

Non-English Majored Students' Attitudes towards Learning English for Specific Purposes

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Abstract: *This paper examines economics majors' attitudes towards learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at a university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Specifically, it investigates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of their attitudes towards ESP. Gender difference is also out into consideration. Data were collected from a questionnaire administered on a total of 246 non-English majored students. The results showed that the respondents had positive attitudes towards learning ESP, in cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. Moreover, the findings also indicated here was no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards learning ESP by gender. The study provides a theoretical basis regarding students' attitudes towards learning ESP in all directions.*

Keywords: ESP, Gender Difference, Language Learning, Non-English Majored Students

1. Introduction

English has not been only one of the most popular languages in the world but also the official language in international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO and UNESCO, etc. In 2016, English was proclaimed to have been the most powerful language by The Power Language Index (comparing the usefulness level of languages around the world). In Vietnam, many decisions and circulars related to teaching English have been put in force, and the demand for teaching and learning English is rising, not only for general communication purposes but also for specific purposes. Courses of English for specific purposes (ESP) in universities are receiving a lot of attention.

However, teaching and learning ESP in Vietnam have not been effective (Nguyen & Pham, 2016). This can be the result of a variety of factors, including motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, intelligence, age, personalities, etc. (Gardner, 1960& Lehmann, 2006; cited in Shams, 2008). Learner attitude is recognized as one of the most significant factors towards learning a language (Fakeye, 2010). Kara (2009) believes that positive attitude leads learners to positive behaviors towards studying, absorbing themselves in learning, and attempting to learn more. Such students are also noticed to show more enthusiasm in problem-solving, acquiring helpful things for life, and being engaged emotionally. Scholarly literature also reveals that little to no empirical research on learner attitude and gender difference in their attitude towards ESP has been documented. An in-depth investigation into learner attitude as one of the most dominant factors for success or failure in learning ESP at a university seems imperative. More specifically, taking into account its three aspects, including cognitive, emotional and behavioral ones, the current study examines economics students' attitudes towards learning ESP in a public university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Moreover, the research explores whether there is any difference in attitudes towards learning ESP between male and female students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Attitude

Attitude has been defined differently by many researchers. Gardner (1985) considered attitude as an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred from the basis of a person's belief and opinion about the referent. He also added that attitude was thus connected to the individual's value or belief and encouraged or discouraged the choices made in all fields of activity, whether academic or informal.

Other scholars made very short definitions for the term. In Smith's (1971) perspective, attitude is a comparatively lasting organization of beliefs around an object or a situation, predisposing one to react to some preferential manner. Attitude is moderately lasting as it is learnt and it can be unlearned; and since it is learnt, it can be taught. To Crystal (1997), attitudes towards languages are the feelings about one's language and the languages of the others while Al-Mamun et al. (2012) consider attitude as a psychological construct defining a particular behavior. Ajzen (2005, cited in Dehbozorgi, 2012) states that attitude, like any trait of personality, is a directly unobserved hypothetical construct which must be inferred from measurable responses reflecting and evaluating negative or positive attitudes.

2.2. Aspects of Attitude

Attitude can be studied from three diverse dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral ones. Each aspect has different traits to yield results in terms of language attitude.

The cognitive element indicates the beliefs, viewpoints or thoughts about the objects of the attitude (Wenden, 1991). That means it represents any knowledge, fact and information, related to an attitudinal subject, such as the beliefs, thoughts and values of a language (Rajecki, 1982). The cognitive attitude could be divided into four phases, consisting of linking the prior knowledge with the new one, creating new knowledge, checking new knowledge and putting it into practice.

The emotional factor is negative or positive comments about the language (Baker, 1992; Rajecki, 1982). The so-called affective component involves learners' emotions or feelings towards an object, including likes or dislikes (Wenden, 1991) and influences their attitudes or perspectives towards the target language (Choy & Troudi, 2006).

The behavioral facet of attitude shows the way one behaves and reacts in specific circumstances. In other words, the behavioral element relates to the trend to perform specific learning behaviors (Wenden, 1991). In Rajecki's (1982) perception, this aspect indicates the behavioral intention or the possible acts for the language.

Despite a slight difference in addressing the second element, these researchers believe that these three aspects are similar and have an interrelated influence. As a result, the current study investigates students' attitudes towards learning ESP in these three attitudinal variables.

