THE ATTITUDINAL PROPENSITY OF STUDENTS TOWARD STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to investigate university students' attitudinal propensitytoward strategies in English language learning, taking into consideration the three aspects of attitude i.e., emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Additionally, it attempted to determine the influence of students' demographic profile i.e., gender, and field of study on their attitudes towards learning English.

A total of 114 college students took part in this research study. The measuring instruments used were an attitude questionnaire that focused on the attitudes towards learning English and the English Language Learning Strategies specifically on compensation and metacognitive were taken from the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by Rebecca Oxford.

The collected data were computed and analyzed via descriptive statistics, *t*-test, and two-way ANOVA. The findings of the study were generalized as follows: (1) One of the findings of the study was that the attitude of BSE students on language learning was significantly different from AB English and AB Mass Communication. (2) The respondents of different courses regardless of sex have the same tendencies on the choice of strategies toward English language learning. (3)There was a medium positive correlation between attitude and English language learning strategies among the respondents. (4)The best predictor of English language learning was cognitive aspect of attitude.

Keywords: Attitudinal Propensity, Behavioral, Cognitive, Compensation, Learning Strategy, Metacognitive

INTRODUCTION:

It is argued that language learning is regarded as the cornerstone of human existence. Knowing the language can help us to express our opinions, hopes, and even our dreams (Tavil, 2009). In foreign language learning context, there are various factors that influence the learning process such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitudes, intelligence, age, personalities, etc. (Gardner, 1960; Lehmann, 2006, cited in Shams, 2008). The matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact on learning language (Fakeye, 2010).

In this regard, many researchers dealing with the area of second / foreign language learning have explored language learning strategies (LLSs) that language learners use either consciously or unconsciously (Rubin, 1975; Bialystok, 1981; Huang and Naerssen, 1987; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989, 1990; Nyikos and Oxford, 1993; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Sugeng, 1997).

There is little doubt that language learning strategies influence second language learning. The investigation of which strategies learners use, when and how, helps teachers and researchers to find out the development learners have regarding using their abilities, skills, aptitude and proficiencies. At the same time, a wide variety of factors may affect the choice of language learning strategies. Among such factors age, prior knowledge, attitude, motivation, cooperative learning, aptitude, amount of exposure, and anxiety in second language learning have been shown to be strongly related to the choice of language learning strategies (Ames & Archer, 1988; GuilloteaxandDornyei, 2008; Ortega, 2003; Vandergrift, 2005). The study focused on attitude. In addition, for manageability reasons, this study confines itself to compensation and meta-cognitive strategies.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

This study looked into the concept of attitude as one of the major affective factors for success in learning a foreign language. More specifically, it investigated university students' attitudes towards learning English language, taking into consideration the three aspects of attitude i.e., emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Additionally, it attempts to determine the influence of students' demographic profile i.e., gender, year and field of study on their attitudes towards learning English.

The research sought to answer the following questions: a) Is there a significant difference in the attitude of the respondents when grouped according to sex and course? b) Is there a significant difference in the English language learning strategies of the respondents when grouped according to sex and course? c) Is there a significant relationship between attitudes and English language learning strategies of the respondents? d) Which factor best predicts the English language learning strategies of the respondents?

METHODOLOGY:

PARTICIPANTS:

The participants were 114 students of Isabela State University, Echague, Isabela, Philippines, 31(27.2%) males and 83 (72.8%) females. They were from four fields of study: AB English, AB Mass Communications, BSE English and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA).

DESIGN:

The design of this study is quantitative in nature i.e., descriptive and inferential as well. Thus, an adapted questionnaire was employed as a measuring instrument. The participants were required to answer all the items of the questionnaire honestly, giving their own perceptions about their attitudes towards learning English language in terms of the emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of attitude and their strategies in language learning in terms of compensation and metacognitive as well as their demographic profile i.e., gender and field of study.

