

FINDING THE NEXUS BETWEEN STUDENTS' PROFILES AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ESP: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE MEDICAL STUDENTS PURPOSES

Tran Thi Loan

Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this research is to determine the relationship between students' profile and their attitude in learning English as a foreign language. The respondents were 82 second year undergraduate students studying medicine at Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Vietnam. The research instrument is a Likert questionnaire including two parts: Bio Data and Attitude towards ESP. The study was basically a quantitative research utilizing the descriptive-correlational method and SPSS software to describe and investigate the relationship between students' select profile variables and their attitude towards English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings from this study illustrated that there is a significant relationship between Thaibinh medical students' attitude towards ESP and their mothers' education, number of years of studying English, grades in EGP (English for General Purposes) and ESP and native language. Findings also revealed that the profile variables not related to the students' attitude towards ESP are fathers' educational attainment and sex.*

KEYWORDS: Attitude, ESP, Profile, Medical Student, Relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Medical students of Thaibinh University of Medicine seem to pay their attention to their major subjects such as anatomy, surgery, paediatrics, biochemistry, radiology, neurobiology, obstetrics-gynaecology, and physiology. After two years studying English language at the university, a great number of the undergraduate medical students still have problems in communicating and understanding English in real life situations.

Many students appear to lack enthusiasm and interests in their language classes. Therefore, in order to increase the level of participation of students and the level of effort in class assignments, the students are obligated to regularly attend English classes at least 80 % with the grades of attendance as well as the grade of fulfilled assignments.

The researcher hopes to identify factors which may affect Thaibinh medical students on learning English language well. Thus, she makes an effort to explore the relationship between the profiles of students and their attitude towards ESP. The research questions are below:

1. What is the profile of the students in terms of:
 - a. Sex
 - b. Parents' highest educational attainment
 - c. Native language
 - d. Years of learning English
 - e. Grades in English

2. What is the attitude of the students towards ESP in terms of:

- a. Lesson content
 - b. Learning materials
 - c. Learning activities
 - d. Time allotment
 - e. Methodology
 - f. Assessment
- 2 Is there a relationship between students' attitude towards ESP and their select profile variables?

LITERATURE

Profile Factor Related to Language Performance

There are additional significant factors that influence student's language performance such as gender, parents' highest educational attainment, native language, years of learning English and grades in English. Gender is one the element affecting language acquisition. Specifically, females show more a positive attitude towards the target language and females with low achievement are less likely to drop out of class than males (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Melby and Conger (1996) note that parents' educational attainment has a close relationship with adolescents' academic performance. Stevenson and Baker (1987) find that students who have well-educated mothers will perform better at school. David (2008) indicates that "mother tongue influences the students' poor performance in Junior School Certificate examination" and Hamer (1991) states that students prefer to use their mother tongue in English classes when they discuss topics which they are incompetent to talk about. It is found by Bueno et al. (2006) that even though students have been studying English for many years, they are not able to speak English "appropriately and understandably". Recently, there have been many studies conducted to identify the relationship between score and language performance. While Cotton & Conrow (1998) believe that there is no connection between scores (IELTS mentioned) and academic language performance, Feast (2002) find there is a positive (or sometimes low) link between the two.

The Importance of Attitudes in Language Achievement

Research suggests that it may be significant to determine whether attitudes assist to encourage students' interest in pursuing of English studies and whether attitude affects the ability of learners to master a language.

There are many papers that have been studied attitudes and motivation towards language learning in many contexts. Mantle-Bromley and Miller (1991) study the effect of attitude toward language learning: when learners study what they want, they do better and they have more positive attitudes. According to Nunan (2000), it is learners' attitudes, skills, and strategies that influence their underachievement and achievement. Furthermore, Karahan (2007) proposes that positive language attitudes urge learners to have a positive orientation towards learning English. Attitude is thus able to promote language learning process and improve students' language success.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the course of the study, the researcher utilized descriptive-correlational design. The descriptive method was used to ascertain the profile of the respondents (sex, parents' highest educational attainment, native language, years of learning English, and English grades on EGP and ESP) and their attitudes towards ESP (lesson content, learning materials, learning activities, time allotment, methodology, and assessment). The correlational method was used to investigate the relationship between students' profile and attitude towards ESP.

