



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Hassan Ahdi,
Global Institute for Research Education
and Scholarship, Netherlands

REVIEWED BY

Yenita Uswar,
Universitas Potensi Utama, Indonesia
Enni Maisaroh,
Universitas Potensi Utama, Indonesia

*CORRESPONDENCE

Bader Alharbi
bahrbi@qu.edu.sa

SPECIALTY SECTION

This article was submitted to
Higher Education,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Education

RECEIVED 20 July 2022

ACCEPTED 10 August 2022

PUBLISHED 29 August 2022

CITATION

Alharbi B (2022) Saudi English
for specific purpose students' attitudes
toward the learning of English
language: An investigative study.
Front. Educ. 7:998531.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.998531

COPYRIGHT

© 2022 Alharbi. This is an open-access
article distributed under the terms of
the [Creative Commons Attribution
License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution
or reproduction in other forums is
permitted, provided the original
author(s) and the copyright owner(s)
are credited and that the original
publication in this journal is cited, in
accordance with accepted academic
practice. No use, distribution or
reproduction is permitted which does
not comply with these terms.

Saudi English for specific purpose students' attitudes toward the learning of English language: An investigative study

Bader Alharbi*

Department of English and Translation, College of Science and Arts, Qassim University,
Ar Rass, Saudi Arabia

Students' attitudes are usually consulted before launching any learning/teaching program since they are the center of the learning process. This study is also motivated by such an aim as it gauges the attitudes of Saudi health track students on learning English for specific purpose (ESP). Furthermore, the students' perceptions toward the culture of English are sought. It also explores the factors that impact the students in their endeavors. The study applies mixed methods by conducting a survey and follow-up interviews to gather information from 57 Saudi students enrolled at the preparatory year program (PYP), and interviews with 25 students. Findings show that the students have a moderately positive attitude toward learning English. Further, students' responses aggregate toward moderate attitudes toward learning the target culture. In addition to that, the study reports some factors which shape the students' positive attitudes toward learning English: (1) teaching quality, (2) classroom scenario, and (3) classroom environment. The study indicates the necessity of engaging students in a relaxed learning environment. As far as the English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers are concerned, they need to take into consideration their students' interests while preparing and delivering the lectures.

KEYWORDS

language learning, language attitudes, ESP learners, Saudi Arabia, preparatory year

Introduction

Learners' attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors affecting language learning and determining the success of the language learner. The learners' attitude can be influenced by many factors, such as the quality of instruction (which involves the teacher, curriculum, and lesson plans), the learners' perception of the target language, and the learner's perception of the socio-cultural environment and English language expectations (Gardner, 2006). Previous studies (Gardner, 2006; Peng et al., 2017; Getie, 2020) suggested that having a "positive attitude" facilitates the acquisition

of a second language, whereas having a “negative attitude” inhibits learning. Thus, it can be said that there is consensus among researchers (Al-Tamimi and Shuib, 2009) that a negative attitude is a contributor to students’ poor academic performance. Hussain et al. (2011) demonstrate that there is a substantial link between one’s attitude toward English and their level of English proficiency.

Currently, Saudi Arabia boasts of a large number of institutions of higher education, including 29 government universities, 38 private universities and colleges, and many other training institutions. All these educational institutions provide their students with an intensive English preparatory year program (PYP). The rationale behind the development of these programs was their necessity and value in preparing learners fresh from a regimented school system for more autonomous university education. This clearly shows that the position of the English language in the educational system of Saudi Arabia is quite well recognized. Saudi Arabia’s policymakers, stakeholders, and other decision-makers consider English a key tool for international relations and scientific-technological improvement. English is Saudi Arabia’s official foreign language, and the government remains interested in English programs as a gateway to the growth of the Saudi individual and nation (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

English is the only foreign language taught in Saudi Arabian public schools and is also a medium of education in some private and most public institutions of higher education. English is seen as a prestigious attribute both inside and outside of the classroom (Alkubaidi, 2014), and as a consequence, there is an ever-growing demand for it in the Kingdom (Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996). More than ever, this demand has led people to consider ESL as a potential new field of study in Saudi Arabia (Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996). In more recent times, English has acquired the status of a “second semi-official language” that is used in tandem with Arabic on public information signs erected in public places. Moreover, although the declared official language is Arabic, the private sector uses English as the official medium of communication. Consequent to these dynamics, the Saudi Ministry of Education has established eleven goals for teaching English in Saudi Arabia, including “enabling students to acquire basic language skills,” “developing students’ positive attitude toward learning English”, and “to help students gain the linguistic skills needed in different professions.”