2.3. Attitude in Language Learning

Attitudes are believed to be one of the most important factors that have an influence on learning a language (Fakeye, 2010) and on language performance (Visser, 2008), so linguistic behavior can be explained by language attitude. Weinburgh (1998) believes that such behaviors as choosing and reading a book or speaking in a foreign language are affected by attitudes toward learning. Generally speaking, attitudes are believed to have determined whether or not learners will be able to learn about the language details. That means achievement in the target language is subject to both learners' intellectual capacity and their attitude towards language learning. As a result, language learning should be approached mainly as a social and psychological phenomenon rather than as a solely academic one and relies primarily on learner's motivation and attitude towards learning the target language (Padwick, 2010). Having the same viewpoint with Padwick, Gardner and Lambert (1972) or Abidin et al. (2012) also conclude that students' ability to acquire a language is impacted both by the mental competence or language skills and by the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards that language. Furthermore, they confirm that attitude can boost the language learning process, affecting the nature of students' beliefs and behaviors towards the language, its culture and community, which will identify their tendency to master that language. In other words, the restoration, preservation or death in the life of a language is fundamentally governed by people's attitudes towards that language (Baker, 1992).

In short, since language learning is closely related to learners' attitudes towards that language, De Bot et al. (2005) emphasize that language researchers, teachers and learners should acknowledge that learners' high motivation and positive attitude facilitate the second language learning process.

2.4. Previous Studies on Learners' Attitudes towards Learning English

Since attitude is among the key factors for success and failure in language learning, various research on attitude has been conducted (Alhmani, 2007; Ghazali et al., 2009). Abidin et al. (2012) examined 180 students in the three study years from three specializations of Basic Sciences, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences in Libya. Their attitudes towards learning English were considered in behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects based on the demographic information, such as gender, field and year of study. The results indicated that the learners had negative attitudes towards learning English. Furthermore, on the demographic profile, significant attitudinal differences were found in gender and major, except year of study.

A study on students' attitudes towards English language learning was conducted at a university in Vietnam by Nguyen and Pham (2020). The data from a questionnaire on 89 undergraduates indicated that the students had average positive attitude towards English and interestingly there were no attitudinal differences by gender. However, the attitudes towards English of the three majors are not similar, and tourism students' attitude was slightly lower than that of the students majoring in office administration and medicine.

Gender differences were also taken into consideration in Ma (2014), Chan (2018) and Wayar (2017) in the contexts of six main universities in China, some secondary schools in Hong Kong, and four secondary schools in Nigeria. These studies showed that the female learners held a more positive attitude to EFL than the male ones. In contrast, Mtawaa (2017) proves that male Saudi Arab students have more positive attitudes towards English than their female counterparts. However, there is no significant difference between male and female students' attitudes towards English language learning in Shan and Li's study on 44 graduates from different majors of a university in China (2020).

The studies in different contexts showed different results about students' attitudes. However, the focus of these studies mostly was on the students' attitudes towards general English, and there is still a gap for thorough investigations into the ones towards ESP learning.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to measure students' attitudes towards learning ESP in terms of behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects. It is also conducted to find out gender difference in their attitudes towards learning ESP.

3.2. Research Questions

To reach the above-mentioned aims, two research questions are posed:

1. *What are the attitudes of Economics students towards learning ESP in terms of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects?*
2. *Is there any difference in attitudes towards learning ESP between male and female students?*

3.3. Research Design

The current study employed a descriptive design and focused on analyzing data collected via an adapted questionnaire. The respondents were asked to provide the answers to all the items in the questionnaire honestly, showing their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes towards learning ESP.

3.4. Instrument

The measuring instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire on attitudes towards learning ESP. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, as follows:

- (1) The first section contained four demographic and personal questions about the student's name, class, major, gender, year of birth, duration of learning English;
- (2) The second section consisted of 30 statements followed a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1 (strongly disagree) to Level 5 (strongly agree). Some items were adjusted from the survey instrument developed by Rukh (2014) and Mamun (2012). Other items were adapted from the Attitude Test employed by Boonrangsiet al. (2004), the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery designed by Gardner (1985) and a Behavioral, Cognitive, Emotional Attitude questionnaire (Abidin et al., 2012). The left relied on the researchers' experience as ESP teachers.

In order to avoid misunderstanding due to students' limited English competence, the questionnaire was designed in both English and Vietnamese.

The internal consistency of this scale using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS Statistics shows that the reliability coefficient is 0.954, which indicates a high level of the reliability of the questionnaire to be used for this research.

3.5. Respondents

The respondents in the current study were 246 non-English majored students. Most of them had started to learn English at grade 3 or grade 6. They majored in Accounting and Auditing; Finance and Banking; International Business; Business Administration; Marketing; Commercial Business; International Business; Economics; Agricultural Economics, and Environmental and Resource Economics at a university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, and they studied ESP as a compulsory subject. Their median age was 21. Fifty-seven of the respondents were male and 189 of them were female. At the time of data collection, they had finished their ESP classes. Therefore, they had enough experience in learning ESP to express their attitudes clearly and accurately.

