

THAI EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF WEEKEND NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT PHRANAKHON RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated weekend non-English major students' attitudes towards English language learning at Phranakhon Rajabhat University in terms of their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. Additionally, the study investigated their attitudes towards English language learning in teaching methodology, and preferences of language skills. The participants were composed of 102 Thai students in different programs from the Faculty of Management Science. A set of 5-scaled questionnaires was administered in this quantitative research. Based on the research findings, the students generally had positive attitudes towards English language learning. The statistical results were reported in the averages at Neutral and High Levels. Discussion and recommendations are presented in the conclusion.

Keywords: EFL students (1), Attitude (2), English language learning (3)

Introduction

In today's world, English is the current lingua franca in many important fields such as science, technology, trade and commerce, and diplomacy. Thus, knowing

English and having a moderate level of proficiency is a precondition and a necessity for job seekers to express their abilities in English communication to employers

(Ihmeideh, AL-Omari & AL-Debabneh, 2010).

Foley (2005) revealed that *“English is used as a foreign language in Thailand”*. It has played an important role in Thai educational context for over century in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) with varieties of appropriate content selection, material, and assessment criteria (Graddol, 2006). These have been major concerns in the Thai educational system since English language teaching first began in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007).

In the foreign language learning context, there are a multitude of factors that may influence the learning process such as motivation, anxiety, learning achievement, attitude, and so on. (Gardner, 1982). One of the most important factors that affect students’ language learning process is attitude (Fakeye, 2010). Dagnev & Latchanna (2009) pointed out that *“attitude is accepted as an important concept to understand human behavior. It is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings”*. Negative attitudes can lead to obstacles in the students’ language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011).

Phranakhon Rajabhat University (PNRU) is one of the largest government universities in Bangkok, Thailand consisting of a variety of different faculties and

programs for studying during weekdays or weekends. The backgrounds of weekday and weekend students are significantly different. The majority of weekend students are adults, and many of them have their own careers with more working experience than weekday students. However, both weekday and weekend students who are in non-English majors need to take English courses as a part of general education (GE) requirements with additional courses required for specific programs and curriculums.

As EFL students’ attitudes towards English language learning plays a vital role in achieving the target language, there are numerous related studies reporting the findings of different significant areas. For example, Momani, (2009). investigated High School students’ attitudes towards learning English regarding English reading comprehension. The results found that the students had positive attitudes towards EFL learning. Similarly, Al Noursi’s (2013). study investigated United Arab Emirates EFL students’ attitudes towards learning English. The findings revealed that the students had positive attitudes, and the teacher’s native language didn’t affect their attitudes towards learning English. The different results of the students’ attitudes towards English language learning also appeared

in studies by Al-Tamimi & Shuib, (2009); Abidin, et al (2012); Ameh, (2015). However, there is no prior study concerning Thai EFL weekend university students' attitudes towards English learning, including exploring obstacles and suggestions to facilitate the English learning process simultaneously. To fill this void in research, this study investigates Thai EFL students' attitudes in the concept of foreign language learning achievement. Specially, the study examines weekend non-English major students' attitudes at PNRU towards English language learning by taking into consideration aspects of attitude; behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. The study also investigates the students' attitudes towards teaching methodology, and preferences of English language skills. The results of the study will help English language educators realize the importance of students' attitudes towards English language learning and teaching. The study will provide additional insight for educators to identify and plan effective lessons and activities in English classes at PNRU for the weekend non-English major students.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the weekend non-English major students' attitudes towards

English language learning in different attitude considerations of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects.

2. To examine the weekend non-English major students' attitudes towards English language learning in terms of teaching methodology and preferences of language skills.

Research Scope

1. Area of Study: Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand

2. Area of population: 102 weekend non-English major students in different programs from Management Science Faculty

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study began from the inquisitiveness to examine the attitudes in different defined areas of EFL weekend non-English major students at Phranakhon Rajabhat University by using survey questionnaires. The main study objective is to investigate the students' attitudes towards English language learning. The results will provide guidance for English instructors at PNRU to help, facilitate, motivate, and create appropriate materials for the students in classes to reach the language target.

