

## Attitude of Acehnese Students Toward English Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Having a positive attitude is a fundamental aspect that affects students' success in the learning process. The purpose of this study is to describe Acehnese students' attitudes toward English learning in terms of knowledge, emotion, and behavior. This study employed a descriptive qualitative study. 30 students from the seventh grade of SMPN 1 (Junior High School), Darul Imarah, the Greater Aceh regency, participated in this study. The data were collected using a questionnaire and an interview. The findings of questionnaire analysis showed students attained useful knowledge and information, felt thrilled, and were well encouraged when learning English. The interview analysis revealed that female students have a more positive attitude than male students in learning English. The interesting finding from this study is that the positive attitudes of research participants do not always have a good impact on students' English learning outcomes. Students who give good responses to English learning, but they get low scores. Conversely, those who have negative responses; they have high scores in English learning. It indicates that between students' attitude and their learning outcome toward English learning, do not correlate one another. This study brings both theoretical and practical implications for further research investigations about how the attitude positively affects students' English learning achievement. The findings of the present study suggest that the forthcoming studies may probe other factors that have a mutual relationship between attitude and learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Attitude, English, Knowledge, Emotion, Behavior.*

### INTRODUCTION

For most students in Indonesia EFL context, English is considered difficult to learn; while others consider it important to master English for various reasons or purposes. In

terms of this matter, according to Sultra and Baharudin (2020) English is difficult to learn due to grammar rules, language structure, and vocabulary. The notion that English is challenging reflects a negative attitude toward the language. Meanwhile, Kurniasari and Mbato (2018) state that English has become an important aspect of education and work, so there is an increasing need to learn English. Thus, it is quite essential for EFL learners to learn English in order to have skills that are helpful for their education and work in the future.

In addition, a person who learns about a matter or object has a state or condition toward the learning. This internal condition can be a positive or negative attitude reaction. That means the internal state refers to a person's view of an object or situation, which influences how they think, feel, and act. In relation to this, Zeinivand et al. (2015) explain the internal state is how we react positively or negatively to an object. It is the same as regarding students' attitudes toward English. If they perceive learning English is a must in this globalization era, then they will conceive it is necessary to master it. Thus, the students' paradigm shift toward English, which considers it difficult to learn, it should be changed because it can hinder them from mastering L2.

Attitude in daily interaction can influence the way someone reacts toward something. About this matter, Fazio and Olson (2003) contend that attitude plays an important role in human interactions. It forms how individuals perceive and respond to an object or aspect around them. It influences personal interactions and broader social. Giles and Marlow (2011) argue that attitudes influence self-presentations and interactions with others. For instance, the attitude of a student toward English can affect his/her confidence and pride in using the language. That is why attitude plays a significant role in everyday interactions.

Moreover, students' attitude is an influential factor that might bring his/her success in learning a foreign language. As stated by Qimmahtum et al. (2023) the attitude is shown by students will be the prime matter on learning a language. Similarly, Prastiwi and Suharso (2018) and Mai and Thao (2022) deem students will be successful on language learning if they show positive attitudes. From the standpoint of Prastiwi and Suharso and Mai, and Thao can be concluded that having a positive attitude is prominent for EFL learners to succeed in

mastering English. When the students have a positive attitude toward English learning, it can impact on their internal motivation to learn it. Students who have a positive attitude toward language learning tend to exhibit good actions and achieve positive progress in understanding the language. This can be seen during the language learning process. It can reflect whether they like or do not to the language. Therefore, students' attitudes toward a language such as English are important.

Furthermore, according to Prastiwi and Suharso (2018), a positive attitude tends to show someone's excitement in English. It can help a student learn harder to get better scores on his/her English test. Good learning outcomes or academic achievement will be achieved by students if they have a positive attitude toward English. Conversely, if students do not show a positive response to learning it, their learning results may be adversely affected. Relating to this, Lukman et al. (2022) affirm that the failure of English learning achievement will be found in students who have negative attitudes. It shows the effect of students' attitudes toward English on students' learning outcomes.

Apart from this, a study conducted by Herwiana and Laili (2019) found that some elementary school students in Jombang showed positive reactions in learning English. It was found the students were happy while learning because the teacher was patient and used jokes in teaching English. It can be inferred that the learning and teaching process that is interactive and entertaining becomes one of the reasons that encourages students to have a positive attitude toward English. Likewise, another study carried out by Kholipah et al. (2023) indicated that senior high school students in SMA N 1 Batanghari also gave a positive response toward English learning. The research findings that students believed English was the opportunity that paved the way for their career and get a good job. Therefore, they had a strong wish to master this foreign language so that they would be able to use English in oral and written practices.

