

Student Attitudes and Motivation in Learning English

Virginia G. Sengkey and Eva H. Galag

Abstract

This study aimed to find the levels of student attitudes and motivation in learning English, as well as the correlation between their attitude and motivation to learn English. This study used descriptive and correlational approaches. The researchers adapted questionnaires available from the literature as the survey instrument. This study involved 118 students enrolled in Grade 10 of a public high school in Manado, Indonesia, during the second semester of the 2016/2017 school year. The results showed that the level of student attitudes toward learning English was moderate ($M = 2.93$) and the level of their motivation in learning English was high ($M = 4.01$). Lastly, this study found that there was no significant correlation between students' attitude and their motivation in learning English ($p = 0.105$). Thus, it was concluded that the students' attitude in learning English was neutral, and that they were highly motivated in learning English. It may also be assumed that other factors are significantly related to students' motivation in learning English.

Keywords: *Attitude, motivation, learning English*

Introduction

The success of learners in mastering English depends upon their attitude towards that language. In the process of English language learning, students have different perceptions of their class, teacher and curriculum. Such perceptions are responsible for their attitudes, which are one important factor that affects English language learners. Fakeye (2010, p. 206) stated that "students' attitude to the language is one of the personal variables that affect[s] the learning of English language." Moreover, Karahan (2007, p. 84) explained that "positive language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English." Ghazali (2008) also suggested that students' attitudes are related to their proficiency levels in the language to be learned. Thus, it is well recognized that one's attitude may affect the attainment of language mastery.

Another factor that affects students when learning the English language is motivation. Motivation is important for someone to be successful in learning English. According to Rehman, Bilal, Sheikh, Bibi and Nawaz (2014, p. 254), motivation is "an important factor that has a positive influence in any educational learning process, especially in learning a second language." Othman and Shuqair (2013, p. 126) also explained that "motivation is one of the primary forces influencing second language learning." Moreover, it can lead learners to continue learning even after they fulfill a specific goal. Learners take pleasure in learning a second or foreign language when they have adequate motivation. Tu and Zhou (2015) believed that in order to be successful in learning a language, motivation is one prominent factor that needs attention. Thus, if students have strong motivation, they will enjoy learning a language, and try to learn it.

At the present time, many students do not appear to realize the importance of learning English. Hence, they do not have a positive attitude towards it or feel motivated to learn it. In fact, according to Ming, Ling, and Jaafar (2011), there is a possibility that secondary school students in some locations in Malaysia may not be aware of the importance of English for their future. It is also probable that these problems stem from a lack of motivation and poor attitudes beginning from secondary school. This unawareness is one of the possible causes of students' failure in English. Mat and Yunus (2014), again working with Malays, placed the problem of students' failing in English at the primary school level. Therefore, attitudes and motivation are significant factors that are related to students' failure to master English.

Studies have been conducted on students' attitudes and their motivation in learning English. The results of a number have shown that there is a significant correlation between students' attitudes in learning English and their motivation in learning English (FirdosFida & Ravindra, 2016; Mat & Yunus, 2014; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Ozturk, 2014). However, in contrast with the results of these studies, Abdel-Hafez (cited in Obeidat, 2005) found no significant correlation between students' attitudes and their motivation in second language learning. Thus, the inconsistency in the data indicates that attitude and motivation need to be further investigated.

Since attitude is an important part of language learning, it is important to understand what is meant by attitude in language learning. Attitude is defined as "a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing such as an idea, object, person, or situation" (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013, p. 63). Likewise, Ajzen (2005, p. 3) defined attitude as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event." It means that attitude refers to the response (positive or negative) and subsequent acts of someone or some groups of people toward something that happens around them. Students have negative and positive attitudes that affect their language learning process.

A positive attitude in language learning can encourage the process of learning. Farooq and Shah (2008, p. 76) explained that "interest and attitude in the subject are the special predictors for the students' participation and success in the subject." Additionally, as described by Meng (2010, p. 144), a "positive attitude helps to conquer difficulties, establish confidence and maintain plenty of fight while [a] negative one will depress people, fill their heart with complaint, or restrict and even strangle their potentials." This enables optimistic language learners to give better performances than pessimistic language learners (Marzban & Sadighi, 2013). Hence, attitude of learners is an important concept because it plays an important role in language learning and teaching.

Similarly, a negative attitude on the part of students can affect their language learning process. There is a possibility that both students' attitude and those of their teacher can be negative in learning English (Fatiha, Sliman, Mustapha, & Yahia, 2014). Research in another subject area, which is in mathematics, supports such a relationship (Mutai, 2007). However, students' attitudes may change. They may have a negative attitude at the beginning of the language learning process, but not long after that, they might realize the advantages of learning the target language, and thus have positive attitude towards it.