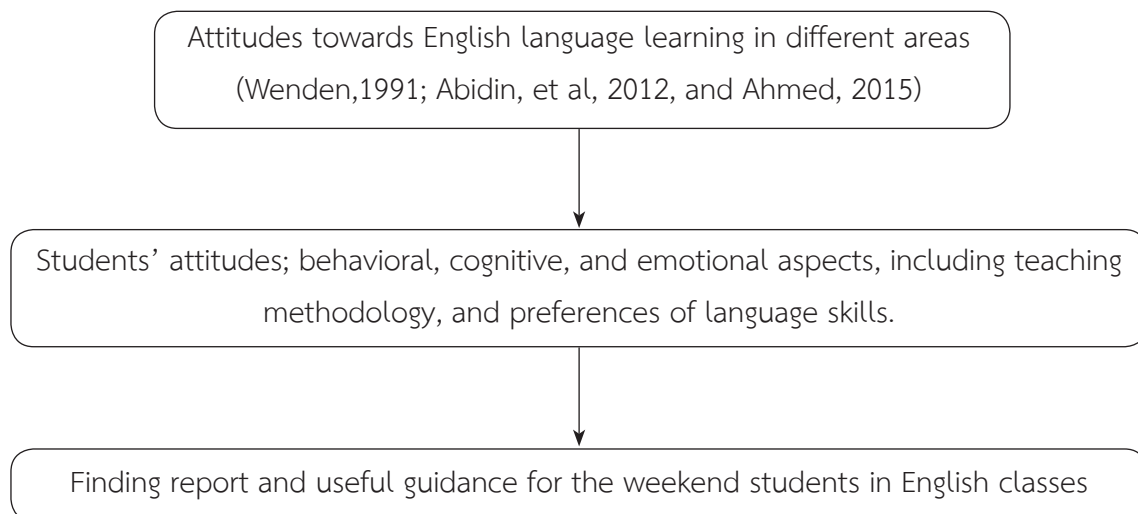


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology (participants, research design, instrument and data analysis)

The participants were composed of 102 weekend non-English major students in different programs from the Faculty of Management Science. The students were enrolled in four different fields of studies which included Marketing, Accounting, Human Resource Management, and General Management. There were 20 Marketing students (19.62%), 16 Accounting students (15.69%), 23 Human Resource Management students (22.55%), and 43 General Management students (42.16%). The participants were chosen by purposive sampling from Business English 1-2 courses.

According to the research design, the study used the quantitative method research which involves collecting, analyzing

and integrating quantitative data in nature by using the questionnaire survey. The participants were required to answer all the questionnaire items about their attitudes towards English language learning in terms of their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects, including teaching methodology, and preferences of language skills.

The research instrument of this study was a questionnaire. The research questionnaire survey was adapted and based on the previous studies by Abidin, et al (2012) and Ahmed (2015). Furthermore, some items were based on the researcher's experiences as a teacher in teaching English. The questionnaire survey items were designed in Thai and then submitted to two experts in English Language Teaching field to investigate the content validity.

The comments were taken into the consideration and the questionnaire was adjusted.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first section focused on the participants' demographic profiles including gender, age, and career. The second part consisted of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of language attitudes, followed by the students' attitudes towards their teaching methodology and preferences of language skills in learning English language. All the items were ranged in a 5-point Likert scale (Level 1: Strongly Disagree, Level 2: Disagree, Level 3: Neutral, Level 4: Agree, and Level 5: Strongly Agree).

Finally, the data was analyzed by using Arithmetic Mean to answer the quantitative research question. The statistical analysis was conducted to determine the mean (\bar{X}), standard deviation (S.D.), average, and level of the gathered data.

Result and Discussion

Results

In this section, the findings are divided into six main parts. The first part is demographic data of research participants, followed by student's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of language attitudes, including teaching methodology and preferences of language skills in learning English language.

Table 1 The Demographic Data of 102 Research Participants

Items		Number (n=102)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37	36.27
	Female	65	63.73
Age	20-	1	0.98
	20	8	7.84
	21	15	14.71
	22	12	11.76
	23	19	18.63
	24	12	11.76
	25	9	8.82
	25+	26	25.49
Field of Study	Marketing	20	19.62
	Accounting	16	15.69
	Human Resource Management	23	22.55
	General Management	43	42.16
Career	Freelancer	20	19.60
	Business Owner	10	9.80
	Company Employee	38	37.25
	Government Officer	22	21.57
	Unemployed	12	11.76

Table 1 shows the 102 EFL students' demographic profiles that consists of gender, age, study field, and career. The students were enrolled in either the second or fourth year of a bachelor's degree program in the Faculty of Management Science in four different study fields.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the weekend students are female (63.73%).

