

**COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

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**Abstract**

Learners' attitude towards the grammar of the foreign language is of importance in the process of language learning. It is an obvious fact that attitudes have impact on students' success in learning a foreign language. This research paper is an attempt to investigate FLL college students' attitudes towards learning English grammar as a language component. This paper falls into two parts. The first one is a quick survey of different studies concerning the relationship between attitudes and foreign language learning. In the second part, the researchers prepared a questionnaire to measure students' attitudes towards learning English grammar taking into consideration various points. The population of this research comprises FLL students at the depts. of English in the College of Education and College of Basic Education. A sample of 100 male and female students has been chosen; 50 students from each college. Then the subjects' responses had been scored by the researchers and the data collected had been computed and analyzed.

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**المستخلص:**

وجهة نظر الطلاب لقواعد اللغة يلعب دور مهم جداً في مجال تعلم اللغة الأجنبية هناك حقيقة مفادها أن وجهات النظر لها تأثير على نجاح الطلبة في تعلم اللغة الأجنبية. هذا البحث هو محاولة لمعرفة وجهة نظر طلبة الكلية المتعلمين للغة الأجنبية تجاه تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنكليزية.

تقع هذه الدراسة في جزئين. الجزء الأول هو مراجعة سريعة لمختلف الدراسات فيما يخص العلاقة بين وجهة النظر وتعلم اللغة الأجنبية. في الجزء الثاني قام الباحثان بإعداد استبيان لقياس وجهة نظر الطلبة فيما يخص تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنكليزية آخذين بالاعتبار عدة نقاط.

المشاركون في هذا الاستبيان جميعهم طلبة متعلمين للغة الأجنبية من أقسام اللغة الإنكليزية في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية وكلية التربية الأساسية. العينة تتكون من مئة طالب من الذكور والإناث، خمسون طالب في كل من الأقسام المذكورة. قام بعدها الباحثان بحساب النتائج وتحليلها.

**1-Statement of the problem:**

English which is the most widely used foreign language is a significant instrument in many fields such as scientific communications, business world, and political issues. Gardner and Lambert (1972) stated that "motivation, attitudes, anxiety, age and personalities are factors that influence the foreign language learning process". Fakeye (2010) claimed that "learners' attitude is the most important factor that impact on foreign

language learning". The current study deals with attitudes as one of the major affective factors in foreign language learning process.

There has always been a rising stress on grammar. It is one of the central components of all languages. The role of grammar in teaching English as a foreign language has been a debated issue for along time. Grammar is generally thought as one of the basic elements to help learners communicate in the target language. In the 80s however, Krashen (1982) considers grammar is a skill that can be acquired naturally within meaningful situations and rejected designing grammar-based language curricula. This claim created a great impact among scholars and practitioners.

Usually, most English language learners have a perception that English grammar is the most difficult part in English language learning. Jean and Simard (2011) discovered "that both students and teachers considered grammar instructions to be very useful but not very entertaining". They also believed that students feel that grammar instruction to be difficult or confusing for them to understand because of many factors like the large number of the language rules in grammar. Though teachers and learners agreed that grammar is very useful but not very entertaining, as the different subject, they will have different attitudes and feelings toward grammar learning. This kind of differences can lead language learning to be ineffective if both of the learners and teachers cannot find the right problem solving plan.

Some factors might affect learners' way of thinking. After affecting the learners way of thinking, it will affect the English language learning easily since learners are the subjects who learn the English grammar.

To make English language learning effective, teachers need to persuade the learners' feelings and attitudes into a positive way so the learners will have motivation in learning grammar of a language. Hence, this study answering a question about students attitudes' towards learning grammar. So, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of FLL students toward grammar as a language component.

## **2- Aims of the research:**

The current research aims at exploring FLL college students' attitudes toward learning English grammar as a language component. Further, this study investigates the difference in attitudes between students at two colleges; College of Education for Humanities and College of Basic Education.