3.6. Data Analysis

Firstly, statistical and coding methods were used to analyze the quantitative data. Then, the synchronized data were processed by SPSS software to identify the reliability of questionnaire and the level of students' attitudes.

4. Results

4.1. The Respondents' Attitudes towards Learning ESP

The respondents' general attitudes: The respondents' language attitude was considered to identify their traits in general and in three diverse dimensions. The collected results are presented in Table 4.1 and Chart 4.1.

Table 4.1: the respondents' general attitudes towards learning ESP

General attitudes	N	Min	Max	Mean (M)
From S1 to S30	246	3.268	4.557	3.778

As presented in Table 4.1, the result of the descriptive analysis shows that the overall mean score of the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP is high ($M_{GA} = 3.778$; $SD = .56362$) in comparison with scale 3 in the five-point scale. Moreover, the level of significance ($p = .000$) shows that there is a significant difference between the mean score of general attitudes and the average mean score, higher

than the accepted one. This result reveals that the respondents had positive attitudes towards learning ESP. Specifically all three different attitudinal aspects were examined in this study. The results are presented in the chart below.

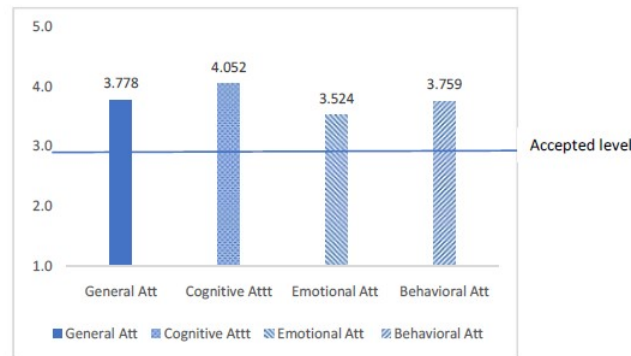


Chart 4.1: Aspects of the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP

The chart shows that the mean scores of the three attitudinal aspects, including cognitive, emotional and behavioral ones are high ($M_{CA} = 4.052$, $M_{EA} = 3.524$, and $M_{BA} = 3.759$, respectively) in comparison with scale 3 in the five-point scale. Moreover, the levels of significance for all three dimensions ($p = .000$) show significant differences in the mean scores of the three attitudinal aspects and the average mean score. For this reason, it can be concluded that the students had positive attitudes towards learning ESP in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects.

Paired samples t-tests are also run to test the differences among the three attitudinal dimensions. The data in Tables 4.2 show that the mean differences between Cognitive and Emotional aspects and between Cognitive - Behavioral aspects are both positive ($M1 = .5276$ and $M2 = .2922$) and significance values are all zero ($p = .000$). In contrast, the mean difference between Emotional and Behavioral aspects is negative and significance values are zero. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students' attitudes in Cognitive dimension were the highest while there was no clear difference between their emotional and behavioural attitudes.

Table 4.2: the differences in the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Cognitive - Emotional	.5276	.4130	.0263	.4757	.5795	20.037	245	.000
Pair 2	Cognitive - Behavioral	.2922	.4052	.0258	.2413	.3431	11.312	245	.000
Pair 3	Emotional - Behavioral	-.2353	.3926	.0250	-.2846	-.1860	-9.403	245	.000

The respondents' cognitive attitudes towards learning ESP

In the questionnaire, the first 10 statements aim to look into the respondents' cognitive attitude level towards learning ESP, which is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. The respondents' cognitive attitudes

Cognitive Aspect	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)
1. Economic students should learn ESP.	1.00	5.00	4.5569	.69017	94
2. Being able to use ESP is an advantage in the present time.	1.00	5.00	4.4512	.75839	91
3. I think I should spend more time learning ESP even though it is not a core subject in my major.	1.00	5.00	4.0772	.08125	78
4. In my opinion, people who can use ESP are very knowledgeable.	1.00	5.00	3.7236	.93285	57
5. Being good at ESP will help me study other subjects well.	1.00	5.00	3.6301	.93315	57
6. I like my ESP class so much and look forwards to studying more ESP.	1.00	5.00	3.7439	.87334	63
7. ESP has been used widely in many fields of economy.	1.00	5.00	4.4309	.74045	93
8. Studying ESP helps me get new information which I can link to my previous knowledge.	1.00	5.00	4.2114	.79027	86
9. I need ESP to study and do research better.	1.00	5.00	4.0569	.80611	79
10. In my opinion, ESP is neither difficult nor complicated to learn.	1.00	5.00	3.6341	.91042	57

Among the three aspects, the cognitive one represents the highest mean score of attitudes towards learning ESP ($M_{CA} = 4.052$; $SD = .56364$; $p = .000$). The findings indicate that the majority of the participants showed positive cognitive attitudes towards ESP and recognized the importance of ESP in their study and work. Especially, many of them believed that economic students should spend more time learning ESP since ESP has been used widely in many fields of economics. To them, being able to use ESP is a competitive advantage in the present time and is very useful for students to enrich and connect knowledge.

