

Exploring College Students' Attitudes towards English Language Learning in Nepal

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Abstract

This study explored college-level students' attitudes, perceptions, and motivation toward learning English. The data were collected via online structured questionnaire in a Google form which was sent to two hundred students through email and social media. Data were analyzed using statistical tools such as frequency and percentage. The findings reveal a positive attitude toward English language learning, high motivation and enthusiasm, confidence, and recognition of its value for academic, professional, and personal growth. Emotional and psychological engagement emerged as a critical factor in language acquisition, while instrumental motivation, particularly regarding career opportunities, played a significant role. The study also found the importance of English in personality development and continued academic development. The findings of this study line up with established theories in second language acquisition, emphasizing the role of motivation and engagement in language learning. The implications suggest the need for interactive and communicative instructional approaches, confidence-building activities, and career-oriented English courses. By addressing these factors, educators can enhance language learning outcomes and better prepare students for academic and professional success.

Keywords: Perceived importance, Emotional and psychological engagement, English for personality development, Motivation

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Introduction

English language is taken as the most difficult subject among others by the students in the English as foreign language EFL context as a result, many students fail in the English subject either in school or university level. In the context of Nepal, English is regarded as a foreign language and students get very few opportunities to practice the English language. English is taught from the elementary level (grade one) as a subject both in community and institutional schools in Nepal, but in private schools, English is adopted as the medium of instruction believing to provide quality education to the students, although some public/government schools are shifting their medium of instruction from Nepali to English (Ojha, 2018; Phyak, 2013). Those students who have passed their school education from a public school find the English subject the

most difficult one to pass in the exam, in comparison to students from private schools. This can be easily proved by observing the results of the schools or universities in Nepal. According to the report of the University Grant Commission (2019), the pass percentage of students in the faculty of education, humanities, and management is below 25%. Being a faculty member of the university, I experienced that the majority of the students fail in the English subject. In the university level in Nepal, English is taught as a compulsory subject up to undergraduate/bachelor level and as a major subject up to Graduate or postgraduate level. Although university-level students study English courses for more than 13 years from their school education, the proficiency level of the students, even after reaching the bachelor's level, is not satisfactory.

There are various factors that influence language learning, such as motivation, age, attitudes, intelligence, personality, and learning style (Ellis, 2015). Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (2006) has given six different language learning factors, such as individual factors, negotiation factors, tactical factors, affective factors, knowledge factors, and environmental factors. But this present study primarily focused on the attitudes of the learners towards English language learning. As Gardner and Lambert (1972) have pointed out, the attitudes of learners play a vital role in his/her success and failure in terms of language learning. Those students who have positive attitudes towards language learning may have a higher rate of success than those of negative attitudes (Brown, 2001). Various studies have been conducted on language and attitude, such as students' attitudes towards English (Abidin et al., 2012; Burgos & Molina, 2020; Rukh, 2014; Soomro et al., 2018). Zulfikar et al. (2019) found that most of the students have positive attitudes in terms of behaviour, cognitive and emotional aspects. Similarly, Rukh (2014) has also found that business students showed positive attitudes towards English language learning and its association with their academic achievement. The study of Abidin et al. (2012) found quite different results from the others; they found that students revealed negative attitudes towards learning English in Libya in terms of three aspects of attitudes: cognitive, behavioural, and emotional. In a similar study of Jethara (2015), the majority of Lama students in Nepal are positive about learning the English language. They are highly motivated to get a better job and go to a foreign country after learning the English language. This present study is different than other study that, as no studies have been conducted in Nepal to find out the attitudes of college –level students; therefore, this study is different than other studies previously conducted.

In the tertiary level, in the context of Nepal, many students fail in the English subject, and some of them drop out of the bachelor level only; this is due to the English subject only [*in an informal talk with my students*]. Those who continue their studies also do not perform well

in the English subject. Therefore, this study tried to find out the attitudes of college-level students towards English language learning. This study tried to find opinion of students towards English language, whether they are positive towards English language at the university level

Understanding Language Attitudes

Attitude is the feeling and behavior of a person towards a particular phenomenon or things. Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that attitude is an overall feeling of a person towards a particular thing. In the same way, Baker (1992) argues that attitude is a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of behaviour. He further stated that attitudes are not a tangible phenomenon; they are latent, inferred from the direction and persistence of external behaviour. Allport (1954) defines attitude as a learned disposition to think, feel, and behave towards a person or an object in a particular way (cited in Garrett, 2010). So, it can be said that attitude can be seen in one's thinking, feelings, and behaviour. One's behaviour shapes the activities of a person; this means how a person views a particular thing and behaves accordingly. If they possess a positive attitude towards a particular thing or person, they may behave positively or vice versa. Attitude can be reflected in their behavior. In a similar context, Latchanna and Dagnev (2009) asserted that understanding one's attitudes helps us understand their behaviour. Therefore, attitudes are mental construct which directs our behaviour (Gardner, 1985). Attitudes are taken as the determining factors in shaping the thinking, feelings, and behaviours of a person. Mensah et al. (2013) also argued that attitude tells us an individual's performance, such as how they think about a particular phenomenon, or how they react towards a particular event or things.

