

Analyzing the change of students' attitude toward learning English (A case study of the students of foreign language school)

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Abstract—The present study aims at investigating attitude change which could possibly occur to some students who are pursuing an undergraduate degree. Unlike other studies, the present study was conducted within a longer time span in order to identify the potential attitude change after experiencing one semester learning program.

The research method was a case study which involved a few respondents using semi-structured interview as an instrument in order to allow the respondents to freely express their attitudes toward their learning process. The interview was conducted two times both at the beginning of semester I and after the completion of semester I within one week interval. The use of multiple interviews was to provide more elaborate information so that the respondents' attitude differences prior to their learning and after their learning program could be identified.

Despite the absence of attitude change, it was found that the five respondents did not indicate the same attitudes. In fact, three of them were identified to have negative attitudes for various reasons. It is imperative that the students who had negative attitudes be given some treatments or remedies in order to prevent academic disruption or failure which might occur as their negative attitudes continue to deteriorate.

Keywords—Analyzing; the change; students' attitude; learning; English

I. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long postulated that attitude can serve as a predictor of the students' success or failure in their academic journey [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. Due to this widely held paradigm, there have been many studies which investigated the students' attitude in pedagogical context ever since [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13].

Despite being noteworthy, studies on attitude are mostly conducted in a specified time frame [10, p. 17], thus resulting in the analysis which describes attitude as a merely static entity [7], [8], [9], [10], [14], while neglecting the fact that attitude is naturally dynamic [4], [15], [5], [10]. So far, there have been very few studies on attitude which are conducted to analyze the students' attitude in pedagogical context dynamically [16]. In fact, with the nature of learning which generally brings about the change in learners' capacity [17], [18], the possibility of the learners' attitude change within their learning period is likely to occur [19].

The present study seeks to fill the above gap, thus being conducted in a much longer time span. Specifically, the present study aims at investigating the students' attitudes caused by the student's previous learning experience (as the input factor) as well as the product (as the output factor) of the learners' attitude which will probably be generated by the students' participation within their new academic environment. In order to investigate the potential attitude change, the present study was conducted from the beginning of the first semester to the end of the first semester (approximately for 5 months), thus enabling the researcher to acquire not only some insightful preliminary data on students' attitude in the beginning of their semester I but also the potential differences after attending their semester I [4], [20].

The questions of the present study are formulated as follows:

- a) What are attitudes of students toward learning English at the beginning of semester I?
- b) What are attitudes of students toward learning English at the end of semester I?
- c) How is each attitudinal component interrelated?

As one of the influential psychological constructs [4], study on attitude might reveal the bearer's behavioral tendency, thus enabling educators/teachers to predict their students' academic predisposition as well as some negative consequences which will probably be generated by their students' negative attitude [2], [21].

Besides, the analysis of each attitudinal component (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) might as well provide some useful information on how the students' attitude components interact and later on move into certain behavioral patterns. So far, scholars have long postulated that positive attitude might lead to relatively higher academic effort [4], [5], [22]. However, there is not much explanation or discussion on how these attitudinal components might contribute into certain attitudinal direction. At the same time, scholars have also believed that attitudes might not always be harmonious [23], [11], thus leading to less intense behavioral inclination [24]. The need to find such relationship is important so that teachers/educators/administrators can possibly identify the commonly accepted model on the formation of such

relationship for the sake of improving the learning process in their institution.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Attitude components, consistency, and intensity

