

**Attitudes of Saudi Secondary School Level Students Towards Learning
of English as a Foreign Language**

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Abstract. This study aims at analyzing the results, taken from a survey of 124 male students at secondary school level in Buraydah, Gassim, Saudi Arabia. It reveals rationale behind the relationships among students, in terms of their interest, desire and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. It further focuses on finding the differences, based on cultural background between Saudi students and the students from the other areas. This also leads to locate any particular attitude of the students towards learning of English Language. In one hand, this article involves in a very interesting study about the love/hate attitudes of the learners of English language while on the other hand, inspite of accepting the importance of English it reveals that the students seem to have negative attitude towards particular native speaking communities due to some present day political issues. This research reaches the conclusion by using an attitudinal questionnaire with the students.

Introduction

English is an important and useful language to learn because today, millions of people from all over the world are using English as a means of communicating with each other. In this regard, like other non-English speaking countries, Saudi Arabia too, understands the sensitivity of English and considers it a source of professional growth.

As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia is a major oil producing and exporting country to many countries around the world and English plays a vital role in international trade. This position of English necessarily necessitates the need for English for many official agencies and their staff.

In the context English as a foreign language (EFL), the 'attitude' of the students towards the achievements of English language has got a queen position and one can hardly ignore it in such a situational study. Gardner and Lambert (1972) claim that 'positive attitude' enhances second language learning whereas 'negative attitude' does not serve the purpose. [1]

Similarly, Shah (1999) agrees with that in his findings that the lack of a positive attitude contributes towards low achievements to the students [2]. Hassan (1996) also shows a significant correlation between attitudes towards English and English achievement. [3]

Statement of the Problem

Most of the studies conducted on attitudes towards English learning have focused on university students' attitudes (Dhaif-Allah, 2005). Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the pre-university period in which the students study English in forming their attitudes and perceptions. [4]

Although Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia started introducing English in the primary schools in 2004, intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia (three years of education after the primary schools) are the real encounter with English as a foreign language. Students in primary schools are only introduced to the alphabetical letters and numerical figures with very limited words.

Students continue studying English in the secondary school for three more years prior to entering the university. It is these years that mostly have an effect on the students' attitudes they develop during this period that forms the basis of students' perceptions towards the study of the English language. The researcher wants to investigate this problem particularly the Saudi students' attitudes towards English learning at the pre-university level in secondary schools.

Focus of the Study

We may look through this section at three points.

Research Questions

1. What are the secondary school Saudi students' attitudes towards studying English?
2. What are the possible reasons behind their like/dislike attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language?

Hypotheses of the Study

The study includes two main hypotheses:

1. Secondary school students have generally positive (like) attitude towards English as a foreign language.
2. Students may develop like/dislike attitudes towards the English language because of some reasons.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study is applied on only three male secondary school students in governmental (public) schools in Qassim area, Saudi Arabia.
2. The study is conducted on male students only.

Review of Literature

What is Attitude?

Victori & Lockhart (1995) claim that attitudes of learners towards language learning consist of general assumptions about factors influencing language learning and the nature of language learning and teaching [5]. In a similar vein, Dittmar (1976) suggests that attitudes consist of three components: the cognitive, affective and conative components. The cognitive component refers to an individual's belief structure, the affective refers to emotional reactions and the conative component comprehends the tendency to behave in a certain way towards the attitude. [6]

These definitions agree with Sarnoff (1970), who suggests that 'attitude' deals with a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects [7]. Eagly and Chaiken (1989) expand on this idea by stating that attitude is an outcome of the categorization process, which is influenced by the social environment [8]. That is attitudes can be looked at as items of social knowledge that are continually formed, strengthened and modified. They can therefore be defined as mediated reactions that have been strongly influenced by social context (Long & Russell, 1999). [9]

What is a language attitude?

From the definitions above we can see that learners hold different types of attitudes. For instance, learners manifest different attitudes towards: the target language, the target language speakers, the target language culture, the social value of learning the foreign language, the particular uses of the target language, and themselves as members of their own culture (Demir, 2003) [10]. However, Baker (1988) stresses the importance of attitudes in the discussion of bilingualism. He claims that attitudes are learned predispositions, not inherited, and are likely to be relatively stable; they have a tendency to persist. He adds that attitudes are complex constructs; e.g. there may be both positive and negative feelings attached to a language situation. [11]

Importance of studying attitudes

There are a number of reasons that show the importance of studying attitudes, which are summarized in the following points:

1. An investigation into learner's attitudes is a means by which language teachers, education planners, syllabus designers and researchers can gain greater insight into the language learning /teaching process. It is generally agreed that positive attitudes facilitate the learning process.
2. Students have different needs, preferences, beliefs, learning styles, and educational backgrounds, and that imposition of change upon these factors can lead to negative reactions.
3. Learners have views on the learning process and can articulate them.
4. We can find very limited studies on attitudes that are conducted on Saudi students towards English learning.

