to speak English	0,729		
You like to read books, documents and journals in English	0,717		
You like watching TV shows in English	0,668		
In general, you realize that learning English is important and you love learning English	0,662		
You spend a lot of time learning English.	0,647		
You will enroll an extra English course even if it is not a compulsory subject in the school	0,495		
Being able to communicate with foreigners in English is a fundamental purpose of learning English.	0,319		
Being able to speak English is an advantage in the present time		0,779	
You need English to be more successful in your studies		0,751	
English is an important tool in scientific research		0,662	
All students should learn English		0,639	
Learning English is important to you, because English is a very useful tool in modern society		0,626	
When someone speaks English, you think they make a good impression.		0,562	
Learning English will help to develop your mind.		0,521	
Students should regularly use English in communication		0,504	
When someone speaks English you think they are good and qualified		0,408	
The important purpose of learning English is to get high score in English Tests			0,822
The important goal for learning English is to get a college degree			0,745
The important purpose of learning English is to have a good job			0,549
You learn English to make good academic progress			0,504

Attitude of students toward learning English

Student's attitude was evaluated by the mean of the 22 items of the survey. In which, each statement in the items was evaluated on a 5-level Likert scale (from 1 to 5), where value 5 was the most positive (very agree), value 1 was the most negative (Very disagree). To draw conclusions about students' attitudes to the survey factors, agree on the distribution of the average value of the observed variables as follows: 1 to 1.8 (very negative); From 1.8 to near 2.6 (negative); From 2.6 to near 3.4 (normal); From 3,4 to to 4,2 (positive), from 4,2 to 5 (very positive).

Table 3. Descriptive analysis

Items		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. deviation
Learning English is important to you, because English is a very useful tool in modern society	Frequency	33	1	10	223	427	4.46	.926
	(%)	4.8	0.1	1.4	32.1	61.5		
When someone speaks English you think they are good and qualified	Frequency	12	58	167	380	77	3.65	.849
	(%)	1.7	8.4	24.1	54.8	11.1		
When someone speaks English, you think they make a good impression.	Frequency	15	29	113	409	128	3.87	.833
	(%)	2.2	4.2	16.3	58.9	18.4		
Being able to speak English is an advantage in the present time	Frequency	26	0	8	209	451	4.53	.850
	(%)	3.7	0	1.2	30.1	65.0		
English is an important tool in scientific research	Frequency	15	7	55	337	280	4.24	.813
	(%)	2.2	1.0	7.9	48.6	40.3		
You need English to be more successful in your studies	Frequency	20	4	35	317	318	4.31	.834
	(%)	2.9	0.6	5.0	45.7	45.8		
Learning English will help to develop your mind.	Frequency	9	25	143	371	146	3.89	.817
	(%)	1.3	3.6	20.6	53.5	21.0		
You like to learn English	Frequency	13	36	241	300	104	3.64	.864
	(%)	1.9	5.2	34.7	43.2	15.0		
You like to speak English	Frequency	6	40	183	301	164	3.83	.884
	(%)	0.9	5.8	26.4	43.4	23.6		
You like someone else speaking with you in English	Frequency	15	126	257	227	69	3.30	.950
	(%)	2.2	18.2	37.1	32.7	9.9		
You like watching TV shows in English	Frequency	7	103	313	212	59	3.31	.861
	(%)	1.1	14.8	45.1	30.5	8.5		
You like to read books, documents and journals in English	Frequency	10	149	333	162	40	3.11	.852
	(%)	1.4	21.5	48.0	23.3	5.8		
All students should learn English	Frequency	18	16	56	327	277	4.19	.877
	Tỷ lệ (%)	2.6	2.3	8.1	47.1	39.9		
Students should	Frequency	14	31	135	358	156	3.88	.875

regularly use English in communication	(%)	2.0	4.5	19.5	51.6	22.5		
You will enroll an extra English course even if it is not a compulsory subject in the school	Frequency	18	32	86	395	163	3.94	.880
	(%)	2.6	4.6	12.4	56.9	23.5		
You learn English to make good academic progress	Frequency	12	72	168	341	101	3.64	.913
	(%)	1.7	10.4	24.2	49.1	14.6		
The important goal for learning English is to get a college degree	Frequency	52	278	157	180	27	2.79	1.035
	(%)	7.5	40.1	22.6	25.9	3.9		
The important purpose of learning English is to have a good job	Frequency	16	24	77	407	170	4.00	.838
	(%)	2.3	3.5	11.1	58.6	24.5		
The important purpose of learning English is to get high score in English Tests	Frequency	30	140	236	238	50	3.20	.984
	(%)	4.3	20.2	34.0	34.3	7.2		
Being able to communicate with foreigners in English is a fundamental purpose of learning English.	Frequency	10	28	87	392	177	4.01	.820
	(%)	1.4	4.0	12.5	56.5	25.5		
You spend a lot of time learning English.	Frequency	10	77	428	155	24	3.15	.713
	(%)	1.4	11.1	61.7	22.3	3.5		
In general, you realize that learning English is important and you love learning English	Frequency	9	9	152	357	167	3.96	.792
	(%)	1.3	1.3	21.9	51.4	24.1		
Attitude							3.7678	.43468
<i>Cognitive</i>							4.1428	.55572
<i>Behavioral</i>							3.4063	.65676
<i>Emotional</i>							3.5616	.57557

Statistical results (see Table 3) show that the mean value of attitudes toward English learning of 694 respondents in the survey was 3.77 (standard deviation of 0.43). This data shows that students have a positive attitude towards learning English. In addition, the mean of the three components of attitudes including cognitive, emotional and behavioral was positive, with the cognitive component achieving the highest value of 4.14 (The standard deviation is 0.55, followed by the emotional component of 3.56 (standard deviation of 0.57) and the behavioral component of 3.4 (standard deviation of 0.65).

Detailed statistics on frequency and percentage (%), we find that the majority of students in the research sample agree (61.5%) with the assumption that learning English is important because English is a very useful tool in modern society. 95% of students in the sample agree and strongly agree with the statement that speaking English is an advantage in the present stage. 88.9% of the students in the sample agree and strongly agree with the statement that English is an important tool in scientific research. 99.5% of the students in the sample agree and strongly agree with the English speech to help them succeed in their studies. 47.1% of all students should learn English, 39.9% would agree. 74.1% agreed and very much in line with the statement that students should regularly use English in communication. 83.1% agreed and strongly agreed with the important purpose of learning English is to have a suitable job. 82% agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that the basic purpose of learning English was to be able to communicate with foreigners.

At the same time, the figures also show that the students in the sample appreciated English speakers. Specifically, 54.8% agreed, 11.1% strongly agreed that when someone speaks English, they are good and qualified. In addition, 58.9% agreed and 18.4% strongly agreed that speaking English would make a good impression. However, 18.2% of the students in the sample did not like others talking to themselves in English. 14.8% did not like watching TV shows in English. 21.5% do not like to read more books, documents, magazines in English. 11.1% disagree with the statement "you spend a lot of time learning English".

5. Conclusion

From the results of the analysis above, we can conclude that most students are aware of the importance of English in their studies and in future career development. However, there is still a gap between awareness and their actions. This has made the effectiveness of learning English and the English level of students is still limited. What factors have affected students' learning English? May be an interesting question for the next study.

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