A Gender-based Investigation of Attitudes of Saudi EFL Learners towards English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This empirical study is an attempt to analyze perceptions of Saudi preparatory year EFL learners regarding various dynamics of English language teaching along gender lines. This survey exploited a Likert-scale questionnaire to generate data related to their perceived attitudes towards ELT in the context of Saudi higher education. 132 participants from a Saudi university were investigated through a self-developed survey. The final instrument had 42 items divided into the following three sub-categories: 1) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English Language and its culture, 2) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards ELT learning /teaching, and 3) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards teachers'/learners role. Independent-samples T-test was run to identify whether any significant difference exists in the perceptions of Saudi male and female EFL learners. The results of statistical analyses exhibited significant differences along gender lines as the third sub-categories was concerned, whereas no such differences were reported for the first two. Findings have also revealed that Saudi EFL learners seem to believe that learning a foreign language is easier if it is supported by society and surroundings. Both groups have shown high preferences towards friendly teachers and the use of target language in classes. Participants of this study have positive attitudes towards English language, its culture, and high status of English language in Saudi society. Majority of the participants reported to have strong urge to achieve high English language proficiency. Findings also revealed that Saudi male and female EFL learners bore strong instrumental motivation. Recommendations of the study included use of a variety of innovative pedagogical techniques like role-play, simulation, exploiting realia, group/pair work, etc. To ensure better results, Saudi EFL learners need to be exposed to audio-visual teaching aids as well as training to exploit modern technology to practice target language in real-life situations in addition to the academic setting of EFL classrooms.

Keywords: EFL learners, ELT, perceptions, attitudes, gender

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign/second language differs from learning other academic subjects. Brown (2000) theorized that learning another language

requires such a devotion on the part of learners that "your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 1). Furthermore, the learners who are involved in learning a new language also vary in terms of factors like attitudes, motivation, learning style, age, gender, aptitude (Javid, 2011; Petrides, 2006). Same has also been emphasized by Wenden (2002) who posits that "the notion of learner –centred instruction in foreign and second languages grew out of the recognition that language learners are diverse, in their reasons for learning another language, their approach to learning, and their abilities" (p. 32). A growing mass of research is reported to investigate these factors of extreme pedagogical significance in learning English as a second/foreign language to better understand the learners' socio-psychological underpinnings that are instrumental in achieving the much sought-after goal of effective and efficient teaching/learning practices in English language teaching (ELT). Among these factors, attitudes towards the target language, its culture, its speakers, its teaching/learning process etc. have been investigated throughout the world (See for example Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Candlin & Mercer, 2001; Gardner & MacIntyre 1993; GÖKÇE, 2008; Lightbown & Spada 1993, Merisou-Strom, 2007; Siti, 2008). The present study is an attempt to find out the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards English language and its culture, its teaching learning process and the role of EFL teachers and learners along gender lines.

2. Literature Review

Significance of attitudes becomes evident from the fact that numerous attempts have been made to define this pedagogically important factor. Eagly & Chaiken (1993) have postulated that attitude may be defined as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). Attitudes are stated as" a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior" (Baker, 1992, p. 10). It was as late as 1930's when social psychologists got interested in understanding this knotty question because of its determining position in human behavior as proclaimed by Allport (1935 cited in Franzoi, 2003) that "attitudes determine for each individual what he will see and hear, and what he will think and what he will do" (p. 155). Though there have been contradicting voices in this regard (Brehm & Kassin, 1990; Morris, 2002) yet a vast majority of experts believe in the close relationship of persons' attitudes and their behavior; therefore, Franzoi (2003) concluded that "the principal reason the attitude concept is so popular is that the aim of psychology is to study behavior, and attitudes are supposed to influence behavior" (p. 155). GÖKÇE (2008) reports that social psychologists tried to define this term

