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## **Impact of Students' Attitudes on their Achievement in English: A Study in the Yemeni Context**

**Hassan Saeed Awadh Ba-Udhan**

# Impact of Students' Attitudes on their Achievement in English: A Study in the Yemeni Context

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master's Degree in TESL



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## CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Impact of Students' Attitudes on their Achievement in English: A Study in the Yemeni Context**, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS in TESL**, is an original piece of research work done by **Mr. Hassan Saeed Awadh Ba-Udhan** under my supervision at **the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad**.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to examine students' attitudes towards English and towards learning English. It focuses on the relationship between students' attitudes towards English and their achievement in English. Besides, the measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English have also been investigated. The subjects of the study are 71 first-year students of which 41 are males and 30 are females. They have been studying a four-year BA course in English in the Faculty of Education, Seiyun, Hadhramout University of Science and Technology, Yemen. A questionnaire is administered to collect the data for the study. The findings show that there are no significant differences between the male and the female students in term of their attitudes; both hold positive attitudes towards English and towards learning English and towards the native speakers of English and their culture. The female students realize the importance of understanding the target language culture but interestingly many of them prefer to learn English without paying attention to the culture of the English speaking communities. Moreover, though the Yemeni people realize the importance of speaking English, they tend to discourage people who speak in English among them. It is found that there is a positive correlation between students' attitudes towards learning English and their proficiency in it. Furthermore, the study

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reveals that students use effective measures such as reading books and newspapers, watching programs in English on TV etc in order to improve their proficiency in English. In the light of this study, it is possible to put forward that factors like students' attitudes towards teachers, curriculum, and teaching methodologies could be the causes of students' low achievement in exams or of their inattentiveness to their studies. In order for teachers to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere wherein meaningful learning can take place, they need to build a good rapport with students and strengthen the rapport among the students themselves. Teachers should encourage the students to interact with them and with each other in English in and outside the classroom.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

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## **1.0. Introduction**

This chapter will explain the English language learning and teaching scenario in Yemen and discuss briefly the influence of attitude on learning a second or a foreign language. The research questions and the possible outcomes of the study will be stated. Some of the terms used in the title will be defined. Finally, the outline of the study will be presented.

### **1.1 English language learning and teaching in Yemen**

The education system in Yemen mainly consists of three levels, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary school education is obligatory for all Yemeni children. It lasts for nine years; students usually join school at the age of seven years and finish primary education at around the age of 16. English is taught in the primary school at grade VII when students are 14 years old. Students study English for three more years in the secondary school. Thus those students who have completed the secondary level are supposed to have six academic years of studying English. At the tertiary level, there are many colleges of education and arts wherein English is studied as a major course in the departments of English. Students in non-English majors usually take an English course in the first academic year of the tertiary level.

Teachers of English in the primary and secondary levels are usually those students who graduate from the colleges of education, whereas MA and PhD holders

usually teach English at the tertiary level in the departments of English. Some professors from Arab and foreign countries, like Iraq and India, are invited to teach English in the Yemeni universities.

Yemen is a monolingual country; Arabic is the only medium of communication used by Yemeni people. English is considered a foreign language in Yemen; it is taught as a subject and not as a language in schools. It is indeed a fact that anyone who is interested in speaking in English rarely finds company. Guides with good communicative competence in English usually keep company with foreign tourists who come to visit Yemen to translate for them. However, most tourist guides are from Yemen itself, they either travel abroad to acquire English or their aptitude and motivation in learning English help them to speak it. However, despite this paucity of English speaking environment, or rather because of it, Yemeni people with good communicative competence in English can easily find lucrative jobs. As a matter of fact, English for specific purposes (ESP) is actually the area which Yemeni people need to focus on. For instance, people need English to work in the oil companies, and in the tourism and translation fields. Knowing English and speaking in English is not necessary for every day communication since the whole country is monolingual.

## **1.2. Attitude in second language learning**

Attitude is one of the most crucial factors in learning a second or a foreign language. Attitude plays a major role in arousing students' interest and motivation

to learn a second language. Gardner (1985) views attitudes as a component of motivation in language learning. According to Gardner motivation includes favourable attitudes towards learning the language. Gardner also states that learning a foreign language is determined by the learner's attitudes towards foreign people in general, and the target group and language in particular. Thus, success or failure in learning a language is determined by the degree of favourable dispositions that students hold towards the language and also towards learning it and towards the target language group and their culture.

### **1.3. The present study**

Attitude plays a major role in learning a second language since the students' positive or negative attitudes towards learning English largely determine high or low achievement or proficiency in English. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate students' attitudes towards English and towards learning English. It attempts to examine the relationship between the students' attitudes towards learning English and their English language achievement. The present study also identifies the measures adopted by the students to improve their achievement and proficiency in English. It is assumed that that the students' attitudes towards learning English can be negative since the proficiency level is low. Hence there is a felt need to investigate students' attitudes towards learning English and identify the link between these attitudes and students' English language achievement.

### **1.4. The research questions**

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The present study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. What attitudes do students hold towards English and towards learning English?
2. Is there a correlation between students' attitudes towards learning English and their achievement in English?
3. What are the measures adopted by students to improve their achievement or proficiency in English?

### **1.5. Defining terms**

Before we proceed further, an understanding of the important terms used in the title will be useful. The term *attitude* as used in the title refers to the set of beliefs that the students hold towards English and towards learning English and towards their own culture as well as towards English-speaking people and their culture. The term *achievement* is used to refer to the student's proficiency in English as well as the efforts made by them to improve their proficiency in English. However, the two terms: *achievement* and *proficiency* are used interchangeably in many positions in the present study.

### **1.6. Possible outcomes**

The study, it is hoped, will throw light on the students' attitudes towards learning English in the Yemeni context. Further, the study will help us understand the relationship between students' attitudes towards learning English and their achievement in English. The measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English will be identified. It may be that students hold negative Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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attitudes towards learning English and that these negative attitudes, in turn, affect their achievement in English and hinder them from adopting effective measures to improve their competence in English.

The study might show that students with positive attitudes towards learning English have high achievement and proficiency in English, and those students who hold negative attitudes have low achievement and proficiency in English. On contrary, it is also possible that students with negative attitudes have high proficiency and achieve better in English than those students with positive attitudes. The study might offer more useful insights about the complex issue of learners' attitudes and achievement thereby help improve the teaching and learning scenario in the Yemeni context.

### **1.7. Design of the study**

The study is designed in six chapters. The first chapter, *Introduction*, introduces the study. In this chapter an attempt has been made to briefly present the background to the study. It discusses English language learning in Yemen and explains briefly the importance of attitude in learning a second language. It provides a general glimpse of what the present study is about and it suggests the possible outcomes.

The second chapter, *Review of Literature*, discusses the researches previously done in the field of students' attitudes towards English and towards learning English and relates these to the framework of the present study.

The third chapter, *Theoretical Framework*, offers theoretical perspective to view the study from. It also tries to place the present study firmly in the context of ESL teaching and learning by gathering theoretical evidence and support from the existing theories on students' attitudes towards learning a foreign or a second language.

The fourth chapter, *Methodology*, describes the setting in which the study is located and explains the rationale behind conducting the present study. A detail profile of the sample and the tools used to elicit the data from the subjects are provided. The assumptions and the hypothesis of the study are presented and the aims and the objectives are explained. Finally, the scope and the limitation of the study are stated.

The fifth chapter, *Data Presentation and Analysis*, presents the data obtained for the study and analyzes it.

The sixth chapter, *Conclusion*, sums up the findings of the study and discusses the implications of these findings for teaching and learning in the Yemeni context. Finally, the chapter suggests possibilities for further research.

### **1.8. Overview of the chapter**

This chapter has discussed English language learning and teaching in the Yemeni EFL context and has explained briefly the impact of attitudes on learning a second language. It has presented the outline of the study. Some terms used in the title

have been defined. The research questions and the possible outcomes of the study have been stated. In the following chapter the researches done in the field of students' attitudes towards learning English will be discussed.

# CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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## **2.0. Introduction**

Numerous studies have been conducted to assess students' attitudes towards learning English. Some of these have been conducted in Yemen and other EFL countries. The present study aims to investigate the relation between students' attitudes towards learning English and their achievement in English. This chapter, therefore, attempts to summarize the researches previously done in the field of attitudes towards learning English and relate these to the context of the present research. The researches done in Yemeni context are presented first because the present study is conducted in Yemeni context too. Then, some related researches conducted in Arab countries are dealt with. Finally, studies done in non-Arabic EFL contexts are discussed.

### **2. 1. Reviewing researches**

Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2009) identified the students' motivation and attitudes towards learning the English language in the context of an engineering programme. The study investigated students' motivation in terms of three motivational constructs: instrumental motivation, integrative motivation and personal motivation based on Gardner's (1985) and Cooper and Fishman's (1977) works. The study also investigated learners' attitudes towards the use of English in Yemen, towards the English language and towards the culture of the English-speaking world. The sample of the study consisted of 81 petroleum engineering

students at Hadhramout University of Science and Technology. A questionnaire and interviews were used as tools for data collection to elicit the responses of the students.

Regarding the issue of students' motivation, the findings showed that students learn English mainly to help them to do well in their academic study and their professional life in future. However, the results revealed that the students are less interested in learning the English-speaking culture. Interestingly, many students showed their interest in watching English films. So far as students' attitudes are concerned, the study revealed that most students have positive attitudes towards the social status and educational value of English. In addition, the findings showed that students have positive orientation towards the English language.

Another study by Al-Quyadi (2002 as quoted in Al-Tamimi & Shuib 2009) explored into the nature of the psychological variables of learning English by Yemeni EFL learners in terms of attitudes and motivation as revealed by English majors at the Department of English, Faculties of Education at Sana'a University. A questionnaire was used as the research tool. The sample consisted of 518 students representing seven Faculties of Education. The results showed that the students have a high level of both instrumental and integrative motivation towards the English language. With regard to their attitudes, the findings indicated that the students have positive attitudes towards the English language and towards the use of English in the Yemeni social and educational contexts.

