

Evaluation of Engineering ESL Learners' Language Perceptions and Attitudes towards English language learning: A Case Study

Sridhar Maisa, Ph.D.^{*1*2} & Elliriki Mamatha Ph.D.^{*1}

1. Asst. Professor, GITAM University, Bengaluru. 2. University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.

ABSTRACT: *The paper presents English language perceptions and attitudes of engineering students in India, as students' attitudes towards learning the language is one of the leading predictors of success in learning English as a second or foreign language. Correspondingly, knowing the learner's attitude is an utmost significant aspect in language learning and teaching. So, teachers and teacher educators should consider attitude as pivotal aspect to motivate the learner at all stages of education. However, there is broad gap to understand and analyse the prominence of these elements in imparting language learning. Teachers must visualise the deep concern to minimise the negative perceptions and attitudes which drives the learner with preconceived notions. So, the paper directs to address the problem of engineering students English language perceptions and attitudes. The research was conducted in an Indian Deemed University situated in Bengaluru. Data of engineering students' attitudes were collected through administering a questionnaire, third year electronic and computer science students were participated. Engineering students' opinions were analysed using statistical tools. The comparison of electronic and computer science students' attitudes were presented and discussed.*

Keywords: language attitude, perceptions, motivation, learning

Introduction:

A student's attitude towards learning the language is one of the leading predictors of success in learning English as second or foreign language. Gardner emphasised that attitude is important element in language learning and teaching (Gardner, 1985). Therefore, teachers and educators should take motivation and attitude factors into consideration when teaching and designing English language training and instruction (Hall, 2009 as cited in Gomleksiz, 2010). According to Latchanna & Dagnev (2009) attitude is accepted as an important concept to understand human behaviour and is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings (as cited in Gomleksiz, 2010). According to Ajzen (1988) beliefs are essential points and have a relation with learning. Ellis (1994) felt that negative attitude can impede learning a language. Lennartsson (2008) stated that students' beliefs can be an impediment if they believe that they cannot learn the new language successfully and also believes that negative attitudes can be

changed and turned into positive ones, and it facilitate acquiring positive result. Having positive attitude towards learning a language is a good start to learn a language. Csize´r et al. and Saville-Troike reported that positive attitude enhances learners' motivated behaviour and the importance of motivation, claims that the more motivated students will learn a new language and the speed of learning depends on individual learners (Csize´r et al., 2010; Saville-Troike, 2006 as cited in Gomleksiz, 2010).

The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching defines language attitudes as follows: "the attitude which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or their own language" (2002, p.297). There are negative or positive feelings expressed towards a language which may reflect ease or difficulty of learning, simplicity or difficulty of language, degree of importance, social status, elegance etc.,. Language attitude may have an effect on second or foreign language. The measurement of language attitude is very useful in language teaching and language learning. The language attitudes of tertiary learners are need to study and more focus should be given to engineering students.

In Indian context students need motivation to study language, particularly professional students who have to get employment in companies need good English communication and language skills. So, engineering students require having a proficiency level in English of at least C1 on Common European Framework Level (CEFL) – this equates to about Band 6.5 of the IELTS test. The C1 level is also regarded as the minimum requirement for professional employment. Graddol stated that "students' proficiency level should be C1 level, if in case their proficiency level below C1 their education quality will suffer" (Graddol, 2010, p.100). Therefore, the level of teachers' motivation and understanding learners' attitudes may help learners to promote English language learning to achieve minimum proficiency level which is necessary to get employment and to study higher education in foreign countries.

Literature Review

Gardner (1985) has emphasised the role of attitudes and motivation in second language learning. His study findings state that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second

language learning. According to Skehan (1989) the successful learners are highly motivated. Gardner and Lambard (1972) points out that highly motivated learners are more integrative to the culture of English language and they felt affectionate to the English language than other learners.

Learning process brings positive change in the individual's in terms of emotional and cognitive domains. Furthermore, learning process has cognitive approach besides the social and psychological aspects (Kara, 2009 as cited in Abidin et al., 2012). The concept of attitude can be understood from three dimensions. These three dimensions have different features to focus language attitude results. These three components are behavioural, cognitive and effective. These attitudinal aspects are based on the three theoretical approaches of behaviourism, cognitivism and humanism respectively.