## **3-Significance of Research:**

The result of this study will show students' attitudes toward grammar as an academic component and toward grammar in general outside the campus as a language component. It will show how FLL students deal with grammar inside campus as a lesson and outside campus as a language component. From this study, we could discover whether FLL learners like, hate, avoid, or want to learn more about English grammar in campus. This study also investigated whether the students thought that grammar is an important thing and necessity in English. Further, this study investigated the students' attitudes towards grammar outside the campus.

## **4- Definition of Basic Term:**

### **Attitudes:**

Eagly and Chaiken (1993:1) define attitude as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor”.

Before (2001:61) states that “attitudes are characterized by a large proportion of emotional involvement such as feelings, self, and relationships in community”.

Gawronski (2007:575) sees attitudes as “enduring systems of beliefs that can be examined on three different levels; cognitive, emotional and behavioral”.

Dolan (2011: 88) defines attitudes as “a feeling or opinions of approval or disapproval towards something” (cited in Kranawetter, 2012: 10).

The researchers define attitude operationally as the ability of FLL college students to respond positively or negatively to a series of items on the scale prepared by themselves.

### 5-Literature review:

There are various words that are used in the attitude literature such as the words “opinion”, “values”, “paradigms” and “world views”. However, there is no easy way to obtain a consistent picture of the use of these words.

The term attitude is highly related to other concepts such as *opinion*, *belief* and *stereotype*. Often these terms are used synonymously in everyday conversations. While this is acceptable in frequently informally exchanged utterances, scholars make a clear distinction between the definitions of those terms. Hence, it is important to explain in which way those terms differ from the term attitude.

**Attitude and opinion** seem to be used most often synonymously in everyday communication. **Smit** (1996: 29) believes that “opinions are conscious and therefore more individualistic, whereas attitudes are generally held by a group of people. **Baker** (1992: 14) emphasizes another important aspect of opinion defining it as “an overt belief without affective reaction”. Attitudes on the other hand include affective reactions. Another difference between the two terms is concerning surveys. While opinion polls reflect the views the population holds towards specific issues, attitude surveys are concerned with the correlation of people’s attitudes in combinations with many other variables. Attitude surveys aim at understanding human functioning better (**Ibid**).

Most researchers claim that the cognitive concept of “**belief**” is more conscious than attitudes. In addition, beliefs can be explained reasonably (**Smit, 1996: 29**). The difference of both terms tends to be in degree rather than in their nature (Soukup, 2007, 148). “**Stereotypes**” are defined as rigid attitudes. In general they are created by group members in order to differentiate themselves from other groups (**Weber**, 1992: 70). The most common way to distinguish the in-group members from their out-group members is by stressing the dissimilarities between these groups. Stereotypes have the tendency to be oversimplified and undifferentiated. Very often those standardized beliefs and opinions are shared within a group (Soukup, 2007: 148). Therefore they “constitute a crucial aspect of intergroup communication” (**Svara**, 2009: 9-10).

### 6-Types of Attitude:

Attitudes are important factors in both language growth or decay, restoration or destruction. They are internal states that influence what the learners are likely to do. The internal state is said to be some degree of (positive/negative) or (favorable/

unfavorable) reaction towards an object. Researchers such as Stern (1983:376-7) distinguish three types of attitudes in second language learning situation :

- 1- Attitudes towards the community and people who speak the L2 ( group specific attitudes).
- 2- Attitudes towards learning in general and language learning in particular.
- 3- Attitudes towards languages and language learning in general.

These attitudes are likely to be influenced by the learners' personalities- for example, whether they are "ethnocentric" or "authoritarian". They may also be influenced by the particular social environment within which the language learning process takes place. Different attitudes, for example, might be found in monolingual versus bilingual contexts (Ellis: 1985).

Brown (2000) uses the term 'attitude' to refer to "the set of beliefs that the learner holds towards members of the target language group and also towards his own culture" (Tahaineh & Daana ,2013 : 164).

**Lambert** (1967) mentions two type of attitudes; "Integrative" and "instrumental" attitudes to language learning. The integrative attitude is a desire to know and become friendly with speakers of a language. Whereas the instrumental one is a desire to better oneself materially by means of the language. And he adds, "an integrative attitude is more likely to lead to success than an instrumental one" (Ibid).