A study (Malallah 2000) conducted in the Kuwaiti Arab EFL context, on undergraduates enrolled in English courses offered by the English Language Centre at Kuwait University, examined students' attitudes and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language. The study focused on the inter-relationships between attitude, motivation, anxiety and achievement in the English language. Malallah hypothesized that: (1) Kuwait University undergraduates, in general, have positive attitudes towards learning English, towards the English language and towards native speakers of English. (2) Kuwait society values and regards the English language highly; and (3) students' achievement is positively related to their motivation and attitudes towards the English language and negatively related to their anxiety. A questionnaire consisting of items extracted and adapted from instruments used in previous studies was used for data collection. The sample included three groups of university students taking English courses at Kuwait University. These students were enrolled in three colleges: the College of Arts where Arabic was the medium of instruction; the College of Science where English was used as a medium of instruction and the College of Sharia and Islamic studies where Arabic was the medium of instruction. The total number of students in the research amounted to 409, of which 385 were born in Kuwait, while 24 were non-Kuwaitis; besides, in the total sample of 409 students, 343 were females and 66 were males. As a matter of fact, it is a general characteristic of the population in Kuwait that females outnumber males.

In general, the research confirmed the above mentioned hypotheses and found that the more a student is exposed to the English language, and the more a student needs the English language either for present studies or for future career, the more positive his/her attitudes appear towards the language. It was also found that students from the College of Science, whose major subjects were physical sciences, biological sciences and maths, had the most favourable attitudes towards literacy, oracy and instructional materials in class. They appeared to have the strongest positive attitudes to English, to native speakers of English, and more purpose for learning English. Students from the College of Arts, whose major subjects were Arabic language, humanities and social sciences, had less preference for literacy in the English class. However, compared with the students of both College of Science and College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, they expended the most effort in learning English. They had positive attitudes towards English and towards native speakers. They seemed to have clear purposes for studying English. They had a degree of positiveness but not as strong as that of the Science students. Students from the College of Sharia, whose major subject was Islamic studies, had the least preference for literacy, oracy and instructional material, the least purposes for studying English and the least favourable attitudes towards English and towards native speakers of English.

In another study done in the United States of America, but related to the Arab EFL context, Suleiman (1993) explored into (a) Arab university students' motivation for studying English as a second language (ESL), (b) their attitudes

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towards studying English and the English language, (c) their attitudes towards Americans and the United States and (d) the benefits that accrue to them from the study of English e.g. a better job. The study used qualitative and quantitative tools for collecting data. Two kinds of questionnaires were used: a background survey questionnaire to obtain background information and a Likert-format scale Attitude/Motivation Test Battery questionnaire which was prepared and adapted from Gardner (1985) for measuring motivation and attitudes. Questionnaire results were used to validate data collected from the interview method. The subjects were 15 male students and 7 female students from diverse Arabic-speaking backgrounds, all with at least five years of ESL experience studying at the Arizona State University.

The results revealed a number of categories of motivation for studying English, both before and after arrival in the United States; they also showed gender-related differences in motivation. Attitudes towards study of English fell into nine categories ranging from amusement to resentment; again, some gender differences were found. Attitudes towards methods of English instruction in the home country were generally unfavourable, but were generally favourable towards English instruction in the United States. Attitudes towards Americans and the United States before arrival fell into five categories: attraction; admiration; dislike; fear; and indifference. After arrival in the United States, attitudes became more complex, reflecting cultural conflict since all participants showed strong adherence to the culture they belong. Subsequently, the loyalty to one' own

indigenous culture affected the previously held positive attitudes towards the target language culture. Compared to male students, female students' attitudes were generally negative. Most felt little need to study English further.

Buschenhofen (1998) examined the attitudes towards English among students of high school and university in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This study was conducted to obtain information regarding the attitudes of the both groups (i.e. the students of high school and university) towards English. It also compared the language attitudes of the two groups. The aim was on the basis of this comparison to analyse any developments in attitudes towards English which had taken place during the transition period from high school to university. Two questionnaires were used for data collection. The first was a demographic questionnaire. The second was a direct attitude questionnaire of twenty-three items adapted from Pennington and Yue (1994), who had obtained them from Pierson et al. (1980). The sample included a total of 537 final-year secondary students from four National High Schools, as well as a total of 734 first-year university students from the two largest universities in PNG.

The results of the study showed a generally positive attitude towards English on the part of both the national high school students as well as first-year university students in PNG. The first-year university students strongly expressed the view that the use of English plays a crucial role in the country's development. Furthermore, the study found that neither the national high school nor the university students associated the use of English with threats to their Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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ethnolinguistic identity. The respondents were less clear, however, about whether the use of English inhibited their sense of patriotism. Students from both groups, but especially those from the national high school, did not wish to see English abandoned as a medium of instruction, nor did they wish English to cease as the official language of PNG or as the language of their textbooks. They wanted to improve their English, felt comfortable being surrounded by English, and were happy engaging in a variety of activities in English.

In the Turkish EFL context, Karahan (2007) examined the relationship between language attitudes towards the English language and its use in Turkey. The study also investigated the interlaced relationship among language attitudes, the starting age of language learning, and the place where the individual started to learn language within the context of EFL students in Turkey. The sample included 190 eighth grade students of a private primary school in Adana, Turkey, where English is intensively taught. Data were collected through a questionnaire which consisted of two parts: the first part required personal information, while the second part dealt with students' attitudes towards the English language and also towards the use of English in the Turkish context.

Results showed that although these Turkish private primary school students are exposed to English in a school environment more frequently than other students at public schools, they had only mildly positive attitudes. It was also found that these students recognised the importance of the English language but interestingly did not reveal high level orientation towards learning the language. Consequently,

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Karahan suggested that strategy-based learning and teaching could be helpful for the learners who realize the importance of the English language but are unmotivated to learn it. On the other hand, this study revealed that although the students have mildly positive attitudes towards the English language, they are not tolerant to Turkish people speaking in English among themselves. Karahan pointed out that the role of the teacher could be an important factor in establishing the appropriate environment to encourage students to practise speaking English with other Turkish students.

In Japan, Lafaye & Tsuda (2002) investigated attitudes to English among students in higher education. The study was carried out because students in Japan seemed to make little progress and seemed fed up with English and generally disappointed by their English learning experience. The study set out to investigate: a) how the average Japanese student feels about English, that is, what he/she thinks of his/her learning experience and his/her own ability, and whether or not he/she actually perceives a need for English and b) whether students are amenable to the idea of English as an official language. A questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data from the students. The sample group included 518 subjects from the newly-established Jinbun Gakubu (Humanities) Department of Tokaigakuen University, located in Nagoya. 287 of the subjects were first year students and 231 were second year students of which 36% were male students and 63 % were female students. The students were studying one of the following three courses: Human

Behaviour, Language Communication, or International Culture; there were no English majors at the university.

The results indicated that the students share similar ideas about English, including their perceptions of their English learning experience, to which they responded negatively, and their opinions about the usefulness of English, a question to which they responded overwhelmingly in the positive. Results also showed that students want to learn functional English that will allow them: a) to perform in English in different contexts and b) that will facilitate their communication with many different nationalities; hence they are penchant towards an international variety. The majority of the students think that English should be a compulsory subject in secondary schools. Many students also think that it should be introduced at the elementary level. Although one third of the students are of the opinion that English should be an official language of Japan, a half of them are not quite sure. Many of them think that they are most likely to use it to communicate with native speakers.

## **2. 2. Relevance of the researches to the present study**

The discussion above clearly shows that the previous studies have investigated students' attitudes towards learning English. The first two studies (Al-Quyadi 2002 and Al-Tamimi & Shuib 2009) have examined both students' attitudes and motivation in Yemen, the country wherein the present research is conducted. Like the present research, the first study has been conducted at Hadhramout University

of Sciences and Technology in Yemen. The only difference is in terms of the subjects. The target group in the former study was students who study English for specific purposes (ESP), while the target group of the present study is English-major students. The difference in the target group could bring about different results. However, the second study and the present research share similar subjects, namely, English-major students, but they have been conducted in two different universities in Yemen. Thus, the different settings of the two studies might lead to significantly different results; especially the fact that the former study has been conducted in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen and that could make all the difference. The third and the fourth studies (Malallah 2000 and Suleiman 1993) are related to the present study in terms of the Arab EFL context. The questionnaire designed for data collection in the present study draws inspiration from the aims and objectives of the third study, i.e., Malallah (2000). The aims and objectives of Malallah's study are to survey the following five issues: (1) Students' attitudes towards learning English. (2) Students' attitudes towards the English language. (3) Students' attitudes towards native speakers of English. (4) Students' purposes of studying English. (5) The place of English in Kuwait society. Suleiman (1993) points out that Arab students have not been given the opportunity to assess their own needs, motivation and attitudes in their EFL preparation. The present study aims to provide the students such an opportunity to assess their own attitudes. The study conducted by Buschenhofen (1998) has examined high school and first-year students' attitudes. It held the view that university students' attitudes could be

shaped by their experiences of learning English in the high school stage. The Turkish study (Karahan 2007) and the present study seem to share a common ground in that: a) both seem to emerge from the dissatisfaction expressed by parents, teachers, administrators and the learners themselves about their low proficiency levels in English and b) both focus on the learners' attitudes towards English. The final study (Lafaye & Tsuda 2002) has revealed several contradictions in the questionnaire results, the most pertinent one being that the students stated that their interest in English was strong and yet they did not like studying it and were unhappy with their proficiency in it.

