

## THE ROLE OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS EFL LEARNING PROCESSES IN THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

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### Abstract

There are some factors that may influence students' achievements. One of them is their attitude towards EFL learning processes. This article aims to find out the role of students' attitude in their achievements. To find out the role of attitude in students' achievements, an analysis of some theories and previous related studies has been carried out. According to the theories, people's attitudes influence how they behave, how they think, and how they react towards something. It also applies to EFL learning processes; students who have positive attitudes tend to show positive behavior during the learning processes. Some theories also show that positive attitude is highly needed when someone wants to achieve better language proficiency. Several studies were also conducted to find out the relationship between students' attitude and their achievements. Most of the results reveal that it has positive relationship. Students who possess positive attitude towards EFL learning processes also get better scores in their achievements. According to some theories and the results from the related studies, it can be concluded that students' attitude plays a big role in their achievements. Therefore, students should pay attention and to maintain positive attitudes to improve their language proficiency so that they will get better achievements.

Keywords: Students' attitude, EFL learning processes, achievements

### Abstrak

*Ada beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi prestasi siswa. Salah satu faktor tersebut adalah sikap siswa tersebut pembelajarn Bahasa Inggris. Jurnal ini mencoba mengetahui peran dari sikap siswa selama proses pembelajaran terhadap prestasi mereka. Untuk mencari tahu peran sikap terhadap prestasi siswa, beberapa teori yang didapat dari berbagai penelitian serupa akan dianalisis. Berdasarkan teori-teori, sikap seseorang mempengaruhi bagaimana dia bertingkah laku berpikir, dan bagaimana mereka bereaksi terhadap suatu hal. Hal serupa juga terjadi didalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, siswa yang bersikap positif selama proses pembelajaran, cenderung melakukan hal-hal positif yang menunjang prestasi akademiknya. Beberapa teori juga menekankan bahwa untuk memiliki kemampuan berbahasa yang baik, siswa dituntut untuk menunjukkan sikap yang baik pula selama proses pembelajaran. Beberapa penelitian terkait sikap siswa dan pengaruhnya terhadap prestasi juga menunjukkan hubungan yang positif. Berdasarkan beberapa teori dan hasil penelitian yang serupa, dapat disimpulkan bahwa sikap siswa terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris memiliki peran yang besar untuk menentukan prestasi mereka. Oleh karena itu, untuk memiliki kemampuan berbahasa yang baik dan prestasi yang baik, siswa dituntut untuk menunjukkan sikap yang positif selama proses pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris.*

*Kata kunci: Sikap siswa, pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, prestasi*

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has widely spread because it is an international language. This fact requires people living in this era to learn and understand English in order to

communicate and to maintain relationship.

The Indonesian government has already made many efforts in order to improve students' English skill. However, empirical data show an unpleasant fact that there is a

significant decrease in English subject results compared to other subjects' results in the national examination. A study conducted by international education company English First (EF) stated that Indonesia ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 72 countries in the 2017 English First Proficiency Index (EF EPI). Those facts should be considered in order to find out a way to improve students' English proficiency level.

The most frequently asked question is why most of the Indonesian students still have a low proficiency level. Factors that may influence students' language achievements are motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitudes, intelligence, ages, personalities, etc. Based on the observation during the teaching practicum, the writer found that students' psychological condition was important to support their learning processes. Students who possess positive beliefs that English is easy, fun and challenging will be excited to follow the lesson. On the other hand, those who possess negative beliefs that English is difficult, boring and hard to understand will tend to be ignorant during the learning processes. In supporting students' achievement, many researchers have already conducted studies about factors influencing students' achievement such as teachers'

pedagogy skill, the instructional technology, the media and the materials. Besides those aspects, the writer assumes that another important issue in supporting students' achievement is students' attitude. Those who possess positive attitudes tend to show their excitement in learning English so it can make them learn harder to get better scores in their English test. Based on some statements above and also the writer's observation in teaching a junior high school, it can be concluded that it is important to analyse how attitude towards EFL learning processes gives impact in students' achievement or to their English proficiency level. It is important because in EFL learning processes, students tend to show varied attitudes and when it comes to a test, they also show varied results. Many problems can be found in EFL learning processes. Based on the writer's experience in teaching English in a junior high school, the problems may come from many aspects such as from teachers, students, learning sources, media etc. Those aspects play a vital role in supporting students' achievement. During the observation, the writer found that the supporting aspects are unbalanced. Some educational institutions only focus on some aspects such as the instructional technology, the quality of the teachers and the media without paying attention to students'

psychological condition. The writer also found that some students kept showing their negative attitudes toward English lesson no matter how interesting the lesson was. That phenomenon indicates that students have a special condition to be considered.

This article will focus more on problems from students' side. In teaching and learning practice, students tend to show different attitudes and reactions. Some students show that they are interested in following the lesson while some of them ignore the lesson. Based on the writer's observation, some students feel that learning English is fun and challenging. On the other hand, other students say that English is difficult and too boring to be learned. When the writer conducted a test, the writer found varied results. Another problem is that students who got good results are not always the ones who possess positive attitudes during the lesson. Sometime, students who show positive attitude during the lesson are the ones who got lower achievements.

