



## Individual Variables, Attitudes towards English and Being a Teacher: A study on Prospective Teachers of English

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### ABSTRACT

The achievement in learning a foreign language depends not only on cognitive factors such as intelligence, aptitude etc., but also on affective factors such as attitude and motivation. As the main branch of prospective teachers of English is teaching a language, their attitudes towards English and towards being a teacher are of vital importance in their future careers. The purpose of this descriptive study is to determine whether the attitudes of the students of English Language Teaching Department towards English affect their attitudes towards being a teacher of English and whether the students' attitudes indicate significant differences with regard to individual variables such as gender, class, the types of High Schools from which they have graduated, their socio-economic background, and whether there is a teacher in their family. The sample group of the study were composed 540 prospective English teachers of the first, second, third and fourth year students of the Department of English Language Teaching at Buca Faculty of Education at Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir. For data collection, personal information sheet, the scale for attitudes towards English developed by Altunay (2002) (Alpha Reliability Coefficient: 0.96) and the scale for attitudes towards Being a Teacher developed by Semerci (1999) (Alpha Reliability Coefficient: 0.68) were used. The results indicate that the more positive the students' attitudes towards English are, the more positive the students' attitudes towards teaching profession are. Furthermore, when attitudes towards English and towards being a teacher are compared," it is indicated that the students' attitudes towards English are a little bit higher.

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#### Keywords:

Attitudes towards English and towards being a teacher, individual variables, gender

## 1.Introduction

### 1.1. The Definition of Attitude

In Gardner's words, attitude is "an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent". Attitudes are constructs, discoverable in statements of belief or opinions (Gardner, 1985:9). According to Azjen attitude is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the particular behaviour of interest" (cited in Chambers, 1999).

Gardner suggests that there are various ways of classifying attitudes towards second language. Attitudes can be classified along a dimension of specificity/generality. For instance attitudes toward French are more definite than attitudes towards foreign languages. Attitudes can also be classified according to their relevance to achievement (Gardner, 1985: 40-41).

People have attitudes in order to

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1. help them understand the world around them, by organizing and simplifying a very complex input from their environment,
2. protect their self-esteem, by making it possible for them to avoid unpleasant truths about themselves,
3. help them adjust in a complex world, by making it more likely that they will react so as to maximize their rewards from the environment; and
4. allow them to express their fundamental values (Triandis, 1971:4).

### 1.2. Factors Affecting Attitude

Attitudes are formed as a result of learning and experiences which develop in a certain period of time. Since attitudes are bound to an individual's set of values, there are several factors which have an influence upon the construction or changes in the pre-existing attitudes of people. These factors can be summarized as motivation, aptitude, intelligence, background of the individuals and their curiosity for learning. However, among these variables, motivation is considered to be one of the most important factors as it determines the extent of the learner's active participation towards learning (Ngeow and Yeok-Hwa, 1998).

### 1.3. The Significance of Attitude towards Second Language Learning and Towards Being a Teacher

Attitude has been regarded as one of the most significant factors that affect the achievement in the teaching career and in the foreign language learning process; therefore, it has been investigated by many researchers. With regards to its importance in foreign language teaching Chambers (1999: 25) argues that:

Pupils do not come to the foreign languages classroom as *tabulae rasae*. They bring with them certain attitudes born of conversations shared with family and friends, the media and personal experience of the target language community.

Altunay (2004 b) advocates that foreign language teaching is a complex process in which cognitive, affective and psychomotor processes are active. Studies related to how foreign languages are acquired and the factors affecting second language acquisition are pervading. Research on students' attitudes toward language learning is important mainly for two reasons. First, as Kaballa and Crowley (1985) suggest attitudes toward learning are believed to influence behaviors such as watching movies or reading books in foreign language (cited in Weinburgh, 1998). Second, there is a relationship between attitudes and achievement. For instance, in a study carried out by Altunay (2004a) on 2065 English Language preparatory class students, the results indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between students' achievement in English exams and their attitudes towards English. Likewise, in İnal, Evin and Saracaloğlu's study (2005) it was found that the students with more positive attitudes were much more successful in foreign language learning. Schibeci and Riley (1986) argue that there is support for the proposition that attitudes influence achievement, rather than achievement influencing attitudes (cited in Weinburgh, 1998).