In contrast to, the result of a study undertaken by Makhtuna (2021) revealed that students at STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin had negative attitudes toward English. The research findings found that the students felt tired and burdened with so many lessons, so they found it difficult to learn English. In addition, another research done by Telaumbanua (2023)

showed that second-semester students of Civics Education at Nias University had negative attitudes toward English. The findings of the study show that they believed that without acquiring English, they could still create and find their job in this globalization era.

In relation to the students' attitudes toward English, from the information read by the researchers through an online local newspaper (Serambi Indonesia), it was found that there was a program related to English at SMP N 1 Darul Imarah, the Greater Aceh, which was expected to make students have positive perceptions toward English learning. It is an English club program that aims to maintain students' attitudes toward English. The newspaper mentioned that positive attitudes toward English should be maintained from an early age, including junior high school. In other terms, if they have positive attitudes, it will influence learning in foreign languages or English. It was aligned with the study carried out by Seni and Lekatompessy (2021), which explained that learning English will run well if the students had a positive attitude; however, they will be unsuccessful in learning it if they do not have a good response.

Furthermore, to confirm and validate the information, the researchers conducted a preliminary study through interviews. The preliminary study showed positive and negative attitudes from each student. Many students were quite enthusiastic, while others were not interested with that program. It found a gap between the expectations of the English club program and the preliminary study results. The expectation was that the program would enable students had good responses or reactions toward English learning. However, a reality from the preliminary study was not all students had positive attitudes toward English. From the preliminary study, the purpose of this study is to describe the attitude of Acehnese students toward English learning. This study uses Ladegaard's theoretical framework (2000) that focuses on three components, namely knowledge, emotion, and behavior.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used a qualitative approach. A qualitative method was used to investigate the research focus in this study. In relation to this, Crewell (2014) stated that the study of behavior and attitude can be explained broadly through the qualitative method. A descriptive study used to find out the needed data in this study. According to Manjunatha

(2019) a descriptive study aims at describing the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. It is lined with what the researchers want to investigate related to Acehese students' attitudes toward English. While questionnaires, interviews, and documentation were the methods that the researcher used to collect the data. The questionnaires were in the form of statements that were given to the research participants. The model of questionnaire items used in this study were taken from Abidin et al. (2012), then the researchers modified them from the content and language in order to attain the needed data. The questionnaire items used Likert scale consisted of four alternative choices. The four choices were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA), and Strongly Disagree (SDA).

To support the data attained from the questionnaires, the interview was also used by the researchers to obtain the research data. Relating to this, Berg (2007) elucidates that respondents can convey their voices, thoughts and feelings through an interview. In line with this, the interview guide contained 3 questions adapted from Abidin et al. (2012). The questions in this interview guide focused on knowledge, emotion, and behavior components. Furthermore, each question represented one component (knowledge, emotion, or behavior).

Apart from the questionnaire and interview, the method used to collect data in this research was through documentation. In terms of this, Hardani et.al. (2020) assert one of the ways to collect data in qualitative studies is documentation. The documentation used to analyze students' English scores reflected students' learning outcomes. In this regard, Corbin and Strauss (2009) consider that document analysis is intended to review or evaluate documents in the form of printed and electronic materials. For this purpose, the researcher asked an English teacher to get a document of students' English scores. As stated by Putri et.al. (2023) the instrument of documentation related to learning achievement can be in the form of scores of students' English test.

The technique of triangulation was used to validate the data in this study. The researchers reread and rechecked meticulously the data taken from the questionnaire and documentation; whereas, the data gained from the interviews, the researchers clarified every respondent's answer by asking them again each question that the researchers had

asked them. It was done to verify the data or information that the researchers obtained from respondents by looking at the source of data repeatedly to get the valid data and appropriate conclusion. In addition, the involvement of the researchers in the research, including preparation of the study, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation were part of the procedure that the researchers used to validate the data. To get reliable data, the researchers wrote the results of the interview as soon as possible, not more than one day after the interview process.