Attitude Related Studies

Upon review of the literature available in the area of student attitudes, it would appear that most of the research which has been conducted to date has focused on first year university students and their transition from the secondary school English class to the university style lecture (Dhaif-Allah, 2005). [4]

Early research on the relationship between attitudes and second/foreign language achievement was carried out by Gardner and Lambert in the 1950s, and later by Schumann (1975) [12]. Schumann (1975) found a number of contributory factors affecting language learning. Some of these factors are: i) language shock (resulting in feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration or guilt); ii) culture shock (producing feelings of alienation or anxiety and rejection of native speaker values); iii) language stress (shame and loss of self-esteem resulting from a perceived deficiency in language); and iv) anxiety (due to the infantile persona necessarily projected by the language learner). [12]

It was found in a study conducted by Cogan, Torney-Purta and Anderson (1988) that the majority of Japanese students' attitudes towards the study of a foreign language was not important for them personally [13]. Of the first year university students sampled, only 34% indicated that they would study a foreign language if it were not compulsory. On the other hand, Kobayashi et al. (1992) conducted a survey of 549 freshmen and sophomores Japanese students to assess their secondary school learning experiences and attitudes towards English. There was found to be an overall interest in the study of English, with 73% of students wanting to be able to speak the language and 83% to use it to learn about other cultures. A further 87% saw English as being important in their future career choice. However, approximately 85% of the students indicated that their secondary school English course had failed to improve their communicative competence. [14]

Secondary school students can develop like/dislike attitude. According to Hatori (1977) who examined the primary reasons to see why junior high school students hate English and the time period in which they develop this particular attitude, he found that there are some major reasons underlying the students' losing interest. They include: (a) students not understanding information in class and being unable to make a connection between new material and that which has already been covered; (b) students not liking their English teacher; and (c) instructors teaching English as a subject and not as a language for communication; (d) the structure of the Japanese education system in which students are required to cover a considerable amount of work, with teachers lacking the time to review material with students who do not understand [15]. Similarly, Lin and Warden (1998)

studied the different attitudes of 346 college-level English language learners' non-English major EFL students in Taiwan. He wanted to find out some causes that may have hindered English learning in the past for the students participating in the survey, and their perspectives about English learning. Results showed that most of the students had either fear or unpleasant feelings about their past English learning experiences, and that students of different majors had different perspectives about English learning. [16]

A group of researchers in the Department of Education at Hiroshima University (Matsuura et al., 1997) carried out a longitudinal comprehensive study to investigate the attitudes of secondary school students towards the study of English over a 30 year period, beginning with the first survey in 1966 [17]. The researchers point out that many students do like studying English, but that their positive attitudes toward the subject decline as they progress through the six years of secondary school education. The study concluded that teachers and students have differing opinions as to the way in which English should be taught. These findings go with Koizumi and Matsuo (1993) who examined 296 first year junior high school students to determine what attitudinal and motivational changes took place over a one-year period. The results of the study indicated that students suffered a decline in attitude during the first three to seven months in the first year of the intermediate school. This decline was attributed to the increased difficulty of English classes. [18]

Nikolaou (2000) surveyed the attitudes and motivation of Greek students learning English. The findings showed that the respondents have modestly favourable attitudes toward learning English. However, their attitudes toward the American culture are negative but only marginally positive toward the British culture. Similarly, with regard to British and American people the respondents expressed neutral attitudes. Overall the respondents showed a moderate motivation and desire to learn English. [19]

Hassan (1996) assessed some attitudinal variables of Egyptian learners in relation to their college EFL proficiency. These variables were the students' attitudes towards (a) the foreign language culture, and (b) the foreign language learning. Major findings yielded from this study were: (a) EFL students who had more positive attitudes towards the foreign language were more proficient FL learners, (b) scientific major students had more positive attitudes towards the foreign culture than their literary major counterparts, (c) literary major students had more positive attitudes towards the foreign language learning than scientific major students (d) scientific major students were more proficient learners of the target language than their literary major counterparts. He concluded that the results of the study indicated that success in foreign language learning is partly accomplished by a sympathetic orientation and/or a positive attitude towards the language and its culture. [3]

Methodology

Subjects

A total of 135 secondary school students in the third grade from three public schools participated. The findings of the present research were gleaned from 124 secondary school students after excluding incomplete questionnaires thus bringing the total valid questionnaires to 124.

