

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LEARNING OF NON-ENGLISH MAJOR AMONG STUDENTS AT THU DAU MOT UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

International integration not only brings opportunities but also challenges for teaching and learning English. Like other universities, Thu Dau Mot University focuses on teaching English for non-majored students of different faculties to meet the curriculum as well as provide knowledge for them to be confident when communicating. However, teaching English to non-majors still faces a lot of difficulties due to a number of factors. This study aims to understand the attitudes of non-English major students toward learning English at TDMU. Quantitative methods are used through survey questionnaires related to students' attitudes toward learning English and factors affecting students' attitudes toward learning English, and also finding out their wishes when participating in English learning activities in class. The questionnaire was sent to 190 students of different levels (levels 4-5). The results of the study show that most students are aware of the importance of learning English but they are not highly motivated to learn. According to the analysis results, students do not have a positive attitude towards learning English for the following reasons: They haven't spent time studying because they have to work part-time job for paying tuition fee; The purpose of using this language after graduation has not been determined, and they haven't found a suitable learning method. From these findings, some solutions have been discussed to improve students' English learning attitudes, help lecturers make appropriate adjustments to improve students' learning outcomes and meet the standards school output as well as meet the needs of society.

**Keywords:** attitude, non-English major, students, Thu Dau Mot University

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## 1. Introduction

English becomes the dominant language in many countries because it is an international language and English as a window into the world plays an important role in our society. In the current period of international integration and globalization, English is chosen by learners as the most important foreign language and most students have chosen English to study at universities. English is also the main foreign language taught in the Vietnamese education system. In recent years, the Party and State have had policies to encourage the teaching of foreign languages, especially English, in the entire education system. The National Foreign Language Project 2020 [period 2008 to 2020] and adjusted according to Decision 2080/QĐ-TTg [period 2017-2025] was launched with the purpose of improving the quality of foreign language teaching for all levels of education. At Thu Dau Mot University, non-specialized foreign language training, especially English, is of great interest and foreign language training regulations are also updated, adjusted and supplemented to create favorable conditions for learners achieve foreign language output standards, meeting the needs of society. In the context of the policy

of autonomy in the field of education being implemented drastically, innovating foreign language teaching methods, improving the quality of teaching staff, and understanding students' views and learning attitudes non-specialized foreign language teachers, the learning needs of students at universities in Vietnam as well as TDM University are a necessary and inevitable requirement. However, There are many factors that affect the English learning attitude of learners in general and non-major students at TDM University in particular. According to Nguyen (2020), achievement in language learning usually depends on both students' ability and attitude. If students have a negative attitude, it can lead to some detrimental effects. There are some factors that greatly influence someone in the process of his or her second language acquisition such as motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, and personality (Khasinah, 2014). Similarly, Vo (2017) stated that there are a lot of factors that influence the effective learning of a second language. A learner's attitude towards language learning is one of the main factors determining success or failure. If a learner has a positive attitude towards the language, it can lead to increased motivation, which then results in better learning achievement. Based on the above reasons, the researcher conducted a survey of English learning attitudes of non-major students at Thu Dau Mot University through an article titled "*Attitudes towards the learning of non- English major among students at Thu Dau Mot University*". This research result is identified as an important basis for changing students' learning attitudes, thereby improving and enhancing the quality of education.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definitions of attitudes

Attitude is a positive or negative evaluation towards a specific object, person or situation that we feel and behave towards them positively or negatively (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Learners' learning attitudes are based on their self-study ability and readiness for learning. Learning attitudes are external manifestations through positive or negative activities related to the subject. Positivity, self-discipline, and passion for learning and research are factors that contribute to improving the quality of university education.

### 2.2. Factors affecting attitude towards learning English as a foreign language

Many domestic and foreign studies have identified factors in the educational environment that have a great impact on learners' learning attitudes. An educational environment includes many internal and external factors that impact the learner and the learner's learning style, thereby forming the structure of the learner's activities (Huang & Hsu, 2005).

