

AN ASSESSMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH BASED ON ACADEMIC MAJOR, CLASS LEVEL, AND GENDER VARIABLES

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to investigate undergraduate students' attitudes toward learning English based on their academic major, class level, and gender. A total of 150 undergraduate students (65 males and 85 females) distributed in different class levels and different colleges and departments were surveyed using a Likert-type scale. Statistical differences indicated that students had a mixed bag of attitudes about the English language, with some being positive and others being negative. The findings revealed that students in science-related majors and Kindergarten Education had a higher interest in learning English than other students; all students in science-related majors believed that learning English is beneficial; felt more confident and had more positive attitudes toward their English instructors than those in Education-related ones. In addition, juniors were more enthusiastic about learning English as a second language and had more positive attitudes toward it than freshmen. Likewise, female students obtained more positive attitudes in terms of interest and instructor subscales. However, ANOVA analysis of indicated no significant differences in self-confidence and usability subscales between male and female students. In light of the research's conclusions, some practical implications are explored to assist students in adopting a positive attitude toward English language learning.

Keywords: attitude and motivation, attitude towards learning English, English language learning, academic major, class level, gender

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English has become the primary means of communication in the global context as a result of globalization and increased accessibility and connectivity of people all over the world. In commerce, finance and banking, science and technology, widespread culture, and international affairs, English has surpassed all other languages (Gömleksiz, 2010). Wulyani et al. (2019) believe that a strong mastery of the English language is crucial for globalization since it enables access to high-quality education, improved career possibilities and business, in addition to the development of interpersonal and cultural bonds. In addition, Morganna et al. (2020) state that people from all over the world use English to some extent. Learning English has become a necessity for adapting to the current world context and surviving global restructuring. It is generally accepted that proficiency in the English language is a prerequisite for one's own success.

Among the most essential indicators of achievement in learning English is students' attitude toward the language (Herwiana & Laili, 2021, Getie, 2020). As a result, teachers and educators should take motivation and attitude variables into account when developing strategies for English language instruction and training (Pham, 2021). Attitude is defined as an intellectual condition that encompasses beliefs and feelings and is widely recognized as a key notion in interpreting human behavior (Latchanna & Dagneu, 2009). Beliefs are one of the key elements that affect learning (Ajzen, 2005). The beliefs of students can be great stimuli, and they can be significantly affected by their families and teachers (Seven, 2020). A student should assume that anyone who works hard in class can succeed. Motivation, on the other hand, may be the only way to get good academic results and avoid failure. Their beliefs could be an impediment if they think they will not be effective at learning the new language (Lennartsson, 2008).

A negative attitude can make it difficult to learn a language (Ellis, 1994). However, a student's negative attitudes can be transformed into positive ones, making it easier to achieve a positive outcome (Lennartsson, 2008). Learners are off to a strong start if they have a positive attitude toward learning a language (Getie, 2020). Language learners are human beings with emotions, bodies, thoughts, memories, imaginations, passions, and identities in addition to being communicators and critical thinkers (Kramsch, 2006).

Learning a language is also affected by motivation. Lennartsson (2008) has asserted that motivation and the desire to learn a second language were deemed far more important than social factors. According to Liu (2007), motivation to learn a second

language (L2) stems from positive attitudes toward the L2 community as well as a desire to interact with and imitate those in the same community. A positive attitude elevates students' learning motivation (Csizér et al., 2010). Saville-Troike & Barto (2017) highlight the significance of motivation, claiming that more motivated students would learn a new language more effectively. How quickly they pick up a new language is determined by the motivation of each learner. Therefore, a student's interest in learning may indicate that the student is inclined to learn at a certain time in the future. A concept, a feeling, or a physical need can all encourage a student to learn. Hence, it is implausible that learning will take place, if a student is unwilling to do so (Seven, 2020).

Learners who are motivated and more enthusiastic about learning a new language and believe in its usability will progress faster than those who do not (Ellis, 1994; Gömleksiz, 2010; Getie, 2020; Pham, 2021). Reece et al. (2007) confirm that less competent but highly motivated students can gain greater success than more smart but unmotivated ones. Among the factors that influence attitudes are gender inequalities, educational levels, socioeconomic background, grade level, GPA, and proficiency level. According to Gömleksiz (2010), gender, grade level, and department variables all differ from one another in a statistically significant manner.