Based on the explanation, two questions are raised; 1) What is students' attitude? 2) What is the role of students' attitude in their achievements? The questions will be answered by looking at some literature and the studies related to the topic.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several definitions of attitudes have been mentioned by a number of researchers in the fields of psychology and education. Montano and Kapsprzyk (2008) state that individual's beliefs toward attributes of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs) can determine individual's attitude. Thus, people need to possess strong positive beliefs to let them have a positive attitude toward the behavior. Al-Mamun, Rahman, and Hossaim (2012) define the term attitude as a psychological construct which constructs and defines a particular behavior. This theory is in line with students' nature. Every student has their own psychological construct, and different psychological construct creates different behavior even though they are taught in the same situation and the same context. This theory is supported by Harrel (2005) who defines attitude as a consistent tendency to react in a particular way often positively or negatively toward a given matter or social object. Everyone has their own attitude towards learning, but not everyone has the same attitude towards it. Attitudes help someone dealing with challenges, overcoming obstacles, and accomplishing their learning objectives. Others have attitudes that are anchors, slowing them down or stopping them altogether from learning. According to

Mensah, Okyere and Kuranchie (2013) in Langat (2015), attitude is a psychological orientation developed as a result of one's experiences which influence a person's view of situations, objects, people, and how to respond to them either positively or negatively or favorably or unfavorably. Mensah et al. (2013) also propose that attitude as a concept focuses on how an individual thinks, acts, and behaves. It has very serious implications for the learner, the teacher, the immediate social group with which the individual learner relates, and the entire school system. Attitudes can be formed as a result of the learning experiences which they go through. In conclusion, attitude is the implementation of what people believe towards something which is influenced by their psychological construct. Attitude can be defined as an unintended action or behavior performed by someone which is affected by their experience, in this article experience can be said as their learning experience. Students' learning experience forms their view towards something which later may affect their way of thinking and also their behavior during the learning processes.

According to Mensah et al. (2013) attitude can also be formed. Formation of attitude is experiential which means that

attitudes that people perform come from what they experience whether it is positive or negative. According to them, in the view of social psychology, attitudes are formed by three major learning theories which are classical conditioning, operant conditioning and observational learning. Classical conditioning refers to a procedure to modify behavior in which repeated pairing of conditioned stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus leads to the development of a conditioned response. Meanwhile operant conditioning means that attitudes can be formed by a response which is made in anticipation of a stimulus. On the other hand, observational learning believes that attitude can be formed by how someone observe their surrounding environment especially people that they admire.

Since the article talks about how attitude gives impact to students' achievement. There are also some definitions of achievement. Richards and Schimdt (2002) say that language achievements mean a learner's mastery, in a second language and foreign language, of what has been taught or learned after a period of instruction. Language achievement may be contrasted with language aptitude, which is measured before a course of instruction begins.

Meanwhile Kpolovie, Joe and Okoto (2014) say that students' achievement is the ability of the students to study and remember facts and the ability to communicate his knowledge orally or in written form even in an examination condition. They also define academic achievements as excellence in all academic disciplines, in class as well as extracurricular activities. Academic achievement is the outcome of education as it indicates the extent to which the student, teacher, curriculum and indeed the educational institution have achieved the predetermined educational goals. In the English language subject, achievements reflect students' capabilities which demonstrate learning, knowledge, skills, ability, and indeed cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains during EFL learning processes. Joe, Kpolovie, Osonwa and Iderima (2014) state that academic achievement refers to the observed and measured aspect of students' mastery of skills and subject contents as measured with valid and reliable. It can be concluded that achievements can be defined as the accumulative results of students' progress during the learning processes.

To answer the second question. There are some theories from some experts. Numerous studies have already been

conducted and they emphasized on how important students' attitude is in their language learning processes. Saidat (2010) mentions that language attitude has been considered in the previous 50 years because of the growing relation between the importance of the language use and the nature of individuals. The matter of students' attitude is considered as one of the most influencing factors that impact on students' learning processes as proposed by Fakeye (2010). The importance of attitudes in the language learning processes is supported by Popham (2011) who considers that the attitude which is included in the affective domain is important because of its influence on students' future behavior. He believes that students' future behavior is affected by some affective variables such as attitudes, interests and values. He emphasizes that those variables are important. He also believes that to pursue learning in the future students have to possess positive attitudes since today.