from various perspective and the leading among these were "tricomponent view" and "single component view" but majority of the experts attempted to define it according to the tricomponent approach (Brehm & Kassin, 1990; Franzoi, 2003). This approach hypothesizes that "an attitude is an organized combination of three subcomponents: beliefs as the cognitive component, evaluative feelings as the affective component, and behaviors as the behavioral component" (GÖKÇE, 2008, p. 13). Wenden (1991) also identifies the same three components of attitudes in which the cognitive component involves those beliefs or perceptions which a person bears about the object or situation in this regard, the second evaluative component is considered responsible of creating likes or dislikes about that object or situation and the behavioral component of attitudes posits that learners tend to adopt certain learning behaviors governed by the attitudes they have. These three components are closely related to each other and it is suggested that "one who has positive feelings about something may tend to hold positive beliefs about it and display positive behaviors toward it" (GÖKÇE, 2008, pp.1-2). Therefore, it is believed that learners' ability to learn the target language is positively proportionate to their attitudes towards that language (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). Dehbozorgi (2012) also states that "language attitude is believed to be the factor that makes differences between underachievement and accomplishment" (p. 41). Learners' attitudes towards the target language include their fears, prejudices and feelings that play a decisive role in learners' absorption of the intricacies of the target language (Oxford, 1990; Spolsky, 2000).

Much research has strongly suggested that language learners' attitudes have significant implications in second/foreign language learning process because of its sheer difference from that of learning other academic subjects as propagated by Gardner & Lambert (1972) and summarized by Dornyei as follows:

> From an educational point of view, Gardner & Lambert's (1972) claim indicated that unlike several other school subjects, a foreign language is not a socioculturally neutral field but is affected by a range of sociocultural factors such as language attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and even geopolitical considerations. This social argument has been accepted by researchers all over the world, regardless of the actual learning situation they were working in. (p. 67)

Research has offered valuable insights into the fact that learners' attitudes are positively linked with their motivation to learn a second/foreign language (Spolsky, 1989). Among the pioneer of researchers who investigated language learners' attitudes from systematic socio-psychological perspectives Gardner occupies a leading position and reports

that "attitudes and motivation are important because they reflect an active involvement on the part of the student in the entire process of learning a second language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 61). GÖKÇE (2008) posits that "learners' attitudes toward a foreign language together with its culture and the learning process can partially explain learner behaviors and misbehaviors in the classroom context" (p. 2). The significance of understanding language learners' attitudes have been highlighted from another perspective and it has been hypothesized that inculcating positive attitudes among learners towards the target language, its speakers, its culture, etc. is important because of its influence on their future behavior. Popham (2011, p. 233) suggests that "the reason we want to promote positive attitudes towards learning is because students who have positive attitudes towards learning today will be inclined to pursue learning in the future." A host of research studies conducted in various ESL/EFL contexts have strongly suggested that language learning ability is closely related to positive attitudes which enhance language learning possibilities (karahan, 2007; Spolsky, 1989; Starks & Paltridge, 1996).

Attitudes of language learners have been investigated with relation to relevant factors such as motivation (Gardner, 1968; Liu, 2007; Malallah, 2000; Petrides, 2006), learners' age (Henry & Apelgren, 2008), language proficiency (Candlin & Mercer, 2001; Siti, 2008), peer-group influence (Bartram, 2006), language teaching/learning process (Littlewood, 2001), language and its use (Krahan, 2007) and gender (Ellis, 1994; Kobayashi, 2002; Gökçe, 2008; Soku, 2011). Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari (2012) investigated Libyan secondary school students' attitudes towards learning English with regard to behavioral, cognitive and emotional perspectives along gender, field and the year of study. The participants of the study; 180 students of basic sciences, life sciences and social sciences, showed negative attitudes towards learning English language. The results revealed that the participants of the study exhibited significant differences as far gender and their field of study were concerned whereas no differences were found related to the year of study. Kobayashi (2002) exploited a large-scale questionnaire to find out Japanese male and female high school learners' attitudes towards current and long-term English language learning. The findings of the study showed that female cohort of the study bear significantly higher positive attitudes towards English language learning as compared to their male counterparts. The researcher also argued that the positive attitude of the female participants might be due to two main factors, i.e., women's marginalized status and the status of English language as feminished academic choice in Japanese society. Abu-Sharbain & Tan (2013) investigated 50 male and 50 female primary English language teachers and sought their responses through a 34-item attitude questionnaire towards the teaching profession in Gaza strip. The

findings of the study showed that significant differences were reported in favor of female cohort of the study. Ellis' study (1994) also reveals that female learners of English language have more positive attitudes towards second language acquisition as compared to their male counterparts. Though majority of the studies seems to suggest that female learners possess better attitudes yet there have been some voices of contradiction. Fakeye's (2010) study was the one that attempted to investigate gender-based differences as far the attitudes of 400 secondary school Nigerian students were concerned in relation to their achievement in the target language and the findings disclosed significant relationship between their attitudes and achievement but no such significance was reported between the responses of male and female students. Much research has reported that attitudes have been extensively investigated worldwide especially in the advanced countries but there seems a scarcity of research in the Arab world. The present study aims to fill this gap of identifying Arab EFL learners' attitudes towards various dynamics of English language learning along gender lines.

