



The attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language

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Abstract

This study explores the attitudes of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) undergraduate students towards learning English as a second language, examining the relationship between students' attitudes and their proficiency levels, and investigating potential gender differences. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a questionnaire adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). A total of 103 students participated, categorised based on their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) proficiency levels. The findings reveal that students generally have positive attitudes towards learning English as a second language. A significant relationship was found between higher proficiency levels and more positive attitudes. However, no statistically significant gender differences were identified. The study emphasises the importance of improving English proficiency to foster positive attitudes and recommends interventions that support low-proficiency learners. The findings provide insights into language education strategies and contribute to the broader understanding of second language acquisition among Malaysian university students.

Keywords: ESL, SLA, student attitudes, language proficiency, gender differences

Subject area: P118-118.75 Language acquisition

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

In this epoch, English serves as a global common language, transcending borders and cultures, with billions of individuals worldwide utilising it for communication. The importance of being proficient in this language is unquestionable, especially in Malaysia where English has been given the status of a second language. In Malaysia, English is a mandatory subject taught in all public schools from kindergarten to secondary level. English language proficiency is crucial not only in primary and secondary education but also in higher education.

When students step into the world of university, English becomes even more crucial as it is used as the medium of instruction for many courses, and proficiency in the language is essential for academic success. Proficiency in English language is key to understanding course material, participating in discussions, and completing assignments effectively. Thus, university students are required to demonstrate a certain level of English language proficiency, which is often assessed through standardised exams like the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), to ensure they are prepared for both academic and professional challenges in an increasingly competitive, global environment.

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET), administered by the Malaysian Examination Council (MEC), serves as a barometer for assessing English language proficiency among students. The test assesses four core language skills: writing, reading, speaking and listening. Students are scored on a scale of 1 to 360, which places them in proficiency bands from Band 1 (the lowest) to Band 5+ (the highest) (Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2022).

In the 2022 MUET Session 3, a total of 65,886 candidates took the MUET test. Notably, 0% of students achieved the highest level of proficiency, Band 5+, and only a minuscule 0.97% attained Band 5. While 10.32% reached Band 4.5, most students scored Band 4 or lower, with 41.95% achieving Band 4 and 35.43% scoring Band 3.5 (Malaysian Examinations Council,

2022). While it is encouraging that many students attained Band 4 proficiency in the MUET test, showing a functional grasp of English, the wider context must also be considered. A balanced distribution of proficiency levels, with a notable percentage achieving higher bands like Band 5, is vital for success in tertiary education and beyond. Moreover, the significant number of students scoring below Band 4 highlights the need for further efforts to improve language proficiency and to ensure that all students are well-prepared for academic and professional development.

Beyond the realm of formal education, the attitudes of students towards the language and its learning are considered key factors in achieving language proficiency. It is widely acknowledged in Malaysian society that many individuals struggle with English fluency despite eleven years of compulsory schooling. This is largely attributed to attitudinal factors. Some students lack enthusiasm and focus in English classes because they do not recognise its future significance. Thus, they do not put much effort into it. That is probably why the standard of English in Malaysia is unsatisfactory today (Khairunnisa Zukiflei & Nur Ehsan Mohd Said, 2020).

In addition, some studies have also looked at how male and female students feel about learning English, and there seem to be some differences. Research by Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021) and Langat and Chepchieng (2019) found that female students are generally more motivated and have a more positive attitude towards learning English. This might be due to the perception that English is important for future education and career opportunities, especially for women. Nevertheless, other studies, like those by Duy and Trang (2021) and Mutar (2019) found no notable differences in attitudes between females and males. These mixed findings show that more research is needed.

Hence, this study aims to investigate university students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language, the relationship between students' attitudes and proficiency

levels, and whether there are any differences in attitudes between males and females. The research will focus on undergraduate students at Universiti Tuanku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) in Perak.

1.2 Statement of problem

In any educational setting, students' attitudes towards learning are crucial (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hazlina Abdullah et al., 2022). These attitudes significantly influence students' language acquisition and academic performance and therefore have become a significant area of study in educational research. Some past studies have explored the attitudes and motivations of students towards learning English as a second language. However, this study will focus solely on students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language.

Most of the studies have indicated that students generally hold a positive attitude towards learning English as a second language across different countries (Agus Husein As Sabiq et al., 2021; Alsubaie, 2021; Duy & Trang, 2021; Khairunnisa Zukiflei & Nur Ehsan Mohd Said, 2020; Mohamad Fazil Mohd Zin & Melor Md. Yunus, 2020; Mutar, 2019; Sharma, 2022; Zulida Abdul Kadir et al., 2020). Despite many studies exploring students' attitudes globally, there is still limited research that specifically focuses on Malaysian students' attitudes towards learning English, particularly in the university context. Besides, recent research has produced conflicting findings regarding gender differences in students' attitudes towards learning English. Whereas some studies such as Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021) and Langat and Chepchieng (2019) identified that female students generally exhibit more positive attitudes and greater motivation than males, other studies such as Duy and Trang (2021) and Mutar (2019), reported no significant differences between genders. This inconsistency in findings highlights the need for further investigation, particularly in the Malaysian university context, where research on gender differences in attitudes remains scarce.