The research participants in this study were students at the seventh grade of SMP N 1 Darul Imarah, the Greater Aceh. They were from the VII-6 and VII-8 classes. From two classes, 15 students were selected to fill out the questionnaire items. Thus, 30 students filled out the questionnaire. Besides, the researcher chose 10 students from two classes, which consisted of 5 male and 5 female students, to represent the respondents in this study to be interviewed. This study was not intended to generalize to a wider context, but it was restricted to the research scope, the selected respondents, and the context in which the study was conducted. To analyze the results of questionnaires, the researcher used the following formula from Sudijono (2010):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where: P = percentage

F = frequency

N = number of students

100% = fixed value

In relation to the procedure of data analysis from the results of the interview, the three steps that consist of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing were used from Miles et.al. (2014). Furthermore, concerning the data from the results of the document, the researchers analyzed the results of each respondent's questionnaire and their English scores. The students' English scores were obtained from their English teacher in the students' book grades. It was concluded whether there were any effects of Acehese students' attitudes toward English and their scores in learning English.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section will present the results of the questionnaire, interview, and documentation.

### *Research Findings from the Questionnaire*

Students' responses toward English are divided into three categories: knowledge, emotion, and behavior components. The knowledge component is related to students' understanding of English. This covers the full range of English knowledge that they have. Regarding students' responses that deal with this matter, it can be seen below:

**Table 1.** Students' Responses toward English on Knowledge Component

No	Statements	SA	P%	A	P%	DA	P%	SDA	P%
1.	I gain a lot of knowledge and information by learning English.	8	26.6%	17	56.6%	4	13.3%	1	3.3%
2.	I understand when people speak in English.	1	3.3%	15	50%	12	40%	2	6.6%
3.	I can speak English because I often learn it.	3	10%	9	30%	16	53.3%	2	6.6%
4.	I could understand English lesson well.	6	20%	15	50%	8	26.6%	1	3.3%
5.	I am not able to ask and answer in English during English learning process.	2	6.6%	10	33.3%	15	50%	3	10%

Then, the emotion component was related to respondents' feelings and emotions about English. It is about respondents' pleasant and unpleasant or happy and unhappy

toward English. These feelings affect how students perceive English learning. Here are students' responses on the emotion component toward English.

**Table 2.** Students' Responses toward English on Emotion Component

No	Statements	SA	P%	A	P%	DA	P%	SDA	P%
6.	I prefer to learn Indonesian than English.	3	10%	8	26.6%	10	33.3%	9	30%
7.	I like studying English.	8	26.6%	16	53.3%	5	16.6%	1	3.3%
8.	I feel more confident if I can speak English.	4	13.3%	8	26.6%	15	50%	3	10%
9.	I am excited when communicating with my friends using English.	4	13.3%	13	43.3%	12	40%	1	3.3%
10.	I am lazy to study English because it is difficult.	6	20%	15	50%	6	20%	3	10%

Moreover, the behavior component is related to students' activities in learning English. The attitude of this component involves the decisions in action. It is also about students' actions and reactions to learning. In relation to students' responses that deal with the behavior component, it can be illustrated in the following part.

**Table 3.** Students' Responses toward English on the Behavior Component

No	Statements	SA	P%	A	P%	DA	P%	SDA	P%
11.	I often give an opinion when the teacher asks during English learning.	3	10%	6	20%	18	60%	3	10%
12.	I study English well during the learning process takes place.	7	23.3%	18	60%	5	16.6%	0	0%
13.	I am motivated to learn English	6	20%	13	43.3%	7	23.3%	4	13.3%

No	Statements	SA	P%	A	P%	DA	P%	SDA	P%
	when I see my friends able to speak English.								
14.	I ignore my teacher's explanations during English learning process.	5	16.6%	19	63.3%	5	16.6%	1	3.3%
15.	I study hard when English exams are held.	8	26.6%	20	66.6%	2	6.6%	0	0%

The questionnaire results, it shows positive results toward English in terms of knowledge, emotion, and behavior components. The results of the questionnaire it shows 10 out of the 15 questionnaire items show positive attitudes. In the knowledge component, it shows the most positive attitudes. It is seen that 4 out of 5 questionnaire items present satisfactory results. It is similar to Indah and Ramadhani's (2024) research, gathered from the results of the questionnaire that the cognitive component showed the highest positive response. In addition to, students realize that they get useful insights derived from learning English, including increased knowledge and information.

It indicates that obtaining knowledge and information can be an important matter to learn for the future. It is about the students who obtain a lot of knowledge and information while learning English. It is characterized by attitudes such as enthusiasm for learning, interest in English, and using English in communication. In addition, they agree that they can understand English lessons well and demonstrate the ability to answer English questions during the learning process. It means that students have satisfactory responses in understanding English.