With these national goals in mind, the English PYPs have evolved to match the needs of the times in the past few decades on the campuses of institutions of higher education, starting with King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals in 1964. Since then, more English PYPs have found their place in the curricula of the universities across the Kingdom. Only the smartest and brightest high school pupils are accepted at Saudi Arabia’s tuition-free institutions of higher institutions run by the government. Most of the Saudi universities reject

students who obtained less than 90 percent on their entrance tests (Naffee, 2013).

The English Language Unit Preparatory Year Program (ELU PYP) forms the major and mandatory component of the Qassim University (QU) PYP for all newly admitted full-time QU students. The program is composed of different tracks with different exit proficiency levels, catering to the English language needs for faculties in each track. In 2006, when PYP was founded, six McGraw-Hill Interaction Series books were taught. After five years in 2011, these students needed a bridging, lower-level course before being introduced to the Interaction Series.

To improve performance, the McGraw-Interactions Hill’s Access was introduced to the curriculum. In addition, 4 h of Level Two English for Specific Purposes were provided. In 2014, Cambridge University Press’ Unlock Series replaced the Interactions Access, by McGraw-Hill Company. It’s a research-based course with Discovery Education films that motivate students to study English. As per Unlock, a student who completes this course could get a 5 to 6.5 on the IELTS Band.

The Unlock Series comprises eight books for Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking in addition to English for specific purpose (ESP) Medical or Engineering textbooks. Due to the introduction of ESP material in the second semester, 25–35% of the Unlock books material is gradually deleted each year. This track is designed for students who want to join QU health faculties after completing all first and second-semester courses.

Importance of the study

Language attitude research benefits all stakeholders. First, students have a wide range of needs, interests, beliefs, learning styles, and educational backgrounds, and imposing change based on these characteristics can result in unfavorable reactions. Second, studying students’ attitudes can help language teachers, educators, curriculum designers, and researchers better understand the teaching/learning process. Third, learners have opinions about the learning process. Last, it is known that studies on Saudi students’ attitudes toward English learning are sparse. Hence, this study is likely to add to the body of knowledge on learners’ attitudes toward English learning in Saudi Arabia, and in a larger context, the foreign language learning corpus.

Statement of the problem

Despite the importance placed on English in Saudi Arabia and the Ministry of Education’s endeavors, low English performance in Saudi schools has been highlighted in several studies (Al-Sulaiti, 1993; Al-Ahdal and Abduh, 2021). Many people attribute this to learners’ aversion to learning English as a foreign language. As a consequence, Saudi students

reach the university level with different linguistic problems having impacted their English proficiency. They have trouble grasping the concepts presented in English classes that are predominantly delivered by non-English speakers. Teachers are criticized for not providing students with the necessary skills for learning English. However, teachers cannot assist students in acquiring language skills if the students lack motivation or use specific learning practices that are detrimental to their academic pursuits. Adult students are more likely to be resistant to trying out new strategies because they appreciate the opportunity to focus on the life experiences they have already collected (Al-Ahdal and Al-Ma'amari, 2015; Bin-Hady and Abduljalil, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the process of learning English can be affected by the beliefs learners bring to the classrooms.

The objectives of this study are to determine the attitudes of the ESP students in the PYP toward learning English, the culture of English people, apart from determining the factors that influence the students' attitude toward learning English as a foreign language. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Saudi PYP students toward learning English?
2. What are the Saudi PYP students' attitudes toward the culture of English people?
3. What are the factors that influence the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language?

Review of literature

What is attitude?

Learners' attitudes toward language learning are formed of essential beliefs and views about the factors that might directly influence the essence of learning and teaching languages (Victori and Lockhart, 1995). Positive beliefs about the process of learning a language suggest that the attitudes of language learners are related to positive psychological, social, and academic outcomes. According to Walker et al. (2013), "attitude" refers to emotions and feelings associated with objects that result from previous experiences. In other words, attitudes are groups of social knowledge that are constantly forming, consolidating, and evolving. Therefore, it is believed that language learners' perceptions regarding their environment (both internal and external) influence their attitudes toward learning the target language. As a result, attitudes can be understood to be mediated reactions that have been fundamentally shaped by the surrounding social context (Long and Russell, 1999).

Learning the first language is a much more involved process than learning a second because it is a "learnable school subject

in that discrete elements of the communication code can be taught explicitly." It is also "socially and culturally bound, which makes language learning a deeply social event" (Dörnyei, 2003). Language is not internalized independently from its surroundings in that our actions, preferences, and dispositions toward language use are very much under the influence of the socialization contexts in which we develop. Learning a second language is different from first language acquisition because it involves communication in the linguistic and cultural context which differs from that of the native speaker. Besides this, the vast linguistic differences between English and Arabic add to the challenges for students from Arab countries, which makes classroom teaching alone insufficient. As stated by Dörnyei (2003), the attitudes of language learners are said to play a crucial role in the success of this complex process. Brown (2000) sheds light on the unusual difficulties of learning a foreign or second language. According to him, "*your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting*" when learning a foreign language. Brown states that students need to identify all their second language-internal problems in order to control them since many of these problems go unnoticed. Hence, according to Brown et al. (2013) and Dörnyei (2003), the learner needs to have a certain set of personality traits and language learning strategies to ensure language learning success. This also implies that focusing on external factors that are associated with the learning process and teaching methods, can be insufficient and less effective in accelerating the development of the learner than understanding the learner's inner self, which is a reflection of his/her environment.

