

The Psychological Interrelationship between Jordanian Students' FL Attitudes, Demographic Location and Achievement in English Grammar: A TEFL-Based Investigation

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Abstract

The present study measured the Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English in general. It described the participants' beliefs and perceptions about learning English in an EFL classroom in Jordan in terms of the demographic variable of location. That is, whether the participants are originally from rural or urban areas. It also examined the relationship between the type of participants' attitudes (whether positive or negative) towards learning English and their school achievement in English grammar. The current study adopted the whole class sampling procedure. That is, all students enrolled in two classes in the basic education school were selected to take part in the study. The participants' FL attitudes were measured through a 24-item questionnaire, whereas their achievement in FL grammar was measured through the means of the English grammar test. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted in the present study. The findings indicated that the Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English significantly varied in terms of their demographic location. Moreover, their school achievement in English grammar is significantly associated with the type of their attitudes towards learning English. The study introduced implications for TEFL process at the Jordanian basic education schools.

Keywords: FL positive attitude, FL negative attitude, basic education schools, Jordanian EFL students, demographic location, psychological interrelationship, normal distribution.

Introduction

Aouachria (2015) and Eshginrad (2016) explained that attitude towards learning English refers to students' psychological tendency to favor or disfavor learning English. Students' attitudes essentially influence their achievement of a specific task. Students usually express their attitudes in two main forms: positive and negative. Jaliyya and Idrus (2017) clarified that the positive attitude emerges from the students' interest in performing that task. However, negative attitude reflects the fact that students are not interested in performing that task. Khoir (2014), and Ibnian (2017) pointed out that FL learners' proficiency can be determined in accordance with their types of attitudes towards learning that language. The complexity of FL learning process involves internal and external reasons. When FL learners have positive attitudes towards learning that language, they exert interest in its learning. On the contrary, FL negative attitudes learners used to show no interest in its learning. In other words, the advantage of FL learning is always associated with the positive attitudes learners rather than the negative attitudes ones. In addition, Sultana and Rosli (2016) and Erlina, Desvitasari, Marzulina, and Meida Risfina (2020) find out that FL learners' achievement in English language often affects the types of attitudes which they exert in the FL learning process.

Al-Sobhi, Rashid, and Abdullah (2018) emphasized that nowadays English is the most widely used medium of communication at the world at large. Not only is it used for communication between native and non-native speakers, but also among the non-natives of different nationalities. The importance of English is not only restricted to communication purposes, but also related to economic and political reasons. As such the ministry of education in Jordan paid much attention to the improvement of Jordanian EFL school students' proficiency in English. One way to realize that is to examine factors which affect the development of the Jordanian EFL students'

English proficiency. There is no doubt; the types of Jordanian EFL students' attitudes towards learning English affect the development of their FL proficiency. Al Bataineh (2019) and Huwari (2021) stated that in spite of the fact that Jordanian EFL learners have been studying English for many years, their FL language proficiency is not satisfactory. Moreover, most of FL attitude studies conducted in Jordan focused on undergraduate students such as those of Abu-Snoubar (2017) and Rababah (2020). Therefore, there was a necessity to investigate the effect of the types of Jordanian EFL students' attitudes on their achievement in English grammar. It was also necessary to discuss how rural and urban Jordanian EFL students differed in their attitudes towards learning English.

Statement of the problem

The present study measured the Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English in general. It described the participants' beliefs and perceptions about learning English in an EFL classroom in Jordan in terms of the demographic variable of location. That is, whether the participants are originally from rural or urban areas. It also particularly examined the relationship between the type of participants' attitudes (whether positive or negative) towards learning English and their school achievement in English grammar. Therefore, the present study tested three null hypotheses. First, the participants do not adopt different types of attitudes when learning English. Second, attitudes towards learning English do not differ among the grade 8 Jordanian EFL students in terms of their rural or urban location. Third, types of attitudes towards learning English do not affect the participants' achievement in English grammar.

Questions

The current study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types of Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners' attitudes when learning English?
2. Do the attitudes towards learning English differ among the Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners in terms of their original location?
3. What is the effect of the participants' types of attitudes on their school achievement in English grammar?

Aims

The present study aimed to:

1. Define the types of Jordanian grade 8 EFL learners' attitudes when learning English.
2. Determine whether attitudes towards learning English differ among Jordanian EFL grade 8 students in terms of their demographic location.
3. Investigate the effect of the participants' types of attitudes on their school achievement in English grammar.

