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Research article

Students' attitudes towards English: the case of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the attitudes of the students of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University towards learning English in terms of cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimensions. The present study also attempted at investigating whether there is any significant difference in students' attitudes on the basis of their demographic profile such as gender and field of study. A total of 105 students from three disciplines namely— Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Food Science and Technology (FST) and Fisheries (F) were administered a questionnaire as measuring tool. The collected data were then analyzed with SPSS. The results revealed that though respondents over all were positive in their attitudes towards learning English, the students of Fisheries showed the highest attitude towards learning English followed by FST and DVM. As for the gender variable, the female respondents showed higher attitude towards learning English than their male counterparts. However, statistical analysis revealed that these differences among the respondents of the three study disciplines and between their sexes were not significant.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of teaching and learning English language as a subject at primary to tertiary level education and as an instrumental communicative language have treaded a long and zigzag course of history in Bangladesh. It has been reiterated by psychologists, researchers, educator and teachers across the globe that success in learning a second or foreign language is affected to a great extent by a number of key issues like motivation, attitudes, anxiety, belief and expectation etc. along with cognitive capacity, intelligence, age and personality

of the learner. Among these factors, attitudes towards target language alone have a momentous role to play. The matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact on learning language (Fakeye, 2010, cited in Abidin, 2012). There is strong correlation between attitude and language learning process (Bhaskar *et al.*, 2013). From several years of teaching, the researchers have noticed that learning English is closely related to the attitudes towards the English subject (Chaihiranwattana *et al.*, 2010). This study, in the broader sense, explores the

concept of attitude as one of the most important influential factors so far as success in learning a foreign language is concerned. In the narrower sense, it investigates the attitudes of the students of Chittagong Veterinary & Animal Sciences University (CVASU) towards learning English language while taking into consideration the three dimensions of attitude namely emotional, cognitive and behavioral. It also explores whether students' attitudes towards English is affected by their demographic profile such as gender and field of study.

Attitude in general is a hypothetical psychological construct which defines or promotes certain behaviors and explains their direction and persistence (Al-Mamun *et al.*, 2012). Gardner (1985) defines attitude as "an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent". Attitude is a convenient and efficient way of explaining consistent patterns in behavior. It often manages to summarize, explain and predict behavior (Baker, 1992, cited in Al-Mamun *et al.*, 2012). Crystal (1997) defines attitudes as the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others. Chapman and McKnight (2002) say, "Attitude is your general disposition – your mental "starting point" for viewing life and the people and events in it. From your viewpoint, attitude is the way you look at things mentally and it all starts inside your head. For others, your attitude is the overall mood they interpret from what they see you say and do" (Bhaskar *et al.*, 2013).

Language attitude or attitude towards language is what one feels about, thinks of and how one behaves with a particular language. Attitudes towards a language could be positive or negative. The evaluation that a particular language is harsh, sweet, difficult, easy, international, local, prestigious or vernacular is due to the variation of attitudes towards the language (Al-Mamun *et al.*, 2012). Attitude to certain language is so important that they can give life to a language and thereby help it thrive for centuries after centuries or it can cause death to it gradually. The attitude of Muslims towards Arabic—it's being the language of their holy books and rituals—is a good example of the former and the attitude of the world towards classical Greek—once the exalted language of literature and

arts—is an apt example of the latter. Baker (1992) aptly says that "In the life of a language, attitudes to that language appear to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death" (Abidin *et al.*, 2012). It is now an established fact that success in learning a language stems to a great extent from learner's attitudes. Achievement in a target language relies not only on intellectual capacity, but also on the learner's attitudes towards language learning. This means that learning language should be approached primarily as a social and psychological phenomenon rather than as a purely academic one (Abidin *et al.*, 2012).

Learning process is regarded as a positive change in the individual's personality in terms of the emotional, psychomotor (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 (Kara, 2009). This applies in case of learning a language as well. The concept of attitude can be considered from these three points of view i.e. behavioral, cognitive and affective or emotional. The behavioral aspect deals with the way one behaves and reacts in particular situations. The cognitive aspect of attitude involves the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge that they receive and their understanding in the process of language learning. On the other hand, the affective or emotional side of attitude means whether one likes or dislikes an object or surrounding affairs. It has to do with learners' inner feelings emotions towards what they study.