There are lots of definitions on attitude. The present study adapts the concept of attitude coined by Baker [4, p. 10] “a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior”. Besides, the present study adapts the concept of attitude as input and output postulated by some scholars [4], [5] in that it can possibly predispose the bearers to do certain action, or become the product (the result) of some preceding factors within a certain period of the bearer’s life [15], [17]. Further, the present study also seeks to investigate the reasons behind the potential attitude change, thus revealing some determinants which might be potent enough to influence the students’ attitudes. Scholar have long postulated that there are many determinants [4, pp. 41–45] which can possibly affect the bearer’s attitude such as parents, teachers, school, students’ cultural background, etc. [4], [25], [20]. Apart from the differences in viewing attitude, scholars have widely acknowledged that attitude(s) consists of three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral which indicates the bearer’s readiness for action [4]. Cognitive is related to someone’s thought or belief, while affective/affect is related to someone’s emotion, lastly behavioral or conation is related to someone’s action which will probably perform certain action based on the other attitudinal components [4], [20]. For instance, if the students believe that learning English is important (cognitive component), they will usually like English (affective component), and these attitudinal components (cognitive, and affective), further, trigger the students’ behavioral components to learn seriously leading to a relatively higher academic accomplishment [13]. In some instances, however, these components might not always be harmonious [4], or even contradict [23], [11], thus resulting in less intense attitudinal direction or intensity [24].

Despite the above possibility, most scholars still believe in the potency of attitude which can possibly drive the bearer to perform certain actions based on their attitudinal direction [26], [2], [13]. The need to figure out the relationship among each attitude is therefore important in order that the researcher/teacher/educator can possibly expect the relatively common model of the attitude relationship/formation in pedagogical context.

B. Definition of learning and its relationship to attitude change

Most definitions of learning are related to the paradigms of permanent change, behavior, and experience [15], [17], [18]. Thus, it can be analogized that when the students can change their capacity in certain academic field (behavioral component), this will generally result in the change of the other attitudinal components as well (e.g., cognitive and affective) [19].

In other words, the students whose English performance is getting better (behavioral component) due to their intensive

practice through an academic experience will probably like English more (more positive affective component), and will probably think or believe (cognitive component) that English is not difficult anymore, thus making the whole attitude components become more positive toward learning English [19]. Similarly, the students’ unfavorable/unsatisfactory experience with their learning process might also entail the students’ dissatisfaction (affective component) which will probably lead to the students’ negative attitudes (cognitive component)[27].

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Since attitude is naturally latent [9], [4], [6], [28] the researcher employed qualitative case study in order to elicit the students’ thought as well as contextually investigating the students’ attitude toward learning English, and its potential change due to the students’ participation in their new language college. As citing Yin, Sutrisno [29, p. 92] suggests that that a case study belongs to an empirical research investigating the case contextually and naturally. The context of case study might cover either tangible phenomena (e.g. individuals) or intangible phenomena (e.g. relationship and process) [29].

The respondents in this study were five newly registered students who were recruited purposively. Of the five respondents, three are multi-national company workers, one flight attendant, and the rest is jobless. Semi-structured interview in the respondents’ native language (i.e. Indonesian language) was adopted so that the respondents were able to speak more comfortably [30, p. 54]. The interviews were conducted both at the beginning of semester I and at the end of semester I. Each interviewing period (in the beginning or after the end of semester program) consisted of two phases with one week interval. Each interview session took place for 10-15 minutes. The use of multiple interview approach aimed at providing the researcher with more solid data which might have been forgotten in a single interview approach [31], [12]. The sources of data were the students’ verbal responses [26, p. 4] which were recorded to prevent the loss of data and further analyzed using theme analysis [32, pp. 250–252].

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Students’ verbal responses at the beginning of semester I

The following Table contains the extracts taken from the respondents’ verbal responses and translated into English for the sake of greater clarity for the readers. The bold texts are codes with which some important themes could be identified.

Respondent A	Themes
I have never had an idea that that I will go to this college. Actually I prefer to work instead. I also have insufficient vocabulary . I find it hard to study , especially when the lecturers don’t explain the lesson	The respondent had negative attitudes toward learning English in college. The respondent had never thought of going to college before and expected to work after graduating from high school. The respondent thought that