INSTRUMENT:

The measuring instrument was an attitude questionnaire which focused on the attitudes towards learning English. Additionally, it aimed to explore the differences in the participants' attitudes by their demographic information. The items were partly adapted from the attitude questionnaire test employed in a study by Boonrangsri et al. (2004). Other items were taken from Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (1985). Furthermore, there were some items based on the researchers' experiences in teaching English (Appendix). On the whole, there were 45 items concerning language attitudes in terms of: behavioral,

cognitive, and emotional aspects of attitude. Overall, 30 items were positive and 15 items were negative. The items were put in a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Strongly Agree. The English Language Learning Strategies specifically on compensation and metacognitive were taken from the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by Rebecca Oxford.

DATA ANALYSIS:

The collected data was analyzed by the SPSS Program aiming to answer the research questions quantitatively. To answer the first and second research questions, descriptive statistics was conducted to determine the mean, the variance and the standard deviation of the gathered data. This has been supported by the Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to explore the impact of sex and course on attitude and language learning strategies. Pearson r was utilized to treat the data that answered research question number three. Finally, the multiple regression analysis was used to determine the best predictor of language strategy.

RESULTS:

1. Is there a significant difference in the attitude of the respondents when grouped according to a) sex and b) course?

Course	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	Male	2.8313	.29498	8
BSBA	Female	2.8988	.26648	8
	Total	2.8650	.27379	16
	Male	2.8943	.15820	7
AB English	Female	2.8963	.20985	19
	Total	2.8958	.19420	26
	Male	3.0375	.46707	4
AB Mass Com	Female	2.9209	.17454	22
	Total	2.9388	.23154	26
	Male	2.7383	.19168	12
BSE	Female	2.6818	.31599	34
	Total	2.6965	.28781	46
	Male	2.8361	.26575	31
Total	Female	2.8152	.27623	83
	Total	2.8209	.27241	114

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on course and sex

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for AB English (M = 2.90, SD = .19) was significantly different from the BSE (M = 2.70, SD = .29). The mean score for AB Mass Com (M = 2.94, SD = .93) was significantly different from BSE (M = 2.70, SD = .29). BSBA (M = 2.87, SD = .27) did not differ significantly from either of the other groups.

Figure 1 shows the estimated marginal means of attitude more clearly.

Estimated Marginal Means of attitude

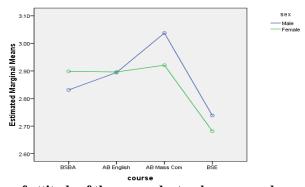


Figure 1.The mean scores of attitude of the respondents when grouped according to sex and course.

2. Is there a significant difference in the English language learning strategies of the respondents when grouped according to a) sex and b) course?

Table 2. Descriptive statist	ics on cognitive as	spect of attitude in	terms of course and sex

Course	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	Male 3.1250 .66399		.66399	8
BSBA	Female	3.0837	.27933	8
	Total	3.1044	.49256	16
	Male	3.0700	.39374	7
AB English	Female	2.7816	.40547	19
	Total	2.8592	.41545	26
	Male	3.3325	.70632	4
AB Mass Com	Female	2.9709	.54450	22
	Total	3.0265	.57150	26
	Male	2.8058	.62667	12
BSE	Female	2.6332	.50569	34
	Total	2.6783	.53796	46
	Male	3.0158	.60219	31
Total	Female	2.8001	.49889	83
	Total	2.8588	.53496	114

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for BSBA (M = 3.10, SD = .49) was significantly different from the BSE (M = 2.67, SD = .54). The mean score for AB Mass Com (M = 3.03, SD = .57) was significantly different from BSE (M = 2.67, SD = .54). AB English(M = 2.86, SD = .42) did not differ significantly from either of the other groups.

Figure 2 shows the estimated marginal means of behavior conspicuously

Estimated Marginal Means of strategies

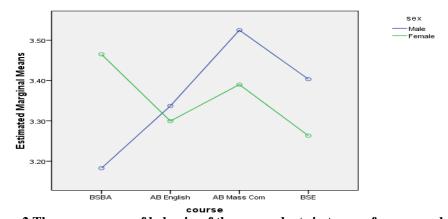


Figure 2.The mean scores of behavior of the respondents in terms of course and sex.