Participants

The population of the study constituted the group of 455 medical students in seven classes at Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy. The group was represented in the study by a sample size obtained through the Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error resulting in a final sample size of 82 medical students as the subjects of the study. The proportional allocation technique was subsequently applied to identify the number of respondents per class.

After the desired sample size was determined, simple random sampling was used to select the equal chance of respondents who were drawn by draw lots and by random numbers.

Instruments

The study questionnaire of the study was adopted from the checklists of Elhaj & Ali, N. A. (2015), Joshani-Shirvan, S. (2008), and Soleimani & Hanafi (2013).

The questionnaire entailed 2 parts namely bio data profile and attitudes towards ESP. Part 1 aimed to gather information on the medical students' demographic information such as sex, parents' highest educational attainment, native language, years of studying English, and grades (from semester 1 to semester 4). Part 2 gathered data regarding medical students' attitudes towards the ESP course with six criteria like lesson/selection content, learning materials, learning activities, time allotment, methodology, and assessment. For 60 items of six criteria in part 2 students were asked to respond to statements on a five-point Likert scale of frequency, in which 1 = Strong Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strong Agree.

Procedures

The researcher sent a request letter to the head of the office of Undergraduate Training and Management Department of Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy to allow her to conduct the study to undergraduate medical students at the university. These students have finished their EGP and ESP courses (in four semesters). After that, with the assistance of two colleagues, who are also teachers of English at the university, administered the questionnaire to the 82 subjects of the study.

Then the researcher used SPSS to conduct a series of statistical analyses on the collected data.

Data Analysis

The profile of respondents was determined using frequency counts and percentage.

The English Grade in EGP and ESP and students' attitude were examined using weighted means which were interpreted with the guides below:

The Scale of English Grade in EGP and ESP

Scale	Mean range	Descriptive Category
5	4.20-5.00	Excellent
4	4.00-4.19	Good
3	2.60-3.39	Satisfactory
2	1.80-2.59	Poor
1	1.00-1.79	Very Poor

The Scale of Attitude toward ESP

Scale	Mean range	Descriptive Category
5	4.20-5.00	Strongly Agree (Very Favorable)
4	3.40-4.19	Agree (Favorable)
3	2.60-3.39	Uncertain ((Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable)
2	1.80-2.59	Disagree (Unfavorable)
1	1.00-1.79	Strongly Disagree (Very Unfavorable)

FINDINGS

Profile of the Students

Table 1 shows that among the 82 second-year students as subjects of the study, there are 39 male respondents or 47.6% while the rest (43) are females constituting 52.4% of the total number of respondents.

With regard to the highest educational attainment of the respondents' parents, most of their fathers are tertiary graduates with 38 or 46.3 percent, while the number of their mothers who attained that level constitutes only 5 or 6.1 percent. Their fathers who attained only elementary and secondary level accounted for 3 or 3.7 percent and 6 or 7.3, respectively, while their mothers who attained the same levels are 11 or 13.4 percent and 30 or 36.6 percent, respectively. The number of father's high secondary education and that of their mothers' is equivalent to 34 or 41.5 percent and 35 or 42.7 percent, respectively while only 1 father and 1 mother is master degree graduate and nobody reached the doctoral level. With respect to native language, majority of the respondents speak Kinh with 53 or 64.6% speaking the language. Other notable speakers are Muong and Thai people accounting to 9 and 8 speakers respectively or 11.0% and 9.8% respectively.

Moreover, Tay and Dao are spoken by 3 and 2 or 3.7% and 2.4% of the respondents, respectively. Specifically, there are 3 students from Laos and Cambodia who constituted as part of the study accounting to 1.2% and 2.4%, respectively. These students come to Vietnam to study medicine. The rest of the native speakers are Khmer, H-Mong, Nung, San Diu which account for 1 speaker each, with each comprising 1.2% of the respondents. In terms of the number of years in formally studying English, the mean years spent to learn English is 10.83 which means that the respondents have substantial years of exposure to the English language. Furthermore, there are 70 or 85.4% respondents who learned English for 10 years and longer and 12 or 14.6% have learned English for less than 10 years.

