

Attitudes and Motivation of Non-English Major Students Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Case Study

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to identify attitudes and motivation of non-English major students towards learning English as a foreign language. The respondents were first year undergraduate students majoring in Public Health within the Faculty of Health and Sports Science at Thaksin University, Phatthalung Campus in the 2013 academic year. As quantitative research, the questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) was employed as a tool to collect data in order to find out students' motivational orientations in terms of instrumental and integrative motivation as well as their interests and attitudes towards learning English language. The data obtained from the questionnaire was calculated and analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Findings show that the majority of the students are surprisingly highly interested in learning English as a foreign language because they want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation ($\bar{x} = 4.40$, $SD = 0.81$). In addition, although they are non-English major students, they have a very strong desire to learn English until it becomes natural for them ($\bar{x} = 4.54$, $SD = 0.66$). Furthermore, most of the students hold positive attitudes towards learning English language. Similarly, even though they are primarily motivated to learn English due to instrumental reason ("studying can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting good jobs", $\bar{x} = 4.48$, $SD = 0.57$), the results also show their high motivation towards learning English language because of some integrative reasons.

Keywords: Attitudes, Motivation, EFL, Language Learning

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Introduction

Despite the fact that English has been recognized by every Thai university student, especially in this AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) era as one key factor for their future success, it is quite surprising that their English proficiency is quite low particularly compared to those from other countries which are the members of AEC. In support of this, Prapphal (2001) emphasizes that “the average English proficiency of Thai students is lower than that of students from other ASEAN countries”. Accordingly, improvement of students’ competency in English is considered as the most significant task for all English teachers in our country. However, in order to boost learners’ skills in English, especially those who are not majoring in English, every lecturer would encounter these relevant questions: “Where should we start?”, “What should we do to involve our students in classroom activities so that they can practice English skills in all aspects possible?”, “Even though we have tried our best every lecture, why do most of them seem to lack the intended interest in learning?”. In order to respond to all these questions, it is necessary for the teachers to first understand attitudes and motivation towards learning English of the courses’ learners. This way, the instructors will be able to re-design the course or even adjust activities in certain classrooms so that it can increase the students’ stimulation and enhance the learning atmosphere. Furthermore, once students feel encouraged, their viewpoints towards learning English will finally become more positive. Prapphal (2001) suggests that another way to help the students achieve their goals in learning language is to increase the students’ motivation towards learning the language. She asserts that “tasks and activities must be designed to expose the students to the target language and increase their motivation to learn the language in class and acquire the language outside classroom (Prapphal, 2001: p.8)”. Moreover, Gardner (1985) also claims that successful students are the ones who hold positive attitudes and a high level of motivation compared to those with negative attitudes and low level of motivation who do not perform satisfactorily. It is proposed that both attitudes and motivation influence language learning achievement (Gardner, 1979). In a nutshell, it is impossible for learners to achieve their goals in learning language if they have positive attitudes but lack motivation or if they may only motivation without constructive attitudes.

English Teaching and Learning at Thaksin University

Like other academic institutions in Thailand, Thaksin University has attempted to provide its students basic knowledge in English in order to serve the students and attend to one of the country’s current needs. Consequently, the two foundation English courses, General English 1 (0000121) and General English 2 (0000122), have been set as compulsory subjects that are required for all first-year university students to enroll in during the first and second semester, respectively. Without exception all freshmen at the university register for these courses; failure to do so precludes completion of the bachelor’s degree program. With

respect to this circumstance, since every first year student must enroll in these General English courses whether they want to or not, this study endeavors to explore the target students' (Non-English major) attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language at Thaksin University.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language of first-year undergraduate students majoring in Public Health within Faculty of Health and Sports Science at Thaksin University, Phatthalung Campus.

Conceptual Framework

Since the main framework of this study is concerned with attitudes and motivation, it is crucial to understand the concept of these two constructs.

1. Attitudes

The concept of attitude is elaborated with various definitions suggested to describe its essence (Gardner, 1985). However, attitudes towards the language learning situation, as pointed out by Masgoret & Gardner (2003), refer to “the individual’s reaction to anything associated with the immediate context in which the language taught” (p.172-173). In his research Spolsky (1969) argues that attitude is deemed as one essential factor that distinguishes the difference in the level of achievement during language acquisition. Similarly, Ellis (1994) claims that attitudes influence learners’ effort investment to learn the target language. Additionally, the same researcher also suggests that “positive attitudes towards the target language, its speakers, and its culture can be expected to enhance learning and negative attitudes to impede learning” (Ellis, 1994, p.200). To sum up, one important aspect for successful language learners is having a positive attitude toward the target language, its speakers, and its culture (Gardner, 1985).

