

The Effect of Age, Gender and Parents' Encouragement on Undergraduate Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

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Abstract

The current study investigates undergraduate students' attitudes toward learning English, and the extent of parents' involvement in the learning process. The population of this study consists of students registered in the Department of English from level one to level four, Faculty of Education and Languages, Amran University. The study sample selected for this study was composed of 83 students. The researchers used a questionnaire as a data collection tool consisting of 17 items. The statements of the questionnaire were verified and validated. The results revealed that the students have moderate attitudes toward learning English, their teachers, and their parents' encouragement. This study recommends that teachers use different methods such as blended learning while teaching English to enhance students' positive attitudes towards learning English. Also, it recommends parents' active participation in the educational process.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language in all walks of life, such as technology, business, media, diplomacy, and tourism. Worldwide, people utilize English as a lingua franca (a mutually known language), as it is the official language of 53 nations. (Lien & Kazantsev, 2015; Attabor, 2021). This implies that learning English may help anyone to communicate with individuals from all over the world, whether you have been working in London or visiting Canada. Numerous studies have demonstrated that adults and students

focus on learning English as a second language to achieve a high social and economic position (Suleyman, 2019). To speak English fluently or as a native speaker means you have the key to success. The attitude of a learner toward learning English is one of the most important factors determining success in life (Getie, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020.). As English becomes a global language, it is more associated with academic development for students in any field of study.

A student with negative attitudes toward learning a foreign language can be changed and turned into positive ones and achieve positive results (Lennartsson, 2008). Attitude is considered an important concept for understanding human behaviour and is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and emotions (Latchanna & Dagneu, 2009). Ellis (1994) has shown that older students do worse than younger students and that girls do better than boys. According to Crystal (2003), there are 330 million native English speakers and about 430 million non-native English speakers, excluding English language learners.

1.1.Objectives of the Study

This study tries to achieve the following aims:

- 1- Examine the attitudes of Amran University students towards learning English.
- 2- Explore the students' attitudes towards their teachers.
- 3- Investigate the extent of parents' involvement in the learning English language process.

1.2.Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- What is the attitude of Amran University students towards learning English?
- 2- Do students' gender, age, and level of study influence their attitudes towards learning English?
- 3- What is the extent of parents' involvement in the learning English language process?

1.3.Statement of the problem

The attitude of EFLs towards English language learning and the impact on their parents' motivations play such roles in these students. The attitudes of Yemeni EFL students towards learning English have also not been investigated. The current study tries its best to shed light on a significant issue. Furthermore, it covers important variables, including gender, age, and parents' encouragement in the EFL context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English is regarded as a universal language. It has been utilized by a lot of nations. It is also one of the most widely used languages, impacting many facets of life. It is frequently employed in business, literature, movies, and sports. Therefore, by learning English, people will have a great deal of amusement and the ability to comprehend other cultures better.

Studying the English language gives people the chance to meet new people, connect with them, and build a huge network of relationships because of the language's widespread use and the enormous population of English speakers worldwide. These benefits are cumulative for the person learning the language. To produce their study and scientific articles, researchers must be fluent in English. This is because more research articles are written in this language than in the researcher's native tongue, and they are also more numerous. English language learners have a better chance than other students to find alternatives to study abroad, making it simpler to comprehend the extensive educational information available on the Internet. Because there are so many books written in or translated into English, studying English helps with understanding other cultures and their distinctive customs, viewing movies, listening to music, and reading numerous literary works from around the world. Because so many people speak English, whether as a mother tongue or a second language, it is simple to relocate to different countries, travel, and communicate with others. The learners' attitude toward learning the English language is one of the main factors which has been widely investigated. Students' attitudes make life easier or more difficult in a foreign language classroom (Kálmán, 2019; Singh et al., 2021; Zitouni et al, 2021, Ahmed et al, 2023; Mohammed, 2023). Moreover, Abdullaev (2021) believes that attitude plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language.

In Yemen, students learn English as a compulsory subject in public schools from 7th to 12th grade. While in private schools, English is taught from KG or 1st grade. Only rich people can teach their children in private schools, while common people teach their children in public schools. Education in private schools is better than in public schools. Math and science subjects in some private schools are taught in English as a medium of instruction as Al-Saeed School in Taiz and Al-Rashed School in Sana'a. English is the only foreign language (as the researchers know) taught as a required course in Yemeni public and private schools.