Krashen states that attitudes and motivation have two functions in second language acquisition. Firstly, they encourage intake. "Attitudinal factors are simply factors that encourage acquirers to communicate with speakers of the target language, and thereby obtain the necessary input, or intake, for language acquisition." Secondly, with the help of positive attitudes and high motivation students will use the language heard for acquisition. For Krashen (1981:21); "Simply hearing a second language with understanding appears to be necessary but is not sufficient for acquisition to take place. The acquirer must not only understand the input but must also, in a sense, be open to it".

Attitude is also of vital importance for being an effective and successful teacher. An effective teacher should not only be a specialist of his field and methodology but also be tolerant, devoted and hard-working. To this end, the attitudes of the teacher towards teaching profession gain great amount of importance and becomes a subject to be investigated for several researchers (Akboy&Semercioğlu, 1991; Er&Öztekin, 2011; Kesercioğlu, T. & Serin, O. & Serin, U. & Balım, G. 2000; Koydemir, 1994; Serin, O.& Saracaloğlu, A.& Serin, U. & Kesercioğlu, T. 2004; Sönmez, 1989; Yavuz, 2004). On the condition that prospective teachers have positive attitudes towards their profession, when they become teachers, they behave well to their students, they think creatively and they can motivate their students (Çeliköz & Çetin, 2004).

In the first dimension of the study, the attitudes of the students towards English have been analyzed. As the main branch of prospective teachers of English is teaching a language, their opinion of English is of vital importance.

The second dimension of this research is based upon the analysis of the attitudes of teachers of English towards being a teacher. In the 21st century, Turkey has to solve its problems related to effective teacher education. To this end, one of the most important affective factors of the prospective teachers; their attitudes towards teaching profession, should be analyzed. Their attitudes are very significant since these will affect their students directly during the teaching period. For that reason, teachers' attitudes towards their profession should be analyzed and negative ones should be diminished. The attitudes of "Prospective Teachers" depend on the following variables such as education, occupational expectations, characteristics of the individuals and moral values. In Turkey prospective teachers are selected without considering their attitudes towards teaching profession, their interests and their individual characteristics. This fact has had a negative influence on the quality of the education system and thus on the future generations. Furthermore, since the attitudes of the teachers affect their students, the education faculties should help the development of positive attitudes towards teaching profession. This study aims to assist the improvement of the teacher quality by measuring the prospective teachers' attitudes towards their specialized area and towards teaching profession.

## 2. The Study

### 2.1. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the attitudes of the students of English Language Teaching Department toward "English" and toward "Being a Teacher". This study also intends to understand to what extent attitudes of students towards English and towards being a teacher are related to their gender, their economic condition, types of High Schools from which they have graduated and whether there is a teacher in their family.

### 2.2. Methodology

This research is a survey-type descriptive study. The universe of the research is composed of all students, namely; the freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors of Department of English Language Teaching of Buca Faculty of Education at Dokuz Eylül University in the spring term of 2003-2004 academic years. The sample of the research is the same as the universe. However, the students who have not marked certain items in the "Personal Information Form" and the students who have marked more than one choice either in the questionnaire or in the personal information form have been disregarded and their responses have been eliminated. Because of this, they have been removed from the sample group. After these processes, the sample of the research is composed of 540 students. The distribution of the students included in the sample with regard to gender is shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** The Distribution of the Students in the Sample with regard to Gender

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	t	p	SIG.
Female	406	52.73	4.10	538	1.671	.711	p>.05
Male	134	53.44	4.75				

In this research, the data have been obtained as a result of administration of the two attitude scales. The first of these attitude scales is towards English and towards exams, lesson programme and physical conditions (Altunay, 2002). The findings of the pilot administration revealed that the correlations of Alpha Reliability Coefficients were as follows:

- Attitude towards English: 0.96                      Lesson Programme: 0.82
- Examinations: 0.83                                      Physical Conditions: 0.62

