

Attitudes of Law Students at the Arab American University– Jenin towards Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study seeks to identify the attitudes of law students at the Arab American University-Jenin towards learning English as a foreign language. To this end, the authors surveyed the opinions of 173 (58 female, 115 male) students using a questionnaire developed according to a 5-point Likert Scale. Cronbach Alpha formula was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. A descriptive analysis was made to measure the target students' attitudes (and thus the percentages, means and standard deviations of the gathered data). Gender differences were also considered via an independent T- test. The study found that law students at the Arab American University-Jenin have positive attitudes towards learning English, with no gender differences.

Keywords: *attitudes, gender, EFL law learners, motivation.*

Introduction

Nowadays, law and justice are globalized themes. This fact entails finding a means for global rapprochement where ideas are communicated via a common language that works as a bridge between different nations with different tongues. Nowadays, English dominates international communication in all areas of life: politics, business, law, etc. English is also instrumental in learning different disciplines at universities, and is increasingly becoming the lingua franca for communication among lawyers throughout the world. Jalil and Kamarudin, (2009) argue that law students are required to learn and even be competent when it comes to English so as to be capable of attaining the basic knowledge of their specialization, master the skill of reading international declarations and agreements, keep up with the most recent updates of the international legislations, and keep contacts with the qualified universal sources of law.

The process of learning English as a foreign language is influenced by many factors, such as students' attitudes and motivation, which determine L2 achievement and attainment (Gardner, 1985). As viewed by Choy and Troudi, (2006), attitudes can help learners express whether they like or dislike the objects/surrounding situations. These researchers also underlined that the inner feelings and emotions of FL learners influence their perspectives and attitudes towards the target language. Thus, attitudes can highly influence how individuals approach different situations, including foreign language learning.

This study considers attitude as one of the major affective factors for success in learning a foreign language. Thus, it seeks to identify the attitudes of law students at the Arab American University-Jenin (AAUJ) towards English language, with a particular focus on gender differences, if any.

Statement of the Problem

There is absolutely no doubt that English is the international language in business, politics, law, technology, science, etc. As such, having positive attitudes towards learning this language facilitates the learning process (Gardner, 1985). It is assumed that attitudes are very decisive and essential factors in the second and foreign language learning process.

From observations of their law students at the AAUJ English Language Center, the authors had an impression that law students have negative attitudes towards learning English as a foreign

language. These students would always complain about taking EFL courses, arguing that law and courts in Palestine do not involve English in teaching, litigations or proceedings. In addition, the students' marks, attendance, readiness, preparation and interests in English are unsatisfactory. This phenomenon has been noticed in almost all the courses the authors have run. However, observations are not always informative, and testing them in a direct way might help inform the future instruction process.

Questions of the Study

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of AAUJ law students towards learning English as a foreign language? What are the manifestations of these attitudes at the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and pedagogical aspects?
2. Are there any statistically significant gender differences between law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language?

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There are no significant differences at the $\alpha = .05$ in the mean scores of AAUJ law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language as demonstrated in their emotional, behavioral, cognitive and pedagogical aspects.
2. There are no significant gender differences at the $\alpha = .05$ in the mean scores of AAUJ law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would hopefully familiarize law students with the importance of English for their professional growth and distinction. The results would lay the foundations for new law curricula which keep up with the age of globalization, and help AAUJ recruit faculty members who are competent in English language.

Definitions of Terms

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

Motivation: An intrinsic (internal) or extrinsic (external) stimulus for action.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study at hand is restricted to law students at AAUJ for the fall semester 2013/2014.

Review of the Related Literature

Attitudes towards learning are undoubtedly the cornerstones in the development and excellence in the learning process. Kara, (2009) argues that positive attitudes towards any subject can enhance the students' interest and eagerness to solve problems as well as to acquire the information and skills useful for their daily life. Brown, (1994) and Abu Rabia, (2004) defined attitudes as the perception of self, of others and of the culture we are living in. Attitudes can be categorized into thoughts (cognitive) and feelings (affective). Thus, it is generally assumed that the negative attitudes towards the foreign language can definitely impede the teaching and learning of that language. Conversely, positive attitudes towards the foreign language improve learning. Attitudes can also be modified by experience and effective language teaching strategies that encourage students to learn the language enthusiastically. The study found that teachers' supportive attitude helped relieve students' anxiety and motivated them to exert more efforts in achieving the goals of learning the language. In his pioneering research in the field of attitudes, Gardner, (1985) found that students' attitudes are closely related to two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. Strictly speaking, instrumental motivation is associated with studying language to gain something, such as money or a better job. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is expressed in students' will to learn the language in order to become integrated into the target language culture. He concluded that integrative motivation is key for predicting classroom participation, language proficiency and persistence in language learning.