Studies on attitudes of language learners

Gokce (2017) conducted a study to see how university students felt about taking English classes during all four years of their university education. She also collected data on the students' earlier experience with language learning and discovered that such experience shapes students' attitudes toward present learning experiences. The research conducted by Asghar et al. (2018) on the attitudes of Art and Design students in Pakistan toward learning English as a Second Language found favorable results across all three dimensions of attitude: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Lanos (2014) carried out a study to investigate the perspectives of multilingual Spanish pupils in the second and fourth grades on the English language learning process. She specifically compared the attitudes of autochthonous students and immigrant students and found that autochthonous students had a less positive attitude toward learning English compared to immigrant students.

There were some studies that tried to investigate attitudes toward the English language among Arab students. Malallah (2000) explored the attitudes of and motivation among Kuwait University undergraduates toward learning English as a foreign

language. According to the findings, first-year students at Kuwait University had positive attitudes toward the English language, the teaching and learning process for the English language, and native speakers of the English language. It was also discovered that English has a reputable position in Kuwaiti society and that students in Kuwait have considerable intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivations to learn English. This was something that came as a surprise to the researchers. [Al-Tamimi and Shuib \(2009\)](#) studied the attitudes toward English held by petroleum engineering students. Participants consisted of 81 students currently enrolled in the petroleum engineering program at Hadhramout University of Sciences and Technology. According to the findings of this research, the vast majority of Yemeni English as a foreign language (EFL) students, who were represented by the students who took part in this study, had favorable attitudes regarding the English language, its place in Yemeni society, and the significance it plays in the education system of Yemen. He concluded that successful English language learners have a substantial link between their positive attitudes and their level of achievement. [Al-Mutawa and Islam \(1994\)](#) conducted a study to determine the perspectives of Kuwaiti students, and the findings revealed that students of English as a Foreign Language in Kuwait did not have positive attitudes toward the English language and its study. The vast majority of people who took part in the research were of the opinion that knowing English does not help one obtain better jobs. [Shaaban and Ghaith \(2003\)](#) attempted to determine the attitudes of college students in Lebanon toward three languages: Arabic, French, and English. The findings revealed that Lebanese students saw French and English as more valuable for their academic careers than their native language, Arabic. This was the case in a world that is dominated by science and technology, which is why the results were significant. The vast majority of participants believed that English was the key source that would allow them to open the door to future opportunities, not only in their academic pursuits but also in achieving success in business and in communicating with people all over the world. [Karahan \(2007\)](#) carried out research in the surrounding areas to investigate the connection between linguistic attitudes and the learning of EFL. The administration, teachers, parents, and students themselves voiced concerns about the low level of English language skills exhibited by EFL Turkish students, which served as the impetus for the research project. The research showed that Turkish students of English as a Foreign Language have favorable attitudes toward the English language and its culture. However, the participants in the study exhibited an odd lack of tolerance toward Turks who communicated with one another in English. In spite of the fact that students in Turkish schools are exposed to English learning more than they are to learning about other subjects, it is possible that a lack of positive attitudes toward the English language, its use in everyday conversation, and English culture is the primary cause of a lack of English competency among EFL Turkish

learners. [Cleary \(1996\)](#) discovered a unique pattern in the data. His audience included students from a university in Malaysia. These students said that English served as a “conduit” for the cultural supremacy of the West and advocated for the standing of Arabic to be at par with that of English in an Islamic country.

Studies in the Saudi context

There have been some previous studies that tried to investigate motivational strategies within the Saudi context. [Akram \(2015\)](#) used a quantitative approach to study the factors that affect the motivation and attitudes of Saudi PYP students toward English. One of the most important points that arose out of the research was that students resent the idea of being mocked for their lack of knowledge. It has been found that students choose to learn English because of its international reach, and want to appear like Englishmen because they are deeply fascinated by Western society. The reason for this wish can be attributed to their desire to appear like the British and the Americans. The study results also indicated that there is a positive correlation between the level of motivation of Saudi students and their success in learning English. The study also brought forth some interesting findings about the effect of various motivational factors on English language proficiency. [Alkaff \(2013\)](#) conducted a study to investigate the perspectives of English language education of students attending King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. A survey was distributed to 47 female students studying at the English Language Institute. The findings of the survey indicated that the majority of students had favorable attitudes toward the process of learning English and that they aspired to improve and use the language although there were many demands placed on their time and few opportunities for them to practice their English. Another study was conducted by [Khan \(2016\)](#) on community college students. [Khan \(2016\)](#) carried out research at Jeddah Community College to investigate the perspectives of Saudi students on the importance of English language learning. According to the research results, the majority of the students lacked positive attitudes toward the English language learning process. The study also found that lower performance was associated with a poor background in English, the fear of making grammatical mistakes, a lack of confidence, and a lack of support from peers.

