

COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: ITS RELATION TO THEIR ENGLISH SPEAKING COMPETENCY

Ma. Arlen F. Arellado

Department of English and Social Sciences, AMA International University-Bahrain,
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN.

arlen_0131@yahoo.com, aarellado@amaiu.edu.bh

ABSTRACT

This descriptive study aimed to determine the college freshmen's attitude towards learning the English language and its relation to their competency in speaking the English language. Purposively, students from two sections of Speech and Oral Communication classes were the respondents of the study. The statistical tools used were Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson r to gather the data based on the researcher-made questionnaire on the students' attitude, while the reading of a classic poem based on the rubric measured the students' competency in speaking. Conducted from May to July 2013, results showed that the college freshmen had poor attitude towards learning English as a subject, but their level of competence was intermediate. There was no significant difference between their attitude in learning the English language and their competence in speaking the English language. Attitude at times may be relative, depending on the students' overall behavior, considering various options in the context, such as the changing social, educational, and linguistic conditions and cultural background, among others. Attitudes can also be positive, negative, or neutral, and can vary according to abstract, specific or general constructs at the time of evaluation according. Results on the negative correlation may be due to giving much attention to situation specific variables related to long-term patterns and relationships.

Keywords: College, freshmen, Attitude, Learning, English Language, Relation, Speaking, Competency

INTRODUCTION

Language teachers are on the cognition that students' learning the English language increases when the attitudes are positive and motivation runs high. This idea may be a universal phenomenon, but researchers could not deny the fact that learning the second language may be conditioned by several factors such as gender, age, culture, socio-economic status and the like.

Supporting these claims may be mirrored on Chomsky's universal theory (1965; Wikipedia (2013), on Linguistics which proposed that the ability to learn grammar may depend on one's linguistic competence.

One's attitude to learn the English language, a belief that predisposes one to a certain kind of motivation, may activate and give direction to one's own thoughts. These claims may correlate with Skinner's Behaviorism theory (Hilgard 1962), summarizing that a child's mind is a tabula rasa. Learning can take place only through experience (Gerrig and Zimbabwe, 2010).

Attitude encompasses both the cognitive and affective domain of the learning process. It touches both the heart and the mind. Mastering English as a Second Language especially among students of diverse social and cultural background is a waterloo for non-native speakers of the language. It is a difficult task, especially that motivations need to begin at an early age, vis a vis influence from significant others including the parents, siblings, environment, etc. The teacher's role then is to touch these key areas in the students' chakras to uphold their innate potentials.

To maximize learning, teachers need to be reminded that students come from diverse background, ranging widely in age, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, social role, and socio-economic status. Many may be attending college part time while holding full-time job. As a family man or woman, their roles vary.

People approach communication in diverse perspectives. Because communication is an interdependent process between at least two people, multiple approaches is required among different situations. In communication, valuing diversity goes beyond simply focusing on individual differences. Embracing multi-cultural differences among students would lead to better understanding of the situation; thus, applying varied approaches in teaching the English language would mean better learning opportunities.

A good command of the English language is a venue to learning all other subject areas in the academe where English is the medium of instruction. A good understanding of the language is basic to the study of any other subjects and a tool to communicate with others.

In public speaking, multiple types of delivery are possible to empower students and professionals alike to deliver with confidence, authority and impact. It is fundamental to success in professional and public life.

International School of Communication in Dubai suggests four pillars for topics and methodologies in public speaking: (a) voice and body language, which includes vocal projection, pace, breathing, stance, posture, gesture and movement; (b) content and structure, which covers speech preparation, organization, narration, framing, messaging, and presentation aids; (c) audience engagement, by which learning how to interact with your audience and maintain eye contact is emphasized; and (d) quality of execution, which emphasizes on presentation for greater confidence, authority and impact.

Dunn and Goodnight (2011), views that there is no one right way to deliver a speech. Multiple types of delivery are possible depending on the audience, situation and one's own talents. For individual differences, it is best to find one's own voice and the best approach for a certain situation. Effective speakers appreciate the different approaches to communication that suits the kind of audience and the interaction it brings.