Thus, the present study aims to investigate the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language, examining the relationship between their attitudes and proficiency levels and focusing on understanding gender differences. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research by providing insights specific to Malaysian university students.

1.3 Research objectives

1. To investigate the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language.
2. To determine the relationship between UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language and their proficiency levels.
3. To explore whether there are significant gender differences in the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language.

1.4 Research questions

1. What are the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language?
2. What is the relationship between UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language and their proficiency levels?
3. Are there significant gender differences in the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language?

1.5 Significance of the study

The findings of this study will offer meaningful insights into the attitudes of university students towards learning English as a second language, with a focus on understanding the relationship between their attitudes and proficiency levels, as well as exploring potential gender differences. These insights will help educators develop more effective teaching strategies and

targeted instructional approaches that create positive learning outcomes for diverse students.

By identifying and understanding students' attitudes, educators can design more engaging activities and effective teaching strategies that connect with students, creating a pleasant and supportive learning environment that enhances language proficiency. Recognising the relationship between students' attitudes and their proficiency levels will also allow educators to implement targeted interventions to help improve English language education across diverse groups. Besides, policymakers can utilise these findings to make informed decisions regarding language education policies and resource allocation. This would ensure that the resources are allocated effectively to address students' diverse needs.

Due to the conflicting results of the past studies, the present study's exploration of gender differences in attitudes towards learning English helps to clarify these inconsistencies and provide a deeper understanding of how gender affects students' learning of English. With these insights, educators could tailor their lessons to meet the unique needs of each student. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights for future research in the field of language learning by exploring the relationship between attitudes and proficiency, as well as providing a clearer understanding of the influence of gender on language acquisition.

1.6 Definition of keyterms

Attitude

According to Sharma (2022), attitude refers to the way individuals positively or negatively evaluate a person, object, place, or event.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to learning a second language after the acquisition of the first language (L1) (Hummel, 2021).

1.7 Scope and limitations of the study

The present study focuses on exploring the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language and examining the relationship between these attitudes and their proficiency levels. Additionally, the study investigates whether gender differences influence students' attitudes, addressing the conflicting findings in past studies. The study will target undergraduate students at the UTAR Kampar campus to gain insight into the specifics of this group in the university.

However, there are some limitations to the study. The study only focuses on one university in Perak, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Differences in English language proficiency across universities and states in Malaysia may hinder the generalisability of the study's findings and restrict the applicability of this study's findings to other settings. In addition, the study primarily examines students' attitudes, proficiency levels, and gender differences, but does not explore other potential influential factors, such as socio-economic background, teaching methods, or cultural context. These limitations may constrain the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study intends to contribute significant insights into the relationship between students' attitudes, proficiency levels, and gender differences, contributing to the broader discourse on language education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with Wenden's (1991) theoretical framework, which categorises attitudes into three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. The chapter then discusses the attitudes and their significance in language acquisition. The chapter will also look at gender differences in attitudes, with some studies showing that female students usually have more positive attitudes, while others found no significant differences. Finally, the chapter reviews previous research on students' attitudes towards learning English in Malaysia and other countries, providing background for the current study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Wenden (1991) as cited in Duy and Trang (2021), categorised attitudes into three components: cognitive (beliefs), affective (emotions), and behavioural (actions). This framework is useful for understanding how students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language shape their overall experience and outcomes.

Cognitive attitudes include the beliefs, thoughts, and opinions that a language learner has about knowledge and understanding during the learning process. Affective attitudes involve people's feelings and emotions towards an object. Lastly, behavioural attitudes refer to how an individual behaves and reacts to an object in a particular situation.

These three components interact and shape how students feel about learning. This framework will guide the present study in analysing how attitudes influence language proficiency and whether there are gender differences in these attitudes.

2.3 Attitudes

In language learning, attitude significantly impacts the motivation and achievements of learners. According to Sharma (2022), attitude is described as a positive or negative judgement

towards a person, object, place, or event, and it significantly influences behaviour. Besides, attitude' refers to someone's thoughts or emotional state about something (Ahmed et al., 2021). In language learning, students' attitudes are one of the most important components (Ahmed et al., 2021; Langat & Chepchieng, 2019). As noted by Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021), attitudes affect the way learners perceive language learning and their academic skills. Attitudes of learners, whether positive or negative, will determine the effectiveness of language acquisition in the target language group.

2.4 The Significance of Attitude in Learning English

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a multifaceted process impacted by various factors, among which attitude plays a pivotal role (Ahmed et al., 2021; Khairunnisa Zukiflei & Nur Ehsan Mohd Said, 2020; Sharma, 2021). Research by Farah Zulkefly and Abu Bakar Razali (2019) and Sharma (2021) has shown that a positive attitude can help students learn a language better. They found that students who have a positive attitude towards English often perform better in the learning process. Mutar (2019) similarly noted that the attitudes of learners—whether positive or negative will directly influence how easily or difficult they perceive the learning process. Students with a positive attitude towards the language tend to find it less challenging, whereas students with a negative attitude will find it more difficult.