One of the earliest studies on language attitudes is that of Gardner and Lambert. Gardner and Lambert (1972) studied the correlation of a number of different types of attitudes. They emphasized the significance of group-specific ones i.e. the attitude the learners have towards the speakers of the language they are learning. According to them "if a learner possesses positive attitudes towards the target speaker community, a desire to understand them and to empathize with them will emerge, which will also lead to integrative orientation to learn the target language" (Ibid). They found a strong connection between attitudes and language learning achievement. It is very obvious then that foreign language learners take advantage of positive attitudes, and the bitter sweet fact is that negative attitudes might lead to decreased motivation because of lack of input and interaction (Brown,1994).

Gardner (2001)(cited in Dornyei,2005:4) goes further claiming that "language learning without sufficiently positive language attitudes to support is a futile attempt due to the fact that attitudes are learned predispositions and could be influenced by exposure to reality, teachers can aid in dispelling what are often myths about other cultures, and replace those myths with an accurate understanding of the other culture as one that is different from one's own yet to be respected and valued".

### **7-Language Attitudes:**

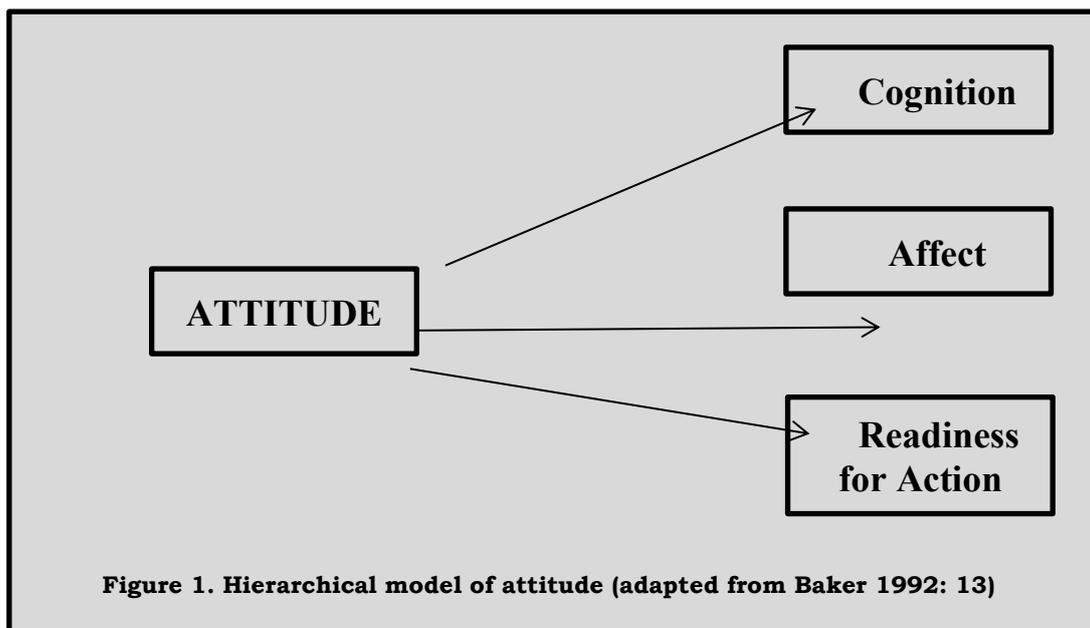
In the field of foreign language learning, it is fact that both motivation and attitudes have impact on students' success in learning a foreign language. Both attitudes and motivation are strongly connected to each other. If a language learner has negative attitudes towards the foreign language they are learning, they cannot be motivated. Gardner (1985) also emphasizes the fact that "attitudes towards the second language may affect the learners' motivation to learn" ( cited in ÇOLAK, 2008:27 ).

Attitudes towards a language could reveal what people feel about the speakers of that language and might have an effect on SL or FL learning. Scholars say that the measurement of language attitudes provides information that is useful in teaching and language planning. In the present study, students' attitudes are measured by their responses to the attitude questionnaire that was developed by the researchers.

