

Gender Difference in Students' Attitude Towards English Language in Selected Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality of the Bono Region of Ghana

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Abstract: This study investigated into the attitude of the Senior High School (SHS) students in the Sunyani Municipality towards the English language. Stratified sampling was employed to select 4 Senior High Schools for the study. Students and teachers of English were randomly selected from each school for the study. The data of this study was collected through a questionnaire. The data collected was subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis using SPSS Version. 22. The study findings reveal that the students have positive attitude toward English language. However, girls had a more positive attitude towards English than boys while Single-sex schools were more positively disposed to English than mixed-sex ones. Efforts should be made to encourage students regardless of sex, to develop a more positive attitude to their study of English.

Keywords: Student's Attitude, English Language, Gender, High School

I. INTRODUCTION

Second language learning is a demanding task. Apart from other requirements, such as the investment of time and effort, and a proper learning environment with qualified teachers, learners need to possess a positive attitude to ease and expedite learning. In a general sense, positive attitude is an excellent driving force that creates an urge in humans to perform certain tasks (Sounders, 2021). Globalization has now become a motivation for many individuals all over the world to learn the English language. The world has become a global village (Fantini, 2018), thus there is a basic need for the people around the world to learn English to meet their cultural, political, and economic needs. In other words, the English language currently enjoys the standing of an international language (Afrifa et al. 2019). English is the most commonest foreign language that has been used as the medium of communication and for exchanging ideas among different nations and societies of the world, and it also enjoys wide use among different societies and cultural/ethnic groups living within the same country, such as the UK; therefore, this language can be considered a lingua franca (Temple et al. 2018; Su et al.). This phenomenon is supported by the fact that the number of non-native English speakers is three times that of native speakers (Afrifa et al. 2019).

Moreover, a multitude of international organisations, for example, the United Nations (UN) and its different institutions use English as one of their official languages. Similarly, different countries also use English at the national level in different ways. Advancements in technology such as the Internet have helped individuals around the world to draw closer, which has aided English to obtain its current status (Temple et al. 2018). Because of this current status, the English language is being taught and learned as a second language more than any other language around the world (Rao, 2019).

To form part of the global village and to be able to fit into Ghanaian society, it is important that learners are exposed to the English language at an early stage of their education. This is because the English language is necessary for meaningful and effective academic work (Akosuah et al. 2018). It is the official language in Ghana, and everybody is expected to formally use it in government, the media, commerce, banks, and the like. It has become the lingua franca in a country faced with many languages. The English language thus serves as a unifying force amongst Ghanaians. English helps people to travel all around the world (Kesewah, 2012). However, the English language teaching and learning, as well as use in our Senior High Schools, have been a problem in this country as it is a second language.

English is a very important subject in the school curriculum. Its importance is not only for the national purpose but also for the individual's life. English plays a significant role in character building, boosting self-esteem, and providing opportunities for developing curiosity and creativity (Akowuah et al. 2018; Hyon et al. 2018; Hall, 2017). In view of this importance, it is desirable for all students in Ghanaian Senior High Schools (SHS) to put extra effort into the learning and use of the language. But this seems not to be the case. There seem to be some differences in attitudes towards learning and use of the language.

This study sought to assess the gender difference in students' attitudes towards the English language in selected Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality in the Bono Region.

Thirty-five (35) students were randomly selected from each of the four schools. This ensured that each student regardless of gender had an equal chance of being selected for the study. Students in the Form Two classes were purposefully selected. This was because the researcher contended that at this level,

- A. students had formed attitudes towards learning and performance of English.
 - B. they would have been exposed to much of the English content as stipulated in the syllabus.
 - C. in Form two, students would have chosen their subjects in preparation for career choices.
- The career choice could be a result of how a student perceived English.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was administered to students in the selected Senior High Schools to assess the attitudes formed by these students towards learning and its relationship with gender in English. This questionnaire was administered to the randomly selected Form Two students in the selected Senior High Schools. A 5-point Likert Attitudes Scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” was used to determine students’ feelings.

Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended items in the questionnaire were grouped into different categories/themes consistent with the research objectives and deduction and generalizations made using patterns and trend of responses. Quantitative data obtained from closed-ended items were coded and entered into the computer using the SPSS program. Specifically, the data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, percentages, means, and frequencies. The data was presented with the aid of figures, graphs, and tables.