Moreover, A positive attitude helps students better understand the language (Farah Zulkefly & Abu Bakar Razali, 2019). Angelina Arini Larasati and Masda Surti Simatupang (2020) also observed that a positive attitude will boost students' motivation and gradually improve their language proficiency. Conversely, a negative attitude can reduce motivation and result in weaker language skills. If students have negative attitudes towards learning a language, they may become disengaged from the learning process and thus struggle to achieve the desired level of competence. In addition, learners' attitudes are the crucial key to stimulating students' interest in language learning (Mohamad Fazil Mohd Zin & Melor Md. Yunus, 2020). Learners

who have a positive attitude tend to dive into the subject and hence show better learning behaviour (Agus Husein As Sabiq et al., 2021).

In summary, learners' attitudes are essential in determining whether they succeed or struggle in learning a second or foreign language. As the studies show, the attitudes of the learners are the major determinant of their overall achievement in a language. Positive attitudes help learners to learn faster and improve language proficiency. On the contrary, negative attitudes will demotivate learning and hence hinder the language learning process.

2.5 Gender Differences in Attitudes

In many studies, gender has been explored as a factor influencing attitudes towards English learning, but the results are not always consistent. Some studies, such as those by Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021) and Langat and Chepchieng (2019), found that male students generally had less positive attitudes than female students. In Kenya, female students demonstrated higher motivation and performed better in English, while male students' less favourable attitudes contributed to weaker results in exams (Langat & Chepchieng, 2019). The study further noted that positive attitudes have a direct impact on language performance, whereas negative attitudes were more common among male students, which contributes to students' poor results in national assessments such as the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). A similar finding was reported in the study by Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021), which aimed to explore the students' attitudes and motivation concerning gender differences and to evaluate their overall levels of attitude and motivation. The study found that female and male students had moderately high motivation and positive attitudes towards English language teaching. However, male students have a lower average score for motivation and attitudes compared to females.

On the other hand, Duy and Trang (2021) and Mutar (2019) found that male and female students show no significant difference in learning English. For instance, Mutar (2019) found

that Iraqi non-English major university students had positive attitudes towards learning English. They are aware that English is not only a tool for academic learning but also an essential communication skill in the future workplace. There was no notable difference between female and male students, as both were equally motivated to enhance their English proficiency. The study by Duy and Trang (2021) investigated non-English major students' attitudes towards learning English from three dimensions of attitude (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) and examined the influence of students' gender and specialisation on their attitudes towards learning English. The result revealed that the attitudes of students towards English language learning were typically positive, with no gender differences.

2.6 Reviewed of Past Studies

Students' attitudes towards learning English as a second or foreign language have always been the focus of research on language acquisition in different cultural and educational contexts. Most studies show that students generally have positive attitudes towards English as a second or foreign language. Many students understand the significance of English and know that it is an essential skill for education, careers, and communication around the world.

In Malaysia, Khairunnisa Zukiflei and Nur Ehsan Mohd Said (2020) explored Malaysian secondary students' attitudes towards English, focusing on cognitive (beliefs), affective (emotions), and conative (behaviours) aspects. The findings suggested students' attitudes were moderately positive, with a positive relationship between attitude and language achievement. At the university level, Zulida Abdul Kadir et al. (2020) explored the motivation and attitudes of Malaysian university students towards learning English from four institutions (USM, USIM, UMP, and UTHM). The study found a prevalent positive attitude among students, indicating a favourable disposition towards English language learning.

Malaysian students living in rural areas often have negative attitudes and face greater challenges in learning English compared to students in cities (Farah Zulkefly & Abu Bakar

Razali, 2019). Thus, Farah Zulkefly and Abu Bakar Razali (2019) conducted a study to analyse the factors influencing rural Malaysian students' attitudes towards learning English. The findings reveal that students' negative attitudes were primarily caused by lessons that did not align with their proficiency levels or interests and by their reactions to positive or negative learning experiences. Students expressed that more engaging teaching methods would improve their enthusiasm for learning English. Although they recognised the importance of English, they did not see an immediate need for it in their daily lives, especially when communicating in their native language. The study called for more adaptive teaching strategies to foster a positive learning environment, suggesting that teachers should consider students' experiences and attitudes when designing lessons. Similarly, Mohamad Fazil Mohd Zin and Melor Md. Yunus (2020) explored attitudes among TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) students in Malaysia, noting that students generally expressed positive attitudes towards English.