The current study

According to the information currently available to the researcher, this is the first study that focuses on PYP students in the health track. This paper adopted mixed methods to investigate PYP health track students as one of the few research projects which used this approach. In addition, it is important to note that none of the studies that were discussed earlier took into account the attitudes of health track students in the Saudi context toward the process of learning a second language. As a result, this study reflects, first, on the attitude of the health

students in the PYP toward language learning, and second, it reports on the factors affecting the students' attitudes in their acquisition of English.

Methods

Research design

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate Saudi PYP students' attitudes toward English language learning. Mixed methods is used to triangulate the findings. Both the questionnaire and interview were applied at the same time. Creswell (2012) confirmed that in convergent design, the data collected in each tool are analyzed in isolation and then they are and/or combined. When this approach is applied appropriately, the data and findings will provide consistent results and the study findings will be relevant to the research questions. In this study, the questionnaire was used to collect data needed for the first and second question, whereas the interview is obtained to answer the third question. Furthermore, data collected from the interview were compared which in turn consolidated the students' attitudes collected from the interview (see results). These procedures helped to reduce the possibility of bias on the part of the researchers and directed the study toward more trustworthy conclusions regarding the students' attitudes toward learning English at QU. The questionnaire was initially used in order to investigate the learners' attitudes. In addition to the survey that was distributed to all the students, the researcher also carried out a semi-structured interview with some students chosen at random in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of this issue.

Participants

A sample of 57 students was drawn from the Saudi PYP learners for this research with ages ranging from 18 to 21 years. All participants were students of the PYP in the College of Applied Health Sciences, QU. Furthermore, 25 of them were also interviewed based on voluntary participation. The PYP courses emphasize helping students develop basic English language knowledge and skills. The participants were registered in the second level of the PYP and assigned to the health track. They were exposed to ESP courses in the second level with a focus on health topics. Participants were duly educated about the ethical issues and their verbal consent was sought both for participation and use of data for research purposes.

Instrumentations

The study instruments were a questionnaire and interviews.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate students' attitudes toward English language learning. After an extensive review of previous studies, a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was devised to elicit responses from the participants. To answer the research questions, the questionnaire was divided into three sections: the first two sections included 12 positive/negative statements to study the students' attitudes toward learning the English language. The third section comprised 6 items on the students' attitudes toward the cultures of native English speakers.

Interview

Twenty-five interviews were conducted to verify the information sought from the students on different opinions of the underlying reasons and attitudes toward the English language and the factors influencing their attitudes. Using semi-structured questions, the interview prompted participants to expound more on their answers and reasons to the questions.

Data analysis

The collected data were classified and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. SPSS version 22 software was used to analyze the responses of the participants and provide descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, standard deviation, percentage) for this study. In addition to quantifying the statistical data of the study, information drawn from the qualitative analysis was used to qualify the numbers drawn from the descriptive statistics.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of EFL Saudi ESP students toward studying the English language, the culture of English people, and the factors affecting their positive and negative perceptions. Descriptive statistics were employed to address the initial study questions. The mean and standard deviations were used to show the variation in the attitudes of QU PYP students toward learning English. **Table 1** displays the (mean and standard deviation).

Answering the research questions based on the data gathered:

RQ1: What are the attitudes of Saudi PYP students toward learning English?

Table 1 shows the mean responses and standard deviation for the total sample of the students ($N = 57$) stands at ($M = 3.164$,

TABLE 1 English as a foreign language (EFL) students' attitudes toward learning the English language.

| Item | Mean | Std. | Level |
|---|------|-------|--------|
| English is the subject I study the most. | 3.14 | 1.27 | Medium |
| I would like to learn a new language. | 3.07 | 1.51 | Medium |
| I comprehend what was taught to me. | 2.49 | 0.83 | Medium |
| I get good test results every time I take them. | 2.75 | 0.98 | Medium |
| English classes are enjoyable. | 3.26 | 1.08 | Medium |
| English will be useful in my future studies and work. | 3.33 | 1.13 | Medium |
| I do not understand what's being taught in class. | 3.14 | 1.14 | Medium |
| I dislike wasting my time studying the English language. | 2.89 | 1.15 | Medium |
| English is taught as a subject rather than as a communication language by teachers. | 3.75 | 1.32 | High |
| I dislike having to recall vocabulary. | 3.68 | 1.31 | High |
| Studying the English language is very boring and challenging. | 3.19 | 1.09 | Medium |
| I do not like how we learn English in school. | 3.28 | 1.16 | High |
| Average | 3.16 | 1.164 | Medium |