Table 1. Profile of the Students

Category	Frequency (n=82)	Percentage
Sex		
Male	39	47.6
Female	43	52.4
Education of Father		
Elementary	3	3.7
Secondary	6	7.3
high secondary	34	41.5
Tertiary	38	46.3
Mastery	1	1.2
Education of Mother		
Elementary	11	13.4
Secondary	30	36.6
high secondary	35	42.7
Tertiary	5	6.1
Mastery	1	1.2
Native Language		
Kinh	53	64.6
Tay	3	3.7
Thai	8	9.8
Muong	9	11.0
Khmer	1	1.2
H. Mong	1	1.2
Nung	1	1.2
Dao	2	2.4
San Diu	1	1.2
Laos	1	1.2
Cambodian	2	2.4
Number of Years Studying English Language		
Less than 10 years	12	14.6
10 years and longer	70	85.4
Mean = 10.83 SD = 1.86		

English Grades on EGP and ESP

A closer look at the table (table 2) reveals that 43 or 52.44% obtained a "satisfactory" rating and 23 or 28.05% registered a mark of "Poor". Furthermore, there are 13 or 15.85% who scored "Very Poor" and only 3 garnered a rating of 3.66% which is "good".

Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy adopts a grading system where 1 is the lowest and five, the highest. Below 1 is already a failing grade. Table 3 shows that the mean grade of the respondents in EGP and ESP is 2.44 which has an adjectival value of "Poor".

Table 2. Average grades of the students in English (EGP and ESP)

GRADE	Frequency	Percentage	Descriptive Value
1.00 – 1.79	13	15.85	Very Poor
1.80 – 2.59	23	28.05	Poor
2.60 – 3.39	43	52.44	Satisfactory
4.00 – 4.19	3	3.66	Good
4.20 – 5.00	0	0	Excellent
Total	82	100	
Mean Grade	2.44		Poor

Attitude of the Students towards ESP

Table 3 illustrates the summary table showing the over-all attitude of the students toward ESP along the six dimensions. It reveals that the over-all attitude of the students is neither favourable nor unfavourable with a computed general weighted mean of 3.01.

Table 3. Overall Attitude of Students towards ESP along the six dimensions

Categories	Weighted Mean	Description
Lesson Content	3.12	Neither favorable nor unfavorable
Learning Materials	3.33	Neither favorable nor unfavorable
Learning Activities	2.57	Unfavorable
Time Allotment	2.74	Neither favorable nor unfavourable
Methodology	3.07	Neither favorable nor unfavourable
Assessment	3.24	Neither favorable nor unfavourable
Overall Mean	3.01	Neither favorable nor unfavorable

Relationship between students' attitude towards ESP and their select profile variables

It was hypothesized in the study that there is no relationship between the students' attitude toward ESP and their profile variables. As gleaned from table 4, the null hypothesis of the study is rejected because there is a significant relationship between the students' attitude toward ESP and their mother's education, number of years of studying English, grade in EGP and ESP as well as native language. The only profile variables which are not related to the students' attitude towards ESP are the education of father and sex.

Education of Mother is reflected in the computed correlation coefficient of 0.276 and probability value of 0.001. Number of Years of Studying English is reflected in the correlation coefficient of 0.276 and a probability value of 0.012. The significant relationship between

native language and students' attitude towards ESP is reflected in the computed correlation coefficient of 40.465 and a probability value of 0.0000.

