

# Prospective ELT Teachers' Attitudes Toward The English Language<sup>1,2</sup> In An EFL Context

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## ABSTRACT

*Attitudes toward a foreign language and the motivation to learn a language have been of interest to many educators and researchers. However, the majority of research has been conducted with language learners. There is a lack of literature concerning the attitudes of teachers and teacher trainees toward the language they are or will be teaching. Thus, the current study aims to investigate English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher trainees' attitudes toward the English language and their self-reported difficulties when using their foreign language skills in daily and academic language. Two hundred teacher trainees participated in the study. The questionnaire, which was developed via an extensive literature review and adaptations of Karahan's (2007) and Al Zahrani's (2008) studies, was found reliable (Cronbach's alpha, .876). The study showed that trainees have mildly positive attitudes toward the English language, with females being more positive than males. The findings also suggest that trainees have stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. Moreover, the results indicate that trainees do not differ significantly in terms of their difficulties in using daily language skills. However, there are some statistically significant differences in academic language, such as vocabulary and monologue speech. In addition, there are statistically significant differences between males and females in speaking and reading comprehension for daily language, as well as reading comprehension for academic language.*

**Keywords:** Attitudes; ELT Teacher Trainees; Foreign Language Teaching; Motivation; Professional Readiness

## INTRODUCTION

Learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning" is a widely researched topic. Attitudes have been explored in terms of their relationships with other factors, such as motivation (Gardner, 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Liu, 2007; Kızıltepe, 2000; Shirbagi, 2010), foreign language achievement (İnal, Evin & Saracaloğlu, 2005), gender (Kobayashi, 2002; Gökçe, 2008), age (Henry & Apeltgren, 2008; Dilitemizoğlu, 2003), peer-group influences (Bartram, 2006), culture (Wright, 1999), language teaching (Bağçeci, 2004; Verma, 2008), classroom language learning (Littlewood, 2001), language and its uses (Karahana, 2007), and parental influences (Gardner, 1968). The age group of the subjects varied in previous research with learners from the primary level (Henry & Apeltgren, 2008; Merisuo-Storm, 2007; Dilitemizoğlu, 2003) and the secondary level (Karahana, 2007; Bağçeci, 2004; Bartram, 2006; Wright, 1999) to the tertiary level (Shirbagi, 2010; LoCastro, 2001; Verma, 2008; Pudjiati, 1996). Most research conducted with university students at the tertiary level involves learners enrolled in various departments (see Shirbagi, 2010; Yang & Lau, 2003) and teacher trainees in departments other than ELT (English Language Teaching) (Saracaloglu & Varol, 2007). However, the study of ELT teacher trainees' attitudes toward the language that they are expected to teach after graduation is a gap in the literature. Thus, the

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current study aims to shed light on prospective ELT teachers' attitudes toward English because attitudes can be an important determinant of their future students' success, motivation, and attitudes toward this language.

Because the teacher affects students' motivation and interest in lessons, it is important for an EFL teacher to have a positive attitude toward the English language and to reflect this attitude in his or her classroom. Moreover, a positive attitude can be an indicator of willingness to teach a language, which may contribute to the implementation of effective methods and techniques to increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language and may help students to develop positive attitudes. Because attitudes are frequently related to motivation (see Gardner & Lambert, 1972), it can be assumed that teacher trainees with positive attitudes toward English have greater motivation to learn and teach it. Gardner and Lambert (1972) believe that motivation is the primary factor that enhances or hinders intercultural communication for an L2 (second language) learner. To this end, the current study aims to investigate ELT teacher trainees' attitudes toward English and their self-reported difficulties when using their foreign language skills in daily and academic language.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Attitude and motivation have interconnected roles in second/foreign language development. Although there is no direct influence of attitude on the learning process, attitude plays an important role in the development of motivation. Positive attitudes tend to increase the motivation to learn, whereas negative attitudes make learning more difficult by decreasing learners' motivation. Thus, Oxford (2001) suggests that it is essential to identify learners' attitudes. The type of motivation is an important factor in achievement. Gardner and Lambert (1972) make this distinction by referring to integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is related to learners' willingness to empathize and interact with native L2 speakers and their culture (Merisuo-Storm, 2007; Shirbagi, 2010). It is associated with openness to cultural differences and different ways of living through the development of a positive emotional disposition toward native speakers of the target language (Dörnyei, 2003). In contrast, instrumental motivation refers to a desire to learn an L2 for occupational reasons or to pass an exam (Merisuo-Storm, 2007; Shirbagi, 2010). Falk (1978, cited in Shirbagi, 2010) claims that L2 learners become successful when they appreciate the culture and the native speakers of a language and want to become familiar with the society of the target language. Although integrative motivation has a stronger effect on success (Macnamara, 1973; Gardner and Lambert, 1972), learners generally have instrumental reasons for learning another language (Shirbagi, 2010).

