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Educational Research Association  
The International Journal of  
Educational Researchers 2016, 7(2): 12-20  
ISSN: 1308-9501



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## Examining University Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Using Different Variables

(Üniversite Öğrencilerinin İngilizce Öğrenmeye İlişkin  
Tutumlarının Farklı Değişkenlere Göre İncelenmesi)

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### Abstract

This study aimed to understand if the students' attitudes towards learning English show significant differences in terms of gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from. The study was carried out in the descriptive survey model. The research group included 320 male (65.6 %) and 168 female (34.4 %) English preparatory students at Istanbul Technical University. The Attitudes towards English Scale was used as the data collection tool. Data were analysed using independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA. According to t-test and ANOVA results, it can be said the university students' attitudes towards learning English are not affected by gender, receiving preparatory training, language level and high school differentiation.

**Keywords:** Attitude, foreign language, university students.

### Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, hazırlık sınıfında okuyan öğrencilerin İngilizceye karşı tutumlarının onların cinsiyetlerine, dil seviyelerine, daha önce hazırlık eğitimi alıp almadıklarına ve mezun oldukları lise türüne göre değişiklik gösterip göstermediğini anlamaktır. Çalışmada betimsel tarama modeli uygulanmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma gurubunu, 320 erkek (% 65.6) ve 168 kadın (%34.4) olmak üzere İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi'nin hazırlık sınıfında okuyan öğrenciler oluşturmuştur. İngilizceye Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği, araştırmada veri toplama ölçeği olarak kullanılmıştır. Veriler, bağımsız örneklemeler için t-testi ve tek yönlü ANOVA teknikleri kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. t-testi ve tek yönlü ANOVA sonuçlarına göre, öğrencilerin İngilizceye karşı tutumlarının cinsiyetlerinden, dil seviyelerinden, daha önce hazırlık eğitimi almış olmalarından ve mezun oldukları lise türlerinden etkilenmediği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tutum, yabancı dil, üniversite öğrencileri.

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## **Introduction**

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) suggested that motivation, attitudes, anxiety, age, and personalities are factors that influence the foreign language learning process. According to Fakeye (2010), learner's attitude is one of the most important factors that impact on foreign language learning. The current study looks into the attitude as one of the major affective factors in foreign language learning process. More specifically, it attempts to determine the influence of university students' gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from on their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Attitude and Foreign Language Learning***

In the field of language learning, there are several definitions of attitude. For example, attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behaviour (Montana & Kasprzyk, 2008). It is also defined as the sum total of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic (Gardner, 1980). Attitude is classified into three components: *cognitive* is made up of the beliefs and thoughts about the object of the attitude, *affective* involving the person's emotions towards an object, and *behavioural* which refers to person's consisting actions or tendency to adopt special learning behaviours (Wenden, 1991).

Smith (1971) states that no student is born liking or disliking foreign language. If the student enter to the class with neutral attitudes about it, or even positive ones, her/his attitudes about foreign language and foreign language learning will be strongly influenced by the situation itself. Also, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) express that attitude is a significant factor in foreign language learning process. Moreover, Gardner (2005) linked positive attitude towards language learning to motivation by stating that enjoyment will be achieved by the learners who are motivated to learn a foreign language.

Hohenthal (2003) and Kara (2009) indicate that attitudes of learners, other than their opinions and beliefs, will directly reflect upon their behaviours and as a result their performance. Some studies on attitudes towards language learning such as Masgoret and Gardner (2003) and Fakeye (2010) have displayed that there is a strong relationship between attitude and language performance. Also, some others have investigated the relations between attitudes and the level of academic achievement (Graham, 2004), and the beliefs and attitudes towards the use of language (Levine, 2003).