Students' attitude in learning English may be related to their academic achievement. For instance, Samadani and Ibranian (2015) conducted a study to explore the attitudes among Saudi university students towards learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The results of the study showed that – overall – the students with the highest positive attitudes towards learning EFL were also the students with the highest GPAs.

Success in academic pursuits depends on students' motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished instrumental motivation (e.g. practical benefits will be gained) and integrative motivation (wish to learn in their desire to know the people of the language). Later, Gardner (1985, p. 10) defined motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language." Thus, motivation in learning English can be defined as the willingness and determination to achieve the goal of learning English. Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015, p. 135) stated that "motivation is one of the important aspects of second language acquisition." Moreover, according to FirdosFirda and Ravindra (2016, p. 27), "motivation is one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning." In regards to learning, highly motivated students usually have higher levels of success (Li & Pan, 2009).

Instrumental motivation is needed in order to succeed in education. To be able to make a higher income is an example of instrumental motivation (Vaezi, 2008). Students who are interested in learning a foreign language to allow for their continuing education programs may be regarded as having primarily instrumental motivation. The thought that English acquisition is beneficial for students' future careers is a powerful motivational force, which is echoed by a number of other

authors (Dailey, 2009; Choosri & Intharaksa, 2011). Thus, instrumental motivation is seen as an encouragement to make students learn English because it can be useful for their future life.

Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is related to students having the desire to learn a language because they want to be part of the language community. Kitjaroonchai (2012, p. 24) wrote that “in integrative orientation, learners acquire a foreign or second language to become familiar with members of the language community or to learn about their culture or values.” Similarly, integrative motivation can be referred to as the “behavior of someone who appreciates the target language community, and studies the language for the reason of joining that community” (Zanghar, 2012, p. 4). Thus, students who have an integrative motivation and want to learn the language are primarily interested because they wish to know the culture of those whose native language is English.

In 2011, Choosri and Intharaksa conducted a study in Thailand to examine the relationship between motivation and students’ English learning achievement in college students. They intended to find out the level of motivation in students with high and low achievement. However, the motivation of both groups was at a high level. Under these circumstances, it was found that instrumental motivation was significantly correlated with English learning achievement. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that English teachers should create effective teaching and learning strategies for English language to develop students’ motivation for the subject.

A combination of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation is important, especially in improving reading class performance. English teachers need to choose effective ways to stimulate students so that they will be motivated in reading class, and assist them so they will have integrative motivation as they learn English.

Attitude and motivation are closely related in the case of learning a second language. Fatiha Sliman, Mustapha and Yahia (2014, p. 127) stated that “motivation can greatly influence [student] attitudes towards the learning and language achievement.” The relationship between these factors was also highlighted by Ming, Ling, and Jaafar (2011). These researchers proposed that students with intrinsic motivation are likely to succeed more because their favorable attitudes can motivate them to be successful. In addition, both motivation and a positive attitude are needed to achieve success in the language learning experience. For instance, if a student has a positive attitude towards learning the language but is not motivated to learn it, the student will not succeed in language learning. This means that teachers need to support less motivated learners to help them realize the importance of learning another language (Nakata (2010). They need to have wider concerns than about covering everything that is written in the syllabus; teachers should plan the learning well, and create an interesting class environment so that students can be interested in learning the language.

Students should also be aware that they must make enough effort so they can master a language well. A positive attitude, motivation and efforts determine whether language learners are successful. Abidin, Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012, p. 126) emphasized this when they stated that “a positive attitude should be the umbrella of language learning.”

This study aimed to find out the level of students’ attitude and motivation in learning English and the correlation between students’ attitude and their motivation. The research questions were:

1. What is the level of students’ attitude in learning English?
2. What is the level of students’ motivation in learning English?
3. Is there any significant correlation between students’ attitude and their motivation in learning English?

Based on the research questions, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

There is no significant correlation between students’ attitude and their motivation in learning English.

Methodology

Research Design

Both descriptive and correlational research methods were utilized. This study was basically descriptive in nature because it attempted to find the level of students’ attitude and their motivation

in learning English. We used correlational analysis to determine the relationship between students' attitude and their motivation.

Respondents

The respondents of this study were grade X3 – X6 students of SMA A, which is one of the public high schools located in Manado, Indonesia. The cohort of grade 10 students was enrolled in the second semester of the 2016/2017 school year. The samples involved in this study were 118 students, consisting of 53 male students and 65 female students. To determine the respondents of this study, the researcher used a convenience sampling method, which were those individuals readily available (Walker and Almond, 2010).

