

## BANGLADESHI COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is an exploration of Bangladeshi college students' attitude towards English language learning. Learners' attitude towards any language can be either positive or negative. Students with positive attitudes put more efforts into the job of learning a foreign language and therefore learn it better, faster and easier than those with negative attitudes towards the same language. Therewith, gender could be one of the factors influencing students' attitudes towards ESL / EFL learning. The present piece of research was undertaken on 50 Bangladeshi college (higher secondary) students with a view to finding their behavioral and emotional attitudes towards English language learning and the study came up with a finding that the students hold positive attitude and there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes between males and females. In this research a questionnaire survey on participants' behavioral and emotional attitudes was carried out and the collected data were put in SPSS and thereafter the statistical results were interpreted. A Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to get the result of the difference of attitude on the basis of gender. The findings are expected to add significance to the body of research done in the relevant area and help teachers and syllabus designers re-set the pedagogical principles of English language learning and teaching at college level in Bangladesh in particular.*

**KEYWORDS:** Attitude, ESL/ EFL learning, EFL learner, gender

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### INTRODUCTION

Attitude is deemed to be a very influential factor in the context of EFL / ESL learning and this is why the issue has received an outstanding attention from the researchers who are predominantly interested on first and second language learning as well as acquisition. Researches and analyses have over the years confirmed that it is critical to have a sound understanding about the learners' attitude towards language learning for the sake of successful language teaching and learning. Whatever much intelligent a student is sometimes does not suffice in learning expected amount of EFL / ESL just if that student holds a negative behavioral or emotional attitude towards the target language and vice-versa. Thus, students' behavioral attitude explains their situation specific attitude or overall idea about a language and the emotional attitude explains their discernment of the importance, pride, enjoyment in learning the language. This study aimed to test the notion that Bangladeshi college students hold a positive attitude towards English language learning and there is no statistically significant difference between male and female groups in terms of their behavior towards EFL learning. A questionnaire survey was accomplished on 50 college students of Bangladesh who are supposed to have had 11 years' positive or negative attitude towards English which is in fact an academically compulsory subject to learn until 12th grade. The findings of this investigation are analogous with most of those of the huge body of previous researches on language attitude.

## **Hypothesis**

The present study was engaged in the following hypotheses:

Bangladeshi college students have positive attitudes towards English language learning. Male students don't differ from female students in terms of attitudes because of necessity and life expectancy.

## **Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to explore Bangladeshi college (higher secondary) EFL students' feelings and ideas about learning English, who have had 11 years' schooling on EFL. Additionally, the study also aims to determine if the language attitude is gender-related. More precisely the study seeks the answers to the following of the two categorical research questions:

1. What are the behavioral and emotional attitudes of Bangladeshi college students towards English language learning in terms of their behavioral and emotional aspects?
2. Is there any difference between two genders' attitude towards English language learning?

## **Language attitude and significance of the study**

For Brown (2001) attitude involves emotional proportions viz. feelings, self, relationships in the community. According to Al- Mamun et al (2012) attitude is a psychological construct defining a particular behavior. Moreover, the concept of attitude may be viewed from three aspects viz. behavioral, cognitive and affective (emotional) which are further based on the theories of respectively behaviorism, cognitivism, and humanism. However, to keep it narrower and decisive, the present study selected two important aspects i.e. behavioral and emotional. Behavioral aspect of attitude (BAA) concerns the way one reacts and behaves in certain situations while emotional aspects involves one's emotions/ feelings, pride, importance, enjoyment, confidence etc.

As far as foreign language learning is concerned, attitude towards a language is deemed as a crucial factor that can have an impact on the learning of that language. Weinburgh (2000) holds that attitude influences selecting and reading books and speaking a foreign language. Correspondingly, positive attitude enhances EFL learning and negative attitudes, in contrast, 'result in the students' poor performance in English' ( Tella et al 2010). Fakeye (2010) maintains that the issue of learners' attitude is one of the most affecting factors in learning a language. Ergo, a substantial attention has been received by the researchers throughout the world on the investigation of attitude of language learners predominantly towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL).