Table 3. Summary of the Two-way Analysis of Variance on metacognitive strategy of language learning and variables sex and course

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Corrected Model	3.664 ^a	7	.523	1.867
Intercept	1049.290	1	1049.290	3.743E3
course	1.999	3	.666	2.376

sex	.776	1	.776	2.768
course * sex	1.478	3	.493	1.757
Error	29.719	106	.280	
Total	1682.128	114		
Corrected Total	33.383	113		
R Squared = .110				

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of sex and course on levels of metacognitive under strategies, as measured by the language learning strategies test. Subjects were divided into four groups according to their course (Group 1: BSBA; Group 2: AB English; Group 3: AB Mass Com; Group 4: BSE). The interaction effect between sex and course group was not statistically significant, F(3, 106) = .1.76, p = .16. There was no statistically significant main effect for course, F(3, 106) = 2.38, p = .07 and sex, F(1, 106) = 2.8, p = .099.

3. Is there a significant relationship between attitudes and English language learning strategies of the respondents?

Table 4. The correlation between attitude and strategies toward English language learning

		Attitude	Strategies					
	Pearson Correlation	1	.431**					
attitude	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000					
	N	114	114					
	Pearson Correlation	.431**	1					
strategies	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	114	114					
**. Correla	**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

The relationship between attitudes towards English language (as measured by attitude scale) and language learning strategies (as measured by language learning strategies scale) was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There was a medium positive correlation between the two variables, r = .43, n = 114, p < .0005.

4. Which factor best predicts the English language learning strategies of the respondents?

Table 5. Summary of Multiple Regression on the Predictors of English Language Learning Strategies

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.473ª	.224	.203		.31447

a. Predictors: (Constant), emotional, behavior, cognitive

Table 6. Variance in the Regression Analysis

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	3.135	3	1.045	10.567	.000a
1	Residual	10.878	110	.099		
	Total	14.013	113			

Predictors: (Constant), emotional, behavior, cognitive

Dependent Variable: strategies

Standard multiple regression was used to assess the ability of three control measures (emotional scale, cognitive scale, behavior scale) to predict levels of language learning strategies (language learning strategies scale). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The total variance explained by the model as a whole was 22.4%, F (3, 110) = 10.57, p < .001.

b. Dependent Variable: strategies

	del	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize d Coefficients		Ci a	95% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	dei	В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero- order	Partia l	Part	Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	1.746	.311		5.616	.000	1.130	2.363					
1	behavior	.084	.131	.068	.642	.523	175	.343	.324	.061	.054	.629	1.589
1	cognitive	.481	.136	.432	3.527	.001	.211	.751	.470	.319	.296	.470	2.128
	emotional	004	.108	005	041	.967	219	.210	.308	004	003	.567	1.762

Table 7. Multiple Regression Predictor of English Language Learning Strategies

Dependent Variable: strategies

In the final model, only the cognitive scale (beta = .432, p < .001) were statistically significant and thus, the best predictor for the language learning strategies. Both behavior scale (beta = .068, p < .001) and emotional scale (beta = -.005, p < .001) did not reach statistical significance.

DISCUSSION:

One of the findings of the study was that the attitude of BSE students on language learning was significantly different from AB English and AB Mass Communication. This result lends support to those of Ames and Archer (1988), who found that students who emphasized mastery goals in the classroom, used more strategies and had a more positive attitude toward the class. According to some researchers, learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards languages (Starks and Paltridge, 1996). Karahan (2007, p. 84) states that "positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English". As such, attitudes may play a very crucial role in language learning as they can influence students' success or failure in their learning. On the other hand, Gardner (1980) explains that different social contexts may influence the outcomes of studies related to attitudes towards language learning. In his view, the effects of attitude might be much stronger in a context where there is much more of an opportunity for contact between learners and target language speakers than in a foreign language context where learners are not in a close contact with the target cultures and beliefs.