Subject's proficiency level

The average mean mark (i.e. good) in the most recent school report for the sample is 66%. When participants were asked to rate their level in English, the majority of secondary school students 60% rated themselves as good, 20% as very good, 8% as excellent, 7% as poor and 5% as fair. In conclusion, from the school report and students' self assessment students seem to be doing well in English. This can be attributed to the five years period of time secondary and intermediate schools students have spent in learning English and the experience they have gained through this period. These responses, however, are not accurate indication of students' mastery of English.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire given to the students was developed in English and then translated into Arabic to make sure the students have more confidence in understanding the statements due to their low English proficiency. The questionnaire (see Appendix) consisted of the following items: 1) Demographic data aiming at building the foreign language profile of the respondents, 2) Attitude Scale which is adapted largely from Gardner (1985) [20], Nikolaou (2000) [19], Demir (2003) [10] and Buschenhofen (2001) [21], and 3) Reasons that are thought to be underlying students' attitudes (Likes/Dislikes) towards learning English as a foreign language.

Attitude Scale

The questionnaire was firstly designed on a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Prior to conducting the questionnaire a pilot study was undertaken in order to assess the suitability of the questions selected and the Likert scale chosen. To see how the students understand and answer the questions, thirty randomly chosen intermediate and secondary school students undertook the initial questionnaire. It was noticed that the students had a tendency to select "undecided" for most of their answers as they felt they were not required to make a commitment to either a positive or a negative response. For this reason the five-point scale was reduced to a four-point scale eliminating "undecided" as a response answer. The questionnaire was then given to a jury of specialists (nine faculty members living in Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates). Faculty members were chosen for their rich experience in the field of teaching English as a foreign language; their awareness of the nature, importance and effect of attitudes on foreign language learning; and their acquaintance of the Saudi culture and students due to teaching experience in Saudi Arabia (those from Egypt) and cultural similarity (those in Oman and UAE).

Based on the comments of students and suggestions of the jury of specialists, a number of modifications have been incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. Some modifications have been made regarding the wording of some items, the addition and deletion to avoid repetition of ideas, and the length and instructions of the questionnaire.

An 18-item questionnaire using a four-point positive/negative scale was designed to assess students' attitudes towards learning English. The subjects who participated in the study were informed that the data collected from the questionnaire would be used to conduct research and would be used for research purposes only. This was done in an attempt to secure the most honest and accurate responses from the students involved. They were also made aware of the fact that mentioning their names would be optional. The students' classroom teachers who helped in distributing and supervising the questionnaire survey were instructed to give the students some initial guidelines regarding how to complete the questionnaire answer sheet. This included directions on the four-point scale and the importance of circling one answer only. The students were encouraged to write comments if necessary. The teachers were also instructed to allow the students adequate time to complete the questionnaire in order to collect the most accurate information. All students answered the questionnaire during class time which took approximately 30 minutes to be completed.

Reasons underlying students' attitudes

This part comprises 12 statements which were developed to reflect the reasons underlying the degree of positive or negative attitude of the respondents towards learning English. These items included six positively worded statements and six negatively worded ones. The respondents were also asked to rate their responses on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The students were encouraged to write other reasons which they think might have an impact on their attitudes.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes, and the underlying reasons, of third-year secondary school students towards learning of English.

Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language

This scale was constructed to measure the respondents' attitudes (favorable or unfavorable) toward learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, students who are generally favorably disposed to foreign language learning might show a more favorable attitude to learning English.

The quantitative data gathered from this part were tabulated and analyzed statistically using frequency of responses and weighted percentages. The results gleaned from the students are shown in Table (1) below:

Table (1). Frequency and weighted percentages of the students' attitudes toward learning English.

