

Saudi Secondary School Male Students' Attitudes towards English: An Exploratory Study

Mohammad S. Al-Alam Al-Zahrani
*Department of English Language and Literature,
College of Languages and Translation,
Imam University*

(Received 8/9/1427H.; accepted for publication 6/10/1427H.)

Abstract. The major purpose of this study is to assess the attitudes of Saudi EFL secondary school students towards English in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A 25-item questionnaire was completed by 320 male students who were randomly selected from five secondary schools in Riyadh. The results showed that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards English. A closer examination of data demonstrated that the less positive attitudes among some of the participants may have been a reaction to the instructional practices used by some teachers. The implications of the study findings for Saudi EFL classrooms are discussed.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the goal of language teaching is to maximize the learning outcomes of foreign (or second) language classes (Harmer, 1991; Allwright, 1990). Learners' attitudes towards the target language have been shown to play a key role in the learning of a second as well as foreign language (Gardener, 1985, 1968; Ellis, 1994; Prapphal, 1987; Brown, 1994; Krashen, 1982, 1984). Indeed, Gardener (1985) emphasizes that language-learning motivation is "the combination of effort plus desire, to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language", (1985: p. 10). Likewise, Krashen (1994, 1982, 1984), an SLA researcher, argues that negative attitudes towards the L2 prevent the input from reaching the language acquisition device. That is, learners with negative or hostile attitudes towards the target language will have a "high" affective filter, thus causing the comprehensible input containing $i + 1$ to fail to penetrate sufficiently to activate the posited natural language acquisition device. Conversely, if the affective filter is "low", as is the hypothesized case for learners with favorable attitudes to the L2, the comprehensible input gets through to the language

acquisition device, and successful language acquisition takes place.

Reviewing an extensive body of research on how important the affective filter in SLA is, Brown (1984) concludes, "Intuitively and empirically it is difficult to deny the claim that a "low" affective filter is necessary for success in a second language". Moreover, Buschenhofen (1998: p. 97) warns against taking students attitudes for granted since:

While improved instructional materials, syllabus design, and teaching approaches all play a role in improving learner achievement, such achievement is not maximized if the students do not exhibit a positive orientation towards their subject.

His warning is confirmed by research on L2 language attitudes, which indicates that positive attitudes towards the L2 do enhance learning, while negative attitudes tend to impede it (Ellis, 1994; Lightbown and Spada, 1999; Brown, 1994; Ehrman, 1996; Gardener, 1968).

The most compelling case to date for the necessity of positive attitudes to language learning success is advanced by Scarcella and Oxford (1992). They argue convincingly that positive attitudes spur learners to use the language more extensively which in turn increases the amount of input that learners

receive, a point that is supported by Krashen's claim above. Second, positive attitudes make it possible to learners to use a variety of learning strategies, which facilitate and enhance language learning. Thirdly, favorable attitudes encourage language learners to exert greater overall effort on the part of language learners, which will lead to greater success both at the levels of language proficiency and specific language skills. Finally, positive attitudes allow learners to maintain their language skills even after the classroom instruction has come to an end. All of these claims are supported by SLA research or by the language learning strategies research (Oxford, 1994).

Yet, the L2 learners' attitudes research indicates that foreign language teachers rarely take learners' attitudes (positive or otherwise) into consideration in the teaching process (Paul, 1996). This fact may explain why many learners are failing to succeed in foreign language learning even though they may have studied it for many years, as is the case in Saudi Arabia intermediate and secondary schools. This paper examines the attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language among Saudi secondary school students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. More specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards English as a foreign language?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards learning English language?

It is the researcher's belief that most EFL teachers wish their students had positive attitudes towards English and are willing to foster these attitudes in a variety of ways. However, if EFL teachers do not know exactly what their students' attitudes actually are or how important positive attitudes are, they will not be able to teach the EFL secondary school classes effectively.

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study is that its population is limited to the Riyadh area. As such, the findings cannot be generalized to all Saudi students.

Literature Review

While many studies assessing L2 attitudes have appeared in the past three decades, the number of studies investigating learners' attitudes towards foreign language learning in general and EFL in particular is relatively small. One possible reason for this lack of enough studies is the fact that many

foreign language researchers, like foreign language teachers mentioned above, take for granted that all learners' attitudes towards the foreign language are always positive. In this part of the paper, only studies focusing on learners' attitudes towards learning a foreign language (including studies dealing with EFL learners attitudes) will be reviewed. Second language attitudinal studies have been ignored in this review, as they tend to focus on the learners' attitudes towards the community of the target language speakers, and the degree of self-identification with the target language community. In other words, they investigate attitudinal variables or elements, which are not applicable to the context of foreign language learning as many researchers; have noted (Qin, 1998).