Another factor in the learning process is the teacher. Successful teachers guide their students toward educational goals (Delić & Bećirović, 2016) while instilling positive attitudes toward learning. If the students appreciate the language teacher, they can develop language skills more promptly and efficiently. However, if the students dislike or disrespect their teacher, they will be unable to attend class or enjoy the teaching-learning process (Abu-Melhim, 2009). Moreover, role-playing and providing constructive, satisfactory evaluative and developmental feedback have a considerable positive effect on students' self-confidence and self-esteem (Munna & Kalam, 2021). It was also discovered that a dynamic educational atmosphere enhances inclusion and participation and helps instructors and students perform better academically (Munna & Kalam, 2021).

One way to maintain students' attention and engagement in what they are practicing in the classroom and increase their motivation to learn the language is to use a variety of interesting topics and activities (Harmer, 2007). It may well be in increasing interest that instructors expend the most commitment and see the most instant and

visible results in terms of student motivation (Ur, 1996). Since activities can have a substantial influence on students' enthusiasm and given that the teacher is the one who planned, designs, and sets them up, it is important to invest time and energy into making classroom activities interesting and inspiring for students (Daskalovska et al., 2012).

In addition, to learn a second language, you must also have self-confidence. It might facilitate the learning process and can have a significant impact on a person's life, for better or worse (Brown, 2000). It goes without saying that the L2 self-confidence component is important and valuable to learners both in and out of the language classroom. Students who are confident are more likely to engage actively in class activities (Edwards & Roger, 2015). On the other hand, students who lack confidence are often proven to be considerably terrified and hesitant, avoiding conveying their thoughts and even being unable to communicate (Jabor et al., 2017). Therefore, having self-confidence is essential for several reasons. The first explanation is that people are more open to taking chances when they are confident in themselves. In order to succeed, one would likely have to undertake some risks. Another reason is that a self-confident person is unlikely to give up. With these certain aptitudes, a student can make progress and enhance language performance.

Family expectations are one of the influencing factors. Family expectations are one aspect that affects how students feel about learning a language, but they can also cause anxiety if the student does not live up to their family standards (Csizér et al., 2010). Therefore, understanding language learners' attitudes is crucial since it can increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning instructional strategies. Ukpong and George (2013) asserted that there was a connection between English study time and accomplishment. Barnes and Lock (2010) have stated that lecturers must understand their students' attitudes in order to respond to their needs and improve students' learning outcomes. As a result, research into language attitudes will benefit lecturers in terms of teaching-learning pedagogical practices. Some important aspects of a person's personality, such as who they are and what they believe in, can be expressed through their attitude.

Moreover, each student has distinct demands, beliefs, interests, educational backgrounds, and learning styles. These variables can cause a variety of responses in learning the language. To put it another way, students have their own language attitudes

toward English as a second language. Furthermore, they have opinions on the English learning process. Therefore, investigating language attitudes benefits decision-makers in various ways. A study of students' attitudes is an operative method for language teachers, education professionals, curriculum developers, and experts to achieve a better sense of the language pedagogical procedure.

In light of the above-mentioned discussion, it's critical to look into how students feel about English. Considering the significance of students' attitudes in the language learning process and their implication for their accomplishment, the role of L2 students' attitudes toward English in the context of Saudi Arabia has received insufficient attention, and the main contribution of this study is an attempt to bridge that gap. In this case, the research looks into the factors that may affect students' attitudes, such as academic major, class level, and gender. The central focus is to find out how university students feel about learning English. More specifically, it examines Saudi undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English language. The main goal was to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in attitudes toward learning English among students based on their academic major, class level, and gender. Therefore, the current research may serve as a leading study in the context of Saudi university students' language learning and may, together with the investigation on interest, self-confidence, usability, and instructor variables contribute to the enhancements in the L2 learning processes in general.

Research questions

The purpose of the present work was to provide answers to the subsequent research questions:

(1) Are there any statistically significant differences among students' attitudes toward learning English in relation to the academic major, class level and gender variables?

(2) To what extent does each factor (i.e. interest, self-confidence, usability and instructor) affect students' attitudes toward learning English in relation to the academic major, class level and gender variables?