#### *For training organizations*

##### + Lecturers

Lecturers play an important role throughout the student's learning process. They are the ones who brings knowledge and guide learners to access knowledge. Building the image and pedagogical communication relationships of lecturers is very necessary for forming awareness of learners. Qualifications, firm, profound and always updated knowledge along with the image, personality, and teaching enthusiasm of the lecturers all have an impact on the learning attitude of students (Curran & Rosen, 2006; Maat & Zakaria, 2010; Lee & Zeleke, 2004; Goodykoontz, 2009)

##### + Teaching methods

Active, creative, easy-to-understand, and learner-centered teaching methods can create excitement and passion for learning in students, thereby contributing to improving students' positive learning attitudes (Curran & Rosen, 2006).

##### + Infrastructure

In evaluating training quality, equipment and facilities system is a very important standard. A good and complete system of facilities can meet the learning needs of students, create excitement and

passion for learning for students as well as ensure teaching work for lecturers (Goodykoontz 2009; Huang & Hsu 2005).

#### + Subjects, Syllabus

Subjects and curriculum are prerequisite factors that bring knowledge, understanding, and skills to students. The content of the subjects as well as the curriculum must be clear, in-depth in practice and highly applicable, which will promote the learning attitude of students who are trying to learn to accumulate knowledge and abilities for the future (Curran & Rosen, 2006)

#### *For students*

##### + Learning motivation

Students' learning motivation is reflected in their interest in learning, career goals, motivations and social relationships, which promotes students' learning attitudes and self-discipline in learning. It is the students' enjoyment, ability to understand the subject, belief in the knowledge received and need to improve their understanding that will make an important contribution to improving students' learning attitudes (Lee & Zeleke, 2004; Huang & Hsu, 2005).

##### + Living conditions and accommodation

University students come from different provinces and cities, so they often stay at dormitories or rent houses to study and start an independent life. After school, they must do daily activities such as cooking, washing clothes, entertainment, etc. Furthermore, most students take advantage of part-time jobs to earn extra money to cover their living expenses. Some students coming from poor families earn money to pay tuition fee. Others want to earn money to meet their personal needs or to experience. All of these things affect their learning (Musa Juma, 2023).

### **2.3. Related studies**

There have been many articles on the English learning attitudes of English majors as well as non-English majors at different schools nationwide as well as many countries around the world. However, this article only researches and surveys the English learning attitudes of non-major students at TDM University, so researches related to this field will be reviewed and discussed in this section.

Duy Thi Thuy Pham & Trang Huynh Nguyen (2020) studied on Students' attitudes towards learning foreign languages with title "A study on attitude towards English language learning among non-English majored students at Tra Vinh University". In this study, there are 89 students (46 male students and 43 female students) from 3 majors: Office Administration, Tourism and Medical Physician. The questionnaire has 34 items concerning language attitudes in terms of behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspect of attitude. The finding of the study shows that the students have average positive attitude towards English and especially, there are no attitudinal differences by gender. However, the attitudes towards English of the three majors are not similar. Tourism students' attitude is slightly lower than that of the other two specializations.

Nguyen Thi Thu Huong and Bui Thi Huong Giang (2022) conducted a research on "An investigation on non-English majored students' attitudes on English language learning at a Medical College". The study aims to investigate non-English-majored students' attitudes toward English language learning at Thai Nguyen Medical College with participation of 312 first-year students at Thai Nguyen Medical College. This study focused on investigating: (1) the students' attitudes toward English language learning at Thai Nguyen Medical College; (2) the influences on the students' attitudes towards English language learning at Thai Nguyen Medical College. The results show that most learners were aware of the importance of English language learning and had an average positive attitude towards English language learning. However, other students had negative feelings about practicing and applying English in real life with reasons like not determining the purpose of using this language after graduation, losing their previous knowledge of this subject, and not finding a suitable learning method.