### ***Related Studies***

Tella, Indoshi, and Othuon's (2010) study carried out learners' attitude is the most affective and psychological factor in their performance in Kenya. Also, there are many studies which have been carried out in order to explore whether the learners' attitudes towards language learning show significant differences in terms of gender and their proficiency levels (Ahmed, 2015; Al Samadani & Ibnian, 2015; Bagheri & Andi, 2015; Bristi, 2015; Guryay,

2016; Momani, 2009; Razy & Amer, 2016; Shams, 2008; Tetik, 2016; Zeinivand, Azizifar & Gowhary, 2015). Whereas Dehbozorgi (2012) who studied on the effects of attitude towards language learning highlighted that correlation results of the study were not significant between attitude towards English language learning and proficiency, Starks and Paltridge (1996) stressed that it is believed language learning is related to the learners' attitudes towards foreign language.

All the above mentioned studies confirm the importance of identifying learners' attitudes towards English language learning. Thus, this study aims to find out whether gender is an influential factor on the students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and identify if the students' attitudes towards learning English demonstrate significant differences with regards to their language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from. For these purposes, following research questions are the frame for this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between female and male students in terms of their attitudes towards learning English?
2. Is there any significant difference in students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of receiving English preparatory training?
3. Does difference exist in students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of their language levels?
4. Is there a significant relationship between students' attitudes towards learning English and the kind of high school they graduated from?

## **Method**

### ***Subjects***

The current study was conducted during 2015-2016 academic year with the participation of 320 male (65.6 %) and 168 female (34.4 %) English preparatory students at Istanbul Technical University. All participants took part in the study voluntarily. The distribution of the sample with respect to their receiving English preparatory training, the kind of high schools, and language levels are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*University Students Participating in the Survey by Receiving English Preparatory Training, the Kind of High Schools, and Language Levels*

Demographic variables		f	%
Receiving English preparatory training	Yes	80	16.39
	No	408	83.61
	Total	488	100
The kind of high school	Anatolian high school	326	66.8
	Science high school	95	19.48
	Anatolian teacher training high school	47	9.63
	Open high school	9	1.84
	Vocational high school	11	2.25
Total		488	100

Proficiency level	Upper	55	11.27
	Intermediate	259	53.07
	Pre-intermediate	174	35.65
	Total	488	100

### ***The Instrument***

This study is based on survey design. Attitudes toward English Lesson Scale was used as the data collection tool. The original form of it was Attitudes towards Mathematics and Physics Scale developed by Aiken (1979). The scale was later adapted by Tunc (2003) in Turkish in order to determine the attitudes of students towards English. It consists of 24 items for a total. For each item, respondents were asked to rate themselves on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). He highlighted that the statement “neutral” in the original scale was exchanged with the statement “agree somewhat” to reduce the number of participants who has lower interest in relation to others during the rating process. And, it is stated the reliability coefficient was calculated through Cronbach’s Alpha and the result was .77.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data acquired by means of the applications of Attitudes toward English Lesson Scale was analysed using independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 software program. The analysis of independent samples t-test was used to specify whether there was a significant difference in university students’ attitudes towards learning English according to gender and receiving English preparatory training. Also, the analysis of one-way ANOVA was administered to examine whether there were differences in university students’ attitudes towards learning English in terms of their foreign language levels and the high school differentiation.

### **Findings**

To explore gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kinds of high school they graduated from differences in university students’ attitudes towards learning English, the data was analysed in this section. In this section, it was given the results of these analyses.

Table 2 summarizes the following findings which include descriptive statistics on university students’ attitudes towards learning English.

Table 2  
*Means, Standard Deviations and Maximum Scores*

	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. D.	Std. Er.
Attitude	488	78.59	40	120	12.99	.59

The mean of attitudes towards learning English scores of university students is 78.59, which is above the medium level. This finding shows that university students have positive attitudes towards learning English.

Table 3 focuses on the students’ attitudes towards learning English in terms of gender.

Table 3

*T-Test Analysis about University Students' Attitudes towards Learning English According to Gender*

	Gender	N	M	Std. D.	Std. E.	t	p
Attitude	Male	320	77.94	12.39	.69	1.51	.13*
	Female	168	79.82	14.02	1.08		

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

As it is observed in Table 3, the female students' arithmetic mean is 79.82; male students' arithmetic mean is 77.94. According to this findings, it can be said that gender is not a significant variable on students' attitudes towards learning English ( $t=1.51$ ;  $p>.05$ ).