Culture also has an important impact on motivation. Littlewood (2001) notes the importance of culture for thought and behavior. One perspective considers whether a society is collectivist or individualist. Eastern countries are considered collectivist, whereas western societies are individualist. In collectivist value systems, a person's attitude and behavior are determined by the groups with which s/he is involved. In contrast, individualism is built on self-fulfillment and freedom from 'in-groups' (Littlewood, 2001). Another perspective relies on the distinction between socially-oriented and individually-oriented achievement motivation. The former is highly relevant in collectivist societies and the latter is relevant in individualist orientations. In socially-oriented motivation, an individual behaves in certain ways that are considered prestigious for the members of his or her group, whereas in individually-oriented achievement motivation, a person attempts to achieve personal goals (Littlewood, 2001).

Most of the research literature on attitudes concerns language learners; however, language teachers' and/or trainees' attitudes toward the target language that they teach or will teach are not investigated. The current research is an attempt to contribute to the research literature by investigating ELT teacher trainees' attitudes toward English. It is believed that teachers' attitudes toward the L2 are reflected in the classroom and help to increase or diminish learners' motivation. As discussed previously, attitudes and motivation are interrelated and play a major role in success. Language teachers can be expected to have strong instrumental and integrative motivation for learning the L2. Instrumental motivation may result from their desire for a job related to the use of their FL/SL (foreign language/second language). Integrative motivation is also necessary because these teachers prefer jobs that require the transfer of knowledge related to native speakers and their culture rather than simply any job that requires the L2. It is assumed that if teacher trainees have strong personal and occupational reasons for learning the L2, they will have better attitudes toward English, which will affect their teaching.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current study is part of a larger research conducted in the Foreign Languages Department of a large state university in Turkey, which aims to investigate the attitudes of foreign language teacher trainees in the English, German, and French teaching departments. However, only the results from the ELT department will be reported here.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the ELT teacher trainees' self-reported difficulties in academic and daily English?
2. What are the attitudes of ELT teacher trainees toward the English language?
3. Are there any significant differences between male and female students in terms of their attitudes toward English?

## **Sample**

The present study was conducted with 200 ELT teacher trainees in their first (n=39, 19.5%), second (n=44, 22%), third (n=65, 32.5%) or fourth (n=52, 26%) year of studies at a large state university in Turkey. The majority of the ELT teacher candidates enrolled in the department are female, as reflected in the percentages of genders - 48 (24%) male and 152 (76%) female trainees contributed to this study. The age of the majority of participants (92%) ranged from 18 to 22 years.

## **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected via a questionnaire based on an extensive literature review and adaptations of Karahan's (2007) and Al Zahrani's (2008) studies. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part collected demographic information such as age, gender, etc. The second part gathered data on learners' self-reported difficulties in academic and daily English. The third part included an attitude questionnaire consisting of 25 items. The instrument was a Likert-type scaling instrument with five gradations - (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) No idea, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree. These gradations represent different levels of attitudes - (1) strongly negative, (2) mildly negative, (3) neutral, (4) mildly positive, and (5) strongly positive. The attitude questionnaire was composed of five groups of items: 1) social and educational status of English, 2) social and instrumental value of English, 3) the relationship between English and national culture, 4) the value of English language and English-based culture, and 5) discomfort about Turkish people speaking English. The groupings were created by taking Karahan's (2007) study into consideration.