Correspondingly, we might want to attach a considerable significance to the present study in that the results of positive or negative attitudes may be of massive interest to the researchers who are working on ESL / EFL learning at higher secondary level (HSC) in the context of Bangladesh. The discovery of the study takes on further significance as it will bolster Bangladeshi college English teachers' enthusiasm to recognize students' feelings, attitudes and needs and accordingly encourage adapting appropriate English teaching and learning

activities. Over and above, the authority concerned might get emboldened to review the English syllabus, content and curriculum of college level to fit the needs in congruous with learners' attitudes to EFL /ESL learning in the context in Bangladesh.

## REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

A huge body of research on language attitudes has been carried out so far over the years with various dimensions such as teachers' attitude towards students' needs (Bigham, 2010), attitude towards the use of humor in EFL class of Persian EFL teachers and learners (Ketabi & Simm, 2009), relationship between motivation and attitude (Al-Mamun et al., 2012), teachers' attitude toward students' beliefs and motivation (Salehi et al., 2015) (cited in Eshghinejad, 2016). If we think in a narrow scale such as 'attitude of students' only coupled with 'gender', we also find a phenomenal amount of research on these two variables alone. I have incorporated here some of paradigms of such studies done within the last ten years.

In many countries being culturally close to Bangladesh where English is a foreign or second language, there has been much research with an intent to investigate their respective students' attitude towards English language learning and its correlation with gender, which may have contributed to English language pedagogy. Most studies found that students had positive attitudes and gender was not a relevant factor:

Eshghinejad (2016) conducted a research on the attitudes toward learning English language of Kashan University (Iran) EFL students and found the students' positive attitude concerning English but there were statistically significant attitudinal differences between male and female groups. Thus, the study determined gender as a possible factor in constructing behavioral and emotional attitude towards English language learning. Karatas et al. (2016) in a research examined a Turkish university students' attitude towards learning English and discovered that attitudes towards learning English are not affected by several variables namely gender, receiving preparatory training, language level and high school differentiation. Ibnian et al (2015) came up with a finding that the students of a Saudi university have overall positive attitudes towards learning EFL and students with high GPA's have the highest positive attitudes towards learning English. Ahmed (2015) did a research on Malaysian university-undergraduate students and his results showed that attitude towards English language learning and using the language in various domains of usage is extremely positive but the students had negative feelings or fear regarding classroom instructions in their learning experience. Zareian et al (2014) found participants' positive attitudes toward English learning and no significant differences between two genders. The findings of Noursi (2013) revealed that vast majority of the subjects of the study had positive attitudes towards learning the English Language and teacher's nativity (native speaker vs non native speaker of English) did not influence students' positive orientation toward the English language. Abidin et al. (2012) investigated Libyan secondary school students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects and found negative attitude towards learning English and statistically significant attitudinal differences in terms of gender and field of study but not year of study. A research conducted by Fakeye (2010) on 400 senior secondary students randomly picked up from five secondary schools revealed that student's attitude is gender unrelated but it has a significant relationship with EFL achievement.

The originality and novelty of this research was found in the gap of research on the difference at college level male and female students' attitude towards EFL / ESL in the countries of the corresponding setting with Bangladesh. Being the students' of a third world country, the college students of Bangladesh are expected to have positive attitude towards English for good jobs, handsome salary and a better life because English is the key language of higher education and which is regarded as the international passport of modern world of communication.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were selected randomly from 5 colleges located in the district of Jhenaidah, Bangladesh and from different groups i.e. science, arts and business. Because of the time constraint, the number of the participants was kept 50. There were made two gender groups consisting of equal number (25 males and 25 females). They were all 12<sup>th</sup> graders aged between 15 and 16 having a background of 11 years' English learning and therefore were deemed to be able to put their pragmatic feelings and attitudes toward English language learning. They all take private tuition in English at UCC Jhenidah branch where I used to be an English teacher. So, it was very easy to gain access to the respondents for data collection. In addition, the further reason behind choosing this type of participants was that I have been a college level English teacher for more than five years and consequently had a period of 5 years' observance of college level students' attitudes towards English language learning which envisioned this study.

### **Instruments**

An attitude questionnaire (see appendix 1) was exploited as the sole instrument for the collection of data for the research in question. The questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's Attitude / Motivation Test Battery AMTB (2004) and further from Behavioral, Cognitive Emotional Attitude (ACEA) questionnaire adapted by Eshghinejad (2016). Furthermore, the questionnaire utilized in the study comprises of two multi-item scales. The first multi-item scale used 11 items of statements to figure participants' behavioral attitude and the second multi-item scale had 12 items of statements to measure their emotional aspects of attitudes towards English learning. A five-point Likert scale (from level 1: Strongly disagree to level 5: Strongly agree) was adapted to determine the participants' attitudes about the certain statements. Later a few items were eliminated to improve the reliability scores for both the scales.