In regard to the emotion component, it shows that students prefer using English instead of Indonesian. They feel happy when learning English and excited when communicating using the target language with their friends. This research finding is supported by Khansir et al. (2023), which found that students' responses from questionnaire results that most of the students had a great deal and lot to enjoy learning English. Similarly,

this study is also found that students have a big interest in learning English. It can be inferred that students not only enjoy the English learning process but also feel happy in using the language. It shows a high sense of pleasantness toward learning English.

In the behavior component, it is found that 3 out of 5 questionnaire items show positive attitudes. It indicated that students showed supportive action toward English learning. It reveals that they study well during the process. They feel motivated to learn English, especially due to the encouragement from friends who can also speak English. In accordance with Kara's study (2009), a positive attitude guides positive behavior toward learning; a person who absorbs more in learning will strive to learn more. In addition to, students show high dedication by studying hard for exam preparation. From the results shown by students' actions on this component, a similar study carried out by Indah and Ramadhani (2024) found that the readiness of action in learning English, as shown by students, shows positive attitudes.

### ***Research Results from the Interview***

The data are still related to the three components (knowledge, emotion, and behavior) regarding students' attitudes toward English. Here are some excerpts of interview with the research participants. To present the interview results, the researcher uses some symbols, namely **R** is for Respondent, and **Q** is for the Question. Respondents one, two, three, and four are asked the question that deals with the first question that relates to knowledge component. The following extracts are students' responses related to this matter.

*Q1. Do you understand learning materials well when studying English?*

*R1: No, I do not quite understand English well. Because I think learning English is difficult to understand. I agree that it is difficult because of differences in our language (Indonesian).*

*R2: No, I do not understand English well.*

*R3: I quite understand English learning. I think it depends on the learning material.*

*R4: Yes, I understand English well. In my opinion, the learning material is not too difficult to understand. About the learning material, I like the translation of it.*

In addition, this extract shows students' responses to the second question which is related to the emotion component. The following question is for respondents five, six, and seven answered the question. The results of the interview can be seen below:

*Q2. Do you like learning English?*

*R5: I like English, especially when I listen my friends use it in class. I like it and feel motivated to speak English too.*

*R6: Yes, I like learning English because I want to go to the UK (abroad). So, I think I need to learn English and it makes me like it.*

*R7: No, I do not like learning English because it is difficult. In my opinion. The translation is one of the factors that contribute to my lack of interest in learning it.*

Respondents eight, nine, and ten are asked the third question regarding the behavior component. The excerpts are presented as students' responses to the question. The interview results are as follows:

*Q3. Are you enthusiastic in English learning?*

*R8: No, I don't feel enthusiasm in English learning. I do not answer questions from the teacher or give responses during the learning process. The reason is that I do not know the answer.*

*R9: Yes, I actively participate in the English learning process. If I have an opinion, then I express it. if I understand and know the answer to the question, I will answer it.*

*R10: I am a little bit actively participating in the English learning process. I answer the teacher's questions if I know the answer, for example, about self-introduction.*

The results of the interview indicated that they have dreams or goals that they want to achieve, which motivated them to learn English. It also supports their positive attitude, as they feel happy to learn the language. It is in line with Choy and Troudi's study (2006), which explained that students' internal feelings and responses can influence their perspectives and attitudes toward the language they are studying. In addition, students responded that they actively participated in class, and when a teacher asked a question, they would answer it. Although they will answer if they know the answer, it shows a positive attitude in behavior. This activity reflects students' interest in English and their participation in the learning process. From the study was carried out by Ajzen (1991) showed that positive attitudes are related to students' intentions and actions. This positive attitude encourages students to be more engaged and responsive toward classroom activities.

Besides, the interview results showed that 6 out of 10 students answered positively. It indicates that more than half of the students interviewed have positive attitudes toward English in terms of knowledge, emotion, and behavior components. It is in line with the

questionnaire results, where almost all students also have positive attitudes. Thus, the results of this interview further corroborate that seventh-grade students of SMP N 1 Darul Ijarah have positive attitudes toward English, divided into three components. It is similar to Indah and Ramadhani's (2024) research, which found that students' positive attitudes were based on the three components, namely knowledge, emotion, and behavior.

From the results of the interview, it was also found that 5 of 6 students who had a positive attitude were female students. It reveals that female students have a more positive attitude toward English. It showed through the students' responses in the interview that R3, R4, R5, R6, and R9 are female students. However, it is only one male student who showed a positive attitude, while other male students did not show the positive attitude toward English. It was aligned with Mohammed's study (2022) that showed female students had more positive attitudes than male students toward English.