Literature Review

It is discovered that attitudes toward languages have three aspects or elements, namely cognitive, emotional, and behavioural (Baker, 1992). While the cognitive aspect is concerned with a person's beliefs, principles, and personal opinions about a language, the emotional aspect is concerned with his or her thoughts and feelings toward the language, and the behavioural aspect is concerned with his or her behavioural responses in that language. Positive language beliefs, on the other hand, are associated with positive emotions, which lead to positive linguistic behaviour. These three components may not always be present, though, as some individuals may have a stronger cognitive attitude toward language than a behavioural or emotional one.

A variety of factors, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, were reported to influence attitudes. Gardner (1985) suggested that second or foreign language (L2/FL) learners who have a positive perception of the target culture will typically tend to learn its language more efficiently than those who do not. According to (Ellis, 1994), students' attitudes could be influenced by the cultures of the source and the target languages.

Similarly, parental influences on learners' attitudes toward learning a L2/FL have been reported (Brown, 2000). Academic achievement, religious practice, culture, socioeconomic status, place of origin, and awareness of the target language were just a few of the social contexts to consider in the various parent factors (Brown, 2000; Spolsky, 1989). According to Wright(1987), teachers were seen as having a significant impact on students' attitudes (see also Getie, 2020).

Numerous scholars have produced taxonomies of variables such as personality factors, educational factors, social factors, and others such as age and gender that influence L2/FL learners' attitudes, which ultimately affect their language proficiency (Ehrman, 1996; McDonough & Shaw, 2012; Spolsky, 1989). Furthermore, Conteh-Morgan (2002) reinforced the view of some applied linguists that sociocultural context, learner personal qualities, learning environments, learning process, and academic achievement affect attitudes and language learning methods of students.

Attitudes and their functions in learning English as a L2/FL have been explored in a variety of settings around the world. Kiziltepe (2000), for instance, looked into the

impact of attitudes and motivation on Turkish students' English learning. Turkish students had a positive attitude toward learning English and the British and American cultures, and they also revealed no anxiety in class. On the other hand, Durer and Sayar (2013) looked at the attitudes of 400 non-English major students in Turkey to see if there were any gender differences. The results exhibited that male and female students had similar positive attitudes regarding EFL.

As to class level, Sedighi and Zarafshan (2006) looked at the responses of 126 freshmen and seniors majoring in English and English translation to see how their attitudes influenced their use of language learning strategies (LLSs). The respondents demonstrated that their attitudes had a significant impact on how they used LLSs. To clarify, learners who expressed positive attitudes toward LLS users were more likely to adopt their strategies than those who expressed negative attitudes.

In addition, Malallah (2010) discovered that university students in Kuwait were enthusiastic about learning English and native English speakers. The findings indicated a correlation between respondents' attitudes and their command of English and practical needs. Similarly, Tahaineh and Daana (2013) investigated Jordanian students' attitudes toward learning English. The findings showed that female English language and literature major students demonstrated positive attitudes toward EFL than English-speaking people.

Malaysian undergraduate students exhibited positive attitudes toward English learning (Ahmed, 2015; Adnan, 2017). To optimize English language classroom instruction, Ming et al. (2011) investigated the attitudes of secondary school Malaysian students. The outcomes demonstrated that the students' attitudes toward learning English are positive. However, compared to students of Arts, students majoring in science showed a greater interest in developing their English. Additionally, it was observed that advanced students had a more positive attitude than medium or lower-proficient ones.

Similarly, Orfan (2020) examined the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes of Afghan non-English major students regarding studying English based on six criteria. The students' attitudes were found to be generally positive. Additionally, the perspectives of students were more influenced by their Internet access and English learning experiences at English language centres than by their gender, age, first language, and the subject of study. Another study, conducted by Bhaskar and Soundiraraj (2013), looked into the influence of age and level of education in the learning of English by Indian first-

year mechanical engineering students. It was discovered that students' attitudes change significantly to be more positive at the college level. Likewise, Abu-Snoubar (2017) discovered that gender influenced students' attitudes in Jordan, with females displaying more optimism than males. Students' attitudes, instead, were found to be unaffected by their field of study.

Abidin et al. (2012) performed a study into Libyan students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. The research also looked into whether there were any significant dissimilarities in students' attitudes concerning their gender or field of study. Overall, the students' attitudes toward learning English were negative. Gender proved to be effective in this situation. Female students' attitudes were considerably more positive compared to male students. The study's findings also revealed that students majoring in social science fields had the greatest positive attitude of all, followed by students in the basic sciences and life sciences.

Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) investigated how Petroleum Engineering students had the commitment to master English. The findings of the study showed that the students' attitudes regarding learning English and the English-speaking community were positive. Arshad and Yusoff (2019) considered Indonesian non-English major students' attitudes towards the English language. The findings revealed the positive attitudes of students and their willingness to communicate.

Likewise, Iqbal et al. (2019) attempted to investigate the widely held belief that Islamic educational background students had negative attitudes toward learning English. The analysis indicated that there is hardly any difference in attitudes between the two faculties, with the Islamic Learning Faculty's students expressing less positive attitude toward English than Education Faculty's students.

In the Saudi context, a few studies have been done to look into the significance and function of attitudes in learning EFL, particularly in higher education. In higher education, the language used varies by university and subject. Some universities teach scientific subjects in English, generally in addition to some required English courses for all university students, whatever their area of study. Numerous investigations have been carried out to determine undergraduate students' attitudes toward learning English, each with a different focus.

Al-Zahrani (2008) study reported that Saudi respondents had a negative attitude toward learning EFL. This attitude, according to the researcher, was generated by inadequate practices and strategies of some teachers and instructors. On the contrary, Khan (2016) realized a relationship between students' attitudes and their ability to communicate in English. Despite having all of the necessary conveniences and resources in the learning setting, students' English proficiency was insufficient. This was ascribed to students' negative attitudes toward education in general as well as other aspects including a lack of confidence and a fear of making mistakes in English. Thus, the study highlighted how crucial the teacher is in fostering students' attitudes and inspiring them to utilize the target language in this particular situation.

Alkaff (2013) study findings revealed that the pre-intermediate and intermediate Saudi female students at King Abdulaziz University had a positive attitude toward learning English. Even though they had few opportunities to practice English in their EFL society, the participants emphasized how eager they were to enhance their English linguistic competence. Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015) conducted a thorough investigation into the impact of Saudi EFL students' attitudes toward learning English on their academic accomplishment, using a sample of 112 English major students ranging from freshmen to seniors with varying grade point averages (GPA). The study's conclusions showed that students generally view studying English positively. Students with high GPAs had the most positive attitudes toward learning English, followed by students with medium GPAs and students with low GPAs, in that order.

Ali et al. (2019) looked into the attitudes and perceptions of intensive English program students regarding their English-speaking abilities (2019). Participants came from different colleges, including business, community and arts. The findings indicated that students generally have positive attitudes and are becoming increasingly conscious of the value of learning English for their future.

Alsubaie (2021) studied the attitudes of Saudi non-English major students - particularly those majoring in Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, and Business Administration-toward learning English, the culture of English, and native speakers, along with its value in recent times. The findings revealed that the students had generally positive attitudes toward learning English, English culture, and native English speakers, and had sufficient knowledge of the value of English in the present era.

Nevertheless, the importance of L2 students' attitudes toward English in Saudi Arabia has received insufficient attention. The research that examined students' attitudes toward studying English in Saudi Arabia did not address the factors of attitudes (e.g., interest, self-confidence, usability, and instructor) or the variations in attitudes concerning variables like students' academic major, class level, and gender at the same time. In light of these scenarios, the current study, in conjunction with research on interest, self-confidence, usability, and instructor variables, may help as a leading study in the context of English language learning among Saudi university students, and contribute to overall improvements in L2 learning processes.

Method

Participants

The sample included 150 students (65 males and 85 females) at a public university in Saudi Arabia. Males made up 43.3% of the respondents, while females made up 56.7%. There are 78 freshmen and 72 juniors among the students. With reference to the academic majors, students are distributed in different colleges and departments as follows: Applied Medical Sciences (n=18), Engineering (n=16), Computer Science & Information Systems (n=16), Science (n=18), Administrative Science (n=16), Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion (n=15), Education (n=18), Arabic Language Education (n=17), Kindergarten Education (n=16). The Participants were informed about the procedures and how to complete the survey questionnaire. The students voluntarily participated in the study, and their ages ranged from 21 to 24. All of the participants had completed their required English courses successfully. These mandatory courses at the faculty had learning outcomes that were at the A2 level of English proficiency. Furthermore, some students, especially those majoring in the sciences, had taken additional courses such as English language skills (reading, writing, listening, and reading), vocabulary and grammar, general English, technical writing and communication skills before commencing their studies.