### **Procedure**

Once my boss, Mr. M.A. Rahim, honorable director of UCC, Jhenidah Branch very happily and enthusiastically gave his full consent to conduct the research at his institution. He helped me from beginning to the end of the accomplishment of data collection job. He arranged 50 interested participants. The participants were made into two groups- male (25) and female (25)- who responded to the questionnaire in person. First, the participants were given the consent forms to fill in and three of my colleagues at UCC named Mr. Golam Sarwar, Mr. Sree Suvo Kumar and Mr. M. Sazzad Hossein assisted me in distribution and collection of the consent forms. Thereafter, detailed instructions had been given and the participants had

been asked to follow before the questionnaire was distributed to both the groups. The questionnaire was tested on the 50 participants at the same time and at one sitting in 20 minutes in all. There arose a problem of comprehension of the meaning of some of the statements in English. A colleague of mine immediately translated them into Bangla, the participants' mother tongue and thus the problem was resolved. All the participants were done with rating the statements in the given time. The filled in questionnaire was collected back and filed up in order of groups. The session for data collection was declared done giving thanks and leaving my email so as to know the results of the research. Following the collection, the data were put into SPSS. Besides obtaining some statistical reports about respondents' language attitude from SPSS, A Mann-Whitney U Test was also done and the significance of the observed differences between male and female learners' attitudes towards English language learning was analyzed.

## RESULTS

### English language learning and participants' behavioral attitude:

Statements 1, 4, 5, 6 & 7 elicit 50 respondents' positive and negative behavioral attitudes towards English language learning, the accomplished results of which from SPSS have been disposed in the table 1 & 2 just below:

**Table 1: Respondents' behavioral attitudes towards English language learning (%)**

Item No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried	28.0%	28.0%	2.0%	36.0%	6.0 %
4	I put off my English homework as much as possible	52.0%	18.0%	2.0%	20.0%	8.0 %
5	I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students.	20.0%	20.0%	10.0%	34.0%	16.0 %
6	When I miss the class, I never ask my friends or teachers for the homework on what has been taught.	64.0%	18.0%	6.0%	8.0%	4.0 %
7	I do not feel enthusiastic to come to class when English is being thought	52.0%	34.0%	6.0%	6.0%	2.0 %

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (Behavioral aspect)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	50	1.00	5.00	2.6400	1.38151
Q4	50	1.00	5.00	2.1400	1.44293
Q5	50	1.00	5.00	3.0600	1.42012
Q6	50	1.00	5.00	1.7000	1.14731
Q7	50	1.00	5.00	1.7200	.96975
Valid N (listwise)	50				

**English language learning and participants' emotional attitude:**

Statements 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22 & 23 bring forth 50 respondents' positive and negative emotional attitudes towards English language learning and the obtained results from SPSS have been presented in the table 3 & 4 just below:

**Table 3: Respondents' emotional attitudes towards English language learning (%)**

Item No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
12	Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable	12.0%	10.0%	10.0%	30.0%	38.0%
13	I feel proud when studying English language	4.0%	4.0%	8.0%	30.0%	54.0%
14	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident	6.0%	4.0%	4.0%	30.0%	56.0%
15	I am interested in studying English		6.0%	2.0%	30.0%	62.0%
16	Knowing English is an important goal in my life	2.0%	4.0%	4.0%	38.0%	52.0%
17	I look forward to the time I spend in English class	4.0%	8.0%	4.0%	50.0%	34.0%
21	Speaking English increases my social status		16.0%	14.0%	24.0%	46.0%
22	I feel happy when someone speaks English with me	4.0%	32.0%	6.0%	42.0%	16.0%
23	I read English newspaper because it improves my English		14.0%	16.0%	36.0%	34.0%

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics (Emotional aspect)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q12	50	1.00	5.00	3.7200	1.38564
Q13	50	1.00	5.00	4.2600	1.04608
Q14	50	1.00	5.00	4.2600	1.12141
Q15	50	2.00	5.00	4.4800	.81416
Q16	50	1.00	5.00	4.3400	.89466
Q17	50	1.00	5.00	4.0200	1.03982
Q21	50	2.00	5.00	4.0000	1.12486
Q22	50	1.00	5.00	3.3400	1.20560
Q23	50	2.00	5.00	3.9000	1.03510
Valid N (listwise)	50				