I want to learn English because:	Total Agree		Total Disagree		Weighted Average	Rank order
	N	%	N	%		
1 - I enjoy learning English	75	60.48	49	39.52	1.60	7
2 - I plan to learn English as much as possible	86	69.35	38	30.65	1.69	4
3- Compared to other subjects , I study English the most	45	36.29	79	63.71	1.36	12
4 - Learning English is a waste of time	25	20.16	99	79.84	1.20	13
5 - Studying the English language is a requirement of good education	92	74.19	32	25.81	1.74	2
6- English is the language of progress and modernization	85	68.55	39	31.45	1.69	5
7 - I wish I could speak the English language perfectly	99	79.84	25	20.16	1.80	1
8- I would like to be able to speak the language of the American/British people	85	68.55	39	31.45	1.69	5
9 - I would study the English language even if it were not required in school	90	72.58	34	27.42	1.73	3
10 - I would really like to learn a lot about the English language	90	72.58	34	27.42	1.73	3
11- -I think that learning English is a privilege	81	65.32	43	34.68	1.65	6
12 - I am highly interested in anything related to my English lessons	67	54.03	57	45.97	1.54	10
13 - I think every student should learn English at elementary school	81	65.32	43	34.68	1.65	6
14 – Compared to others in my English class, I think I do more studying than most of them	49	39.52	75	60.48	1.40	11
15 – I do my English homework with extra care and very carefully, making sure I understand everything	70	56.45	54	43.55	1.56	9
16 – When doing homework in English I find that I do the work without much interest	67	54.03	57	45.97	1.54	10
17- As regards English, I can honestly say that I really try to learn English	90	72.58	34	27.42	1.73	3
18- When I have a problem understanding some things we are learning in English class I immediately ask the teacher for help	72	58.06	52	41.94	1.58	8

Accordingly, the cut-score point for secondary school students' responses to the attitude scale items is (1.50). All the items with weighted percentage higher than the criterion were regarded as positive attitudes for the target group.

Hypothesis (1): Secondary school students have generally positive (like) attitude towards English as a foreign language.

The mean response for the whole sample of secondary school students (N=124) is 60.44, suggesting a relatively positive attitude towards learning English as a foreign language which supports Hypothesis 1. Looking at Table (1) we see the statements indicate that the students have a favourable attitude towards learning English

"Studying the English language is a requirement of good education" (74.19 %)

"I would study the English language even if it were not required in school" (72.58 %)

"I would really like to learn a lot about the English language" (72.58 %)

"As regards English, I can honestly say that I really try to learn English" (72.58 %)

"I plan to learn English as much as possible" (69.35)

"I would like to be able to speak the language of the American/British people" (68.55%)

"English is the language of progress and modernization"(68.55 %)

However, the students were unanimous in affording an overall agreement, with a ranking of (1) to the statement *"I wish I could speak the English language perfectly"* which agrees with Kobayashi *et al.* (1992). This may explain why there is a general weakness in language proficiency among Saudi students. The high percentage (79.84%) of the students preferring to speak the language affected their desire to study other skills (e.g. reading and writing). [14]

Statistical analysis of the students' responses reveals an overall interest in the study of English, with 79.94% of students wanting to be able to speak the English language perfectly and 74.19% to study it being a requirement of good education. A further 72.58% saw English as being important in their future career choice

and therefore indicated that they *would really like to learn a lot about the English language and would study the English language even if it were not required in school*. Respondents' positive attitudes towards English learning was also emphasized by 68.53% of the total sample of the students who expressed their willingness to *be able to speak the language of the American/British people* (i.e. the English language), and 68.55 % of them view *English as the language of progress and modernization*.

To express similar attitude about the English language the students disagreed most strongly with the negatively worded statement "*Learning English is a waste of time*" (79.84 %) which was ranked last.

Low percentage of agreement expressed in the mentioned below two statements support what we suggested about the students' desire in speaking the language and not putting more effort in studying other skills.

"Compared to other subjects, I study English the most" (36.29%)

"Compared to others in my English class, I think I do more studying than most of them" (39.52 %)

The overall disagreement with item (4) "*learning English is a waste of time*" (79.84%) indicates that respondents are to a great extent hold a positive attitude towards learning English which they view as an important school subject. The students' response to this item confirms the value of English as an investment for the future and not a waste of time. However, statistical analysis of students' agreement to items 3, 12, 14, 15, and 16, reveal a relatively low interest in the study of English, with 36.29 % of students would study English more than any other subject. A further 39.52% expressed that they do more studying than most of other students in the English language class. It was also found that only 54.03% are highly interested in anything related to their English lessons which was reflected on doing their homework with extra care (56.45%) and with much interest (54.03%).