Prapphal and Oller (1982) conducted a study to investigate, among other things, whether attitudes towards English and demographic variables (such as formal exposure, high school GPA, etc.) were good predictors of attained English proficiency. The subjects were 528 Thai first-year university students in Bangkok, Thailand, most of whom had studied English as a foreign language in formal exposure for about 10 years. The findings of the study show that while both the Thai students' attitudes towards English and their high school GPAs were significantly related to English proficiency, the subjects' high school GPAs were the most reliable predictor of English proficiency in the study followed by the students' attitudes. To the researchers' surprise, formal exposure to English, one of the demographic variables, was not shown to be a good predictor of English proficiency.

Ogane and Sakamoto (1999) examined the attitudes of 110 EFL Japanese university students in Japan from different majors in an attempt to determine possible factors which contribute or influence the motivation in Japanese students. A 45-item motivation questionnaire consisting of a five-point Likert scale has been used to measure the students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The study finds that the students' motivation is substantially related to the variables of effort, desire and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language; anxiety, on the other hand, is not an important factor in motivation. Thus, the study provides empirical evidence to support Gardner's (1985) claim above that attitudes are a key component of motivation. While the Ogane and Sakamoto study has come up with very interesting findings on EFL students attitudes towards learning

English as a foreign language, a word of caution is in order here for several reasons. First of all, the study did not focus on examining the attitudes or their role *per se*. Rather, the attitudes represented a secondary objective to the study of motivation factors in general. Hence, its contribution to our understanding of the role of attitudes in foreign language learning or how they relate to students' L2 achievement is clearly bound to be limited. Secondly, the study used a relatively incomprehensive instrument to measure students' attitudes towards English. With only five questions, it is not possible to get a comprehensive view of the EFL students attitudes. Finally, the sample size of the study was, considering that their purpose was to develop a model of EFL motivation through a quantitative procedure, a problem that they themselves noted.

Lin and Warden (1998) surveyed 346 Taiwanese college students from nine different majors—and whose ages ranged from 17–20 years—regarding their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan. The subjects were asked to complete 15-item attitudinal questionnaire. However, even though a major purpose of the study was to assess the participants attitudes, nearly two thirds of the survey questions asked the participants questions about how their most favorite teaching methods (e.g., I like to learn English through grammar translation) or what skills their EFL teacher should focus on (e.g., speaking is the skill I like to learn most). In spite of this major limitation, the study has found that although the participants were equally interested in learning English, different majors had different preferences for different skills and teaching methods. Martin (1985) assessed, among other things, the EFL attitudes held by 236 Peruvian students enrolled in a private English language institute in Peru. The subjects displayed a wide range of differences regarding age (10-50), years of English study, and education level (college students, secondary school students, housewives, etc.). They were asked to answer a questionnaire made up of many components including reasons for studying English, and the preferred variety of English and so on. Very few questions focused on the participants' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The study concluded that the students had generally positive attitudes towards English language. However, with only a few questions focusing on the students' actual attitudes towards learning English, the findings of the study related to how the Peruvian

students felt about learning raised many more questions than it answered. For example, the study did not seem to provide any findings on what they thought of the value of learning English in Peru. As a matter of fact, it seems that it is more concerned with assessing motivation than with attitudes, even though the title of the study suggests that it is attitudinal in nature.

Pennington and Yue (1994) surveyed the attitudes towards English existing among secondary school students in Hong Kong, using an attitudinal questionnaire. The study found that there is a strong desire “to learn English on the part of Hong Kong secondary students without any strong sense that knowledge of English confers particular social benefits within the community”. Moreover, the subjects “do not associate the use of English with threats to their ethno-linguistic identity, nor do they wish to see English abandoned as a medium of instruction” (p. 18).

Buschenhofen (1998) in one of the most interesting attitudinal studies to date assessed the attitudes of 537 final year secondary school students as well as those of 734 first year college students in Papua New Guinea towards English. Students were asked to fill out a questionnaire of a Likert type with four alternatives according to whether the participants absolutely agree, quite agree, quite disagree or absolutely disagree with a statement. The results of the students' responses showed that a generally positive attitude by both groups towards English, which is at present is the medium of instruction from primary all the way to college education as well as the vehicle of professional communication in Papua New Guinea (Buschenhofen, 1998). For example, both groups strongly agreed with statements like:

1. I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English.
2. The command of English is very helpful in understanding expatriates and their cultures.
3. I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject at school.
4. The English language sounds very nice.
5. The use of English is one of the most crucial factors in the Papua New Guinea's development today.

Similarly, both groups disagreed strongly with statements reflecting “discomfort about Papuan New Guineans using English, a negative orientation to the educational status of English, and English as detracting from cultural identity” like:

1. English should not be a medium of instruction in Papua New Guinea.
2. At times, I fear that by using English I will become like an expatriate.
3. When using English, I do not feel that I am Papua New Guinean anymore (p.100).

Despite the striking similarities between both groups on most statements, Buschenhofen (1998) states that the responses of the two groups on some items were significantly different. However, no statistical tests were used to support this claim.