**English language learning and participants' gender:**

As stated earlier, there was an aggregate of 50 participants (25 males and 25 females) in the sample group. The present research seeks to identify if there is any statistically significant difference between male and female students' attitudes towards learning English language. To this end, my variables being nominal and ordinal in nature, a non-parametric test i.e. Mann-Whitney Test was decided to be performed, which tested the hypothesis that male students do not differ from female students in terms of attitude towards English language learning. The Mann Whitney Test was separately carried out one time for each multi-item scale. The results subsuming both groups' mean rank, Mann Whitney U scores, P-values etc. as disclosed are put consecutively in the tables 5, 6, 7 & 8 below:

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
BA	male	25	25.74	643.50
	female	25	25.26	631.50
	Total	50		

	BA
Mann-Whitney U	306.500
Wilcoxon W	631.500
Z	-.117
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.907

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
EA	male	25	28.72	718.00
	female	25	22.28	557.00
	Total	50		

	EA
Mann-Whitney U	232.000
Wilcoxon W	557.000
Z	-1.566
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.117

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

## DISCUSSION

### Behavioral aspects

In the literature, it was reported that students predominantly hold a positive attitude towards learning English language. The present investigation hypothesizing Bangladeshi college students' positive behavioral and emotional attitude and gender being no factor fulfills the hypotheses:

Statements in first scale of behavioral attitudes were all of negative type and the SPSS statistics demonstrate (see table 1) that 28 % respondents strongly disagreed and 28% disagreed to statement 1. This suggests that the 58% participants do not feel worried in speaking English. 52% respondents strongly disagreed and 18% disagreed to the statement 2. This signifies that 70% participants do not avoid their English homework which amounts to their positive behavior towards English learning. 64% respondents strongly disagreed and 18% disagreed to the statement 6 which manifests that 82% respondents ask either their classmates or teachers about the English lesson taught in the class which they miss. This, again, represents respondents' very positive attitude to English learning. 52% respondents strongly disagreed and 34% disagreed to the statement 7. This indicates 86% respondents' positive attitude that they feel to go to English classes enthusiastically. Nevertheless, 20% strongly disagreed and 20% disagreed to the statement 5 while 34% strongly agreed and 16% agreed to the same statement. This is an indication that in productive skills i.e. speaking before public makes the respondents worried despite their overall positive behavior towards English. This result is, however, not an accident because other research asserts that students 'feel more anxious in productive skills i.e. speaking and writing than in receptive skills i.e. listening and reading' (Palacios, 1998). In brief, overall both the groups' behavioral attitude towards English language learning is positive, which supports the findings of Eshghinejad (2016), Ibnian et al. (2015), Ahamed (2015) and Zareian et al. (2014) who examined and found university students' positive attitude towards English language learning. However, the results of this study contradict with the findings of the study by Abidin et al.(2012) pointing to the negative attitude of secondary school students towards learning English.

### Emotional aspects

In the scale of emotional aspect, 38% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that they enjoy EFL learning (statement 12). A vast majority of respondents (statement 13: 54% strongly agreed and 30 % agreed) stated that they find pride in English language learning and when they study English their confidence level rises (statement 14: 56% strongly agreed, 30% agreed). Therefore, the respondents consider English language as a prestigious language the study of which is not only a matter of enjoyment to them but also it has a relation to building up overall confidence in their life. It is an amazing exposure that 92% of the participants are interested in English language learning (statement 15, 62% strongly agreed, 30 agreed) and to learn this language is made one of the important goals of life by 90% of them( statement 16: 52% strongly agreed, 38% agreed). However, there are 6% respondents who do not agree to neither of the statements (15, 16). 84 % opined that they eagerly wait for the time for English classes to come up (statement 17: 34% strongly agreed, 50% agreed), which corresponds with the previous statement 12 that they enjoy English classes / learning. Although 16% disagreed, 70% respondents agreed that they opt to learn English because they think being able to speaking this language earns a social prestige in Bangladeshi societies (statement 21: 46% strongly agreed, 24% agreed). Although 58% respondents feel happy in English



conversation with others, there 36 % who do not feel so (statement 22) because speaking is, as previously stated, a productive skill which makes learners nervous. This finding about Bangladeshi college students' feeling nervous in productive skills of English language is confirmed by the Ahmed's (2015) study which revealed students' fear while they are asked to speak in the classroom. 70% participants have positive emotional attitude towards the issue of reading English newspaper because they think they can learn English by doing it. If put in a few words, the emotional aspect scale elicits highly positive emotional attitudes of the respondents towards learning English language. This finding is line with that of Eshghinejad (2016) but contradicts the results of the investigation by Abidin et al (2012).