2. Motivation

Wlodowski (1985, p.2 cited in Root, 1990) explains motivation as “the processes that (a) can arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior”. Similarly, the general concept of motivation in Dornyei’s (1996a, cited in Dornyei, 1998), is to explain why humans act the way they do. It can also be referred to as goal-directed behavior according to Heckhausen (1991, cited in Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

Orientations of Motivation

According to Gardner (1985b, 1989, cited in Schmidt et al, 1996), the most well-known orientations concerning motivation are integrative and instrumental orientation.

(i). Instrumental orientation: results from recognition of the practical advantages of learning, and is identified when learners say that they want to learn the target language to pass examinations or for economic or social advancement.

(ii). Integrative orientation: identifies when learners state that they want to learn a foreign language because they are attracted to the target language culture or group or the language itself.

Research Methodology

1. Population or Sample Design

The population of this study comprised all first-year undergraduate students majoring in Public Health within the Faculty of Health and Sports Science (academic year 2013) at Thaksin University, Phatthalung Campus. There are 92 persons altogether with 8 males and 84 females from the two separate sections. (Group 2114, n=44 and Group 2115, n=48)

2. Measurement and Data Collection Design

As quantitative research, the questionnaire from Gardner's Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985) was adapted and employed as a measurement tool. Moreover, the questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale to find out the level of the subjects' interest, attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language.

To obtain the quantitative data, 92 copies of an adapted questionnaire were distributed to those first-year undergraduate students in the university. Moreover, to address all criteria the researcher aimed to investigate the adapted questionnaire was divided into two main parts:

Part I General information about the subjects: focuses on the general demographics of the subjects such as age, gender and background in learning English.

Part II The questionnaire in this section was adapted according to Gardner's Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985). It examines four different characteristics: (1) the level of student's interest in learning English as a foreign language, (2) the level of student's desire to learn English as a foreign language, (3) the student's attitudes

towards learning English as a foreign language, and (4) student's motivation towards learning English as a foreign language.

3. Analytical design

In order to accomplish the objectives of this present study, all the returned questionnaires (80 copies altogether) were calculated and analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program (1) To answer the general question about the subjects as well as the general information regarding their background in learning English language; data is expressed as the frequency and percentage (Part I), (2) To explore the frequency of the interest, desire, attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language, which were reported through the questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was applied to rate the level of interest (Part II) , and (3) Arithmetic mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) were employed to calculate the level of interest, the level of attitudes and the level of motivation (part II) based on the following criteria:

Table 1: Interpretation of Mean Score of Interest/Desire/Motivation Level.

Scale	Mean Range	Interest/Desire/Motivation Level	Score Range
5	Strongly agree	Very high	4.50 – 5.00
4	Agree	High	3.50 – 4.49
3	Moderate	Average	2.50 – 3.49
2	Disagree	Low	1.50 – 2.49
1	Strongly disagree	Very low	1.00 – 1.49

Table 2: Interpretation of Mean Score of Attitudes Level.

Scale	Mean Range	Attitudes Level	Score Range
5	Strongly agree	Very positive	4.50 – 5.00
4	Agree	Positive	3.50 – 4.49
3	Moderate	Average	2.50 – 3.49
2	Disagree	Negative	1.50 – 2.49
1	Strongly disagree	Very negative	1.00 – 1.49

Results

Part I: General Information about the Subjects.

The subjects in this study were 80 first-year undergraduate students (72 females and 8 males) majoring in Public Health within the Faculty of Health and Sports Science at Thaksin University during the 2013 academic year. Their ages range from younger than 18 years old to 20 years old. Most of the subjects have had more than 10 years of experience in learning English (91.25%) while 6 of them have had 6 – 10 years of experience (7.50%). Surprisingly, the result revealed that one of the participants has had only 1 – 5 years of experience in learning English language (1.25%) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Experience in Learning English Language.

	Frequency	Percentage
<u>Experience in Learning English Language</u>		
1 - 5 years	1	1.25
6 - 10 years	6	7.50
More than 10 years	73	91.25
Total	80	100.00

Part II: (A.) Interest in Learning English as a Foreign Language

This part presents the results which answer the research questions discussed in this study. The findings from the returned questionnaires regarding the respondents' interest in learning English as a foreign language are as follows:

In the questionnaire, the subjects were requested to rate the level of interest in learning English as a foreign language using the following scales:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The ratings as well as the mean of interest in learning English as a foreign language are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Type of Interest and Mean Interest in Learning English as a Foreign Language.