<p>clearly. I never have English training before. I don't think I am good at language. I like when learning pronunciation since it doesn't make me think too much. I find the rest of the subjects difficult to learn. I don't have any idea about my future with English.</p>	<p>it was hard to learn English because of limited vocabulary mastery. The respondent was unable to learn at his leisure time. Despite having negative attitudes, he still liked learning pronunciation. The respondent did not indicate future plan with regard to his English skill.</p>
Respondent B	Themes
<p>I am not really positive compared with others I actually need English for my work. My less positive attitude is mainly caused by my frequent travelling. I have very limited time to learn. I change my schedule very often thus making me learn with different lecturers. For me English is quite difficult</p>	<p>The respondent thought that the difficulty in adjusting her learning schedule made her attitudes toward learning English less positive. Attending classes with different teaching methods was considered as serious problem by the respondent. The respondent almost never learned due to her tight working schedules. Thinking that English was not easy.</p>
Respondent C	Themes
<p>I think I like learning English. I find English useful. I work in a Taiwanese company. I think that my attitude is positive. My father graduated from English college and he suggests that I take English too. I am going to apply for a job as a flight attendant or as a bank staff. I spend my spare time to learn English either from dictionary or from the English songs.</p>	<p>The respondent had positive attitude toward learning English. The respondent considered that learning English was beneficial for her job. She learned not only some college subjects but also some English songs which she listens to improve her English pronunciation. With her English she planned to pursue her dream as a flight attendant or as a bank worker.</p>
Respondent D	Themes
<p>I still don't really like English I want to learn but I find it hard to learn. My attitude might be negative. I find it difficult to study English.</p>	<p>The respondent had negative attitudes toward learning English indicated with her unfavorable expression toward English. The respondent considered that she was not good at learning English.</p>

<p>I never have prior English training. I might be lazy to study or may be because I am very busy so I cannot spend my spare time to study English. Actually, English is important. I forced myself to take English.</p>	<p>Despite having poor ability, she tried to enter a language college in order to improve her English. The respondent indicated that she did not have prior English training. She did not learn English at her leisure time.</p>
Respondent E	Themes
<p>It seems to me that I like English. I want to learn further in this college. I once learned English in high school, and I enjoyed it. I think my English teacher is quite good in teaching me. It makes me believe that I can further my English. I like to add up some new words from the dictionary. Sometimes, I consult with my dictionary or see my gadget about English. I plan to use my English to look for a better job</p>	<p>The respondent had positive attitudes toward learning English. The respondent planned to learn English further. The respondent claimed that she had an enjoyable English learning experience at her high school due to the teacher. She always learned whenever she had some spare time. She liked learning English, especially vocabulary. After graduation, she planned to look for a better job.</p>

B. Students' verbal responses at the end of semester I

Respondent A	Themes
<p>I don't think that my attitude is better since the beginning of the semester. I find that my attitude toward learning English is not positive. I think that I don't see any improvement in my study. I find that the lessons are getting more complicated. I might not be a good learner, but I find that the lecturers are not very supportive. I might not have good talent in English. I might be good at business instead of studying at college. It is okay to study, but studying alone is not easy.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The respondent had negative attitudes toward learning English in college. The respondent had never thought of going to college before and expected to work after graduating from high school. The respondent thought that it was hard to learn English. The respondent did not indicate specific future plan with regard to his English skill.
Respondent B	Themes
<p>It is getting more difficult to adjust my time to study and</p>	<p>The respondent thought that the difficulty in adjusting her</p>