Table 4. Relationship between students' attitude towards ESP and select profile variables

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Prob.	Statistical Inference
Attitude towards ESP and			
Education of Father	0.114	.307	Not significant
Education of Mother	0.276	.001	Significant at 0.01
Number of Years of Studying English	0.276	.012	Significant at 0.05
Grade in English for General Purposes Sem1	0.279	.011	Significant at 0.05
Grade in English for General Purposes Sem2	0.356	.001	Significant at 0.01
Grade in English for General Purposes Sem3	0.285	.010	Significant at 0.01
Grade in English for Specific Purposes Sem4	0.232	.036	Significant at 0.05
df = 81			
	X² value		
Sex (df=1)	0.366	0.545	Not significant
Native Language (df=1)	40.465	0.000	Significant at 0.01

DISCUSSION

Profile of the Students

Firstly, students' profile, the medical students of Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy are female-dominated which is truly reflective of the population of the university. In addition, it seems to be relevant to the general trend that female students outnumber male ones in some courses like nursing, medicine, English and law, while men are more on computer and engineering.

In terms of parents' highest educational attainment, the Vietnamese parents are schooled as reflected by the majority of the parents reaching tertiary and high school level.

When it comes to native language, Thaibinh University of Medicine and Pharmacy is heavily populated by Kinh speaking people and Kinh people comprise the majority race in Vietnam. Followed by Muong and Thai, the reason for this may be accounted for the fact that there is the proximity of Muong and Thai to Kinh. Tay, Dao, Khmer, H-Mong, Nung, and San Diu are ethnic minorities living in mountainous areas. Those people have to learn Vietnamese language (official language) before learning English which produces a big barrier for students to learn English well. The number of foreign students (Laos and Cambodia) is not many.

The substantial years of formally learning English can be accounted for the fact that English is being taught to the respondents as early as primary school. Rocío (2012) believes that the English language should be introduced by teachers from primary education because when

pupils are familiar with this language at an early age, it will make them not only communicate easier but also understand English better as well as reduce their fears whenever using English.

English Grades on EGP and ESP

The “Poor” mean grade of the respondents implies that they have not satisfactorily met the minimum competencies desired for English. It also connotes that there is much to be done in order to improve their proficiency in English.

The poor performance of the respondents may be accounted to the fact that they focus more on their major subjects rather than the English language. Students are more interested in learning their major subjects because this is their field of specialization and future career. Nonetheless, English language plays a significant role for students not only for current grade but also for future job opportunities (Al-Tamimi and Shuib, 2009) because they explain that books, papers, handbooks, journals in the fields of science and technology are mostly written in the international language. It has been observed that most students are not very much interested to study English because it is just treated as a foreign language and not as a second language.

Attitude towards ESP

This finding of the study implies that the students have not yet developed a positive attitude towards studying ESP because they pay too much attention to their major subjects in the field of medicine. Students believe that those subjects are very helpful to their future career since the majority of their patients are Vietnamese, and hence at least some of them prefer to learn ethnic languages as they will work in mountainous areas to treat ethnic minority patients. In short, at least some of them question the need for medical English in their lives. Their attitude shows ambivalence or neutrality in liking or disliking medical English. This also implies the need to further develop their favorable attitude towards learning medical English associated with making themselves become globally competitive medical practitioners in the future.

Among the six dimensions, the students have the highest score related to learning materials and the lowest in learning activities. Although the highest score relates to learning material usage, it has to be stressed that students are about whether they agree or disagree. Significantly, the unfavorable attitude of the students in terms of learning activities reveals that they do not like the learning activities provided by their teachers. They find these learning activities to be boring, irrelevant and unrealistic to Vietnamese life and culture. This finding is in disagreement with the results of the study conducted by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) in the Malaysian context, where "Learning English to be part of the culture of its people had the least impact on students' English language motivation". The finding may also imply that they need to have activities focusing on four macro skills as this study limits to speaking and listening. Infusing other macro skills in the study of medical English would make them more interested and engaged in all the activities of the lesson.

Relationship between students' attitude towards ESP and their select profile variables

This study revealed that there is a close relationship between students' attitudes towards foreign language and mother-education while Gardner (1972) (as cited in Altasan, 2016) denotes that there is no connection between students' attitude towards parents' education and language proficiency.