Thus, all these studies and their findings offer significant insights for the present research and help consolidate certain issues on which the present study is based. But from there, the research takes off and moves forward in a new direction aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of students' attitudes towards learning English in the Yemeni context. The present study mainly focuses on the relation between students' attitudes towards learning English and their current level of proficiency or achievement in English. It also investigates the relation between the students' attitudes and the measures adopted by them to improve their achievement in English.

### **2. 3. Overview of the chapter**

This chapter has discussed a few researches on students' attitudes towards learning English and has attempted to relate them to the present study. Some of

these researches have been conducted in Yemen, some in Arab countries, while the rest in other EFL contexts. These researches and their findings have helped in understanding the major thrust areas concerning students' attitudes towards learning English. Such an understanding, in turn, has contributed to determine the focus of the present study. In the following chapter, the various theoretical standpoints underlying the present research will be discussed.



# CHAPTER III

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter attempts to gather theoretical evidence and support in favour of the present study from the existing research on attitudes towards learning a foreign or a second language. The term *attitude* is introduced and explained. The components of *attitude* and the relationship among these are discussed. Later, the possibility of modifying attitude and the teacher's role in doing so is emphasized; some ways of modifying students' attitude are presented. Subsequently, the correlation between students' attitudes towards English and their achievement or proficiency in English is established.

#### **3.1. Attitude: a brief introduction**

Attitude is one of the most important factors in understanding a person; it involves mental, emotional and behavioural activities. It can be understood as a mental disposition for viewing people and things around us. Chapman and Mcknight (2004) define attitude as the way a person looks at things mentally; it represents the overall mood in which people interpret what a person says and does. An attitude, thus, begins as a mental disposition towards people, things and events around us; subsequently it turns into actions and manifests in one's way of talking. According to Ajzen (1988) an attitude is "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event". Attitude, therefore, can be understood as something that guides a person to behave in a

particular direction; if a person holds favourable attitude towards something, he/she will like it and be attracted towards it. On the other hand, if a person holds negative attitude towards an object, he/she will dislike it and try to avoid it. Brown (2007) states that attitude is characterized by a large proportion of emotional involvement such as feeling, self, relationship in community. Attitudes usually have something to do with feelings and mental disposition towards oneself and one's own culture; and towards others and their cultures. If a person sees a particular culture as inferior to his/her own culture, this negative attitudinal disposition will direct the person to dislike that culture and avoid anything that emerges from it; while if a person views both cultures as social equals, then the attitude towards the other culture will be positive; and this attitude, in turn, will encourage the person to like the other culture and even try to understand it. What has been pointed out about attitude in general can be extended to language learners and how they view the culture of the target language community. Thus, the way in which a learner evaluates his own culture or the culture of target language group, as well as the way in which he/she reacts towards the people of the target language is considered to be a reflection of the attitudes held by that learner. Brown (1981 as quoted in Ellis 2008) seems to agree with this view when uses the term *attitudes* to refer to the set of beliefs that the learner holds towards his/her own culture as well as towards the target language people; for example, the learner could see the members of the target language group as 'interesting' or 'boring', 'honest', or 'dishonest', etc. Thus, learners may hold either negative or

positive attitudes towards the target language, towards learning the target language and towards its speakers and their culture.

### **3.2. Components of attitude**

The construct of attitude includes three components: cognitive, evaluative and behavioural. Wenden (1991 as cited in Karahan 2007) provides an explanation as to what each of these components involves. The cognitive component of attitude, as the name suggests, involves beliefs or perceptions about the objects or situations related to the attitude. The evaluative part of attitude is formed when the objects or situations related to the attitude generate likes or dislikes. The third component, the behavioural one, appears when certain attitudes tend to prompt learners to adopt particular learning behaviours. Mantle-Bromley (1995) gives an example for each of the three components. The belief that English speakers are mostly poor and uneducated would be an example of the cognitive element of attitude; while the degree to which a student likes or dislikes speakers of the language being studied can be an instance of the affective component. Students' intentions or actions, such as, attempting native-like pronunciation, seeking out native speakers of the language, or intending to continue language study are examples of the behavioural element of attitude. Eiser (1994); Rajecki, (1990); and Zimbardo & Leippe (1991 as quoted in Mantle-Bromley 1995) state that each component of attitude is important since the connection among affect,

cognition, and behaviour changes primarily when there is disagreement within the components. They provide an example of someone whose attitude towards Spanish is negative. This person's cognition is that Spanish speakers are socially beneath him/her; consequently he/she ridicules the language. In this case, affect, cognition, and behaviour are in agreement. However, if this person then meets a Spanish speaker who he/she considers attractive and desirable, the person's cognition as a result will be that maybe Spanish speakers are socially equal to him/her. The person's cognition in this case is no longer in accord with the other two components: affect and behaviour. It is this state of dissonance that will most likely lead to attitude change.

### **3.3. Modifying attitudes**

Attitudes are not inherent in an individual but are developed due to an individual's own experiences right from childhood. Just as attitudes are developed through one's own experience, they can also be modified by experience. Doughty and Long (2003) explain that the acquisition of a second language depends on a modification of attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour towards the members of the target language group. Indeed changing students' attitudes towards the English-speaking community and culture is necessary for success in learning English. In general, teachers, parents and the community in which students live need to take responsibility for changing students' attitudes. Students bring their own attitudes towards learning English to the classroom and if some of these attitudes are negative, teachers may play a major role in modifying these attitudes so that Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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learning will happen in the desired way. Cook (2008) states that the one of the goals of language teaching includes changing students' attitudes towards the target language culture. For improving student's attitudes, Cook suggests reinforcing teaching with models of successful second language users, other than the native speakers, such as, Gandhi, Einstein, Picasso, Marie Curie and Samuel Beckett. According to Cook, showing students that the world is full of successful second language learners will help students hold favourable attitudes towards learning the second language. In addition, the careful selection of tasks would help modify and improve the learners' attitudes towards learning English. Arnold (1999) conducted a questionnaire to measure the students' attitudes towards the foreign language after using humanistic activities over a two month period. The questionnaire reveals the following ways of change and improvement:

1. The students felt that learning a language was not so hard as before.
2. They also felt that the foreign language class was more enjoyable and fun than before.
3. Besides, they liked speaking in the foreign language more.

These findings prove that a teacher can change the students' attitudes for the better if he/she chooses suitable activities and ways of instruction. Morgan (1993) provides (as cited in Mantle-Bromley 1995) the following advice for a teacher who attempts to change the students' attitudes:

1. The classroom environment should be constantly varied and renewed.

2. Students need to struggle with complex and controversial material and reach their own conclusions, rather than be just the passive receivers of information.
3. Students should become aware of their own attitudes toward language and culture, and this, in turn, will help them to accept others.

Different ways and techniques can guarantee change and improvement in students' attitudes towards learning English. The teacher's role here is to find out the effective methods which will help foster positive attitudes in the students.

### **3.4. Attitude and language achievement**

Learning a new language is linked to the way in which the learner views the target language community and culture. Gardner's theory (as quoted in Dornyei 2003) states that the students' attitude towards the target language group will affect their success in learning that language. A student, who does not like the native speakers of English or views his/her own culture superior to the English speaking culture, can walk into a foreign language classroom and quickly generalize his dislikes; he or she will dislike school, teacher, book, homework, etc. Mantle-Bromley (1995) emphasizes that attitudes towards the teacher, the class, the language, speakers of the language, and cultures of the language have all been found to be significant in their relationship with both students' achievement and their intention to continue language study. Students can have either negative or positive attitudes towards learning English. If their attitudes are positive, they will show an interest in

learning English. On the other hand, if their attitudes are negative, they will dislike learning English or even feel reluctant learn to it. Thus it can be argued that attitudes towards learning a language influence performance in the language. Learning will be facilitated if the student holds positive attitudes towards the language and this, in turn, will affect the student performance in that language. In other words, if the attitude is positive, learning will be high whereas if the attitude is negative, in the sense that the learner' community and the target language community do not accept each other' way of life, learning will not be facilitated. Both negative and positive attitudes have a strong impact on the success of language learning. The correlation between attitude and achievement or proficiency in a language has been emphasized by many researchers. Dornyei (2003) asserts that attitude is as important as language aptitude for predicting the language achievement; he also confirms that positive attitudes towards the learning situation have consistently been associated with language achievement. Gardner (1985) notes that positive attitudes towards the target language and its people and culture lead to better achievement in language learning.

The viewpoints presented above help us argue that there is a strong correlation between students' attitudes towards learning a language and their achievement in that language. This might work in two interesting and opposing ways as shown in the figure below.



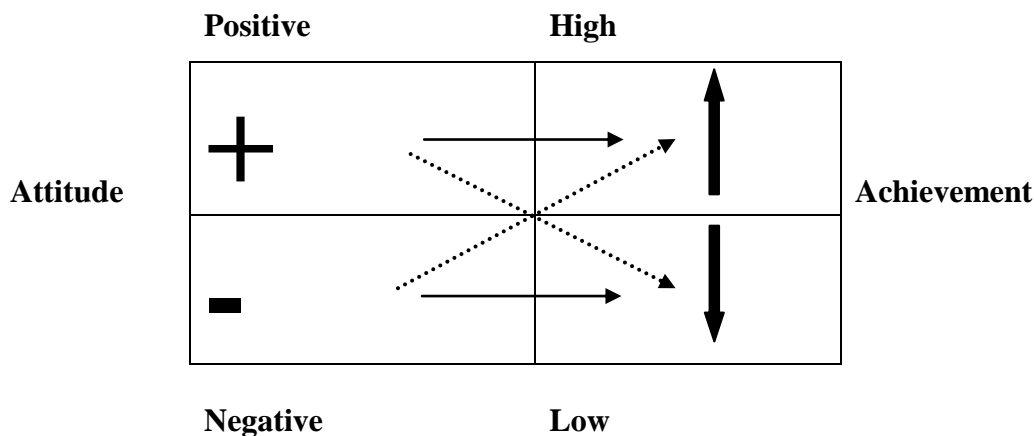


Figure 3.1. Correlation between learner attitudes towards English and achievement in English

The figure shows that if learners' attitudes are positive, their achievement in the language being studied will be high; whereas, if they hold negative attitudes, their achievement in the language will be low. However, the figure shows that the opposite is also possible; learners with negative attitudes might have high achievement and vice versa.