The students of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) have to study a compulsory English course in their first year of study at the university where the medium of instruction is completely English. In addition to studying English as an essential part of their curriculum, they tend to learn English for various other reasons such as keeping pace with the outer world, personal development, entertainment and most importantly, standing out in the most competitive job market. Like others, CVASU students' interest in learning English and their success or failure in doing so has to do with their attitudes towards the language in question. An extensive literature review reveals that the attitude of CVASU students towards English language has not been studied ever before. Hence,

the present study is relevant in exploring the attitudes of target population towards English.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objective of the study

Attitudes towards language have been a common research interest as they are important in learning a language. Psychologists, sociolinguists and educators across the world have come up with numerous attitude related researches at different times and levels while considering attitude from different dimensions. This study aims at divulging whether the attitudes of the undergraduate students of CVASU towards English language is positive or negative with reference to their behavioral, cognitive and emotional sides of attitudes, that is, whether their attitudes towards English language cause any change in their behavior, belief and perception as well as the way they feel. The study also attempts to unearth if there is any statistically significant difference in target population's attitudes towards English language in terms of their demographic profile such as their gender and field of study.

Methodology

The survey was conducted among 1st year students of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University who have to take a compulsory English course as part the university curriculum. The total number of the participants was 105 among which 58 persons (55.2%) were male and 47 persons (44.8%) were female, randomly selected from the three existing faculties of the university. The subjects were from three disciplines: Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Food Science and Technology (FST) and Fisheries (F). 35 students were selected from each of the three disciplines to be 105 in total. The present study is quantitative in nature. An adapted attitude questionnaire was developed and used to gather required data. The questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Some items were also taken from the attitude questionnaire employed by Abidin *et al.* (2012) in their study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part sought data regarding subjects' demographic profile such as their sex and field of study. The second part contained 21 close end statements designed to measure attitudes of the respondents from behavioral, cognitive and emotional points of

view. These statements were set in a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1 Strongly Disagree to Level 5 Strongly Agree. Respondents were asked to mark the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the given statements of the questionnaire. The researchers administered the questionnaires in their classes and collected them at the spot after completion. The items of the questionnaire were written in English; but researchers explained some items in Bengali when asked by the respondents. It took about 15 minutes for the whole process of questionnaire administration. To see whether this difference in attitudes towards English among the respondents of the three faculties is statistically significant or not, One-way ANOVA analysis was conducted. The collected data were then analyzed with SPSS in an attempt to meet the objective of the study quantitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' attitudes towards learning English language

The result of descriptive analysis shows that the overall mean score of English Language Attitude (ELA) among the participants is 3.4014 (SD=0.25309). This result indicates that the participants have a positive attitude towards learning English. Moreover, the mean scores of the three aspects of attitudes towards English among the respondents differ. As seen in Table 1, the mean score of Behavioral Aspect of Attitude (BAA), Cognitive Aspect of Attitude (CAA) and Emotional Aspect of Attitude (EAA) are 3.2435 (SD=0.35434), 3.3102 (SD=0.37298) and 3.6503 (SD=0.42117) respectively and these scores too represent respondents' positive attitudes towards English language. The results of the present study correspond to the study conducted by Mamun *et al.* (2012) who also found that students at Khulna University had positive attitude towards learning English language. It could be attributed to the fact that the status and instrumental use of English have improved quite a lot in recent years in Bangladesh and those who know English well usually stand out in the most competitive job market and even enjoy some prestige in the society

The behavioral aspect of attitude towards English language

Among the three aspects of attitudes, the behavioral aspect of attitude towards English

language represents the lowest mean score (M=3.2435, SD=0.35434). But still it represents that respondents have positive attitude towards English and they have admitted that when they hear a student in their class speaking English well, they like to practice with him/her. The item "I like to give opinions during English lessons" obtained the second rank (M= 3.85, SD=0.718), while the lowest mean score is 2.44 (SD=1.028) and demonstrates that the participants do not feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students (Table 2).