English textbooks were used only after the revolution of 26th September 1962 in northern Yemen, while English was introduced in southern Yemen by the British in the early thirties of the 19th century. The English language is considered a foreign language in the Republic of Yemen. It is a compulsory subject in schools and universities. Therefore, it is the only foreign language taught in universities and schools.

Yemen was divided into two parts before its unification in 1990; Yemen was unified into one country. The two educational systems of two parts merged into one system. The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Yemen issued a new English textbook, "Crescent English

Course Book”, these new textbooks are taught in public and private schools (Mohdar & Pawar, 2020).

The English language is used as a medium of instruction in such colleges as medical colleges and computer and IT colleges. To be a student of these colleges, you should pass the entrance exam in which English is one subject. Most governmental universities have faculties of education, faculties of arts, and faculties of languages; there must be a department of English. Yemeni people are positively aware of the importance of the English language in their lives and know well that English is the language of success for their children. Yemeni parents encouraged their children to study English and enrol in English institutes and schools that teach some English courses.

2.1. Attitudes

Positive attitudes toward learning language help learners to achieve their careers in academic life. Language learning is affected by attitudes and motivations; a positive attitude is crucial to start learning a language, while negative attitudes can hinder learning the language.

Allport (1935, pp. 798-844) considered attitude as a "mental and neural state of readiness organized through exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individuals' responses to all objects and situations with which it is related”.

Allen (1960) talked of attitude as an arrangement of mental processes, an internal disposition, or the way specific cognitive functions are organized in a person to make him act in a particular manner.

Brown (1994) used the term attitude to refer to a set of beliefs that learners have towards members of the target language group and their culture.

Gardener and Lambert (1972) view attitude as the learner's persistence in pursuing a goal. For them, it is possible to discern a person's attitude towards a particular object or reference by looking at what the person thinks about the object or recommendation. Gardener argues that there are two important types of attitudes - attitudes towards speakers of the target language and attitudes towards the actual use by which learners think they can use the language they have learned. Several Scholars have, based on Katz's definition (1960), proposed that "an attitude is the predisposition of the individual to evaluate a particular object favourably or unfavourably" (p.168).

2.2. Parents' participation in the educational process

The educational process begins at the house. According to Alexander (1996) and Al-Ghofaili, (2021), the family is the first educational setting that aids the children in learning since it is in this setting that the child acquires from the people around him. According to Ahmed et al.

(2019), it is regarded as the most significant social and educational institution that might affect a child's success or failure in early learning. The family significantly influences a child's ability to stand out in his culture. Therefore, education is not just the responsibility of the school but also a joint duty of the students, families, instructors, and the school. To guarantee the calibre of their children's academic performance, parents should engage in the educational process (Li, & Qiu, 2018;). Various studies (Boonk et al., 2018; Li & Qiu, 2018) have demonstrated a strong relationship between parent participation in education and academic achievement positively. The positive impact of family participation on the student's academic achievement. Moreover, this participation improves students' self-esteem, enhances academic performance, and reduces non-attendance (Wilson: 1975; Rasool & Winke, 2019; Cepada & Grepon, 2020; Van Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Orfan, et al, 2021; Mansoor et al, 2023). Scholars have not paid much attention to the impact of family intervention in the educational process on students' academic achievement in Yemen. Family intervention in the educational system is almost neglected in the Yemeni context.

Memon et al. (2019) examined the attitudes, motivations, and relationships of junior high school students in the Matiyari district. They found that the students had a positive attitude towards English, and there was a strong correlation between motivation and attitude. Ghazvini and Khajehpour (2011) examined the attitudes and motives of Iranian students towards studying English. They found that female students had more integrative motivations, while male students had more instrumental motivations. Female students were also more engaged in studying English than male students. Mutar (2019) conducted a study to identify students' attitudes towards learning the English language. The findings showed that the students had positive attitudes towards learning the language, and gender and level of education did not affect their attitudes. Tanni (2015) surveyed Palestinian students' attitudes towards English. The survey found that most students had a positive attitude towards English, and women's attitudes were more positive than men's. Orfan (2020) investigated Afghan students' attitudes towards learning English. The results showed that the students had positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioural attitudes towards learning English, and there were no significant differences in attitudes based on gender, age, level, and field of study. Santos et al. (2018) investigated students' attitudes towards English. They found that business students had a more favourable opinion of English compared to education students, and female business students had more positive attitudes than male students.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

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The researchers in this study used the quantitative method; a questionnaire was used. It was adopted from (Abidin, 2012; Al Noursi, 2013; Sharma, 2022). It consisted of two main independent sections; the first section consisted of questions that aim to collect the participants' demographic background, i.e., gender, age, and level of study. The second section comprised three sub-sections: undergraduates' attitudes toward learning English, students' attitudes toward teachers, and parents' attitudes toward learning English. The participants were required to express their answers to 20 items about their attitudes toward learning English, attitudes towards teachers, parents' attitudes towards English, and students' demographic profiles.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 83 undergraduates who majored in the English language. They were selected randomly from the Department of English, Faculty of Education and Languages, Amran University.