### **Attitude and gender**

One research question was if there is any difference between male and female students' attitudes towards English language learning. Our original hypothesis apropos of the question was that there is no difference between two groups' attitudes. The Mann-Whitney U Test results confirmed that this hypothesis was true. As far as participants' behavioral aspects of attitudes are concerned, the Mann-Whitney U test rejects alternative hypothesis (H1) (U=306.500, p=0.907) - meaning there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students' behavioral attitudes towards English language learning. Likewise, the Mann-Whitney U test which was performed on the participants' emotional aspects further rejects the alternative hypothesis (H1) (U= 232.000, p= 0.117). Ultimately, this implies that males and females uniformly have positive behavioral and emotional attitude towards English learning. This result is expected probably because Bangladesh government has given a lot of priority on the female education and has introduced up to 60% quotas for females in different kinds of the government jobs including BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service). Presumably, this may have motivated females to learn English to meet the English language requirement in both higher education and the growing working domain in home and abroad. Although the result that gender influences attitude of matches those found by Karatas et al. (2016), Zareian (2014), Fakeye(2010), it is opposite to the findings shown by the researches done by Eshghinejad (2016) and Abidin et al. (2012). They found gender influences learners' attitude towards English language learning.

### **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

The following are the problems and limitations with this study:

- very small data set
- poor questionnaire design

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the present research draw out the implications that in terms of English language learning, college students who next go to be undergraduate students at universities are very positive and girls and boys do not differ in degree of positiveness. Nevertheless, we find that 49.9 % college students failed in the public examination of 2015 (as per The Daily Star report, August 10, 2015). This implies that there must be some problem elsewhere behind the poor performance of such an overwhelming percentage of pupils in English while they (both males and females) are very enthusiastic and positive about EFL learning. One more thing was found that a good number of college students feel worried and perform very

badly in speaking skill which implies that the teachers might need to develop their strategies to deal with the issue of how to get the students relaxed and confident in speaking skill.

## CONCLUSION

In an attempt to find out the behavioral and emotional attitude of Bangladeshi college students towards English language learning, the present study was conducted and the results revealed participants' positive attitude. There was a hypothesis earlier in the search that there is no difference between male and female students' attitude to learning English and the finding confirmed it. Nevertheless, in the research it was found that a convincing percentage of respondents expressed that they feel nervous in speaking before others. So, further research is appreciated in regard to the cause of such emotional predicament of college students in English speaking skill in the precise context of Bangladesh.

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### APPENDIX-1: Questionnaire

The following section aims at finding out about your attitude towards learning English language.

**We would like to ask you to rate these remarks based on the scale below:**

1=Strongly disagreed, 2=Disagreed, 3=Neutral, 4=Agreed, 5=Strongly Agreed

For example, if you feel that you strongly agree with the following remark, you can rate it as follows:

(a) Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried

No	Questions	1 Strongly Disagreed	2 Disagreed	3 Neutral	4 Agreed	5 Strongly Agreed
1.	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried					
2.	When I hear a student in my class speaking English well, I like to practice speaking with him/her					
3.	Studying English helps me to improve my personality					
4.	I put off my English homework as much as possible					
5.	I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students.					
6.	When I miss the class, I never ask my friends					

	or teachers for the homework on what has been taught					
7.	I do not feel enthusiastic to come to class when English is being taught					
8	I like to learn English like native speakers					
9	Learning English is really great					
10	Learning English is less important than Bangla					
11	I wish I did not have to learn English					
12	<b>Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable</b>					
13	I feel proud when studying English language					
14.	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident					
15.	I am interested in studying English					
16.	Knowing English is an important goal in my life					
17.	I look forward to the time I spend in English class					
18.	Studying English makes me have good emotions (feelings)					
19	I do not like English					
20	I get nervous when I am asked to speak English					
21	Speaking English increases my social status					
22	I feel happy when someone speaks English with me					
23	I read English newspaper because it improves my English					