Apart from the Malaysian study, studies in other countries have also found the same results. Duy and Trang (2021) noted that Vietnamese non-English major students recognised English as a critical subject and tool for their future success, even though many lacked strategies to further their proficiency. Therefore, the role of an English teacher is important to foster students' positive attitudes towards English. Similarly, Sharma (2022) examined the attitudes of first-year bachelor's degree students in Nepal and found a predominantly positive attitude towards learning English. They acknowledged that English is critical for education and career. In addition, a study carried out at the University of Bisha in Saudi Arabia assessed the attitudes of non-English major students towards learning English, including their perceptions of English culture and native speakers. The findings found the students held positive attitudes towards learning English, recognised its importance, and had a favourable perception of English culture and native speakers (Alsubaie, 2021).

Moreover, Langat and Chepchieng (2019) found that most secondary school students showed positive attitudes towards learning English but students with lower proficiency often had negative attitudes. This was mainly due to challenges such as low confidence, difficulties with English pronunciation, and limited language skills. These struggles made students feel less confident, leading to decreased motivation and engagement in learning. Furthermore, the study suggested that the students' attitudes towards the subject are a key factor in the continued underperformance in the English language subject in the Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams. Although there are many studies have explored students' attitudes globally, research specifically focusing on Malaysian students' learning of English, especially among university students in recent years, is still very limited. Besides, recent research has produced conflicting findings regarding gender differences in students' attitudes towards learning English. The inconsistencies in findings emphasise the need for more exploration, particularly in the Malaysian context, where research on gender differences in attitudes is lacking.

Hence, the proposed study seeks to address this gap by investigating the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language, examining the relationship between their attitudes and proficiency levels and focusing on understanding gender differences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study, including the research design, sampling technique, instrument, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.2 Research design

This study employs a quantitative research design to address the three research questions. Quantitative research, known for its objectivity, is particularly suitable for collecting quantifiable measures of variables and making inferences from samples of a population (Ghanad, 2023). Thus, it is well-suited to investigate the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language, examining the relationship between their attitudes and proficiency levels as well as exploring gender-based differences. This quantitative study collects data through a questionnaire survey adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Additionally, the study will be carried out at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) in Kampar, Perak, providing an appropriate setting for data collection within an academic environment.

3.3 Sample

In this study, purposive sampling will be employed as the chosen non-probability sampling method. This method is selected because the study targets participants who have completed the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) to evaluate their proficiency levels. Participants will be divided into three proficiency levels (HP, MP, LP) based on their MUET scores and corresponding CEFR levels. High Proficiency (HP) refers to students whose MUET Bands are 5 and 5+ (corresponding to CEFR level C1 and C1+). Moderate Proficiency (MP) refers to students whose MUET Bands are 4 to 4.5 (corresponding to CEFR level B2). Low Proficiency (LP) refers to students whose MUET Bands are 3 to 3.5 (corresponding to CEFR

level B1). Considering the study's focus on ESL context, participants are required to have English as their second language. In addition, participants will be categorised by gender (male and female) in order to investigate gender differences in attitudes towards learning English as a second language. To ensure balanced analysis and meaningful comparisons, the study seeks equal or proportional numbers of males and females. Besides, the target sample size is set at 120 participants.

3.4 Instrument

Questionnaires will serve as the primary instrument for data collection, comprising two sections. Section A collects participants' socio-demographic information, including whether English is their second language, MUET results and gender. Section B focuses on items related to students' attitudes towards learning English, adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The AMTB survey was widely employed in international studies and was adapted to reflect various target language groups, including Japanese, Panjabi, Portuguese, and Malaysian. This validated and widely used questionnaire ensures the validity and reliability of the data collected. For this study, the original questionnaire was modified by replacing the term "French" with "English" to align with the study's context and enhance its relevance to the research objectives.

In this study, the AMTB adapts 20 questions related to attitude, with responses recorded using a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with Scale 1 representing "Strongly Disagree," Scale 2 for "Disagree," Scale 3 for "Neutral," Scale 4 for "Agree," and Scale 5 for "Strongly Agree." To ensure the reliability of the AMTB survey, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the entire scale. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the full scale was 0.936, indicating excellent internal consistency. This strong reliability value confirms that the survey items consistently measure students' attitudes towards learning English, supporting the validity of the data collected. As such, the survey is considered a reliable

instrument for further analysis in this study.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection will be facilitated through Google Forms, providing an accessible and efficient platform for participants to respond to the questionnaire. The researcher will approach students at UTAR Kampar campus randomly, inquiring whether they have taken the MUET exam and if English is their second language. If the response is affirmative, these students will be considered potential participants, and the researcher will request their consent to participate in the study.

Before administering the questionnaires, obtaining participants' consent is essential. A consent form will be provided, clearly outlining the study's purpose and participants will have the autonomy to decide whether to participate or not. Participants will be notified that all data collected will remain confidential and only be used for research purposes. Before completing the questionnaires, students will also be reminded to provide genuine responses to ensure the validity of the collected data. Subsequently, the questionnaires will be distributed to the participants.