The number of participants was few because Amran University is located in a small city – Amran. The study was conducted in the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Table (1) Distribution of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	37	44.6
	Female	46	55.4
Level	first year	12	14.5
	second year	22	26.5
	third year	24	28.9
	fourth year	25	30.1
Age	From 18-20	9	10.8
	From 21-23	31	37.3
	From 24-26	30	36.1
	Above 26	13	15.7

3.3. Validity of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was given to four experts specialized in English language teaching to validate the questionnaire's content validity, relevancy, and wording. They thankfully commented on the questionnaire items; the researchers made modifications according to their comments and suggestions. Four items were deleted for redundancy.

The researchers translated the English questionnaire into Arabic; they did so to get more reliable information from the respondents. The translated version was given to a professional

translator to gain accurate translation. The final form of the questionnaire consisted of 17 items, distributed on three dimensions (Students' attitudes toward English, students' attitudes towards English language teachers and parents' attitudes toward English).

3.4. Reliability of the Questionnaire

According to In (2017), a pilot study offers treasured data for guessing the sample size and assessing all other features of the main study to reduce redundant effort from the researchers and participants.

39 students from Amran University were randomly chosen for a pilot study to assess the validity of the items of the questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale was used. The items of the questionnaire were evaluated for reliability using SPSS version 20. The value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.94, as shown in the table. According to the results, the reliability of questionnaire items was acceptable as they attained the acceptable value according to Cronbach's alpha values.

Table (2) Reliability value of the dimensions of the attitudes

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N
Students' attitudes toward English	.896	7
Students' attitudes towards teachers	.895	6
Parents' attitudes towards English	.931	4
Total	.948	17

4. RESULTS

The attitudes of the learners are very crucial in learning any language. So, the researchers assessed the student's attitudes toward the English language.

Table (3) the attitude of students toward the English language

Items		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
I love learning English	F	14	12	30	12	15	3.02	1.30
	%	16.9	14.5	36.1	14.5	18.1		
English is important because it is an international language	F	12	16	17	22	16	3.17	1.34
	%	14.5	19.3	20.5	26.5	19.3		
I can learn English very well.	F	5	20	20	24	14	3.27	1.18
	%	6	24.1	24.1	28.9	16.9		
I do my best to learn English because it has many advantages over other languages.	F	8	13	22	25	15	3.31	1.21
	%	9.6	15.7	26.5	30.1	18.1		

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I really work hard to learn English.	F	7	11	27	24	14	3.33	1.15
	%	8.4	13.3	32.5	28.9	16.9		
Learning English is one of the most important aspects of my life	F	9	14	20	20	20	3.34	1.30
	%	10.8	16.9	24.1	24.1	24.1		
I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	F	6	12	16	31	18	3.52	1.19
	%	7.2	14.5	19.3	37.3	21.7		
Total mean score							3.28	0.93

In the above table, the researchers found that the statement that states that students love learning English scored the lowest mean (3.02) and its standard deviation (1.30), which falls under the neutral category, while the statement that indicates that students have a strong desire to know all aspects of English, scored the highest mean (3.52). The total standard of all items of the students' attitudes towards English was (3.28), which indicates that their responses are in the neutral category.

Table (4) attitudes of students toward their English language teachers

Items		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
English language teachers simplify difficult topics so I can understand them easily	F	12	17	21	23	10	3.02	1.24
	%	14.5	20.5	25.3	27.7	12		
I understand English language teachers' pronunciation easily.	F	11	13	26	23	10	3.10	1.20
	%	13.3	15.7	31.3	27.7	12		
English language teachers subjects speak English fluently.	F	8	16	20	29	10	3.20	1.71
	%	9.6	19.3	24.1	34.9	12		
Teachers of English subjects use an interesting teaching style.	F	7	17	21	28	10	3.20	1.15
	%	8.4	20.5	25.3	33.7	12		
I really like my English teachers.	F	9	12	23	26	13	3.27	1.21
	%	10.8	14.5	27.7	31.3	15.7		
English language teachers are a great source of inspiration to me	F	6	12	20	32	13	3.41	1.13
	%	7.2	14.5	24.1	38.6	15.7		
Total mean score							3.20	0.87

The researchers identified that the item “English language teachers simplify difficult topics so I can understand them easily” scored the lowest mean (3.02), with standard division (1.24), while the statement “Teachers of English subjects are a great source of inspiration to me” scored the highest mean (3.41), standard division (1.13). The total mean of all items of the

students' attitudes towards their teachers was (3.20), indicating that their responses are in the neutral category.