These responses go with what was said earlier about the students' willingness to speak English fluently more than any other skill.

An analysis of the respective top-ranked and bottom-ranked items, as can be seen in Tables 2 and 3 respectively.

Table (2). the top-ranked "agree" items.

Statement	Rank
7 - I wish I could speak the English language perfectly	(1)
5 - Studying the English language is a requirement of good education	(2)
9 - I would study the English language even if it were not required in school	(3)
10 - I would really like to learn a lot about the English language	(3)
2 - I plan to learn English as much as possible	(4)
6- English is the language of progress and modernization	(4)
8- I would like to be able to speak the language of the American/British people	(4)
11- I think that learning English is a privilege	(5)
13 - I think every student should learn English at elementary school	(5)

The four items which are included among the top-ranked items (i.e., item 5, "*Studying the English language is a requirement of good education*", item 7, "*I wish I could speak the English language perfectly*" item 9, "*I would study the English language even if it were not required in school*" and item 13, "*I think every student should learn English at elementary school*") indicate that the students possess a strong positive attitude towards learning English which supports hypothesis 1. They are aware of the importance of learning English and therefore emphasize that English is an important element of good education. Students' agreement to these statements reflects their strong desire to learn English as a foreign language, but are not willing to put more effort in studying other skills. The reason behind this may come from the educational system which is similar to what we saw with the Japanese students in Hatori's (1977) study. It may be also caused by the teaching method(s) of the English language teachers, which means there need to be more investigation on these issues. [15]

Students may have absorbed the idea that being able to speak the language perfectly is the sign of good education. This attitude is highly emphasized by the students' positive response to items 5 and 9 indicating that English is the requirement of good education and they would study the English language even if it were not required in school.

Hypothesis (2): Students may develop like/dislike attitudes towards the English language because of some reasons

Although item 7 is ranked the first and item 8 is ranked the fourth while both are directed to speaking the language, the reason that probably made the students rank item 8 the fourth is the wording "*the language of the American/British people*" which reflects the students' attitudes towards these two communities.

An indication of positive response from the students was elicited by item 11, "*I think that learning English is a privilege*". Although it was ranked 5 by the students it still shows a good sign of the informants' acknowledgement that learning English can be utilized and therefore they expressed a similar positive response regarding the importance of introducing English to elementary level students. This is also supported by the students' responses to item 4 "*learning English is a waste of time*" and item 6, "*English is the language of progress and modernization*" which agrees with Kobayashi et al. (1992). [14]

Table (3). The bottom-ranked "disagree" items

Statement	Rank
1- I enjoy learning English	7
15- I do my English homework with extra care and very carefully, making sure I understand everything	9
12- I am highly interested in anything related to my English lessons	10
16- When doing homework in English I find that I do the work without much interest	10
14- Compared to others in my English class, I think I do more studying than most of them	11
3- Compared to other subjects , I study English the most	12
4- Learning English is a waste of time	13

As revealed in Table (3) above, one of the lowest-ranked items is item 4, "*Learning English is a waste of time*". This overall disagreement indicates that the students are aware of the negatively worded item and shows that they are unanimous in their positive attitudes towards learning English. They reject the opinion that spending time in learning is not reflected positively in their lives. This response is also an indication of students' awareness that learning English, despite its shortcomings as a school subject, will be useful for them in the future and that English is an important subject in the school curriculum.

Looking at Table (3), we notice that the students give low ranking to items 3, 12, 15, 14 and 16. This attitude is expected since English is a compulsory subject in school and students have other subjects to study which is consistent with Cogan, Torney-Purta and Anderson (1988) [13]. They reported that Japanese students regard the study of English as purely an academic pursuit rather than one for enjoyment purposes. Long & Russell (1999), showed that when university students were questioned regarding their enjoyment of English class and level of confidence, the negative responses of students were double that of the positive ones. [9]

The responses to items 3, 14, 15 and 16 show that the students do not have interest in English, probably as a result of the type and quantity of work they are required to complete in their own time. This result may reflect the attitudes of some students regarding the lack of interest to do more studying of the language English which agrees with Norris-Holt (2002). It may also reflect their attitude towards the curriculum and teaching methods which need further research. [22]

These findings support hypothesis (2) and raise the need for further investigation about the reasons why students' attitude decline as they progress in education. Factors influencing this decline could be attributed to the curricula, methods of teaching, teachers, examinations etc. The study conducted by Koizumi and Kai (1992), is one of the very few studies that investigated students' attitudes in pre-university levels. The results of their study indicated that students suffered a decline in attitude during the first three to seven months in the first year of junior high school. This decline was attributed to the increased difficulty of English classes. [23]

Important findings were revealed as a result of the investigation of the reasons underlying students' attitudes (likes/dislikes) towards learning English as a foreign language. The results gleaned from the students regarding the reasons which underlie their favourable attitude are shown in Table (4) below.

