

# 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 drive of this study is to explore students' attitude toward learning English. Data were collected through a questionnaire from a total 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.

## 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.

Attitude is considered as an important concept to understand human behavior and is defined as a mental state includes beliefs and feelings (Latchanna, G. & Dagnev, A, 2009).

Belief is an important factor determining achievement in language learning. If learners believe that they cannot 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. Researchers and educational administrators are very much concerned about how to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In the context

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of ongoing changes in the theory and methodology of teaching, the students (not the teachers) have 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 the students 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 questionnaires. 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 al. (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.

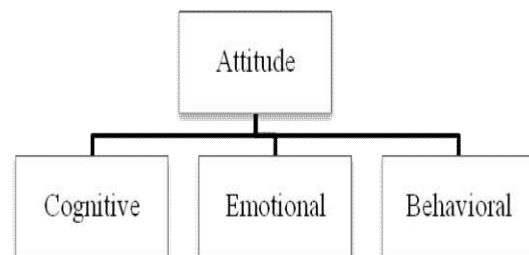
Because the study was conducted only at Nong Lam University based in Ho Chi Minh City, so the research findings provide only partial pictures about the students' attitudes toward learning English. Furthermore, data for the research based mainly on respondents' opinion about the statements in the

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 an 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 behavioral 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
<b>Gender</b>	Female	422	60,8
	Male	272	39,2
<b>Year of study</b>			
	Freshman	121	17,4
	Sophomore	259	37,3
	Junior	248	35,7
	Senior	63	9,1
	Others	3	,4
<b>Time began to study</b>			
	From primary school	227	32,7
	From secondary school	438	63,1
	From high school	9	1,3
	From college	20	2,9
<b>Taking extra English courses</b>			
	No	434	62,5
	Yes	260	37,5
<b>Self- Assessment of English Skill</b>			
	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 to 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. A half of respondents, fifty percent (n=347), have classified as fairly good at English; 321 respondents classified as bad and very bad.

## 5. 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 factors 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.

Table 2. EFA

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

## 6. Attitude of student towards learning English

Student's attitude was evaluated by the mean of the 22 main 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 agreeable), value 1 was the most negative (Very

disagree). To draw conclusions about students' attitudes towards the survey factors, agreed on the distribution of the average value of the observed variables is 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 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
	Percent (%)	2.6	2.3	8.1	47.1	39.9		
Students should regularly use English in communication	Frequency	14	31	135	358	156	3.88	.875
	(%)	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		
<b>Attitude</b>							<b>3.7678</b>	<b>.43468</b>
<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).

Around 61.5% of respondents agreed with the statement that “learning English is important because it’s a very useful tool in modern society”. The majority of respondents (95%) agreed with the statement that “speaking English is an advantage in the present time”. 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% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the item "the purpose of learning English is to have a suitable job". 82% of respondents 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".

## 6. 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, attitude and their actions. Therefore, further studies should be conducted to develop more understanding of students' attitudes towards learning English and the factors that may affect their learning achievement.

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