This questionnaire which was developed by Altunay (2002) consists of five parts. The first part which is called "Personal Information Form" is composed of four questions related to the students themselves aiming to collect information about their gender, class, the high school they graduated from, the economic condition of

their parents and the profession of their parents (whether there is a teacher in their family). In the second part of this questionnaire there are seventeen statements to determine the attitudes of the students towards English. The third part includes eighteen statements which aim to gather information about the students' attitudes towards their lesson programme. The fourth part consists of fifteen statements related to the students' attitudes towards the examinations at their department. The last part of the questionnaire which is composed of seven statements aims to find out the attitudes of the students towards the physical conditions of the school.

The latter attitude scale which was developed by Semerci (1999) is towards being a teacher. The Alpha Reliability Coefficients of this thirty-statement-scale were 0.68.

In both of the attitude scales a five-point Likert-Type Scale was used to determine the level of the students' agreement or disagreement on the items. These items are both in affirmative and negative forms and they are presented randomly in order to enable the students to be honest. Besides, for avoiding possible misunderstandings the questionnaire was prepared in the students' mother tongue.

The obtained data were analysed by using SPSS 11.0 Statistics Programme. In the analysis of the data, Frequency, Mean, Percentage and Standard Deviation have been used to describe and express the data. When the two groups were compared and contrasted t-test was used. In the comparison of more than two groups, the Analysis of Variance was used. Finally, Scheffé test was used to determine the origin of the differences between groups.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Results Related to the Attitudes towards English

On the basis of the research results, the attitude of the male students towards English was found to be very close to that of the female students. Namely, the mean scores of the male students (53.44) are only a little bit higher than that of the female students (52.73). In other words, there was not any significant difference between gender and the attitudes of the students.

This finding contradicts to the assumption that female students are more successful in foreign language learning within the limits of this study. For instance, Gardner and Lambert (1972) investigated the relationship between gender and attitude towards learning French, taking their sample group from the American high school students in the state of Maine. It was found out that the positive attitudes and motivation to learn the foreign language of the girls was higher than that of the boys. Burstall (1975) also analyzed the relationship between gender and attitudes towards French. The sample of the research comprised 6000 eight-year-old primary school students in England. The findings revealed that the girls had much more positive attitudes toward learning French than the boys did (cited in Çakıcı, 2001). Spolsky (1989) conducted a research in order to find out the attitudes of the students learning Hebrew as a second language in Israel. It was found out that the attitudes of the girls toward learning Hebrew, Israelis and Israel culture were much more positive than that of the boys. Saracaloğlu (1992) conducted a research on the students of English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature, History, Geography, Psychology, Astronomy, Chemistry and Biology Departments at Ege University and analyzed their attitudes towards foreign language. The results of this research also denote that the attitudes of female students towards foreign language learning were much more positive. Koydemir (1994), in her MA Thesis, compared the attitudes of the students in Dokuz Eylül University Buca Faculty of Education, Department of German Language Teaching and Ege University Faculty of Literature, Department of German Language and Literature. Although neither boys nor girls had positive attitudes towards learning German and their programmes, it was concluded that the girls in the sample group exhibit less negative attitudes towards learning German. Kızıltepe (1998) also investigated the relationship between the students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language and their gender. At the end of this study, the female students were found to have a much more positive attitude towards learning English when compared to the male students (cited in Tonbul, 2001). Another study which was carried out with high school students also states that female students have much more positive attitudes towards English as a foreign language (İnal et. al. 2005)

Similar to the findings of this research, there are cases contradictory to most of the former studies in literature. In these cases, either there is no significant difference between gender and attitude or the boys' attitudes toward foreign language are found to be more positive. A case that illustrates this is the research of the Oxford Project for Diversification of First Language Teaching (OXPROD), which aimed to find out the difficulties of students learning French, German or Spanish as their foreign language. The findings of data analysis indicated that male students have more positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language than do girls (Filmer-Sankey, 1993). Another example of this kind of study was carried out by Çakıcı (2001). She investigated the attitudes of the university students towards English within the scope of common compulsory courses. The findings of this study revealed that there was not any significant difference between gender and the attitudes of the students.