3. Research Objectives

The present study attempts to find out:
1. Attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards English language and its culture.
2. Attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards English language teaching/ learning process.
3. Attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards the role EFL teachers and learners.

4. Hypotheses

This study has the following hypotheses (null hypotheses were also framed):

H1. There are statistically gender-based differences in the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards English language and its culture.

H2. There are statistically gender-based differences in the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards English language teaching/learning process.

H3. There are statistically gender-based differences in the attitude of Saudi EFL learners' towards the role EFL teachers and learners.

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Participants

The participants of this survey study were 233 EFL learners: 112 males (48%) and 121 females (52%) who were randomly chosen from Saudi university undergraduates who joined Taif University Preparatory Year

Program (PYP) for the academic year 2012-2013. They were randomly selected from all the three major streams of PYP, i.e., humanities, sciences, and medicine.

5.2. Design

The design of this study is quantitative in nature in which a 5-point Likert-scale agree-disagree questionnaire was developed based on the previous studies as a measuring instrument. The participants were requested to respond to the questionnaire items that meant to elicit their perceived attitudes towards English language and its culture, English language teaching/learning process, and the role of English teacher/learners.

5.3. Instrumentation

The researchers consulted several studies that were conducted to elicit participants' perceived attitudes towards various dynamics of English language and its teaching through using questionnaires (Dehbozorgi, 2012; GÖKÇE, 2008; Karahan, 2007; Soku, 2011). The data gathered from these sources as well the researchers' long experience of the academic echo system of the research setting were exploited and a Likert-scale questionnaire was developed that had the following format:

5. Strongly Agree   4. Agree   3. Neutral
2. Disagree   1. Strongly Disagree

The final instrument had 42 items divided into the following three sub-categories: 1) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English Language and its culture (14 items), 2) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English Language Teaching/learning (14 items), and 3) Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the teachers'/learners role (14 items). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic so that authentic responses may be ensured.

5.4. Validity

The initial version of the questionnaire, which had 48 items, was given to three senior faculty members from foreign language department, Taif University to determine the face validity of the instrument. They were requested to suggest any appropriate changes to improve the quality of the instrument. Their comments were considered, 6 items were deleted and other recommended changes were also incorporated before it was translated into Arabic and piloted to determine its reliability.

5.5 Reliability

The questionnaire was piloted to determine the reliability level of the questionnaire items. The Arabic version of the questionnaire was administered to 20 students of PYP. Their responses were coded and reliability coefficient test was run for the instrument as a whole and for its

three parts separately as well using SPSS version 10.0. The Cronbach Alpha value remained .8838 for the instrument as a whole that is a highly acceptable consistency of reliability. The instrument has three sub-parts and reliability test was run for these parts separately as well. An acceptable value of .7515 was calculated for the first part that meant to elicit Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English Language and its culture (14 items), Cronbach alpha value remained .7537 for the second part which was included to identify Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English language teaching/learning (14 items) and the highest value of .8484 was reported for the last part of the instrument which meant to generate data related to Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the teachers'/learners' role (14 items).

5.6. Data Analysis

The data generated through the questionnaire was manually entered, coded and analyzed using SPSS program aiming to answer the research objectives and test the hypotheses. Independent sample t-test was run to test three hypotheses set for this survey research.

6. Results and Discussion

All the responses of the participants of the study, as indicated by their selection of various questionnaire items in terms of strongly agree to strongly disagree, were scientifically analyzed to generate the descriptive statistics and identify any significant differences in their perceptions along gender lines. The following tables contain the data analyses in this regard.

