

Attitudes and Motivation of TVET Students in Learning English

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes and motivation of students enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) undergraduate programs at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) towards learning English. Recognizing the pivotal role of English in enhancing employability, especially in global markets, the research investigates the factors influencing students' engagement with the language. Utilizing Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), data were collected from 46 UTeM students across various faculties. The findings reveal that while students generally exhibit positive attitudes towards learning English, particularly in practical settings, there is variability in how they perceive the role of personal effort versus innate ability in language acquisition. Motivation is driven primarily by career-oriented goals, with strong agreement on the necessity of English for professional advancement and academic success. These insights suggest the need for more engaging and relevant teaching methods that align with students' motivations, ultimately helping them overcome challenges in English proficiency and better preparing them for the workforce.

Keywords: Tvet, Graduate Employability, English Language Learning, Attitudes, Motivation

Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Malaysia was established in 1964 under the Technical Management Department, now known as the Technical and Vocational Education Division. It was created to equip students with the skills needed for industrial sectors, aligning with national economic goals. In 1995, the Ministry of Education introduced the Technical Manpower Improvement Action Plan to further develop skilled workers for the industrial economy. Over the years, TVET has expanded its focus to include both technical skills and English language proficiency to ensure global employability. Today, TVET plays a critical role in supporting Malaysia's industrialization and workforce development initiatives.

English plays a vital role in TVET and higher education as it serves as the global lingua franca, essential for students to access international knowledge, resources, and industry standards (Shrestha et al., 2016). In the context of TVET, English proficiency is crucial for employability, especially in industries that operate in global markets or require technical communication in English (Bassah, 2023). In higher education, English is often the medium of instruction and research, particularly in fields like science, technology, and engineering, enabling students to engage with global academic communities and cutting-edge advancements (Kedzierski, 2018). Proficiency in English also enhances students' competitiveness in both local and international job markets (Ting et al., 2017). Overall, mastering English is key to succeeding in today's interconnected and rapidly evolving professional landscape.

In Malaysia, English is taught from an early stage, beginning in preschool and extending through to tertiary education. At the university level, public institutions like Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) require students to achieve at least a Band 3 score in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Despite the long-standing emphasis on English, student performance in MUET remains concerning, with less than half of students achieving Band 3 or higher since 2012. This ongoing challenge suggests that many students struggle with English, which limits their academic and professional prospects.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore TVET students' attitudes and motivations in studying English, as these factors are seen as critical to enhancing their overall proficiency and success in both academic and industrial settings. Multiple studies have examined the correlation between student attitudes and motivation in language learning, suggesting that these psychological factors play a pivotal role in language acquisition. Students with a positive attitude towards English are more likely to engage actively in class, participate in learning activities, and show better academic outcomes. Similarly, motivation is a crucial driver in language learning, determining the effort students put into mastering the language. Research indicates that motivated students find it easier to learn English and apply it in practical situations.

The connection between TVET and English language proficiency is crucial, given that many industrial and technical fields operate in English-speaking environments, and fluency in English is often a requirement for global competitiveness. Understanding and addressing the motivational barriers TVET students face in learning English could lead to more effective educational strategies and ultimately better prepare them for the workforce.

Literature Review

Attitude and motivation are two of the most critical psychological factors influencing language learning, and they play a substantial role in students' success or failure in mastering English, particularly in Malaysia.

Attitude refers to students' feelings, beliefs, and perspectives towards learning a language, which can significantly affect their engagement and performance. In Malaysia, research has found that many students harbor negative or indifferent attitudes toward learning English, particularly those in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs. Normazidah, Koo, and Hazita (2012) indicated that some students view English as an irrelevant

or unnecessary subject, especially when they believe their future careers will not require strong language skills. This mindset often results in inattentiveness, lack of participation, and low motivation in the classroom, which directly correlates with their underachievement in English. Students with a positive attitude towards English, on the other hand, tend to be more engaged, active, and willing to participate in language-learning activities. Jee and Byun (2020), argue that positive attitudes encourage students to take risks in the classroom, engage in conversations, and tackle learning challenges. These students typically perform better in language proficiency tests like the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) because their approach to learning is proactive and enthusiastic. Additionally, Baaqeel (2020), found that students who see the value of English in their academic and professional lives are more likely to develop a sustained interest in mastering the language.

Motivation, the internal drive that pushes students to achieve goals, is equally critical in language learning. Liang and Kelsen (2018) suggest that although students may understand the need for English, they often feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of mastering it, leading to discouragement and reduced effort.

In Malaysia, where English is a second language but not the primary language of everyday life, motivation may be weaker compared to countries where English is more dominant. According to Wijnia, Loyens, and Derous (2010), students lacking exposure to English-speaking environments may find it difficult to sustain integrative motivation.

Attitude and motivation are closely linked and often reinforce each other. A positive attitude towards English can fuel motivation, making students more determined to overcome obstacles and excel. Conversely, poor motivation can lead to negative attitudes, where students see little value in learning English and thus disengage from the learning process. Teachers and educational institutions play a pivotal role in addressing these psychological factors by creating a supportive learning environment and designing engaging, relevant activities that help students see the practical and cultural value of English.