The results of this research also denote that there is not a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards English and the type of high school from which they have graduated. The findings show that the Vocational High School graduates have the highest mean (54.27), whereas, the lowest mean (51.50) belongs to the graduates of Private Schools. Anatolian High School graduates are found to have the second highest mean score. Contrary to the researcher's expectations, the lowest mean belongs to the graduates of Private High Schools. The graduates of these schools are believed to be proficient in English and accordingly have positive attitudes towards it. Thus, the findings of this study showing that they have the least positive attitude towards English may be explained by their boredom of this language during the long years of education.

Çakıcı (2001) in her MA Thesis also investigated the attitudes of the university students towards English and found out that there is a significant difference between their attitudes and the types of High School from which they have graduated. The findings revealed that the Anatolian High School graduates have the lowest mean score, while the graduates of the State High School have the highest mean score.

Another finding of the research indicates that there is a significant difference (Table 2) between the students' attitudes towards English and the class they are in.

**Table 2.** The Relationship between the Students' Attitudes towards English and the Class they are in (The Results of Variance Analysis)

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F	p
Between Groups	226.173	3	75.391		
Within Groups	9644.736	536	17.994	4.190	.006*
TOTAL	9870.909	539			

\*p<.01

The highest mean and the most positive attitudes towards English belong to seniors as shown in Table 3. On the other hand, freshmen have the lowest mean and the least positive attitudes towards English. This finding of the research may be the result of the difficulties that freshmen come face to face. As they have just started a new life leaving their families behind, the first grade the students have several problems. They have to deal with difficulties related to residence, money and adaptation to the different atmosphere of the university. However, seniors have the highest mean and the most positive attitudes towards English. This result may result from the fact that these students have already adopted themselves to their department and its main subject; "English". After long years of education they start to see "English" as the main part of their future job, thus they ignore the negative sides.

**Table 3.** The Relationship between the Students' Attitudes towards English and the Class they are in

CLASS	n	$\bar{X}$	sd
Freshmen	110	51.92	3.30
Sophomores	113	53.49	4.25
Juniors	150	52.53	4.32

Seniors 167 53.50 4.67

The findings also indicate that the students' economic situation has a direct effect on their attitudes towards English and towards their departments (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Students' Attitudes towards English with regard to their Economic Condition (The Results of Variance Analysis)

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F	p
Between Groups	225.459	3	75.153		
Within Groups	9.445.450	536	17.995	4.176	0.006*
TOTAL	9.870.909	539			

\*p<.01

The most positive attitude towards English belongs to the students whose parents have more than 1.000 TL monthly income (Table 5). Since these students do not have any financial problems, they can easily reach the course materials and other necessary resources whenever they want. What is more, they have a better educational background; they are generally graduates of Private Schools where they have an intensive education of English or they have got the chance of joining different courses. Consequently, the students with the highest income have much more positive attitudes toward English. On the other end of the spectrum, the students whose parents have less than 300 TL monthly income have the least positive attitudes toward English. This can be the result of the limited educational opportunities of the family due to their financial problems.

**Table 5.** The Relationship between the Students' Attitudes towards English and their Economic Condition

Monthly Income	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
0	50	51.96	4.30
300-500 TL.	118	52.99	4.31
500 TL-1.000 TL.	266	52.58	4.23
More than 1.000 TL.	106	54.10	4.14

According to the results of the first questionnaire analysis, it is also found out that the students whose mother is a teacher have a much more positive attitude than the other students, whereas, the students who do not have any teacher in their families have the least positive attitudes toward English and their departments. However, a detailed analysis indicated that there is not a direct relationship between the students' attitudes towards English and the fact that whether there is a teacher in their family.