### 3.5. Overview of the chapter

The chapter has attempted to arrive at a theoretical framework from which the present study can be looked at. The construct of *attitude* has been explained. The components of attitude and the relation among them have been briefly presented. The ways to modify students' attitudes and the teacher's role in doing so were discussed. Finally, an attempt has been made to show how students' attitudes towards learning English can affect their achievement in English. In the following chapter the methodology of the study will be presented.

# CHAPTER IV

## METHODOLOGY

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#### **4.0. Introduction**

This chapter describes the setting in which the study is located. It builds the rationale for the study and establishes its relevance. It presents the assumptions and the hypothesis of the study. The aims and objectives of the study are explained. The tools used to elicit the data from the subjects are discussed; the rationale for the choice of the tools is also clarified. A detailed profile of the sample is presented. The scope and the limitations of the study are stated.

#### **4.1. The backdrop of the study**

The subjects of the study are the students of the Department of English in the Faculty of Education, Seiyun, Yemen. The faculty prepares and trains the students to become teachers in secondary and primary schools. The students join the department without taking any entrance exam or interview. Their admission is based on their secondary school final grade which should be a minimum of 70%. This grade stands for all subjects of the secondary school and not the English language alone. Moreover, this grade does not indicate learner's level of achievement or proficiency in English. Thus, students with low level of proficiency could get a high grade and vice versa.

In Yemen, usually, people are not encouraged to speak in English. The fact that Yemen is a monolingual and mono-cultural country can provide an explanation to such behaviour of the Yemeni people. Further, in the educational scenario, we see

that students cannot take independent decisions regarding the college in which to study or the specialization that they want to choose. Parents usually decide their children's future career; they want their children to study what they as parents perceive beneficial to their children in future whether their children really like it or not; for instance, parents might force their children to study English in order to help them get a better job. In addition, a friend also might convince the other friend to join the same department just for their friendships' sake.

Many Yemeni families live in abject poverty; this compels some of the students to find a part-time job. They, for instance, go to college in the morning and work as taxi drivers, shopkeepers or farmers in the evening. What makes matter worse is that many teachers of English are not qualified to teach; some of them speak Arabic during the English class. And, the teachers who are indeed qualified to teach English do not seem to possess the required proficiency in English. Thus all these factors and many more contribute in shaping the students' mindset towards learning English in one way or another. It therefore becomes important to investigate the attitudes with which the Yemeni students enter college to study English and how these, in turn, determine their proficiency in English.

#### **4.2. The rationale and the relevance of the study**

The researcher is one of the graduates of the Department of English in the Faculty of Education Seiyun in which the present study takes place; he has also taught in the college for two years. From his experience as both a student as well as a faculty member, the researcher has observed that the students of the Department

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of English rarely communicate in English to each other or to their teachers. The students tend to pay little attention to their studies and seem to be disinterested in doing their English class assignments. It is quite disheartening to notice students depend on the Internet café keepers to have their assignments done through copy-paste method from the internet. Furthermore, they generally do not do well in the exams, and so score low marks. Thus the fact remains that many of them graduate with low proficiency in English.

Research in language learning shows that there is a correlation between students' attitudes and their proficiency in English. Students with positive attitudes towards English are considered to be more proficient in English than those who hold negative attitudes. It is possible to argue that the low proficiency of the Yemeni students is an offshoot of their negative attitudes towards English and towards learning English. These attitudes could impact in two major ways: firstly, they will affect the students' level of interest and motivation in learning English, and this, in turn, will influence the students' general competence and proficiency in English; secondly, these trainee-teachers will be responsible for teaching generations of students in the future; hence whatever attitudes the would-to-be teachers hold and whatever competence of English they end up with would have a far-reaching consequences in that these would influence their future students' attitudes as well. Thus the issue of attitudes and their corresponding impact on learner proficiency emerges as a pertinent theme in the Yemeni context of second language learning and teaching and therefore forms the basis of the present study.

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### **4.3. Aims and objectives**

The study examines the attitudes of students towards learning English and attempts to identify the relationship between these attitudes and the students' achievement or proficiency in English. It explores into the attitudes of both male and female students, and therefore, an attempt is made to identify the gender differences in attitudes.

In order to achieve the aforementioned aim, the following objectives are formulated:

- 1) to investigate students' attitudes towards learning English and towards native speakers of English and their culture.
- 2) to identify the link between students' attitudes towards learning English and their achievement in English.
- 3) to explore into the measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English.
- 4) to examine the role of parents and society in encouraging students to learn English.

### **4.4. Assumptions and Hypothesis**

The study is based on the following assumptions:

- 1) The foreign language learners in Yemen have low proficiency in English.
- 2) There is a link between the proficiency level and the students' attitudes towards learning English.

Interestingly and conversely it can further be argued that the students' attitudes towards English might be negative since the proficiency level is low.

Based on the above assumptions, it is hypothesized that

- 1) The low proficiency level in English of the Yemeni students is a result of their negative attitudes towards English.
- 2) The students do not adopt effective measures to improve their proficiency in English.

#### **4.5. Scope of the study**

The present study focuses on students who study English at the tertiary level; the data is gathered from the Faculty of Education, Seiyun, Hadhramout, Yemen. The study focuses on the attitudes of students towards English and towards learning English. Teachers' attitudes towards teaching English, though worth investigating, do not fall under the purview of this study.

#### **4.6. Research tools: the questionnaire**

The only tool used for data collection is the questionnaire. The rationale for the choice of the tool and its design, and the administration of the tool is discussed below.

Questionnaire-based data collection was preferred over other means. The questionnaire is most easily administered and can be used to collect data from an unlimited number of subjects. In fact, the nature of data determines the tool and the method of collecting it. Seliger and Shohamy (1989:172 as quoted in Lafaye & Tsuda 2002) states that "Questionnaires are used mostly to collect data on Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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phenomena that are not easily observed, such as attitudes, motivation, and self-concepts". Therefore, since the present study deals with attitudes, the questionnaire seemed the most appropriate tool for data collection. A further argument in favour of the questionnaire is the large number of the subjects from whom the data was elicited. The high sensitivity of the topic of the present research was another factor that determined the tool; an interview might not have worked well here since the students may have appeared disinclined to answer questions of a sensitive nature frankly. Since the success of the investigation depends on the students' sincerity and openness in showing their real attitudes, anonymity becomes an issue that can be taken care of by a questionnaire. Furthermore, since the researcher works from India while the study is located in Yemen, a questionnaire proved to be the most appropriate tool.

The questionnaire of the present study was adapted from three questionnaires of previous studies: Gardner & Lambert. (1972), Gardner (1985) and Deshmukh (1960). Most of the questions require the students to respond on the basis of a Likert Type scale in five gradations: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree* and *strongly agree*. The vice-dean of the college who is also a teacher of English in the college and another assistant from the college administrative staff helped the researcher in administrating the questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 100 students; the majority of the subjects managed to fill them in the same day, but some of them were absent so the questionnaire had been sent to them to fill it at home. However, only 71 filled



copies of the questionnaire have been collected back from the students. Thus, the sample of the study is restricted to 71 students of which 41 are males and 30 are females.

#### **4.7. Profile of the sample**

The subjects of the study are the students who study English in the Faculty of Education, Seiyun, Yemen. The total number of the students in the Department of English is around 300 students distributed into four levels: freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior. The study focused on the first year students (the freshmen) whose total number exceeds 100 students. They are a mixture of both men and women whose average age is 21 years. It is considered worthwhile to explore into the freshmen's attitudes more than those of the other three levels since the former have recently finished their secondary school, and their attitudes before joining the college might affect their achievement in the college.

#### **4.8. Limitations**

Some limitations to the present study must be noted. First of all, the present study focused on the attitudes of the first-year students alone; it does not include the other three levels (i.e. second, third and fourth year students). It is possible that the students of the other three levels at the tertiary level hold different attitudes towards learning English. The study also limits itself to one college of education because of the constraint of time. It is quite possible that if many other colleges of education in Yemen had been included, the results of the study could have been more comprehensive. Another limitation of this study is its research tools; the

study used only the questionnaire to collect data from the students. Since the study has focused on the relationship between the students' attitudes towards learning English and their English language achievement, a test could have been conducted to measure the students' achievement and proficiency in English rather than allowing the students to self-evaluate their own achievement and proficiency in English.

#### **4.9. Overview of the chapter**

The chapter has discussed the methodology of the study. It has described the setting in which the study is located. The rationale and the relevance for the study have been established, and the assumptions and the hypothesis of the study have been presented. The scope of the study has been stated. The aims and objectives of the study have been explained. The tools used to elicit the data from the subjects have been discussed; the rationale for the choice of the tools has also been clarified. A detailed profile of the sample has been presented. Finally, the limitations of the study have been stated. The next chapter will present and analyse the data obtained for the study.

# CHAPTER V

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

## 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the data obtained for the study will be presented and analysed. The finding will be discussed. The data collected through the questionnaire has been presented in tabular and graphic forms.