SD = 1.164). This suggests that the students have a relatively positive attitude toward learning EFL. There are a few reasons which impacted the ESP Saudi students to have such medium perceptions. They basically learn English to get a job. Others stated that they study English because English is important to pursue their higher studies. The item *“English will be useful in my future studies and work”* scored the highest with a mean average ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.13$). In the interview, Students D said: *“English will help me fly beyond the world and continue my education everywhere.”* Student F said, *“I need it to get a job.”* This explains the students' attitude to the item *“I would like to learn a new language”* which scored second with a mean of ($M = 3.903$, $SD = 1.14$). Students ranked the item *“English classes are enjoyable”* third with average means of ($M = 3.835$, $SD = 0.095$). The item *“I get good test results every time I take them,”* came next with a mean ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.08$) while the item *“I comprehend what was taught to me”* scored the least mean ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.28$). As revealed in **Table 1**, students expressed their negative attitudes toward the negative statements. The item *“English is taught as a subject rather than as a communication language by teachers”* ranked first with a mean score of ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.32$). The item *“I do not like how we learn English in school”* came next with a mean of ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.16$). These results revealed the negative attitudes which demotivate the EFL learning English. Another example of the

students' low motivation is their attitudes toward learning new vocabulary. However, students strongly disagreed with the negatively worded statement regarding the English language, *“I dislike wasting my time studying the English language,”* with a mean score of ($M = 2.89$, $SS = 1.15$).

RQ2: What are the Saudi PYP students' attitudes toward the culture of English people?

Table 2 summarizes the sentiments expressed by the participants in their responses regarding the culture of English-speaking countries, students showed moderately positive attitudes reflected in an average of ($M = 3.067$, $SD = 1.1542$). This sub-category had eight items, four of which had mean values greater than 4 and were assigned to high mean values. Rather, they see it as a potential threat to their native environment. The statement, *“I like listening to English music”* scored the highest, with a mean of ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.03$). The item that was used to measure the participants' views of Thanksgiving and Halloween had a minimum value of ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.05$). This is probably because these events are part of the cultural and religious practices in Arab countries. Thanksgiving is not a holiday in Gulf countries and most other Arabic countries. In the interview, Student 8 answered the question, *“What do you know about Thanksgiving or Easter events?”* with, *“I know it is a kind of celebration where the family gathers to celebrate.”* They also aired their resentment against celebrating the event because it is against their religion. Students 3 said, *“It is a religious day where farmers thank God for the harvest season. It is against my religion to celebrate Christian events.”* Student 6 replied to the question by stating, *“They*

TABLE 2 Students' attitudes toward the cultures of English language countries.

| Item | Mean | Std. | Level |
|---|-------|--------|--------|
| I prefer to know more about the culture of the English language culture. | 3.29 | 1.25 | Medium |
| I like watching English movies. | 3.47 | 1.16 | High |
| I like listening to English music. | 2.64 | 1.10 | Medium |
| Learning English can help me get to know English-speaking people better. | 2.61 | 1.03 | Medium |
| Learning English can help me to learn more about the English language and culture. | 3.22 | 1.23 | Medium |
| I prefer to study ELT books published by English-speaking writers. | 3.03 | 1.17 | Medium |
| I prefer to know more about western events like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter weekends. | 3.21 | 1.14 | Medium |
| Average | 3.067 | 1.1542 | Medium |

(Thanksgiving and Easter events) do not belong to me.” This is expected as the religious beliefs in Saudi society shape the practice of the people who live here.

RQ3: What are the factors that influence the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language?

One of the main factors that are thought to influence the language learning experience is the teaching quality. The quality of teaching can have a significant influence on the students' attitudes. During the interview, they were asked, *What is your opinion about your classroom and your teachers?* A significant number of the respondents claimed that their English lecturers did not make use of language labs and added that their teachers did not encourage them to speak in English during lectures. They also did not provide clear instructions during English exams. A (students 1) said, *“The teachers do not encourage us to talk in English during lectures and do not take us to the listening labs all the time.”* Student 15 mentioned that his teachers did not give *“clear guidelines before English tests.”* Participants were also livid about the rigid teaching style of their teachers and their keenness to finish the course syllabus rather than learners' language acquisition. A student (23) said, *“in the classroom, teachers are usually rushing to complete the course quickly without paying attention to what we have missed in prior lessons.”*

The study found that another factor affecting students' attitudes is the classroom atmosphere. It can be said that language is best learned through classroom activities. The participants were asked to respond to a question on this: *“What is the importance of learning English for you?”* Student 10 said, *“Learning the English language now will help me with my work in the hospital in the future.”* Student 25 claimed that he would need the language *“to communicate with expatriates working in the health sector.”*

When comparing the students' responses to the items *“I do not understand what's being taught in class,” “I dislike having to recall vocabulary”* and *“Studying the English language is very boring and challenging,”* It seems that students are aware of the significance of the language even though they do not enjoy studying it as a subject in the classroom. It is possible that the learners are disinterested in English because of the nature of the work that they are expected to accomplish in their free time.