Table 4 addresses the students' attitudes towards learning English according to receiving English preparatory training.

Table 4

*T-Test Analysis Regarding University Students' Attitudes towards Learning English According to Receiving English Preparatory Training*

	Receiving Preparatory Training	N	M	Std. D.	Std. E.	t	p
Attitude	Yes	80	77.14	12.68	1.45	-1.04	.29*
	No	408	78.84	13.05	.65		

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of receiving English preparatory training ( $t=-1.04$ ;  $p>.05$ ). Regarding this result, it can be said that receiving English preparatory training is not a significant variable on students' attitudes towards learning English.

One-way ANOVA test was conducted to find out if there was a significant difference in the students' attitudes towards English as a foreign language in terms of the kind of high school they graduated from and their language level. Table 5 includes the descriptive statistics of the students' attitudes towards learning English according to the kind of high school.

Table 5

*The Descriptive Statistics of the University Students' Attitudes towards Learning English in Respect to the Kind of High School They Graduated From*

	Groups	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean	f	p
Attitude	Between Groups	911.97	4	455.98	2.71	.06
	Within Groups	80162.15	484	167.70		
	Total	81074.13	488			

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

As presented in Table 5, it is noticed that there is no significant difference in the students' attitudes towards English as a second language ( $t=2.71$ ;  $p>.05$ ). The result of the

ANOVA test shows that high school differentiation does not influence on their attitudes. It is also confirmed that there were no differences between groups.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The students' attitudes towards learning English were analysed in terms of gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school in the current study. One of the findings of the study is that gender is not a significant variable on students' attitudes towards English language learning, which is consistent with the previous studies in this area. For example, Kiziltan and Atli (2013) highlighted there is not a significant difference in the attitudes of students towards English according to gender based on their research. But, there are many researchers who stated gender is a significant variable on students' attitudes towards English language learning such as Gomleksiz (2010), Karahan (2007), and Shams (2008) finding out female students had more positive attitudes towards English language learning. Also, the studies conducted by Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) and Tetik (2016) indicated that male students had more positive attitudes towards learning English when comparing with females.

Another finding of the study is that there is no significant difference in attitude scores of the students when their foreign language level is taken into consideration. When the literature is reviewed, it can be seen that many studies revealed proficiency level variable did not create significant difference in the students' attitudes (Akay & Toraman, 2015; Jahin & Idrees, 2012). In spite of these, Bagheri and Andi (2015) claimed that there was a small positive correlation between students' attitudes towards English language learning and their foreign language proficiency level. Also, Johnson (2012) focused on the attitude of Japanese non-English EFL learners. That research indicated their positive attitudes related positively with their foreign language level.

Cakıcı (2001) investigated the attitudes of the university students towards learning English. It was found out that there is a significant difference between their attitudes and the types of high school. According to this research results', whereas the graduates of the State High School have the highest mean score, the Anatolian High School graduates have the lowest mean score. Yet, the results of the study which was conducted by Guryay (2016) showed that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards English and the type of high school from which they have graduated. As stated in this study, the Vocational High School graduates have the highest mean, while the lowest mean belongs to the graduates of Private Schools. Despite these studies, based on the current study's results, it was seen that there are no significant differences in the students' attitudes towards English as a second language according to receiving preparatory training and high school differentiation.

As the findings of the study take into consideration, it can be suggested some ideas for the researchers for further research. Firstly, this study investigated and evaluated the information of the students by the questionnaire. For this reason, more qualitative data may be collected through observation or interview techniques. Secondly, this study conducted with the participation of 488 English preparatory students. Because of this, further studies may be

carried out with a larger sample group. And, lastly, in further studies, it may be examined the relationship between foreign language learners' attitudes and motivational beliefs.

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