The significant relationship between students' attitude towards ESP and their mothers' level of educational attainment implies that the higher is their mothers' education, the more favorable is their attitude towards ESP. This can be accounted for the fact that their mothers talk more often to their children rather than their fathers. If mothers have higher educational attainment and they know how to speak English, there is more tendency that they are able to influence their kids to speak in English language, too. Awan and Kauser (2015) reveal that a mother mainly provides the fundamental care from the first six years of a child's life. She concerns not only her children's hygienic condition, health and nutrition but also their education. Therefore, a (highly) educated mother is a source of courage and strength for her child. In terms of education, she knows how to guide and prepare her child in a better way for its education and future career and she is able to teach her child at home after school as well. This finding shows that there is no connection between gender and attitude because it is likely that both female and male medical students pay much of their attention to their major field such as how to prevent, diagnose, treatment or cure the patients. Notwithstanding, in Makrami's (2010) finding females express higher motivation, attitude and lower anxiety toward ESP than males.

Meanwhile, the significant correlation between the Number of Years of Studying English to students' attitude towards ESP conveys that the more years they spent on studying English, the more favorable is the attitude towards ESP. Such finding implies that longer exposure to formally learn English is positively associated with a better attitude towards ESP. Perhaps, the reason for this is that students are able to give higher appreciation and deeper meaning to English language if they get more immersion and exposure to the language. Once they get immersed in the language, they have a better attitude towards ESP. However, in the recent study conducted by Mohamad et al. (2012) reveal that there is no difference between attitude towards foreign language and year of study.

On the other hand, the significant relationship between grade in EGP for first to third semesters and attitude towards ESP reveals that EGP is a precondition to develop a more favorable attitude towards ESP. For students to have a positive attitude towards ESP, they also need to have the higher grade in EGP.

The same holds true in students' grades in ESP and their attitudes about it. The higher is their grades in the ESP course, the better is their attitude towards the subject itself. Perhaps, this finding can be attributed to the fact that grades in English (EGP and ESP) are indicative of students' achievement and proficiency in the medical English. If they have good grades in these subjects, they also manifest favorable attitude towards ESP.

The high positive correlation between these variables connotes that those who are using Kinh as an official language in Vietnam have a better attitude towards ESP. Conversely, those who are non-Kinh speakers show a negative attitude towards ESP. Perhaps, this finding can be attributed to the fact that Kinh is a national language of Vietnam and there is a higher tendency for these speakers to adjust to the English language as compared to the non-Kinh speakers. The non-Kinh speakers are more conservative and they tend to appreciate more their language than the Kinh speakers.

Implication to Research and Practice

This study determined the connection between medical students' profile and their attitudes toward ESP. The Results of this study may be beneficial to the following:

School Administrator. This study may supply information about students' attitudes and their challenges towards ESP programs to the administrators of the university. Thus, it may serve as a basis of providing meaningful ESP experience to ESP students.

ESP Teachers. This study may remind the instructors the factors influencing the students' attitudes towards ESP education and improve their teaching to limit students' negative attitude towards ESP education.

ESP Students. This study will benefit ESP students as they are the ones are directly addressed their specific needs.

Other Researchers. This study may be used as the reference for future studies on learning attitude towards English language.

CONCLUSION

The respondents' profile reveals that majority of them are females, they have fathers who are tertiary graduates and they have mothers who have finished high secondary. Also, the majority of them are Kinh speakers, they have studied English language for 10 years and longer and they have the poor grade in English particularly along EGP and ESP.

The over-all attitude of the students towards ESP is neither favourable nor unfavourable. However, among the six dimensions of attitude towards ESP, the students have the highest score across learning materials and they have the lowest score across learning activities.

The test of relationship reveals that there is a significant connection between the students' attitude towards ESP and their mothers' education, number of years of studying English, grades in EGP and ESP as well as native language. The only profile variables which are not related to students' attitude towards ESP are fathers' educational attainment and sex.

Future Research

The results of this study may raise a number of opportunities for future research. For instance, the next research of the researcher may focus on ENGLISH PERFORMANCE AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ESP: A SEARCH FOR CONGRUENCE,

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