Comparing Students' Attitudes Towards English Language in an Indonesian State High School

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Abstract

This article reports a study of high school students' attitudes in Indonesia towards English as a foreign language. The attitudes in this study pertain to the students' interest towards learning English as a language, their motivation to master it, their difficulty in learning English grammar, and also the importance of English for their future. Students from two different classes i.e. science class and social class were involved in this study. A questionnaire was administered to 72 students, $n = 40$ from science class and $n = 32$ from social class. It was found that the students' of both classes interest in learning English was not statistically different. They consider that learning English is quite interesting for the students in both classes. Meanwhile in the matter of their motivation, difficulty in learning English grammar, and also their consideration in viewing the importance of English, the results show statistically significant differences between the students in both classes.

Keywords : Students' Attitudes, English as a Foreign Language, Comparative Study

Introduction

English as a foreign language is taught in high school in Indonesia. As a compulsory subject, English lessons have become familiar among the students in junior and senior high school. As this study was concerned with the students' attitudes in high school, the focus was on students in two different major programs in senior high school i.e. science and social class students.

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Students in senior high school in Indonesia are selected and categorized into two different majors; natural science and social science. Although, there are some schools that divide the students into language major as well. There are often assumptions that imply that the science class tends to be a favored class (to teach). It is also considered that the science students are mostly smart.

A study about students' self-concept (Pujowatie, 2013) indicates that students majoring in science and social studies have different perceptions of their self-conceptions. The study shows that students majoring in science have a dominant dimension of self-identity, which is more powerful in judging behavioral self-concept. In addition to the students' self-concept, the students' characteristics and academic lessons in science and social classes are different.

However, whether in science or social class, the students study the same English curriculum. Building on the idea that the science and social students have different dimensions of self-concept, characteristics and academic lessons, this study will try to analyze whether there are any differences between the science and social class students' attitudes in perceiving their English lessons.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to identify the students' attitudes towards learning English as a language. The attitudes here are related to the students' interest in English, their motivation to learn the language, their difficulty with English grammar and also their perceptions of the importance of English. This research study addresses the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences between science and social students in the matter of their interest in learning English as a language?

2. Are there any significant differences between science and social students' motivation in mastering the English language?

3. Are there any significant differences between science and social students in regards to the difficulty of English grammar?

4. Are there any significant differences between science and social students in considering the importance of English language for their future?

There are some related studies that can help explore this research. Those are discussed further in the next section.

Conceptual framework

A student's attitude in the learning process has gained much attention from researchers as it can play a major role in affecting their learning process. "Attitudes plays an important role in second language [and/or foreign language] learning as it determines to a large extent the learners' behaviors, i.e., action taken to learn, or efforts exerted, during the learning process" (Alkaff, 2013, p.107). Therefore, it can be beneficial for recognizing students' attitudes for both the students and the "academic programs" (Inal et al., 2003 cited in Alkaff, 2013). In line with the hypotheses of this study, the term of attitude here was specified and linked into the students' interest in learning English as a language, their motivation to master the English language, their difficulty in learning grammar and also their perception of learning English for their future.

According to Gursoy (2013, p.108) attitude in learning is interrelated with the development of motivation. Moreover, Tamimi et al. (2009) cited in Alkaff (2013, p.107) assert that learners' attitudes towards a particular language learned can influence the learners' motivation in learning that language. Al-Bustand (2009, p.454) also reinforce that "teachers" and "administrators" should recognize the learners' attitudes and tendencies towards learning English to gain their learning motivation. Thus, attitude and motivation play important role in learning language.

Motivation in learning language also can be interrelated with the students' future self-image as Dornyei (2005) cited in Kormos et al. (2011, p.497) points out, the main driving force of language learning is the students' future self-image. This can be linked with the last hypotheses of this study that investigate the students' attitudes towards the English language for their future.

One related study about students' attitudes in university level was undertaken by Al Mamun et al. (2012) in Bangladesh. The findings reveal that the participants had positive attitudes and were motivated to learn the English language. Although the study was not to compare the students' attitudes from different majors or backgrounds, it can still be useful in this research. There have yet to be specific research studies for comparing students' attitudes towards English language in the context of Indonesian high schools majors. Thus, this study tried to fill in a gap in this area of study. However there are research studies that compare students' attitudes based on gender as well as age. One of the studies was conducted by Soku et al. (2011, p.22) as cited in Alkaff (2013, p.108) found gender differences between male and female students had a substantial result on students' attitudes towards English study. Also, Buschenhofen (1998) cited in Alkaff (2013, p.108) compares attitudes towards English between 12-year-olds and final year university students, and his study indicates that both groups have a generally positive attitude towards English. Meanwhile, there is also a research study, conducted by Lamb (2004), in the Indonesian EFL context that investigates the