The data was also subjected to two-independent-samples t-test analysis. This t-test is suitable for empirical analyses where the samples are independent entities. In the current research, the girls’ and boys’ populations would be approached as separate and independent entities in order to assess each group’s language learning attitudes. Therefore, the two-independent-samples t-test would be an appropriate tool for the data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the respective Heads of the sampled schools before talking to teachers and students. Before the actual issuing of the questionnaire, the consent of teachers of English and students was sought. Respondents were assured that the information that was collected would be treated confidentially.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background data of Students

This section covers the gender distribution of the respondents, type of schools studied, and attitudinal problems affecting the learning of English according to the respondent students.

Age Distribution

The sample selected for the study constituted (55%) males and the rest (45%) females as indicated in Figure 2.

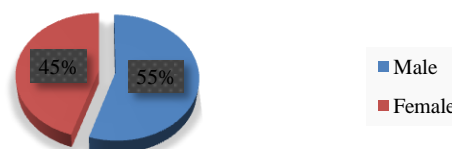


Figure 2: Gender distribution of students

Type of School

The study revealed that 50 % of the respondents came from mixed schools, 25 % of the respondents were from boys’ schools and the rest 25 % were from girls’ schools as shown in Figure 3.

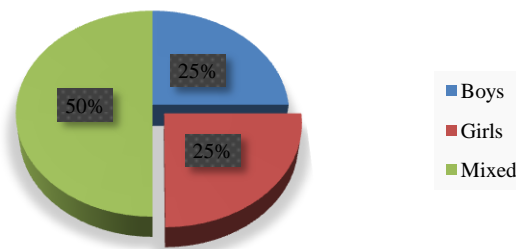


Figure 3: Types of School

Problems associated with attitudes affecting the learning of English

The respondents were asked to identify some of the problems they experienced that affected their learning of English. Their views are summarized in Figure 4.

The major problems in the learning of English in the selected secondary schools included lack of teaching facilities such as textbooks and learning resources was mentioned by 37.9 % of the respondents, and lack of confidence in the ability to learn English as reported by 22.1 % of the respondents. The difficult language used by the teacher was cited by only 17.9 % of the respondents while lack of interest in English was mentioned by 16.4 % of the respondents. Only 5.7 % of the respondents reported that they experienced no problems learning English.

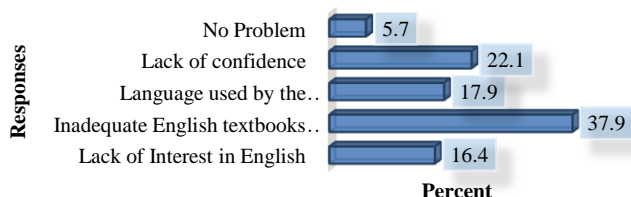


Figure 4: Problems associated with attitudes affecting the learning of English

Students’ attitudes towards learning English

The study further sought to identify the opinions of students towards learning English. This helped in detecting the kind of attitudes they had formed towards the subject. The responses were put under five categories of a five-point Likert-scale which included strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree, Table 1.

The findings indicated that 48.6 % of the respondents strongly agreed that they enjoyed learning English as a subject, with 30.7 % of the respondents strongly agreeing that they would like to continue doing English or communication-related courses after Senior High school. Further to this only 68.6 %

of the respondents strongly disagreed that understanding English was difficult and therefore impossible to learn, while 82.1 % of the respondents strongly agreed that English was a very useful subject in life. Only 21.4 % of the respondents strongly agreed that among the subjects taught, English was their favorite.

The study also revealed that only 7.1 % of the respondents strongly agreed that they felt extremely anxious and fearful when English examinations were mentioned or brought while 33.6 % strongly disagreed. High-level of anxiety in students had a negative influence on their learning and performance in the subject. This has been associated with increasing test stress, low self-confidence, fear of failure, and negative attitudes towards learning a subject (Getie, 2020). A high percentage, however (67.1%) strongly disagreed and disagreed that they study English for the sake of it. 36.4 % of the respondents strongly agreed that when someone speaks English they think he/she is educated, while 55 % of them strongly agreed that when someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him/her.