The respondents' emotional attitudes towards learning ESP

The responses 11 to 20 regarding the emotional dimension of attitudes towards learning ESP represent the lowest mean score ($M_{EA} = 3.524$) among the three aspects. However, based on the level of significance ($SD = .64886$; $p = .000$), it can be concluded that there is a difference between the mean score of the emotional aspect of attitudes and the average mean score. Actually, it is higher than the accepted one. In other words, the large number of the respondents had positive emotional attitudes towards learning ESP.

Table 4.4: The respondents' emotional attitudes

Emotional Aspect	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)
11. I like to do my ESP homework.	1.00	5.00	3.3780	.90315	45
12. I like to read Economic books, documents or journals and listen to Economic news in English.	1.00	5.00	3.2683	.87667	37
13. I am satisfied with my performance in ESP.	1.00	5.00	3.6545	.94249	61
14. Studying ESP makes me feel more confident.	1.00	5.00	3.8740	.88316	71
15. Studying ESP helps me have good relationships with friends.	1.00	5.00	3.3496	.95604	43
16. I feel excited when talking to my friends about major in English.	1.00	5.00	3.4106	.89336	43
17. I prefer my ESP teacher to use English rather than my mother tongue.	1.00	5.00	3.6260	.96805	55

18. I look forward to the time I spend in my ESP class.	1.00	5.00	3.4797	.85571	46
19. I feel relaxed when being asked to do ESP exercises or to use ESP in class.	1.00	5.00	3.4756	.86509	49
20. I like to use ESP in the way native speakers do.	1.00	5.00	3.7236	.91963	64

As can be seen in Table 4.4, the majority of the students showed their positive emotions and comments about their ESP classes. Particularly, the mean scores of statements 14 and 20 are the highest ($M = 3.8740$ and $M = 3.7236$). The majority of the respondents confirmed that studying ESP helped them feel more confident and that they liked to use ESP in the way native speakers did.

The respondents' behavioral attitudes towards learning ESP

Items 21 to 30 concerning the behavioral aspect of the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP represents a high mean score ($M = 3.759$; $SD = .61423$) compared to scale 3 in the five-point scale. Furthermore, the significance level ($p = .000$) proves that there is a significant difference between the mean score of the behavioral attitude and the average accepted mean score. Therefore, this result proves that the respondents had positive behavioral attitudes towards learning ESP.

Table 4.5: The respondents' behavioral attitudes

Behavioral aspect	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)
21. I can apply the knowledge from ESP in reality.	1.00	5.00	3.6789	.87512	59
22. I spend a lot of time learning ESP.	1.00	5.00	3.3984	.81054	46
23. I like to study and practise ESP with my classmates who are good at ESP.	1.00	5.00	3.8659	.84894	70
24. I try to learn ESP well to get high scores in tests and a good university degree.	1.00	5.00	4.0122	.79015	78
25. I usually give opinions in my ESP classes.	1.00	5.00	3.3415	.99246	44
26. Being able to use ESP is an important goal in my university study.	1.00	5.00	3.8415	.80513	57
27. When I miss the ESP class, I ask my friends or teachers for the homework or what has been taught.	1.00	5.00	3.8984	.84385	73
28. I come to class enthusiastically when ESP is being taught.	1.00	5.00	3.6707	.85316	57
29. I am very attentive when my ESP teacher is explaining the lessons.	1.00	5.00	3.8943	.78572	74
30. I try to study ESP so that I can get a good job after graduation.	1.00	5.00	3.9919	.80808	76

Table 4.5 shows the respondents' positive behaviors and acts for learning ESP. Typically, statements 24 and 30 show the highest mean score ($M = 4.0122$; $SD = .79015$ and $M = 3.9919$; $MD = .80808$, respectively). The majority of the students tried to learn ESP so that they could get high scores in tests, good university degrees and good jobs after graduation.