Significance of the study

The significance of the current study stems from the fact that it is compatible with the ministry of education endeavours to improve the Jordanian students' proficiency at the basic education schools. The present study provides insights to the FL curriculum planners about the Jordanian students' beliefs about learning English. This, in turn, helps the FL curriculum planners to devise FL activities that meet different types of Jordanian EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English. The current study is also significant because it focused on the basic education stage as opposed to most studies on the Jordanian students' FL attitudes which were conducted at the university level. The current study is of a particular significance to the basic education school where it was conducted as it helps FL teachers to improve their FL teaching in light of the Jordanian students' views of learning English. The findings are also useful to other Jordanian basic education schools.

Limitations of the study

The study was applied to a smaller number of participants compared to other studies on FL attitudes. This can be compensated in other studies by using a number of different FL classes in order to enlarge the population out of which the sample is selected. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of teaching English in Madba basic education school for girls. It is also hoped that other Jordanian basic education schools will benefit from the current study's findings.

Literature review

Casil-Batang and Temporal (2018) examined the attitudes of high school students in the Philippine towards speaking English. The study was conducted as the students found difficulty in following up the English language teachers who used English as a medium of instruction in the classroom. The 47 participants were grade 12 senior high school students. They were selected by using the stratified sampling procedure. Data were collected through the instrument of English speaking attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section handled items related to why the students need to speak English, while the second section dealt with the importance of English language. The third section described the students' perceptions of their English speaking abilities. Data were analyzed quantitatively by using descriptive statistics and T-Test. The findings indicated that the participants had positive attitudes towards the English speaking skills and towards the importance of English language. The participants admitted their low proficiency in speaking English. The participants were also worried to make mistakes while speaking English. The participants also asserted the need for learning English to get good jobs in the future. Casil-Batang and Temporal (2018) recommended that English teachers should motivate and encourage students to practice, speak and communicate in English.

Pelu (2019) discussed the participants' attitudes towards teachers of English, English teaching materials, and management of FL classroom. The randomly selected fifty participants were second year students at a junior high school in Indonesia. Pelu (2019) employed the instrument of an attitude questionnaire to collect the intended data. The five-point Likert attitude questionnaire contains 45 items divided equally to cover the three investigated elements (i.e. teachers of English, English teaching materials, management of FL classroom). Each 15 items includes nine positive statements and 6 negative statements. The descriptive statistics was used for the purpose of data analysis. Pelu (2019) found that most of the participants had positive attitudes towards their English teachers, while some of them had neutral attitudes. However, none of the participants had negative attitudes towards their English teachers. On the other hand, participants varied in their attitudes towards the English teaching material. The variance includes positive, neutral and negative attitudes. Meanwhile, the majority of participants had neutral attitudes towards the English classroom management. Some participants indicated positive and negative attitudes towards the management of English classroom. Pelu (2019) suggested that the school administration should train the English language teachers on better strategies of classroom management.

Alotaibi (2020) investigated the attitudes of 118 randomly selected Saudi third year students at a high school towards learning English. Data were collected through the instrument of a 24-item attitude questionnaire. Findings indicated that the majority of Saudi students had positive attitudes towards learning English. This type of positive attitudes is attributed to the Saudi students' beliefs of the importance of English particularly when they travel abroad to pursue their studies or it helps them get better jobs. Alotaibi (2020) emphasized the important roles of English teachers to provide useful learning environment to motivate students to learn English effectively. Alotaibi (2020) also stressed that the English teaching materials should meet the Saudi students' interests. Alotaibi (2020) gave recommendations that there should be an investigation of the Saudi students' attitudes towards learning the English language skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking.

Huwari (2021) examined factors affecting Jordanian EFL students' attitudes towards learning English. These factors were gender, learning environment, and language experience. The three hundred participants were grade 10 students at a private school in Irbid governorate. Data were collected by using a 55-item attitude questionnaire. Data analysis was based on descriptive statistics of the attitude questionnaire to determine the types of participants' attitudes, while T-Test and ANOVA were employed to verify the statistical significant relationship between the participants' gender, learning environment and language experience on the one hand and their FL attitudes on the other hand. Huwari (2021) found that Jordanian female students had higher attitudes frequency than their male counterparts. Moreover, language experience significantly affected the participants' FL attitudes. That is, participants who started learning English at the pre-school stage had higher positive attitudes towards learning English as opposed to those who did not. In addition, positive attitudes towards learning English were associated with higher school achievement particularly in the development of the participants' speaking skills.