Moreover, as shown in Table 2, a good number of respondents like to practice English the way native speakers do (M=3.76, SD=0.904). This could be attributed to the fact that some students are motivated by the English way of life as shown in the English movies and also to the fact that a lot of them want to pursue higher study in English speaking countries and they think that native-like accent will give them an upper hand both home and abroad.

The cognitive aspect of attitude towards English language

The cognitive aspect represents the second highest mean score of attitudes towards English (M= 3.3102, SD= 0.37298). The findings indicate that a good number of the respondents showed positive

cognitive attitude and agreed that studying English is important because it will make them more educated.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of students' attitudes towards English language

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
ELA	105	2.76	4.29	3.4014	0.25309
BAA	105	2.57	4.57	3.2435	0.35434
CAA	105	2.14	4.43	3.3102	0.37298
EAA	105	2.29	4.57	3.6503	0.42117

This item of the questionnaire represents the highest mean score 4.72 with SD 0.612. As seen in Table 3, the statement "Being good at English will help me study other subjects well" has the second highest mean score (M=4.58, SD=0.568). A considerable number of respondents think so; may be it is because the medium of study at CVASU is essentially English and all the books relating to veterinary, food science and fisheries are English.

However, some of the respondents think that they cannot apply the knowledge from English subject in their real life (M=1.84, SD=1.128) and some frankly have admitted that they study English just to pass the exams (M=1.86, SD=1.122) (Table 3).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of behavioral aspect of attitude

Behavioral aspect of attitude	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried	105	1	4	2.50	1.048
Studying English helps me to have good relationships with friends	105	1	5	3.25	0.969
I like to give opinions during English lessons	105	2	5	3.85	0.718
When I hear a student in my class speaking English well, I like to practice speaking with him/her	105	1	5	4.08	0.874
I am not relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class	105	1	5	2.84	1.161
I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students	105	1	5	2.44	1.028
I like to practice English the way native speakers do	105	1	5	3.76	0.904

The emotional aspect of attitude towards English language

The emotional aspect of attitude towards English has achieved the highest mean score 3.6503 (SD=0.42117) (Table 1). As can be seen in Table 4, the majority of the students think that "studying foreign language like English is enjoyable" representing the highest mean score 4.13 (SD=0.856) and a lot of them also think that studying

English subject makes them feel more confident (M= 4.11, SD=0.880) although a few of them opine that they do not like studying English which got the lowest mean score (M=1.41, SD=0.781).

Attitudes towards learning English regarding participants' demographic profile

This section discusses whether there is any statistically significant difference in the participants'

attitudes towards English in terms of their demographic profile.

Language attitudes and participants' gender

The inferential statistical analysis was used to see whether there is any statistically significant

difference in students' attitudes towards English in terms of their gender. As represented in Table 5, the results show that the mean scores of language attitude among female and male students are 3.4144 (SD=0.29269) and 3.3908 (SD=0.0281), respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of cognitive aspect of attitude

Cognitive aspect of attitude	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD*
Studying English is important because it will make me more educated	105	2	5	4.72	0.612
Being good at English will help me study other subjects well	105	3	5	4.58	0.568
Frankly, I study English just to pass the exams	105	1	5	1.86	1.122
I cannot apply the knowledge from English subject in my real life	105	1	5	1.84	1.128
Studying English makes me able to create new thoughts	105	1	5	3.86	0.945
In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn	105	1	5	2.17	1.087
English subject has the content that covers many fields of knowledge	105	1	5	4.14	0.713

*SD=Standard Deviation

As represented in Table 5, the results show that the mean scores of language attitude among female and male students are 3.4144 (SD=0.29269) and 3.3908 (SD=0.0281), respectively. Apparently, female students' attitude towards English seems to be slightly higher than that of their male counterparts. This could be due to the fact that in the recent years the female students all over Bangladesh are seen to be motivated and more conscious and serious about study in particular and their right in general. As a result, female students are seen cutting better figures than the male students in the country's secondary and higher secondary level public examinations. Again, though the last decade has seen an increase of female population in the workforce, still they are lagging behind and more often than not are deprived while competing with their male counterparts.

