

# Investigating the Educational and Social Factors Affecting Saudi EFL Learners' Attitudes toward Learning English

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the attitude of Saudi EFL learners toward learning English as a foreign language, their motivation, and contextual and surrounding factors affecting their attitudes positively or negatively. Out of the population that comprises students studying in levels 1 & 2 of the graduate programs at Business College, PSAU, 216 EFL learners of Saudi Arabia were selected through a simple random sampling method. A self-designed questionnaire with partial adoption of modified items from existing studies was sent to the students to collect their responses. The quantitative approach (descriptive quantitative design) revealed that Saudi EFL students typically exhibited a high level of positivity toward English as a foreign language, and they demonstrated a high level of instrumental motivation but a lower level of integrative motivation toward English. The use of Spolsky's (1969) and Gardner's (1985) *Second Language Learning Model* and *Second Language Acquisition* theories respectively revealed that certain educational and social factors (e.g., English learning situation, language teachers, and parents) had an advantageous effect on Saudi EFL learners. In the same way, different social and educational factors, such as peer groups, educational settings, and educational environments, have been found negatively impacting learners' motivation and their desire to speak or learn the language. The study implies that the factors (learning physical environment, teaching material, peer groups) affecting the learners' attitude negatively should be improved. The study would be beneficial to instructors and students in understanding the elements that impede language acquisition and assist them in attaining outstanding and effective English skills.

**Keywords:** social and educational factors, physical learning environment, instrumental motivation, Saudi EFL learners, academic context

## 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, there has been wider acceptability and popularity of the English language among all sections of society in Saudi Arabia specifically in the Arabian Peninsula in general. Global connectivity, the emergence of multinational companies, and increasing trade and business opportunities have made English an everyday existential need. Today, it carries an unusual allure and is considered an important means of social mobility and economic prosperity (Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006). Nobody disputes English's importance as a global means of interaction and communication. It is a means of contact between nations and parts of the same nation (Shaw, 1981). However, despite its wider acceptability and popularity transcending geographical boundaries and territories, people do have their share of differences toward English. Many socio-cultural and environmental factors affect the opinions of individuals about English as a language. Many continue to regard English as an enduring symbol of British colonialism and American cultural imperialism. English is a lot more than that (Shaw, 1981).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, though adopted English in the early days of its existence, has its share of resistance and acceptance as far as teaching and learning English is concerned. Earlier people viewed it from a colonial, imperial, and cultural lens. Despite efforts by the govt, little attention was paid to it in the Saudi Arabian education system, with the students often considering it a language to pass the exam (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). However, English today has wider social acceptability among the masses and people of Saudi Arabia. It is being taught at all levels of education, school, college, and university with full participation from students and parents. The new curriculums, policies, and social reforms being implemented as the kingdom embarks upon its ambitious mission of economic diversification are evidence of how English has essentially become a means of economic prosperity and social mobility. A large section of the young generation has developed effective English skills which have brought better employment and job opportunities to people on a wider scale.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The English language continues to confront challenges on various fronts in different contexts. It carries certain religious, economic, cultural, and religious overtones. (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Some sociocultural and contextual factors affect the attitudes and learning of ESL/EFL learners. It is an undeniable truth that positive attitudes about a language and its culture have an enormous effect on learners' proficiency and skills. (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Getie, 2020). In addition, attitudes and perspectives are shaped and influenced by the surrounding social factors. Some research studies have investigated the factors affecting second/foreign language learning acquisition disregarding the learners' perspectives. However, this study looks at the opinions and perspectives of learners regarding studying English as a foreign language. This is what differentiates the present research from the existing studies.

### 1.2 Purpose Statement

The study investigates Saudi EFL learners' attitudes toward English, their motivation, and contextual factors that affect and govern their English language learning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 ESL/EFL Learning and Language Learning Theories

Many research studies have been conducted to evaluate the factors shaping the attitudes and motivation of ESL/EFL learners to learn the English language. They have demonstrated a connection between one's immediate environment and language acquisition. Two celebrated works that theorise and corroborate how contextual factors affect language learning are Spolsky's (1969) *Model of Second Language Learning* and Gardner's (1985) *Second Language Acquisition Theory*. Similarly, Ellis (1994) argued that the opinions and attitudes of EFL learners toward the target language inform their commitment and determination to address the challenges in learning the target language. Learners of English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) have varying perspectives on the target language, its speakers, its culture, and its values. The learners' attitudes influence the language and proficiency of the ESL/EFL learners. Since learning a language has a very close connection to the attitude one has toward a language, it is necessary to understand what the term symbolizes. To put it simply, one's attitude is one's behavior and one's way of looking at things. It refers to a feeling or opinion about something. A person's perspective toward a language is determined by how much they identify with its language and culture. (Crystal, 2003). The term 'attitude' refers to a psychological construct that implies a particular kind of behaviour (Al Mamun et al., 2012). Language proficiency does not come without positive attitudes, and they are in turn influenced by life experiences. Therefore, surrounding factors perform a very fundamental role in fostering positive attitudes and in enhancing proficiency in the language.