Table 1: Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English language and its culture (14 items)

	Questionnaire Items	G	N	M	SD	df	p value	
1	I love to speak English fluently.	Boys	112	4.77	.595	231	.245	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.85	.357	178.85	.254	
2	English language proficiency is important for success in Saudi Arabia.	Boys	112	4.21	.904	231	.159	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.04	.960	230.93	.158	
3	It is positive that English language enjoys high status in Saudi Arabia.	Boys	112	3.57	1.19	231	.029	p < 0.05
		Girls	121	3.89	1.03	219.78	.030	
4	English language proficiency is a mark of educated person.	Boys	112	3.91	1.21	231	.006	p < 0.05
		Girls	121	3.48	1.16	227.57	.006	
5		Boys	112	2.92	1.44	231	.184	p > 0.05

	English should be medium of instruction in Saudi Arabia.	Girls	121	2.68	1.33	225.56	.185	
6	I love to learn English even if it was not a university requirement.	Boys	112	4.20	1.01	231	.253	$p > 0.05$
		Girls	121	4.04	1.05	230.66	.252	
7	Speaking English earns respect by the family, relatives and friends.	Boys	112	3.29	1.35	231	.004	$p < 0.05$
		Girls	121	2.80	1.20	222.57	.004	
8	I want to know more about the culture of English-speaking countries.	Boys	112	3.96	1.08	231	.647	$p > 0.05$
		Girls	121	3.90	1.01	226.32	.647	
9	I want to know more about the English-speaking nations.	Boys	112	4.18	.963	231	.480	$p > 0.05$
		Girls	121	4.09	.943	228.77	.481	
10	I love to watch English movies.	Boys	112	4.33	.924	231	.003	$p < 0.05$
		Girls	121	3.90	1.19	223.90	.003	
11	I love to listen to English music.	Boys	112	3.48	1.51	231	.001	$p < 0.05$
		Girls	121	2.80	1.57	230.72	.001	
12	I love to learn English because it will help me to know more about English-speaking people.	Boys	112	4.28	.864	231	.976	$p > 0.05$
		Girls	121	4.28	.943	230.97	.976	
13	I love to learn English because it will help me know more about the culture of English-speaking countries.	Boys	112	4.06	1.05	231	.880	$p > 0.05$
		Girls	121	4.08	.979	226.09	.880	
14	I prefer to study ELT textbooks published in English-speaking countries.	Boys	112	3.50	1.28	231	.004	$p < 0.05$
		Girls	121	2.99	1.36	230.90		

The data analysis presented in Table 1 is related to the attitudes of Saudi PYP EFL learners towards English language and its culture along gender lines and it has been reported that male and female cohort of this study showed significant difference in six questionnaire items out of the total 14 in this part. Both groups assigned highest value to the item that elicited their attitude towards their desire to achieve the target of speaking

English fluently: females ranked it higher than the males though the difference is not significant. This finding is in line with much research conducted in the Arab world including Saudi Arabia that revealed that Arab EFL learners love to achieve higher level of proficiency in English (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Javid, 2010; Malallah, 2000; Rababah, 2003; Zughoul & Taminian, 1984). The data revealed an interesting finding as exhibited by the higher values assigned to items 2, 6, 9, and 12 that the participants expressed their preference of learning English for instrumental as well as integrative motivation. They indicated that they wanted to learn the target language because it would help them in their academic as well as professional life in the KSA that pointed to their high instrumental motivation whereas the other two items were related to their integrative motivation and equally high values have been reported for them as well. The finding confirms a growing mass of research that EFL learners are usually instrumentally motivated and their main purpose of studying English is for their academic as well professional needs (Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Humphreys & Spratt, 2008; Liu, 2010; Javid & Al-Asmari, 2011; Javid, Al-Asmari, & Farooq, 2012; Rababah, 2003; Wu, 2004). This finding has a very positive pedagogical implication for EFL teachers working in Saudi Arabia that due to the efforts of Saudi educational institutions to ensure effective ELT, the realization is on the rise among Saudi EFL learners that they need English language not only for their instrumental needs but also as a tool to better understand native speakers of English as well as their culture. ELT faculty should try to exploit this positive change in the attitudes of Saudi freshmen students represented by the participants of this study to enhance and maintain higher motivation in their efforts to achieve the required English language proficiency. The findings of this survey also revealed that the participants do not consider it an important factor to study English and that English enjoys high status in the KSA or they would be able to achieve recognition as educated persons in the society. Both these items (3 & 4) showed significant difference in the perception of the male and female participants of this study. The study supports the findings of Umer, Javid, and Farooq (2013) reporting that the Saudi English-major students believe that they cannot get a good job if they have low English language proficiency. Lower values (male 3.29 & female 2.8) were assigned to item 7 that elicited their perception towards the attitude of their families if they speak English and it is reported that it is not an important factor for their preference to learn and speak English. Among the remaining items that reported significant difference, males assigned higher values as compared to their female counterparts. Items 10 and 11 elicited their responses towards their attitude to learn English for watching English movies and listening to English music. A higher value of 4.33 was reported for the male students whereas females assigned moderate value of 3.9