3.6 Data analysis

After the data were collected from the online questionnaire, they were analysed using the JAMOV software, a statistical analysis tool that supports descriptive and inferential statistical tests. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise the participants' attitudes and proficiency levels. This provided an overview of the general trends in students' attitudes towards learning English and the variation in their responses. The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the average attitude score of all participants and the variability in their responses.

Next, a One-way ANOVA was conducted to explore how students' attitudes related to

their proficiency in English. This test compared the attitude scores across the three proficiency groups (low, moderate, and high) to see if students with higher English proficiency levels had more positive attitudes towards learning English. To further explore potential gender differences in attitudes, an Independent Samples T-Test was performed. This test compared the mean attitude scores between male and female students, assessing whether gender had a significant effect on students' attitudes towards learning English. Before running the t-test, Levene's Test was used to check the assumption of equal variances between male and female groups, ensuring the reliability of the t-test results.

The results of these statistical tests were used to address the research questions: (1) What are the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language? (2) What is the relationship between UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language and their proficiency levels? (3) Are there significant gender differences in the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language?

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which aimed to investigate the attitudes of UTAR undergraduate students towards learning English as a second language. The data, gathered through a questionnaire, were analysed using JAMOVİ to address the three research questions: What are the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language? What is the relationship between UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language and their proficiency levels? Are there significant gender differences in the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language?

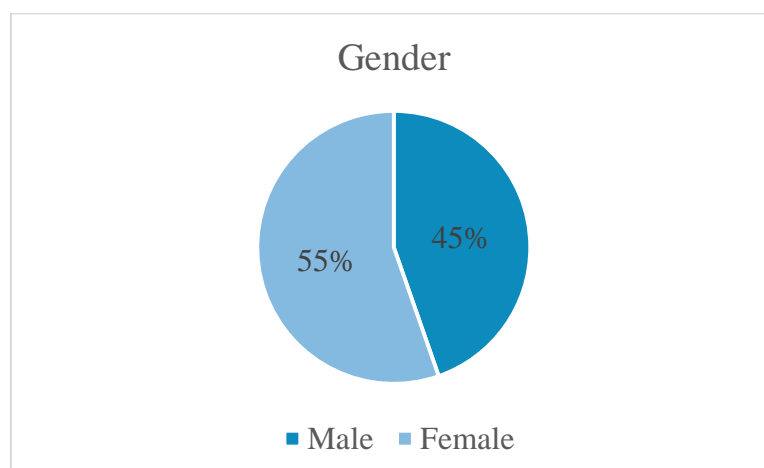
The chapter begins with an overview of participants' demographic profiles. The subsequent sections detail the results of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses conducted to examine overall student attitudes, the relationship between English language proficiency and students' attitudes, and the gender differences in attitudes.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Demographic Information

Figure 1

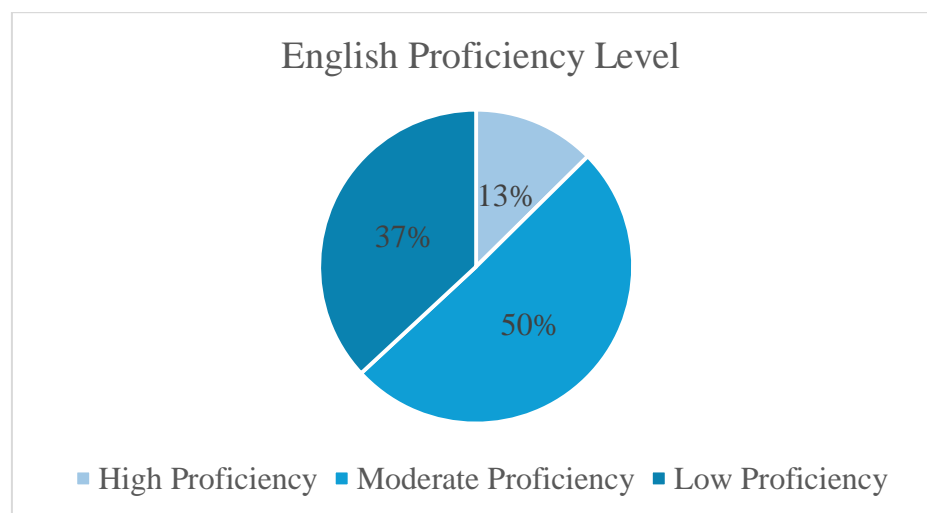
Gender Distribution of Respondents



A total of 103 undergraduate students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) participated in this study. Among the respondents, 57 identified as female and 46 as male. This gender distribution is illustrated in Figure 1, where female students comprise approximately 55% of the sample, while male students account for the remaining 45%. Although there are slightly more female than male participants, the difference is modest, and the overall gender composition remains sufficiently balanced for meaningful comparative analysis. All participants met two key criteria: first, they were required to have taken the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), which provided a basis for assessing their English proficiency levels. Second, they had to identify English as their second language, in line with the research's objective of examining attitudes towards learning English as a second language (ESL).