Many studies deal with the relationship between an attitudinal variable and second language proficiency and level of achievement. First- and second-language researchers have paid considerable attention to the significant motivational role and positive attitudes in language learning. Given the significance of attitudes to language acquisition, they must be incorporated into pedagogical practices (Getie, 2020). This is corroborated by Ajzen's theories concerning the impact of attitudes on one's behaviour. According to social psychologists, attitudes dictate actions since they mould how a person reacts to a specific stimulus (Dörnyei, 1998). According to *the theory of reasoned action* developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), what determined an individual action was the intention of a person to behave in a particular way. This style of behaviour has two primary elements: an attitude toward how one behaves and a subjective standard expressing how society expects an individual to behave in every action.

The groundwork for investigating attitudes as important factors for language learning and proficiency was laid down in the 1970s and 1980s by Gardner and Lambert (1972). Tódor and Dégi (2016) discussed how learners' views about language and the people who speak it determined language learning outcomes and how processes of learning were controlled. The language learning experiences involving American military personnel and the British Air Force learning the Russian language with stupendous success effectively demonstrated that positive attitudes and a higher degree of motivation played a fundamental role in learning and proficiency in a language (Ahmed, 2015). The qualitative analysis utilized in the study revealed that students had a high level of positive attitude about English and were strongly motivated to use it. It, however, revealed that the students had negative attitudes and feelings about classroom instruction. The study offers insight into how language instructions can further be improved. Zulfikar et al. (2019) contended that perception and attitude was considered among the success factors for language learning. The study, qualitatively interpreting the data gathered through a semi-structured interview, revealed that the students scored four and three points in emotional and behavioral attitudes respectively. It suggested that ESL learners' positive perspectives about English enhanced their language skills. Rahman et al. (2021) investigated the impact of attitude in learning a new language. The quantitative analysis of the collected data revealed that the learners who possessed a positive attitude toward English were more proficient and good learners. Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) examined attitude, motivation, and language acquisition. With the help of descriptive and analytical approaches, the outcomes of the study indicated that attitudes and levels of motivation were among the elements that had a significant impact on the proficiency and effectiveness of second language learners. In addition, it suggested certain measures for language teachers to enhance the learners' level of motivation.

### 2.2 Examining Factors Affecting ESL/EFL Learners' Attitude toward English as a Foreign Language

Many scholars and experts have found several factors impacting the attitudes of ESL/EFL learners that in turn have useful or detrimental effects on the skills and proficiency of the learners. These factors include educational, social, and other contextual factors (Ehrman, 1996; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Spolsky, 1969). What Conteh-Morgan (2002) said lent credence to the opinion of some linguistic experts that

certain factors such as learner personality, social and contextual factors, educational environment, and the learning and teaching processes had considerable influence on language learners' competency and skills.

### 2.2.1 Language Learning and Affective Variables/ Individual Learner Differences

Individual differences among learners have long been recognized as some of the important factors playing a critical part in the learning and development of skills in a foreign/second language (Pyun et al., 2014). Those classified as ones involving affective dimension, among individual learner differences, have been an object of debate and discussion by several scholars (Csiz  & Drnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985). The studies carried out on individual learners' personalities and outcomes revealed that the personality of the language learner himself was one of the key elements influencing language learners' attitudes. Furnham and Medhurst (1995) stated that a learner's personality left a positive impact on his/her activities of learning and acquiring. Similarly, Conteh-Morgan (2002) stated that a learner's characteristics included several personal and attitudinal aspects (p.193). A good learner demonstrates a willingness to learn and acquire knowledge of the language. Krashen (1987) argued that a successful learner could gather sufficient second language substance and had a low emotional filter to utilize it for language acquisition. The study discussed three types of bad learners of the language. The worst in his opinion was the one who had no learning or acquisition prospects. He expounded on a few factors such as lack of interest, high anxieties and self-consciousness, and lack of aptitude in Grammar.

### 2.2.2 Language Learning and Motivation

Motivation is what gets a person to start learning a language and helps him or her keep track of his or her learning efforts and language goals. (Csiz  & Drnyei, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). Motivation is defined as a learner's attitude concerning the second language learning goals (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Both attitudes and motivation are so closely related that they cannot be seen in isolation. Thus, it is preferable to investigate and comprehend the learners' reason for studying English as a second language. While both form an essential element of success, integrative motivation has been found of much use for studying a foreign language (Ellis, 1997; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Though a few research studies have drawn attention to the importance of instrumental motivation, it has often been found that those supporting integrative motivation are more motivated and are more useful in language proficiency.

In general, motivation refers to an internal urge that forces us to do something. Within the framework of teaching and learning English, it is what encourages us to learn and teach English. Wu (2013) argued that one of the key factors determining the achievement of learners in learning a language was motivation. The results of the research study, conducted to investigate the factors affecting the use of vocabulary, revealed many factors including family involvement and teacher encouragement. However, it was found that motivation had the greatest effect. Similarly, Ekiz and Kulmetov (2016) examined various variables impacting English as a second language instruction and acquisition. Level 1, 40 students were given a survey that examined environmental, parental, and teacher-related factors. The results found that the learners were highly motivated when supported by their parents and when they worked with their friends. According to Al Othman and Shuqair (2013), an individual's level of motivation was directly proportional to their level of success in learning a second language. The study asserted that attitude and motivation worked together to help learners develop effective English skills. It finally documented the motivational impact on language learning by eliciting the responses of researchers in the field.