4.2 Gender difference in the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP

Gender difference in students' attitudes towards learning ESP is shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Gender difference in the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP

Attitude	Gender	N	Mean	SD
General	Male	57	3.6801	.74279
	Female	189	3.8079	.49581
Cognitive	Male	57	3.9474	.76814

		Female	189	4.0831	.48370
	Emotional	Male	57	3.4789	.80970
		Female	189	3.5376	.59378
	Behavioral	Male	57	3.6140	.76938
		Female	189	3.8032	.55409

The results from the questionnaire indicate that the mean scores of general attitudes towards learning ESP between male and female students are high ($M_{MA} = 3.6801$ and $M_{FA} = 3.8079$, respectively) in comparison with scale 3 in the five-point scale. Moreover, the level of significance ($p = .005$) shows a significant difference between the mean scores of males' and females' general attitudes and the average mean score, higher than the accepted one. Therefore, it can be concluded that both groups had positive attitudes towards learning ESP.

In terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of attitudes, the findings also reveal that the mean scores of these dimensions are high ($M_{MC} = 3.9474$ and $M_{FC} = 4.0830$; $M_{ME} = 3.4789$ and $M_{FE} = 3.5376$; $M_{MB} = 3.6140$ and $M_{FB} = 3.8032$, respectively) compared to scale 3 in the five-point scale. Additionally, the levels of significance ($p = .010$, $P = .033$ and $P = .018$, respectively) indicate a significant difference between the means scores of males' and females' three attitudinal aspects towards learning ESP and the average mean score. As a result, the findings prove that both groups had positive attitudes towards learning ESP in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects.

In addition, the data in Table 4.6 indicate that the significance values of Levene's Test of the general attitudes and of the three aspects of attitude are all lower than .05. Therefore, the significance values (2-tailed) in t-test for Equality of Means are considered in terms of equal variances not assumed. These values are higher than .05, which means that there was no significant difference between male and female students.

In conclusion, the above tables concern economic students' attitudes towards learning ESP by gender. The results prove that there was no statistically significant difference in general attitudes and in three attitudinal dimensions, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects ($P > .05$), and both groups had positive attitudes towards learning ESP.

Table 4.7: Gender difference in the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP through Independent T-test

Independent Samples Test										
Attitude		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
General	Equal variances assumed (1)	8.000	.005	-1.505	244	.134	-.1278	.08495	-.29515	.0395
	Equal variances not assumed (2)			-1.220	71.675	.227	-.1278	.10479	-.33673	.0810
Cognitive	(1)	6.730	.010	-1.598	244	.111	-.1357	.08490	-.30294	.0315
	(2)			-1.261	69.897	.212	-.1357	.10765	-.35042	.0790

Emotional	(1)	4.619	.033	-.597	244	.551	-.0586	.09818	-.25201	.1347
	(2)			-.507	75.050	.614	-.0586	.11562	-.28894	.1717
Behavioral	(1)	5.626	.018	-2.051	244	.041	-.18914	.09222	-.37078	-.0075
	(2)			-1.726	74.347	.089	-.1891	.10959	-.40748	.0292

5. Discussions

5.1. The respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects

The results from the questionnaire showed that the students had positive attitudes towards learning ESP. They recognized the importance of ESP and tried to learn ESP to get high scores, good university degrees and good jobs. These results are similar to those of Amal (2013) Mehmet (2010), Momani (2010), Omar (2013), Salem (2017), Shameem (2015), Suleiman (1993) and Vo (2017). In contrast, the findings of this study are different from those of other researchers (Abidin et al., 2012 and Tella et al., 2010). In their studies, the participants had negative attitudes towards learning English in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions.

5.2. Gender difference in the respondents' attitudes towards learning ESP

The research also provided evidence about the relationship between gender and attitudes towards learning ESP. The research results show that both groups had positive attitudes towards learning ESP and that there was no significant difference in the attitudes between male students and female ones. The findings are in line with Shan and Li (2020). However, they are different from Chan (2018), Ma (2014) and Wayar (2017), whose results show that female learners hold a more positive attitude to EFL than male ones and Mtawaa (2017) who proves that male students have more positive attitudes towards English than their female counterparts.

6. Conclusions

The study reveals that both gender groups of economic students were highly motivated and had positive attitudes towards learning ESP. Especially, their awareness of the importance of ESP resulted in their effort, time and action for learning ESP. The results of the study provide a theoretical basis regarding students' attitudes towards learning ESP in all directions. Since attitudes can determine success or failure in learning in general and English learning in particular, it is necessary that students' attitudes should be taken into consideration and factors affecting their attitudes should be investigated to increase students' positive attitudes to the maximum in order to gain expected outcomes.

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