Kara (2009) states that attitude towards learning English, besides opinions and beliefs, gives a big influence on students' behaviors and also their performances. She also states that students who possess positive beliefs towards language learning have a tendency to increase more positive attitudes towards language learning. On the other

hand, she believes that negative beliefs may lead to negative attitudes during learning processes, anxiety in the class and it makes them have low cognitive achievements. This theory has been proved by the writer through a class observation. During the observation, students who have positive attitudes and admit that they like the lesson tend to be more excited also have a willingness to work hard during the learning processes. Students who have a willingness to work hard will also achieve better. It is well known that negative attitudes towards the foreign language and group, which often comes from stereotypes and superficial contact with the target culture, can impede the learning of that language. Conversely, positive attitudes towards the foreign language and group increase language learning success. Brown (2000) describes several studies about the effects of attitude on the language learning and concludes that “positive attitudes towards people, the native language group, and the target language group could enhance proficiency” When students with positive attitudes experience success, the attitudes are reinforced, while those with negative attitudes may fail to progress and become even more negative in their language learning attitudes. Because attitudes can be modified by experience, the effective language

teaching strategies are believed to be the best way in encouraging students to be more positive towards the language they are learning. Focusing on attitude towards language learning, Abidin et al. (2012) in Eshghinejad (2016) explain that the ability of students to master a particular language is not only influenced by the mental competence or language skills but also on their attitudes and perceptions towards the target language. They also advocate that attitude concept could enhance the process of language learning, influencing the nature of student’s behaviors and beliefs toward the other language, and this will identify their tendency to acquire that language. Visser (2008) in Kara (2009) states that students’ belief in knowledge acquisition is a significant factor in their performance. Those who believe that learning occurred quickly or not at all are more likely to have fewer problems in searching for information or evaluation than the students who believes learning to be a gradual process, requiring both times and efforts. Attitudes towards a language can help to see what people feel about the speakers of that language. Karahan (2008) states that language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English, so it can be said that attitudes play a crucial role in

students' success or failure in the language learning processes.

Mustafa, Rashid, Atmowardoyo and Dollah (2015) proposes a figure on this study about students' attitude towards EFL learning processes and how it affects their English language achievements. They emphasize that positive correlation between attitude and motivation will create students' positive language attitudes. Students' positive language attitudes mean their attitudes towards EFL learning processes and their attitudes towards every aspect of the target language. It also includes thoughts, feelings and emotions. As what is stated above, some researchers mention that besides students' cognitive aspects, affective aspects are also important in language learning processes because they can affect how students behave during the learning processes. Students' positive language attitudes let students have positive orientation towards the learning processes and according to the chart, it is also agreed that students who have positive orientation may influence language learning outcomes.

The ability of students to master a second language is not only influenced by the mental competences or language skills, but also by their attitudes and their perceptions towards the target language. Attitude concept

could enhance the process of language learning, influence students' behaviors and beliefs toward particular language and this will automatically make a tendency to acquire a particular language.

## CONCLUSIONS

EFL learning processes need complete components in order to achieve the goals. One of the important aspects is students' psychological condition. Students must be in a positive atmosphere before they acquire a new language. Many researchers state that positive mind will create positive attitude and positive attitude may lead students to learn better. Another important issue is that positive inner feeling may attract students' perspective towards a target language.

To prove the theories, some studies are conducted by many researchers. Most of them try to find out students' attitudes first before relating with their achievements. The results show that most of them found that those two variables show a strong correlation, which means that attitude plays a big role in influencing students' English achievements.

Based on the statements above, the writer has some recommendations for students and teachers. In EFL learning processes, teachers can freely influence

students' behavior and attitudes by applying an appropriate method. Teachers should equip themselves with the ability of managing classrooms, designing an appropriate teaching method and having the ability of creating an interesting learning environment. Teachers are also expected to know each student's characteristics so that they can give special treatments to particular students. In addition, the English language teachers should evolve effective teaching and learning strategies for English language learning to develop students positive attitude to the subject. They can also attend seminars/workshops for EFL teachers to keep them informed about the innovation of teaching methods. Their personality goes a long way in influencing students' attitude towards English language.

To improve students' achievement the most important thing that they need to have is a positive belief towards the learning processes. Students need to keep in their mind that English is fun and easy to be learned. They should also start to engage themselves with some things which are spoken or written in English to make them get used with the language. They should not be ignorant during the learning processes so they can open their mind to receive knowledge.

In order to let students have positive attitude, both educational institutions and teachers must be cooperated. Since students' attitude is also influenced by their surrounding environment, the educational institution has some authorities to arrange some aspects such as; Sorting the teachers before employing them, the institution must be careful in selecting the teachers, they have to consider all aspects of the teachers because it may affect students' attitude later. They also have an authority to design a syllabus, the syllabus must include some interesting lesson that may attract students' attention. The institution also be expected to train the teachers very well, the teachers should be equipped with the ability of managing the whole class includes understanding each student characteristic.

Moreover, teachers must understand must be well prepared before entering the classroom. Because if everything has been well prepared, it will be easier for them to manage the class. They are also expected to know each student characteristic by observing them. Besides preparing the interesting lesson, teachers are also need to understand the students' background so that they can adjust the materials and the method to attract students' interest. Lastly, every teacher must realize that they are a role

model, they need to possess positive attitude and positive behavior during the EFL learning process so that the students will imitate the behavior.

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