### 2.3 Educational and Academic Context

In addition to affective variables and informal situations, some formal surrounding situations and environments influence the attitudes and language learning of ESL learners. Spolsky (1969) argued that there were many people whose attitudes toward one another could be of great importance to language learners, parents, teachers, and speakers of the second language. They also had a very important part to play in shaping the positive attitudes of ESL learners. They refer to the existing general environment, classroom dynamics, teacher students' participation, opportunities for academic debates and engagements, and the way students look at the commitment of the teacher to his profession and language learning (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). Educational contexts represent how language is being taught and learned, English language teachers, variables including social, physical, cultural, and the teaching material and content. Wright (1999) found that the most noteworthy factors which influenced the attitudes of learners were teachers and textbooks.

#### 2.3.1 Language Learning Environment

Many research studies revealed a close link between language learning and the conducive learning environment in surroundings. They emphasized that a foreign/second language could not thrive and be learned in a hostile environment. Light (1997) stated that language acquisition must consider both a child's characteristics and the setting in which they learn languages, which might be described as a complex network of social, physical, functional, and cultural factors. He explained that the physical environment shaped psychological and linguistic development. A language's time and place were its functional environment, which included structure and daily activities. Linguistic context means communication instruments.

In situations where acquiring a language was required, the motivation and attitudes of the students might be influenced by several factors (Ehrman, 1996). According to Littlewood (2001), a deep connection existed between the teacher's authority, the attitude of learners, and their ability to actively participate in classroom discussions. In situations like this, the teacher was the motivating force that guarded students against falling prey to demotivation, anxiety, and frustration. Similarly, one more factor that needed to be taken care of while dealing with second language teaching was the time and opportunities available for learning and mastering a language. This will have an impact on language learning (Getie, 2020). Classroom learning would not bear real fruits if the opportunity to use a language outside the

classroom was not available. A learner was motivated from within. But it was society that gave a practical shape to his dreams of learning a language. Pride (1979) argued that three variables were essential for good learning: opportunity, motivation, and aptitude. Learner's exposure to language-speaking environments and situations wherein making use of English and practicing was required was mandatory for effective language learning.

### 2.3.2 Foreign Language Learning and Teacher

The function of the teacher is extremely important in the classroom setting, but it is especially important in language classes. They are the source of inspiration and motivation for their students. Ghazali et al. (2009) argued that instructors not only taught students but also affected how they think regarding education, school, and the subjects they taught. Teachers could have both positive and negative impacts on language learners. A teacher equipped with a pleasant personality, effective communication skills, professional knowledge, sincerity and commitment, and better skills management would help second language learners develop positive attitudes and acquire proficiency in the language (Getie, 2020). As a teacher was often imitated by his students, he was very closely observed by his second language learning learners. Larsen and Long (1991) asserted that the teacher was one of the crucial elements that had a considerable influence on the attitudes of second/foreign language learners and their entire learning process. Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) argued that the way educators interact with students could influence their school relationship, motivation, achievement in school, and psychological health.

### 2.3.3 English as a Second Language and Materials for Instruction

One of the most influential factors on language learners' attitudes is the teaching resources and the material language instructors use in their classrooms. The textbooks and teaching materials shape the learner's worldview for learning a language. Guariento & Morley (2001) argued that there was now a consensus that the use of important texts and useful teaching material was very useful in language learning. They were an important source for increasing students' motivation. They further asserted that the teaching and learning material should motivate people who were learning a language. Similarly, Wilkins (1974) stated that teaching resources and material formed an essential and integral part of learning. If there were not sufficient resources in the surroundings, they hampered the English language growth of second language learners. The availability of things like workbooks, blackboards, writing papers, reading material, and libraries- all have positive or negative effects on learners and learning situations. If the needs and requirements of the ESL learners were embedded in teaching material and surroundings, they would have a favourable impact on language learners and encourage their excitement for acquiring learning the language and improving their level of skills (Wlodkowski, 1993).

## 2.4 Social and Environmental Context

The social and environmental contexts play an important role in language acquisition. Spolsky (1969) saw languages as social procedures learnt in situations of social interaction and which take place in society. He argued that language learning was an individual exercise that was affected positively and negatively by existing attitudes of the environment in which a language was learned and taught. While throwing light on the essentiality of social and environmental context, Van Lier (1996) stated that language learning was an integral part of the social world where the language learner lived. Any teaching activity that happened within the four walls of the classroom necessarily had a connection to the outside world. It shaped the behavior and attitudes of learners. According to Spolsky (1969), a social context was generally made of the home environment or family, peer group, and the community to which the learner belongs.

### 2.4.1 Parents and Home Environment

Since learners' parents are part of a social environment and culture, their psychology is deeply affected by social values, religion, and culture. These existing values and social preferences determine their goals and priorities for their children. Many studies have revealed that children demonstrate their parents' behaviour and attitudes toward things around them. Bartram (2006) claimed that parental impact included role modelling positive/negative behaviours, communicating educational regrets, and helping children comprehend linguistic relevance and position. Larsen and Long (1991) believed that parents affected their children's language and culture preferences. This attitude and behaviour shaped their perspectives and affected their language learning and proficiency positively or negatively. Wilkins (1974) stated the same when he said that children's attitudes primarily reflected upon parents' attitudes. Thus, it could be inferred that parents' attitudes determined both the success of language learning and failure. Children imitate their parents in their practical life. Brown (1994) argued that parents shaped their children's attitudes and other aspects of their lives early on, which in turn shaped their future perspectives.