The finding of the study by Tran Thien Quynh Tran, Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet , Luu Thu Thuy, Pham Thi Bich Ngan (2021) on factors affecting English non-majored freshmen's language attitude towards EFL learning at Can Tho University of Technology showed that both students and teachers affirm that learning and teaching English is essential in the era of global integration. In spite of having acknowledged the importance of the English language, students did not show high motivation in EFL learning. The results also showed that learning materials, lecturers, and friends were positive factors, while the home learning environment, personality and habits, and interests negatively affected English non-majored freshmen's attitude. The findings showed that students liked and appreciated the lecturers, on the contrary, lecturers thought that most students had a negative attitude towards learning foreign languages.

In general, the above studies all have the same topic: studying English learning attitudes of non-major students and the results show that non-major students' English learning attitudes are quite similar. The results also reveal that there are significant differences in views towards learning English as a foreign language related to learning environment, living conditions, and gender.

### 3. Data collection and Methodology

#### Data collection

There were five classes at two different levels (level 4: 23EN09E60069, 23EN09E60070, 23EN09E60071; level 5: 23EN11ENK001, 23EN11ENK002) participating with a total of 190 people. These classes were selected because the author taught during three semesters of the 2022-2023 academic year.

#### Methodology

The quantitative research was employed in this study. The researcher used questionnaires to collect data on non-English major students' attitudes towards English language learning at Thu Dau Mot University. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert-type scale for both negative and positive items and the learners were given the option of ticking one of the scales

The questionnaires were delivered to students. Then all the questions were collected for data analysis. Statistical Package for the Social Science program (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to analyze the collected data.

### 4. Results and Discussion

First, we did descriptive statistics to find the proportion and number of the issues we were interested in to serve the research. Specifically, we present that information through the following tables:

TABLE 1. Factors affecting students' learning attitudes

Statements	Total	Response rate				
		Strongly agree	agree	Hesitation	disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>Syllabus</b>	<b>190</b>					
The Outcomes curriculum is good and suitable for learners.	quantity	<b>164</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	86,3%	5,8%	5,8%	2,1%	0%
The knowledge and skills content of the curriculum meets the requirements for knowledge and skills standards in the 4.0 era.	quantity	<b>89</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
	percent	46,8%	38,4%	7,9%	3,7%	3,2%
Knowledge close to daily life.	quantity	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	47,4	52,6%	0	0	0
<b>Teaching Staff</b>	<b>190</b>					
Lecturers have profound knowledge and are always update and reference about the subjects they teach.	quantity	<b>105</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	55,3%	40,5%	4,2%	0	0

Lecturers flexibly use teaching methods as well as apply information technology to help students enjoy learning and understand lessons easily.	quantity	<b>113</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	59,5%	35,3%	4,2%	1,0%	0
Lecturers often apply information technology in teaching	quantity	<b>158</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	83,2%	16,8%	0	0	0
Lecturers provide and guide the use of necessary learning and reference materials for each module.	quantity	<b>151</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	79,5%	20,5%	0	0	0
Instructors follow the teaching plan and come to class on time.	quantity	<b>120</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>
	percent	63,2%	28,9%	0	6,8%	1,1%
Lecturers are enthusiastic, friendly and willing to share experiences with students.	quantity	<b>179</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	94,2%	4,2%	0	1,6%	0
Lecturers evaluate students' learning outcomes accurately and objectively	quantity	<b>141</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	74,2%	21,1%	2,6%	2,1%	0
<b>+ Facilities</b>	<b>190</b>					
Classrooms meet students' learning requirements	quantity	<b>71</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	37,4%	57,4%	5,2%	0	0
The number of students in a class is appropriate.	quantity	<b>79</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	41,6%	53,2%	5,2%	0	0
Online utility applications and Internet access effectively support teaching and learning	quantity	<b>60</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>
	percent	31,6%	23,7%	4,2%	19,5%	21%
Study and research materials provided by instructors for each module are rich and diverse.	quantity	<b>81</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
	percent	42,6%	39,5%	14,2%	2,6%	1,1%
<b>Learners</b>	<b>190</b>					
Lack of basic knowledge	quantity	<b>88</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>49</b>
	percent	46,3%	11,1%	0	16,8%	25,8%
Spending a lot of time doing part time job to make ends meet.	quantity	<b>131</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>
	percent	68,9%	15,3%	1,1%	7,9%	6,8%
.Distracted by family matters	quantity	<b>50</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>
	percent	26,3%	27,9%	6,8%	17,9%	21,1%
Poor living conditions	quantity	<b>61</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>
	percent	32,1%	27,4%	8,9%	12,1%	19,5%