### 5.1. Data presentation and interpretation

The questionnaire is divided into six sections. Section I elicits personal information: sex, level of study and age. Section II focuses on the students' attitudes towards learning English. It is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the students' present attitudes; it contains six items to which the students are asked to respond on the basis of a five-point scale: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree* and *strongly agree*. The second part in section II contains three questions dealing with the students' past attitudes, i.e. the attitudes held by students during the primary and secondary levels. Section III examines the students' attitudes and feelings towards using English. Section IV addresses the students' attitudes towards native speakers of English and English language culture. Section V deals with parental and societal encouragement. The three sections III, IV, and V include items with the same five-point scale mentioned above in the first part of section II. Section VI requests the students to self-evaluate their proficiency in English. It is divided into two parts: the first one comprises self-evaluation of one's proficiency in English and consists of eight items with a four-point scale: *excellent*, *good*, *fair*, and *poor*. The second part in section VI is an open-ended question which persuades the students to state whether they study more than, less than or

about as much as the others in their English class. Section VII addresses the measures adopted by the students to improve their proficiency in English and it contains four questions. Question 1 asks the learners to specify, in an average span of two months, how often they speak to the following people: classmates, teachers, native speakers of English and other foreigners who speak English. They are required to give a response based on a five-point scale: *never, very rarely, at least once a week, at least once a day, and many times a day*. Question 2 of the last section requires students to state whether they spend time to improve their English outside college. It invites the students to list the activities they do to help them learn English outside the classroom and to indicate how often they do each activity. Question 3 requires students to specify if they have taken a course in English outside the primary/secondary school or university and where they have studied it. The last question in the last section requires the learners to state the amount of time they spend doing self-study in English.

The findings of the questionnaire have been analysed and discussed at the end of every table or graph.

### 5.1.1. Personal information

The following table presents the profile of the subjects of the study.

**Table 1: Personal information**

Students	Level of study	Age average	Number	Total number of students
Male	I	21	41 = 57.7%	71
Female	I	21	30 = 42.3%	

The table above shows that the subjects include the first-level students. The average age of the students is 21 years which constitutes the normal age of the students who join the tertiary level in Yemen. The total number of the participants is 71; of which 41 are male students and 30 are female students; the former represents 57.7 per cent and the latter represents 42.3 per cent of the total group. The number of male students outweighs the female students here since the number of female students who join the tertiary level in Yemen is less; this so because most of the female students get married early and this hinders them from continuing their studies.

### 5.1.2. Students' Attitudes towards learning English

Table 2 and graph 1 below show the student's attitudes towards learning English after joining the college.

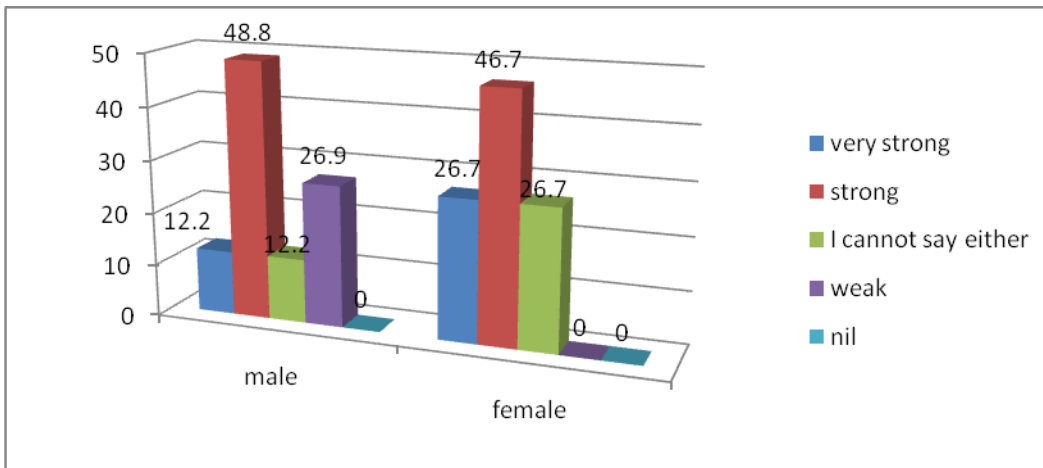
**Table 2: Present attitudes to learning English**

	Strongly disagree %		Disagree %		Neither Agree nor disagree %		Agree %		Strongly Agree %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. I really enjoy learning English.	0	0	9.8	10	0	13.3	68.3	73.3	22	3,3
2. Learning English is easy for me.	0	6.7	9.8	16.7	19.5	23.3	56.1	46.7	14.6	6.7
3. Learning English is very difficult for me.	19.5	13.3	41.5	33.3	19.5	26.7	12.2	13.3	7.3	13.3
4. Learning English is not important at all.	41.5	33.3	34.1	33.3	4.9	3.3	17.1	13.3	2.4	16.7
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.	2.4	6.7	4.9	3.3	17.1	0	65.9	70	9.8	20

6. I plan to make sure that my children learn English well.	2.4	0	7.3	10	2.4	3.3	70.7	66.7	17.1	20
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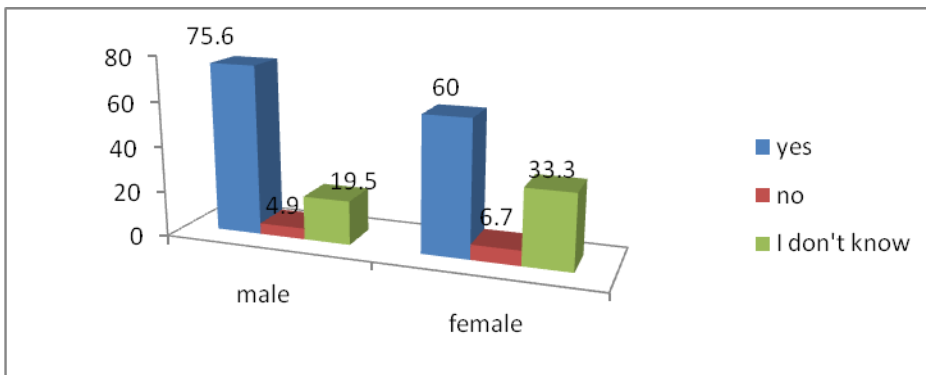
From the table above, it can be observed that the students - both males and females - are favourably disposed towards learning English. However, this probably is not to be interpreted as the students having a strong penchant for English since they state only *agree* and not *strongly agree*. The students also agree but not strongly that they will ultimately speak English very well and that they will help their children learn English very well. As far as the item *learning English is very difficult for me* is concerned, 41.5% of the male students and 33.3% of the female students disagree. From the data one can observe the fact that students tend to agree and disagree but not strongly to most of the items in the questionnaire; this can be interpreted as evidence to the conclusion that students' attitudes towards learning English is moderately positive. Another common observation, based on the students' responses to the questionnaire, is that there are no differences between male and female students in terms of their attitudes towards learning English. The following graph captures the students' attitudes towards learning English at the primary and secondary levels.

### Graph 1: Past attitudes to learning English



The graph shows that most students were interested in learning English in the primary and secondary school stages since 48.8% of the male students and 46.7% of the female students have strong interest; none of the students record his lack of interest in learning English. While 26% of the male students had weak interest in English, none of the female students had such weak interest. The reasons for the low interest in English expressed by some male students are recorded in the graph 2 below.

**Graph 2: English as favourite subject**



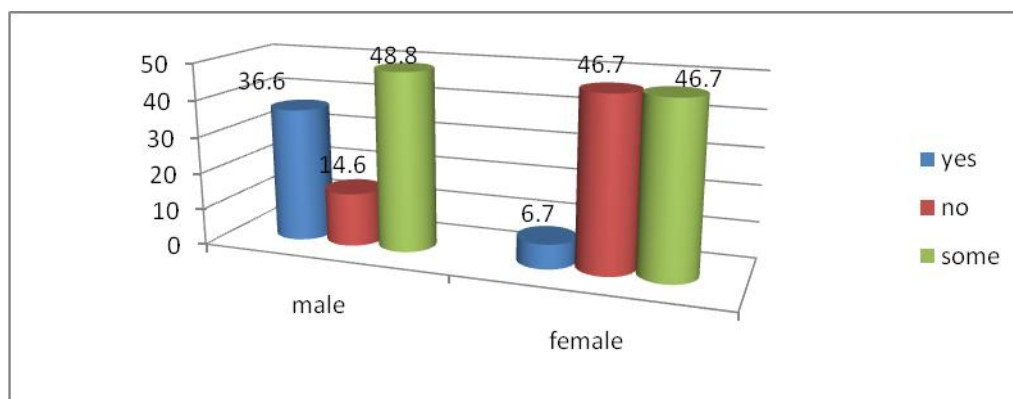
The graph shows that English was the favourite subject for the majority of the students at the primary and secondary levels (75.6% of the male students and 60% of the female students). Only very small number of them said English was not their favourite subject.



So far, for both male and female students English was their favourite subject and they were quite interested in learning it in the past. Consequently, their attitudes towards learning English before joining college were positive and these attitudes, as shown in table 2, remain positive after joining college.

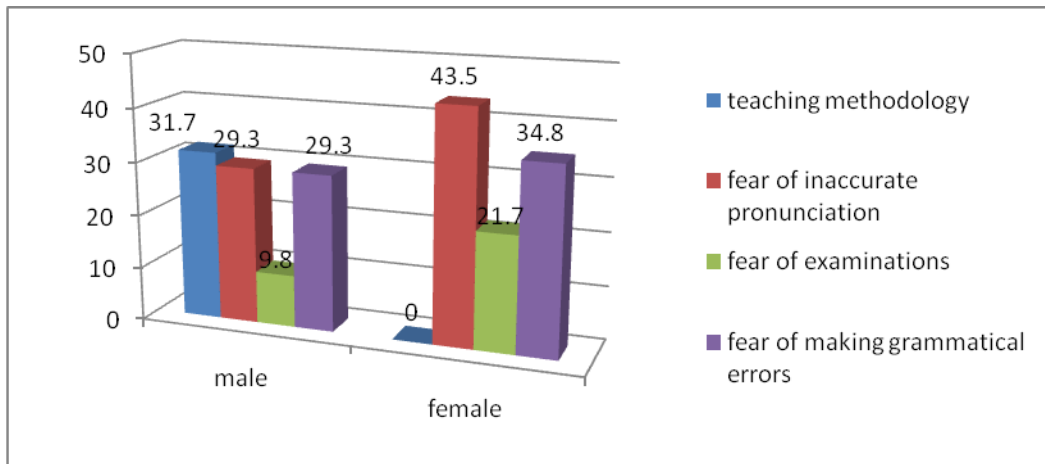
The following graph attempts to discover if the students encountered any unpleasant experiences while learning English at the primary and secondary levels.