indicating that they are not much interested to watch English movies. It may be due to fact that Saudi Arabia is a traditional society where females face more restrictions as compared to the males. As far as their attitudes related to English music is concerned, both groups assigned lower values reinforcing the religious inclinations they bear as it is not permitted in Islam. The last item that also showed significant difference in favor of the male cohort of this study also indicated their low preference towards using ELT textbooks published in English-speaking countries. The lowest value of less than 3 has been given to the item that elicited their attitudes towards having English as medium of instruction in Saudi Arabia. The findings partially confirm the findings of Javid, Farooq, & Umer (2013) who investigated Saudi English-major students who reported that use of Arabic by their teachers is an important factor in their low proficiency in English language. There seems a contradiction as far as their negative attitude is concerned towards having English as medium of instruction in the educational institutions in the KSA because it does not match with their higher instrumental and integrative motivation as reported by the findings of this survey. This contradiction may be due to two factors. The first one is their love and preference for the Arabic language and the second is that they are afraid of the fact that due to this their academic burden would double because they have to study the contents along with an additional burden of English that may adversely affect their grade point average (GPA). The finding is in line with a study conducted in Malaysia to elicit Saudi students' attitudes towards English language and majority of the participants emphasized that Arabic should not be compromised by giving unnecessary importance to English language (Al-Mutawa, 1986). The results of independent-samples t-test revealed significant differences in the attitudes of both the groups in 6 out of the total 14 items included in this part of the questionnaire mainly in favor of the male cohort partially accepting the first hypothesis of this survey study.

Table 2: Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English language teaching/ learning (14 items)

	Questionnaire Items	G	n	m	SD	Df	p value	
15	Foreign language learning ability is same in all nationalities.	Boys	112	2.48	1.17	231	.068	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	2.22	.987	217.95	.070	
16	Saudi students are good English language learners.	Boys	112	3.16	1.18	231	.975	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.16	1.03	221.38	.975	
17		Boys	112	3.10	1.21	231	.010	p < 0.05

#	Statement	Group	N	Mean	SD		Sig.	Result
	Women are better English language learners.	Girls	121	3.49	1.05	220.60	.010	
18	English language learning is easier if it is done in an English-speaking country.	Boys	112	4.56	.694	231	.112	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.38	.943	220.13	.108	
19	English language learning is different from learning other academic subjects.	Boys	112	3.61	1.05	231	.923	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.62	.838	212.17	.924	
20	A lot of memorization is involved in learning English language.	Boys	112	3.88	1.08	231	.542	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.79	1.16	230.99	.541	
21	English language can be learnt easily if teachers give priority to vocabulary.	Boys	112	4.25	.799	231	.160	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.09	.830	230.63	.159	
22	English language can be learnt easily if teachers give priority to grammar.	Boys	112	4.18	.822	231	.334	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.07	.950	229.98	.331	
23	English language can be learnt easily if teachers ensure students' active participation in class.	Boys	112	4.19	.814	231	.747	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.23	.834	230.33	.746	
24	English language can be learnt easily if teachers practice variety of exercise in class.	Boys	112	4.23	.900	231	.433	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.14	.878	228.61	.433	
25	English language can be learnt easily if students use English language outside the class.	Boys	112	4.47	.793	231	.108	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.29	.862	230.99	.107	
26	English language can be learnt easily if teachers use frequent group/pair work.	Boys	112	4.05	1.04	231	.531	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.96	1.05	229.90	.530	
27	English language can be learnt easily if teachers	Boys	112	4.08	1.02	231	.091	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.29	.843	215.19	.094	

	use modern teaching aids.						
28	English language can be learnt easily if students are trained to use online resources.	Boys	112	3.94	1.03	231	.544	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.03	1.13	230.98		