## **Data Analysis**

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire and was found to be .876. The data analysis was conducted with SPSS 13.0 and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and t-tests were used to identify the differences between groups. For the demographic information, a frequency analysis was performed. Tukey and Scheffe tests were used to identify the differences between groups at the end of the variance analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

As mentioned previously, motivation and attitudes are strongly related to one another, and integrative motivation is the most effective type. When trainees were asked about their reasons for learning English, 60.6% of the participants indicated that they learned English for personal reasons (an indication of integrative motivation) and 82.9% stated that they learned English for occupational reasons (an indication of instrumental motivation). The results suggest that the participants have mildly positive motivation toward English, with stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation.

The results related to the self-reported difficulty that trainees encounter during their ELT education revealed that 45.4% of the participants had no difficulty, 34.3% had a little difficulty, 11.6% had a lot of difficulty,

and 1.4% thought that their English was not adequate to receive an education in the ELT Department. Furthermore, 82.5% of the participants indicated that they were at an advanced level and 17.5% indicated that they were at an intermediate level of English.

In this study, 98.5% of the participants indicated that they learned English in Turkey. This is important information in terms of determining the starting age for learning the L2. In Turkey, English is a compulsory course in the curriculum, and the 1997 education reform reduced the starting age for learning English to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The rest of the participants (1.5%) stated that they learned English in another non-English-speaking country. This group of learners also stated that they began learning English in primary school. Karahan (2007) claims that the starting age for learning languages has an impact on attitudes. In her study of private high school students, she found that students who began learning the language in kindergarten showed a more positive orientation toward English and felt more comfortable and confident when speaking the language.

When the analysis of the ELT teacher trainees’ daily language skills is compared on the basis of grade level, the results indicate no statistically significant difference. However, when trainees are compared on the basis of academic English skills, there are statistically significant differences in monologue speech ( $F=5.414, p>.05$ ) and vocabulary knowledge ( $F=6.818, p>.05$ ). According to the Scheffe test results, there is a statistically significant difference between second-grade trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.6$ ) and third-grade trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.4$ ) for second-graders. Similarly, in monologue speech, there is a statistically significant difference among third- and fourth-grade trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.7$ ) for fourth graders. For vocabulary knowledge, there is a statistically significant difference between first- ( $\bar{X}=1.6$ ) and third-grade trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.3$ ) for first-graders and between third- and fourth- grade trainees for fourth graders. No other significant differences are found for any other academic language skills.

When daily language skills are compared between genders, statistically significant differences are found between males and females in dialogue speech and reading comprehension. Female trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.3$ ) have more difficulty composing dialogues than do male trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.4$ ), whereas male trainees ( $\bar{X}=1.8$ ) have more difficulty with reading comprehension than females do ( $\bar{X}=1.9$ ).

The comparison of males’ and females’ academic language skills reveals that males ( $\bar{X}=1.8$ ) have more difficulty in academic reading comprehension (females  $\bar{X}=1.9$ ). Similarly, a statistically significant difference is found between males ( $\bar{X}=1.7$ ) and females ( $\bar{X}=1.9$ ) in comprehending audio-visual materials with academic content.

The results of the ANOVA and t-test indicated that gender and trainees’ self reported difficulty levels have an effect on attitude (see Table 1). Accordingly, females show more positive attitudes toward English than males, and trainees who indicated that they did not have difficulty or had a little difficulty have more positive attitudes than those who stated that they had a lot of difficulty and those who felt inadequate.

