

The Language Attitude of Senior High School Students towards English Language

Authors : Fia Vauliany Br Siringo-ringo^{1*}, Ketut Artawa², Yana Qomariana³

Affiliations : ^{1,2,3} Udayana University

*Correspondence : viasiringoringo@gmail.com

Abstract : English is one of the most important languages for students to learn since it is the most spoken language in the world and has long become the global lingua franca. Hence, this study is aiming to find out the attitude of students, particularly senior high school students towards the English language. This study applied the combination of the two methods, the quantitative one in analyzing the data, and the qualitative method in providing the results of the research. Meaning, the data observed were in the form of circular diagrams, and the provided results were in the form of word collection. The data were obtained from a prepared questionnaire concerning students' language attitudes toward the English language. The subjects of the questionnaire were the students of X-5 and X-7 graders of SMA Negeri 1 Kabanjahe for the academic year of 2022 with a total number of fifty students. The result showed that the dominant attitude reflected by the students is positive.

Keywords : *language attitude, English language, senior high school*

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1. Introduction

Language attitude can be defined as an evaluative reaction toward different language varieties. People will always have attitudes, feelings, and beliefs regarding language in general, the language of other people as well as their own language. People could be proud and happy when other people hear their language and some others could be embarrassed instead. People may be excited to learn other languages, but some others may be reluctant and even totally have no will to do it. Some people may prefer to use other languages to their own language. All of these situations present the existence of language attitudes. Most simply, language attitude can be divided into two categories, positive and negative attitudes.

Studying the language attitudes of students towards the English language is interesting because it is one of the factors that encourage their motivation and enthusiasm in learning the language. The concern about the learners' attitudes toward the target language was emphasized by Gardner et al (1985), who stated that the attitude of a learner in learning another language plays a key role in motivating them to learn that language. Kara (2009) stated that apart from opinions and beliefs, attitudes toward learning have a certain influence on the behavior of students and consequently on their performance. It has been argued that students possessing positive beliefs about language learning will have a tendency for improving a more positive attitude towards language learning. There are many various reasons why students' attitudes toward language learning are important. "Attitude is one of the factors influencing foreign language learning since how much effort students put into language learning depends in part on their attitudes" (Gardner, et al 1985).

Furthermore, in the study conducted by Seyyed Behrooz Hosseini (2013) entitled "Language Learners' Attitudes and Beliefs: Brief Review of the Related Literature and Frameworks" It was proven that attitude and perception play an important role in enabling learners to learn effectively. It was stated that the motivation of students, the types of assignments given, cultural background, and previous experience all contribute to the way learners behave toward their understanding of learning strategies and their ability to sustain higher levels of learning. The study also found out that students need to have a clear understanding of the language taught and student beliefs, because learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave be productive in class, work harder outside of class, and (most importantly) last longer with language learning. The study concluded that having a positive or negative attitude toward certain languages and the way students perceive that language can have a considerable influence on their performance in the language itself.

English has been appointed to be the international language or the global lingua franca for a very long time. It was contended by Crystal (2000) and Nunan (2001), as well as British Council (2013), that the spread of English has been providing immeasurable access to the modern world of science, information, and communications technology (ICT), money, power, international communication, intercultural understanding, entertainment, and many other fields.

The widespread usage of English made it being taught in over 118 countries, including Indonesia. English is commonly started being taught to students from the third grade of primary school but several schools required students to learn English from the first grade of primary school or even from elementary school.

English presently becomes more and more important for students, especially the ones who have been at senior high school level, for their future since almost every occupation started to consider that English ability is a significant qualification. It is hardly ever to find a job vacancy that does not require a postulant to have the ability to use English. For students who want to continue their education at university, English will be one of the subjects they study no matter what major they take. Thus, both for finding a job and studying in university, English ability includes one of the important aspects for the qualification.

Not only learning English is important, but it is also good for our brains. In an article written by Roitman (2013), it is stated: "Because the language centers in the brain are so flexible, learning a second language can develop new areas of your mind and strengthen your brain's natural ability to focus, entertain multiple possibilities, and process information,".

Senior High School students are expected to have better English language proficiency since they are the generation who will soon live college and working life. However, it was observed that most students find it hard to keep up with the lessons taught in class and in the end even consider English as a less important or even unimportant thing to learn. The researcher associated this problem with students' attitudes toward English itself. This study looked at the concept of attitude as one of the main affective factors to be able to learn English effectively. More specifically, it investigated the attitudes of high school students towards English, especially in the classroom, taking into account several assessment variables.