This finding may mean that several students lack interest in conducting extra work in the English language. It may also signify the learners' attitude toward the course content and teaching style, which need further investigation.

Discussion

This study explored the attitudes of Saudi PYP students toward learning English. Results show their moderately positive

attitudes toward learning English with an average score of ($M = 3.164$, $SD = 1.164$). The results obtained from this study confirm those of previous studies which stated that EFL learners exhibited positive attitudes toward the English language and its learning such as (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2003; Al-Tamimi and Shuib, 2009; Chalak and Kassaian, 2010; Alkaff, 2013). This result is also in line with the findings of Alkaff (2013) that participants believed that “learning English could help them to get a good job, in addition to the importance of English for their postgraduate education”, which indicates the general positive stance students have toward learning English.

Furthermore, it seems that the students were positive about studying English and were aware of the negatively phrased statement. They accepted the idea that learning English will be beneficial to them, which suggests that the learners' attitudes were positive toward learning it. It is seen that the students have a strong belief that the English language can reward them in their career prospects as it is the international language of communication and ensure better job opportunities for them. In the interviews, students expressed their positive stance regarding the importance of language for their future.

Besides, the study gauged the PYP students' attitudes toward the culture of English people. The study findings reported moderately positive attitudes ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.164$) toward learning about the culture of native English speakers. According to this study, Saudi PYP students are interested in learning more about English-speaking people and their culture, which agreed with the findings of Al-Asmari and Javid (2011) who found that their Saudi learners preferred things that triggered their affinity for native people and their culture. However, it is in contrast to Abu-Ghazaleh and Hijazi's (2011) results, which show that Jordanian students do not have very positive attitudes toward English-speaking culture and lifestyle. This finding is also confirmed by Genc and Bada's (2005) study. They opined that teaching English without including its culture is insufficient since students are likely to struggle while attempting to communicate with native English speakers. They highlighted that *“for students of ELT, studying English culture is not an arbitrary but a necessity activity”* (p. 80). Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu (2008) pointed out that effective EFL/ESL teaching requires a systematic coverage of both aspects, language, and culture. Therefore, it can be said that language and culture are inseparable from each other, and both aspects of the English language must be developed simultaneously in order to provide learners with the full benefits of a communicative language program. Further, there is a risk in learning English without understanding its cultural context since the emphasis would be placed solely on linguistic rather than communicative skills.

Finally, the study synthesized the factors that affect the students' attitudes toward English language. Learners' attitude

about the classroom scenario is a crucial element that also affects instructors in the learning-teaching situation. This is because learners who are relaxed in the classroom and who like the teacher are more likely to accept the teacher as a source of information. Additionally, having a constructive outlook on the classroom environment and the instructor may lead to increased levels of self-confidence and integrative motivation, all of which contribute to improved language learning. According to [Conteh-Morgan \(2002\)](#), the learning environment may also have an effect on the overall quality of the educational experience. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of [Norris-Holt \(2001\)](#), which found that the majority of students chose “*communication with foreigners*” above all others as their primary reason for studying English. It also concurs with [Bin-Hady and Al-Tamimi \(2021\)](#); [Haryati et al. \(2020\)](#), who found that their participants wanted to use the English language to communicate with their colleagues from abroad. Furthermore, this is in line with the findings of ([Hatori, 1977](#), cited in [Treephongphan, 2005](#)), which found that among the major factors contributing to the students’ loss of interest were their inability to understand the information being presented in class and the English curriculum being taught as a subject and not as a language for communication. The attitude of the students toward teachers’ roles was investigated in the interview. In the interview, some of the students replied to the question: “*how can you see your teacher’s role during lectures?*” saying “*...and the teachers take into account the sentiments and interests of the students.*” Another student answered “*... I like the teachers who make me relaxed during the lecture. I try to attend all their classes.*” Similar attitudes toward the teachers’ role were found in previous studies such as [Kikuchi \(2005\)](#) and [Khan \(2016\)](#). According to the results, the participants would rather have teachers who are friendly and calm than those who are strict. The most effective English teachers can maintain classroom processes that are adaptable and take into consideration the students’ emotions and interests so that the learners can concentrate on language activities. During lessons, teachers who prioritize their students’ interests over rigid environments and predetermined routines are more favored by learners.

Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate the attitudes of PYP students at QU toward learning English in the College of Applied Health Sciences. The aim included two objectives. The first was to examine the attitude of the PYP students. The second was to identify the factor impacting their attitudes. The current investigation revealed that despite their low English proficiency,

PYP students had a generally positive attitude toward the English language. It was also discovered that the participants of this study had a great interest in improving their English and wanted to learn English in a short period. However, students lacked the habit of either finishing their assignments or focusing on their English learning courses. The participants are aware that having a good command of the English language is beneficial to them and can assist them to succeed in their professional life. This research suggests that positive attitudes can promote proficiency, rather than high success shaping favorable attitudes toward language acquisition. To reach this goal, teachers should be provided with multiple resources and opportunities in order to integrate the learners’ interests. Therefore, teachers’ efforts to improve students’ proficiency and positive attitudes toward language acquisition will lead them to succeed in their professional lives. It was revealed that students have a positive stance on the necessity of the English language for them in their future professional lives. This provides evidence that the attitudes of the learners about the process of acquiring English were encouraging. It is clear that the students have a significant feeling that being proficient in the English language may benefit them with their career chances as English is being more recognized inside Saudi Arabia in both the private and public sectors as a language of communication.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

- The learners must be engaged in classroom activities in a relaxed atmosphere.
- The student’s interests should be considered when designing English language courses.
- Future research should explore in-depth the factors that are linked to the students’ attitude toward language learning such as classroom interactions, linguistic knowledge, teaching strategies, and learning environment).

Limitations

The researcher feels that the small sample size and the presence of just one gender were factors that restricted the scope of the study since the findings of the study can now only be applied to a specific setting. Further, the interviews would have revealed more about learners’ attitudes

if a larger number of participants were asked to share their individual views. Future studies need to pay attention to these limitations to ensure more applicable conclusions.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of the study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript.

References

- Abu-Ghazaleh, D., and Hijazi, D. (2011). Jordanian graduate and undergraduate university students' attitudes towards the english language. *Eur. J. Soc. Sci.* 21, 625–637.
- Akram, M. (2015). Arab students' motivation in learning english: A study of PYP students. *Int. J. Engl. Lang. Teach.* 3, 80–90.
- Al-Ahdal, A. A. M. H., and Abduh, M. Y. M. (2021). English writing proficiency and apprehensions among Saudi college students: Facts and remedies. *TESOL Int. J.* 16, 34–56.
- Al-Ahdal, A. A. M. H., and Al-Ma'amari, A. A. H. (2015). Learning strategies of the Arab EFL learners: Finding correlation with outcomes. *Adv. Lang. Lit. Stud.* 6, 230–241. doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.5p.230
- Al-Asmari, A. R., and Javid, C. Z. (2011). Motivational constructs: A cross sectional study of EFL learners at Taif university. *J. Soc. Sci. Hum.* 19, 73–104.
- Al-Haq, F. A. A., and Smadi, O. (1996). The status of english in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from 1940-1990. *Contrib. Sociol. Lang.* 72, 457–484. doi: 10.1515/9783110872187.457
- Alkaff, A. A. (2013). Students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning english. *Arab World Engl. J.* 4, 106–121.
- Alkubaidi, M. A. (2014). The relationship between Saudi english major university students' writing performance and their learning style and strategy use. *Engl. Lang. Teach.* 7, 83–95. doi: 10.5539/elt.v7n4p83
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2014). The four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. *Int. J. Engl. Linguist.* 4, 17–26. doi: 10.5539/ijel.v4n5p17
- Al-Sulaiti, L. M. (1993). *Some aspects of Qatari Arabic phonology and morphology*. Doctoral dissertation. Lancaster: University of Lancaster.
- Al-Tamimi, A., and Shuib, M. (2009). Motivation and attitudes towards learning English: A study of petroleum engineering undergraduates at Hadramout University of Sciences and Technology. *GEMA Online J. Lang. Stud.* 9, 29–55.
- Asghar, A., Jamil, I., Iqbal, A., and Yasmin, M. (2018). Learner attitude towards EFL learning: A response from art and design. *Open J. Soc. Sci.* 6:81.
- Bin-Hady, W. R. A., and Abduljalil, N. H. (2021). EFL students' achievement and attitudes towards flipped pronunciation class: Correlational study. *PSU Res. Rev.* [Epub ahead of print]. doi: 10.1108/prr-09-2020-0029
- Bin-Hady, W. R. A., and Al-Tamimi, N. O. M. (2021). The use of technology in informal English language learning: Evidence from Yemeni undergraduate students. *Learn. Teach. Higher Educ. Gulf Perspect.* 17, 107–120. doi: 10.1108/LTHE-09-2020-0037
- Brown, G. A., Bull, J., and Pendlebury, M. (2013). *Assessing student learning in higher education*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781315004914
- Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 30, 745–778. doi: 10.1002/1099-0992(200011/12)30:6<745::AID-EJSP24>3.0.CO;2-O
- Chalak, A., and Kassaian, Z. (2010). Motivation and attitudes of Iranian undergraduate EFL Students towards learning English. *GEMA Online J. Lang. Stud.* 10, 37–56.
- Cleary, J. (1996). "Can theories of linguistic imperialism 'be falsified? Attitudes to English in a Malaysian university," in *Proceedings of the Edinburgh Linguistics Department Conference*, Edinburgh, 191–203.
- Conteh-Morgan, M. (2002). Connecting the dots: Limited English proficiency, second language learning theories, and information literacy instruction. *J. Acad. Librariansh.* 28, 191–196. doi: 10.1016/S0099-1333(02)00282-3
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 4th Edn. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). Attitudes, orientations, and motivations in language learning: Advances in theory, research, and applications. *Lang. Learn.* 53, 3–32. doi: 10.1111/1467-9922.53222
- Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Genc, B., and Bada, E. (2005). Culture in language learning and teaching. *Read. Matrix* 5, 73–84.
- Getie, A. S. (2020). Factors affecting the attitudes of students towards learning English as a foreign language. *Cogent Educ.* 7:1738184. doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2020.1738184
- Gokce, D. D. (2017). Language learning attitudes: Ingrained or shaped in time. *Int. J. Lang. Educ. Teach.* 5, 257–275.
- Haryati, S., Rochsantiningsih, D., and Wahyuni, D. S. (2020). English needs of occupational safety and health (OSH): The multinational and national companies' voice in Indonesia. *Pedagogy J. Engl. Lang. Teach.* 7, 117–126. doi: 10.32332/pedagogy.v7i2.1669
- Hatori, H. (1977). What are the primary reasons for students to hate English. *Engl. Teach. Mag.* 26, 6–7.
- Hussain, M. A., Shahid, S., and Zaman, A. (2011). Anxiety and attitude of secondary school students towards foreign language learning. *Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci.* 29, 583–590. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.279
- Karahan, F. (2007). Language attitudes of Turkish students towards the English language and its use in Turkish context. *Çankaya Univ. J. Arts Sci.* 1, 73–87.
- Khan, I. A. (2016). Effectiveness of E-learning for the Teaching of English: A study of comparative strategies. *Adv. Lang. Lit. Stud.* 7, 125–135. doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.3p.125

