

Attitudes of Education Faculty Students towards Compulsory English Courses: The Case of Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University

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Abstract: Attitudes toward learning a language is thought to be one of the most important factors affecting the failure or success of the foreign language learners. In this respect, the aim of this study was to determine the attitudes of Education Faculty students at İbrahim Çeçen University, Ağrı, Turkey, towards compulsory English courses. The subjects of this study were 249 Faculty of Education students from 5 different departments. In the study, the relationship between attitudes of the students towards such variables as demographic data related to the participants' genders and departments was searched using a foreign language attitude scale prepared by Çakıcı (2007). For the data analysis, SPSS 17 program was used and for the assessment of the results independent Sample t-test and descriptive statistics were used. According to the result of the study, at the Education Faculty of İbrahim Çeçen University 135 (54,2%) of the students had a negative attitude towards compulsory English courses, whereas 114 (45,8%) of them had positive attitude. The results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the attitudes of male students and female ones $t(247)=2,45, p<0,05$. Female students had more positive attitudes ($M =137,79$) than male students ($M = 132,40$).

Keywords : students' attitudes, compulsory English, Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University, gender, department

Introduction

Attitudes are considered to be one of the most important factors affecting the failure or success of foreign language learners. Therefore, much research has been carried out to show the role of the beliefs and attitudes of the students (Gardner, & Lambert, 1972; Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1975; Boykin, & Trugamphai, 1982; Horwitz, 1988, 1991; Saracaloğlu, 1992; Lanara, 1999; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000, 2005; Rifkin, 2000; Jernigan, 2001; Mattern & Schau, 2002; Dornyei, 2003). Dornyei (2001) argues that unsuccessful learners' lack of learning attitude and motivation affects their learning in a negative way. Attitude and motivation play a significant role in determining the learners' level of achievement in language learning. According to Gardner (1985) there is a strong connection between achievement and language attitude, motivation and anxiety. In his two studies about the psychology of second language learning, Lambert (1963,1967, Cited in Reynolds & Lambert 1991) discussed some psychological theories related to language learning of Hebb (1949) and, Skinner (1957) and the concept of language attitude of Carroll (1959). Lambert, in his article in 1963, described his "Social Psychology of Second Language Learning" and "Psychology of Bilingualism." Lambert's theory proposes that a learner who is acquiring a second language gradually gets various aspects of behavior that are unique to the members of another cultural group. The learners' attitudes toward the other group are believed to determine their success in learning the new language and their motivation to learn is thought to be determined by their attitudes.

Problem

Although learning a foreign language is considered to be vital in Turkey, there hasn't been much progress in achieving it, except in private schools. Students learn a foreign language, namely English, at primary, secondary, high school, and university level, however, with the exception of foreign language departments and departments with preparatory classes, no satisfactory result has been reached.

Research Questions

1. Do students at İbrahim Çeçen University in Education Faculty have a positive attitude towards compulsory English courses?
2. Is there a significant difference in the attitudes of students in relation to their gender?

Methodology

This study was carried out to investigate the attitudes of Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University students' attitudes towards compulsory English courses in relation to departments and genders.

Participants

The subjects of this study were 249 students (164 males and 85 females) from Education Faculty.

Instrument

A language attitude scale formed by (Çakıcı, 2007) was used in this study. The scale aimed to measure four aspects of the participants; affective features (Cronbach Alpha: 0.95), perceptions about the usefulness and importance the compulsory foreign language (Cronbach Alpha: 0.87), the reasons for negativity (Cronbach Alpha: 0.77), and the reasons related to the teacher (Cronbach Alpha: 0.79). The questionnaire was composed of two parts. First part was prepared to elicit demographic information related to the participants. The second part consisted of a 45- question containing 5- point likert-type scale that attempted to determine the attitudes of the first year students towards English as a common compulsory course. Of 45 statements in the second part, 26 were positive and 19 were negative.

Procedure

In order to use the attitude scale in the study, a permission e-mail was sent to Dilek Çakıcı on 22nd 02.2010. Çakıcı responded our e-mail on 03rd 03.2010, accepting our using her attitude scale. Then on 15th 03. 2010 an official permission was requested from the authorities of Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University and the authorities accepted our proposal. On 14th March we administered the questionnaire to 249 students from five different departments of Education Faculty during the class hours.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis SPSS 17 for windows was used and significance level was set as 0,05. For the statistics, descriptive statistics and independent simple t-test were used.

Results

Analysis of Demographic Data

Gender and Department

As can be seen in Table 1, mostly the participants were from Primary School Teaching 80 (32,1%) and from Social sciences 68 (27,3%).

Department	N	Gender	
		N	%
Primary School Teaching	80		32,1
Teaching of Physical Education	43		17,3
Social Sciences	68		27,3
Turkish Language Teaching	46		18,5
Preschool Teaching	12		04,8
Total	249		100,0

Table 1. The Numbers and Percentages of the Participants according to the Departments.