Instrument

This study employed a quantitative approach. A 56-item five-point Likert-type attitude scale developed by (Gömleksiz, 2003) was adapted to collect data for the study.

Out of the 56 statements, 38 had a positive attitude, while the remaining 18 had a negative attitude. The items addressed the areas of interest in learning English (14 positive, 7 negative), the usability of learning English (6 positive, 4 negative), self-confidence in learning English (11 positive, 7 negative), us, and the instructor (7 positive, 0 negative). The questionnaire form comprised of two separate sections, one of which was demographic profile questions and the second incorporated attitude questions. The participants were instructed to give each statement a score based on their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly agree, 2=agree, 3 = normal, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree. They were asked to pick the most appropriate opinion from the list. The positive items were selected from the "Strongly Agree" option starting with 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, while negatively formulated items were scored in the opposite direction, i.e. they have a rating of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The scale's reliability was calculated, and the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .91. This result displays that the scale is reliable.

Since this study was restricted to one university in Saudi Arabia, the findings can only give a partial picture of the Saudi students' attitudes toward learning English. Furthermore, the data was centered on respondents' opinions about the questionnaire items, therefore; it is assumed that students answered honestly and openly.

Data Analysis Procedure

To identify factors influencing students' attitudes toward learning English and the degree to which each factor affects students' attitudes, students were requested to check each statement using a 5-point Likert Scale rating system Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, No opinion = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1 and vice versa for negative statements. Therefore, students who checked the boxes next to the numbers 5 and 4 (Strongly Agree and Agree) confirmed that they have positive attitudes towards learning English. Firstly, the students were notified of the research's objectives. Then, the questionnaires were distributed to all students under the researcher's supervision. They were also advised to ask whatever inquiries they wanted regarding the survey. They took roughly 45 minutes to fill out the survey, and it was collected in its entirety.

The demographic profile of the participants was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data collected through the questionnaire was organized, tabulated, and

quantitatively analyzed. In addition, One-way ANOVA and Scheffe Post Hoc tests were applied to ascertain if there were any differences in students' attitudes in relation to the academic majors' variable. Similarly, the examination of variations in students' attitudes toward learning English with respect to class level and gender variables was conducted using an independent groups t-test. The data was collected by the researcher herself, who managed to administer the scale items to the students.

Findings and Interpretations

In this section, the t-test and one-way ANOVA tests were employed to determine if there were statistically significant differences in student attitudes regarding academic major, class level, and gender. The results of one-way ANOVA for academic majors on students' attitudes toward learning English were shown in Table 1.

Table 1
ANOVA results for the academic major on interest subscale

Scale	Academic Major	N	\bar{x}	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Interest	Applied Medical	18	3.87	0.76	Between Groups	51.491	8	4.454	9.706*	0.000
	Engineering	16	3.66	0.82						
	Comp. Sc. & Info. Systems	16	3.76	0.81						
	Science	18	3.82	0.73	Within Groups	566.443	141	0.134		
	Sharia & Fund. of Religion	15	2.93	0.78						
	Arabic Language	17	3.02	0.78						
	Admin. Sc.	16	3.44	0.76	Total	617.934	149			
	Education	18	3.43	0.64						
	Kindergarten Edu.	16	3.60	0.72						
Total		150	3.50	0.76						

* $p < 0.05$

As presented in Table 1, ANOVA analysis exposed that there was a statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes regarding the interest subscale [$F_{(8, 141)} = 9.706$; $p < 0.05$]. Scheffe Post Hoc test findings showed that students majoring in Applied Medical Sciences, Science, Computer Science & Information Systems, Engineering, and Kindergarten Education academic presented a higher interest to learn English than the students of Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion, Arabic Language Education, Administrative Science, and Education academic majors.

Table 2*ANOVA results for the academic major on self-confidence subscale*

Scale	Academic Major	N	\bar{x}	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Self-confidence	Applied	18	3.64	0.65	Between Groups	48.406	8	6.834	12.534*	0.000
	Engineering	16	3.826	0.72						
	Comp. Sc. & Info. Systems	16	3.61	0.71						
	Science	18	3.88	0.67						
	Sharia & Fund. of Religion	15	3.26	0.64	Within Groups	432.615	141	0.436		
	Arabic	17	3.21	0.41						
	Admin. Sc.	16	3.52	0.76						
	Education	18	2.72	0.84	Total	481.021	149			
	Kindergarten	16	3.36	0.42						
	Total		150	3.45	0.65					

* $p < 0.05$

The significant F value [$F_{(8-141)}=12.534$; $p < 0.05$] achieved for the academic major variable demonstrated that the students majoring in Science, Engineering, Applied Medical Sciences, Computer Science & Information Systems and Administrative Science felt more confident than those of Education, Arabic Language Education, Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion and Kindergarten Education majors.