The study also concluded that the largest percentile of student are more than 25 years old (25.49%). The table shows that most of the students are in General Management (42.16%) and Human Resource Management (22.55%) fields. In addition, over half of the students are either company employees (37.25%) or government officers (21.57%).

Table 2 EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning in the Behavioral Aspect

Items	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1. You like to practice speaking and learn English by yourself.	3.28	0.86	Neutral
2. You like to practice English with foreigners or native speakers.	3.03	1.14	Neutral
3. You can make yourself concentrate or pay attention while studying English.	3.42	0.87	Neutral
4. You review English lessons and do homework regularly.	3.04	0.91	Neutral
5. When you miss class, you always ask friends and teachers for homework and lessons to review.	3.77	0.87	High
Average	3.31	0.93	Neutral

Table 2 shows the behavioral aspect of students' attitudes towards English language learning in the average at Neutral level ($\bar{X} = 3.31$, S.D.=0.93). The finding reflected that the weekend EFL students at PNRU had moderate level attitudes towards English language learning in terms of the behavioral aspect. The results presented that the students asked their friends and teachers for the homework and lessons to review when they missed the classes ($\bar{X} = 3.77$).

Additionally, the results showed that students feel they are able to concentrate and stay focused on the lessons in English classes ($\bar{X} = 3.42$). It was interesting that the students preferred to practice speaking and learning English by themselves ($\bar{X} = 3.28$). While the lowest mean scores demonstrated that the students reviewed English lessons and did homework regularly ($\bar{X} = 3.04$). Lastly, the students liked to practice English with foreigners or native speakers ($\bar{X} = 3.03$).

Table 3 EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning in the Cognitive Aspect

Items	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
6. Learning English is important because it gives you more education.	4.16	0.84	High
7. Learning English helps you to communicate in English effectively.	4.06	0.84	High
8. Learning English gives you more opportunities to work.	4.16	0.80	High
9. Learning English can help, support, and promote your business.	4.02	0.91	High
10. In fact, you study English just to pass the exams.	3.14	1.08	Neutral
Average	3.91	0.89	High

Table 3 reveals the cognitive aspect of students' attitudes towards English language learning in the average at High level ($\bar{X} = 3.91$, S.D.=0.89). Learning English gave the students more education ($\bar{X} = 4.16$), and provided more opportunities for work ($\bar{X} = 4.16$). The results also demonstrated that the students thought learning English

could help them to communicate in English effectively ($\bar{X} = 4.06$). The students thought that learning English could help, support, and promote their business ($\bar{X} = 4.02$) at the High level. Furthermore, the results showed that students who studied English just to pass the exams ($\bar{X} = 3.14$) was at the Neutral level.

Table 4 EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning in the Emotional Aspect

Items	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
11. You like English and are interested in learning English.	3.68	0.91	High
12. You feel shy and not relaxed when you have to practice speaking English in the classroom.	3.04	0.93	Neutral
13. You are excited and anxious when communicating in English with others.	3.40	0.99	Neutral
14. You feel proud and confident when you can do English activities.	3.73	0.86	High
15. In fact, you have to learn English because it is a compulsory course.	3.30	1.03	Neutral
Average	3.43	0.94	Neutral

Table 4 shows the emotional aspect of students' attitudes towards English language learning in the average at Neutral level ($\bar{X} = 3.34$, S.D.=0.94). This result reflected that the weekend EFL students had moderate level regarding attitudes towards English language learning in terms of the emotional aspect.

According to the findings, the students showed that they felt proud and confident when they were able to do English activities in classes ($\bar{X} = 3.73$). They liked English, and

were interested in learning English ($\bar{X} = 3.68$) which was shown at the High level.

However, the results indicated that the students were excited and anxious when communicating in English with others ($\bar{X} = 3.40$). Moreover, at the Neutral level, some students thought that they had to learn English because it was a compulsory course ($\bar{X} = 3.30$), including they felt shy, and were not relaxed when they had to practice speaking English in the classroom. This was at the lowest mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.04$).