Attitude is regarded as the most important aspect of language learning (Gardner, 1985), the success and failure of language learning depend on the attitudes of the learners towards the particular course. In our context, when students fail in the exam, people mainly accuse teachers of not teaching well, but there

are many other factors behind it; among them, attitude is very important. In a similar context, Baker (1992) stated that the attitudes of a person play a crucial role in shaping the learning behavior of a learner. Besides, the intellectual aspect of the learner, language learning is affected by the social and psychological aspects of the learners (Padwick, 2010). He further pointed out that the proficiency level of language is also the output of the attitude he/she possesses towards the particular language. In another context, Gardner and Lambert (1972) asserted that attitude and motivation are an integral part of learning. That means, if the learners are highly motivated towards a particular language, then they create a positive attitude towards it, and if they are not motivated well, then they may reflect negative attitudes towards it. Therefore, in the classroom, teachers need to create a favourable environment to create positive attitudes in students towards it. There are so many studies carried out on language attitudes, and most of the studies found that a positive attitude of learners increases language learning proficiency (Abidin et al., 2012; Kara, 2009; Zulfikar et al., 2019). In the similar context, Brown (2001) analyzed many studies and suggested that students need to create positive attitudes towards learning to achieve success; a negative attitude is the cause of failure in the exam or learning a language (see Holmes, 1992; Zulfikar et al., 2019). Similarly, Ellis (2015) argues that learners possess various beliefs related to the target language, its culture, their own culture, their learning style, and their teachers' teaching style; these various beliefs of the learners are called attitudes, and these beliefs influence learning in a different way. In the same way, Jethara (2015) posits that attitude is the set of beliefs related to language learning that affects the motivation of learners to learn a language. To understand the nature of attitudes more comprehensibly, it is essential to examine their domains, that is various dimensions or components that attitudes encompass, as discussed below.

Domains of Attitude

Attitude simply means psychological aspect of a human being which includes various other aspects such as behaviour, emotion, and knowledge. Therefore, Attitudes can be regarded as a composite of behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. Those dimensions can be theoretically grounded in behaviourism, cognitivism, and humanism, respectively, each explaining how attitudes are formed and exposed. Behaviourism related to the behavioural manifestation of attitudes through observable actions, cognitivism explains the role of beliefs and perceptions in shaping attitudes, and humanism emphasizes the active or emotional experiences of learners. Through the interaction of these dimensions, learners may develop positive, negative, or neutral attitudes towards a language. These attitudinal orientations shaped by behavioural engagement, cognitive evolution, and emotional responses, have a direct impact on the language learning process

Behavioural domains means the action or conative or readiness (Baker, 1992) aspect of learners. They may show positive or negative behaviour towards learning a language. How a learner is ready to learn that language is the cause of behavioural aspect of attitudes. If they are positive towards that language, they can learn it fast and enjoy doing different activities in that language, but in case of exhibiting negative behaviour, they may feel difficulty in learning that language (Kara, 2009). In the same way, the cognitive domain is related to the knowledge or understanding of the target language. How learners understand or create new knowledge and link his/her previous knowledge to understand the present language is known as the cognitive aspect of attitudes. People may like or dislike a particular language, which is known as the emotional or affective domains of attitudes. It is believed that a person's inner feelings may influence their activities or performance of an activity (Abidin et al., 2012). In this way, this study focuses on these three domains of attitudes of students in learning English language in the university level.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey research design was used to characterize the attitudes of college level students towards English language learning by the help of students' responses given to the statements in the questionnaire. Two hundred students from different colleges in Kanchanpur district, studying in undergraduate level were sampled using convenient sampling procedure but 177 participants only responded the questionnaire. A questionnaire (in Google form) was developed to find out the attitudes of college level students towards English language learning in Nepal. The questionnaire contained three scales: agree, disagree and neutral. The questionnaire was developed based on the three aspects of attitude i.e. cognitive domain, psychomotor/ behavioural domain, and affective / emotional domain (Abidin et al., 2012; Burgos & Molina, 2020). The questionnaire was sent to the professors to corroborate the validity of the items in the questionnaire before dispatching to the students. Students' email id and messenger id were collected from the campuses and requested English teachers of the particular

campus for the help to share the form with the students. After collecting the responses, The author analyzed and interpreted the data based on the themes developed from the questionnaire.

