



## Students' Language Attitude of SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan towards English

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### ABSTRACT

The research aims to analyze the language attitudes of SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah (Hikmatul Fadhillah Junior High School) Medan students towards English based on attitude components. Data was taken from students of grade VIII, with 28 students selected from four different classes and seven randomly chosen from each class using random sampling techniques. The selection process involved teachers as informants based on students' relatively better English proficiency, identified through classroom observations. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with data collected through observation and interviews based on techniques proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The results show that students generally exhibit positive attitudes toward English. Cognitively, they recognize its importance for future opportunities such as education, career, and global access to information. Effectively, they view English proficiency as a source of pride, and conatively, they show a strong desire to improve and frequently use English, supported by school regulations. However, despite these positive tendencies, some students experience negative feelings, including pressure and low self-confidence, particularly when facing challenges with English grammar. These mixed responses highlight the complexity of student attitudes toward English learning.

**Keywords:** Affective, Cognitive, Conative, English, Language Attitudes

### 1. Introduction

As an international language, English is one of the most frequently learned foreign languages. Besides being used in business contexts, English is also used in education. Proficiency in English is essential for students to succeed in today's increasingly interconnected and globalized world (Putri et al., 2023). A good command of English can effectively enhance the understanding of science and technology, thereby increasing the competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources (Ananda, 2023).

Although most of the world's population can only speak one language, a significant minority can communicate in two or more languages. For example, someone with reasonable fluency in several languages will still choose to speak their native language whenever possible, as it is the most familiar and comfortable language. This natural tendency will be limited only by one factor: linguistic suitability. For instance, a native Hungarian speaker might prefer to use Hungarian whenever possible, but if they find themselves in an environment where there are no other Hungarian speakers in a foreign country, they would have to use their second or third language (Eliza et al., 2022).

Attitude is a psychological phenomenon usually manifest in actions or behaviors (Wardani et al., 2020). Language attitude is a mental position or feeling towards one's or another's language (Kridalaksana, 2008, p.221). Language attitude refers to general feelings towards individuals, objects, institutions, events, and abstract ideas such as language (McKenzie, 2010, p.19). Mayehoff (2006) defines language attitude as examining a person's positive and negative attitudes towards various language varieties and explaining how people perceive language, particularly organized language. Language attitude measures the extent to which a language is alive and developing within its speaking community (Jalaludin, 2021). By analyzing language attitudes, one can determine whether the speaker's attitude toward the language is positive or negative. Language attitude is a psychological event that cannot be directly observed. However, it can be seen through

an individual's language or speech behavior (Chaer and Agustina, 2010, p. 149). Attitudes toward language are simple yet significant concepts because they play an important role in language learning and have a major impact on success in language acquisition (Fitri et al., 2021). Thus, it can be concluded that language attitude is an individual's mental attitude or feeling towards a language, which cannot be directly observed but can be seen through language behavior or speech behavior.

Language attitude in the context of sociolinguistic research refers to actions or behaviors that arise in response to the use of a particular language by individuals and are influenced by their views or perceptions of that language phenomenon. Language attitude is an integral part of sociolinguistic studies that explore various aspects of language. In this context, it is important to understand that the freedom to choose and use a language is not absolute and depends on the situation and conditions in a specific place. The actual conditions show variations in the attitudes of the Indonesian people, with some having positive views towards certain languages and others having negative views. Therefore, it can be understood that individuals who use a particular language are greatly influenced by their choice of language in their daily lives. According to Karsana (2009, p.78), a positive attitude towards a language can be seen when someone actively uses the language as a tool of communication in various situations, has a high proficiency in the language, is not influenced by other dialects that could undermine the presence of the language within themselves, and also defends the language from potential harm. On the other hand, a negative attitude towards a language can arise when an individual or group of individuals lose pride in their language and switch to using a language that does not originate from their group.

A common phenomenon related to students' attitudes towards English in schools is the variation in the student's level of interest and motivation. Every class or group of students has differences in how enthusiastic or interested students are in English. Some students may have a very positive attitude towards English. They might be interested in foreign cultures, English-language films, and music or have had positive previous experiences learning the language. On the other hand, some students might be less enthusiastic about learning English. They may face difficulties understanding the material, feel unconfident in speaking English, or have less interest in the subject. Therefore, students' attitudes can affect their participation, motivation, and achievement in learning English at the junior high school level. Teachers and schools must understand these differences and foster more positive interest and motivation towards English through appropriate and motivating approaches.