### 3.2. Results Related to the Attitudes towards Being a Teacher

According to the findings of the "Attitude Scale towards Teaching Profession", it is revealed that the attitudes of male students are more positive in comparison with that of the female students. On the other hand, a detailed analysis indicated that this finding is not statistically significant. A study which has parallel results to the findings of this research is conducted by Serin et al. (2001). They administrated the attitude scale toward teaching profession to the teachers working in primary and secondary school teachers; however, this does not indicate a significant difference. Şahin (1992), Luke and Cope (1994), Erden (1995), Saracaloğlu (2000) (cited in Serin et al., 2001) and Kesercioğlu et al. (2000) also found out that there is no significant difference between

attitudes towards being a teacher and gender. On the other hand, some other researches prove that the attitudes of the females are much more positive towards teaching profession. To exemplify, the researches conducted on university students by Aşkar and Erden (1986), Aşkar and Çelenk (1988), Saracaloğlu (1991, 1992) (cited in Serin et al., 2001) revealed that the attitudes of girls are much more positive. The fact that there is no significant relationship between teachers' attitudes towards their profession and gender may be due to the global trend that removes the gender difference in occupations.

Another finding of the research is that the attitudes of prospective teachers of English towards teaching profession do not change according to the type of high school they graduated from. However, the findings also reveal that the most positive attitudes belong to the graduates of State High Schools, whereas the graduates of Anatolian High Schools have the least positive attitudes towards teaching profession. The lowest scores of the graduates of Anatolian High Schools may be due to their high expectations in the university entrance exams; namely, they might have wanted to have a more advantageous job with a high salary, since they are quite successful students. Contrary to the researcher's expectations the graduates of Anatolian Teacher High Schools have quite low degrees in the attitude scale compared to other students. This finding draws attention to the effectiveness of this kind of high school where it is aimed to educate prospective teachers from the young ages. There are other researchers who investigated the relationship between the attitudes of students towards being a teacher and the type of high school they graduated from. Kesercioğlu et al. (2000), in their study conducted on the prospective teachers of Biology at Dokuz Eylül University, found out that there is not any significant relationship between the attitudes of the students towards teaching profession and the type of high school from which they graduated. A contradictory result is found by Bozkurt et al. (2000). They carried out a study on the prospective teachers of Dokuz Eylül University from three different departments; Counselling and Guidance, Primary School Teaching and Science. In the end, it is revealed that the types of high schools from which the students graduated influence the students' attitudes towards teaching profession to a great extent. The graduates of Anatolian High School have the most positive attitudes towards teaching profession. In accordance with this study, the graduates of Teacher High Schools have the least positive attitudes towards teaching profession.

The third research area of this study is the relationship between the attitudes of the students towards being a teacher and the class they are in. The analysis showed that the most positive attitudes belong to sophomores, whereas, freshmen have the lowest scores in the attitude scale. However, these findings are not meaningful statistically, they can be interpreted clearly. This result reveals the fact that when the students first come to the university; they deal with several problems such as accommodation, different responsibilities and adaptation to a new city and new people. On the other hand, sophomores have already dealt with this kind of troubles and are able to concentrate on their lessons and prepare themselves to their future occupation. There are other studies which support the same finding. For instance, in a study made by Kesercioğlu et al (2000), it is found out that there is not any significant difference between the attitudes of the prospective teachers of biology and the class of the students. Bozkurt et al. (2000) conducted a research aiming to investigate the effective factors in the attitude development of the prospective teachers towards being a teacher. The sample of the study consisted of 168 students at Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, Departments of Counselling and Guidance, Teaching Primary School and Science. In the end it is found out that there is no meaningful relationship between the attitudes of the students towards teaching profession and their class.

The students whose parents have more than 1.000 TL monthly income have the most positive attitudes toward being a teacher; whereas, the least positive attitudes belong to the students whose parents have less than 300 TL monthly income. However, a detailed analysis reveals that there is not any significant relationship between the economic condition of the students and their attitudes toward being a teacher. A study which has parallel results to the findings of this study is conducted by Bozkurt et al. (2000) on the prospective teachers of Dokuz Eylül University from the Departments of Counselling and Guidance, Teaching Primary School and Science. The findings of this research indicated that the attitudes of the students towards teaching profession were at medium level and are not affected by the socio-economic conditions of their families.