Findings and Discussion

Attitudes of the students were analyzed based on the five main themes derived from the questionnaire. Out of the fifteen questions, five themes were developed like: Emotional and psychological engagement, perceived Importance of English, instrumental motivation, personal development, and academic interest and aspirations. Each theme contains certain questions and the responses of the respondents were presented in frequency with percentages in the table.

Emotional and Psychological Engagement

Under this theme, three statements were included, such as: I feel happy while studying English subject, I feel excited while speaking in English with my friends and teachers, and Studying English makes me more confident in expressing myself. The data collected on these statements are presented in the following table.

Table 1 *Emotional and psychological engagement*

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I feel happy while studying English subject	165 (93.22%)	12 (6.78%)	0 (0%)
I feel excited while speaking in English with my friends and teachers.	165 (93.22%)	12 (6.78%)	0 (0%)
Studying English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself.	156 (88.14%)	18 (10.17%)	3 (1.69%)

In the above table majority of the students expressed positive attitudes towards learning English. 93.22% students agreed that they feel happy while learning English and no students disagreed with this statement. Similarly, similar number of students also reported that they feel excited while communicating with their teachers and peers in English. 88.14% students shared that English made makes them confident to express themselves in the mass and only 1.69% students disagreed with this statement. From the above results, it can be said that students are emotionally and psychologically positive towards English language. They take English as a tool to

increase their confidence and make them to feel happy when they talk in English in the mass. Therefore, from the data it can be inferred that college level students have positive attitude or they are psychologically attached with English language. These findings are aligned with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of second language acquisition, which focuses on the positive attitudes and motivation of the students enhances effective language learning. Similarly, Krashen (1982) also highlighted importance of emotional engagement of students towards language fosters language acquisition. It means if students are

emotionally attached with a particular language that motivates them to acquire the language fast. The study of Abidin et al., (2012); Kara, (2009); Zulfikar et al., (2019) also found out the importance of positive attitudes of students to learn a particular language effectively.

Perceived Importance of English

English is learned and taught everywhere in the world considering its importance. In this

Table 2 *Perceived importance of English*

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
English is the most important language in my life	156 (88.14%)	18 (10.17%)	3 (1.69%)
speaking English is the sign of a well-educated person	141 (79.66%)	24 (13.56%)	12 (6.78%)
Being good at English will help me study other subjects well	150 (84.75%)	18 (10.17%)	9 (5.08%)

In the above table most of the participants (88.14%) shared that English is the most important language in their life and only 1.69% people disagree with the statement. Similarly, 79.66% respondent shared that speaking English is the sign of well-educated person and only 6.78% respondents disagreed with the statement. Researcher wanted to get their responses on whether English helps to understand other subject or not and more than 84% respondents shared that English helped them to understand other subjects and only five percent respondents said that English did not help them to understand other subjects.

Table 3 *Instrumental motivation*

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I need English to impress others	111 (62.71%)	30 (16.95%)	36 (20.34%)
I wanted to learn English because it will enable me to get a job easily	141 (79.66%)	24 (13.56%)	12 (6.78%)
English will help me get higher marks in the exam	141 (79.66%)	24 (13.56%)	12(6.78%)

The data in Table No. 3 highlights the instrumental motivation of students learning English, emphasizing practical reasons such as social status, career opportunities, and academic success. Most of the students (62.71%) agreed that they need English to impress others and maintain social standard or image; although a small number of participants (37.29%) remain neutral or disagree, because they considered this English is not a universal motivator. Majority of the participants stated that the strongest motivation is career-related opportunities,

study, researcher wanted to find out their attitude towards the importance of English. To collect their attitude towards English, three statements were given on the questionnaire such as: English is the most important language in my life, speaking English is the sign of a well-educated person and being good at English will help me study other subjects well. The collected data are presented in the following table.

Instrumental Motivation

The most important thing to improve students learning is motivation. The researcher wanted to explore their motivation and causes of motivation and analyze whether students were motivated towards English language or not. For analyzing their motivation three statements were given in the questionnaire like: I need English to impress others, I wanted to learn English because it will enable me to get a job easily, and English will help me get higher marks in the exam. The responses provided by the students are presented in the following table.

with 79.66% of students agreeing that learning English will offer them impressive job opportunities, aligning with research that links English proficiency to better employability in a globalized job market (Crystal, 2003). Similarly, 79.66% believe English will help them achieve higher marks in exams because if they understand English very well then they can also easily understand other subjects, emphasizing its importance in academic success, particularly in contexts where English is the medium of instruction (Kirkpatrick, 2010). These findings indicate

that while social factors play a role, the primary drivers of English learning are pragmatic goals like career advancement and academic achievement, consistent with studies on instrumental motivation (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 1994). Understanding these motivations can help educators design curricula that align with students' aspirations and practical needs.