**Graph 3: Unpleasant experiences while learning English**



The graph above shows that, in comparison with the 14.6% males, 46.7% of the female students never underwent unpleasant experiences. It is evident that male students experienced more unpleasant feelings while learning English in the past than female students. These unpleasant experiences could be attributed to the unfavourable teaching methodologies that the male students were exposed to in the past as shown in graph 4 below.

**Graph 4: the source(s) of unpleasant experience**



The graph reveals that the main source of unpleasant experiences for the male students is the classroom teaching methodologies. Interestingly, none of the female students associates their unpleasant experiences to this source. However, the major source of unpleasant experiences for the female students (53.5 %) is the fear of inaccurate pronunciation. Unpleasant experiences such as these need to be understood in the light of the fact that the Yemeni society is conservative, and therefore women tend to feel shy to speak in Arabic, let alone in English, in front of men. The common source of unpleasant experiences among both groups is the fear of making grammatical mistakes. As it will be shown in table 5 below, the fact that the Yemeni people discourage a person who speaks in English could be the cause of students' fear of making the grammatical mistakes when they speak in English. Furthermore, in the classroom situation, some teachers have nothing but scorn for the students who commit mistakes. Furthermore, the students feel afraid that the other students will laugh at them when they speak English as shown in table 3 below. Demoralizing responses such as scorn and ridicule seem to increase the students' fear of making grammatical mistakes.

### 5.1.3. Students' attitudes and feelings towards using English

In this section, the students' attitudes and feelings towards using English are investigated.

**Table 3 Attitudes and feelings towards using English**

	Strongly disagree %		Disagree %		Neither agree nor disagree %		Agree %		Strongly agree %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. I get nervous and confused when I speak English.	19.5	0	34.1	36.7	14.6	13.3	26.8	36.7	4.9	13.3
2. I generally find trying to communicate in English frustrating.	2.4	3.3	36.6	16.7	17.1	30	39	50	4.9	0
3. When I speak in English, the fear of making grammatical errors has a great influence on me.	9.8	3.3	19.5	10	14.6	26.7	51.2	46.7	4.9	13.3
4. I always feel that the other students speak English better than me.	7.3	3.3	26.8	10	19.5	30	39	43.3	7.3	13.3
5. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English	17.1	10	19.5	23.3	24.4	16.7	39	36.7	0	13.3
6. I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students.	12.2	16.7	17.1	36.7	26.8	20	41.5	23.3	2.4	3.3

As the table above shows, it is interesting to note that 36.7% of the female students show their agreement and another 36.7% of them show their disagreement to the first statement: *I get nervous and confused when I speak English*. It seems that the various personalities and the different innate natures of the female students differently influence their confidence to speak English. While 34.1% of the male students disagree with the statement above, 26.8% of them disagree with it. Compared to female students, the male students, to some extent, feel more confident when they speak English. Concerning the statement *I generally find trying to communicate in English frustrating*, half of the female students agree with it while 39% of the male students agree and 36.6% of them disagree. Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 196

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Again the nature and the personality of the male students play a great role in this matter. As revealed in graph 4 (see page 39), both male students and female students state that one of the sources of their unpleasant experiences while learning English is the fear of making grammatical errors; Further, table 3 above reveals that this fear has a great influence on students when they speak English (51.2% male and 46.7% female students). 39% male students state that other students speak English better than them and that others will laugh at them when they speak English. This further demotivates the students with low proficiency and there is a risk of these students remaining as poor language speakers for ever. Moreover, female students feel that there are many other students who speak English much better than they do (43.3 %) and they do share the concern that they will be laughed at when they speak English (36.7%). Thus it is clear that the fear that they will be laughed at arouses out of the notion that others are better language speakers than they are. A clear contrast appears between the genders when male students state that they feel embarrassed to speak English in front of others (41.5%), while female students do not share this feeling (36.7%). This is in sharp contrast to the reality that actually exists in the Yemeni society wherein women are thought of as more shy and embarrassed to speak in front of others than men.

#### 5.1.4. Students' Attitudes towards native speakers of English and their culture

The following table shows the attitudes the students hold towards the target language group and their culture.

**Table 4: Attitudes towards native speakers of English and their culture**

	Strongly disagree %		Disagree %		Neither agree nor disagree %		Agree %		Strongly agree %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F

1. I like the people who are native speakers of English.	4.9	6.7	9.8	3.3	2.4	0	68.3	80	14.6	10
2. Native English speakers are sincere and honest.	2.4	6.7	14.6	20	21.9	30	53.7	40	7.3	3.3
3. Native English speakers are very kind and generous people	2.4	3.3	19.5	10	34.1	40	34.1	43.3	9.8	3.3
4. I should learn English without paying attention to the cultures of English-speaking countries.	4.9	16.7	36.7	36.7	17.1	3.3	29.3	43.3	12.2	0
5. It is necessary to know the cultures of English-speaking countries in order to speak English	3.3	4.9	16.7	9.8	13.3	14.6	53.3	61	13.3	9.8
6. The Yemeni culture is superior to the cultures of the English-speaking countries.	9.8	10	14.6	36.7	26.8	10	39	30	9.8	13.3

From the table above, we can realize, in general, that both male and female students have positive attitudes towards the native speakers of English. The majority states that they like the native speakers of English (68.3% male and 80% females students); they also agree that the native speakers of English are sincere and honest (53.7% male and 40% female students) and that the native speakers of English are very kind and generous (34.1% male and 43.3 female students). As far as the cultures of the native speakers of English are concerned, , 43.4% female students, compared to 29.3% females, think they should learn English without paying attention to the cultures of English speaking countries. It seems that male the students are more inclined towards the notion of paying attention to the English-speaking culture than the female students. But concerning the necessity of knowing the English-speaking culture in order for someone to speak English,

the female students who agree outnumber the males; 61% females, compared to 53.3% males, agree with that opinion. Consequently, there is some evidence that female students realize the importance of understanding the English-speaking culture for them to acquire English well, but many of them prefer to learn English without paying attention to that culture. Moreover, compared to 14.6% male students, 36.7% of the females believe that the Yemeni culture is superior to cultures of the English-speaking countries and this give justification to the female students' preference to learn English without paying attention to the culture of English speaking community.

### 5.1.5. Parental and societal encouragement

Parents and society can greatly influence the students' attitudes towards learning English. The following table shows the degree of encouragement that students who learn English receive from their parents and from the people in general in the Yemeni society.

**Table 5: Parental and societal encouragement**

	Strongly disagree %		Disagree %		Neither agree nor disagree %		Agree %		Strongly agree %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. My parents really encourage me to study English	2.4	13.3	9.8	3.3	12.2	10	53.7	63.3	21.9	10
2. My parents show considerable interest in anything to do with my English courses.	9.8	3.3	19.5	20	19.5	23.3	29.3	50	21.9	33
3. My parents urge me to seek help from my teacher if I have problems with my English.	7.3	6.7	17.1	20	39	16.7	29.3	53.3	7.3	3.3

4. Yemeni people think it is important to speak English.	2.4	6.7	19.5	23.3	24.4	26.7	39	33.3	14.6	10
5. Yemeni people discourage a person who speaks in English.	4.9	10	26.8	33.3	12.2	6.7	46.4	43.3	9.8	6.7
6. If I use English I will be praised by my family, relatives and friends.	2.4	6.7	12.2	16.7	21.9	20	46.4	50	17.1	6.7

The table shows that the parents of both male and female students encourage them to study English and to seek help from their teachers if they have problems with their English. The parents show considerable interest in anything to do with their English. Their family, relatives and friends praise them when they use English. It is interesting to note here that only relatives and friends encourage students to speak in English, while most Yemeni people who are not relatives or friends discourage a person who speaks in English. Further, the table shows that female students (63.3%) receive more encouragement from their parents than male students (53.7%). This is so because, in the Yemeni society, female students tend to be diffident and introvert and to help them overcome these stumbling blocks parents encourage them. Male students who generally exhibit extrovert personalities do not require so much encouragement as their female counterparts. However, many students (46.4% male and 43.3% female) state that the Yemeni people discourage them when they speak English though they (the Yemeni people) realize the importance of speaking English. The monolingual nature of the Yemeni society can be cited as a reason for this contradiction. Yemeni people consider those who speak English among themselves as peculiar since Arabic is the only language spoken by people in Yemen.

#### **5.1.6. Learner proficiency in English**

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Students are given the chance to evaluate their own proficiency in English; the following table presents the results of the students' self-evaluation.