Table 1: Students’ attitudes towards learning English

Students’ Feelings/Opinions	Responses (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy learning English/ I like speaking English.	48.6	41.4	2.1	6.4	1.4
English classes/lessons are not interesting	8.6	17.9	11.4	26.4	35.7
I would like to continue to pursue English/communication-related courses after my completion of SHS education	30.7	22.9	24.3	15.0	7.1
English is very useful in life/ English is an important lingua franca in globalization.	82.1	14.3	1.4	1.4	0.7
When someone speaks English I think he/she is educated.	36.4	28.6	7.9	18.6	8.6
When someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him/her.	55.0	33.6	7.1	2.9	1.4
I dislike people who speak to me in English.	2.1	5.7	5.0	20.7	66.4
I think it is the teacher who can make the learning English easier	37.9	25.0	10.7	15.7	10.7
Among the subjects taught, English is my favourite	21.4	25.7	22.9	24.3	5.7
I am well provided with English textbooks and other learning resources	27.9	27.1	6.4	25.7	12.9
I feel extremely anxious and fearful, when English examinations are mentioned or brought	7.1	20.0	12.1	27.1	33.6
I do a lot of English reading exercises on my own or with a friend	28.6	35.7	8.6	17.1	10.0
English is impossible to learn	1.4	3.6	7.1	19.3	68.6
Learning English is just remembering what the teacher says and does while in class	15.7	20.7	15.0	31.4	17.1
My grades (marks) are always low in English	11.4	17.1	9.3	32.1	30.0
I study English for the sake of it	12.1	11.4	9.3	30.7	36.4
I like my English teacher	56.4	25.0	7.9	5.7	5.0
My friends don’t like learning English	20.0	23.6	21.4	21.4	13.5
My parents and siblings encourage me to learn, speak, and to perform well in English	60.0	22.9	2.9	8.6	5.7
Being a girl or a boy interferes with my learning and my performance of English	9.3	15.7	9.3	17.1	48.6
I learn English well regardless of the gender of my teacher	43.6	17.9	7.1	8.6	22.9

Gender differences in Attitude toward English

There was a significant difference in attitude towards English between the girls and the boys of the selected schools at a 5 % significant level (Table 2). The girls had a more positive attitude towards English than the boys.

There were significant differences in the mean attitudes of girls and boys with respect to their feelings towards English examinations (p= 0.037), how their families and siblings encourage them to learn or speak English (p=0.008), and their grades in English (p=0.000).

The attitude of students towards English in Single-sex and Mixed-sex Schools

There were significant differences (p= 0.019) among Boy’s SHS, Girls’ SHS, and Mixed SHS. Students in Same or single-sex schools had a more positive attitude to the English Language than their counterparts in mixed-sex schools (Table 3), especially the girls’ SHS.

Table 2: Means responses of boys and girls and the p-values

Students’ Feelings	Means		p-Value
	Male	Female	
I enjoy learning English/ I like speaking English.	1.70	1.71	0.933
English classes/lessons are not interesting	3.78	3.44	0.146
I would like to continue to pursue English/communication-related courses after my completion of SHS education	2.47	2.43	0.857
English is very useful in life/ English is an important lingua franca in globalization.	1.27	1.21	0.532
When someone speaks English I think he/she is educated.	2.42	2.25	0.487
When someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him/her.	1.61	1.63	0.866
I dislike people who speak to me in English.	4.39	4.49	0.539
I think it is the teacher who can make the learning English easier	2.57	2.11	0.053
Among the subjects taught, English is my favourite	2.71	2.62	0.648
I am well provided with English textbooks and other learning resources	2.65	2.73	0.742
I feel extremely anxious and fearful, when English examinations are mentioned or brought	3.39	3.86	0.037*
I do a lot of English reading exercises on my own or with a friend	2.61	2.24	0.100
English is impossible to learn	4.74	4.54	0.633
Learning English is just remembering what the teacher says and does while in class	3.10	3.17	0.760
My grades (marks) are always low in English	3.12	4.02	0.000*
I study English for the sake of it	3.53	3.86	0.168
I like my English teacher	1.73	1.84	0.555
My friends don’t like learning English	2.83	2.47	0.854
My parents and siblings encourage me to learn, speak and to perform well in English	2.01	1.48	0.008*
Being a girl or a boy interferes with my learning and my performance of English	3.63	3.95	0.252

I learn English well regardless of the gender of my teacher	2.52	2.46	0.833
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*= Significant difference