Interest in Learning English as a Foreign Language	(N=80)	
	Mean	SD
I wish I could speak English perfectly.	4.21	0.77
I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation.	4.40	0.81
I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in English.	4.28	0.80
I would study English in school even if it were not required.	3.94	0.79
I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak English.	3.84	0.74
Studying English is an enjoyable experience.	4.18	0.74

As can be seen from Table 4, the majority of students show their highest interest in learning English as a foreign language because they would like to read literature in its original language ($\bar{x} = 4.40$, $SD = 0.81$). Moreover, many of them have high interest in learning English due to the following reasons: (1) they wish to read newspaper and magazine in English ($\bar{x} = 4.28$, $SD = 0.80$), (2) they wish to speak English fluently ($\bar{x} = 4.21$, $SD = 0.77$), and (3) they feel that studying English is an enjoyable experience ($\bar{x} = 4.18$, $SD = 0.74$). In addition, the students' reason that is "they would study English in school even if it were not required" was rated $\bar{x} = 3.94$, $SD = 0.79$. On the other hand, the lowest rated reason for learning English is "I enjoy meeting and listening to people to who speak English" ($\bar{x} = 3.84$, $SD = 0.74$).

Part II: (B.) Desire to Learn English as a Foreign Language.

This part presents the results which answer the research questions discussed in this study. Findings from the returned questionnaires regarding the respondents' interest in learning English as a foreign language are as follows:

In the questionnaire, the subjects were requested to rate the level of desire to learn English as a foreign language using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The ratings as well as the mean of desire to learn English as a foreign language are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Type of Desire and Mean Desire to Learn English as a Foreign Language.

Desire to Learn English	(N=80)	
	Mean	SD
I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	4.31	0.70
If it were up to me, I would spend all of my time learning English.	3.65	0.84
I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me.	4.54	0.66
I would like to learn as much English as possible.	4.50	0.73
I wish I were fluent in English.	4.35	0.71
Knowing English isn't really an important goal in my life.	2.36	0.13
I sometimes daydream about dropping English.	1.82	0.02
I'm losing any desire I ever had to know English.	1.76	0.98
To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.	1.61	0.86
I haven't any great wish to learn more than the basics of English.	1.82	0.91

What is interesting in Table 5 is that most of the students have the strongest desire to learn English because they want it to become natural for them ($\bar{x} = 4.54$, $SD = .66$) though they are not even majoring in English. Furthermore, it is apparent that the reasons ranked second and third: “I would like to learn as much English as possible” ($\bar{x} = 4.50$, $SD = 0.73$) and “I wish I were fluent in English.” ($\bar{x} = 4.35$, $SD = 0.71$) illustrate their strong desire to learn English as a foreign language. Likewise, findings also demonstrate that the 3 least desirable reasons to learn English (rated $\bar{x} = 1.61$, $SD = 0.86$, $\bar{x} = 1.76$, $SD = 0.98$, and $\bar{x} = 1.82$, $SD = 0.02$) are (1) “To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English”, (2) “I, losing any desire I ever had to know English”, and (3) “I sometimes daydream about dropping English”, respectively. The final response shares the same rate rate ($\bar{x} = 1.82$, $SD = 0.02$) as “I haven’t any great wish to learn more than the basics of English”.

Part II: (C.) Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language.

This part presents the results which answer the research questions discussed in this study. Findings from the returned questionnaires regarding the respondents’ interest in learning English as a Foreign Language are as follows:

In the questionnaire, the subjects were requested to rate the level of attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language using the following scales:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The ratings as well as the mean of attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Type of Attitudes and Mean Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language.

Attitudes Towards Learning English	(N=80)	
	Mean	SD
Learning English is really great.	3.98	0.78
I really enjoy learning English.	3.80	0.80
English is an important part of the school program.	4.31	0.72
I plan to learn as much English as possible.	4.17	0.78
I love learning English.	3.68	0.81
I hate English.	2.39	0.05
I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.	2.28	0.91
Learning English is a waste of time.	1.71	0.89
I think that learning English is dull.	1.79	0.82
When I leave school, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it.	1.80	0.83

As shown in Table 6, the subjects rate “English is an important part of school program” as the most significant reason which they hold positive attitudes towards it ($\bar{x} = 4.31$, $SD = 0.72$). The second ranked statement is that they want to learn as much English as possible ($\bar{x} = 4.17$, $SD = 0.78$) while the third rank, rated $\bar{x} = 3.98$, $SD = .78$, is that they believe that learning English is really great. In accordance with the above, some unfavorable reasons such as “When I leave school, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it” ($\bar{x} = 1.80$, $SD = 0.83$), “I think learning English is dull” ($\bar{x} = 1.79$, $SD = 0.82$) and “Learning English is a waste of time” ($\bar{x} = 1.71$, $SD = 0.89$) are considered as weak attitudes according to this target group of students towards learning English language.