Liu and Zhang, (2013) conducted a study on the general patterns of Chinese university EFL students, learning anxiety and motivation and their relationship to the students' performance in English. The sample of the study consisted of 1697 students (921 females and 776 males) from

five universities. The researchers found that learners who are high on integrative motivation worked harder and learned faster than those who are low. In addition, one third of the students were scared of English classes and feared of being negatively evaluated. The study subjects were largely integratively and instrumentally motivated to learn English, fairly strongly motivated to learn English by personal development, moderately motivated to learn English by going aboard, and not motivated to learn English in their current learning situation. Based on these findings, Liu and Zhang made some recommendations: Chinese language teachers should be more responsible to help their students become more confident in the English class; they should set achievable and realistic goals and build a classroom environment; they must provide more chances to the learners to use the language; and they ought to foster positive attitudes towards English classes through open discussion and role play in a positive manner to avoid any negative attitudes.

A few years earlier, Moriam conducted a survey to find out what motivates the university students in Bangladesh to speak English. The study, conducted in 2008, involved 355 university undergraduate and graduate students (187 males and 168 females). Moriam was able to identify seven factors behind the drive to learn spoken English: foreign residence and friendship, second language speaking anxiety, determination to learn, securing a good job and gaining financial benefits, intrinsic motivation, the social appeal and increasing the social status.

Javid et al (2012) investigated Saudi undergraduates' motivational orientations for learning English as a foreign language. They concluded that the participants of the study (709 male and female students) exhibited higher extrinsic (instrumental) motivation with fairly high intrinsic (integrative) motivation. In comparison to their female counterparts, the male subjects were more positive towards both motivational orientations. In 2005, Csizer and Dornyei tackled the issue of gender differences in L2 motivation in Hungary to describe motivational profiles of L2 learners through cluster analysis. In this study, 8000 Hungarian students were involved. The results indicated that males dominated the least motivated clusters. The more motivated clusters, on the other hand, were largely populated by females. The findings of the study gave evidence that male students are less motivated L2 learners.

Abidinet al (2012) conducted a study on Libyan secondary school students, and Alseweed (2009) studied the Saudi secondary students to explore students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. Strikingly, both studies concluded that most of the subjects showed negative attitudes allegedly resulting from traditional techniques used by the EFL teachers. The students also had more negative behavioral attitudes and felt confused and nervous whenever they had to speak English in the classroom. In addition, students exhibited difficulty in applying the knowledge from English in their real life. The results of the studies showed that the attitudes of female secondary students towards learning English are more positive than those of the males.

Rahimi and Farvardin (2009) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between attitudes, self-confidence, and teacher and class evaluation of Iranian university students. The study comprised 50 participants (28 female and 22 male students). The researchers concluded that the students who evaluated their teachers favorably also evaluated their classes positively and vice versa. What's more, students with high self-confidence evaluated their teachers positively and believed that their English teachers' role in their self-confidence was effective and crucial. In addition, the study showed that the students' attitudes can greatly affect students' evaluation of teacher and class. Even more, students who had more faith in their teachers' abilities proved to have more positive attitudes towards language learning.

In addition, many studies have been conducted to explore the nature of law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in particular. In his study of the Turkish 'Baskent University', Colak (2008) found that most of the participants of the study had moderately positive attitudes towards learning English. In addition, Political Sciences students had the highest mean score. However, students from law faculty had the lowest mean score regarding the integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The researcher also found that Political Sciences students got the highest scores because they study English not only in English language courses, but also in some of political sciences courses. Furthermore, the students were required to do their assignments making use of articles written in English. By contrast, the students from law faculty had the lowest scores because they study English only in English courses and in their department only international law course is in English. The researcher also noted that students of law do not

need English in their job to be successful lawyers. In case they need English, they can ask for assistance from a professional translator.

Jalil and Kamardun (2009) stressed the necessity of English language in the legal profession and so they considered proficiency in the language as a prerequisite for effectiveness in law profession. Lawyers should be equipped with the necessary language skills to be able to deal with the complex legal terms, textbooks, journals, and reports, they added. This argument was reiterated by a previous study by these authors who investigated the needs of law students at the International Islamic University in Malaysia. The study surveyed 102 male and female students and concluded with the following: law students acknowledge the importance of English for both their academic success and future career; the students ranked writing skill as the most important followed by speaking, reading and writing; the students were highly motivated but lacked the confidence in using the language; and the majority of law students hardly use English outside the classroom and they use their mother tongue as the sole means of communication instead.