### 2.4.2 Second Language Learning and Learner's Community

The society and community where the learner lives shape the psyche and personality of the learners in many subtle ways. The attitudes and perceptions embedded in a community's social life essentially become a part of the learner's psychology. If a community's attitudes toward English and its culture are positive, the learner will surely hold positive ways. Therefore, the social context influences a learner in many important ways. If the social context offers opportunities to communicate, learn, and develop a learner's skills in formal or informal situations, then second language learning and proficiency becomes easier (Spolsky, 1969). Similarly, Gardner (1985) found in his research that if second/foreign language learners held attitudes of positivity toward the language's culture and the native speakers, they were more likely to acquire the language; the learner would get better results in language proficiency and learning. Since a learner was a social product, he would have the same attitudes toward the language as held by his community. No one could deny the fact that the community and society's hostile and indifferent attitudes toward the language influenced language learning and proficiency (Wilkins, 1974).

2.4.3 Second Language Learning and Peer Group

Many studies have noted that peers and friends have a deep impact on language learning (Oskamp, 1977; Taylor, 2000; Dornyei, 2001). Expounding upon the remarkable role of the peer group, Morgan (1966) stated that irrespective of the reasons operating in each case, the result was that peers might influence the views as well as the behaviour of the learners as compared to their parents.

2.5 Research Questions

1. Do Saudi EFL learners experience an attitude problem with English?
2. What factors do affect Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English learning positively or negatively?
3. Is Saudi EFL learners' and their parents' motivation instrumental or integrative?

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative method (descriptive quantitative design) to collect and analyse the results of the numerical data and establish the relationships among the dependent (attitudes) and independent variables (contextual factors). Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend a quantitative method to a research study that involves identifying the factors that affect an outcome and understanding its predictors. Since our study is focused on the random selection of the participants and the understanding of the relationship among variables, this approach was selected, and a scale was designed by the researcher to collect data. The participants were asked to show their opinions on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree).

3.2 Participants' Description

The population of the study refers to the students studying in the level 1 and level 2 Bachelor programs of Business College, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. The respondents are all Arabic native speakers and learn English as a foreign language. English has been one of their compulsory subjects for 8–10 years. They are in their early twenties. They were chosen out of a population of about 2000 students. Out of the population of almost 2000 students, 216 participants were selected through a simple random sampling method. While 123 (56.9%) participants are male; 88 (40.7); are female. 5 participants (2.3%) did not specify their gender.

Table 1. Sample Distribution (Demographic profile)

Description	Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Parents' educational level	Postgraduate +	39	18.1
	Pre-university+	138	63.9
	Middle school+	21	9.7
	No education	7	3.2
	Others	10	4.9
Parents' profession	Govt. job	164	76
	Private job	11	5.1
	Business	13	6
	No job/self-employment	21	9.7
	Others	7	3.3
Gender	Male	123	56.9
	Female	88	40.7
	Other(neutral)	5	2.3

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Prior to developing an appropriate questionnaire, an extensive review of existing research was carried out. As a result, a questionnaire was self-designed with partial adoption of modified items from certain existing studies (Getie, (2020); Orfan, (2020). The first part of the questionnaire deals with items related to the demographic profile of the participants. Of the next 12 items, four items each assesses cognitive, behavioral, and emotional perspectives. The last 20 items seek to collect data regarding the socio-cultural and educational factors affecting the attitudes of the respondents positively or negatively. The respondents were asked to mark their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree).

3.4 Validity

Given the status of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia with limited use in public spaces, Saudi EFL learners struggle to learn English despite years of studying it as a compulsory subject in their school curriculum. That is why the questionnaire was prepared both in English and Arabic languages with verification of translation from the experts having professional expertise in both the languages. To confirm the validity of the scale and its questions/items, a pilot study was undertaken. The feedback and comments received from the experts were incorporated into the questionnaire.

3.5 Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure items' reliability. The alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value for the scale of all 32 items is .877.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.877	32

This shows that the items chosen were reliable since  $\geq .70$  and above are acceptable levels of reliability for the items (George & Mallery, 2003).

### 3.6 Data Collection Procedure

This data was gathered from the respondents using a questionnaire. The survey link was sent to student and course teacher groups. Arabic translation with English text was provided to enable the participants to better express their choices. The participants of the study were requested to read the separate instructions provided in each section of the questionnaire. As they were guaranteed strict confidentiality and secrecy and only academic and research use of the data, they felt free to express their choices.

### 3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

When adequate responses were received, the data was moved from the Google form to an Excel sheet. For calculations, the data was imported into SPSS version 23 and assigned a numerical value as explained in the data collection tool. The range of the 5-point Likert scale was calculated by deducting the highest score (5) from the lowest score (1) and dividing it by the highest score (5). As the questionnaire only comprised closed-ended questions, the participants' responses were entered into a table and evaluated statistically. The following standards were assumed to interpret and categorize learners' positive/negative opinions.