Kara (2009) stated that, "positive attitude lead to the exhibition of positive behaviours toward course of study, with participants absorbing themselves in courses and striving to learn more. Such students are also observe to be more eager to be solve problems to acquire the information skills useful for daily life and to engage themselves emotionally", the cognitive aspect of attitude involves the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge that they receive and their understanding in the process of language learning (as cited in Abidin et al., 2012). According to Feng & Chen (2009) emotional aspects stated as, "learning process is an emotional process, different emotional factors effects learning process. The teacher and his/her students engage in various emotional activities in it and varied fruits of emotions are yield" (as cited in Abidin et al., 2012). Rukh (2014) studied attitudes of business students in the context of Pakistan and stated that business students have positive attitude toward English language learning. Soleimani & Hanafi (2013) study showed that the attitude of male students was higher than females and the results showed that Iranian medical students hold highly positive overall attitude regarding English language learning. Yang Yu (2010) study results showed that Chinese college students have positive attitudes toward English and their experience with native English-speaking teachers and their majors also explains their positive attitude toward English.

There are not many studies in Indian context but in last three decades many studies have been conducted to explore students' attitudes towards learning foreign language in EFL context.

Method

The questionnaire was used to know the students' perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning. The study was exploratory research. First few questions were to know students' demographic profile and main part of questionnaire consists of 36 statements. Each statement consist of Likert Scale with five options, start from 5= strongly disagree (SDA), 4=disagree (DA), 3= neutral (N), 2= agree (A), 1=strongly agree (SA). Students' were asked to provide opinion on English language learning. Behavioural, emotional, cognitive attitudes and perception of the learners were stated in the questionnaire to choose option. The data were collected from third year electronic and computer science students. The behavioural and emotional aspects of learners were compared using statistical techniques. The sample size of the present study was seventy two (n=72). From each engineering branch thirty six students were participated in the study. Majority statements in questionnaire have associated to positive attitude but few (five) statements associated to negative attitudes and perceptions. The study was delimited to engineering learners in deemed universities in India. The present study was conducted in GITAM University (a Deemed University), Bengaluru, India.

Research Questions

1. Do engineering students' have positive attitudes and perceptions towards English language learning?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between electronics and computer science engineering students' attitudes and perceptions?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between behavioural and emotional attitudes of engineering students?

Hypothesis

H₀: Electronic and computer science students language attitudes and perceptions have correlated.

H₁: There is no co-relation between electronic and computer science students' language attitudes and perceptions.

Data Analysis

Electronic and computer science engineering students' language attitudes and perceptions had differed in opinion, but they had positive attitudes and perceptions (46%) towards English language learning. It was noticed that twenty six (26%) percentage of students had neutral language attitudes and perceptions. Majority of electronic students and computer science students had positive language attitudes and perceptions towards English language learning.

The behavioural aspects of English language attitudes and perceptions of two groups differ but majority of students (48.5) had positive attitudes and perceptions. Twenty five percent (25%) of students had neutral attitudes and perceptions on English language learning. Similarly, emotional aspects of engineering students had positive attitudes (50.2%) toward English language learning and 24.5% of students had neutral attitudes towards English language learning.

The test Statistic have presented below:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

χ^2 calculated value =26.9118

Degrees of freedom= (r-1) (s-1)

r=Electronics and Computer Science students (departments)

χ^2 (0.05, 4) =9.49 (table value)

Chi square calculated value is 26.9118 and table value is 9.49 (0.05, 4). The calculated value is more than table value (χ^2 cal > χ^2 tab i.e. 26.9118 > 9.49). Therefore, there is difference in language attitude between electronic and computer science students. In other words, the calculated value (of χ^2) is greater than the tabulated value (of χ^2); we may reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, at 5% level of significance. There is enough statistical evidence to show that there is a considerable difference between the electronics and computer science students' language attitudes and perception. The comparison of language attitudes of both groups is presented in the below graph.