Table (4). Frequency of the students' reasons underlying their positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language.

Students like learning English because:	Total Agree		Total Disagree		Rank order
	N	%	N	%	
1 - I like the teacher	81	65.32	43	34.68	2
2 - I am interested in learning a foreign language	75	60.48	49	39.52	2
3 - I can understand the lesson	41	33.06	83	66.94	5
4 - I always achieve good test results	75	60.48	49	39.52	3
5 - English lessons are fun	66	53.23	58	46.77	4
6 - English will help me in future study	98	79.03	26	20.97	1

The table above reveals that the cut-score point for the students' responses to the reasons underlying their positive attitude towards learning English is (1.56). All the items with weighted percentage higher than the criterion were regarded as important reasons for the target group. This table shows clearly the reasons that underlie students' strong desire to learn English. The students were unanimous in affording an overall agreement, with a high ranking to the following statement: "*English will help me in future study*". This reason highlights students' desire to learn English as a means of academic and professional development. The students seem to be futuristic enough to think of the value of English in planning for their future.

On the other hand, Table (5) shows the results gleaned from the students regarding the reasons which underlie their unfavorable attitude towards English language learning.

Table (5). Frequency of the students' reasons underlying their negative attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language.

Secondary school students dislike learning English because:	Total Agree		Total Disagree		Rank order
	N	%	N	%	
1 - I don't understand information in class	45	36.29	79	63.71	5
2 - I don't like the English teacher	27	21.77	97	78.23	6
3 - Instructors teach English as a subject and not as a language for communication	81	65.32	43	34.68	4
4 - I don't like having to remember vocabulary	89	71.77	35	28.23	1
5 - It is the language of Americans and British	82	66.13	42	33.87	3
6 - I don't like the way we learn English	83	66.94	41	33.06	2

The table above reveals that the cut-score point for the students' responses to the reasons underlying their unfavorable attitude towards learning English is (1.47). All the items with weighted percentage higher than the criterion were regarded as important reasons for the target group.

The students were unanimous in identifying three significant reasons which might have undesirable effect on their attitudes towards learning English. The students do not like having to remember vocabulary and keep things by heart. Similarly, they do not like the traditional methods of teaching which focus on the memorization of vocabulary and the rigid application of grammar rules. The students feel unhappy in English classes because instructors teach English as a subject and not as a language for communication. This result raises the need to adapt teaching methods in relation to the students' interests in order to make learning the foreign language a fun task not a hard one.

The third top-ranked reason underlying the students' unfavorable attitude towards learning English is that it is the language of Americans and British. This last reason that needs to be highly considered because it expresses the students' negative attitudes towards the target language community (i.e. American and British). However, Saudi students can not express their attitude towards the target language community from experience, for the simple reason that the majority of them are not in direct contact with English speaking people. Probably, the current political and military events in the Middle East led by some American and British politicians were a direct cause of the negative attitude the students have towards these two communities and their language. Students seem to be influenced negatively about these two communities through the mass media which broadcasted these events sometimes live on daily basis. So, this last reason is culture-bound, and it indicates the need for cross culture awareness for the students, teachers, and curricula designers and to be an issue in EFL conferences and meetings. Learning about the culture of other people is one way for developing cross-culture understanding and avoiding stereotyping (Dhaif-Allah 1998). [24]

Conclusion

A number of points can be drawn from the present study. Although research results recorded low level of English proficiency, yet there was found a generally positive attitude towards English language among the secondary school students. There do not appear to be, however, strong indicators of negative attitudes declining the study of English as an important school subject. The students showed positive attitude towards learning English as a foreign language and highlighted the value of studying English, namely the crucial role it plays in the country's development.

Furthermore, this study found that the recent introduction of English in elementary schools is a requirement of most learners to develop their proficiency in English when they start early in learning English. It was also found that the subjects of the present study have a strong desire to improve their English and therefore they plan to learn English as much as possible. Students are not either very much interested in doing homework or studying English more than any other subject.