Table 3. Assumed Scale/criteria for measuring the degree/level of positive/negative attitude

Mean Square	Level
3.1 – 4.50	High
1.51 – 3.00	Moderate
1.00 – 1.50	Low

## 4. Results

The study found that Saudi EFL learners held a high level of positive attitude toward English. Almost all students are free from any attitudinal problem. They were also very much motivated to study English and enhance their language skills and proficiency. Even the parents of the learners also hold very positive attitudes toward English. They had a higher degree of motivation and were a source of inspiration and encouragement for their children. However, the result revealed that they possessed strong instrumental motivation, and less degree of integrative motivation as far as English language learning was concerned. The study also revealed several factors that influenced the learners positively or negatively. The factors that affected the Saudi EFL learners positively were English language teachers, the attitudes of parents towards the English language, and the English language-learning environment (language learning tools, etc.). In addition, the factors that did not seem to motivate students positively but became means of demotivation included teaching material and content, the surrounding environment, and peers' attitudes.

### 4.1 Saudi EFL learners' behavioral attitude toward the English language

Table 4. Analysis of responses regarding the learners' behavioral attitude toward learning English

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
5. I am learning English to enhance my career opportunities.	68.5	25.9	3.7	0.9	0.9	4.6	High
6. I like reading English books, novels, and poetry in English.	10.2	25	30.6	29.2	5.1	3.06	High
7. I regularly attend my English lectures.	53.2	34.7	8.3	3.7	0	4.38	High
8. I enjoy English movies and music.	44	29.2	12	11.6	3.2	3.99	High

Table 4 shows Saudi EFL learners' behavioral attitude toward the English language measured through items 5 to 8. The table shows that 94.4% (SA 68.5 & A 25.9) agreed that they studied English to enhance their employment and career opportunities. 3.7 % chose to remain neutral, 0.9% disagreed and the same number of the participants strongly opposed the statement. The mean score is 4.6 which is considered high as per the assumed criteria. In item no. 6, 35% (SA 10.2% & A 25%) stated that they liked reading books, novels, and poetry in English. 30.6% did not express their choices, 29.2% disagreed and 5.1% expressed disapproval of the statement. The mean is 3.06 which is accepted to be high. Concerning item 7, 87.9% (SA 53.2% & A 34.7%) said that they regularly attended their English lecture. While 8.3% remained neutral, 3.7% opposed, and none strongly opposed the statement. The mean score is 4.38 which is considered high. Similarly in item no. 8, 73.2% (SA 44% & A 29.2) accepted that they enjoyed English movies and music. 12% remained neutral, 11.6% disagreed, and 3.2% expressed strong disapproval of the statement. The mean is 3.99 which is considered high.

4.2 Saudi EFL Learners' Cognitive Attitude toward the English Language

Table 5. Analysis of responses regarding the learners' cognitive attitude toward learning English

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
9. Learning the English language is a pressing need today.	61.6	28.23	6.9	1.4	1.9	4.46	High
10. English skills advance an individual's social status.	47.2	36.6	7.9	4.6	3.7	4.19	High
11. English is an easy language to learn and speak.	23.6	45.4	19.9	7.4	3.7	3.78	High
12. English language skills guarantee better career choices.	60.6	32.9	5.6	0.5	0.5	4.53	High

Table 5 shows the respondents' cognitive attitude toward the English language measured through items 9 to 12. The table shows that 89.9% (SA 61.6 & A 28.23%) said that studying English was of the utmost importance today. 6.9 % remained neutral, 1.4 % expressed disagreement and 1.9% of the respondents expressed strong disagreement. The mean is 4.46 which is considered high according to the assumed criteria in research methodology. In item no. 10, 83.8 % (SA 47.2 % & A 36.6 %) accepted that English skills advanced an individual's social status. 7.9 % were neutral, 4.6 % dissented and 3.7% expressed strong rejection. The mean is 4.19 which is considered high. As far as item no. 11 is concerned, 69 (SA 23.6% & 45.4%) said that English was an easy language to learn and speak. 19.9% chose not to express their choices, 7.4% opposed and 3.7% expressed strong rejection. The mean is 3.78% which is considered high. In the last item 12, 93.5% accepted that English language skills guaranteed better career choices. 5.6% chose to remain neutral, 0.5 % disagreed and almost the same number expressed disagreement with the statement. The mean is 4.53% which is considered high.

4.3 Saudi EFL Learners' Emotional Attitude Toward The English Language

Table 6. Analysis of responses regarding the learners' emotional attitude toward learning English

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
13. I feel proud when I talk in the English language.	42.1	32.4	13.9	8.3	3.2	4.02	High
14. I eagerly look forward to my English lecture.	27.8	44	18.1	6.5	3.7	3.86	High
15. I get nervous to see someone speaking in English.	9.3	22.2	19.9	40.3	8.3	2.84	Moderate
16. I always try to imitate native English speakers.	42.6	36.1	14.4	6.5	0.5	4.14	High

Table 6 shows the respondents' emotional attitude toward the English language measured through items 13 to 16. The table shows that 74.5% (SA 42.1 % & A 32.4%) felt delighted when they spoke English. 13.9 % maintained neutrality, 8.3 % dissented and 3.2 of the respondents strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 4.02 which is considered high. In item no. 14, 71.8 % (SA 27.8 % & A 44 %) said that they eagerly waited for their English lecture. 18.1 % did not express their choices, 6.5 % dissented and 3.7 strongly opposed the opinion. The mean is 3.86 which is considered high. As far as item no. 15 is concerned, 31.5 (9.3% & 22.2%) accepted that they got nervous to see someone using the English language. 19.9% chose not to express their choices, 40.3% opposed and 8.3 % strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 2.84 % which is considered high. In the last item 16, 78.7 % said that they always tried to imitate native English speakers. 14.4 % remained neutral, 6.5 % dissented and only 0.5% strongly rejected the assertion. The mean is 4.14% which is considered high. The means of all the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of attitude are 4.00, 4.24, and 3.71 respectively. The cumulative mean of all the components of attitude is 3.98 which shows that Saudi EFL learners did not experience any attitudinal problems. They held a high degree of positivity toward English. This analysis addresses the study's first research question.