The respondents of different courses and regardless of sex have the same tendencies on the choice of strategies toward English language learning. Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy and Jusoff (2009) investigated attitudes toward text selection, students' preferences in reading as well as the effect of teaching strategies used by teachers. Results showed that although students were less eager toward strategies, they had positive attitude about text selection. It was suggested that teachers have an important role not only in teaching content to students but also in shaping their attitudes. They also can choose interesting strategies to develop the attitudes of the students.

There was a medium positive correlation between attitude and English language learning strategies among the respondents. The findings of the present study support Wu's (2010) findings that there is a high correlation between attitude of students toward learning and the number of strategies they use. Also, this study is in accordance with the findings of Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006), who found that students with positive attitudes used strategies more commonly than students with negative attitudes. In addition, although this study did not focus on any skill, the findings support those of Gupta and Woldermariam (2011), who found that students with high levels of attitude toward learning more frequently used writing strategies than students with lower levels of attitude.

The best predictor of English language learning was cognitive aspect of attitude. A group of researchers (Latif, Fadzil, Bahroom, Mohammad, San, 2011) conducted a research to determine the relationship between various socio-psychological variables like attitude, motivation, anxiety and instrumental orientation on performance in English as a second language. The results indicated that all of the four variables were significantly correlated with learners' performance in the English course conducted at Open University of Malaysia. Moreover, the regression analysis showed that all the variables except for personal motivation exerted significant impacts on performance with anxiety having a negative impact while attitude and instrumental orientation having positive impacts.

Many studies have been conducted to explore the nature of students' attitudes towards learning foreign language in general and EFL in particular, compared with the studies concerning the attitudes of ESL learners during the past three decades (Al-Zahrani, 2008). For instance, Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined that the students had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. This also highlighted that most

of them showed positive attitudes towards English language and its learning which, in turn, emphasized the value of English language efficiency in the daily life.

Momani (2009) also investigated the secondary stage students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the respondents had neutral positive attitudes toward learning English. Also, there was a strong correlation between the students' attitudes toward learning English and their performance in reading comprehension.

The findings of study by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) on Petroleum Engineering students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English revealed that they had positive attitudes towards the use of English in the Yemeni social and educational contexts. They also showed affirmative attitude towards the culture of the English speaking world.

In terms of the year of study variable, Al-Zahrani (2008) conducted a study to determine the attitudes of Saudi students towards English. The statistical analysis revealed that there was not any clear difference among the three years in their attitudes towards Learning English as the descriptive statistics showed that the respondents in the three years had the same level of attitude.

CONCLUSION:

The respondents' obvious positive attitude towards English may lead to conclude that they are aware of the importance of English and learn it as a compulsory subject. Briefly, attitude concept is considered as an essential component in language learning. So, a positive attitude should be the umbrella of language learning. ESL teachers should respect and think about students' feelings, beliefs and behaviors before the cognitive abilities. English curriculum and classroom activities should involve affective aims according to the students' needs and their individual differences to build up positive attitudes towards English. It is so important to study learners' personalities. Cognitive performance can be achieved if the ESL learners possess positive attitudes and enjoy acquiring the target language. For that reason, the affective perspective, especially attitude, should be considered in language research.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS:

The study has led to the following implication for teaching and learning English. Most students seem unfamiliar with the efficiency of LLSs. It is the duty of language teachers to familiarize them with LLSs and incorporate strategy training into teaching programs (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Teaching learners how to learn is believed to be of paramount importance in making learning in general, and language learning in particular, more effective. The purpose of such training is to provide learners with the strategies of learning a language, and an awareness of how and when to use such techniques most effectively. Strategy training is based on the belief that it is possible to develop in the learners the ability to take charge of their own learning so that eventually they can become independent of the teacher.

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