2. Method

The data of this analysis were obtained from a prepared questionnaire regarding language attitudes toward the English language that took senior high school students of X-5 and X-7 graders of SMA Negeri 1 Kabanjahe for the academic year of 2022 as the subjects. The data was collected by asking the subjects to fill out the questionnaire prepared by the researcher. Afterward, the result of the questionnaire was read and analyzed with the final intention of finding a conclusion.

The method used in conducting this research was the descriptive quantitative method. This method is also known as survey research (Gay et al 2012: 183) in which the data were collected numerically with the purpose to answer questions about the right status of the subject of a study. This research method involves collecting data to examine hypotheses or to answer questions about people's points of view regarding a topic or an issue. Furthermore, Creswell (2012: 376) argued that in applying this method, a researcher surveys samples to describe their attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of them. Thus, the data in this study were analyzed and presented statistically by using tables and numbers that were elaborated descriptively. The questionnaire was provided in the form of word collection and the results were in the form of circular diagrams.

The data were analyzed by using some sort of theories of sociolinguistics proposed by several experts, such as Crystal (1992), Petty and Cacioppo (1982), Lambert (1967), and David Olorunsogo (2017). In presenting the result of the analysis, a combination of the formal and informal methods was used, in which the numerical data were explicated by using a collection of words.

3. Result and Discussion

The analysis in this study was conducted by using the theories of sociolinguistics provided below.

3.1 Language Attitude

Aristotle defined language as a speech sound produced by human beings to express their ideas, emotions, thoughts, desires, and feelings. Language is one of the most important things in any society because it is the means people use to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Melander (2003) referred language to as a social act that can give people information about the person they are listening to. Each human being has his/ her own attitude towards any language including their mother tongue, their national language, their second language, and any language they acquire and learn.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, attitude refers to a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior. Thus, it can be inferred that language attitude is the feeling someone reflects about language that is indicated by his/ her behavior. According to Crystal (1992), language attitude is the feeling people have about their own language or the language of others. In *Baker* 1988: 112-115, it is stated that attitude is a complex construction and it can be positive and negative. Furthermore, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) argued that the term attitude should refer to a general positive or negative feeling about something. Thus, it can be said that language attitude can be classified into two categories namely positive attitude and negative attitude. It would be considered a positive attitude when someone is enthusiastic about using the language, proud of it, and trying to keep it. On the other hand, someone will be considered to have a negative attitude towards a language when she/ he seems to be reluctant to use the language or embarrassed about it and even tries to stop using it.

According to Lambert (1967), attitudes consist of three components. These are the cognitive, affective, and conative components (Dittmar 1976: 181). The cognitive component refers to an individual's belief structure involving conscious intellectual activity such as thinking, reasoning, or remembering, the affective component refers to something that evokes feelings, or emotional actions or actions driven by feelings, while the conative component comprehends the tendency to behave in a certain way towards the attitude, can also be referred to as the way the attitude we have influences on how we act or behave. (Gardner et al, 1985).

David Olorunsogo (2017) explicated some factors affecting someone's attitude towards a language in his article, those are historical factors, sociocultural factors, prestige and power of the language, political factors, economic factors, religion, ethnicity, language policy, occupation, social class, and language policy among others.

3.2 Result and Discussion

The results of the language attitude questionnaire whose subjects are the students of X-5 and X-7 graders of SMA Negeri 1 Kabanjahe for the academic year of 2022 with a total number of fifty students showed that the subjects reflect different attitudes towards the English language. The results of the questionnaire are attached below.

Table 1. Language attitude questionnaire results concerning the cognitive components

Statements/ Questions	Percentage (%)			
	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. You are excited about learning English because it makes your parents or your teacher proud.	60%	24%	14%	2%
2. You are excited about learning English because you want to get a good mark at school.	62%	18%	20%	-%
3. English is important for you because you want to communicate with foreigners.	48%	52%	-%	-%
4. English is important for you because you want to make friends with foreigners.	48%	44%	6%	2%
5. English is important for you because you want to study abroad.	36%	30%	34%	-%
6. English is important for you because you may need it later for your job	36%	64%	-%	-%
7. English is important for you because all educated people must be able to use English.	58%	30%	8%	4%
8. You learn English because you have to.	50%	28%	22%	-%
9. You think you are able to use English well.	50%	4%	44%	2%
10. You like to assess other people's English skills.	46%	8%	40%	6%
11. You believe that with intensive practice, you can master the	48%	44%	8%	-%

English language.				
12. English is an important language for you to know.	46%	50%	4%	-%

Table 1 above shows the result of the assessment of the student's attitude toward English in accordance with the cognitive component. The assessment was concerned with the student's intellectual activities such as their enthusiasm for joining English classes at school, their ability to understand the materials of English subjects, the tendency for them to assess other people's English abilities, and so on. From the table above, we can also see the reason why the students like English and consider it important to them.