5. Analysis of the contextual factors influencing Saudi EFL learners' attitudes toward English

5.1 Saudi EFL Learners' Attitudes toward English Language Teaching Material

Table 7. Analysis of learners' attitudes toward English language teaching material

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
17. Traditional study material is useless for today's market.	15.7	16.7	35.6	21.8	10.2	3.06	High
18. Textbooks teach me job and competitive exam skills.	26.9	38	21.8	8.8	4.6	3.74	High
19. In real life, we seldom encounter English textbook situation.	20.8	32.9	24.5	19	2.8	3.5	High
20. Teacher-centered texts offer limited student participation.	18.1	28.2	31.5	17.1	5.1	3.37	High

As is clear from Table 7 given above, for item no. 17, students were asked to express their satisfaction regarding the teaching material and syllabus content. Of the total participants, only 32.4% (SA 15.7 & A 16.7%) were satisfied with their teaching material. While 35.6% remained neutral, 21.8% of the respondents express disagreement and 10.2% express strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.06 which is high as stated in the research methodology. In item 18, 64.9% (SA 26.9 & A 38%) accepted that textbooks helped them develop those skills that were required for employment and competitive exams. While 21.8% of the total participants remained neutral, 8.8 % expressed disagreement, and 4.6% expressed strong disagreement. The mean is 3.74 which is also considered high. As far as item no. 19 is concerned, 53.7 % (SA 20.8 & A 32.9%) said that the contents in English textbooks often offered situations and contexts that they rarely came across in their daily lives. 24.5 % remained neutral. 19 % disagreed and 2.8% strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 3.5 which is also considered high. In the last item, 20, 46.3% (SA 18.1% & 28.2%) said that the textbooks were teacher-centred and offered very little scope for students' participation in language learning. 31.5% remained neutral, 17.1% disagreed and 5.1% strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 3.37 which is considered high.

5.2 The Attitude of Saudi EFL Learners toward the English Language Learning Environment

Table 8. Analysis of learners' attitudes toward English language learning environment

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
21. Language-learning resources make English learning fun.	33.3	36.1	16.7	9.7	4.2	3.85	High
22. English language Instructions make me feel good.	29.6	28.7	22.7	12.5	6.5	3.63	High
23. My college strives to improve students' English skills.	28.7	38.9	20.4	9.7	2.3	3.82	High
24. The environment is very demotivating for learning English.	15.7	17.6	29.9	24.5	17.7	2.94	Moderate

Table no. 8 shows students' responses and reactions to English learning situations/environment. In item no. 21, 69.4 % (33.3% & 36.1%) of the participants said that the English learning situation and tools of learning motivated them to learn English. 16.7% of the respondents remained neutral, 9.7% of respondents differed, and 4.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.85 which is considered high in accordance with the criteria in research methodology. As far as item no. 22 is concerned, 58.3% of the participants said that they felt comfortable in English because it (English) was the medium of instruction and teaching/dialogue in their college/university. While 22.7% remained neutral, 12.5% disagreed and 6.5% strongly disagreed with the opinion. The mean is 3.63 which is considered high. In item no. 23, 67.6% (SA 28.7% & A 38.9%) of the total participants agreed that their college/university management took all possible steps and measures to improve their English skills. While 20.4% remained neutral, 9.7% disagreed and 2.3% strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 3.82 which also is considered high. In the last item no. 24, 33.3 % (SA 15.7 % & A 17.6%) of respondents said that the environment around them was very demotivating and discouraging for the English language. While 29.9% of the respondents chose to stay neutral, 24.5% disagreed and 17.7% strongly differed with the opinion. The mean is 2.94 which falls within the category of moderate according to the assumed criteria. The cumulative mean is 3.56. Of all four elements taken together, 57.17% have positive opinions regarding the English language learning situation on college/university campuses. There is a high percentage of those students who remain neutral. This is a need to work on this aspect.

5.3 The Attitude of Saudi EFL Learners toward English Language Instructors

Table 9. Analysis of learners' attitudes toward English language instructors

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
25. I became interested in English because of my good teacher.	34.7	32.4	20.4	7.9	4.6	3.85	High
26. My teacher illustrates by examples, actions, and situations.	39.4	39.4	16.2	3.2	1.9	4.11	High
27. My teacher's conventional teaching doesn't help me.	9.3	17.6	21.8	32.9	18.5	2.66	moderate
28. My teacher works harder to enhance my English.	23.6	39.4	24.5	9.7	2.8	3.71	High