Figure 2

English Proficiency Level of Respondents



To better understand the impact of language proficiency on attitudes, the participants were categorised into three proficiency levels based on their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) scores. Students scoring MUET Band 3 to 3.5 were placed in the Low Proficiency (LP) group, which aligns with the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference

(CEFR). This group included 38 students. Those scoring between Band 4 and 4.5 were classified as Moderate Proficiency (MP), corresponding to CEFR level B2, and made up the largest group with 52 students. Finally, students scoring in Band 5 to 5+ were identified as High Proficiency (HP), equivalent to CEFR C1 and above, and this group comprised 13 participants.

The proportions of students in each proficiency group are illustrated in Figure 2. As shown in the chart, half of the sample (50%) belonged to the moderate proficiency category, while 37% were in the low proficiency group and only 13% were classified as high proficiency. The distribution indicates that most students **fall** within the moderate range of English ability, with fewer students at the highest proficiency level. This variation in proficiency levels is critical for understanding how students' language ability may influence their attitudes towards English learning. By comparing these groups, the study is able to assess whether higher proficiency is associated with more positive perceptions of English as a second language.

4.2.2 Overall Attitudes Towards Learning English as A Second Language

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Attitudes Towards Learning English

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------------|-----------|
| | N | Mean | Median | SD |
| Attitude Score | 103 | 4.16 | 4.25 | 0.597 |

The first research objective was to examine the general attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language. Responses were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The average attitude score for all respondents was 4.16, with a standard deviation of 0.597. The median score was 4.25, suggesting that a large majority of participants selected either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" for

most items related to positive perceptions of English learning. These results indicate that the respondents generally have positive attitudes towards the English language.

This **generally** positive attitude suggests that most students recognise the value of English in their academic and personal lives. Given that English is widely used in higher education, especially in Malaysia, where it often serves as the medium of instruction, students are likely aware of the benefits that come with being proficient in the language. These include better access to academic content, more effective communication skills, and improved employment prospects after graduation. Furthermore, with English being so prominent in digital media and international communication, many students may see it as a vital tool for engaging with the global community.

It is also worth noting that these findings reflect a strong positive attitude among students. Attitude is closely related to language learning, and a strong, positive attitude often goes hand in hand with greater effort and persistence in learning. From this data, we can conclude that the majority of students are not only aware of the importance of English but also generally enjoy learning it.

4.2.3 Relationship Between Proficiency Level and Attitudes

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Attitude Scores Based on Proficiency Levels

Descriptive Statistics

| | Proficiency Level | N | Mean | SD | SE |
|----------------|-------------------|----|------|-------|--------|
| Attitude Score | LP | 38 | 4.02 | 0.560 | 0.0908 |
| | MP | 52 | 4.21 | 0.655 | 0.0908 |
| | HP | 13 | 4.39 | 0.327 | 0.0907 |

The second research question aimed to find out the relationship between UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language and their proficiency levels. To answer this, students were grouped into three categories—low, moderate, and high proficiency—based on their MUET scores, and their attitude scores were compared.

The results showed a clear trend: students with higher proficiency levels **tended** to have more positive attitudes. The mean score for the low proficiency group was 4.02 (SD = 0.560), the moderate proficiency group had a mean of 4.21 (SD = 0.655), and the high proficiency group scored the highest with a mean of 4.39 (SD = 0.327). This upward trend indicates that the more proficient a student is in English, the more likely they are to view learning English in a positive light.

Table 3

Welch's One-Way ANOVA for Attitude Scores Across Proficiency Levels

| One-Way ANOVA (Welch's) | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|-----|------|-------|
| | F | df1 | df2 | p |
| Attitude Score | 4.12 | 2 | 46.2 | 0.022 |

To determine whether these differences were statistically meaningful, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that the differences were significant, with a p-value of 0.022 (F = 4.12). This means that the likelihood of these differences occurring by

chance is low, and we can reasonably conclude that proficiency level has a meaningful impact on students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language.

There are several possible explanations for this pattern. Students who are more proficient in English may find the learning process easier and more rewarding, which can lead to greater motivation and a more positive outlook. They may also feel more confident using the language, whether in academic settings or social interactions, which further strengthens their appreciation for English. On the other hand, students in the Low Proficiency group may face more challenges in understanding or using the language, which can lead to frustration and less favourable attitudes. The link between proficiency and attitude highlights the importance of supporting students at all levels, especially those who are struggling, to help them build confidence and improve both their skills and motivation.