The students have given different opinions for each of the statements. However, it can be seen that most of the statements were agreed by the students and that means most of them reflect positive attitudes towards the English language. From the last statement, it can be concluded that 96% of the students, meaning forty-eight out of fifty students, believe that English is important for them.

Moreover, from the first to the eighth statements, it was found that the mean for students who agree is 86%. This finding indicates that forty-three of fifty students obviously know why English is important to them. However, statement number nine shows that 46% or twenty-three students do not think that they are good at English. This means that there are approximately twenty students who are not good at English but have positive attitudes to it. This proves that a person's inability to use a language does not indicate that they have a negative attitude toward the language.

Table 2. Language attitude questionnaire results concerning the affective components

Statements/ Questions	Percentage (%)			
	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. You enjoy studying English.	72%	16%	10%	2%
2. Learning English is fun.	66%	22%	10%	2%
3. English is one of your favorite subjects.	52%	18%	26%	4%
4. Compared to other foreign languages, you prefer English.	56%	22%	18%	4%
5. You like English as much as you like your mother tongue.	56%	22%	20%	2%

6. You are not afraid of making mistakes in using English.	44%	8%	40%	8%
7. You are not afraid of being laughed at for making mistakes in using English.	42%	8%	46%	4%
8. It is often for you to be anxious in joining an English class.	38%	14%	44%	4%
9. You are comfortable and confident in joining the English class.	56%	14%	24%	6%
10. You know why English is important to you.	50%	50%	-%	-%

Table 2 represents the result of the assessment of the student's attitude toward English concerning the affective component. The assessment was regarding the students' personal feelings about English particularly when joining English class. According to the results, the students reflect mostly positive feelings which means that most of them are having positive attitudes towards English. From the statements one to five, we can conclude that 80% of the students are interested in English because they think it is fun, enjoyable, and better than any other foreign language, some of them even like it as much as they like their mother tongue and it is one of their favorite subjects. This result means that forty out of fifty students like English and are enthusiastic to learn it.

Statements six to nine are concerned with the student's confidence in using English. Based on the result, there are 55% of twenty-seven students stated that they have good self-confidence in using English and that they are not even afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at, but 45% of twenty-two students are not confident to use English. Although the students who dominate are students with high self-confidence, not a few students have low self-confidence in using the English language.

The last statement represents the students' consciousness of the importance of English for them, and the result shows 100% of students, meaning all of them realize and know the reason why it is important. From these findings, it can be inferred that almost all students reflect positive attitudes toward English.

Table 3. Language attitude questionnaire concerning the conative components

Statements/ Questions	Percentage (%)			
	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Being able to understand the materials of English subjects often makes you happy.	50%	48%	2%	-%
2. You feel happy interacting with your teacher in English class.	54%	16%	26%	4%
3. You feel proud if you are able to use English well.	46%	46%	8%	-%
4. You interact actively with your teacher in English class.	50%	8%	32%	10%
5. You use English sometimes in your daily life.	56%	14%	26%	4%

Table 3 shows the result of the assessment of the student's attitude towards English according to the conative component. The assessment was in accordance with the student's personal actions and feelings that are influenced by their respective attitude towards English. The first to the third statements are concerning their feelings when they are using or learning English. From the results, it can be concluded that 72% of students feel happy and proud when they are good at English, for instance being able to understand the material explained in class, interacting with their English teacher, and being able to use English well. This implies that thirty-six out of fifty students have positive attitudes towards the English language.

The last two statements in the table above are regarding the actions done by the students because of the attitude they have. From the results, we can infer that the students dominantly reflect positive attitudes towards the English language because 64% or thirty-two of them actively interact with their teacher in English class and use English sometimes in daily life.

4. Conclusion

From the results and findings provided above, it can be concluded that the dominant attitude towards English, reflected by the students of X-5 and X-7 graders of SMA Negeri 1 Kabanjahe for the academic year of 2022 is positive. This indicated that as senior high school students, most of them have realized and understood the importance of the English language to their future. However, not a few students still have low self-confidence in using English, also some students thought that they are not good at English. Fortunately, all of the students know that English is important for them, so they won't lose interest to learn it to make their English better.

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