Kasuma, Akhiar, Haron, Fesal, and Abdul Kadir (2021) discussed the influence of the perception, motivation, attitudes and self-efficacy of 270 undergraduate Malaysian students at the Malaysian Science University on their interaction with online English learning session during the COVID-19 crisis. The participants had enrolled in online English classes and affiliated to 12 different faculties at the university. Data were collected through online distributed questionnaires. Kasuma, et al. (2021) found that the participants' different types of motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy affected their online learning of English. The participants had positive attitudes towards online English classes. The participants' positive attitudes enabled them to fulfill online English tasks. The participants' strong self-efficacy of technical ability helped them to interact with online English classes. The participants managed to complete and submit English assignments through online medium,

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted in the present study (Kothari, 2013, Hoy and Adams, 2015, Bernido, 2021, and Marghany, 2022). The quantitative method computed frequency of the participants' responses to the 24-item attitude questionnaire. Moreover, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used twice. First, it determined the statistical differences between the rural and urban participants' attitudes towards learning English. Second, it verified whether the participants' positive and negative attitudes significantly affected their achievement in English grammar. The qualitative method was used for two purposes. First, it described the responses of the rural and urban participants to the attitude questionnaire. Second, it discussed examples of the participants' achievement in the FL grammar test.

Participants

The 62 participants are students at two grade 8 classes in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba, Jordan. The school is affiliated to the education department of Madba governorate. The study adopted the whole class sampling procedure as all students at the two classes participated in the present study. Of all participants, 27 students originally descended from rural areas while 35 students came from urban origins.

Procedure

The attitude questionnaire was administered separately to each class in two different sessions lasted for one hour each. The participants had English and Arabic copies of the attitude questionnaire in order to ensure their full understanding of the questionnaire items. The participants were taught English grammar rules over the first term of the school year 2021-2022 as part of the English syllabus. The grammar rules covered English tenses and prepositions. The grammar test was also administered in two different sessions with each session lasted for one hour. Both the attitude questionnaire and the grammar test were piloted using 30 grade 8 students. In the two data collection instruments, participants were asked to indicate their original location whether urban or rural areas. The pilot study aimed to check for the clarity of items and sentences included in the two data collection instruments. The Cronbach's alpha of the attitude questionnaire was .87 whereas it was .86 for the grammar test.

Data collection instruments

Data were collected through two instruments. First, attitudes towards learning English were measured through a five-Likert point attitude questionnaire. It was developed according to attitude items included in Attitude/Motivation Test Battery used by Gardner (2006) and Bernaus and Gardner (2008). The attitude questionnaire consists of 24 items which include equally distributed statements about positive and negative attitudes towards learning English. That is, the questionnaire design aimed to obtain information about the participants' feelings and use towards learning English. The five responses were strongly disagree= 5, disagree= 4, not sure=3, strongly agree=2 and agree=1. The negative attitude responses were reversed: strongly disagree= 2, disagree= 1, strongly agree= 5, and agree=4. Second, an English language grammar test was devised to measure the participants' achievement in FL grammar. The test includes two sections, namely multiple choices and fill-in-the- space exercises with ten sentences each (Appendix A). The grammar test was devised by using two sources, namely Murphy's (2015) *Essential Grammar in Use*, and Murphy, Smalzer, and Chapple's (2017) *Basic Grammar in Use*. The test total score was twenty marks.

Data analysis

Table 1 indicated that the urban grade 8 students' total responses frequency to positive attitude items highly exceed that of their rural counterparts. This is evident as the total responses of SD (49) and D (44) of the urban students were largely less than total responses SD (95) and D (74) of their rural counterparts. In addition, the urban students' total responses of NS (19) to the attitude positive items were largely less than that of the rural students (41). Meanwhile, the urban students had higher total responses of SA (170) and A (130) to the positive attitude items compared to (58) and (52) for their rural counterparts respectively. For examples, the urban participants had less strong disagreement to consider English as the best foreign language. Their strong agreement to that statement was higher than that of the rural participants (17 vs. 4). The urban participants also had higher strong agreements than the rural participants to statements like they wish to improve their proficiency in speaking English, English must be a compulsory school subject, and learning English sustains the national development. Therefore, the present study concluded that the Jordanian grade 8 urban basic school students had higher positive attitudes towards learning English in comparison to their rural counterparts.