motivation of Indonesian children aged 11-12 years old in studying English in an urban junior high school. This study points out that "changes in individuals' motivation to learn the language may therefore be partly explained by reference to ongoing processes of identification, especially during the formative years of adolescence" (Lamb, 2004, p.1). The study also suggests that the students were entangled to particular discourse probably through "parents" and "schools" and also "media" that can inspire them to an English-speaking vision that can contribute to the students' motivation in learning the language (Lamb, 2004, p.14). Lamb (2004) is relevant to this research study that has a similar context in Indonesia.

Another related study about attitudes was also undertaken by Arslan and Akbarov (2012, 27) in their study "EFL learners Perceptions and Attitudes towards English for the Specific Purposes". The result of the study put forward that "most of the students believe that English will be useful in their future job. It is in line with the general belief that knowing English opens door to jobs". It is quite often that one reason somebody makes effort to master English is to open wider opportunities for a future job.

Furthermore, some researchers such as Garrett and Shortall (2002); Loewan et al. (2009); and Savignon and Wang, (2003) as cited in Weger (2012, p.143) "more fully investigated learners' attitudes towards grammar instruction, revealing variation in learners' attitudes based on proficiency, educational background, and current educational setting". Therefore, several studies on attitudes in learning language have variously interrelated with some aspects in learning as such motivation, interest, students' belief, gender and so on and so forth. This study, as part of these larger studies, can hopefully fill the gaps in this related issue, particularly in different students' major context.

Research Methodology

This study was undertaken during the 2014-2015 academic year in an Indonesian high school.

1. Population or Samples design

A state senior high school in West Java Indonesia was involved in this study. The access to the school and all the participants were gained by the researcher as it is a school where the researcher worked before. An English teacher, the researcher's colleague, helped conduct this study by administering and distributing the questionnaire.

Purposive sampling was applied in this study; as a result, this study is not generalizable. According to Silverman (2005, p.129) "purposive sampling allows researchers to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which they are interested". Therefore, "researchers build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs" (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p.156). The participants of this study were 40 students from a science class and

32 from a social class (total =72). They were approximately 16 to 17 year old students. The participants are rather different than in Lamb's (2004) study that was focused on 11-12 year old children in learning English.

2. Measurement and Data collection design

The variables used in this study were categorized into independent and dependent variables. Science and social class type were categorized as independent variables. Meanwhile, the students' responses relating to their interest, motivation, difficulty and importance of the English language were categorized as dependent variables.

The instrument used was a questionnaire that was assessed by a tutor, as an expert, to consider content validity and was then piloted to ten students. Content validity focuses on how "the instrument must show that it fairly and comprehensively covers the domain or items that it purports to cover" (Carmines and Zeller, 1979, p.20 cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2011, p.188). It means that besides considering the full content of the instrument, the questionnaire was validated by involving expert judgments (Cruz, 2009, p.1), in this case the tutor of the researcher, and also piloted with some students. There were some changes in the questionnaire. The changes in the questionnaire were particularly in the numbers of questions and also the wording of the questions.

The questionnaire was used as an instrument for collecting data for this study. The questionnaire was set in Indonesian language to help the students understand the questions and complete the questionnaire properly. The students of both science and social classes completed a short questionnaire (see appendix). A relevant class teacher helped to administer the questionnaire to the students. The questionnaire consisted of five questions. The first one collected information about the class they are in. The second to the fifth ones questioned the students' attitudes towards the English language. These questions were Likert-type scaling questions with four gradations e.g. (1) very interesting, (2) quite interesting, (3) not very interesting, and (4) very uninteresting. The questionnaire was set to examine the students' attitude in: (1) their interest to learn English as a language, (2) their motivation to master the English language, (3) their difficulty in learning English grammar, and (4) their view in considering the importance of English language for their future.

3. Analytical design

The data analysis for this study was examined with SPSS 17.0. The findings were presented in a table and illustrated using a clustered bar chart. The inferential statistical differences between two groups of students were tested using a Mann-Whitney Test.

4. Ethical issue

The ethical issue in this study was related to the need to seek informed consent from the schools and children to take part in this study. The confidentiality and anonymity of the students were taken into priority as part of the ethical consideration. This was achieved by not collecting the students' names on the questionnaires and also reporting the findings relating to individual children.

Results

The questionnaires were distributed and 72 were collected i.e. $n = 40$ from science class and $n = 32$ from social class.

1. Students' interest in learning English as a language

The students' interest in learning English as a language varied in science class and social classes.