One of the most recent and interesting studies on the attitudes of EFL students is Malallah (2000). Malallah investigated the attitudes of three groups of university students most of whom are female Kuwaiti students taking English courses at Kuwait University. The first group consisted of 143 undergraduate students studying in different fields in the College of Arts in which Arabic was the medium of instruction. The second group consisted of 143 undergraduate students studying at the College of Science, where English is the medium of instruction. The third group was 123 students majoring in Arabic and Islamic studies, where Arabic is the medium of instruction. Similar to the objectives to the present study, Malallah investigated (a) students' attitudes towards learning English, (b) students' attitudes towards English language, (c) students' attitudes towards native speakers of English, (d) students' purposes of studying English, and (e) the place of English in Kuwait society.

Contradicting Al-Mutawa's (1994) findings, Malallah's students showed overall favorable attitudes towards learning English, the English language, the native speakers of English, students' purpose of studying English, and the place of the English language in the Kuwaiti society.

In conclusion, all of the studies reviewed above in both ESL and EFL contexts stress the importance of positive attitudes. Furthermore, they all found that students did not have negative attitudes towards English language. The present study is in line with the above studies in that it also stresses the importance of positive attitudes. As a matter of fact, it places a special importance on positive attitudes and the role it plays in the EFL context.

Methodology

Setting of the study

The present study was conducted in Riyadh, the

capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh's population is approximately 4,000,000. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education (2001, 2002), there are 40 educational districts with 357,104 male secondary school population. Being the largest city that consists of several towns, Riyadh District has 107 secondary schools, in which there are 52,657 male students. For the purposes of this study, five secondary schools were randomly selected in order to represent all secondary school population in Riyadh City. To ensure that the surveyed schools were appropriate representatives, the researcher randomly chose one high school from different parts of Riyadh City; that is, center, west, east, north, and south of Riyadh.

The research design

This study was conducted utilizing a 25-item attitudinal questionnaire. In order to get accurate statement of the students' attitudes and that participants had comprehended the items of the survey instrument, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Arabic; a procedure was done by most of the attitudinal studies reviewed above. The first four questions were intended to gather personal information about each participant, e.g. school year, the type of school attended (public or private), the overall proficiency of the student, etc. (see Appendix 1). The remaining 21 questions measured students' attitudes towards learning English language as well as their attitudes and their motivations towards learning English language itself. The participants completed the questionnaire during a class period under the supervision of the researcher or in the presence of a regular English teacher.

The questionnaire used in this study was a five-point Linkert scale whose items were selected from Pennington and Yue (1994) and the Buschhofen (1998) studies cited above, and were modified to suit the Saudi secondary school context. The modified version of the questionnaire asked the participants to respond to the items by selecting one of the five choices:

5- Absolutely agree, 4- Quite agree, 3- Do not know, 2- Quite disagree, 1- Absolutely disagree.

The researcher is fully aware of the possible drawbacks of using self-report instruments to measure attitudes. However, to the best of his knowledge, attitudes towards English among the participants could not have been measured otherwise. In addition, attempts have been made to minimize the

chance for this inconsistency by alternating the way in which questionnaire items were worded in that some questions were negatively worded and others were positively worded whenever possible. Oller and Perkins (1978) suggested that self-report instruments may generate inconsistent findings for many causes, including the approval motive, self-flattery, and response set. They state that approval motive may lead to answers based on what the respondents believe to be socially acceptable, whereas the self-flattery tendency results in positive self-ratings on attitudinal scales. Response set, according to them, is the tendency for respondents to be consistent in expressing themselves on questions with similar contents.

Since many questions on the questionnaire were worded positively, there is a possibility of a response set in the data. That is, the students may have answered some questions consistently, (especially if their responses were uniformly positive). It may be the case that these participants did actually have positive attitudes towards English.

Participants

The present study utilized three groups of Saudi male participants. The first group consisted of 160 first year secondary school students. The second group consisted of 90 second year secondary students with the third year secondary students being 66. The participants' ages ranged between 15-20 years. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants from each school year:

	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Total
No. of participants	164	90	66	320

The students have to study English as a required subject starting from the first year of intermediate school. That is, all participants of this study have studied English formally for at least three consecutive years.

Results and Discussion

For the purpose of discussion of the results, the questionnaire items were divided into three main sections; the first deals with questions that were either of a personal nature, e.g. whether students had studied English in commercial institutes or in private

schools, or asked students to evaluate their own proficiency or their parents'. The second section deals with the answer of the first research question, while the third section deals with the answer of the second research question of this study.

Section 1

Private institutes in Saudi Arabia offer courses in all EFL skills to students who either want to overcome linguistic difficulties they face at school or improve their English language proficiency for some instrumental objective. The inclusion of the first item "Have you studied English in private/commercial institute(s)?", was intended to know if, in principle, there was an enrollment in such institutes, and if so, was there any correlation between the enrollment and students' attitudes towards English? Table 1 shows this situation.

The analysis, however, shows that only 7.2% of the surveyed students have studied in private institute(s) and 92.8% did not. Thus, the correlation was not taken any further.