In addition, Table 1 showed that the urban grade 8 students' total frequencies of SD (196) and D (163) responses to negative attitude items were higher than that of the rural students (79) and (73) successively. Moreover, the urban students' total frequencies of NS responses (15) to the attitude negative items were largely less than that of the rural students (36). Furthermore, the urban grade 8 students' total frequencies of SA (32) and A (34) responses to negative attitude items were largely less than that of the rural students (77) and (59) respectively. For instance, the urban participants had higher strong disagreement than their rural counterpart to statements like they hate to learn English, they only study it because it is a compulsory school subject, they found difficulty in learning English and learning English is a waste of time. Thus, the present study came to the conclusion that the Jordanian grade 8 urban basic school students had less negative attitudes towards learning English in comparison to their rural counterparts. The finding is consistent with those reported by Khoir (2014), and Ibnian (2017).

Table 1: Frequency of the Jordanian grade 8 urban/rural students' responses to attitude questionnaire

Items	SD	D	NS	SA	A
	Urban/Rural	Urban/Rural	Urban/Rural	Urban/Rural	Urban/Rural
The best foreign language I like to learn is English	4/9	5/7	2/4	17/4	7/2
I wish to achieve fluency in speaking English	3/7	4/4	1/3	16/7	11/6
English must be compulsory at schools	8/10	2/6	2/3	13/5	10/3
I used to listen to	6/9	4/6	1/3	14/3	14/6

English songs					
I used to watch English programs on the TV	4/7	3/5	2/4	15/7	10/4
I prefer to watch English movies	5/10	6/8	2/3	15/2	7/4
Learning English sustain the national development	5/9	4/7	1/3	14/4	11/4
I prefer to study English	3/7	4/6	2/4	15/5	10/5
Certainly, I can improve my proficiency in English	2/6	6/7	1/3	14/5	12/3
I like to speak English	3/5	2/6	2/3	12/8	6/5
I like to make friends with English people	4/7	3/5	1/4	10/7	17/4
Learning English is important nowadays	2/6	1/7	2/4	15/4	15/6
Total frequency score of urban/rural students' positive attitude items	49/95	44/74	19/41	170/58	130/52
I just study English since it is a compulsory subject	15/8	10/6	2/3	5/6	3/4
Actually, I do not like to study English	18/9	12/6	1/4	2/6	2/3
I find it difficult to study English	16/7	13/8	0/3	3/6	3/3
It is a waste of time to study English	14/6	15/5	1/2	2/7	3/7
I cannot improve my English language	15/8	13/5	2/4	3/5	2/2
English is not necessary to succeed in life	19/6	12/8	0/3	2/6	1/4
Jordanian students should not study English	20/7	9/5	1/2	3/10	3/3
I fear of making mistakes in English	15/5	11/8	2/3	2/4	5/9
I am not keen to	17/5	20/4	1/2	3/8	4/8

speak English					
It is boring to attend English classes	18/7	19/5	2/3	3/8	3/4
I do not like to read English newspapers	12/5	14/6	2/4	3/7	4/5
I delay doing English homework	17/6	15/7	1/3	1/4	1/7
Total frequency score of negative attitude items	196/79	163/73	15/36	32/77	34/59

Table 2 asserted the above-mentioned findings that both Jordanian grad 8 rural and urban students differed in their attitudes towards learning English. The mean score of the urban students' responses to attitude questionnaire (14.26) was higher than that of their rural counterparts (8.70). The standard deviation of rural students' responses to attitude questionnaire (7.45) revealed higher variance in their responses compared to their urban counterparts (4.02). Thus, the urban students as opposed to the rural students were found to have positive attitudes towards learning English. The finding rejects the null hypothesis that Jordanian grade 8 rural and urban did not adopt different types of attitudes when learning English. The finding comes in agreement with those reported by Aouachria (2015), Eshginrad (2016), and Jaliyya and Idrus (2017).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the Jordanian grade 8 urban/rural students' responses to attitude questionnaire

Participants	Mean score	Standard deviation
Urban	14.26451	4.0263
Rural	8.70413	7.4560

Table 3 indicated that the Jordanian grade 8 urban and rural students varied significantly in their responses to the attitudes questionnaire as the p value was <0.05. The difference was in favour of the urban students who had higher positive attitude frequency compared to their rural counterparts. The finding rejects the null hypothesis that types of FL attitudes among Jordanian grade 8 students did not differ in terms of their demographic location. The finding was consistent with those reported by Abu-Snoubar (2017) and Al Bataineh (2019).