Table (5) student's parent's encouragement

Items		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
My parents encourage me to practice my English as much as possible.	F	7	14	27	22	13	3.24	1.16
	%	8.4	16.9	32.5	26.5	15.7		
My parents are very interested in everything I do in my English course.	F	9	12	25	23	14	3.25	1.21
	%	10.8	14.5	30.1	27.7	16.9		
My parents encouraged me to learn English.	F	5	15	24	24	15	3.35	1.15
	%	6	18.1	28.9	28.9	18.1		
My parents urge me to ask my teacher for clarification if I face difficulties.	F	8	7	22	25	21	3.53	1.23
	%	9.6	8.4	26.5	30.1	25.3		
Total mean score							3.34	0.97

From the above table, it is clear that the statement that parents encourage their students to practice English as much as possible scored the lowest mean (3.24), and its standard deviation was (1.16), which falls under the "neutral" category, while the statement that states that, "parents urge students to ask teachers for clarification if they face difficulties scored the highest mean (3.53). The total mean of all items of the parents' attitudes towards English was (3.34); this indicates that the responses are in the "neutral" category.

Table (6) student's attitudes according to gender

Attitudes				
Gender	Mean	STD. Division	T-Value	P-Value
Male	3.24	1.04	0.34	0.73
Female	3.31	0.85		
Teachers				
Gender	Mean	STD. Division	T-Value	P-Value
Male	3.02	0.97	1.73	0.08
Female	3.35	0.75		
Parents				
Gender	Mean	STD. Division	T-Value	P-Value
Male	3.20	1.08	1.18	0.23

Female	3.46	0.87
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It was found that gender has shown no significant difference between male and female students in their attitudes towards English as the P-Value was 0.73, which is higher than 0.05. At the same time, students' attitudes toward their teachers were also insignificant, as the P-value was 0.08, which is higher than 0.05. There is no significant difference between male and female students in their parents' attitudes towards English; the P-Value is 0.23. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes toward learning English between the attitudes of females and males.

Table (7) student's attitudes according to age

Attitudes				
Age	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
From 18-20	2.79	0.77		
From 21-23	3.13	1.03	1.833	0.14
From 24-26	3.50	0.90		
Above 26	3.47	0.77		

Teachers				
Age	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
From 18-20	2.76	1	0.93	0.43
From 21-23	3.26	0.86		
From 24-26	3.21	0.90		
Above 26	3.35	0.72		

Parents				
Age	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
From 18-20	3.00	1.256	0.83	0.47
From 21-23	3.41	0.98		
From 24-26	3.26	0.95		
Above 26	3.62	0.76		

In the above table, the researchers analyzed the differences in students' attitudes towards English according to their ages. The P-value was 0.14, meaning there is no significant difference between students. On the opposite side, students' attitudes towards their teachers

also have no significant difference between students according to their ages, as the P-Value is 0.43. Parents' attitudes towards English show no significant difference between students, of which the P-value was 0.47. Hence, there is not a statistically significant difference between students' attitudes toward learning English according to their age.

Table (8) student's attitudes according to the level of study

Attitudes				
Level	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
First Year	2.98	1.06	1.042	0.37
Second Year	3.12	0.78		
Third Year	3.40	0.80		
Fourth Year	3.45	1.10		
Teachers				
Level	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
First Year	2.85	1.12	0.84	0.47
Second Year	3.26	0.86		
Third Year	3.33	0.68		
Fourth Year	3.20	0.91		
Parents				
Level	Mean	STD. Division	F-Value	P-Value
First Year	3.17	1.36	0.49	0.68
Second Year	3.44	0.79		
Third Year	3.21	0.96		
Fourth Year	3.47	0.93		

In the above table, the researchers analyzed the differences in students' attitudes towards English according to their level of study. The P-value was 0.37, meaning there is no significant difference between students. The attitudes of students towards their teachers also have no significant difference between students according to their level of study as the P-value is 0.47. No significant difference exists between all level students in their parents' attitudes towards English; the P-value is 0.68. Hence, there is no statistically significant difference between students' attitudes toward learning English according to their level of study.