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design, carried out at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), located at Melaka, Malaysia. UTeM is a technical university located in Melaka, Malaysia, known for its focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Established in 1999, UTeM aims to produce skilled graduates who are well-prepared for the demands of the industry. The participants consisted of 46 UTeM degree students, all enrolled in various bachelor Degree's programmes offered by the university.

To assess students' attitudes and motivation toward learning English, the researcher utilized Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The AMTB was designed by Gardner to analyze linguistic and non-linguistic goals that people try to accomplish by learning a second language (Cocca et al., 2017).

The AMTB measures several key constructs, including:

- Integrative motivation
- Instrumental motivation
- Attitudes toward the target language speakers
- Attitudes toward learning the language

- Motivational intensity
- Desire to learn the language
 - Parental encouragement (Sayadian & Lashkarian, 2010)

The instrument used in this study comprised three sections: the first gathered demographic information, the second focused on motivation, and the third examined attitudes. A four-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4), and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Finding and Discussion

The overall count of respondents involved in this study were 46 respondents. The breakdown according to genders is 28 male and 18 female students. They are currently enrolled in Faculties of Faculty of Electronics and Computer Technology and Engineering, Faculty of Electrical Technology and Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical Technology and Engineering, Faculty of Industrial and Manufacturing Technology and Engineering, Faculty of Information and Communications Technology and Faculty of Technology Management and Technopreneurship.

Attitudes

The study utilized an instrument adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to assess students' attitudes toward learning English. This instrument includes a total of seven items related to attitudes. The data collected were analyzed and ranked according to the mean scores, from highest to lowest.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on Students' toward learning English

	Items	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	If I were on trip in an English-speaking country, I would attempt to communicate English.	3.92	0.39
2	When I listen to an English song on the radio or watch a movie, I attempt to comprehend the meaning.	3.82	0.67
3	If I did not have the opportunity to learn English at the university, I would practice it momentarily.	3.82	0.58
4	In the language classroom, I like to communicate as much English as possible.	3.77	0.65
5	I am keener to learn some other different languages besides English.	3.83	0.56
6	I tend to favour our English teacher to clarify things in a primary language.	3.70	0.73
7	I genuinely think of fortune or intellectual ability to the extent that I do not make too much effort to learn English.	3.45	0.95

The highest mean score (3.92) is associated with the statement "If I were on trip in an English-speaking country, I would attempt to communicate English." This suggests that students feel most confident or willing to use English in practical, immersive environments. The lowest

mean score (3.44) corresponds to the statement "I genuinely think of fortune or intellectual ability to the extent that I do not make too much effort to learn English." This indicates a more mixed or less positive attitude towards the role of personal effort in learning English.

The highest standard deviation (0.95) is also for the statement with the lowest mean, suggesting that opinions vary widely on the importance of effort versus innate ability in learning English. The lowest standard deviation (0.39) is found in the statement with the highest mean, indicating a high level of agreement among students about the importance of using English in an English-speaking country.

While there is generally a positive attitude towards learning and using English, especially in practical settings, there is notable variability in how students perceive the role of effort and innate ability in their language learning process. We can conclude that students generally have positive attitudes towards learning and using English, especially in practical situations. They show strong interest in communicating in English-speaking countries and understanding English media. However, there's more variability in opinions about learning methods and the role of effort versus innate ability in language acquisition.

Motivation

The first three items have the highest mean (4.0) and lowest standard deviation (0.0), suggesting unanimous strong agreement. These items relate to career, studies, and staying connected with English speakers.

The item with the lowest mean (3.375) and highest standard deviation (1.0395) is "I admire to live in a nation that speaks English," indicating more diverse opinions on this point.

Most items have mean values between 3.6 and 4.0, suggesting overall positive attitudes towards learning English for various reasons.

Items related to discovering new things, making journeys to foreign countries, and receiving an excellently-paid job have relatively high means (>3.86) and moderate standard deviations (0.41-0.51).

	Items	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	I need it for future endeavors in my career.	4.0	0.0
2	I need it for my studies.	4.0	0.0
3	It is convenient to stay connected with the English speaker.	4.0	0.0
4	I prefer to discover new things.	3.87	0.51
5	It is what I need to make the journey to foreign countries.	3.91	0.42
6	It enables me to receive an excellently-paid job.	3.91	0.43
7	I require it to receive financial aid.	3.68	0.75
8	It encourages me to take part in cultural events	3.69	0.74
9	Learning is a gratifying process.	3.77	0.65
10	I keen to learn foreign languages.	3.83	0.65
11	It serves to make me more competitive.	3.79	0.63
12	I admire to live in a nation that speaks English.	3.38	1.04

Motivations like receiving financial aid, participating in cultural events, and the gratifying process of learning have slightly lower means (3.67-3.76) and higher standard deviations (0.65-0.75), indicating more varied opinions.

This data suggests that the primary motivations for learning English among the respondents are related to career advancement, academic pursuits, and communication with English speakers. There's generally strong agreement on these points. Other motivations, while still positive, show more variation in responses, particularly regarding living in an English-speaking nation.