<p>work, I find that most lecturers are not supportive. I find that English is useful since I work as a flight attendant and I frequently use English to serve my passengers. Except for speaking, there are some subjects which I think quite difficult such as writing, grammar. I find it difficult to study in my spare time.</p>	<p>learning schedule made her attitudes toward learning English less positive. Attending classes with different teaching methods was considered as serious problem by the respondent. The respondent almost never learned due to her tight working schedules. Thinking that English was not easy. She considered that most of the lecturers did not care with her problem. She also thought that English was useful for her work.</p>	<p>complicated. How can I feel positive with my study? If everything is getting more complicated, let alone I have to work. May be I wanted to learn, I wanted to try, but I find that English is hard for me.. There are many things to do, let alone not all lecturers are willing to explain and help the students' difficulty. All subjects are complicated When reading, for instance, I have to open the dictionary very often since the words are different. I am not pretty good at English. I once studied English, but I studied at school only and I am not interested. Maybe I wanted to be able to speak it, but I don't know maybe I just tried who knows? To find better job, but maybe if can graduate later</p>	<p>toward English. The respondent considered that she was not good at learning English. Despite having poor ability, she tried to enter a language college in order to improve her English. The respondent indicated that she did not have prior English training. Despite her difficulty, she thought that English was important for her future career. She did not learn English at her leisure time. She claimed that her superior frequently speaks English.</p>
<p>Respondent C</p>	<p>Themes</p>	<p>Respondent E</p>	<p>Themes</p>
<p>I think I make better progress I feel positive on my study I think I have been able to learn better compared with early semester, and I also feel that the lecturers teach me quite well so I feel better in my study. I have been interested in learning English. Besides, I also feel that English gives me a lot of benefits, for instance I can work and make friend with foreigners easier. Especially, because I work for a foreign company. My father is also a graduate of English literature and he strongly encourages me to take the same major since it will be important for me. I will possibly apply for a job in a flight company or in a bank...a much better job. I usually learn English, starting from gadget, internet or English web, listening to song, etc.. The most important I can practice my English.</p>	<p>The respondent had positive attitude toward learning English. The respondent considered that learning English was beneficial for her job. She learned not only some college subjects but also some English songs which she listens to improve her English pronunciation. With her English she planned to pursue her dream as a flight attendant or as a bank worker.</p>	<p>Basically, I like English so I study here. If I started to get interested in English when I was in high school. Maybe because my teacher could teach me well so I could learn better In fact, when I was in junior high school I was not really interested in English. Basically, my parents also supported my choice to study language in this college. My parents strongly agreed with my plan to study English here. Especially because this campus has been long established. I must be responsible with my choice, so I must spend my time for studying event though I feel tired. I usually learn vocabulary, grammar, or short readings from the net. I will find better work with my English</p>	<p>The respondent had positive attitudes toward learning English. The respondent planned to learn English further. The respondent claimed that she had an enjoyable English learning experience at her high school due to the teacher. She always learned whenever she had some spare time. She liked learning English, especially vocabulary. After graduation, she planned to look for a better job.</p>
<p>Respondent D</p>	<p>Themes</p>	<p>I think my attitude is negative, I think everything is the same, even I think my subjects are getting more</p>	<p>The respondent had negative attitudes toward learning English indicated with her unfavorable expression</p>

C. *Discussiosn*

1) *Students' attitude toward learning English (at the beginning and at the end of semester I)*

Based on the table I (at the beginning of semester I), it could be found that the students' attitudes toward learning English were varied, with the first groups (C and E) indicated to have positive attitudes toward learning English, while the rests were negative. Gardner [33, p. 179] postulated that those having positive attitudes toward learning English can be identified with some verbal responses: a) Indicating the perceived importance of an attitude object (e.g. learning English is useful as stated by respondent C), b) indicating high interest (e.g., I like learning English as stated by respondent E, etc.), c) indicating future plan or certain actions due to the perceived importance (e.g. I plan to find better job with my English as stated by respondents C and E, etc.).

On the other hand, the second group was considered having negative attitudes (A, B, D) indicated with their unfavorable verbal responses toward learning English such as a) indicating the perceived negative or harmful factor toward an attitude object (e.g. English is difficult as stated by respondent A, B, and D), b) unfavorable verbal responses indicating less interest or dislike (e.g. I don't have time/It is difficult to study English on his/her own as stated by respondent A, B, and D) and b) unfavorable responses indicating discontinued activity or other actions due to the perceived harmful or negative factor toward an attitude object (e.g. I don't know what to do with my English in the future as stated by respondent A,) [33, p. 179].

Further, the above data also indicated some determinants which might have contributed to either positive or negative attitudes held by the respondents, such as a) Inability to cope the rigid yet complex academic learning process as indicated by respondents A, B, and D, b) The absence of the students' favorable/enjoyable learning experience before as indicated by the expressions "I never have any English training before as stated by respondents A and D, c) the absence of motivational factors which might pose as an example or a catalyst which triggers the students to learn English, e.g. parental support toward their children's learning process, etc.. d) The absence of or less specific future associated with their learning activity as stated by respondent A (e.g., I don't know what to do with my English yet).