Rajeswaran (2006) asserted that the twenty first century is the age of globalization of law and the South East Asia countries should rise to this challenge. One of the challenges is the use of English among lawyers. He cited some attempts being implemented in Thailand where the government and other educational institutions are offering some courses in English for undergraduate students. As a result, more and more of their lawyers speak English than ever. Also, some of the courses in Business Law are given in English.

Methodology

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised 775 law students studying law at AAUJ for the Fall Semester 2013/2014. The distribution of population of the study is shown in Table (1) below.

Table (1): Distribution of the population of the study

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	264	34
Male	511	66
Total	775	100

A simple random sample, selected by drawing numbers, comprised 173 (58 females and 115 males) law students as shown in Table (2) below.

Table (2): Distribution of the sample of the study

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	58	34
Male	115	66
Total	173	100

Design of the Study

This study is quantitative. Thus, an adapted questionnaire was developed as a measuring instrument. The participants were asked to answer all the items of the questionnaire, stating their gender and attitudes (emotional, behavioral, cognitive and pedagogical) towards learning English as a foreign language.

Instrument of the Study

The researchers consulted several studies of attitudes and developed a 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Arabic to make sure the students, who have low English proficiency, would have more confidence in responding to the statements. The first part of the questionnaire involved the participant's gender and year of study; while the second part contained 30 items largely adapted from the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery designed by Gardner (1985), while other items were developed by the authors.

Reliability of the Instrument.

The reliability of the study was tested by using the Alpha Cronbach formula which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.90, which is significant and acceptable for the purpose of the study.

Validity of the Instrument

To investigate the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was given to two TEFL experts from AAUJ. They suggested some amendments and the questionnaire was modified accordingly. To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was piloted prior to carrying out the main study. Responding to the outcome from the pilot study, some of the terms were modified to make them more intelligible for law students.

The statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Program aiming to answer the research questions quantitatively. To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics was conducted to determine the percentages, the means and the standard deviations of the gathered data. Besides, since we needed to draw a comparison between two variables (males and females), an independent T- test was conducted to answer the second research question. Cronbach's Alpha formula was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

To answer the first question of the study, the authors examined the null hypothesis: "There are no significant differences at the $\alpha = .05$ in the mean scores of AAUJ law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language as demonstrated in their emotional, behavioral, cognitive and pedagogical aspects." The authors analyzed the data using means, standard deviations and percentages.

Students' Attitudes Towards English Language

The result of this descriptive analysis shows that the overall mean score of English language attitudes of law students at AAUJ in the four aspects of attitudes is 3.227 (SD 1.135). This mean score is equivalent to 64.6 %, as shown in Table 3.

Table (3): Students' Attitudes towards English Language

Aspects of attitudes	N	Percentage	SD	M
Emotional	173	60.5	1.219	3.025
Cognitive	173	64	1.202	3.20
Behavioral	173	71	1.082	3.545
Pedagogical	173	63	1.037	3.14
Overall Attitudes	173	64.6	1.135	3.227

N= Number of students SD = Standard deviation M = Mean

This result reveals that the participants have positive attitudes towards learning English.

The Emotional Attitude Towards English Language

Although the emotional aspect represents the lowest mean score (3.025, with a standard deviation of 1.219), the participants still have positive emotional attitudes as shown in Table 4.

Table (4): The emotional aspect of attitude towards English language

Item no.	Item	N	Percentage	SD	Mean
24	Learning English is really great.	173	71	1.227	3.53
2	I love learning English.	173	69	1.300	3.45
1	I really enjoy learning English.	173	66	1.145	3.29
29	I would rather spend my time on other subjects.	173	64	1.234	3.18
16	I hate English.	173	63	1.516	3.13
4	I plan to learn as much English as possible.	173	62	1.028	3.09
26	English is an important part of the college program.	173	61	1.407	3.06
3	When I leave college, I will give up the study of English.	173	58	1.091	2.92
19	I think that learning English is dull	173	53	1.166	2.64
8	Learning English is a waste of time.	173	40	1.078	1.99

The items with highest ranks were "Learning English is really great" (3.53), "I love learning English" (3.45) and "I really enjoy learning English" (3.29). The three lowest items were "Learning English is a waste of time" (1.99), "I think that learning English is English is

dull”(2.64) and “When I leave college, I will give up the study of English” (2.92). This reveals that law students at AAUJ love and enjoy learning English although their instruction language is Arabic. This result is in line with Rajeswar (2006) who asserted that the first step in learning English is to have a positive behavioral attitude.

The Cognitive Aspect of Attitude Towards English Language

The cognitive aspect represents the highest mean score of attitudes towards English ($M=3.545$, $SD = 1.082$). The majority of the respondents showed positive cognitive attitude as shown in Table 5.