Table 2 comprehensively details the data analyses for the questionnaire items that were meant to elicit participants' responses regarding English Language Teaching/learning process. Majority of the items have been assigned comparatively higher values. Both the groups have assigned the highest value to the item which sought their response towards the supposition that English language learning is much easier if it is done in an English-speaking country whereas the second highest means were calculated for the item which stated that it is easier to learn English if they use English language outside the classroom. Both these highest ranking items strongly suggest that the participants of this study know that language is a skill and proficiency depends on its active usage so that frequently used structures should become automatic to be used without any inhibition and additional efforts. Much research has indicated that Arab students are in the habit of using their mother tongue in their mutual interaction that is a major factor that hinders the required English language proficiency (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Javid, Al-thubaiti, & Uthman, 2013). This finding is an extremely positive sign as evident by the highest mean values assigned to these two items related to the role of using the target language outside the academic setting and the faculty members who are teaching English in the KSA should exploit this positive trend to motivate their students to use the target language outside the classroom as well. They should be exhorted to benefit from the online resources as well to practice the target language with native and non-native friends. The participants assigned third highest value to the item related to using modern teaching aids in English classes supporting the findings of Javid, Farroq, & Ajmal (2012). Fourth and fifth highest values were assigned to the supposition that learning English language becomes much easier if English teachers make their classes interactive and exploit variety of exercises in class providing the students with ample opportunities to practice the target language and keep their motivation high. This finding confirms the findings of Javid et al. (2012) who investigated English-major undergraduates and English faculty to find out the causes of ineffective ELT in the same academic setting and the results revealed that both faculty and English-major students from Taif University reported that to ensure effective ELT. It is extremely important to make classes interactive in which students

should be involved in such activities that ensure maximum interaction in the target language among the students as well as with the faculty members.

Moderately high values were reported for the items that elicited their responses towards the supposition that learning English will be more effective if teachers give priorities to English vocabulary and grammar. This result partially aligns with the findings of Javid (2011) who reported that Saudi medical undergraduates also favored learning grammar rules to achieve English language proficiency. The next most favored items stated that learning English can be easier if teachers use frequent group/pair work and ensure students' active participation in classroom activities. The finding related to their preference for interactive classes support the previous study conducted in the same context (Javid, Farooq, & Ajmal, 2012) which investigated English-major university undergraduates and English Faculty members and reported that interactive classes are imperative to ensure effective ELT in the KSA. The study of Javid (2011) also investigated the learning styles and assessment techniques of Saudi medical undergraduates and the participants strongly favored the use of group/pair work to improve their English language proficiency. Though the participants of this study also supported the use of this pedagogical technique by assigning moderately high values to it but it is rather important for English faculty to motivate the students and provide them with ample opportunities to be involved in group/pair work which will not only increase students' talking time but also extremely instrumental in helping them overcome their cultural inhibition of speaking in front of their class fellows. Proper benefit cannot be achieved unless the teachers ensure that the students only use the target language while interacting with each other during group/pair work. The lowest mean values have been calculated for the first item of the questionnaire stating that foreign language learning ability is same in all nationalities suggesting that the participants bear this belief that some nationalities have higher ability to learn a foreign language. The same trend is also evident from the results of the second questionnaire item. The participants assigned 2nd lowest mean to the statement that Saudi students are good English language learners. This belief may be due to the fact that the participants of this study equate the ability to learn a foreign language with supporting dynamics such as strong English teaching/learning culture in educational institutes and society support in terms of having sufficient opportunities to get ample feedback and sufficient practice for easier learning of the target language. The lack of these opportunities in Saudi Arabia may be the reason behind this psychological underpinning. The item eliciting their responses towards the supposition that women are better English language learners also showed extremely low mean value. An interesting finding is that the girls assigned

significantly higher value as compared to their male counterparts: this is the only item that showed a statistically significant difference resulting in rejecting the second hypothesis of this study.

Table 3: Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the role EFL teachers and learners