Usually, delivery is the most dreaded part of the speaking skill. People are conscious of people's reaction in front of an audience. They fear rejection. However, when people try to overcome this insecurity, they would feel comfortable during speech delivery and eventually improve their self-confidence. Furthermore, positive feedback received from the audience reinforces one's confidence. Talents and skills innate in an individual is also believed to be of utmost importance.

Speech and Oral Communication (Engl403) is the English subject which explores the various concepts about the process of communication, perception, listening, language, and non-verbal behavior and demands learners to integrate these concepts in their speech presentation towards the end of the term. The course promotes learning from diverse perspectives and increases the learners' ability to successfully respond to a wider array of communication

solutions that will help them formulate appropriate responses to new communicative situations, thereby becoming more confident and successful communicators (Engl403 Course Specifications, 2013).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

English, the most widely spoken language in the world, encompasses several areas as a venue to a broad spectrum of opportunities. People who can speak well the English language cover a wide range of capabilities in the modern world.

A group of professors (Stephenson et al. 2003) conducted a study on “Assessing Language proficiency: Using Valid Results to Optimize Instruction”. Findings showed that English Language Proficiency Tests are needed to diagnose differences in language instruction.

Attitude can color everything we do, say and think. It can either affect positively or negatively the people around us. Positive attitude can more likely help accomplish one’s goals and overcome setbacks.

Buschebhofen (1998) assessed the attitudes towards English among university students. Findings showed that generally, students had positive attitude towards English language learning, although there were some significant differences in certain grammatical contexts.

Emotions and behavior play an important role in the manifested behavior of an individual. In learning the English language, One’s interest and attitude toward motivation may lead to a better understanding of his behavior. These concepts may explain the attitude of an individual towards learning the language.

One’s attitude to learn the language may be affected by his motivations. Motivations can make one do things with greater energy and enthusiasm because of a pressing particular situation. Alongside with this concept is a study from the language teachers’ perspective on teaching the English language learners by Goldenberg’ (2006). Results showed that primary language instruction enhances English Language learners’ academic achievement; English Language Learners learn in much the same way as non-English Language Learners; Certain accommodations must be made when English language Learners are instructed in English, primarily because of the students’ language motivations, while the studies of Nasri Harb and El-Shaarawi (2007); Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari (2011) found out that one’s competency in speaking the English language greatly contributed to their academic performance. Students who participated in class discussions and were on leave from their jobs outperformed other students. Missing many lectures and living in crowded household negatively affected student performance. Non-national students outperformed national students, while female students outperformed their male counterparts. A significant difference was identified based on the students’ personal-related variables.

Thus, English will open its doors for one who is willing to make an effort – to reach a dream career he wants to pursue. Learning English can be a venue to all other areas of one’s life for a better tomorrow.

As one language in the world, English is considered and applied as an international language. There are some reasons why English is important: for finding a job, for travelling, interacting with each other, doing business, taking examinations, doing research, and writing in the foreign language.

To be proficient in English means to know the language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, understanding the cultural background of the learner and the

like in order to know and use the language for a real purpose. According to Carnale and Swaine (1980), communicative competence is used to refer exclusively to knowledge or capacity relating to the rules of the language use.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to determine the attitude of freshmen students towards learning English as a subject and its correlation to their competency in speaking the English language.

Specifically, the researcher would like to find out the following:

1. What is the selected college freshmen students' attitude towards learning English as a subject when taken as an entire group?
2. What is the selected college freshmen students' competency in speaking the English language when taken as an entire group?
3. Is there a correlation between the selected students' attitude towards learning the English language and their competency in speaking the English language?

NULL HYPOTHESIS

1. There is no correlation between the selected students' attitude in learning the English language and their competency in speaking the English language?

THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

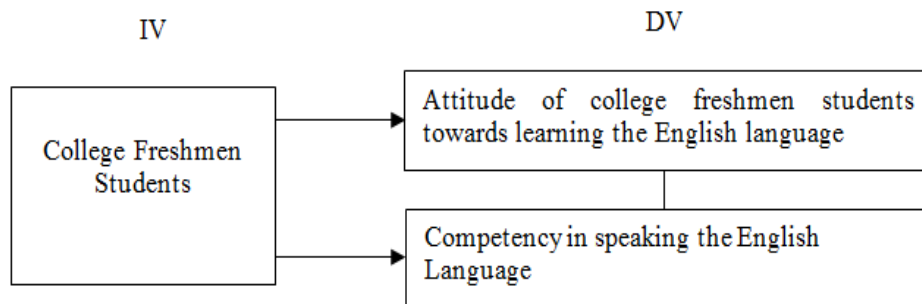


Figure 1. Relationship between the selected students' attitude towards learning the English language and its relation to their competence in speaking.

Research Design

This study used the descriptive method of research. Good (1963) in Arellado (1994) describes this method as the process of gathering facts with adequate evaluation with interpretation of anything one may wish to study.

Participants

The respondents of this study were all the 38 freshmen students enrolled in Speech and Oral Communication during the third trimester, AY 2012-2013. Purposive sampling was used for ease of administration of the instrument.

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents

<i>Students</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
ENGL403 EC	16	100
ENGLO403 3D	22	100
Total	38	100%

The Data Gathering Instrument

Part 1, a researcher-made questionnaire, was juror validated by experts in the field. This included 20 questions on the students' attitude towards learning the English language as a college student in the university. The level of their attitude toward the English language was rated as follows: Strongly Agree (1), Somewhat Agree (2), Neither Agree or Disagree (3), Somewhat Disagree (4) and Strongly Disagree (5).

Part 2, a standardized Public Speaking Rubric (Grodd 2013), was used for the students' competency in speaking the English language. The speaking competency rubric includes the following criteria: Tone, Volume, Enthusiasm, Pacing, Eye Contact, and Body Language. These were scored 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, with 5 as the highest and 1 as the lowest.

The statistical tools used were Mean, Standard Deviation, and Pearson R.

METHODOLOGY

Part 1 of the instrument, a questionnaire checklist on students' attitude toward learning the English language was distributed among them during the opening of classes in May, third trimester of the Academic Year 2012-2013. Students ticked the column which corresponded to their attitude towards learning the English language. This included 20 questions on the students' attitude towards learning the English language as a college student in the university. The level of their attitude toward the English language was rated as follows: Strongly Agree (1), Somewhat Agree (2), Neither Agree or Disagree (3), Somewhat Disagree (4) and Strongly Disagree (5).

Part 2, poetry reading, was administered during the last week of the Midterm period, after the rudiments of oral activities on poetry reading were thoroughly discussed. Each of the students read the poem *Richard Cory* by Edwin Arlington Robinson. The teacher encircled the number that corresponded to the level of the students' oral reading competency based on the rubrics, items classified as to Tone, Volume, Enthusiasm, Eye Contact, and Body Language, with 1 point per category as the lowest and 5 points as the highest, for a total of 30 marks.

The results were then statistically processed.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to determine the attitude of freshmen students towards learning English as a subject and its correlation to their competency in speaking the English language.

The findings of the investigation revealed the English language proficiency of college freshmen obtained from the given checklist on the attitude of the students in learning English as a subject and their competency in speaking the English language. Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation between attitude in learning the English language and Competence in Speaking the English Language of Selected College Freshmen were also used to determine the significance of correlation.

Table 2. Attitude in Learning and Competence in Speaking the English Language among the College Freshmen in a University

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Description</i>
Attitude in learning the English language	38	2.18	.50	Poor
Competence in speaking the English language	38	20.53	8.53	Intermediate

Scale of Means:		<i>Description</i>
Attitude	1.49	Negative
	2.49	Poor
	3.49	Good
	4.49	Very Good
	5.0	Excellent
Competence	1-10	Novice
	11-20	Intermediate
	21-30	Advanced

The data in Table 2 reveal that the college freshmen have a poor attitude towards learning English as a subject ($M=2.18$, $SD = 0.50$), despite of their intermediate competence in speaking the English language ($M = 20.43$; $SD = 8.53$).