In table no. 9, the items from 25 to 28 show the students' reactions and responses toward their English language instructors. In item no. 25, 67.1% (SA 34.7% & A 32.4%) stated that they developed their interest in English due to their teacher's excellent and effective way of teaching. While 20.4% of the respondents stayed neutral, 7.9% differed, and 4.6% strongly opposed the assertion. The mean is 3.85 which is categorised as high. Regarding item no. 26, 78.8% (SA 39.4% & A 39.4%) stated that their English teachers gave examples, created situations, and enacted scenes to explain things. While 16.2% of the participants remained neutral, 3.2% expressed disagreement and 1.9% expressed strong disagreement. The mean is 4.11 which is also accepted to be high. About item no. 27, 26.9 % (SA 9.3% & 17.6%) said that their teachers' method of teaching English was traditional and it, in no way, helped them improve their English. While 21.8% of the respondents were neutral, 32.9% differed and 18.5% strongly differed with the opinion. The mean is 2.66 which is considered moderate. In the last item, no 28, 63% (SA 23.6 & A 39.4%) of the respondents said that their teachers took extra measures to enhance students' English language skills. While 24.5% remained neutral, 9.7 differed, and 2.8% strongly differed. The mean is 3.71 which is considered high. The cumulative mean is 3.58. Of all the elements taken together, 59% of respondents had positive attitudes toward English language teachers.

5.4 Peers' Attitudes toward English Language Learning

Table 10. Analysis of peers' attitudes toward English language learning

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
29. My classmates make fun of me when I speak in English.	8.8	6	11.6	33.3	40.3	2.1	Moderate
30. My classmates want to improve their English skills.	30.1	38.4	24.1	5.6	1.9	3.89	High
31. I learn English better when I am with my classmates.	25	33.8	22.7	14.4	4.2	3.61	High
32. My friends eagerly participate in English class activities.	20.4	29.6	32.4	13	4.6	3.48	High

Table 10 shows peer group opinions regarding English learning. In item no 29, only 14.8% (SA 8.8% & A 6%) said that their friends made fun of them when they spoke English. While 11.6% were neutral, 33.3% disagreed and 40.3% strongly opposed the assertion. The mean is 2.1 which is considered moderate as stated declared in research methodology. This shows that peers and friends appreciate English speaking by their classmates. Thus, their attitude toward English is very positive and they, thus, help each other learn effective communication and speaking skills. Regarding item no. 30, 68.5% (SA 30.1% & 38.4%) said that their friends were interested in improving their English skills. While 24.1% stayed neutral, 5.6% differed and 1.9% strongly differed from the opinion. The mean is 3.89 which is considered high. In item no. 31, 58.8% (SA 25% & A 33.8%) of the respondents said that they learned English better when they were among their classmates. While 22.7% were neutral, 14.4% disagreed, and 4.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement. The mean is 3.61 which is considered high. In the last item, 32, 50% (20.4% & 29.6%) of the respondents stated that their friends eagerly participated in English class activities. While 32.4% were neutral, 13% differed and 4.6% strongly differed from the assertion. The mean is 3.48 which is also considered high. The



cumulative mean is 3.27. Of the four elements taken together, 48% of participants said that their peers were positive about English language learning.

In the same way, the cumulative mean of students' satisfaction regarding the teaching material and syllabus content is 3.41. Of all the four items under this category taken together, only 49.30% of Saudi EFL learners are positive about teaching material, its applicability, and practical usage. Similarly, the cumulative means of students' responses about the English learning situation is 3.56. Of all four elements taken together, 57.17% are positive about college/university English language learning. Similarly, the cumulative mean of students' responses about English language instructors is 3.58%. Of all the elements under this category taken together, 59% of respondents had positive attitudes toward English language teachers. This means language teachers affect the students positively toward learning English. The cumulative mean of peers' responses about English language learning is 3.27. Of all the four elements taken together, 48% of respondents believed their friends were positive about English language learning. There is a high percentage of those who remain neutral. This shows that peers are not so much motivated about English language learning. This analysis related to contextual factors affecting Saudi EFL learners' attitudes answers the second research question.

**6. Motivation for English Language Learning among Saudi EFL Learners**

*6.1 Analysis of Motivation for Language Learning among Saudi EFL Learners*

Table 11. *Analysis of learners' motivation for language learning*

Statements/Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Level
33. My parents think studying English is essential for my career.	60.6	28.7	7.9	2.3	0.5	4.47	High
34. My parents appreciate my English-improvement efforts.	55.1	31.9	10.2	2.8	0	4.39	High
35. My parents urge me to imitate English native speakers.	34.7	27.3	25	10.2	2.8	3.81	High
36. My parents love English culture and the way of life.	60.6	25.5	26.4	15.7	6.9	3.44	High

Table 11 represents the opinions of parents on English language acquisition. In item no. 33, 89.3% (SA 60.6% & 28.7%) of the respondents believed that their parents thought studying English was crucial for their careers. While 7.9% were neutral, 2.3% disagreed, and 0.5% strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 4.47 which is considered high as per the assumed criteria in research methodology. Similarly, in item no 34, 87% (SA 55.1% & 31.9%) said that their parents were happy to see their children making efforts to improve their English. While 10.2% stayed neutral, 2.8% differed and no one differed strongly. The mean is 4.39 which is categorised as high. Regarding item 35, 62% (SA 34.7% & A 27.3%) of the respondents stated that their parents urged them to imitate native English speakers. 25% of the respondents were neutral, 10.2% disagreed, and 2.8% strongly opposed the statement. The mean is 3.81% which is considered high. In the last item, 36, 86.1% (SA 60.6% & 25.5%) said that their parents preferred English culture and lifestyles. While 26.4% stayed neutral, 15.7% expressed disagreement, and 6.9% expressed strong disagreement. The mean is 3.44 which is considered high. The cumulative mean is 4. Of all the four elements, 72% of participants' parents possessed an attitude of positivity toward the English language learning. Similarly, the cumulative mean of students' and parents' attitudes toward English language learning is 4. The analysis revealed that of all the four elements under this category, 72% of respondents and their parents had positive attitude toward learning English. It was also revealed that most of the students and their parents had a high degree of instrumental motivation, and they had a less degree of integrative motivation. This analysis answers the third research question.