Table 3*ANOVA results for the academic major on usability subscale*

Scale	Academic Major	N	\bar{x}	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Usability	Applied	18	3.81	0.61	Between Groups	30.825	8	4.521	22.834*	0.000
	Engineering	16	3.486	0.43						
	Comp. Sc. & Info. Systems	16	3.71	0.79						
	Science	18	3.68	0.67						
	Sharia & Fund. of Religion	15	3.00	0.38	Within Groups	221.369	141	0.157		
	Arabic	17	2.55	0.451						
	Admin. Sc.	16	3.51	0.53						
	Education	18	3.06	0.35	Total	252.185	149			
	Kindergarten	16	3.40	0.38						
	Total		150	3.32	0.51					

* $p < 0.05$

The ANOVA results for the usability subscale, which compared the average mean scores of the students' attitudes, were summarized in Table 3. The data exhibited that there were significant differences among the students' attitudes on the usability subscale

[$F_{(8-141)} = 22,834$; $p < 0.05$]. Scheffe Post Hoc test results indicated that students majoring in Applied Medical Sciences, Computer Science & Information Systems, Science, Engineering and Administrative Science thought learning English to be more advantageous than other groups did.

Table 4
ANOVA results for the academic major on instructor subscale

Scale	Academic Major	N	\bar{x}	SD	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Instructor	Applied Medical	18	3.61	0.76	Between Groups	29.181	8	3.422	6.562*	0.000
	Engineering	16	3.29	0.63						
	Comp. Sc. & Info. Systems	16	3.79	0.69						
	Science	18	3.49	0.77	Within Groups	608.7507	141	0.518		
	Sharia & Fund. of Religion	15	3.43	0.68						
	Arabic Language	17	3.22	0.751						
	Admin. Sc.	16	3.50	0.73	Total	637.931	149			
	Education	18	3.37	0.65						
	Kindergarten	16	3.54	0.78						
Total		150	3.47	0.72						

* $p < 0.05$

The results of ANOVA for the instructor subscale in Table 4 revealed that students' attitudes concerning the academic major variable differed significantly [$F_{(8-141)} = 6,562$; $p < 0.05$]. Scheffe Post Hoc test findings exposed that students majoring in Computer Science & Information Systems, Applied Medical Sciences, Kindergarten Education Administrative Science, and Science expressed stronger positive attitudes toward their English instructors than those majoring in Arabic Language, Engineering, Education, and Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion.

Table 5
t-test results for class level on students' attitudes towards learning English

Scale	Class Level	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	t	p
Interest	Freshmen	78	3.24	0.765	148	-2.0833*	0.004
	Junior	72	3.48	0.329			
Self-confidence	Freshmen	78	3.38	0.702	148	-2.4014*	0.020
	Junior	72	3.44	0.482			
Usability	Freshmen	78	3.22	0.387	148	-6.9444*	0.001
	Junior	72	3.51	0.743			
Instructor	Freshmen	78	3.36	0.815	148	-4.1667*	0.000
	Junior	72	3.61	0.758			
Total		150					

As can be noticed in Table 5, *t*-test results indicated significant differences between freshmen and juniors' attitudes in relation to interest [$t_{(148)} = -2.0833$; $p < 0.05$], self-confidence [$t_{(148)} = -2.4014$; $p < 0.05$], usability [$t_{(148)} = -6.9444$; $p < 0.05$] and instructor [$t_{(148)} = -4.1667$; $p < 0.05$] variables. In other words, juniors were more likely than freshmen to endorse learning EFL.