Part II: (D.) Motivation Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language.

This part presents the results which answer the research questions discussed in this study. Findings resulting from the returned questionnaires regarding the respondents' interest in learning English as a foreign language are as follows:

In the questionnaire, the subjects were requested to rate the level of motivation towards learning English as a foreign language using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The ratings as well as the mean of motivation towards learning English as a Foreign Language are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Type of Motivation and Mean Motivation Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language.

Motivation Towards Learning English	(N=80)		
	Mean	SD	Orientation
Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak English.	3.93	0.82	INTG
Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	4.09	0.68	INTG
Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature.	3.89	0.76	INTG
Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups.	4.21	0.67	INTG
Studying English can be important for me only because I'll need it for my future career.	2.64	0.18	INST
Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	3.81	0.66	INST
Studying English can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting good jobs.	4.48	0.57	INST
Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.	3.95	0.95	INST

As illustrated in Table 7 and in accordance with Gardner (1985), the subjects of this study express the highest motivation towards learning English instrumentally (“studying can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting good jobs”, $\bar{x} = 4.48$, $SD = 0.57$). Followed by integrative motivation, the students are highly motivated towards learning English because (1) they think studying English is important for them as they can participate in the other cultural groups’ activities more freely ($\bar{x} = 4.21$, $SD = 0.67$), (2) it can allow them to meet and converse with a larger variety of people in the society ($\bar{x} = 4.09$, $SD = 0.68$), and (3) studying English can be important to them because it will allow them to be more at ease with people who speak English ($\bar{x} = 3.93$, $SD = 0.82$). The only average level of motivation is due to the instrumental reason that they need to learn English because of their future careers (rated $\bar{x} = 2.64$, $SD = 0.18$). Notably, from the above table, no evidence of students’ low motivation towards learning English appeared.

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine the first-year undergraduate students majoring in Public Health at Thaksin Univeristy, Phatthalung Campus regarding attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language. Findings from this study may be applied as guidelines for those who are English instructors in terms of course adjustments and/or enhancing classroom environment in various courses. The assessment tool utilized in this study is questionnaire adapted from Gardner’s (1985) AMTB (Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery). The study was conducted on a sample of 80 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the General English 1 course (0000121) from the Public Health major at this particular university during the 2013 academic year. All the participants, ranging from 18 years old to 20 years old, completed the questionnaire. The data obtained from the completed questionnaire were calculated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to answer the 3 research questions.

The following are the major findings of the data analyses as related to the research questions posed in this study.

1. Are the students highly interested in learning English as foreign language?

According to the obtained data, despite being Non-English major students, the participants are highly interest in learning English. Moreover, in accordance with the earlier mentioned, they also have a very strong desire to learn English as a foreign language.

2. What are the attitudes of the students toward learning the English language?

The participants recognized English as an important part of a school/university program, and they have positive attitudes towards learning the English language.

3. Are they primarily integratively or instrumentally motivated towards learning the English Language?

Although students are primarily instrumentally motivated towards learning English, they are also highly motivated due to integrative reasons. In this regard, it can be interpreted that as Non-English major students, the participants tend to mainly focus on learning English because they believe that it can support their future success in both educational and occupational pursuits. And since they have high interest and very a strong desire to learn English themselves, it is reasonable that the participants also have high integrative motivation to learn English, as shown by the results.

Suggestions

The findings of this study indicate that the students are highly interested in as well as have a very strong desire to learn English as a foreign language, mostly because they want to be successful in their future careers. Therefore, it is strongly recommended for the instructor to conduct a needs analysis on the specific skill(s) or course(s) required by the certain group of students in order to (re)design the course to match the learners' requirement. Since they have positive attitudes and high motivation towards learning English, the course instructor may consider adding more activities to help encourage the students to improve their English skills as well.

Recommendations for further studies

1. Future research should be conducted to determine attitudes and motivation towards learning English to in other fields of education, i.e., Law, etc.
2. It is recommended future studies use a large sample size.
3. The relationship between the attitudes and motivation towards learning English language and students' learning achievement should be studied further.

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