**7. Discussion and Analysis**

The investigated Saudi EFL learners' attitudes, motivation, and contextual and surrounding factors that impact English learning attitudes. It was revealed that Saudi EFL learners' attitudes were highly positive toward learning English. They viewed English an important means of social mobility and economic prosperity. The results of the first question of this study (high level of positive attitudes among the learners toward English) align with multiple studies (Ababneh, 2016; Al Mamun et al. 2012; Al Noursi, 2013; Iswahyuni, 2018; Morganna et al. 2020; Orfan ,2020; Rahman et al. 2021 & Zulfikar et al., 2019). However, many studies (Abidin et al. 2012; Yandi, 2015) contradict our findings and report negative attitudes (emotional, cognitive, and behavioral) among EFL/ESL learners toward the English language. One study conducted by Choy & Troudi (2006) found mixed perceptions and attitudes among students toward learning the English language.

The study also looked at the contextual and environmental variables that impacted Saudi EFL learners' English learning attitudes. It was found that certain educational and social factors (e.g., English learning situation, language teachers, and parents) helped EFL learners in Saudi Arabia develop positive attitudes. Several studies (Getie, 2020, Le & Le, 2022) support and confirm this finding as they found these socio-educational factors created a conducive environment for developing positive attitudes among ESL/EFL learners in different contexts. However, one study carried out by Ahmed (2015) contrasts with this finding as it found that classroom instruction/learning acted as a demotivating factor for language learners. While classrooms and language teachers were found to act as a motivating factor in our study, a study conducted by Getie (2020) found them (e.g., English language teachers and classrooms) acting as a demotivating factor and impacting EFL/ESL learners' attitudes negatively. Our investigation found certain educational and social factors like educational surroundings, the environment around EFL learners, and peer groups were found leaving them less positive and less motivated about language speaking/learning. One study carried out by Rahimi and Hassani (2012) to investigate Iranian students' attitudes toward English textbooks as a predictor of attitudes found them among mitigating factors. Moreover, there are several studies (Getie, 2020 & Nawaz et al. 2015) which found that social factors like peer groups were found to act as a means of motivation and encouragement for language learning.

Regarding the third research question concerning motivation, the result revealed that Saudi EFL learners and their parents had a high degree

of instrumental motivation and a low degree of integrative motivation. It implied that they studied the English language as a requirement for degrees, jobs, and market needs. This result is in line with many studies (Al-Ta 2018; Ametova 2020; Hong & Ganapathy, 2017; Warden & Lin 2000). Many other studies (Qashoa, 2006; Burcu & Carol, 2012; Muftah & Rafik-Galea, 2013; Mahara, 2015; Hong & Ganapathy, 2017) also confirm the findings of the current study. These studies found a stronger instrumental motivation and lower integrative motivation among the learners. However, some studies (Strong, 1984 & Zanghar, 2012) found a higher degree of integrative motivation among learners. Moreover, this is often found among advanced learners. On the other hand, there are several studies (Lamb, 2004, Sultan & Hussain, 2010, Al-Ta, 2018, & Al-Oliemat, 2019) that have found the existence of both types of motivation among ESL/EFL learners. Many studies (Gardner 1985; Oroujlu & Vahedi, 2011; Getie 2020) have noted an important connection between language positivity and culture. The language instructors must promote integrative motivation among ESL/EFL learners.

## 8. Conclusion

This study investigated Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards studying English as a foreign language, their motivation, and the contextual and surrounding elements that impacting their opinions positively or negatively. It was found that Saudi EFL learners had highly positive attitudes towards learning English language. It was also revealed that they had a higher degree of instrumental motivation but a lower degree of integrative motivation. It was also discovered that multiple factors, including parents, language instructors, and English environments for learning (language resources), had positive effects on the learners. In contrast, it was revealed that several of contextual factors, including the learning environment, peer groups, and social settings where English was not used, adversely affected the opinions of the learners.

## 9. Implications

The study has immense pedagogical implications as it calls for the teachers' attention toward certain factors including syllabus, contents, learning situation, and atmosphere adversely affecting English language learning. There is a large percentage of students who are not positive and motivated to study English. There is a need to reach out to this demotivated group of learners. Even many students are not positive about English language teachers.

## 10. Limitations and Suggestions

The current study looked at examples from one university. The organizational structure of campuses, methods of instruction, and learning opportunities can each impact the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners toward learning English differently. It is concerned only with investigating surrounding factors and internal factors positively or negatively affecting language learners. Future researchers should investigate multiple examples of universities and higher learning institutions particularly from different Arab states to have a better understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of Arab EFL learners.

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## Authors' contributions

Dr. Mohammad Jamshed was responsible for data collection and drafting the manuscript. Dr Mohammad Saleem and Dr. Iftikhar Alam were responsible for study design. Dr. Wahaj Unnisa Warda revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

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## Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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