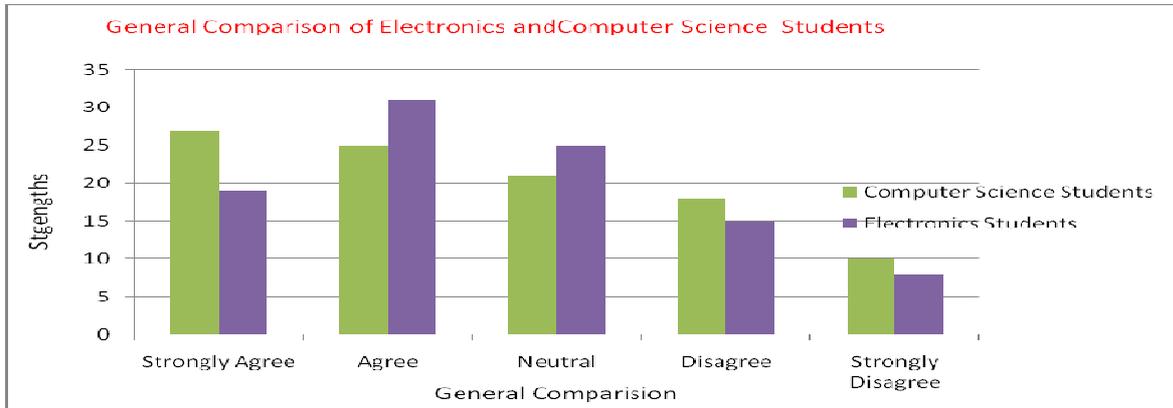


Figure 1: General comparison of electronics and computer science students’ attitudes

Electronic and computer science students’ behavioral aspects of language attitudes and perceptions had differed. The chi square calculated value is 15.895 and table value is 9.49. The calculated value is greater than table value ($x^2_{cal} > x^2_{tab}$ i.e. $15.895 > 9.49$). Therefore, it can be argued that there was difference between electronic and computer science students’ behavioral aspects of language attitudes. There was no correlation between electronic and computer science students behavioral aspects of language attitudes. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted at 5% level of significance.

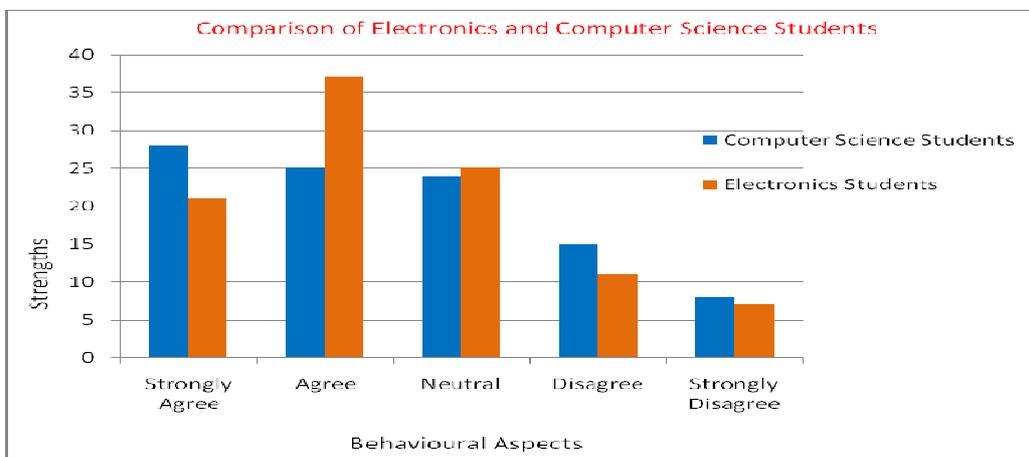


Figure 2: Comparison of Electronic and Computer Science Students Behavioural Aspects of Language Attitudes and Perceptions

The chi square value of emotional aspects of electronic and computer science students was 11.99 (cal) and table value is 9.49 (tab). The calculated value was more than table value ($x^2_{cal} > x^2_{tab}$). Therefore, there was a difference between emotional aspects of electronic and computer

science students. The comparison of language attitudes and perceptions have presented in the below graph.