**Table 1: The Comparison Of Trainees’ Attitudes In Terms Of Gender, Grade Level, And Language Level**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Statistics</b>
<b>Gender</b>				$t = .003^*$
female	152	100.9	10.6	
male	48	94.9	15.8	
<b>Year</b>				$f = .271$
1st year	39	100.1	15.0	
2nd year	44	99.9	10.5	
3rd year	65	98.4	9.8	
4th year	52	100.2	14.3	
<i>Total</i>	200	99.5	12.3	

Language Level				f = 4.247*
Having no difficulty	98	100.3	12.5	
Having a little difficulty	74	101.2	9.4	
Having a lot of difficulty	25	92.5	16.2	
Inadequate	3	89.0	11.1	
		99.5	12.3	

Finally, when we examine the question groups, it is found that the trainees showed the highest positive attitudes toward the social and instrumental value of English (group 2), followed by the social and educational status of English (group 1), the relationship between English and national culture (group 3), the value of English and English-based culture (group 4), and discomfort about Turkish people speaking English (group 5). The second group of questions represents socially oriented achievement motivation with a collectivist orientation. The third and fourth groups of questions represent an individualist orientation. This result agrees with the trainees' reasons for learning English with more instrumental motivation (82.9%) than integrative motivation (60.6%).

## CONCLUSIONS

The research results support the literature in terms of the relationship between attitude and success, as well as gender differences. The results indicate that ELT teacher trainees have mildly positive attitudes toward English and 79.7% of the participants indicated that they have had little or no difficulty during their ELT education. The trainees' self-reported difficulty level is closely related to their attitudes toward English. The majority of the participants consider themselves successful and the majority have developed positive attitudes toward the L2. This result supports the literature suggesting that positive attitudes have an important impact on success. Moreover, as indicated in many gender and attitude studies (see Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Karahan, 2007; İnal et al., 2005), female participants were found to have more positive attitudes than males. However, one limitation of the study should be considered when interpreting the results. Female enrollment in the ELT department at the aforementioned university is always higher than male enrollment. This imbalance between the number of males and females is also reflected in the study, which may affect the results.

Another conclusion from this study is related to the tendency toward stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. The mean scores of the question groupings and the percentages related to the reasons for studying English revealed that the majority of the participants had an instrumental desire to learn English. Kızıltepe's (2000) study claimed that although both types of motivation appeared to be important for her Turkish participants, instrumental motivation was more important than integrative motivation. As discussed previously, both types of motivation are important for ELT teacher trainees to help their future students develop positive attitudes toward English. Integrative motivation is essential for understanding intercultural communication (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) and for learning and accepting the cultural and lifestyle differences of the target language community. A teacher with high integrative motivation would be aware of such differences and would improve himself/herself and his/her students by using the L2 with greater pragmatic and linguistic awareness. Instrumental motivation, in contrast, is a natural outcome for those who have chosen to become English teachers. The increase in instrumental motivation could be explained by this fact. Moreover, the trainees gained improved understanding related to the social and instrumental value of English, indicating that the society in which the trainees live supports English learning. Turkey has traditional norms and values and a collectivist orientation, although there have been societal changes toward individualism in recent years. Trainees' tendencies toward socially-oriented achievement motivation could be a result of Turkey's perspective on learning English as a foreign language (FL). Since the educational reform in 1997, English has been a compulsory course in the curriculum and the starting age for learning English has been reduced to fourth grade, demonstrating the importance that Turkish government gives to FL education. As a result of globalization and Turkey's attempts to join EU increasing numbers of people are prioritizing FL learning. These changes are revealed in learners' attitudes and motivation. Therefore, a good language teacher must have a positive attitude and motivation to enable his/her learners to develop their own motivation for success in the L2. Several suggestions can be derived from the research results. First, because the trainees who contributed to the present study showed mildly positive attitudes, further research is necessary to identify the factors that affect ELT teacher trainees' attitudes. Second, the teachers' attitudes toward ELT classroom teaching should be investigated in a follow-up study. Third, lower integrative motivation should be considered as an

indication of professional readiness because an internal desire to learn and use a language is related to a teacher's teaching efficacy. Thus, reasons for lower integrative motivation should be identified because they may affect a teacher's classroom performance.

#### **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

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**NOTES**