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

- Kikuchi, K. (2005). Student and teacher perceptions of learning needs: A cross analysis. *Shiken JALT Test. Eval. SIG Newsllett.* 9, 8–20.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Cultural globalization and language education*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lanos, M. A. (2014). *Language attitudes in a multilingual and multicultural context: The case of autochthonous and immigrant students in Catalonia*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Lleida: University of Lleida.
- Long, R. W., and Russell, G. (1999). Looking back: Student attitudinal change over an academic year. *Lang. Teach.* 23, 17–27.
- Malallah, S. (2000). English in an Arabic environment: Current attitudes to English among Kuwait university students. *Int. J. Biling. Educ. Biling.* 3, 19–43. doi: 10.1080/13670050008667698
- Mutawa, N. A. A., and Islam, N. (1994). *Evaluation of an EAP reading course at the faculty of education*. Kuwait City: Kuwait University.
- Naffee, I. (2013). *Saudi Universities preparing graduates for labor market*. Arab News. Available online at: <http://www.arabnews.com/news/448284> (accessed February 11, 2022).
- Norris-Holt, J. (2001). Motivation as a contributing factor in second language acquisition. *Internet TESL J.* 7, 1–8.
- Peng, J. E., Zhang, L., and Chen, Y. (2017). The mediation of multimodal affordances on willingness to communicate in the English as a foreign language classroom. *TESOL Q.* 51, 302–331. doi: 10.1002/tesq.298
- Shaaban, K., and Ghaith, G. (2003). Effect of religion, first foreign language, and gender on the perception of the utility of language. *J. Lang. Ident. Educ.* 2, 53–77. doi: 10.1207/S15327701JLIE0201_3
- Treephongphan, U. (2005). *Relationships between attitudes toward a study of English and English proficiency: A case study of students in Nakprasith school, Nakhon Pathom Province*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Nakhon Pathom: Christian University of Thailand.
- Victori, M., and Lockhart, W. (1995). Enhancing metacognition in self-directed language learning. *System* 23, 223–234. doi: 10.1016/0346-251X(95)00010-H
- Walker, D. A., Smith, M. C., and Hamidova, N. I. (2013). A structural analysis of the attitudes toward science scale: Students' attitudes and beliefs about science as a multi-dimensional composition. *Mult. Linear Regres. Viewpoints* 39, 38–48.