Table 1 : Students' Interest in Learning English

		How interesting is English to learn as a language?			
		Very Interesting	Quite Interesting	Not Very Interesting	Very Uninteresting
		Count	Count	Count	Count
Type of Class	Science Class	12 (30%)	21 (52.5%)	7 (17.5%)	0 (0%)
	Social Class	4 (12.5%)	20 (62.5%)	5 (15.6%)	3 (9.4%)

The table above shows that in the science class, 12 students (30%) answered that learning English was very interesting and seven of them (17.5%) considered learning English was not very interesting. Most of the science students (n=21 or 52.5%), thought learning English as a language was quite interesting. Similar to the science class, most of the students in social class (n=20 or 65.6%) answered that it was quite interesting to learn English as a language. Four students (12.5%) thought that learning English was very interesting. Meanwhile, those who responded that it was not very interesting and even very uninteresting were five (15.6%) and three (6.3%) students, respectively. Moreover, a Mann-Whitney test

was applied for testing the statistical significance of the differences between two groups of students.

Table 2 : Mann-Whitney Test (Students' interest)

	Type of Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
How interesting is English to learn as a language?	Science Class	40	33.09	1323.50
	Social Class	32	40.77	1304.50
	Total	72		

"The Mann-Whitney test works by looking at differences in the ranked positions of scores in different groups" (Field, 2013, p.224). The main values needed to look at from the table above are the Z value and the significance level, which is given as Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed) (Pallant, 2013, p.237). "*Asymptotic Sig.* and *Exact Sig.* tell the probability that a test statistic of at least that magnitude would occur if there were no difference between groups" (Field, 2013, p.229).

In the table above, the z value is -1.73 with a significance level (*p*) of *p* = 0.084. The probability value (*p=0.084)* is not less than or equal to 0.05, so the result is not statistically significant. Hence, there is no statistically significant difference of the science and social students in their interest to learn English as a language.

Table 3 : Median (Students' interest)

Type of Class	N	Median
Science Class	40	2.00
Social Class	32	2.00
Total	72	2.00

The table above shows the median of each class. It can be seen that the median value for both the science class students and the social class are 2 (quite interesting). Thus, it can be concluded that both the science class students and the social class students consider learning English as a language was quite interesting.

Field (2013, p.227) asserts that "it is important to report effect sizes so that people have a standardized measure of the size of the effect observed, which can be compared to other studies." The effect size (value of r) can be calculated by using the value of z (Pallant, 2013: 238) as follows:

r = z / square root of N   where N = total number of cases.

Therefore, with the z value = -1.73 and N = 72, the r value is 0.19. This would be considered a small to medium effect size using Cohen (1988 as cited in Pallant, 2013, p.238) criteria of 0.1 = small effect, 0.3 = medium effect, 0.5 = large effect.

The results of this analysis can be stated that the Mann Whitney test revealed no significant difference between the science and social class students' interest to learn English as a language of science class ($Md = 2$, $n = 40$) and social class ($Md = 2$, $n = 32$), $U = 503.5$, $z = -1.73$, $p = 0.08$ and r=0.19. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted. It means that the students' interest in learning English either in science or social class is not different significantly.

2. Students' motivation in mastering the English language

The second result is about students' motivation in mastering the English language. The students' answers are as follows:

Table 4 : Students' motivation in mastering the English language

		How motivated are you to master the English language?			
		Very Motivated	Quite Motivated	Not Very Motivated	Not At All Motivated
		Count	Count	Count	Count
Type of Class	Science Class	29 (72.5%)	10 (25%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
	Social Class	14 (43.8%)	12 (37.5%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (3.1%)

Most students (n=29 or 72.5%) in the science class were very motivated to master the English language. While 10 students (25%) confessed that they were quite motivated to master it and only 2.5% or just one of them was not very motivated. None of the students (0%) answered "not at all motivated". Meanwhile, in the social class there were 14 students (43.8%) that thought they were very motivated to master the English language. Those who were quite motivated to master the English language were 12 students (37.5%). Five students (15.6%) and one student (3.1%) tended to not be very motivated and not at all motivated, respectively.

Table 5 : Mann-Whitney Test (Students' Motivation)

	Type of Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
How motivated are you to master the English language?	Science Class	40	31.29	1251.50
	Social Class	32	43.02	1376.50
	Total	72		

The z value for this test is -2.71 with a significance level (p) of $p = 0.007$. For the students' motivation, the results are statistically significant because the p value, given as 0.007, is less than the critical value of 0.05. Therefore, there is statistically significant difference between the science and social students in their motivation to master English language.