Thurston (1946; in Edwards 1994) defines attitude as the degree of positive or negative affect associated with some psychological object. Among students in a speech and Communication and public speaking classes, many hesitate to stand and deliver their topics in a classroom set up for fear of being ridiculed.

The social atmosphere, the positive psychological climate of the situation, which refers to how one feels about himself and other people involved in the communication, can contribute immensely to how one handles the rigors of speaking in public (Dunn, D. M. and Goodnight, L. J. (2011).

When one communicates, there are many choices to make. With whom one talks to and what one talks about are important considerations. At times, the choices are easy, however, there are times when one has to overcome his fear or insecurities in sharing his feelings and thoughts. At times, it is safer not to share information at all. Not communicating when there's a need to may sound unethical, but each of us communicates differently and each communication may involve some ethical considerations.

The poor attitude towards learning the English language in this context may be a question of understanding the difference and diversity in communication. Learning the English language especially among the Arab students requires a lot of considerations. One's frame of reference considers many different variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, family background, geographic location, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and the like. All these make a person unique, feel and think differently, thus, their attitude towards certain factors.

On the other hand, their intermediate level in speaking competency can be obviously observed. Despite the flaw in grammatical competency due to their respective cultural language orientations, students are capable of conversing with ease and confidence in dealing with the routine tasks and social situations, handling successfully uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to their work, school, recreation, particular interests, and areas of competence. Though not all the time, students can perform speaking tasks, like narrating events and sustaining to perform connected discourse using longer paragraphs.

Table 3. Correlation Between Attitude and Competence in Speaking the English Language

<i>Variables</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Competence in speaking the English language, Attitude in Learning the English Language	0.13	0.43

The data in Table 3 reveal that there is no significant correlation between attitude in learning the English language and competence in speaking the English language among selected college freshmen ($r = 0.13$, $p=0.43$); thus, the Null hypothesis is accepted.

The differences in the responses of the respondents may be a representative of changes in attitudes among both groups of students that reflect the changing social, educational, and linguistic conditions. Along with this contention is the understanding of the cultural background of the learner and the like in order to know the possible reasons behind the differences in their attitude towards learning the language. Among students who generally come from Arab countries, speaking the English language may not be their forte, considering that English is not their English language, but they can just do much. Furthermore, English as a subject is somehow not geared towards the programme they are enrolled in (Dunn and Goodnight, 2011).

Attitude at times may be relative, depending on the overall evaluation of people's behavior, considering varied options in the context. Attitude can be positive, negative, or neutral, and can vary according to abstract, specific, or general constructs at the time of evaluation (Millon & Lerner 2012).

Millon and Learner (2012) say that attitudes can be based on different types of information. This is true of one popular conceptualization of the tripartite theory which holds that there are three primary types of information on which attitude can be based upon: what one knows and believes, one's feelings, and actions or behavior. Generally though, attitudes are based on perceived emotions than with cognitively rational ones, but it's also interesting to note that people are generally not aware of the bases of their attitudes.

Results on the negative correlation may be partly explained by Macintyre's (2007) previous research which has given much attention to trait level or situation-specific variables related to long-term patterns and relationships. Kernels of wisdom were extracted based on the literatures on language anxiety and language-learning motivation which were used to frame the argument which states that initiating communication at a certain specific time can be conceptualized as a freely chosen process. The result is a degree of willingness to communicate with the potential to increase and decrease rapidly depending on the situation and complexity of the process involved. Recommendations suggest that methodologies be adapted to focus on the exact need of the research.