Table (5): The cognitive aspect of attitude towards English language

Item no.	Item	N	Percentage	SD	Mean
15	Studying English can be important for me because it makes me a more knowledgeable person.	173	82	.997	4.11
12	Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and communicate with more people.	173	78	.952	3.92
30	Studying English is important because it enables me to understand English or American legal systems.	173	78	.991	3.89
6	Studying English can be important to me because I think it will be useful in getting a good job.	173	76	1.290	3.82
28	Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to communicate more freely with cultural groups.	173	76	.942	3.81
18	Studying English is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with my fellows who speak English.	173	68	1.102	3.39
7	Studying English is important because other people will respect me more.	173	57	1.207	2.86
14	Studying English is important only because I'll need it for my future career.	173	52	1.176	2.59

The results suggest that the motivations of law students at AAUJ are both integrative and instrumental. That is, the overall mean score of items 12, 30, 28 and 18 (which represent the integrative motivation) is 3.75 ($SD .997$). On the other hand, items 6, 7, 14 and 15 (which represent the instrumental motivation in the questionnaire) have an overall mean score of 3.34 ($SD 1.167$). This signals the high motivation of law students at AAUJ. More specifically, the differences in the mean scores of the eight items underline the importance of English in various aspects of life. According to AAUJ law students, English is a source of knowledge; a means for

building relationships, understanding other legal systems, finding a job and booting intercultural communication; and an instrument for effective communication.

The Behavioral Aspect of Attitude Towards English Language

With a mean score of 3.20 (SD1.202), the behavioral aspect is quite different from other dimensions. As can be seen from Table 6, the level of anxiety is high when it comes to learning English.

Table (6): The behavioral aspect of attitudes towards English language

Item no.	Item	N	Percentage	SD	Mean
22	I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class.	173	72	1.166	3.58
21	I always feel that other students speak English better than I do.	173	68	1.114	3.40
20	I never feel quite sure of myself when I speak in our English class.	173	65	1.309	3.23
17	It embarrasses me to willingly answer questions in our English class.	173	59	1.286	2.95
25	I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	173	57	1.135	2.86

This result reveals how much the participants feel and behave when they learn English as EFL though they have positive attitudes towards learning English. This study disclosed the common anxiety factors among EFL learners: confusion and nervousness, lack of confidence, embarrassment and fear of mockery. This is probably a result of the teacher's class management and lack of task-based instruction and student-centered activities such as role-play, dramatization, projects and creating a semi native speaker environment in the classroom.

The Pedagogical Attitude Towards English Language

The pedagogical aspect is mainly related to teaching strategies. The mean score of this aspect is 3, 14 (SD 1.037). Table 7 below shows the results in figures.

This result verifies the importance of English teachers in promoting positive attitudes in their students towards learning English as a foreign language. The lowest mean scores are for items 5

and 13, where the respondents stressed that they learn from their English teachers and their teachers helped them learn English.

Table (7): The pedagogical aspect of attitude towards English language

Item no.	Item	N	Percentage	SD	Mean
9	My English teachers help me learn English.	173	74	.926	3.71
27	I know more English now because of what I am learning in my English classes.	173	74	1.034	3.71
23	My English teachers know how to help me.	173	74	.996	3.69
13	My English teachers do not help me understand more English.	173	47	1.035	2.33
11	My English classes are good places to learn English.	173	61	1.052	3.06
10	I hardly learn English from my English teachers.	173	61	1.153	3.04
5	What I learn from my English teachers does not help me improve my English.	173	49	1.059	2.45

Language Attitudes and Participants' Gender

To answer the second question, the study examined the following null hypothesis: "There are no significant gender differences at the $\alpha = .05$ in the mean scores of AAUJ law students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language." To examine this hypothesis, the independent sample T- test was carried out as shown in Table 8 below.

Table (8): Result

Gender	N	M	SD	T-test	Significance
Female	58	3.19	0.27	1.055	0.293
Male	115	3.23	0.27		

Since the significance level (0.293) is more than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. That is, the attitudes of law students at AAUJ towards learning English are not affected by their gender.

Recommendations

To promote these positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, the researchers recommend the following:

- English for legal purposes courses should be included in the law students' study plan. These courses should integrate the four English language skills.
- Some courses in the law faculty might be taught in English. This entails employing faculty members who are proficient in English.
- Opening up opportunities for law student to participate (in English) in workshops, conferences and visits.
- Organizing competitions between law students, with generous rewards for the best English defense, pleading, cross-examination, translation...etc.
- More research should be done to identify the attitudes of students in other majors towards English learning.

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