As for the other departments, 46 (18,5) were from Turkish Language Teaching department, 43 (17,3%) from Teaching of Physical Education department, and 12 (4,8%) were from Preschool Teaching department, respectively. 164 of the students were males and 85 females.

The high schools and departments and the University

The high schools, the participants graduated from and their departments at the Education faculty of İbrahim Çeçen University have been given in Table2.

Department at the University	High School Type							
	General High School		Private College		Anatolian High School		Vocational High School	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary School Teaching	60	24	01	0,01	19	08	00	00
Teaching of Physical Education	36	14	00	0,00	04	02	03	0,12
Social Sciences	62	25	01	0,01	05	02	00	00
Turkish Language Teaching	41	16	00	0,00	04	02	01	0,01
Preschool Teaching	04	02	00	0,00	06	2,4	02	01
Total	203	82	02	0,1	38	15	06	2,4

Table 2. High School Types of the Participants and their Departments

As seen in Table 2, of 249 students 203(82%) came from general high school, 38 (15%) from Anatolian high school, 6(2,4%) from vocational high school and 2 (0,1) from private college.

Having English Lessons at Secondary and High Schools

Course Taken	N	%
Yes	187	75,1
No	62	24,9

Table 3. The numbers and Percentages of the Participants having English Lessons at Secondary and High School

It is clear in Table 3 that 187 (75,1%) of the students had English courses at secondary and high school, while 62(24,9) didn't have.

English Level of the Students

English level of the students have been given in Table 4.

Knowledge	N	f
Little	174	69,09
Medium	42	16,09
Good	29	11,6
Excellent	04	01,6
Total	249	100

Table 4. English Levels of the Students

According to Table 4, 174 (69,09%) of the students had little knowledge of English, 42 (16,09%) had medium, 29 (11,6%) had good, and 04 (1,6) had excellent, respectively. Therefore, it is clear that students mostly didn't have enough knowledge of English.

Attending to a Private Course

According to the results of the study, none of the students attended any private courses.

Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: Do students at Ibrahim Çeçen University in Education Faculty have a positive attitude towards compulsory English courses?

In determining the attitudes of the students, the means of the responses were taken into consideration (M= 132, S=31,91). If the total scores of the subjects were under the mean value, they were considered as negative attitude, if ever than the mean value then they were considered as positive attitude. The result have been given in Table5.

Attitude	N	%
Positive	114	45,8
Negative	135	54,2

Table5. Attitudes of Subjects towards Compulsory English Courses

As seen in Table 5, 135 (54,2%) of the students had a negative attitude towards compulsory English courses, whereas 114 (45,8%) of them had positive attitude.

The highest attitude scores were "I believe the essence of English to be able to communicate with people who speak this language" (M=4,09, S=1,25), "I envy people who speak English fluently" (M=3,81, S=1,40), "I think knowledge of English improves the individual's general knowledge" (M=3,81, S=1,40). The lowest attitude scores were "I never want English courses to be finish" (M=2,15, S=1,18), "I'm more willing to study English than other courses" (M=2,26, S=1,30), and "I like studying English at my free time" (M=2,32, S=1,24), respectively.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the attitudes of students in relation to their gender?

The results of the study have been given in Table 6.

Gender	N	X	S	sd	t	P
Male	164	132,40	18,12	247	2,45	,015

Female	85	137,79	12,79
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Table 6. Attitudes of Male and Female Students towards Compulsory Foreign language

It is clearly seen in Table 6 that there was a significant difference between the attitudes of male students and female ones $t(247)=2,45$, $p<0,05$. Female students had more positive attitudes ($X =137,79$) than male ones did ($X = 132,40$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Burstall (1975) claims that indices of attitudes and motivation are strongly related to success in the second language. Likewise, McDonough (1986) and Skehan (1998) assert that second language acquisition is a cyclical process: strong motivation and positive attitude may lead to the desired level of success in learning a second language process. However, in this study it is clear that most of the participants had a negative attitude towards compulsory English courses and therefore, this may cause them failure.

In a study carried out at Dokuz Eylül University by Çakıcı (2007), it was determined that there was no significant difference between the gender and the attitudes of the students. Similarly, Karaş (1996) and Saracaloğlu (1996) found no gender difference in their studies. However, Graham (1990), Saracaloğlu(2000), and Spolsky (1989) found out that females had a significantly much more positive attitude towards foreign language learning. Our study is in paralel with Graham and Spolsky, as female students had a significantly more positive attitude than males did.

As a result, in order to make students have more positive attitudes towards compulsory English courses, teachers should:

- 1.plan the courses according to interests and levels of the students.
- 2.present the lessons in different techniques such as role plays and dramas.
- 3.benefit from information technologies.
- 4.encourage students to participate in the classroom activities.
- 5.create a friendly atmosphere in the class.
- 6.provide group works and pair works.

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