Another research question of this study aims to find out the relationship between the students' attitudes towards being a teacher with regard to whether there is a teacher in their families. The findings revealed that the students whose mother and father are teachers have the most positive attitudes toward teaching and the students who do not have any teacher in their families have the least positive attitudes toward English and

their departments. Whereas, a detailed analysis revealed that there is not any meaningful relationship between the students' attitudes towards English and the fact that whether there is a teacher in their family. In accordance with this finding, Kesercioğlu et al. (2000) in their study conducted on the prospective teachers of biology, have found out that there is not a direct relationship between the students' attitudes towards being a teacher and whether there is a teacher in their families. Bozkurt et al. (2000) carried out a research on the students at Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, Departments of Counselling and Guidance, Primary School Education and Science Education and they also revealed that there is no significant relationship between these two variables.

The primary research finding of this study is that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards English and towards being a teacher. (Table 6) This result may be due to the fact that the students with positive attitudes towards English have a desire to teach this language to their prospective students since they find their branch quite necessary and they want to make them know and like this language as much as they do.

**Table 6.** Correlations between Students' Attitudes towards English and the Programme, Examinations, the Physical Conditions of School and Being a Teacher

Attitude Towards	English	Lesson Programme	Examinations	Physical Conditions	Being a Teacher
English	-				
Lesson Program	0,21**	-			
Examinations	0,062	0,22**	-		
Physical Conditions	-0,003	0,090*	-0,147**	-	
Being a teacher	0,108*	0,106*	0,050	0,089	-

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

There is a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards English and lesson programme and the students' attitudes towards English and towards being a teacher. The students who have positive attitudes towards English have the same positive attitudes towards being a teacher.

Another finding of this research is that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards lesson programme and examinations, physical conditions and being a teacher. Finally, it is found out that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards examinations and physical conditions of the department and their attitudes towards examinations.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that the attitudes of prospective teachers of English towards English and being a teacher are affected by each other. Since these two variables affect each other directly and because the attitudes of prospective teachers will be of vital importance for their future students, prospective teachers of English should have positive attitudes towards not only their main subject area English but also towards their profession. To this end, the education faculties should help their students to acquire the importance of their future profession and see the positive sides of it. The instructors in these faculties should be able to have a humanistic perspective and exemplify the characteristics of an effective teacher who likes his students and who is successful during the education period. Furthermore, all of the necessary changes should be made such as developing the education quality of faculties, the physical conditions of the departments and giving importance to the self-development of the university instructors. Moreover, necessary developments should



be made in the living and working conditions of the teachers in Turkey. For instance, the salaries should be raised, accommodation problems should be solved, and the social activity centers should be founded for teachers. In this way, the place of teachers in the society would be much more valuable and the prospective teachers may have more positive attitudes towards their future job. Prospective teachers of English should internalize the importance of their profession and should have positive attitudes towards not only their branch; English, but also towards being a teacher. Whatever needed should be made in order to train such effective teachers of English.

The students' attitudes are affected by several factors like parents, social-cultural issues, achievement etc. However, perhaps the most important factors among these are the teachers and the teaching methods they utilize. Teachers have the necessary power to change the attitudes of the students. Thus, they should learn about the attitudes of the students and try to create positive attitudes towards the foreign language and change the existing negative attitudes by analyzing their underlying reasons. The negative attitudes may stem from the methods and techniques of the teacher or the materials he uses. Teacher should be able to change his techniques and methods if these are the source of the students' negative attitudes. A teacher should also keep up with the developments in his field and try to adopt these to his teaching period. What is more, in the preparation of lesson plans, different learning styles should be taken into consideration.

This study has found out the relationships between the students' gender, class, the type of high school they graduated from, socio-economic condition and profession of their parents and the two main subjects of the research; namely, attitudes toward English and toward being a teacher. These factors can be multiplied in order to obtain much more detailed information about the subject.

The growing interest after the 1980s in the researches related to affective factors such as attitude and motivation should continue with new studies on different sample groups. Thus, the importance of affective factors, as well as cognitive ones should be underlined.

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