4.2.4 Gender Differences in Attitudes

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Scores by Gender

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------|-------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Group | N | Mean | Median | SD | SE |
| Attitude Score | Female | 57 | 4.25 | 4.35 | 0.619 | 0.0819 |
| | Male | 46 | 4.06 | 4.15 | 0.557 | 0.0822 |

The third aim of this study **was** to explore whether male and female students differ in their attitudes towards learning English. On average, female students reported slightly higher attitude scores than male students. The mean score for female students was 4.25 (SD = 0.619), while the mean score for male students was 4.06 (SD = 0.557). This difference suggests that female students, on the whole, were marginally more positive in their responses.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Attitude Scores Between Male and Female Respondents

Independent Samples T-Test

| | | Statistic | df | p | Mean difference | SE difference |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Attitude Score | Student's t | 1.60 | 101 | 0.113 | 0.188 | 0.117 |

Table 6

Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances Between Male and Female Respondents

Homogeneity of Variances Test (Levene's)

| | F | df | df2 | p |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Average_Attitude_Score | 0.00933 | 1 | 101 | 0.923 |

However, when an independent samples t-test was conducted to test whether this difference was statistically significant, the results showed that it was not. The p-value was 0.113, which is higher than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.05. Therefore, we cannot conclude that gender had a meaningful effect on students' attitudes in this sample. The assumption of equal variances was also tested and confirmed, with Levene's Test yielding a p-value of 0.923, indicating that the variability in scores between male and female students was not significantly different. Since the p-value is well above 0.05, it confirms that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, allowing the use of the standard t-test and supporting the reliability of the findings.

Although there might be an assumption that female students are more enthusiastic about learning English learning, the results do not support this generalisation. This suggests that students seem to have similar views on the importance and value of English, regardless of gender. This may be **because** English is equally emphasised for both male and female students throughout their education in Malaysia. Exposure to English is generally uniform across the genders, particularly at the university level, and as such, the shared learning environment could contribute to the consistency in attitudes between male and female learners.

4.3 Summary

In summary, the data **show** that UTAR students generally have a positive attitude towards learning English as a second language. This is encouraging and suggests that students value English not just as an academic subject but as a useful and necessary skill in the modern world. Although female students reported slightly more positive attitudes than their male peers, the difference was not statistically significant. What stood out most in the findings was the strong link between English proficiency and attitude: students with higher MUET scores were significantly more positive about learning English than those with lower scores. These findings point to the need for greater support for students with lower proficiency, not only to help them improve their skills but also to foster more positive attitudes that can contribute to long-term language learning success.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the study on UTAR students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language. The primary goal is to interpret the results in the context of the research questions, compare them with previous literature, and provide an understanding of their implications for both educators and researchers. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study and suggest areas for future research that can build upon the insights gained [here](#).

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Overall Attitudes Towards Learning English as A Second Language

The study revealed that UTAR students generally possess a positive attitude towards learning English, with an average score of 4.16 on the Likert scale. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which found that students globally tend to have positive attitudes towards learning English (Agus Husein As Sabiq et al., 2021; Alsubaie, 2021; Duy & Trang, 2021; Khairunnisa Zukiflei & Nur Ehsan Mohd Said, 2020; Mohamad Fazil Mohd Zin & Melor Md. Yunus, 2020; Mutar, 2019; Sharma, 2022; Zulida Abdul Kadir et al., 2020). English, being a global lingua franca, plays a central role in academic and professional life, especially within Malaysian universities, where it serves as the medium of instruction for many courses. Given this, it is not surprising that students at UTAR recognise the importance of English for their academic success, career opportunities, and broader engagement with the global community.

5.2.2 Relationship Between Proficiency Level and Attitudes

A significant finding in this study was the clear relationship between students' proficiency levels and their attitudes towards learning English, directly addressing the second research question. Students with higher MUET scores (High Proficiency) demonstrated

significantly more positive attitudes compared to those in the Low Proficiency group. This result is consistent with the study by Langat and Chepchieng (2019), which found that students with higher English proficiency **tended** to have more positive attitudes. Although their research focused on secondary school students, the pattern remains the same in this study, which examined university students. This consistency highlights the broader trend that higher language proficiency, regardless of academic level, is associated with more favourable attitudes towards the language and its learning process.

The observed trend suggests that high-proficiency students are more confident in their English abilities, experience fewer difficulties in their studies, and feel more motivated, creating a cycle of improved language skills and more positive perceptions of the language. In contrast, low-proficiency students exhibited less enthusiasm and confidence, underscoring the need for targeted support at this level. Addressing these proficiency gaps is essential for enhancing their overall learning experience. To improve English proficiency in Malaysia and ensure that all students are well-prepared for academic and professional development, educational programs should prioritise proficiency enhancement. This could foster more motivated, confident learners, leading to better academic and professional outcomes.

5.2.3 Gender Differences in Attitudes

The study also explored gender differences in students' attitudes towards learning English. While female students reported slightly more positive attitudes than male students, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.113$). These findings suggest that, at UTAR, gender does not play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes towards learning English. This result contrasts with studies by Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021) and Langat & Chepchieng (2019), which found that female students generally exhibit more positive attitudes towards learning English than their male counterparts. However, it aligns with studies

by Duy and Trang (2021) and Mutar (2019), which found no notable differences in attitudes between female and male students.