Statistics show that regarding the curriculum, the majority of students highly agree on the suitability of the curriculum for learners at a rate of 83.6%, and 5.8%. This shows that the School's current curriculum is very standard and suitable for most students; Knowledge closes to daily life and meets the requirements for knowledge and skills standards in the 4.0 era with 47.4%, 52,6% and 46,8%, 38,4%. Only a few students think that the materials are not appropriate or meet the needs of the times with a disagreement rate of 2,1% and 3,7%, 3,2 %.

For the teaching staff, students highly appreciate their professional qualifications with 55,3%, teaching methods, application of information technology in teaching with 59,5%, always updating new information as well as their enthusiasm and willingness to help students solve difficulty in learning with 83,2% and 94,2%. This shows that the research results are the same as Tran Thien Quynh Tran et al. (2021) in this aspect. Moreover, students completely agree that lecturer's assessments of their learning outcomes are accurate and objective at a high rate 74,2% and 21,1%. Only a very small percentage (2.1%) disagree and 2.6% has no opinion on this. However, about time, a few students are dissatisfied with the lecturer's lack of punctuality, showing a disagreement rate of 6.8% and a strongly disagreement rate of 1.1%.

In terms of facilities, students are very satisfied with the classrooms (94,8%), the number of students in a class (94,8%) as well as the learning materials (82,1%). Only a few students think that learning materials are less rich and diverse (3,7%). On the contrary, students often complain about the internet and the internet system is said to be ineffective, with a weak and unstable network (40,5%).

For learner, more than fifty percent of the total number of students participating in the survey agreed that their basic knowledge was lost (with 57,4%). The survey also shows that most students work part-time jobs to make ends meet, accounting for 84.2%. Meanwhile, only 14.7% does not participate in part-time jobs. The percentage of learners distracted by family problems is 15.2% higher than that of learners who are not affected. The rest students (with 6,8%) did not mention this issue. The number of students with difficult family circumstances also accounts for 27.9% more than the number of students with good conditions. A small percentage of students had no opinion on this (8,9%).

After finding the factors that affect non-major students' English learning, a survey was conducted to study how students' attitudes were expressed during class, specifically in table 2.

**TABLE 2.** Students' attitudes toward learning non- English major

<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Never</b>
Paying attention and listen to lessons during class	quantity	<b>120</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>
	percent	63,2%	31,6%	5,2%	0
Taking notes lessons carefully	quantity	<b>105</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>
	percent	55,3%	33,7%	7,8%	3,2%
Participating in discussing lessons actively	quantity	<b>98</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
	percent	51,6%	39,5%	4,2%	4,7%
Actively contributing to answering the teacher's questions	quantity	<b>81</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>
	percent	42,6%	42,1%	10%	5,3%
Using Smart phone for personal purposes	quantity	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>134</b>
	percent	9%	7,9%	12,6%	70,5%
Using laptop for private work during class	quantity	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>73</b>
	percent	3,7%	6,3%	51,6%	38,4%
Talking in class	quantity	<b>14</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>7</b>
	percent	7,4%	39,5%	49,5%	3,6%
Feeling tired and sleepy during class	quantity	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>75</b>
	percent	2,1%	8,4%	50%	39,5%