	Questionnaire Items	group	n	M	SD	Df	p value	
29	English language can be learnt easily if teachers give frequent assignments.	Boys	112	3.196	1.341	231	.603	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.107	1.263	226.74	.603	
30	English language can be learnt easily if teachers control the class.	Boys	112	3.848	1.032	231	.137	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.057	1.105	230.97	.136	
31	English language can be learnt easily if textbooks are followed strictly.	Boys	112	3.303	1.320	231	.932	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.289	1.227	225.88	.932	
32	English language can be learnt easily if teachers give frequent quizzes.	Boys	112	3.580	1.190	231	.829	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.545	1.264	230.93	.828	
33	English language can be learnt easily if teachers correct the mistakes immediately.	Boys	112	4.464	.9097	231	.241	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.338	.7136	210.33	.245	
34	English language can be learnt easily if teachers are friendly.	Boys	112	4.669	.6061	231	.017	p < 0.05
		Girls	121	4.405	1.004	199.54	.015	
35	English language can be learnt easily if teachers give individual attention to the students.	Boys	112	4.419	.9167	231	.535	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.347	.8632	226.71	.535	
36	English language can be learnt easily if students are regular.	Boys	112	4.205	.9216	231	.721	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.247	.8970	228.50	.722	
37	English language can be learnt easily if students use the target language in class.	Boys	112	4.250	.9054	231	.064	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.008	1.060	229.52	.062	
38	English language can be learnt easily if students are trained to carry out their own learning.	Boys	112	3.901	.9951	231	.436	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.991	.7582	207.04	.441	
39	English language can be learnt easily if students use online resources frequently.	Boys	112	3.866	1.086	231	.070	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.603	1.114	230.36	.070	
40	English language can be learnt easily if students practice the target language with their English-speaking friends.	Boys	112	4.366	1.039	231	.481	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.446	.6702	187.19	.489	
41	English language can be learnt effectively if learners reward themselves when they perform better in their English class.	Boys	112	3.919	1.091	231	.355	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	4.049	1.047	227.79	.356	
42	English language can be learnt easily if students use audio-visual material more frequently.	Boys	112	3.910	1.111	231	.915	p > 0.05
		Girls	121	3.925	1.009	224.29		

Table 3 details the results generated by the responses of both male and female cohort of this study towards the questionnaire items meant to elicit their responses towards the role of EFL teachers and learners. Extremely high value was reported to the item stating they like those EFL teachers who are friendly. The finding is consistent with much research conducted in the Arab world as well as in the other parts of the world that like all language learners Arab EFL learners in general prefer friendly teachers who make learning fun that stimulate them to actively participate in classroom proceeding and increase their learning possibilities (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Donaldson, 1991; Radford, 1980; Saafin, 2005; Walls et al., 2002; etc.). This has been presented by Saafin (2005) in the following words:

> The number of responses identified in the data collected from students . . . clearly indicates that teachers' friendliness is of high value for Arab students. There was a perfect consensus among the participants in all three phases that friendliness of EFL teachers was very necessary. (p. 88)

The study of Javid (2011), conducted in the same context, also supports this finding as it was found out that Saudi medical undergraduates assigned the highest preference for friendly teachers and reported that they learn best when teachers make learning fun. The participants of the study rated the item "English language can be learnt easily if teachers correct the mistakes immediately" the 2nd highest suggesting that they want expert teachers and like them to help them right away instead of trying out to reach the correct answers. Third and fourth highest rating was for the items about practicing the target language with their English-speaking friends and teachers' giving individual attention to the students confirming the findings of Javid (2011) who reported that Saudi medical undergraduates want their teachers move around, help individual students, give instant feedback on their quizzes and provide them with correct answers without any delay. As far the practice of the target language is concerned, much research has offered valuable insights into the fact that Arab students feel hesitant to use English that has been identified as one of the major causes of the failure of Arab EFL learners in achieving desired English language proficiency (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Javid, 2010; Javid, 2011; Rababah, 2003). The participants assigned high value to the item that stated that practicing the target language with their English-speaking friends as well as using it with their class fellows and teachers in the academic context of classes will help them achieve the required proficiency easily. Other items that received high mean values were related to students' regular attendance and carrying out their own learning though using online and other available resources for learning the

target language. This finding is in line with the results reported by Farooq, Al-Asmari and Javid (2013) that Pakistani EFL learners also supported the use of online virtual classrooms to improve their learning skills and Farooq and Javid (2012) who reported Saudi EFL learners' preference for E-learning. The items that were given medium preferences include the students' rewarding themselves upon better performance to sustain and boost their motivation and frequent use of audio-visual material to help facilitate learning process. The findings are partially in line with the Javid's (2011) study who stated that Saudi medical undergraduate strongly favored the use of audio-visual teaching aids to facilitate EFL learning process. They also partially confirm the findings of Stapa (2009) who also reported that the participants of his study also assigned high values to the items regarding the use of videos.