Instrument and Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire utilized was divided into two parts. The first part was an attitude questionnaire that was adapted from Ming, Ling, and Jaafar (2011) based on Gardner's theory. There were 10 items to assess positive attitudes and 10 items for negative attitudes. The second part of the questionnaire was a motivation questionnaire adapted from Choosri and Intharaksa (2011), based on Gardner and Lambert's theory. There were 18 items that measured instrumental motivation and 11 items for integrative motivation. The questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Indonesia in order to avoid misunderstandings. The questionnaires were distributed to the students and its purpose was explained. After being instructed to be honest and accurate in their responses, the students completed the questionnaire and it was collected.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software to answer the study's research questions. In answering the first two research questions, the mean score was used in order to find out the level of student attitudes and their motivation in learning English. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to answer the final research question.

Results

Level of Student Attitudes toward Learning English

Table 1 shows the level of students' attitude in learning English. Based on the analysis, the mean score of students' attitude in learning English was 2.93. The mean fell between 2.50 and 3.49, meaning the grade 10 students had a moderate level of attitude in learning English.

Table 1. Student Attitudes toward Learning English

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ATT MEAN	118	2.20	4.07	2.93	0.36
Valid N (list-wise)	118				

Level of Students' Motivation in Learning English

The level of students' motivation in learning English is shown in Table 2. Based on the results, the mean score of students' motivation in learning English was 4.01. Since the mean fell between 3.50 and 4.49, it was categorized as high.

Table 2. Students' Motivation to Learn English

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MOT MEAN	118	2.10	5.00	4.02	0.45
Valid N (list-wise)	118				

Correlation between Students' Attitude and Motivation in Learning English

Correlation analysis was used to describe the strength of the relationship between the two variables. Table 3 shows the results of the correlation analysis between students' attitude and their motivation in learning English. The output showed $p = 0.105 > \alpha = 0.05$. This indicates no significant correlation between students' attitude and their motivation to learn English. Thus, the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 3. Correlation between Students' Attitude and Their Motivation in Learning English

Item		MOT MEAN
ATTMEAN	Pearson Correlation	-0.15
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.105
	N	118

Discussion

The results showed that, generally, the grade 10 students of SMA A had a moderate level of attitude in learning English. In other words, the students had neither positive nor negative attitudes in learning English. The reason why their attitudes in learning English were moderate could be that students did not fully realize the importance of learning the language. The results of this study are different from the results found by Ming et al. (2011) in Malaysia, where it was observed that secondary school students had positive attitudes towards the learning of English. Ming et al. believed that this might have stemmed from students' awareness of the importance of English, as it is a part of the school program, and so they were interested in learning English. As stated by Mustafa, Rashid, Atmowardoyo, and Dollah (2015), students who have a positive attitude toward learning English are those who learn because they consider that English is important and it will make them more educated. Therefore, the difference in the results of our study and Ming's might be due to the level of student awareness regarding the importance of mastering English.

The mean score of students' motivation in learning English was found to be high. One might postulate that the explanation, as offered by Kitjaroonchai (2012), also applied to our study. They explained that the reason for high motivation could be attributed to the fact that students felt that learning English language would help them with their future careers, educational opportunities, and communication in the rapidly changing world subject to globalization. The preference of students to learn English was possibly related to their future success prospects, rather than associated with English speaking countries or native speakers.

There was no significant relationship between student attitudes and their motivation in learning English, irrespective of whether students had high, moderate, or low attitude scores towards learning English. Hence, student attitudes in our study was not a major factor that influenced motivation to learn English. This finding is similar to the result found by Abdel-Hafez (cited in Obeidat, 2005), but differed from that of FirdosFirda and Ravindra (2016). One resolution of this dilemma is to suggest that other factors may be significantly correlated with student motivation to learn English. Indeed, Dailey (2009) found that teachers and parents may be a major factor in whether or not a student is motivated to learn English. For instance, parents have the power to help their children have a positive attitude, and teachers must provide a comfortable learning environment and encourage students to enjoy learning English.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the grade 10 students of SMA A did not have a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards learning English. In other words, their attitudes toward learning English were just neutral. The students were highly motivated to learn English. This means that the students were interested and wanted to learn English. Lastly, it is concluded that student attitude levels toward learning English, which were found to be moderate, did not have anything to do with their high level of motivation in learning English.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, this study gives rise to several recommendations. First, since the respondents had a moderately positive attitudes and high motivation to learn English, it would be advisable to assist students to increase their level of positive attitude. One of the ways to increase awareness is by being informed of the importance of English, such as realizing that the English language is being used worldwide and that most textbooks nowadays are in English. Secondly, English teachers, more specifically the English teachers of the school that was studied, need to encourage the students to have more interest in learning English. This might take the form of encouraging students to read English magazines, watch English movies, and listen to English songs. Lastly, since this study was conducted only in one public school located in Manado, Indonesia, other researchers who are interested in student attitudes and motivation to learn English can use its findings as a basis for conducting similar studies in other schools. Such studies at various levels may help in gaining further in-depth information about how student attitudes can affect their motivation in learning English.

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