The majority of the 18 statements of the direct attitude questionnaire deliberately request responses relating to the respondents' perceptions towards learning English. Therefore, their attitudes towards English speaking community can be inferred partially in relation to these particular items. A clear picture in relation to students' attitudes towards English speaking community will only be gained through further research. The statements that deal directly with English speaking community are insufficient on its own for conclusions to be drawn regarding students' attitude towards English speaking community.

The students indicated important reasons for their favorable attitude towards studying English. One of these is that English will help them in future when applying for a job or higher education (master and doctorate degrees). Conversely, the students indicated that the way English is introduced in class lie behind their unfavorable attitudes towards studying English as they criticize the how English is being taught to them.

In summary, attitudes towards English language learning cannot be viewed as stable, but changing during the transition from one educational level to another. Because of the changing nature between learning setting of secondary school and university further research is needed in this regard.

Recommendations

Teachers need to have more insight observation and discussion with their students to be able to know what aspects of attitudes are to be developed, when, where, and how. Teachers can have an important role to play in developing students' interests. This could be done through manipulating a variety of teaching methods and techniques that enhances students' enthusiasm to learn English.

The researcher hopes that teachers, educationists, and particularly secondary school curricula designers, will undertake the present research results into account when planning future curriculum revisions, teacher education programs, or research projects.

The present study found that English learners develop a love-and-hate attitude toward English due to their attitudes towards English speaking community. The study, therefore, recommends teaching English as a global language and not to be related to a specific culture(s).

Implications for future investigations

1. Replicating this study in other areas of Saudi Arabia or in similar settings in Arabic-speaking countries to find out differences in students' attitudes.
2. Replicating this study with female students to study the effect of gender on attitudes.
3. Studying the impact of favorable/unfavorable attitudes on EFL proficiency.
4. Studying the practices and the methods of instruction currently used in English classes at the Saudi secondary schools. This will clarify the relationship between students' favorable/unfavorable attitudes and methods of teaching.
5. Exploring teachers' attitudes towards teaching English as a foreign language.
6. Further research why the students have the desire to master spoken English more than any other skill.

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Appendix
THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student,

I would like to find out more about your attitudes towards learning the English language in Saudi Arabia. It would be mostly appreciated if you could participate in the study by filling in this questionnaire.

It is VERY important that the information you write down accurate and honest. It is only in this case the study might have some value. I would like to assure you that the replies will remain absolutely confidential and for the use of this research.

Please follow the following directions when responding to the statements:

- 1- The questionnaire contains two parts. Make sure to provide the needed information for each one.
- 2- Choose the right space that reflects your attitude toward each statement by marking the space provided with a cross "X" in front of each statement.
- 3- Mark ONLY one space in front of each statement.
- 4- Please do not leave out any statement without any response.
- 5- If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, the researcher or his assistant will give you the right answer.

Part one: Respondents' Profile

Your name (optional):

Your age:.....

Level of education:

How long have you been learning English in school?

Did you learn English in any place other than schools?.....

If yes mention the place and for how long?.....

What is the mark you obtained in English in the most recent school report?

Are you currently having English lessons outside school ?

My knowledge of English is: (circle only one)

Very poor poor fair good very good excellent

Have you traveled to any English-speaking countries?

If yes, specify.

Part two: Attitude Scale

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 - I enjoy learning English				
2 - I plan to learn English as much as possible				
3- Compared to other subjects , I study English the most				
4 - Learning English is a waste of time				
5 - Studying the English language is a requirement of good education				
6- English is the language of progress and modernization				
7 - I wish I could speak the English language perfectly				
8- I would like to be able to speak the language of the American/British people				
9 - I would study the English language even if it were not required in school				
10 - I would really like to learn a lot about the English language				
11- -I think that learning English is a privilege				
12 - I am highly interested in anything related to my English lessons				
13 - I think every student should learn English at elementary school				
14 – Compared to others in my English class, I think I do more studying than most of them				
15 – I do my English homework with extra care and very carefully, making sure I understand everything				
16 – When doing homework in English I find that I do the work without much interest				
17- As regards English, I can honestly say that I really try to learn English				
18- When I have a problem understanding some things we are learning in English class I immediately ask the teacher for help				

Thank you for your time and co-operation
The researcher

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