**Table 6: Self-evaluation of one's proficiency**

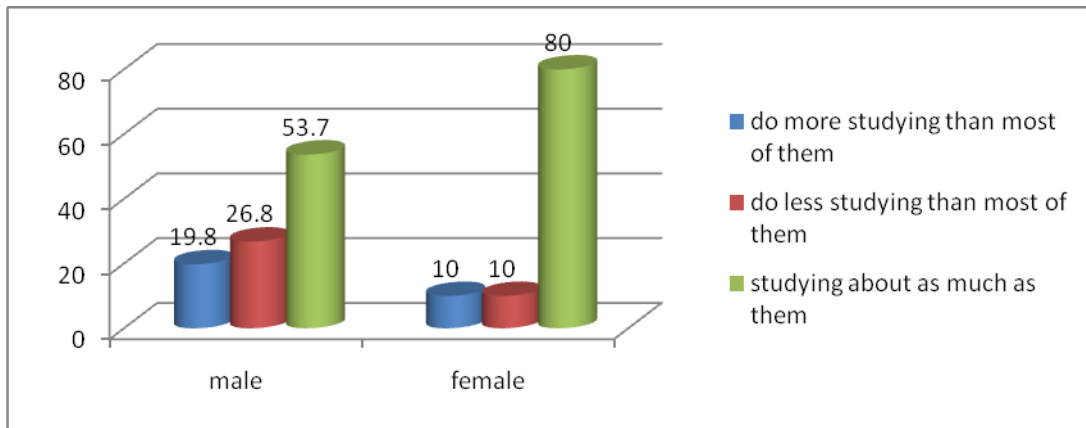
	Excellent %		Good %		Fair %		poor %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. How do you evaluate your proficiency in English?	2.4	13.3	51.2	43.3	46.4	43.3	0	0
2. So far how do you compare your overall proficiency in English to other students in your class?	9.8	3.3	61	63.3	21.9	26.7	7.3	6.7
3. By the end of your BA English course what do you expect your proficiency level to be?	26.8	73.3	58.5	20	14.6	3.3	0	3.3
4. My ability to read English is	19.5	36.7	53.7	46.7	21.9	13.3	4.9	3.3
5. My ability to write in English is	14.6	40	56.1	43.3	26.8	16.7	2.4	0
6. My vocabulary knowledge in English is	2.4	13.3	48.8	56.7	43.9	23.3	4.9	6.7
7. My ability to speak English is	19.5	10	31.7	43.3	46.4	46.7	2.4	0
8. My listening comprehension in English is	0	6.7	41.5	46.7	41.5	36.7	17.1	10

From the data presented above, it is evident that both the male and female students hold positive attitudes towards learning English and towards English-speaking people and their culture. In addition, as shown in table 6, the majority of the students evaluate their own proficiency in English as good or fair and some evaluate themselves as excellent, while none of them said they have low proficiency in English. This finding indicates that the students evaluate themselves as learners with a mid-level. In comparison with the other classmates, 63.3 % of the female students and 61% of the male students evaluate



their overall proficiency in English as good. Another encouraging factor is that most of the students especially the female students have great expectation that their English will be for the better by the end of their BA English course. As far as the skills of English and vocabulary knowledge in English are concerned, majority of the students state that their writing and reading skills range between excellent and good, while their listening comprehension, speaking ability and vocabulary knowledge range between good and fair. As a matter of fact, students think that their listening ability is not as good as their abilities in the other skills since none of the male students and very few female students (6.7%) evaluate their listening comprehension as excellent. Regarding the speaking skill, the students do not find enough opportunity to practise it since they live in a monolingual society and also because Yemeni people tend to discourage a person who speaks English. Moreover, unless the students use the vocabulary they learned when they speak in English, their vocabulary knowledge will not improve. There is some evidence that the students are better in reading and writing than in listening and speaking, since they can easily find some books to read and they can practise writing on their own without being discouraged or disturbed by others. The following graph attempts to capture the students' own perceptions of their efforts to learn English.

**Graph 5: Students' perceptions of their efforts to learn English compared to others**



It can be observed from the graph above that the majority of the students, especially the male students, seem to think that they work as hard as their peers. This finding supports the finding above (see table 6) that the students think that their level of proficiency is as good as others in their English class.

#### 5.1.7. Measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English

The following data reveals the measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English.

**Table 7: Frequency of speaking in English to others in a two-month period**

	Never %		Very rarely %		At least 1/week %		At least 1/day %		Many times daily %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	a. classmates	4.9	3.3	58.5	40	17.1	23.3	4.9	23.3	14.6
b. teachers	14.6	23.3	53.7	26.7	4.9	16.7	7.3	16.7	19.5	16.7
c. native speakers of English	34.1	66.7	34.1	13.3	12.2	10	9.8	-	9.8	10
d. other foreigners who speak English	51.2	50	19.5	33.3	17.1	13.3	4.9	-	7.3	-
e. others :_friends_____	2.4	-	2.4	-	4.9	-	7.3	-	2.4	-

The table shows that most students in an average span of two months either never speak or very rarely speak to others; 58.5% male students and 40% female students state that they very rarely speak to their classmates. Female students speak to their classmates at least once a week (23.3%) and at least once a day (23.3%). As far as speaking to the teachers is concerned, male students state that they very rarely speak to their teachers (53.7% ), while female students confess that they never speak (23.3%) or very rarely (26.7% ) speak to their teachers. 66.7% of the female students compared to 34.1% of the male students said they never speak to native speaker of English. This finding that the female students never speak in English to the native speakers of English along with the finding mentioned in table 3 above that female students get nervous when they speak in English could be attributed to the psychological and social nature of women in the Yemeni society; Yemeni women are rather shy and do not attempt to interact with other Yemeni people, especially the opposite sex, let alone the foreigners. In addition, 51.2 % of the female students and 50% of the male students never speak to other foreigners who speak English. It appears that the students feel more comfortable to speak in English with one another than with teachers and foreigners. Thus the table above shows that the students very rarely speak in English to others. The fact that the students are afraid of making grammatical mistakes; or the fear that others will laugh at them when they speak in English (table 3); and that the Yemeni people discourage the person who speak in English (table 5) could be the main sources which force the students to hardly ever speak in English to others, (i.e. classmates, teachers and foreigners).

**Table 8: Number of students who try to improve their English**

Male %	Female %
--------	----------

100	100
-----	-----

100% of the male and female students responded in the affirmative to the question: *Do you spend time trying to improve your English outside of the college?* The following table shows the activities the students do outside the classroom to help them learn English and the frequency with which students do these activities.

**Table 9: Activities done by students to improve their English**

Activities	Sex	percentage number of students	Frequency						
			daily	once a week	twice a week	3 times a week	4 times a week	5 times a week	once a month
a. Reading books, magazines, newspapers, stories	M	80.5	31.7	2.4	7.3	29.3	-	-	9.7
	F	73	23.3	10	13.3	20	-	-	6.7
b. Speaking with friends in English	M	73.2	31.7	4.8	7.3	14.6	-	2.4	12.2
	F	53.3	26.7	-	3.3	16.7	-	6.7	-
c. Watching programmes in English on TV	M	53.7	36.6	2.4	-	12.2	-	-	2.4
	F	80	46.7	3.3	6.7	13.3	-	3.3	6.7
d. Watching films	M	22	22	-	-	-	-	-	-
	F	30	10	6.7	3.3	6.7	-	3.3	-
e. Preparing and studying for the class	M	14.7	12.2	2.4	-	-	-	-	-
	F	43.3	30	6.7	3.3	-	-	3.3	-
f. Listening to CDs, radio, cassettes ...etc	M	29.3	14.6	2.4	7.3	2.4	-	2.4	-
	F	26.7	20	3.3	3.3	-	-	-	-
g. Practising writing skill	M	36.5	14.9	2.4	2.4	12.2	-	4.9	-
	F	30	6.7	-	-	6.7	3.3	3.3	-
h. Memorizing words	M	7.3	7.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
	F	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
i. Learning new vocabulary from dictionary	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	F	6.7	3.3	-	-	-	-	3.3	-
j. Studying grammar	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

	F	3.3	-	-	-	3.3	-	-	-
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The table shows that the activities done most frequently by the students to improve their English are reading books, magazines, newspapers, stories; speaking with friends in English; watching programmes on TV and practising writing skill. Students prefer reading books because (as shown in table 6) their ability to read and write in English ranges between excellent and good. The finding that many students prefer to speak to friends as another method of improving their English correlates with the finding in table 7 that the student prefer to speak English to the classmates rather than to their teachers or foreigners. The findings in table 9 indicate that the students bring the opportunities available in their own environment into play. Almost every house in Yemen has a satellite dish which brings English channels like BBC and CNN. Besides, every college of education contains a library with valuable English books and local newspapers written in English. However, as it can be observed from table 9 above, compared to the female students (43.3%), the number of the male students (14.7%) who spend time outside the classroom studying or preparing for their English class is relatively less. The female students, thus, are considered more committed to their studies than the male students. Regarding language skills, listening is least attended to the students; just 26.7% of the male students and 36% of the female students try to improve their listening ability. This finding is consonance with the statement presented in table 6 that none of the male students and very few female students evaluate their listening comprehension as excellent.

**Table 10: Students who took extra English course(s) outside school or university**

Male %		Female %	
Yes	No	Yes	No
46.3	53.6	30	70

The table shows that 46.3 % of the male students and 30% of the female students have taken extra courses in English outside school and university. The number of the male students outweighs the number of the female students in this respect since some female students, especially those who live in the suburbs, find it difficult to join English language centres in the downtown.

**Table 11: Places for taking courses in English**

Sex	Language teaching centres %	Tuition %	Other %
M	46.3	0	0
F	30	0	0

The table shows that the students have taken courses in English in language teaching centres; none of them has taken tuition in English since tuitions are uncommon in Yemen. The fact that many students have not joined the English language centres could be ascribed to the financial situation of the students and the high fees of the courses offered by the English language centres.

**Table 12: Time allotted for self-study**

sex	1 hr per week	2 hrs per week	3 hrs per week	4 hrs per week	5 hr per week	6 hrs per week	7 hrs per week	10 hrs per week	12 hrs per week	15 hr per week
M	24.4	4.9	4.9	36.6	-	-	22	2.4	2.4	2.4
F	26.7	-	3.3	36.7	3.3	3.3	26.7	-	-	-

The table shows that the average time of self-study done by the students – both males and females- is around 6 and 4 hours per week respectively. The fact that students do allot time for self-study can be interpreted as an evidence of their interest and positive attitudes towards learning English.