The average mean across all motivations is 3.7960, indicating a generally high level of motivation for learning English across all reasons. The median mean is 3.8157, which is very close to the average, suggesting a fairly symmetrical distribution of motivation levels. The maximum mean is 4.0000, representing the strongest motivations. The minimum mean is 3.3750, which is still above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that even the "weakest" motivation is still relatively strong.

The strongest motivations are tied to practical outcomes like career advancement and education. This suggests that most learners see English as a tool for achieving concrete goals. Even the lowest-rated motivation has a mean of 3.375, indicating that all listed reasons contribute positively to English learning motivation. The top three motivations have no standard deviation, meaning all respondents gave these the highest possible rating. Motivations related to discovering new things and traveling are also very high, suggesting that learners see English as a means of broadening their horizons.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals a multi-faceted motivation for learning English, with a strong emphasis on practical, career-oriented goals, followed closely by personal growth and exploration motivations. Cultural and entertainment-related motivations, while still positive, play a secondary role in driving English language learning for this group of respondents.

Conclusion and Future Work

The findings of this study indicate that students exhibit a positive attitude and high motivation toward learning English, successfully fulfilling the objectives set forth at the beginning of the research. This positive outlook is essential, as it suggests that students are not only willing but eager to engage with the English language, which can greatly enhance their overall learning experience. As a result, these insights provide valuable guidance for educators. With the data gathered, teachers are encouraged to design more engaging and contextually relevant activities that foster a stimulating teaching and learning environment. Such initiatives can include interactive exercises, group discussions, and technology-assisted learning, all tailored to sustain students' interest and participation.

Looking ahead, further research is warranted to explore specific factors that may affect language learning, such as language anxiety and the identification of effective learning methods tailored to students' needs. Language anxiety, for instance, can significantly impede a student's ability to engage with English, and understanding its impact can lead to the development of strategies that help alleviate this anxiety. Moreover, identifying teaching methods that

resonate with students can enhance their learning outcomes. A more nuanced understanding of these aspects could help educators provide targeted support, ultimately leading to improved proficiency among students.

Recognizing and addressing students' attitudes and motivations can serve as a crucial reference point for teachers when planning lessons. By generating motivating and enjoyable classroom activities, educators can create an environment conducive to language acquisition. This is particularly significant in the context of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), where students with positive attitudes and strong motivation are more likely to achieve at least Band 3 or higher, which is essential for their academic and professional futures.

Moreover, the implications of this study extend beyond the classroom to yield benefits for society as a whole. In today's globalized world, English has emerged as the predominant language of communication, and this trend is especially relevant for TVET students. Proficiency in English allows these students to market their products not only in local markets but also on a global scale. As they learn to communicate effectively in English, they can better connect with potential buyers from various countries, thus enhancing their market reach. Given that most educational materials and industry references are produced in English, students must engage with a wide range of resources to improve their understanding and generate innovative ideas in their fields. This exposure is crucial for cultivating a mindset geared towards global competition and collaboration.

Furthermore, teachers can play a pivotal role in this process by incorporating diverse teaching methodologies from around the world into their curricula. By adapting various approaches, educators can create a more dynamic and enriching learning experience. While traditional teaching methods, such as lectures and rote learning, remain effective, the integration of technology can further enhance teaching adaptability and engagement. For instance, using digital platforms, online resources, and interactive software can facilitate a more personalized learning experience, accommodating different learning styles and preferences.

In conclusion, the significance of the English language transcends mere daily conversation; it is essential to education, career development, and effective communication in a globalized world. As students develop their English proficiency, they not only equip themselves with vital skills for their personal and professional lives but also contribute to a more interconnected society. Thus, ongoing efforts to improve English language education, driven by positive attitudes and strong motivation, will ultimately lead to a more skilled and competitive workforce capable of thriving in the global market.

Ultimately, attitude and motivation are fundamental to the success of language learners. In Malaysia's TVET and higher education systems, students with a positive attitude and strong motivation are more likely to overcome the challenges of learning English and achieve proficiency. Bidin et al. (2019) found that there is a significant correlation between students' attitudes and their achievement in English language learning among Malaysian university students. Their study revealed that students' attitudes play a crucial role in their English language performance. A study on Malaysian secondary students showed that they recognize the importance of English for their future development, indicating a strong extrinsic motivation for learning the language. This highlights how motivation, particularly extrinsic motivation, influences students' approach to English language learning in Malaysia ((Ming et al., 2011)

However, negative attitudes and lack of motivation remain significant barriers. Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach that includes engaging teaching methods, cultural relevance, and real-world applications, alongside efforts to make students understand the importance of English for their personal and professional growth. By doing so, the education system can help students unlock their full potential in English learning. The text attributes the poor performance in English to two major factors: student attitudes and motivation. Some students demonstrate a lack of seriousness in learning English, reflected in behaviours such as inattentiveness and a general disregard for classroom activities. This lack of engagement leads to unsatisfactory performance in language proficiency exams like MUET. Furthermore, many students lack the motivation to study English, seeing it as a difficult subject rather than a tool for future success.

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