Table 3: Means response of Boys, Girls and Mixed schools and their p-values

Students’ Feelings	Means			p-Value
	Boys	Girls	mixed	
I enjoy learning English/ I like speaking English.	1.66	1.57	1.80	0.443
English classes/lessons are not interesting	3.74	3.14	3.81	0.047*
I would like to continue to pursue English/communication-related courses after my completion of SHS education	2.69	2.37	2.37	0.448
English is very useful in life/ English is an important lingua franca in globalization.	1.17	1.11	1.34	0.152
When someone speaks English I think he/she is educated.	2.46	2.23	2.34	0.764
When someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him/her.	1.69	1.34	1.73	0.079
I dislike people who speak to me in English.	4.34	4.86	4.27	0.011*
I think it is the teacher who can make the learning English easier	2.71	1.94	2.40	0.066
Among the subjects taught, English is my favourite	2.86	2.63	2.60	0.582
I am well provided with English textbooks and other learning resources	2.40	2.54	2.90	0.195
I feel extremely anxious and fearful, when English examinations are mentioned or brought	3.34	4.11	3.47	0.025*
I do a lot of English reading exercises on my own or with a friend	2.54	2.14	2.54	0.308
English is impossible to learn	4.46	4.71	4.41	0.250
Learning English is just remembering what the teacher says and does while in class	3.51	3.11	2.96	0.137
My grades (marks) are always low in English	3.14	4.37	3.29	0.000*
I study English for the sake of it	3.43	3.80	3.74	0.461
I like my English teacher	1.63	2.00	1.74	0.366
My friends don’t like learning English	2.91	2.97	2.76	0.704
My parents and siblings encourage me to learn, speak and to perform well in English	1.89	1.31	1.94	0.032*
Being a girl or a boy interferes with my learning and my performance of English	3.66	4.09	3.73	0.380
I learn English well regardless of the gender of my teacher	1.91	2.09	2.99	0.001*

*= Significant difference

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the attitudes of students of selected SHS in the Sunyani Municipality of the Bono region towards English by asking them about their opinions. The results revealed that the students realized the

necessity of learning English in the era of globalization and therefore showed positive attitudes toward English. This is in agreement of the results of Getie (2020) which showed that grade 10 students had positive attitudes toward English. Al Mamun et. al. (2012) conducted a questionnaire survey with 79 randomly selected non-major English undergraduate students from Khulna University, Bangladesh to gauge their attitude towards EFL. The research findings indicated that the learners had got a positive attitude towards the English language. Also, Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015) led a study with 112 English major students from Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia to explore their attitudes as well as study factors affecting the learning of English. The findings of their study revealed that the learners have an overall positive attitude towards English. Similarly, Ziyad (2015), carried out a study on the Attitudes toward English among AL-Quds Open University Students in Tulkarm Branch, involving 180 students. The results of the study revealed that the students in AL- Quds Open University, Tulkarm Branch had positive attitudes toward English.

The current study also showed that there was a significant difference in attitude between males and female students, with the female students having a better and a more positive attitude towards English than their male counterparts. The finding is in agreement with the results of Wayar (2017) which revealed that female students generally had higher rates than male students indicating more positive attitudes toward the use of English in Northern Nigeria. Abidin et. al. (2012), exploring whether there was any significant difference in the students' attitudes towards the English language, based on their demographic profiles i.e., gender, field, and year of study, observed that statistically, there was a significant attitudinal difference regarding gender and field of study but not year of study. The results of the current study are similar to those in a study by Ma (2014) and Nilufer and Mehmet (2015). They advocate that gender is an important perspective under second language learning investigations and conclude that females show more interest, positive behavior, and performance compared to males. The differences between the male and female respondents' attitudes may be due to, the diversity of English teaching strategies and classroom activities employed by teachers of the English language to teach female and male students, and on the other hand, the design and content of English curriculum may not meet the interests and needs of the male students. Thus, they do not show a positive reaction towards learning English (Abidin *et. al.*, 2012).

The current study also revealed that there was significant difference in the attitude of students in single-sex schools and those in mixed-sex schools (Table 3). It was realized that students in single-sex schools had a better and more positive attitude towards English than those in mixed schools.

The above results were confirmed by the teachers of English in the selected SHS. They confirmed that the attitude of students in SHS towards English is generally positive.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data collected and analysed, it is concluded that;

Though a majority of students were favourably disposed to English, the girls had a more positive attitude. It is also noticed that students in single-sex schools had a better and more positive attitude towards English while those in girls' school were found to be better disposed towards English than those in boys' school. By implication, those in single-sex schools generally perform better in English, and girls from such schools perform better than their boy school counterparts.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made from the study.

1. A positive attitude towards learning English is a necessary ingredient in secondary school education. There is need for teachers, parents, and any other education stakeholders to encourage these positive attitudes.
2. There is a correlation between learners' attitudes and performance in English. This should be established early enough in a student's education.
3. Teachers of English should utilize available learning resources to encourage positive attitudes in students towards the English language.
4. Efforts should be made to ensure gender does not hinder learning and performance in English among students.

Disclosure

Author takes full responsibility for any error.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in relation to publication of this research paper.

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