### 8-Aspects of Language Attitude

Wenden (1991) suggested a broader definition of the term "attitudes". According to him the term includes three basic components: a cognitive component, an affective component, and a behavioral component. A *cognitive* component is said to be made up of the beliefs and ideas or opinions about the object of the attitude. The *affective* component refers to the feeling and emotions that one has towards an object, 'likes' or 'dislikes', 'with' or 'against'. Finally, the *behavioral* one refers to one's consisting actions or behavioral intentions towards the object (Ibid).

Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) claim that this three component model should be considered in a hierarchical form. Baker (1992:13) claims that "Cognition affect and action provide the foundation in order to become one single construct of attitude at a higher level of abstraction".



Kara (2009) believes that the "learning process is considered as a positive change in the individual's personality in terms of the emotional, behavioral as well as cognitive domains, since when one has learned a specific subject, he/she is supposed to think and behave in a different manner and one's beliefs have been distinguished". This means that the learning process has social as well as psychological aspects besides the cognitive approach. Therefore the attitude concept is said to be of three dimensions. Each dimension has different features to bring out language attitude results. Hence, the attitude concept has three components i.e., behavioral, cognitive and affective. These

three attitudinal aspects are based on the three theoretical approaches of behaviorism, cognitivist and humanism respectively. In the following paragraphs these aspects will be discussed.

#### **9-Behavioral Aspect of Attitude:**

The behavioral aspect of attitude deals with the way one behaves and reacts in a particular situation. A successful language learning situation enables the learners to identify themselves with the native speakers of that language and acquire or adopt various aspects of behaviors which characterize the members of the target language community. Kara (2009) states that:

*“Positive attitudes lead to the exhibition of positive behavior toward courses of study, with participants absorbing themselves in courses and striving to learn more”.*

Such students are said to be very eager to solve problems and to acquire useful skills for everyday situations.

#### **10-Cognitive Aspect of Attitude:**

The cognitive aspect of attitude involves the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge they receive and their understanding in the process of language learning. The cognitive attitude can be classified into four steps of connecting the previous knowledge and the new one, creating new knowledge, checking new knowledge, and applying the new knowledge in many situations.

#### **11-Emotional Aspect of Attitude:**

Feng and Chen (2009) believes that the learning process is an emotional process that could be affected by different emotional factors. He claims that “the teacher and his students engage in various emotional activities in it and varied fruits of emotions are yield” (Ibid). Attitude can help the learners to express whether they like or dislike the objects or surrounding situations. It is thought that the inner feelings and emotions of FL learners influence their perspectives and their attitudes towards the target language (Choy & Troudi, 2006 cited in **Zainol Abidin , 2012**).

#### **12-Methodology:**

This descriptive research focused on investigating students’ attitudes toward learning English grammar and identifying these attitudes difference according to the college.

#### **13-Participants:**

The population of this research comprises FLL students at the depts. of English in the College of Education for Humanities and College of Basic Education for the academic year 2017/2018. A sample of (100) male and female students has been chosen from the described population; (50) students from each college.

#### **14-Attitude measurement:**

After reviewing a number of studies which measure attitudes, the researchers didn’t find a scale which fits the current research. Accordingly, they considered preparing a questionnaire to measure students’ attitudes taking into account the following points:

1. Defining the goal and content of the questionnaire.
2. Writing items of four attempts based on the content.

3. Checking the items validity by presenting the initial version of the questionnaire to a group of jurors.
4. Identifying the score for items.
5. Piloting the questionnaire to check its reliability and items' discrimination.
6. Creating the final version of the questionnaire based on the results of its reliability and discrimination. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of (15) items with four alternatives (Appendix).

#### 15-Application:

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the questionnaire had been administrated upon the prescribed sample in the two colleges at the same time. Then the subjects' responses had been scored by the researchers and the data collected had been computed and analyzed statistically to test students' attitudes towards learning English grammar.