Similarly, the second item was intended to examine whether the type of school had any correlation with the attitudes of students. The following table explains the correlation in question.

The results of the analysis showed that only 10 students or 3.1% of the 320 students had studied in private institution. In other words, the majority of students received their English instruction through government schools. Consequently, no further statistical analysis was performed

Saudi students, like all other students in the Gulf area, as stated by Hammash *et al.* (1989) faced difficulties in English that are reflected in their relatively poor English proficiency. Despite such difficulties, the majority of students surveyed in this study do not seem to underestimate their English language proficiency. That is, while they were expected to report that their proficiency was poor, as many as 45% thought that their English was "good", 36% "very good" and 4.4% "excellent".

The third item asked students to evaluate their own English proficiency. Students were asked to choose one of five choices: (1) Very poor, (2) Weak, (3) Good, (4) Very good, (5) Excellent. The results were as follows:

Only 1.3% and 12.5% evaluated their English proficiency as "very poor" and "poor", respectively. This finding urges us to assume that students do not underestimate their potentials. Such a positive view

Table 1. Students' responses to the question "Have you studied English in private institute?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Valid	No	297	91.7	92.8	92.8
	Yes	23	7.1	7.2	100.0
	Total	32	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.2		
Total		324	100.0		

Table 2. Students' responses to the question "Did you study elementary and/or high school in a private school?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Valid	No	310	95.7	96.9	96.9
	Yes	10	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	320	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.2		
Total		324	100.0		

Table 3. Students' responses to the question "How do you evaluate your English proficiency?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	V. Poor	4	1.2	1.3	1.3
	Poor	40	12.3	12.5	13.8
	Good	144	44.4	45.0	58.8
	V.Good	118	36.4	36.9	95.6
	Excellent	14	4.3	4.4	100.0
	Total	320	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.2		
Total		324	100.0		

may well be a reflection of students' strong motivation, a matter that might have helped them to have positive attitudes, as will be shown through the rest of the analysis.

The fourth item was included to see if the English proficiency of the parents had any effect on the students' attitudes.

The above table shows that the students' evaluation of their parents' English proficiency was generally positive. As many as 31% thought that their parents' English proficiency was "excellent", 13.1% think it was "very good", and 17.8 "good". On the other hand, only 17.5% and 20% thought their parents' English proficiency was "poor" and "very poor", respectively.

The following Table 5 showed the mean and the two-tailed significance of the following four items.

The above table shows that the two-tailed significance is 0.000. Most of the students didn't

study in private schools or institutes, and yet they think quite highly of their English proficiency and their parents'.

Section 2

The answer of the first research question: (What are the students' attitudes towards English as a foreign language?).

The next eight items (10–17) of the questionnaire dealt directly with the attitudes of the participants towards English as a foreign language. The above items were grouped under the following two categories:

Category 1: Students' orientation towards English

The first category consists of six items (10, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17). The students' responses are shown in the following table.

Table 4. Students' responses to the question "How do you evaluate your parents' English proficiency?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	V. Poor	64	19.8	20.0	20.0
	Poor	56	17.6	17.5	37.5
	Good	57	17.3	17.8	55.3
	V.Good	42	13.0	13.1	68.4
	Excellent	101	31.2	31.6	100.0
	Total	320	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.2		
Total		324	100.0		

Table 5.

	One-sample Test					
	test Value = 0					
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
Lower					upper	
1- Have you studied English in private institute?	4.970	319	.000	.07	.04	.10
2- Did you study Elem and/or high school in private school?	3.208	319	.001	.03	.01	.05
3- How well do you know English?	74.697	319	.000	3.13	3.22	3.39
4- How well does your father know English?	37.268	319	.000	3.19	3.02	3.36

Table 6.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
0 - I should not be forced to learn English.	20.3%	24.4%	12.5%	18.8%	24.1%
3 - Reading English magazines is a kind of enjoyment.	12.2%	11.9%	11.9%	46.6%	17.5%
4 - I love conversing with the English native speaker in English.	9.7%	11.3%	6.3%	39.7%	33.1%
5 - I feel lack confidence when speaking English.	22.5%	34.4%	17.8%	13.1%	12.2%
5 - I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject in school	13.4%	5.0%	4.1%	40.0%	37.5%
7. - It is good to have English as a FL.	36.9%	28.8%	20.8%	5.6%	8.8%

The first category aimed at examining students' orientation towards English. Students' responses to the six questions below showed some inconsistencies. Their responses to the statement "I should not be forced to study English", as shown in Table 5, indicate an approximately even distribution. Nearly 44% were in favor of the English being an optional subject, whereas 43% thought that it should be a compulsory subject. This split of opinion and the quite high percentage of students not favoring English as a compulsory subject may well be attributed to the fact that English has always been one of the most difficult subjects in Saudi schools, hence the most highly flunked subject for many students. This rather possible explanation is further supported by the students' responses to the statement "Reading English magazines is a kind of enjoyment", for the majority of students, 17.5% and 46.6%, chose disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