CONCLUSIONS

Motivations can make one do things with greater energy and enthusiasm because of a pressing particular situation. The non-correlation between the students' attitude and their competence in speaking the language seemed unexpected, but tracing on the common observations among English teachers could attest to the fact that generally, students have difficulty learning the rigors especially of the English grammar. They can speak the English language, but grammatically, at the expense of mediocrity. Culturally, these students who are

non-native speakers of the English language and who come from diverse background considers learning English as a waterloo, thus, their attitude.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are the recommendations.

Parents play a significant role in the development of their children's formation years. If one has to dig deeper into the meaning of attitude, one has to discover that emotions and behavior play an important role in the manifested behavior of an individual. This is where parents should be alert with in deciphering their children's motivational behavior towards school.

Generally, students can speak the English language, but not to the best brand a college student should be armed with. Furthermore, proper training and exposure to the use of the language specifically in speaking may still be enhanced.

Changing one's attitude may not be done overnight, but constant motivation especially from the English teachers and their significant others may shed light on the gray areas of the students' academic endeavor.

Guidance counselor can design programmes to motivate the students to appreciate the value of learning English as a second language, considering that with the presence of expatriates in the country, English has become the communication media.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abidin, P.-M., & Alzwari (2011, February). EFL Students' Attitude towards Learning English language: The Case of Libyan Secondary School Students. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 8(2), Asian Social Science
- [2] American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language ACTFL 2012
- [3] Arellado, Ma., & Arlen, F. (1995). *English Language Proficiency of College Freshmen at the West Visayas State University*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, West Visayas State University, Iloilo City, Philippines.
- [4] Fredrickson, B., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2000). *Atkinson & Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Inc.
- [5] Buschenhofen, R. (1998). <https://www.facebook.com/public/Rainer-Buschenhofen>
- [6] Carnale, M., & Swaine, M. (1980). Strategic Competence. slaencyclopedia10.wikispaces.com http://betterlesson.com/document/12161/rubric-public-speakingers.ask.com/Health/Mental/why_is_attitude_important
- [7] Edwards, A. L. (1994). *Techniques of Attitude Scale Construction*. USA: Irvington Publishers.
- [8] Gerrig & Zimbardo (2010). *Psychology and Life*. USA: Pearson
- [9] Grodd, A. (2013). <http://betterlesson.com/document/12161/rubric-public-speaking>
- [10] Goldenberg, E. (2006). *Politics and Government: Way It Works*. Inside Ottawa.
- [11] <http://facultygsb.stanford.edu/wheeler/documents/PettyWheelerTormalaHandbookings.pdf>
- [12] Oxford English Reference Dictionary. (1996). (2nd Edition). USA: Oxford University Press

- [13] Millon, T. & Lerner, M. J. (2012). *Comprehensive handbook of psychology* (2nd Ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons. www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012_FIN AL.pdf
- [14] Plotnik, R. (1999). *Introduction to Psychology* (5th Edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- [15] Brosious JP, Tsuda ST, Menezes JM, Baynosa RC, Stephenson LL, Mohsin AG, Wang WZ, Zamboni WA. (2012). *Objective Evaluation of Skill Acquisition in Novice Microsurgeons*. *Journal of Reconstructive Microsurgery*, 28(8) pp539-542.
- [16] Unruh, P. (). The Importance of Attitude in Customer Service. Available at: http://www.ehow.com/video_4401138_the-importance-attitude-customer-service.html#ixzz2TAFdltKn
- [17] Gerrig, R. J., & Zimbardo, P. G. (2010). *Psychology and Life*. USA: Pearson
- [18] Harb, N., & El-Shaarawi (2007). *Factors Affecting Business Students' Performance: The Case of Students in United Arab Emirates*. *Journal of Educational Business*. Hendref Publications International School of Public Communication (2012) <http://www.isoc.com/dubai/public-speaking-presentation-training?gclid=CPOM1bKN5LgCFSTKtAodJIAAeg>
- [19] Kyoko, M. (2012). Acquiring Interactional Competence in a Study Abroad Context: Japanese Language Learners' Use of the Interactional Particle *ne*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(4), 519-540. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01256.x
- [20] Macintyre, P. D. (2007). "Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process". *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(4), 564-576.