Personal Development

This is the fourth theme derived from the questionnaire in which researcher wanted to

Table 4 Personality development

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
English language improve my personality	150 (84.75%)	18 (10.17%)	9 (5.08%)
studying English makes me more confident in expressing myself	156 (88.14%)	18 (10.17%)	3 (1.69)

The data in Table No. 4 reveals significant insights into how learning English contributes to personality development among students. The most of the participants (84.75%) of respondents agree that the English language improves their personality, indicating a strong belief in the role of language in enhancing personal attributes and social interactions. This findings of the study allies with findings of Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2023) which believes that language proficiency can foster self-perception and identity, leading to improved interpersonal skills and self-esteem. Furthermore, even higher percentage (88.14%) of participants feel that studying English boosts up their confidence level in self-expression. This finding is also aligned with theories believing that language learning is not only enables individuals with communication skills but also empowers them to articulate their thoughts and feelings more effectively (Oxford & Amerstorfer, 2018). The few participants reported neutral (10.17%) and disagree (5.08%) responses across both statements suggests a consensus among

Table 5 Academic interest and aspirations

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I like to study English books or materials to improve my English	141 (79.66%)	24 (13.56%)	12 (6.78%)
I would like to study more English courses in the bachelor level	150 (84.75%)	18 (10.17%)	9 (5.08%)

explore whether English language has any effect on their personality development or not. How do they perceive the role of English in their personality development? To explore the attitudes of students on these aspect two main statements were included in the questionnaire like: English language improve my personality and studying English makes me more confident in expressing myself. The data collected from the students were tabulated in the following table.

students regarding the positive impact of English on their personality development. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of English as a tool for personal growth, reinforcing the notion that language learning is basically linked to psychological and social development (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). As such, educators should consider integrating personality development strategies into English language curricula to further enhance students' confidence and self-expression.

Academic Interest and Aspirations

This is the final category of the questionnaire in which researcher wanted to find out whether students were interested to study English courses more or they were satisfied with the proficiency they had. To find out attitudes of students on this aspect two major statements were included in the questionnaire such as: I like to study English books or materials to improve my English and I would like to study more English courses in the bachelor level. The responses of the students are tabulated as follow.

The data from Table No. 5 reveals a strong interest among students in enhancing their English language skills, with 79.66% expressing a desire to study English materials and 84.75% wishing to take more English courses at the bachelor level. Along with this high percentage of interest of students in English courses a few students (6.78%) shared that they did not like to learn English books and materials and 5.08% also expressed that they did not like to study any more courses of English in bachelor level. In the similar context, Dörnyei (2005) highlights that motivated learners are more likely to achieve higher proficiency. In another context, Özgür and Griffiths (2013) found that intrinsic motivation is crucial for effective language acquisition. The research findings reported that students must have positive attitudes toward language study which correlates with their academic success (Gardner, 2001). These findings suggest that fostering a supportive learning environment and providing opportunities for self-directed study can significantly enhance students' engagement and proficiency in English, underscoring the need for educational institutions to respond to these aspirations effectively

Conclusion

This study explored the attitudes of students towards English language learning. The data were collected from the college-level students studying at Far Western University. The collected data were thematized into five broad themes: emotional and psychological engagement, perceived importance of English language, instrumental motivation, personal development, and academic interest and inspirations. The finding of the study showed that most of the participants had positive attitudes towards English language learning. Most of the participants shared that they feel enthusiastic and motivated to learn English. Based on the findings it was concluded that emotional and psychological engagement of the students plays vital role in language acquisition. Moreover, some participants indicated that English as essential tool for getting success in their life. The results also highlighted the significance of the instrumental

motivation for developing English proficiency. They linked English language proficiency with educational achievement and career opportunities. The findings of the study can also be concluded that participants perceive English as a means of securing good marks in the exam and better job opportunities in their career. Furthermore, the findings also emphasized on use of English language as tool for personality development. Similarly, participants found English as an instrumental motivation to pursue higher education because they have good proficiency on English they could easily pass the particular degree and move for the further study. The findings also pointed out that English language enhances the interactive and communicative skills of a person. The findings also suggested the importance of changing teaching and learning techniques to improve English language learning. The study also concluded that not only students but also teachers and instruction need to be serious on the development of English language proficiency of students' English. Additionally, universities are suggested to offer advance and effective courses and enhance self-directed learning to sustain academic interest of the students. By addressing these factors educators can enhance language learning outcomes and better prepare students for academic and professional success in a globalized world.

For the further study in this topic researchers can study on how students' attitude towards English evolve over time mainly as they pursue their higher education and enter in their professional career. The researchers can also go for comparative study on across discipline to understand the attitudes of the students towards English language in their respective field.

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