Teble 6 : Median (Students' motivation)

Type of Class	N	Median
Science Class	40	1.00
Social Class	32	2.00
Total	72	1.00

The table above shows the median of each class. It can be seen that the median value for the science class student is 1 (very motivated) and the social class is 2 (quite motivated). Thus, it can be concluded that the science class students were more motivated to master the English language than the social class students.

Next, to observe the size effect, the r value was calculated. With the z value = -2.71 and N = 72, the r value is 0.32. This would be considered a medium effect size using Cohen (1988 as cited in Pallant, 2013, p.238) criteria of 0.1 = small effect, 0.3 = medium effect, 0.5 = large effect. Hence, it can be concluded that the Mann-Whitney test revealed significant difference in the students' motivation between the science class ($Md = 1$, $n = 40$) and social class ($Md = 2$, $n = 32$), $U = 431.5$, $z = -2.71$, $p = 0.01$, $r = 0.32$. This test reveals the result that the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It means that there is significant difference between science and social students' motivation in mastering the English language.

3. Difficulty of English grammar

Science and social students gave their responses about English grammar difficulty as follows:

Table 7 : Difficulty of English grammar

		How difficult do you find learning English grammar?			
		Very difficult	Difficult	easy	very easy
		Count	Count	Count	Count
Type of Class	Science Class	1 (2.5%)	16 (40%)	16 (40%)	7 (17.5%)
	Social Class	9 (28.1%)	10 (31.3%)	10 (31.3%)	3 (9.3%)

The table above illustrates the science and social students' viewpoint in considering the difficulty with English grammar. There were 40% of the science students ($n = 16$) that contended it was quite difficult to learn English grammar, while another 40% ($n = 16$) of them thought that it was quite easy to learn it. There were seven students (17.5%) that considered it was very easy and only one of them (2.5%) thought it was very difficult.

On the other hand, the table and the clustered-bar chart for the social class above show that 28.1% ($n = 9$) of students asserted that learning English grammar was very difficult

and 31.3% (*n*=10) of them answered it is quite difficult. The same number also confirmed that it was quite easy to learn the English grammar. There was only 9.3% (*n* = 3) of the social students who clarified that learning English grammar was very easy.

Table 8 : Mann-Whitney Test (Grammar difficulty)

	Type of Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
How difficult do you find learning English grammar?	Science Class	40	41.15	1646.00
	Social Class	32	30.69	982.00
	Total	72		

From the statistical test, it was known that the z value is -2.22 with a significance level (*p*) of *p* = 0.026. For the difficulty to learn English grammar, the results are significant because the *p* value, given as 0.026, is less than the critical value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the science and social students in their difficulty to learn English grammar.

Table 9 : Median (Grammar difficulty)

Type of Class	N	Median
Science Class	40	3.00
Social Class	32	2.00
Total	72	2.50

The table above shows the median of each class. It can be seen that the median value for the science class student is 3 (quite easy) and the social class is 2 (quite difficult). The value r is 0.26 (rounded). Therefore, with the z value = -2.22 and N = 72, the r value is 0.26. This would be considered a medium effect size. Thus, it can be concluded that the Mann Whitney U test revealed significant difference for the students' difficulty in learning the English grammar between the science class ($Md = 3$, $n = 40$) and the social class ($Md = 2$, $n = 32$), $U = 454$, $z = -2.22$, $p = 0.03$, $r = 0.26$. It means the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between science and social students in regards to the difficulty of English grammar.

4. The importance of English language for their future

Science and social students gave their responses about the importance of English language for their future as follows:

Table 10 : The importance of English for students' futures

		How important is mastering English for your future?			
		Very Important	Important	Not That Important	Not At All Important
		Count	Count	Count	Count
Type of Class	Science Class	27 (67.5%)	13 (32.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Social Class	16 (50 %)	8 (25%)	7 (21.9%)	1 (3.1%)

The table above illustrates the science students' attitudes in considering the importance of mastering the English language for their future. 67.5% of the science students ($n=27$) signed that it was very important to master the English language for their future, while 32.5% ($n=13$) of them thought that it was quite important to master it. On the other hand, for the social class, 50 % ($n = 16$) of students marked that mastering English was very important for their future and 25% ($n = 8$) of them answered it is quite important. Seven students (21.9%) confirmed that it was not very important to master the English language. Only 3.1% ($n = 1$) of the social students clarified that mastering the English language was not at all important.