Table 5 EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning in Teaching Methodology

Items	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
16. You think that being able to communicate with foreigners in English is a basic purpose of English.	3.62	1.05	High
17. You like to learn English through 'vocabulary memorization' and 'grammatical rules'.	3.24	0.84	Neutral
18. The fear of making grammatical mistakes has greatly influenced you when you speak English.	3.61	0.92	High
19. You like to participate in English language practicing/training activities and give opinions in classes.	3.23	0.90	Neutral
20. You like the integration of learning English with technology and modern social medias.	3.78	0.91	High
Average	3.49	0.92	Neutral

Table 5 presents the teaching methodology aspect of students' attitudes towards English language learning at the average of Neutral level ($\bar{X} = 3.49$, S.D. = 0.92). This finding revealed that the weekend EFL students also had moderate level regarding attitudes towards English language learning in terms of the teaching method.

As shown in table 5, it is very interesting that the students liked the integration of learning English with technology and modern social medias

at the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.78$). Furthermore, many students thought that being able to communicate with foreigners in English is a basic purpose of English ($\bar{X} = 3.62$). The results also showed that the students thought that the fear of making grammatical mistakes has greatly influenced them when speaking English ($\bar{X} = 3.61$). In addition, the students liked to learn English through 'vocabulary memorization' and 'grammatical rules' ($\bar{X} = 3.24$), favored participation in English language activities, and giving opinions in classes ($\bar{X} = 3.23$).

Table 6 EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning in Preferences of Language Skills

Items	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
21. You think English listening and speaking are the most important elements.	4.12	0.80	High
22. You think that being able to read and write in English is sufficient.	3.20	0.86	Neutral
23. In learning English, you want to focus only on listening and speaking.	3.35	0.82	Neutral
24. In learning English, you want to focus only on reading and writing.	3.19	0.79	Neutral
25. You think that listening, speaking, reading and writing are important elements in learning English.	4.27	0.85	High
Average	3.63	0.83	High

Table 6 presents the preferences of language skills aspect of students' attitude towards English language learning in the average at High level ($\bar{X} = 3.63$, S.D.=0.83). The results from table 6 revealed that the students thought that listening, speaking, reading and writing were the important factors in learning English presented at the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 4.27$). It is also interesting that many students felt that

English listening and speaking were the most important elements ($\bar{X} = 4.12$).

As can be seen from table 6, the students also mentioned that they wanted to focus only on listening and speaking ($\bar{X} = 3.35$). They thought that being able to read and write in English was sufficient ($\bar{X} = 3.20$). Apart from that the students wanted to focus only on reading and writing ($\bar{X} = 3.19$). All these results were shown at the Neutral levels.

Discussion

The study indicated that the weekend non-English major students at PNRU had positive attitudes towards learning English in different points of views. According to the students' attitudes towards learning English, the findings led to the discussion and conclusion as follows.

Firstly, from the study, it was found that the weekend students are adults. Most of them have their own jobs classified into four main fields as mentioned. Their age is significantly different compared to the weekday students who are 18-22 years old on average. This can be inferred that the students have more years of experience in studying English.

According to the behavioral aspect of attitude, it refers to the way that learner behaves and reacts in specific situations. As can be seen from the study, the researcher found that the students had moderate level attitudes towards English language learning. When the students missed the classes, they asked their friends and teachers for the homework and lessons to review. This shows that the students had a high level of responsibility in completing homework and lessons, or what had been taught when they missed the classes. Moreover, there were some students who felt they are unable to pay attention in classes because they

couldn't make themselves stay focused on the lessons. This result was similar to the study by Abidin et al, (2012). which stated that some students didn't pay attention when the English teacher was explaining the lesson in class. It showed the EFL students' behaviors in English classes that needed to be improved. The results presented also can be applied to promote self-study in English language learning with various active activities and tasks because the students generally preferred to practice speaking and learning English by themselves. In addition, the results' lowest mean scores stated that many students did not like to practice English with foreigners or native speakers. This could show that the EFL students' behaviors in learning English caused by anxiety and lack of self-confidence. Hence, the English teachers need to promote, encourage, and provide more activities and opportunities for the students to practice English skills inside and outside classes.