Possible reasons for this inconsistency could include the context of different countries. For example, Langat & Chepchieng (2019) conducted their study in Kenya, Agus Husein As Sabiq et al. (2021) in Indonesia, Duy and Trang (2021) in Vietnam, and Mutar (2019) in Iraq. Cultural and educational differences between these countries and Malaysia may explain the variation in gender-based attitudes towards language learning. In some cultures, gender roles and societal expectations may play a more significant role in shaping attitudes, while in other contexts, these differences may be less pronounced. Additionally, the emphasis placed on English education may vary across countries, which could influence how both male and female students perceive the value of learning English.

In the case of UTAR students, the lack of significant gender differences could be attributed to the equal opportunities provided to both male and female students in terms of English language education. The Malaysian education system often emphasises the importance of English for academic success and career advancement, which might lead both genders to adopt similar attitudes towards learning English.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The **study's findings** have several important implications for educators and policymakers. First, the positive relationship between students' proficiency and attitude highlights the importance of improving English proficiency, especially for students in the low proficiency group. Supporting these students can foster more positive attitudes towards learning English, which often contributes to better academic performance.

In addition, since there are no significant gender differences, educational interventions can be generalised without the need for gender-specific strategies. The finding suggests that

male and female students at UTAR have similar perceptions of English language learning, and both groups value the impact of English on their academic and career prospects. Therefore, educators should focus on creating engaging and effective teaching methods that appeal to all students, regardless of gender.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of continuing to promote the value of English, not only for academic purposes, but also as an important communication skill in a globalised world. Policies that integrate English into all aspects of students' academic lives can further improve students' English proficiency and their attitudes towards English.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights, there are some limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted at a single institution, UTAR, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other universities or regions. A more diverse sample, including other universities in Malaysia, could provide a broader understanding of the relationship between proficiency, attitudes, and gender in language learning. Besides, the study did not explore other factors that could influence attitudes towards learning English as a second language, such as socio-economic background, cultural influences, or individual learning experiences. These factors could provide valuable insights into the variation in students' attitudes and should be considered in future research.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

To address the limitations of this study, future research could expand the sample by including multiple universities across Malaysia or even institutions in other countries to increase the generalisability of the findings. A more diverse sample would offer a broader understanding of how factors such as proficiency, attitudes, and gender vary across different academic environments and regions.

Next, future studies should explore other potential influences on students' attitudes towards learning English, such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and individual learning experiences. These factors could help explain the variations in students' attitudes and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in language learning. A more qualitative approach could also be valuable in future research. Interviews or focus groups could provide rich, in-depth data about students' personal experiences, motivations, and challenges in learning English. This would offer a deeper understanding of the factors that influence students' attitudes and language proficiency beyond what can be found through surveys alone. Such qualitative insights could also help uncover more nuanced reasons behind differences in attitudes between proficiency levels or genders.

Moreover, further research could examine the role of teaching strategies and their influence on students' attitudes towards learning English. Understanding how specific pedagogical approaches (e.g., task-based learning, flipped classrooms, or technology-enhanced instruction) affect students' engagement and language proficiency would provide practical recommendations for educators seeking to improve students' attitudes and language proficiency.

5.6 Conclusion

This study explored the attitudes of UTAR students towards learning English as a second language, examining the relationship between students' attitudes and proficiency levels and exploring gender differences. The findings confirmed that students generally hold positive attitudes towards English as a second language. Students with higher MUET scores have more positive attitudes towards learning English compared to those in the Low Proficiency group. This aligns with existing research that shows proficiency in English is a key factor in shaping attitudes towards language learning. Interestingly, gender did not play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes, suggesting that both male and female students at UTAR recognise

the importance of English equally. This contrasts with some studies but aligns with others where no gender differences were observed.

The study's implications highlight the need for targeted interventions to support low-proficiency students, which could improve both their proficiency and attitudes towards learning English. The absence of significant gender differences also suggests that strategies to improve language learning can be universally applied across genders. Despite some limitations, such as the study's focus on a single institution and the lack of consideration for additional factors like socio-economic status, the findings contribute valuable insights into the relationship between language proficiency and attitudes. Future research should expand the sample, incorporate diverse influencing factors, and explore qualitative methods for deeper insights into student experiences.

In conclusion, the study contributes to the growing body of research on language learning attitudes and proficiency, offering practical recommendations for improving English language education and supporting students' academic and professional development.

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Appendix

Questions adapted from the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)

1. Learning English is really great.
2. I really enjoy learning English.
3. English is an important part of the school programme.
4. I plan to learn as much English as possible.
5. I love learning English.
6. I hate English.
7. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.
8. Learning English is a waste of time.
9. I think that learning English is dull.
10. When I leave school. I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it.
11. Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more varied people.
12. Studying English can be important to me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups.
13. Studying English can be important for me only because I will need it for my future career.
14. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.
15. Studying English can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.
16. I have a favourable attitude towards English.
17. Studying English as a second language is an enjoyable experience.
18. Studying English makes me feel more confident.
19. Learning English makes me have good emotions (feelings).
20. I wish I could speak English perfectly.