## **5.2. Overview of the chapter**

This chapter has presented and analysed the data obtained for the study. It has also discussed the findings of the study. The findings have helped to find answers to the questions raised by the present research. The implications of these findings will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION





## **6.0. Introduction**

This chapter will summarize the findings of the study. It will discuss the implications of these findings for teaching and learning in the Yemeni context. Suggestions for further research in this area will also be offered.

## **6.1. Findings**

### **6.1.1 Students' attitudes towards English and towards learning English**

The attitudes of both male and female students towards English and learning English have been compared. Students stated their attitudes towards English and learning English before and after joining the college.

- There are no significant differences between the male and the female students in term of their attitudes towards learning English.
- Before and after joining the college, the students were interested in learning English and English was their favourite subject at the secondary and primary levels as well.

### **6.1.2. Students' attitudes towards the use of English**

Students identified some aspects in English as posing problems for them to cope with. They also attempted to spell out where their apprehensions emerged from.

- The main source of fear among the male students was the methods of teaching adopted by teachers of English, while none of the female students associated their fear to that source.
- As far as the female students are concerned, the major source of fear is the fear of inaccurate pronunciation.
- The fear of making grammatical mistakes was experienced by both male and female students; as a result, this kind of fear greatly influenced their ability to speak English.
- For the male students, the methods of teaching adopted by teachers of English at the primary and secondary levels triggered higher degree of anxiety and lower level of interest in learning English.

### **6.1.3. Attitudes towards native speakers of English and their culture**

Students expressed their attitudes towards English speakers and their culture, as well their own Yemeni culture. Females showed an interesting disposition towards the English language culture.

- Both male and female students have positive attitudes towards the native speakers and the English culture.
- Though the female students realize that learning English requires understanding the target language culture, many of them prefer to learn English without paying attention to the culture of the English speaking communities. This disposition stems from the female students belief that

the Yemeni culture is superior to the cultures of the English-speaking countries.

#### **6.1.4. Parental and societal encouragement**

Students have stated the extent to which their parents encourage them to learn English. They also pointed out how the Yemeni society reacts towards people who speak in English.

- Despite the fact that the Yemeni people realize the importance of speaking English, they tend to discourage people who speak in English among them.
- Female students receive more encouragement from their parents than male students.

#### **6.1.5. The link between student's attitudes and their achievement in English**

Students evaluated their own achievement and proficiency in English. They also listed the activities that they engage themselves in to improve their proficiency in English. Their attitudes towards learning English and their achievement proficiency in English have been compared.

- There is a correlation between students' achievement in English and their attitudes towards learning English.

- In order to improve their proficiency in English, students use effective measures such as reading books and newspapers, watching programmes in English on TV etc.
- Students perceive that they possess a reasonably good proficiency in English.
- The students hold the opinion that they have better proficiency in reading and writing than in listening and speaking.
- The students feel more comfortable to speak in English with one another than with teachers and foreigners. Consequently, many students do attempt to speak in English to their friends in order to achieve better proficiency in English.

## **6.2. Implications**

The study proves that the students' attitudes towards English and towards learning English are positive; thus, if students get low grades in exams or seem inattentive to their studies, other factors like students' attitudes towards teachers, curriculum, and methods of teaching could be the causes of such phenomena. The study reveals that: the fear of making grammatical mistakes; the discouragement of Yemeni people for those who speak in English; and the fear of being ridiculed by their friends for their mistakes negatively affect students' achievement in English. Consequently, the role of teachers and parents becomes vital to help students overcome these impeding apprehensions. Both parents and teachers should

encourage the students to speak in English and spread awareness among them that learning cannot happen without making mistakes. The study also reveals that the students prefer to speak in English to friends rather than to teachers. This finding has two implications: a) the teachers should build a good rapport with their students so that the students feel comfortable to interact with them and b) they should encourage the students to interact more with each other in English in and outside the classroom. Since students pay little attention to the listening skill, teachers need to find interesting materials catering to the students' level which will help them to improve their listening ability. Moreover, the study shows that students think that their proficiency in English is as good as the proficiency of others in their class. Such a perception can have many positive effects in the classroom. For instance teachers can strengthen the rapport among the students and thereby create a comfortable classroom atmosphere wherein meaningful learning can take place.

### **6.3. Suggestions for further research**

Further research is possible in this area. Since the present study has examined the attitudes of students towards English and towards learning English, a study of the students' attitudes towards teachers, curriculum and classroom teaching methodologies could be conducted. Exploring into this area could reveal many critical issues regarding understanding and improving learners' achievement in English at tertiary level. Further, a study similar to the present one can be carried

out across the English-major students in all colleges in Yemen. In addition, since Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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the present study restricts itself to the tertiary level, exploring the same issue at the primary and secondary levels could lead to better understanding of many factors concerning teaching and learning English in the Yemeni context.

#### **6.4. Overview of the chapter**

In this chapter, a summary of the findings of the study has been presented. The implications of the study in the present context have been discussed. Finally suggestions for further research in the area have been provided.

# APPENDIX

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Dear student

This questionnaire is administered as part of the research undertaken by Hassan Saeed Ba-Udhan (MA TESL, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India) on ‘Impact of Students’ Attitudes on their Achievement in English: A Study in the Yemeni Context’. **This is not a test.** It has no right or wrong answers. You do not need to write your name on the survey. The information obtained through the questionnaire will be kept confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. The questionnaire will not be shown to anyone in your college except the director of the research project. Please read the statements and the questions carefully and answer them frankly. The success of the investigation depends on your sincerity and openness in filling the questionnaire. Your cooperation is solicited and will be greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

Thank you

Yours sincerely  
Hassan

## Questionnaire

Place a check mark [  $\checkmark$  ] to the statement which applies to you.

### Section I: Personal Information

1.	Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> female.		
2.	Level of study	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st year	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd year	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd year	<input type="checkbox"/> 4th year.
3.	Age:	<input type="checkbox"/> 21	<input type="checkbox"/> 22	<input type="checkbox"/> 24	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify) .....

### Section II: Attitudes towards learning English

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

#### Part 1: Present attitudes

1.	I really enjoy learning English.					
2.	Learning English is easy for me.					
3.	Learning English is very difficult for me.					

4. Learning English is not important at all.					
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.					
6. I plan to make sure that my children learn English well.					

Part 2: Past attitudes

- In your primary/secondary school age, your interest in English was:  
 very strong       strong       cannot say either       weak       nil
- Was English language your favorite subject in the primary/secondary school?  
 Yes       No       I don't know
- Did the English learning in your primary/secondary school give you any unpleasant experience?  
 Yes       No       some

If your answer is "yes" or "some", the source(s) of unpleasant experience were:

- teaching methodology     
 fear of inaccurate pronunciation     
 fear of examinations     
 fear of making grammatical errors

Others? Please write in the space provided below

---



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Section III: Attitudes and feelings towards using English

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

1. I get nervous and confused when I speak English.					
2. I generally find trying to communicate in English frustrating.					
3. When I speak in English, the fear of making grammatical errors has a great influence on me.					
4. I always feel that the other students speak English better than me.					
5. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English					
6. I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students.					

Section IV: Attitudes towards native speakers of English and their culture.

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

1. I like the people who are native speakers of English.					
2. Native English speakers are sincere and honest.					
3. Native English speakers are very kind and generous people					
4. I should learn English without paying attention to the cultures of English-speaking countries.					

5. It is necessary to know the cultures of English-speaking countries in order to speak English					
6. The Yemeni culture is superior to the cultures of the English-speaking countries.					

Section V: Parental and societal encouragement

Strongly agree  
 Agree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

1. My parents really encourage me to study English					
2. My parents show considerable interest in anything to do with my English courses.					
3. My parents urge me to seek help from my teacher if I have problems with my English.					
7. Yemeni people think it is important to speak English.					
4. Yemeni people discourage a person who speaks English.					
5. If I use English I will be praised by my family, relatives and friends.					

Section VI: Learner proficiency in English

i. Self-evaluation of one's proficiency

poor  
 Fair  
 Good  
 Excellent

1. How do you evaluate your proficiency in English?				
2. So far how do you compare your overall proficiency in English to other students in your class?				
3. By the end of your BA English course what do you expect your proficiency level to be?				
4. My ability to read English is				
5. My ability to write in English is				
6. My vocabulary knowledge in English is				
7. My ability to speak English is				
8. My listening comprehension in English is				

ii. Compared to the others in my English class, I think I :

- do more studying than most of them
- do less studying than most of them.
- study about as much as most of them.

Section VII : Measures adopted by students to improve their proficiency in English

1. In an average span of two months, how frequently do you speak in English to the following people?

Never	Very rarely	At least 1/week	At least 1/day	Many times daily
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a. classmates				
b. teachers				
c. native speakers of English				
d. other foreigners who speak English				
e. others : _____				

2. Do you spend time trying to improve your English outside of the college?  
 Yes       No

If yes,

List the activities that you do outside the classroom that help you learn English - For example, studying or preparing for class, other reading or writing, watching TV, speaking with friends, watching films, etc. Also, list how often you do each activity- For example: one hour a day; two times a week; once a month.

Activity	Frequency
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____
e. _____	_____
f. _____	_____

3. Have you studied English outside primary/secondary school or university?  
 Yes       No

If you answered 'yes', where did you study English?

- language teaching centres       tuition       other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Outside the classroom, How much amount of time do you spend doing self-study in English.  
 (Excluding all that is given by teachers.)

- four hours per week.       one hour per week.  
 seven hours per week       none of these  
 give approximate number of hours per week: \_\_\_\_ hours.

Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions thoughtfully.

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