The cognitive aspect of attitude involves learners' beliefs about knowledge they receive and their understanding in the language learning process. As can be seen from the study, the findings presented in learning English language showed promising results at high levels on average. The students revealed that English is important because it gives them more education,

and opportunities to work. Furthermore, Learning English could help, support, and promote their businesses. These results show that the weekend EFL students had positive attitudes towards learning English. In contrast, there were only a few students who reported that they studied English just to pass the exams. This shows that a majority of students had positive attitudes in learning English. The students studied English not only to pass the exams but rather understood the importance and the benefits they could earn from learning English. The results were in line with the studies by Alkaff (2013), and Eshghinejad (2016) which showed that the students had positive attitudes towards learning English. The students' responses showed that they enjoyed studying English not just to pass exams, but to gain more knowledge, information, and understanding to help them with other subjects and get better job opportunities.

Regarding the emotional aspect of attitude, the research studied the relationship between the learners' feelings and emotions towards the target language in different learning contexts. Based on the results presented, the researcher found that students had positive feelings in learning English because they felt proud and confident when they could participate in

English activities. They enjoyed English and were interested in learning English. Thus, it is important for the teachers to encourage them to do more activities to improve their English skills in class. The results were similar to the study by Abu-Snoubar, (2017). His findings showed students had positive emotions towards studying English, and studying English made them proud of themselves in the high rank. However, as can be seen from the results, they reflected that some weekend EFL students had negative feelings towards English learning when it became a compulsory course. This point needs to be improved. Teachers can play an important role for consultations. Apart from that, it is necessary for the teachers to promote more English listening and speaking activities or collaborative activities inside and outside classes to let the students interact with others so that they can get familiar and feel more relaxed in English communication naturally.

Furthermore, the researcher found that the students had moderate levels on average regarding their attitudes towards English language learning in terms of the teaching method. However, the finding showed that the students truly liked the integration of learning English with technology and modern social medias. This shows that teachers and students

cannot deny that technology can play an important role in education. The teachers can integrate teaching English online via social media or using online classrooms for collaborative learning activities or self-study without being limited by location or time of day to promote the students' English language learning and skills. The result is in line with Dathumma and Singhasiri, (2015). whose findings showed that all participants understood the teacher feedback on Google Docs. They had positive attitudes towards using Google Docs in giving feedback as an additional online class. Apart from that, as can be seen from the study, the results can lead the teachers to realize that the students like the active English language activities in classes, and they still favor the old teaching methods by learning English through vocabulary memorization and grammatical rules. From these findings, teachers can design the appropriate English classes for the EFL students at PNRU.

Finally, as the participants are EFL students, they should focus on all four English language learning skills which are speaking, listening, reading, and writing in order to reach the target language. According to the students' attitude towards English language learning in preferences of language skills, the students reported that listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

are important in learning English. In those four language skills, the students felt that listening and speaking are the most important skills in English learning. From the study, the researcher found that the students had positive feelings towards the preferences of all language skills. Not surprisingly, Thai EFL students are encouraged and expected to learn English as a whole in all four language skills as mentioned for effective communication results. The results were similar to the study, and confirmed by Ahmed (2015), who found that most of the EFL learners agreed and wanted to learn all English language skills. Additionally, based on the study, the researcher found that there were some students who wanted to improve their specific skills. As the students were in different professional fields, their preferences may be affected by workplace contexts which required particular English language skills.

In conclusion, attitude is a very important factor that affect human actions. In English language learning context, they are the factors that have influenced students in learning and accomplishing the target language. Overall, we can see that Thai EFL students at PNRU had positive attitudes towards English Language Learning. This study confirms that teachers or English instructors at Phranakhon

Rajabhat University can improve the English programs for weekend students in order to make the courses suitable for adults and encouraging positive attitudes.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Further study can be conducted to compare the EFL students' attitudes and motivations towards learning English between weekday and weekend students to find out the significant difference. The study can also be done by finding and comparing

the factors that have affected the students' attitudes such as gender, study fields, and years of study. Additionally, the students are different in terms of learning process as teaching methodology has changed with new technology and innovations in education. Hence, it is important to frequently investigate the obstacles and needs of students to encourage them achieve the target language appropriately and effectively.

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