#### 16-Results and Discussion:

After specifying the aims of the research, preparing and applying the instrument and scoring the obtained data, a statistical analysis of the collected data was needed. As such, T-test had been used to analyze the data which was supposed to be appropriate to the sample of the research. Thus, in this section, the results will be presented and discussed in relation to the aim of the research. The main aim of the research was to explore FLL college students' attitudes toward learning English grammar as a language component. Accordingly, the mean score of the students' scores upon the questionnaire has been computed. Then the mean score should be compared to the questionnaire norm which was (37.5). The mean score for students at the College of Basic Education was (45.82) and the standard deviation was (4.964). the researchers used T-test for one sample to analyze data. Then, the result is shown below:

**Table (1) comparing the mean score to the norm score of the questionnaire (College of Basic Education)**

No.	Mean	Norm Score	Std. Deviation	T-Value	
				Calculated	Tabulated
50	45.82	37.5	4.964	11.852	2.011

Also, the mean score for students at the College of Education for Humanities was (43.5) and the standard deviation for the scores was (5.97). when compared to the norm score of the questionnaire by using T-test for one sample, the obtained result is shown in table (2):

**Table (2) comparing the mean score to the norm score of the questionnaire (College of Education for Humanities)**

No.	Mean	Norm Score	Std. Deviation	T-Value	
				Calculated	Tabulated
50	43.5	37.5	5.97	7.106	2.011

It is obvious from the tables above that the T-calculated for the two colleges is higher than the T-tabulated at 0.05 level of significance and 49 degrees of freedom. Accordingly, students at the two colleges have positive attitude toward learning English grammar. It is a positive finding that the FLL students enjoyed learning in the grammar courses since grammar course seemed to be one of the most challenging courses with its difficulty level

in the college. This finding may seem to indicate that the students felt they have achieved some improvement in their grammar knowledge after they study grammar course in the Dept. of English. It is obvious from students' responses that they know and believe that in learning a language, especially English, they have to learn grammar itself, or in other words, learning grammar is inside a package of learning a language.

One of the findings shown from the data collected that grammar and communication skills like speaking, writing, reading and listening are related to each other. This result suggests a positive perception of the students towards grammar since the respondents stated that grammar and communication skills are related to each other. In other words, they seemed to believe that grammar is as important as the communication skills. Students also believe that the lessons, they got in the grammar or course gave them more knowledge about English language. Their confidence in their English was raised as they got more knowledge from the grammar course.

The other aim of this research was to investigate the difference in attitudes between FLL students at the two colleges. Accordingly, the mean scores of students in the two colleges have been compared by using T-test for two independent samples. The result is shown in table (3).

**Table (3) comparing students' mean scores in the two colleges**

College of	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-Value	
				Calculated	Tabulated
Education for Humanities	50	43.5	5.97	2.113	1.987
Basic Education	50	45.82	4.964		

There is a significant statistical difference between the mean scores for students in the two colleges. The T-calculated is higher than the T-tabulated at 0.05 level of significance and 98 degrees of freedom. The difference is for the benefit of students in the College of Education as the mean score of students in that college is higher than those in the College of Education for Humanities. This may due to method of teaching applied by the prescribed teachers in the two colleges.

### 17-Conclusions

This research notifies the positive attitudes of FLL students towards learning English grammar as a language component. The majority of students have a really positive feeling, perception and also behavior toward grammar course in the Depts. of English in the College of Basic Education and College of Education for Humanities.

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**Appendix**

**Attitudes Toward Learning English**

No.	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	I feel I got improvement in my grammar after I took grammar course in the Dept. of English.				
2	Grammar and communication skills are related to each other.				
3	Learning a grammar course improves my self confidence in my English.				
4	I enjoy learning any grammar class I have taken in this Dept.				
5	Grammar course syllabus are enough for me.				
6	I learn grammar only in grammar classes (I do not study grammar independently).				
7	Grammar is an important thing in English language learning.				
8	My motivation in learning grammar is to be good in English because grammar is the key to be good in English.				
9	I agree if the committee of the Department remove the grammar classes from the program.				
10	I agree if the committee of the Department add more grammar courses to the program.				
11	Learning in the grammar class give me a kind of security in my language skills and knowledge.				
12	Grammar is not important as long as we can communicate very well.				
13	Learning grammar is a necessity in learning a language.				
14	I study English grammar to be more at ease with other native people.				
15	Grammar is useful when travelling to other foreign countries.				

**SA = Strongly Agree**

**A = Agree**

**D = Disagree**

**SD = Strongly Disagree**