This fact, too, has driven the female population to make an extra effort in every sphere of life lest they should fall behind in the race.

However, the independent sample T-test analysis was carried out to explore the probability of the difference in the respondents' attitudes towards English by their gender. It was observed that the p-value was 0.044 (F=4.140). As the p-value is less than 0.05, the assumption of equal variances of the attitude by gender was not met. Furthermore, the T-test for Equality of Means was conducted to examine the differences in the participants' attitudes due to gender variable. After analysis, it was found that the p-value was 0.648 which is greater than 0.05, meaning that the difference in attitudes towards English between male respondents and female ones is not statistically significant.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of emotional aspect of attitude

Emotional aspect of attitude	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD*
I feel excited when I communicate in English with other	105	2	5	3.90	0.936
Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable	105	1	5	4.13	0.856
Studying English makes me have good emotions (feelings)	105	1	5	3.57	1.064
I enjoy doing activities in English	105	1	5	3.90	0.925
I do not like studying English	105	1	5	1.41	0.781
I wish I could speak English fluently	105	1	5	2.44	1.028
Studying English subject makes me feel more confident	105	1	5	4.11	0.880

*SD=Standard Deviation

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards English by gender variable

	Gender	N	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD*	SEM*
Attitudes towards English	Female	47	44.8	3.4144	0.29269	0.04269
	Male	58	55.2	3.3908	0.0281	0.21790

*SD=Standard deviation, SEM=Standard error of mean

Language attitudes on the basis of participants' field of study

Table 6 indicates that the mean score of attitudes among DVM students is 3.3571 (SD=0.17239), the mean score of attitudes among FST students is 3.3973 (SD=0.25381), and the mean score of

attitudes among Fisheries students is 3.4471 (SD=0.30929). So, it is obvious that Fisheries students showed the highest attitudes towards English contrasted with the DVM students who showed the lowest.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards English by field of study

Faculties	N	Mean	SD*	SE*	95% confidence interval for mean		Min	Max
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
DVM	35	3.3571	0.17239	0.02956	3.2970	3.4173	3.14	3.71
FST	35	3.3973	0.25381	0.04290	3.3101	3.4845	3.05	4.19
Fisheries	35	3.4471	0.30929	0.05755	3.3424	3.5517	2.76	4.29
Total	105	3.4014	0.25309	0.02470	3.3524	3.4503	2.76	4.29

*SD=Standard deviation, SE=Standard error

Table 7. ANOVA test results

	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	P-value
Between groups	0.142	2	0.071		
Within groups	6.519	102	0.064	1.114	0.332
Total	6.661	104			

The fact that Fisheries students had shown higher attitude towards learning English could be attributed to the matter that almost all of them were found to have access to Information Technology and all of them said that they regularly watched English satellite channels on TV which probably motivated them towards English more than others. Moreover, as they were the students of the first batch of Fisheries faculty, they had very good prospect of being a university faculty with outstanding academic result. They were well aware that proficiency in English would give them an extra advantage in this regard. As visible in Table 7 the SPSS output shows that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes among the existing three faculties as the P-value is greater than 0.05 (F=1.114, p=0.332 > 0.05). So, the current study has found that the whole target population, regardless of their study stream and gender, bears same positive attitude towards English. However,

sometimes respondents tend to over-show their attitudes towards English taking it to be prestigious or sign of a good student. If that is true in this case, it would be one hard-to-avoid limitation of the study in question.

CONCLUSION

The undergraduate students of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University study compulsory English in the first year. This study intended to look over their attitude towards learning English as the concept of attitude towards any language is precondition for learning that language successfully. The result shows that the target population, regardless of their gender and study discipline, holds a positive attitude towards learning English language and their positive attitude is represented through their feelings, behavior and thoughts. They feel excited when they communicate in English with others and they like to practice

English with their classmates. They are also of the view that being good at English will help them study other subjects well. From the positive outcome that the respondents hold towards learning English, it can be inferred that they are well aware of the importance of English language in the globalised world of knowledge, job market, social establishment as well as self-development.

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