The third statement was intended to examine the students' attitudes towards communicating with the native speakers of English. Results showed that 39.7% of the students, and 33.1% did not like conversing with native speakers. While a negative attitude may be detected here, it may also be explained that such reluctance is due to their beginning level of proficiency, which often makes them feel shy to use English with native speakers. Another possible reason may be the fear of either not being understood or not being able to understand the native speakers' English. Such a justification is further supported by the results of the following statements "I feel I lack confidence when speaking English" as shown in Table 5 below. Twenty two percent of the students strongly agreed and 34.4% agreed that they felt unconfident to speak English with native speakers. On the other hand, only 13.1% disagreed and 12.2% strongly disagreed with

statement above.

The fifth statement was "*I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject in school*". Similar to the results obtained from statement 1 in this category, the students' were not in favor of this statement. In other words, if they were given a choice, they would not choose English as a subject of study. Again, the reason behind this negative response may, as mentioned above, be due to the difficulties students often face in studying English.

Responses to the last statement, "*It is good to have English as a FL*", suggest that the dominant

The two-tailed significance is 0.000, which indicates that students enjoy reading English books and like talking in English. Their attitudes seemed positively towards English.

Category 2

Discomfort about Saudis using English

The second category consists of two items: (11 and 12). The students' responses are stated in the following Table 8.

The above table shows that most of the students disagreed strongly with the statement "*I feel uncomfortable when hearing a Saudi speaking to*

Table 7.

	One-sample Test					
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	upper
10- I should not be forced to learn English.	32.267	319	.000	2.14	2.01	2.27
13- Reading English magazines is a kind of enjoyment.	36.302	319	.000	3.02	2.86	3.18
14- I love conversing with the English native speaker in English.	49.276	319	.000	3.45	3.32	3.59
15- I feel lack confidence when speaking English.	35.493	319	.000	2.58	2.44	2.72
16- I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject in school.	52.111	319	.000	3.75	3.61	3.89
17- It is good to have English as a FL.	87.976	319	.000	4.54	4.44	4.64

Table 8.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
11- I feel uncomfortable when hearing a Saudi speaking to another in English	30.9%	18.1%	13.1%	17.2%	20.6%
12- I feel uneasy when hearing a Saudi speaking English to a foreigner.	10.9%	13.8%	14.4%	29.7%	31.3%

SA: Strongly agree, A: Agree, DNK: Do not know, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly disagree.

Table 9.

	One-sample Test					
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	upper
11- I feel uncomfortable when hearing a Saudi speaking to another in English	48.046	319	.000	3.45	3.31	3.59
12- I feel uneasy when hearing a Saudi speaking English to a foreigner	33.996	319	.000	2.36	2.22	2.50

attitude of students is a favorable one, as revealed by their strong agreement with the sixth statement.

Table 7 shows the means and the two-tailed significance of the following items.

another in English". As shown in Table 8 above, 30.9% strongly agreed and 18.1% agreed. On the other hand, 20.6%, strongly disagreed and 17.2% disagreed. Such a difference between the two groups,

though not very distinctive, may reveal that Saudi students find speaking English amongst their peers justifiable. This rejection may be attributed to the fear that their L1, Arabic, which students viewed as holy and prestigious as will be shown below, may be negatively influenced when English is used to fulfill everyday communicative needs. Contrary to their relatively negative reaction against a fellow Saudi speaking English to another, students showed no reservations on Saudis speaking English with foreigners. They disagreed most with the statement "I feel uneasy when hearing a Saudi speaking English to a foreigner". That is, 31.3% strongly disagreed, and 29.7% disagreed to such a statement.

Table 9 expresses the results of this category. It shows the means and two-tailed significance (possibilities).

In sum, the results obtained from students' responses to the two statements indicate, without a

Table 10.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
5 - When using English, I do not feel that I am a Saudi anymore.	5.0%	11.9%	12.2%	33.8%	37.2%
6 - If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic.	3.2%	5.4%	13.2%	40.1%	38.2%
7 - At times I fear that by using English I will become like an expatriate.	6.9%	16.3%	11.3%	37.2%	28.4%
8 - Arabic is more prestigious than English.	74.4%	12.5%	7.5%	3.8%	1.9%
9 - I feel I am still a Saudi citizen even if I used English.	66.6%	19.4%	3.8%	3.4%	6.9%

SA: Strongly agree, A: Agree, DNK: Do not know, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly disagree.

Table 11.

One-sample test						
test Value = 0						
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	upper
5- When using English, I do not feel that I am a Saudi any more.	26.805	319	.000	1.99	1.84	2.14
6- If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic.	32.444	319	.000	2.79	2.62	2.96
7- At times I fear that by using English I will become like an expatriate	34.001	319	.000	3.01	2.83	3.18
8- Arabic is more prestigious than English.	54.624	319	.000	3.79	3.66	3.93
9- I feel I am still a Saudi citizen even if I used English.	52.658	319	.000	3.77	3.63	3.91

doubt, that there is no resentment against the English language per se. Rather, it is against its use amongst Saudis on the expense of Arabic.