Table 3: ANOVA of the Jordanian grade 8 urban/rural students' responses to attitude questionnaire

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	347.162	30	90.362	296.56	0.000
Within groups	8.315	32	.631		
Total	355.477	62			

Table 4 showed that the two groups of Jordanian grad 8 rural and urban students differed in their achievement in the English grammar test. The difference was in favour of the urban students whose mean score (12.14) was higher than that of the rural students (7.51). The higher standard deviation of the rural students (9.43) compared to that of their urban counterparts (4.21) suggested more variance in the rural students' achievement in English grammar in comparison to their urban counterparts. The finding came in agreement with those reported by Al-Sobhi, et al. (2018) and Kasuma, et al. (2021).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the Jordanian grade 8 urban/rural students' achievement in grammar test

Participants	Mean score	Standard deviation
Urban	12.14622	4.2173
Rural	7.51836	9.4372

Table 5 indicated that the types of both Jordanian rural and urban grade 8 students' attitudes significantly affected their achievement in the English grammar as the p value was < 0.05 . That is, the urban students' positive attitudes towards learning English led them to have higher achievement in English grammar compared to their rural counterparts who had negative attitudes towards learning English. The finding rejects the null hypothesis that the participants' achievement in English grammar did not differ in relation to the types of their FL attitudes. The finding was compatible with those reported by Al Samadani, and Ibnian (2015), Sultana and Rosli (2016) and Erlina, et al. (2020).

Table 5: ANOVA of types of attitudes and the Jordanian grade 8 urban/rural students' achievement in grammar test

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	263.748	30	84.137	212.027	0.000
Within groups	6.451	32	.482		
Total	270.199	62			

Conclusion and TEFL implications

The present study concluded that the Jordanian grade 8 students in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba varied in their attitudes towards learning English in terms of their demographic location. In other words, urban students had higher frequency of strong agreement and agreement response to the positive attitudes items compared to their rural counterparts. For examples, they believed that English is the best foreign language to learn, they had confidence in developing their English proficiency, they preferred to listen to English songs, watch English movies and read English newspapers. On the contrary, the Jordanian grade 8 rural students in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba had higher negative attitudes towards learning English compared to their urban counterparts. For examples, they had less strong disagreement and disagreement responses to the negative statements such as they hate to learn English, they only learned it because it is a compulsory school subject, and they are keen to speak English. Therefore, the present study rejects the null hypothesis that Jordanian grade 8 rural and urban did not adopt different types of attitudes when learning English. It also rejects the null hypothesis that the participants' attitudes towards learning English did not vary in terms of their demographic location. These findings are compatible with those reported by Khoir (2014), Aouachria (2015), Eshginrad (2016), Abu-Snoubar (2017), Ibnian (2017), Jaliyya and Idrus (2017) and Al Bataineh (2019).

In addition, the present study concluded that the Jordanian grade 8 urban students in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba outperformed their rural counterparts in their achievement in English grammar test. This finding is consistent with those reported by Al-Sobhi, et al. (2018) and Kasuma, et al. (2021). The present study also concluded that better achievement in English grammar is associated with positive attitudes towards learning English. Thus, the present study rejects the null hypothesis that the types of Jordanian grade 8 students' attitudes did not affect their school achievement in English grammar. This finding is compatible with those reported by Al Samadani, and Ibnian (2015), Sultana and Rosli (2016) and Erlina, et al. (2020).

Undoubtedly, the types of EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English are essential factors to realize the success of TEFL process. Thus, language teachers in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba should pay much attention to the importance of their students' attitudes towards learning English. Language teachers need to encourage Jordanian students to develop positive attitudes when learning English. This can be partly done when language teachers establish a good rapport with their students to let them actively interact in the process of FL teaching and learning. Language teachers should also encourage students to practice English within and outside the classrooms. Language teachers should realize that effective teaching and simplification of FL rules can improve

their students understanding of FL knowledge and their FL achievement. This improvement will develop their students' self-confidence in language learning and develop more positive attitudes towards learning English. This can also be done by using activities and teaching materials that highlight the important position of English at the world level. Learning activities derived from daily-life situations of the target language community can enhance students' perceptions, feelings and beliefs about their needs to learn English effectively. Therefore, FL curriculum planners should observe the good quality of selected teaching materials that help students develop positive attitudes towards learning English.

Recommendations for further research

The present study recommended the following topics for future research:

1. A study can be conducted to investigate the motivation towards learning English among Jordanian grade 8 students in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba.
2. A study may examine the impact of the classroom learning environment in Madba basic education school for girls in Madba on the successful FL learning among the Jordanian grad 8 students.
3. A possible study may discuss the learning strategies which Jordanian grad 8 students adopt when learning English.
4. A study can also examine the Jordanian grad 8 students' attitudes towards learning different language skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening.
5. A replicable study can be carried out to examine attitudes towards learning English among Jordanian male and female students.

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