On the other hand, those having positive attitude toward their learning English were indicated with some of the followings: a) The ability to cope with the learning process as indicated by C, and D. b) having previously enjoyable learning experience as stated by E. c) Having sufficient support from their family, as indicated by respondents C, and E. and d) Having specific purpose regarding their English as indicated by respondents C and D.

2) *The interconnection among attitudinal components*

The findings indicated that despite having mixed/conflicting attitudinal components (e.g., despite stating their negative attitudes respondents B and D could still admit that English

was important for them), the respondents firmly stated their attitudinal state toward English either in positive or negative direction. In this case, despite being in less consistent state, there was relatively similar pattern that could be identified. For instance, for those having positive attitudes, they were indicated with their willingness to study, thus being able to activate their behavioral component.

On the other hand, those having negative attitudes, despite having partially positive cognition (e.g., English was important as indicated by respondent B), they indicated that they were unwilling or unable to activate their behavior to learn.

Scholars [24] believe that when all of the attitudinal components are not consistent this will lead to less intense attitudinal intensity or direction. Gablinske (as citing Dewey) suggested that teachers should be able to identify such irrelevant or harmful attitudes and to find some useful or positive attitudes in order to strengthen or improve the students' positive learning behavior/predisposition [34].

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Despite the absence of change in the students' attitudes, the respondents were found to have different learning attitudes and remained the same until the end of their semester I. Given the relatively consistent relationship among each attitudinal components (in terms of active or inactive behavioral tendency), the need to provide some treatments or remedies to those having negative attitudes is imperative so that these negative attitudes might not disrupt the students' motivation to learn further.

It is therefore important for educators/teachers/lecturers to always analyze and identify the students' academic predisposition which might unknowingly indicate the students' cognitive and affective intensity. With such important information the teachers could always identify the students' problem regarding their attitudes in order to be further treated or remedied.

Given the potentially mixed/conflicting attitudinal components, the lecturers should also be able to meticulously analyze the students' attitudinal components which might have significantly contributed to the students' behavioral tendency. In short, one of the crucial considerations for analyzing the students' attitudes is from their behavioral tendency [6] since the students' predisposition might be the most noticeable factor which indicates someone's attitude.

For the future research, attitudinal study can be conducted in much more generalizable data (quantitative study/mixed method) involving more respondents so that the result of the analysis can be fully adopted into a much wider pedagogical context. The length of the study could also be extended so that the change of the students' attitude toward their learning process could be more visible.

The concept of examining the students' attitudes could also be adopted in pedagogical context of different disciplines so that the teachers are able to examine their newly accepted students who might have different attitudinal intensity leading

to different academic predisposition. Besides, the above attempt could also be done for preventing academic disruption, academic failure, or even students' dropouts due to their negative attitudes toward their learning activity.

For instance, the newly registered students can be interviewed on several aspects such as their previously relevant learning experience since this can probably lead to certain attitudinal direction [35]. Further, the students' parental role is also inseparable since scholars have long believed that the role of parents pose a very influential factor for their children [15], [25]. The finding confirmed that those having positive attitudes were mostly supported by their parents and have been motivated to choose the major (respondent C and E). The other important aspects are the perceived usefulness of the program [4], or the students' ability to learn in their academic program (e.g., intelligence, aptitude/talent) since their ability might also confirm or corrupt their attitudes toward learning the new program [35].

Given the nature of attitude which is dynamic, the good learning process should ideally be able to produce sufficient pedagogical capacity as well as positive attitudes among the students. Therefore, the finding of the present study can also partially indicate the institution's inability to provide effective learning experience which results in the students' satisfaction and higher appreciation toward their learning process.

The need to improve the students' attitudes is important since their attitude might also affect the students' appreciation toward their knowledge and may determine how well they will make use their knowledge in their future [28, p. 14]. In Gardner's sense [33], it is not enough for the students to have merely strong motivation to go to college, but the students must also have positive attitudes toward their major so that they could feel more confident with their choice.

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