Section 3

The answer of the second question: What are the students' attitudes towards learning English language?

The next 13 items (5–9, and 18–25) of the

questionnaire dealt directly with the students' attitudes towards learning English language. The above items were grouped under the following four categories:

Category 1: Using English and students' cultural identity

This category consists of five questions that asked students to indicate their attitudes by choosing one of the five choices given. Table 10 shows the students' responses.

As can be seen in Table 10, the majority of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed to statements 1, 2 and 3 above. These results, which reveal positive attitudes towards English, are in line with Malallah (2000) and Buschenhofen (1998) studies. Such positive attitudes, however, did not cause students to feel that using English would pose a threat to their cultural or ethno-linguistic identity as

seen by their responses to the statement "Arabic is more prestigious than English".

This finding is further supported by students' strong agreement with the statement "I feel I am still a Saudi citizen even if I used English". Their responses reveal that speaking English does not affect their Saudi citizenship.

Table 11 reveals the means, standard deviations and the possibilities of the first category that deals

with using English and students' cultural identity.

In Table 11, item 8 has the highest mean (3.79), whereas item 5 has the lowest mean (1.99), indicating that the students' attitudes towards learning English. In other words, they do not think that by speaking English they would be like expatriates.

Category 2: Social and instrumental value of English

This is another part of the questionnaire examined students' attitudes from a social and instrumental perspective. This category consisted of the four statements listed in Table 12.

Students' responses indicate their positive attitudes towards the social value of the English language. Almost 80% of the student population agreed with the statement "*English is a mark of an educated person*", and approximately 14% disagreed. Similarly, 24.4% strongly agreed and 44.1% agreed

Table 12.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
18 - English is a mark of an educated person	35.3%	44.1%	6.6%	7.5%	6.6%
19 - If I use English, I will be praised and approved by my family, relatives and friends.	24.4%	31.3%	20.6%	12.8%	10.9%
20 - If I use English, my status is raised..	27.5%	36.9%	13.1%	14.1%	8.4%
21 - English is one of the most crucial factors in the development of Saudi Arabia	37.5%	39.4%	6.3%	8.1%	8.8%

SA: Strongly agree, A: Agree, DNK: Do not know, D : Disagree, SD: Strongly disagree

Table 13.

One-sample Test						
test Value = 0						
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	upper
18- English is a mark of an educated person.	50.240	319	.000	3.88	3.73	4.03
19- If I use English, I will be praised and approved by my family, relatives and friends.	67.299	319	.000	4.35	4.23	4.48
20- If I use English, my status is raised.	51.359	319	.000	3.61	3.47	3.75
21- English is one of the most crucial factors in the development of Saudi Arabia.	37.314	319	.000	3.22	3.05	3.39

Table 14.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
22- I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English	70.9%	17.2%	1.9%	3.8%	6.3%
23- The command of the English language is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their cultures	59.7%	28.8%	3.1%	2.5%	5.9%

with the second statement "*If I use English, I will be praised and approved by my family, relatives and friends*", thereby confirming their positive attitudes

towards English.

Table 13 indicates the means, standard deviations and the two-tailed significance in order to know the students' attitudes towards learning English language.

The above table shows higher means of the above items with the two-tailed significance being less than 0.050. This gives another piece of evidence that students' attitude towards learning English language is positive.

Category 3: Perceived cognitive gains of English language learning

The two statements included under this category were intended to examine the students' perceived cognitive gains of English language learning as well as their motivation.

Table 14 suggests that students' attitude towards English language learning is a favorable one. As

many as 70.9% strongly agreed with the statement "*I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English*" and 17.2% agreed. Quite the opposite, only 6.3% strongly

disagreed and 3.8% disagreed.

In a similar vein, the students' expressed their positive attitudes by responding to the statement "*The command of the English is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their cultures*". Almost 60% strongly agreed to the above mentioned statement and 28.8% agreed, whereas only 5.9% strongly disagreed and 2.5% disagreed. This contrast in the responses of students confirms that their attitude towards English language learning is unquestionably positive.

The following one-sample T-test shows the results of the third category in relation to "perceived cognitive gains of English language learning".

Table 15 shows the result of the two-tailed significance being less than 0.050, with higher means of the two items above indicating students' positive attitudes towards learning English language.

responses in Table 16 below.

Students were asked to respond to the statements "*The English language sounds very nice*" and "*I like to see English-speaking films*". Their responses to the former were very positive, in that 27.5% strongly agreed and 42.2% agreed, with only 12.2% strongly disagreed and 6.9% disagreed. Similar to their responses to the first statement, 43.4% strongly agreed to the second statement and 34.1% agreed. Taking these responses together, it may be freely stated that students surveyed in this study hold a favorable attitude towards English.