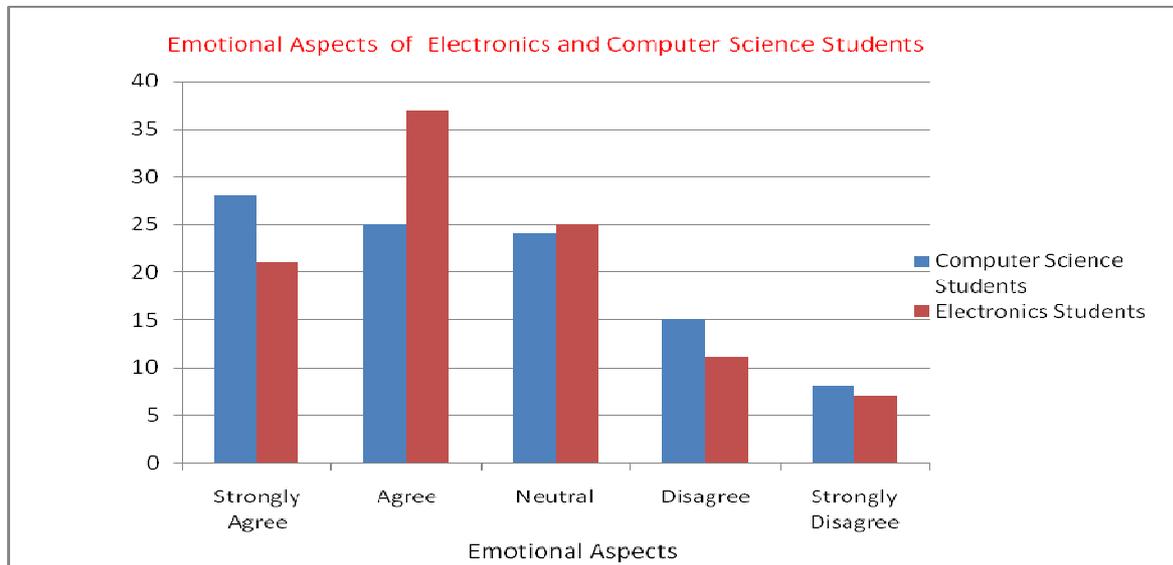


Figure 3: Comparison of Electronic and Computer Science Students' Emotional Aspects of Language Attitudes and Perceptions.

Discussion

The present study results have co-related with Abidin et al. (2012) study in Libyen context. The students of the present study have positive language attitude towards English language learning which is similar to Rukh (2014) study in Punjab province in Pakistan, Lennartsson (2008), Soleimani et al (2013) and Yang Yu (2010) study in China. There were no such studies previously which could focus on engineering students, particularly in Indian context. This study shows a considerable difference between electronic and computer science students' language perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning. The present study is one such kind and it is unique in Indian ESL context.

Conclusion

The research shows that engineering students' had positive language attitudes and perception towards English language learning. It was also found that there was a considerable difference between electronic and computer science students' language perceptions and attitudes towards

English language learning and it was also found that there was no co-relation between behavioural and emotional aspects of electronic and computer science students.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Demographic profile

- 1) Your Name
- 2) Course
- 3) Year of study
- 4) Your first language (mother tongue= L1)
- 5) How many languages do you speak?What are they?

Tick (√) only one option for each item in the questionnaire.

Attitudes and perceptions towards English language

Sl.No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	Studying English is important because it will make me more educated					
2	Being good at English will help me study other subjects well					
3	I feel proud when studying English language					
4	I feel excited when I communicate in English with others					
5	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried					
6	Studying English helps me to have good relationships with friends					

7	I like to give opinions during English lessons					
8	I have more knowledge and more understanding when studying English					
9	I look forward to studying more English in the future					
10	I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class					
11	Studying second languages like English is enjoyable					
12	I am able to make myself pay attention during studying English					
13	When I hear a student in my class speaking English well, I like to practice speaking with him/her					
14	To be inquisitive makes me study English well					
15	Studying English makes me have good emotions (feelings)					
16	I prefer studying in my mother tongue rather than any other foreign language					
17	Studying English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself					
18	Studying English helps me to improve my personality					
19	I put off my English homework as much as possible					
20	Studying English helps me getting new information in which I can link to my previous knowledge					
21	I cannot to summarize the important points in the English subject content by myself					
22	Frankly, I study English just to pass the exams.					
23	I enjoy doing activities in English					

24	I do not like studying English					
25	I am not relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class					
26	I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students					
27	I wish I could speak English fluently.					
28	I am interested in studying English.					
29	In my opinion, people who speak more than one language are very knowledgeable.					
30	Studying English helps me communicate in English effectively					
31	I cannot apply the knowledge from English subject in my real life					
32	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident					
33	To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class					
34	Studying English makes me able to create new thoughts					
35	I like to practice English the way native speakers do.					
36	I am able to think and analyze the content in English language					
37	I wish I could have many English speaking friends					
38	When I miss the class, I never ask my friends or teachers for the homework on what has been taught.					
39	I am not satisfied with my performance in the English subject					
40	In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn.					
41	English subject has the content that covers many fields of					

	knowledge					
42	I do not feel enthusiastic to come to class when the English is being thought					
43	Knowing English is an important goal in my life					
44	I look forward to the time I spend in English class					
45	I do not pay any attention when my English teacher is explaining the lesson					

(Adopted from Soleimani, H & Hanafi, S. (2013))