Table 6

t-test results for gender on students' attitudes towards learning English

Scale	Class Level	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	t	p
Interest	Male	65	3.43	0.425	148	-2.6120*	0.000
	Female	85	3.56	0.724			
Self-confidence	Male	65	3.28	0.517	148	-1.0734*	0.109
	Female	85	3.44	0.662			
Usability	Male	65	3.35	0.718	148	-3.7281*	0.061
	Female	85	3.40	0.645			
Instructor	Male	65	3.33	0.725	148	-6.1250*	0.000
	Female	85	3.46	0.789			
Total		150					

As it is realized in Table 6, the undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English diverged significantly in relation to the gender of the students. A higher mean rating in interest [$t_{(148)} = -2.6120$; $p < 0.05$] and instructor [$t_{(148)} = -6.1250$; $p < 0.05$] subscales designated female students tended to exhibit more positive attitudes than male students did. In addition, analysis of ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences in self-confidence [$t_{(148)} = -1.0734$; $p > 0.05$] and usability subscales [$t_{(148)} = -3.7281$; $p > 0.05$] between male and female students.

Discussion

In the Arab world, active EFL instruction has always been a source of fascination. A growing number of teachers, educational authorities, linguists, and scholars are committed to strengthening language teaching-learning methods. Students' learning is influenced by a variety of factors, including their attitudes. In the present investigation, university students' attitudes toward learning EFL in Saudi Arabia were assessed. Gardner (1985) suggested that attitudes are linked to motivation because they serve as pillars of a learner's overall orientation. Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) also claimed that learners' aptitude for language development is controlled by their attitudes towards learning that language. Consequently, the main objective of this study was to investigate

university students' attitudes towards studying EFL in connection to academic major, class level, and gender variables and to find out to what extent does each factor (i.e. interest, self-confidence, usability and instructor) affect students' attitudes in relation to these variables. As Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Midraj (2003) asserted, a clearer knowledge of students' attitudes will aid the instructional developers in developing language teaching plans and strategies that foster the attitudes and motivation that are most relevant to the improvement of competent EFL learners.

Statistical analysis revealed that students' attitudes differed significantly. Statistically significant differences were discovered among student attitudes based on academic major, class level, and gender variables. As to academic majors, the attitudes of student range from one domain to another. Students majoring in Applied Medical Sciences, Science, Computer Science & Information Systems, Engineering, and Kindergarten Education displayed increased interest in learning English compared to the students of Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion, Arabic Language Education, Administrative Science, and Education. In addition, juniors had more interest in learning English than freshmen. These results were consistent with that of Ming et al. (2011) which indicated that science students were more motivated to work on their English compared to other students, and highly proficient students maintained a more positive attitude than intermediate or less proficient students. The same result, however, is incongruent with that of Abidin et al. (2012) who confirmed that social sciences students had the most positive attitude, followed by students in the basic sciences and life sciences.

The students' attitudes toward learning English were significantly influenced by their gender. In the interest subscale, female students exhibited a more positive attitude than male students. This outcome corroborates Karahan's (2007) survey findings and is in line with Gömleksiz's (2010) study which confirmed that attitudes toward interest were more positive among females. A similar finding was confirmed by Bećirović (2017) who concluded that females are much more motivated to learn English than males. However, this interpretation does not agree with that of Latić & Brdarević (2018) who discovered no statistically significant differences between females and males in terms of their attitudes towards language learning, despite the gender inequalities in language use.

Similar results were realized with regard to the self-confidence subscale. Students enrolled in science-related majors including Engineering, Science, Applied Medical Sciences, Computer Science & Information Systems and Administrative Science looked more confident than those in Education, Arabic Language Education, Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion and Kindergarten Education majors. Similarly, they believed that learning English is more useful. That is to say, students enrolled in science-related departments were likely to hold more positive perceptions compared to other students. This interpretation is in line with several studies (e.g. Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Bhaskar & Soundiraraj, 2013) which reported engineering students' positive attitudes toward learning English and understanding the culture of the English-speaking world. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2019) confirmed that students from Islamic educational backgrounds had less positivity toward learning English than Education Faculty students.

This could be because English is taught as a required course for education-related majors, which require only a minimum qualification and a basic understanding of the language, as opposed to science-related majors, which demand the use of English for a range of academic and professional purposes in the course of their years of education. As a result of the lack of awareness of the target language usability, students majoring in education may believe that learning English is ineffective, leading to a negative attitude toward the language and culture. According to Ellis (1994), students' attitudes can be influenced by their own culture's perspectives. This is also consistent with Gardner (1985) who claimed that positive attitudes toward the target culture help L2/FL learners to pick up the language more efficiently than negative attitudes.