The survey shows that in the first four statements the majority of students' learning attitudes are very positive, the highest achievement rate in the 4 levels, specifically 63.2% is the percentage of students who regularly pay attention to the lesson during class; 55.3% is the proportion of students taking complete notes; 51.6% of students actively participated in discussing the lesson in pairs and groups, and 42.6% of students contributed to answering the teacher's questions. It is also noticed that a very small percentage of students rarely or do not actively participate in learning activities, specifically 5.2% of students rarely pay attention during class. 7.8% of students rarely take complete notes. The number of students who seldom participate in discussions and comments to construct lessons is about 14.2%. 13.2% is the number of students who do not have positive thoughts in learning and they never participate in activities in class.

A very high percentage of students never or rarely use smart phones or laptops during class for personal purposes with 83.1% and 90%. The survey also showed that 53.1% and 89.5% of students seldom or never talked and slept during class. However, the number of students who occasionally talk and sleep in class is also pretty high with 39.5% and 8.4%. Finally, the number of students who usually talk and feel tired during class is 7.4% and 2.1%.

Similar to the research results of Supiah (2018), Duy Thi Thuy Pham and Trang Huynh Nguyen (2020), the results of this study show that students are aware of the importance of learning English as shown by their performance percentages in the table above.

## 5. Suggestions

### *For students*

From the first year, you should focus on learning English because when you are in the third and fourth years of study, you will be busy with specialized subjects, and will not have much time for English. Therefore, you had better learn English as soon as possible. If your English is good, you have many opportunities to choose a job in the future.

There should be clear goals for learning English for each year. You should set directions and have implementation methods for each goal. In the first and second years, you must set yourself a goal of reaching levels 1,2,3, and in the third year, reaching levels 4,5,6, and the last year you spend time on your major.

Don't stick to the English textbook, which will make you feel bored soon. Instead, you should learn to listen first. If you listen to what you like first, your learning will be much easier. Don't be afraid of making mistakes, but actively communicate. You can improve your speaking skills by listening a lot, trying to listen a lot even if you don't understand anything. Then you can view answer key and listen again. If you come across a new word, you can look it up and take notes, then continue listening.

During the listening process, if you have difficulty, you can ask for help from friends or anyone who is good at English. Then you need to diligently pronounce the new vocabulary, and practice speaking the sentences you see or quote from the listening passage. To pronounce correctly, use an online dictionary to read along. When you learn words in the Listening section and actively practice speaking according to the listening passage, you will feel that the reading and vocabulary exercises in the textbook become much easier to learn and remember. But most importantly, you will have great inspiration to speak English when you go to class. That means you'll progress faster.

Don't be afraid to practice speaking because of your limited English vocabulary. On the contrary, you should be more active in communicating. You can join English clubs, make friends with native speakers to have the opportunity to speak more.

English is a subject of will more than intelligence, so it does not require any innate qualities, but it requires effort every day. You are the deciding factor in your English proficiency.

### *For teachers and school*

Teachers should create a friendly environment for learners and create excitement for learners by encouraging, caring, supporting and building relationships with learners. This brings success to learners.

Teachers can set higher expectations and give rewards to learners as a sign of recognition of learners' achievements, which also creates motivation for learning and success for learners.

Schools should invest in good internet to serve teaching and learning more effectively.

## 6. Conclusion

Through a survey of students' attitudes toward learning English and factors affecting the attitudes of non-majors in English, it shows that most students are aware of the importance of learning non-majors in English. They know that English is a compulsory subject and English will be useful for their future lives. However, some students lacked basic knowledge and did not know where to start again; Some students did not have proper time management skills. They spend too much time working part-time and neglect about their studies. Considering family factors, family is very important in motivating and promoting student's learning. In short, the attitude idea is an important aspect of language learning, so a positive attitude should be the foundation of language learning.

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