An interesting finding is that both the groups of this study assigned medium values to the assumption that learning English is easier if EFL teachers control the class. It partially contradicts the highest ranking item of this category stating that both groups strongly believed that language learning is facilitated if teachers are friendly. It also contradicts the findings of previous research conducted in the same as well as in other academic contexts reporting that EFL learners assigned extremely low mean values to the items related to those teachers who are strict and maintain strict discipline in English classes (Javid, 2011; Kikuchi, 2005). It may be due to the fact that the cohort of this study bears a natural liking towards friendly teachers but they also realize that formal attitude facilitates learning a foreign language and academic discipline also contributes positively to achieve English language proficiency. As far the least preferred items are concerned, both the groups assigned the minimum value to the item stating that they learn better if frequent assignments are given to them. Second and third least preferred items remained the use of following textbooks strictly and taking frequent quizzes partially contradicting the findings of Javid (2011) who reported that Saudi medical undergraduates showed medium liking for this using a textbook and taking quizzes.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study in hand is a comprehensive investigation of Saudi preparatory year students' attitudes towards various dynamics of ELT along gender lines. The results revealed that both the groups saw eye to eye to each other as far their attitudes towards English language teaching/learning process and the role of teachers/learners is concerned but they showed comparatively wider differences towards English language and its culture; thus, partially rejecting the 1st null hypothesis and accepting the 2nd and 3rd null hypotheses set for this study. The findings of the study seem to suggest that Saudi EFL learners represented by the cohort of this

study bear quite positive attitudes towards English language, its culture, its status in Saudi society and express their urge to know more about English-speaking people and their resolve to achieve high English language proficiency. It can also be concluded that the participants of this study have strong instrumental motivation along with a reasonably high integrative motivation to learn English language. Another interesting finding is their resolve to learn English even if it were not a university requirement showing their genuine interest in the target language. They have stated that it is imperative for them to learn English if they want to be successful academically and professionally. It is exhorted that EFL faculty in Saudi educational institutions should take extra measures to achieve maximum pedagogical benefits out of this positive attitude of Saudi EFL learners to boost and maintain their motivation in this regard. They should also be motivated to benefit from authentic sources such as English movies, media, online resources, etc. to accelerate their English language learning as well learning more about native culture and people to broaden their vision. Considering the religious fabric of Saudi society and the psychological underpinnings of Saudi EFL learners, it also seems important to exercise care and caution in the selection of material that EFL faculty suggests to be exploited to practice the target language.

The results related to their perceived attitudes towards teaching/learning process and the role of EFL teachers/learners also suggests that they bear mature outlook in this regard. It is learnt that they believe that learning a foreign language is easier if it is not merely limited to the academic setting but they have to try their best to find opportunities to practice the target language outside as well to strengthen and enhance their linguistic competence. Furthermore, it is also found out that they consider English language a skill that cannot be mastered thorough memorization only. It is thus recommended that English teachers should not only provide them with variety of innovative activities such as, role-plays, simulations, exploiting realia etc. supported by an intelligent use of audio-visual teaching aids but also guide them to use modern technology effectively to practice the target language in real-life situations. Another beneficial pedagogical technique of pair/group work should also be incorporated in their routine teaching more frequently that will increase student talking time and also help them overcome their cultural inhibition of speaking English in front of the whole class. A judicious use of this technique will give them confidence and courage to speak English more fluently without being afraid of making mistakes. It is also highly desirable that English teachers should have friendly attitude towards their students and keep the language classes relaxed to encourage their active participation in classroom activities. Furthermore, it is also encouraged that instead of following textbooks strictly and having rigid schedule to cover

the prescribed syllabus, English teachers should remain flexible as far teaching schedule and contents are concerned, i.e., instead of blindly following them the interest of the students should also be considered so that the learners' motivation can be kept high. Another important finding of this investigation is that Saudi EFL learners as represented by the participants of this study do not prefer their teachers to use Arabic and believe that they can master the target language easily if it is used consistently by the teachers as well as the students in the classrooms. Therefore, it is also important that English teachers should support this positive realization among Saudi EFL learners and exhort them to communicate in the target language inside as well as outside the classroom by setting an example themselves in this regard. They may guide their students to join or create special interest groups comprising of EFL learners from within and outside the KSA to compensate for the limited opportunities to practice English language outside the academic setting.

Though the findings of this gender-based perceptive investigation have significant pedagogical implications for ELT in the KSA, they may not be over-generalized or misinterpreted because of the following limitations: a) limited number of participants that were drawn from one university, b) they all belong to Preparatory Year Program and c) use of one close-ended instrument to generate the data.

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