The following table shows the results of the last category pertaining to intrinsic quality of English. Item (24) with a mean of (3.83) provides another piece of evidence of positive attitudes towards learning English language.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the majority of students have positive attitudes towards both the

Table 15.

	One-sample Test					
	test Value = 0					
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	upper	
22- I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English	55.999	319	.000	3.89	3.75	4.02
23- The command of the English language is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their cultures	50.984	319	.000	3.66	3.52	3.80

Table 16.

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
4 - The English language sounds very nice.	27.5%	42.2%	11.3%	6.9%	12.2%
5 - I like to see English-speaking films	43.4%	34.1%	2.5%	6.9%	13.1%

SA: Strongly agree, A: Agree, DNK: Do not know, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly disagree.

Table 17.

	One-sample Test					
	test Value = 0					
	f	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	upper	
24 - The English language sounds very nice.	55.999	319	.000	3.89	3.75	4.02
25 - I like to see English-speaking films	50.984	319	.000	3.66	3.52	3.80

Category 4: Intrinsic quality of English

Two of the questionnaire items examined the intrinsic quality of English as seen by students'

English language per se, and learning it as a foreign language. It is, however, quite natural in an EFL context to find some students with less positive

attitudes towards learning English, as was found in other EFL studies. This may be attributed to the difficulty some students face in learning English, or at least in passing the English subject.

Conclusion

The study attempted to address one major issue, namely "Saudi students' attitudes towards learning English". Based on the findings above, it quite clearly showed that commonly held impression among many teachers and parents that Saudi students in general are not interested in learning English is definitely unfounded. The students' attitudes are generally positive, if not very positive. Thus, the study suggests the difficulties faced by many students at the secondary school level cannot be attributed to the students' attitudes, but they may be caused by some other factors such as inappropriate teaching styles, the techniques being used, (in) sufficiency of exposure to English. Indeed, while the textbooks used in Saudi secondary schools are task-based, the researcher did notice a tendency among several teachers of English to use the grammar translation method or audio-lingual methods even though the task could have been performed using more communicative, more interesting, and therefore more effective techniques. This last finding shows that students are deeply interested in mastering English as a foreign language in spite of the poor teaching methods used by some English language teachers at the secondary school level in Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations

A major finding of this study is that the attitudes of the surveyed students were generally positive and that the difficulties they face cannot be attributed to their attitudes. As such, it is recommended that EFL researchers should examine other factors that may be responsible for the difficulties students have in English, among which is the curriculum, the teaching methods used, and the learning environment. Of a special importance is the teaching method. EFL instructors should use the teaching methods that suit their students and keep them motivated.

References

Allwright, R. L. "What Do We Want Teaching Materials For?" In: R. Rossner and R. Boitho (Eds.), *Currents of Change in English Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, (1990).

- Al-Mutawa, N.** "Factors Influencing English Language Teaching and Learning in the Secondary Schools of Kuwait." *Educational Sciences* (Institute of Educational Studies, Cairo University), Vol. 1, No. 2, (1994), 33-62.
- Brown, H. D.** "The Consensus: Another View." *Foreign Language Journal*, Vol. 17, (1984), 277-279.
- Brown, H. D.** *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 3rd ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, (1994).
- Buschenhofen, P.** "English Language Attitudes of Final-year High School and First-year University Students in Papua New Guinea." *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol. 8, (1998), 93-116
- Coleman, J.** "Residence Abroad within Language Study." *Language Teaching*, Vol. 30, (1997), 1-20.
- Ehrman, M. E.** *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, (1996).
- Ellis, Rod.** *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1994).
- Gardner, R. C.** "Attitudes and Motivation: Their Role in Second Language Acquisition." *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 2, (1968), 141-150.
- Gardner, R. C.** *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold, (1985).
- Harmer, J.** *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. 3rd ed., London: Longman, (1991).
- Krashen, S.** *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York, NY: Pergamon, (1982).
- Krashen, S.** "Practical Applications of Research." In: *Psycholinguistic Research ACTFL Yearbook*. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook, (1983), pp. 54-65.
- Krashen, S.D. and Terrell, T.D.** *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, (1983).
- Krashen, S.** "The Input Hypothesis and Its Rivals." In: Nick Ellis (Ed.), *Implicit and Explicit Learning of Languages*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, (1994).
- Larsen-Freeman, D.** *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, (1984).
- Larsen-Freeman, D. and Long, M. H.** *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. London: Longman Group UK Limited, (1991).
- Lightbown, P. and Spada, Nina.** *How Languages Are Learned*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, (1999).
- Lin, Hsiu-Ju and Warden, C.** "Different Attitudes among Non-English Major EFL Students." *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 10, (1998), 1-8.
- Malallah, S.** "English in an Arabic Environment: Current Attitudes to English among Kuwaiti University Students." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Vol. 3, (2000), 19-43.
- Martin, G.** "Peruvian Student Attitudes towards English." *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 19, (1985), 607-609.
- Nunan, D.** "Communicative Tasks and the Language Curriculum." *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 25, (1991), 56-72.
- Ogane, E. and Sakamoto, M.** "SEM: Relationship among EFL Motivation and Proficiency Factors." *TUJ Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 14, (1999), 1-19.
- Oller, J.W., Jr. and Perkins, K.** "Language Proficiency as a Source of Variance in Self-reported Affective Variables." In: J.W. Oller, Jr. and K. Perkins (Eds.), *Language in Education: Testing the Tests*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, (1978).
- Oxford, R.** *Language Learning Strategies: An Update*. ERIC Digest. ED376707, (1994).