Moreover, t-test results indicated attitudes in relation to self-confidence and usability subscales among freshmen and juniors differed significantly where juniors were found to be more confident than other students and displayed more positive attitudes than freshmen. On the contrary, analysis of ANOVA indicated no significant differences in self-confidence and usability subscales between male and female students. These findings seem to oppose that of Jabor et al. (2017) which revealed that males have higher self-confidence than females. They further stated that females exhibit a high level of self-doubt when speaking English to professors and classmates. The females show a high level of anxiety and fear of speaking English in public, while also being very concerned about their grades and competitiveness. In addition, the findings also contradicts Delić (2020),

who found no significant differences in reporting the types of attitudes regarding gender or grade level. Delić came to the conclusion that students' attitudes have not been heavily affected by their gender or grade level as both male and female students, regardless of grade level, have comparable attitudes toward the English language.

Instead, positive feelings and emotions with instructors can help students develop positive attitudes about learning a FL. The possibility of students adopting a positive attitude toward the target language increases with the number of interactions they have with their teacher. Without interaction between students and teachers, there will not be many chances for successful learning (Getie, 2020). It is true that depending on the instructor's knowledge of the topic, his/her attitude toward the students, and the topic, the impact can be either positive or negative. Dörnyei (2001) added that students adopted comparable perceptions, attitudes, anticipations, and behaviours due to the teacher's transmission of beliefs, expectations, and attitudes. If the teacher possesses all of the previously stated attributes and invites his/her students in a structured manner, the possibility that students will establish a positive attitude toward language acquisition will increase.

In terms of the instructor subscale, students majoring in science-related disciplines including Computer Science & Information Systems, Applied Medical Sciences, Administrative Science, Science as well as Kindergarten Education revealed more positive attitudes toward their English instructors than students majoring in Arabic Language, Engineering, Education, and Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion. Furthermore, the results indicated juniors were more excited about learning English as a FL, ensuring more positive attitudes than freshmen. In terms of gender, female students' attitude was more positive than male students'. This result corroborates Karahan's (2007) survey findings and is in line with Gömleksiz's (2010) study which confirmed that female students displayed more positive attitudes toward teachers.

The teacher's role is critical in developing a positive attitude toward learning English (Delić & Bećirović, 2016; Munna & Kalam, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to afford a more effective, unrestricted educational setting for their students. Students' negative attitudes toward learning English inhibit them from effectively engaging in various activities. Therefore, it's critical to think about ways to reduce negative attitudes

toward learning English in order to enhance students' interests, self-confidence, and positive attitude toward doing so (Gömleksiz, 2010). To do so, teachers must be trained to recognize the issues that seriously affect students and must consider their needs.

To sum up, the assessment of Saudi undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English regarding academic major, class level and gender variables revealed that students tended to have partial positive attitudes (see e.g., Alkaff, 2013; Ali et al., 2019; Al Samadani and Ibnian, 2015; Alsubaie, 2021) and partial negative attitudes (see e.g. Al-Zahrani , 2008; Khan, 2016). In both cases, the importance of the instructor and the teaching environment in enhancing students' attitudes toward learning and inspiring them to use the target language was recommended.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the preceding discussion, it is reasonable to conclude that attitudes (both negative and positive attitudes) highly impacted performance in language learning (Getie, 2020). Therefore, it might be assumed that attitude is vital for language learning. These ideas about the attitude and their significance obviously demonstrate that it could also be a significant barrier to learning a L2/FL (Rahman et al., 2021). People may exhibit a variety of attitudes toward a language, rather than just one. To give an example, someone may enjoy a language in one domain, such as usability, but not in another, such as an instructor; he/she may want to learn it for personal reasons and interest but lack self-confidence.

Other variables that may affect attitudes including socioeconomic and cultural status, financial status, parental education level, and geographic location, should be investigated in future research. Due to the small sample size of the study, more research with larger samples is needed to gain a better interpretation of students' attitudes toward learning English. In addition, qualitative research could be conducted to determine the factors that influence students' attitudes toward learning English. Interviewing students from other institutions of higher education and colleges to see if they share similar viewpoints and to learn further about their attitudes towards learning English could also be a future research topic. Observational research methods could be used in other studies for example observing and interviewing in a real-world classroom. More insight into the possible factors that may affect attitudes could be gained by observing real classroom environments and personal interviews with instructors.

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