Table 11 : Mann-Whitney Test (The importance of English)

	Type of Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
How important is mastering English for your future?	Science Class	40	31.90	1276.00
	Social Class	32	42.25	1352.00
	Total	72		

It was known from the statistical test that the z value is -2.37 with a significance level (*p*) of $p = 0.018$. For the importance to master the English language, the results are significant because the *p* value, given as 0.018, is less than the critical value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the science and social students in their attitudes to consider the importance of mastering the English language for their future.

Table 12 : Median (The importance of English)

Type of Class	N	Median
Science Class	40	1.00
Social Class	32	2.00
Total	72	1.00

The table above shows the median of each class. It can be seen that the median value for the science class student is 1 (very important to master the English language) and the social class is 2 (quite important to master it). The effect size, the value r from the z value / square root of *N,* is 0.28 (rounded). Therefore, with the z value = -2.37 and N = 72, the r value is 0.28. This would be considered a medium effect size. Thus, it can be concluded that the Mann Whitney test revealed a statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes towards the importance to master the English language between the science class (*Md* = 1, *n* = 40) and the social class (*Md* = 2, *n* = 32), *U* = 456, *z* = -2.37, *p* = 0.02, *r* = 0.28. It means that the alternative hypothesis is accepted that there is significant difference in the students' attitudes towards the importance to master English between science and social class students.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the high school students' attitudes towards English as a language in Indonesia. The attitudes in this study were particularly appertained to the students' interest towards learning English as a language, their motivation to master it, their difficulty in learning English grammar and also the importance of English for their future.

1. Students' interest in learning English as a language

The first finding of this study revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the science and social students in their interest to learn English as a language. Both classes tended to consider that learning English as a language was quite interesting. This finding demonstrates that the hypothesis is rejected. It means that both science and social class students' interest in learning English had no significant difference. If the term of "interest" in this context is associated with having a desire to know or learn language, then Gardner (2001a, p.5) cited in Lamb (2004, p.1) points out that a desire to learn a language has become a base principle in language learner motivation. Though, the students' interest of both classes is not significantly different but obviously it is proved statistically that there is significant difference in students' motivation to learn English between science and social class students. The discussion of students' motivation will be explored in the next point.

2. Students' motivation in mastering the English language

The second finding showed that there was statistically significant difference in the students' motivation to master the English language of science class and social class. The science class students were prone to be very motivated and the social class ones were quite motivated to master the English language. Thus, it can be concluded that the science class students were more motivated to master the English language than the social class students. This result reinforces and adds up the previous related research that brings out factors affecting students' attitudes in learning language. The factors are gender (Narayanan, 2007) and background (Soku et al. 2011, p.22 cited in Alkaff, 2013, p.108). Although, these factors are not related directly to this study, the findings of this study highlight and confirm that there is another factor that can be considered when considering effects of student attitudes and motivation in learning English. Hence, the students' major can also be considered as another factor that can affect students' attitudes and motivation in learning English.

3. Difficulty of English grammar

In line with the second finding, the third finding also confirmed that there was statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes in viewing the difficulty of English grammar between the science and social class. The median value for the science class student indicated that most of them thought that English grammar was quite easy. Meanwhile, the

social students mostly thought English grammar was quite difficult. This evidence was in line with the research findings asserted by Loewan et al. (2009); Savignon and Wang (2003) as cited in Weger (2013, p.141) that "attitudes towards grammar instruction depend on educational background and current educational setting" (Loewan et al, 2009 cited in Weger, 2013, p.141). The current educational setting in this study can be associated to the different class context: science and social class. One reason that can influence the students' difference in considering English grammar difficulty might be that science class students are generally the students that are more diligent and keener in learning, including in the English subject. Thus, it is no wonder if most of them invest more efforts to learn and understand English, particularly in understanding English grammar.

4. The importance of English language for their future

Another statistically significant difference found between the science and social class students was the matter of motivation to master the English language. The science class students saw that English language was very important to master yet the social class considered that it was quite important to master it. This is related with the students' future self-image as Rnyei (2005) cited in Kormos et al. (2011, p.497) points out that "the main driving force of language learning is the students' future self-image". It means that there was difference in the students' future self-images between the science and social class students in learning and viewing the English language. Furthermore, this finding was also in accordance with related study that affirmed students' attitudes towards the needs of English that "knowing English opens doors to jobs" (Arslan and Akbarov, 2012, p.27).

Suggestions

The study reflects some limitations to be considered for drawing conclusions. As the sample size is small for each science class and social class, the result of this study was not generalizable. Besides, this study was conducted only in a state senior high school in West Java Indonesia. It is hoped that further related research can be undertaken with a larger sample size and involving more high schools that can represent this certain area. A future study might also want to improve how the variables were measured. Therefore, the study results can be representative enough to be generalizable.

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