### ***Results of Research from Document Analysis***

The data related to the document analysis is the students' summative assessment in the form of English midterm exam test results. The data was obtained from an English teacher. The data of the English midterm test scores were analyzed from 30 students from 2 classes. The results of students' English scores can be seen below:

**Table 4.** Students' Attitudes and Students' English Scores

No.	Students' initial name	Attitudes	Students' English score
1.	MF	Positive	70
2.	NS	Positive	90
3.	KR	Positive	70
4.	MWM	Positive	75
5.	AZA	Positive	80
6.	MFR	Negative	60
7.	CFS	Negative	40
8.	FM	Negative	60
9.	NA	Negative	60
10.	MAM	Negative	60
11.	THR	Positive	65
12.	DHP	Positive	60
13.	RDV	Positive	60
14.	AF	Positive	65
15.	RU	Positive	50
16.	FA	Positive	40

No.	Students' initial name	Attitudes	Students' English score
17.	JL	Positive	50
18.	ANH	Positive	50
19.	IN	Positive	50
20.	MRA	Positive	60
21.	MR	Positive	50
22.	AZ	Positive	60
23.	MI	Positive	50
24.	FA	Positive	50
25.	MAR	Positive	50
26.	SP	Positive	40
27.	ZF	Negative	70
28.	WK	Negative	80
29.	UH	Negative	70
30.	UK	Negative	80

From the results above appear that most students show good responses, even though their English scores are favorable and unfavorable. It can be seen from the results of document analysis that 21 out of 30 students have positive attitudes toward English. Additionally, some students show negative attitudes toward English, although their English scores are good or poor. It is evident that the document analysis results showed that 9 out of 30 students have negative attitudes toward English.

There are 4 classification results related to student attitudes and students' learning outcomes. The first classification showed that students (numbers 1-5 in table 4) have positive attitudes toward English, and they have high English scores as their learning outcomes. It is lined with what was explained by Prastiwi and Suharso in their study (2018) that a positive attitude reflects an individual's excitement for learning English, which can encourage him/her to learn more and achieve better outcomes in English tests. It means that students who have positive attitudes will be enthusiastic in learning English and achieve good scores on their English tests.

The second classification showed that students (numbers 6-10 in Table 4) have negative attitudes toward English. It is in line with their learning outcomes in English learning, which has low English scores. It can be concluded that students with negative attitudes can struggle in their English learning. It hinders their ability to achieve good English

scores as students' learning outcomes. Hence, the success of language learning will be affected by the negative and positive attitudes (Getie, 2020).

In contrast to the previous two classifications, classification three showed students (number 11-16 in table 4) conceive positively toward English, but, they have low English scores, which are obtained from their learning outcomes. This finding shows that 50% of the respondents have positive attitudes. It concludes that the attitudes do not affect students' learning outcomes, which can be seen from their English scores.

The fourth classification found that students (number 17-20 in table 4) who have negative attitudes toward English it contradicts with their learning outcomes, as they have good English scores. Some of these students indicate there is no relationship between their attitudes and scores toward English. It means that there is no direct effect between students' attitudes and their scores in learning English.

The findings of the present study indicate that Acehnese junior high school students generally exhibit positive attitudes toward English learning. Nonetheless, this study raises a critical query regarding existing theoretical perspectives and previous studies that explain there is a mutual relationship between the positive attitudes are possessed by students and their good English scores and vice versa. A study carried on by Prastiwi and Suharso (2018), for instance, was different with the researchers' findings in this study, even if the research focus was the same. Perhaps, it is due to several factors as motivation, aptitude, mnemonics, learning experience, learning styles, learning barriers, students' involvement and participation, individual learner differences, and so forth. Those will profoundly interrelate to students' competence and performance, as well as their English learning achievement. Apart from these, classroom interaction patterns, teaching methods, instructional media, face validity, and assessment form are the influential factors of students' attitude and learning outcomes in English.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current study shows that Acehnese students possess positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward English learning. They perceive English as beneficial,

experience positive emotions during learning activities, and demonstrate encouraging behavioral tendencies toward language study. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that positive attitudes do not necessarily guarantee high academic achievement in English. The students who have good learning responses toward English, but they get low scores. Conversely, those who have negative responses; they have high scores in English learning. This suggests that students' attitude and their learning outcomes toward English learning do not correlate with one another. Consequently, language teachers should not only foster positive attitudes but also provide effective instructional support, learning strategies, and conducive learning environments to maximize students' language learning outcomes. Future studies may investigate additional variables that mediate the relationship between attitude and English achievement among Indonesian learners.

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