4.1.DISCUSSION

The Effect of Age, Gender and Parents' Encouragement on Undergraduate Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

This section tries to answer the research questions. The first question was, “What is the attitude of Amran University students towards learning English?”

It was found that the “love of learning English” was not up to the expectation, which might influence their level of language acquisition, as the love of learning anything plays a great role in mastering it (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015.) The total responses of the participants were in the neutral category. This level indicates that there must be solutions to this attitude by identifying why these participants do not have a positive attitude toward learning English. It can be ascribed that the students feel that there is not much demand for employment of the English language graduate.

Regarding students' attitudes toward their English language teachers, the total responses were in the neutral category. It was also found that the parents did not play the required role, as it was found that their encouragement was under the “neutral category”. The student in the current time amid the war, poverty, and no governmental employment affected their attitude toward learning the English language.

Regarding the second research question, “Do students' gender, age, and level of study influence their attitudes towards learning English?” It was found that gender has shown no significant difference between male and female students in their attitudes towards English as the P-Value was 0.73, which is higher than 0.05. The researchers analyzed the differences in students' attitudes towards English according to their ages. The P-value was 0.14, meaning there is no significant difference between students regarding the Age dimension. Furthermore, the students' attitudes towards English according to their level of study were analyzed. The P-value was 0.37, meaning there is no significant difference between students regarding their level of study. All in all, the student's gender, age and parental encouragement do not play a significant role in the student's attitude toward learning English.

Based on the results collected from data analysis, this research arrived at the following findings:

- 1- The English department, Faculty of Education, and Amran University undergraduate students have moderate attitudes toward learning English. Students reported that they love learning English because it is an international language, and it has many advantages over other languages.
- 2- The results showed that the students have moderate attitudes towards their teachers regarding students' attitudes toward their teachers. The students in the English department agreed that teachers could simplify the difficult topics to make students easily understand

the lectures. Moreover, the respondents agreed that they know the teachers' pronunciation easily, are fluent when they teach in the classes and use interesting teaching styles.

- 3- The results show that students are affected by their parents' encouragement to learn English.
- 4- The results revealed no statistically significant difference among students' attitudes towards learning English, their teachers, and their parents based on their gender, age, and level of study.

4.2.CONCLUSION

The present research focused on students' attitudes towards learning English in the Faculty of Education, Amran University. It has attempted to determine whether students have positive or negative attitudes towards learning English and their teachers in the English department. The findings showed that students have moderate attitudes toward learning English, their teachers, and the impact of their parents on their English learning. It was also found that there are no significant differences between students regarding their attitudes based on their gender, age, and level of study. According to the findings elicited from data analysis, this study arrived at the following recommendations:

- 1- Teachers should carry out lectures using different methods that attract the student's attention and make education a source of entertainment.
- 2- Teachers should focus on improving the students' English skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking).
- 3- English department should conduct conferences for parents showing them the importance of learning the English language to make parents aware of the importance of the English language as a global language and the language of science.
- 4- Family intervention in the educational process is among the most important factors that affect the success of students, so the school should involve the family in any decisions concerning their children and invite them to participate in their children's institute trips, events, and parties held at the institute.

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Appendix

This questionnaire is designed to identify the students' attitudes towards English language learning of Yemeni learners of English as a foreign language at Amran University.

So, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The questionnaire should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, and your participation is vital to the success of this paper. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Gender..... Level.....Age.....

The dimensions

The attitude of students toward the English language

- 1- I love learning English
- 2- English is important because it is an international language
- 3- I can learn English very well.
- 4- I do my best to learn English because it has many advantages over other languages.
- 5- I really work hard to learn English.
- 6- Learning English is one of the most important aspects of my life
- 7- I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.

Attitudes of students toward their English language teachers

- 1- English language teachers simplify difficult topics so I can understand them easily
- 2- I understand English language teachers' pronunciation easily.
- 3- English language teachers subjects speak English fluently.
- 4- Teachers of English subjects use an interesting teaching style.
- 5- I really like my English teachers.
- 6- English language teachers are a great source of inspiration to me

Student's parent's encouragement

- 1- My parents encourage me to practice my English as much as possible.
- 2- My parents are very interested in everything I do in my English course.
- 3- My parents encouraged me to learn English.
- 4- My parents urge me to ask my teacher for clarification if I face difficulties.