- Paul, D.** "Why Are We Failing?" *The Language Teacher Online*, Vol. 20, No. 9, (1996), Document URL: <http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/96/sept/fail.html>.
- Pennington, M.C. and Yue, F.** "The Place of English and Chinese in Hong Kong: Assessing Pre-1997 Language Attitudes." *World Englishes*, Vol. 13, (1994), 1-20.
- Prapphal, K.** "Communication as the Ultimate Goal of English Learning for Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Thai Students." *BABEL*, Vol. 22, (1997), 40-44.
- Prapphal, K. and Oller, J. W.** "Some Factors in Learning English in Thailand." *RELC Journal*, Vol. 13, (1982), 78-86
- Rossner, R. and Bolitho, R. (Eds.).** *Currents of Change in English Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, (1990).
- Qin, X.** "An Investigation into the Internal Structure of EFL Motivation at the Tertiary Level in China." *Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Nanjing University*, (1998).
- Scarcella, R. and Oxford, R.** *The Tapestry of Language Learning: The Individual in the Communicative Classroom*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, (1992).

المراجع العربية

ميدانية. إعداد الدكتور خليل إبراهيم حماش، والأستاذة حكمة عبد الله البزاز، والدكتور عواد جاسم التميمي، الكويت، ١٤٠٩هـ (١٩٨٩م).

مكتب التربية العربي لدول الخليج، المركز العربي للبحوث التربوية لدول الخليج. تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في مراحل التعليم العام بدول الخليج العربي: دراسة

Appendix 1

- Name: ()
- Date of Birth: (/ /)
- 1 Have you studied English in private/commercial institute(s)? Yes () No ()
- 2- Did you study your elementary and intermediate stages in private school(s)? Yes (), No ()
- 3- How do you evaluate your English proficiency? Very Poor () Poor () Good () Very Good () Excellent ()
- 4- How do you evaluate your parents' English proficiency? Very Poor () Poor () Good () Very Good () Excellent ()

Appendix 2

	SA	A	DNK	D	SD
5- When using English, I do not feel that I am a Saudi any more.					
6- If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic.					
7- At times I fear that by using English I will become Like an expatriate.					
8- Arabic is more prestigious than English.					
9- I feel I am still a Saudi citizen even if I used English.					
10- I should not be forced to learn English.					
11- I feel uncomfortable when hearing a Saudi speaking to another in English.					
12- I feel uneasy when hearing a Saudi speaking English to foreigner.					
13- Reading English magazines is a kind of enjoyment.					
14- I love conversing with the English native speaker in English.					
15- I feel lack of confidence when I speak English.					
16- I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject in school.					
17- It is good to have English as a FL.					
18- English is a mark of an educate person.					
19- If I use English, I will be praised and approved by my family, relatives and friends.					

- 20- If I use English, my status is raised.
 - 21- English is one of the most crucial factors in the development of Saudi Arabia.
 - 22- I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English.
 - 23- The command of the English language is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their cultures.
 - 24- The English language sounds very nice.
 - 25- I like to see English –speaking films.
-

اتجاهات طلاب الثانوية السعوديين نحو اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة استكشافية

محمد سعيد العلم الزهراني

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات والترجمة،

جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

(قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٧/٩/٨هـ؛ وقبل للنشر في ١٤٢٧/١٠/٦هـ)

ملخص البحث. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة اتجاهات طلاب الثانوية السعوديين بمدينة الرياض نحو اللغة الإنجليزية. جمعت بيانات الدراسة من خلال استبانة مكونة من ٢٥ فقرة، وزعت على ٣٢٠ طالباً تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من خمس مدارس ثانوية بمدينة الرياض. بينت نتائج الدراسة أن اتجاهات الغالبية العظمى من الطلاب المشاركين في الدراسة كانت إيجابية نحو اللغة الإنجليزية، كما كشفت الدراسة أن اتجاهات نسبة قليلة من الطلاب كانت سلبية، الأمر الذي يمكن عزوه إلى بعض طرق التدريس التقليدية المستخدمة في تدريس مادة اللغة الإنجليزية. وفي ضوء نتائج الدراسة، تمت مناقشة بعض الجوانب المتعلقة بطريقة التدريس ودورها في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية داخل الفصل الدراسي.