Research by Adela Mašić and Senad Bećirović indicates that gender, age, and academic achievement (GPA) in English significantly influence high school students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. Attitudes toward English are strong predictors of students' academic success. The most influential aspect of attitude is the cognitive aspect, followed by the emotional aspect, while the behavioral aspect has the least influence. Females scored higher in the cognitive and emotional aspects, while males scored higher in the behavioral aspect (Adela Mašić and Senad Bećirović, 2021). Another study by Kurniasari and Mbato shows that participants had a positive attitude toward Indonesian identity and acknowledged the importance of English. English is considered important not only as an international language but also as an essential language alongside Indonesian in education and profession. The subjects of this study were 256 Indonesian participants, randomly selected from five universities (two public, three private). The study used a questionnaire divided into two parts: the first part was the bilingual attitude questionnaire adapted from Sicam and Lucas (2016), and the second part was the English orientation questionnaire adapted from Mbato (2013) (Kurniasari and Mbato, 2018). Another study by Casil-Batang (2018) confirms that students generally show a positive attitude towards learning English in three aspects of language attitude: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. This study used a descriptive correlational method through survey questionnaires and written English proficiency tests, with 307 engineering students as the research sample. Thus, the importance of students' attitudes towards English in the context of learning cannot be overlooked. It can be concluded that language attitudes toward English are essential to language learning that every student must possess to succeed in English.

In the studies mentioned above, the research subjects were university-level students. The data collection techniques used were questionnaires and tests. In contrast, this study will discuss students' language attitudes towards English. The research subjects are school students, and the data collection techniques involve interviews. This school mandates that its students use English. This study is aimed at observing the phenomenon of students' language attitudes towards English at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah (Hikmatul Fadhillah Junior High School) Medan School based on sociolinguistic paradigms and determinants of language attitudes.

This study refers to three components (Chaer and Agustina, 2010, p.150): cognitive, affective, and conative. Regarding the cognitive component, this research examines how students assess language and whether they consider it important in their communication. From the affective component perspective, this study investigates their feelings towards the language, whether they like it or not. Based on the conative component,

this research examines their tendencies in acting towards the language, whether they accept or reject it.

Based on the initial observation of the study, the understanding and use of English among students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan are quite satisfactory. This can be seen in their communication with peers in school environments such as cafeterias and classrooms. Most of them use English when communicating, although there are concerns about grammar usage, and some also use Indonesian.

This research is interesting because, in this school, students are required to use English for communication except in Indonesian and Arabic language classes, yet some students use Indonesian when communicating with their peers. In everyday classroom conversations, they use Indonesian, but in front of their teachers, they use English, even though the school mandates English for communication. This discrepancy suggests that their language attitude tends towards Indonesian. Therefore, this study aims to understand their actual attitudes towards English.

## 2. Method

The method used in this research is qualitative because this study aims to analyze the characteristics of a phenomenon, gather facts, and explain them comprehensively based on the problem being addressed. It involves collecting data and conducting observations to obtain accurate data. According to Sibarani (2014), qualitative research seeks meaning and explores the values of its research objects.

This study collects data from four classes of 8th-grade students of SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan. A total of 28 students were selected from four different classes, with seven randomly chosen from each class to avoid overly broad research objects. The selection criteria include the students' better English proficiency than their peers, which was verified through field observations involving teachers as informants for data collection. These 8th-grade students are the oldest and actively participate in the school's learning process. They have been using English for learning and communicating with others for 2 years at the school, giving them more experience in learning and communicating in English than 7th-grade students. Data collection started in May 2024 and did not involve 9th-grade students due to their graduation. Therefore, they could not contribute to the data collection. The data source in this study is the result of interviews with students from SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan. The data collection technique applied in this study is a random technique, which is a sampling method in which each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as a research subject. (Sugiyono, 2019, p.133).

This study employs techniques Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) proposed. In this study, the researcher will use one of these techniques for data collection, specifically, the interview technique, where the researcher conducts face-to-face interactions with informants and formulates questions based on the three components mentioned, thus obtaining results from these interviews. According to Sugiyono (2020, p. 114), an interview is a meeting between two people to exchange information and ideas through questions and answers, facilitating the construction of meaning in the context of the discussed topic.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Result

#### 3.1.1 Students' Language Attitudes Towards English at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan Based on Attitude Components

Students can exhibit attitudes towards a particular language in either a positive or negative form. A positive language attitude is accompanied by positive actions, support, appreciation, and the belief in the importance of using English. Conversely, a negative language attitude is characterized by negative actions, doubt, belittlement, or a lack of appreciation for the importance of using English. The results of the research show the presence of both positive and negative language attitudes among the students of SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan towards English.

##### 3.1.1.1 Interview Results

In this study, data was collected through interviews with 28 students in the classroom. The questions were prepared, and the interview guide used was semi-structured, meaning it included main questions but allowed the interviewer the freedom to explore topics more deeply based on the responses from the informants. According to the preliminary results of this study, students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan have a very positive attitude towards the English language. They appreciate the language as an important communication tool and a way to gain information and see opportunities in the future.

##### 1. Positive Language Attitude

A positive language attitude includes three main components, which means that if a student has a positive

attitude, these three components will be present. The three main components are affective, conative, and cognitive patterns that emerge from the collected data. These components were obtained from the results of the interviews conducted. Each component consisted of several questions, and students not only provided yes or no answers but also gave reasons for the questions asked. These results are available in videos that have been delivered orally and have been transcribed into written form. The following explanation describes the components of the informants' positive language attitude towards English.

#### *A. Cognitive Components*

The Cognitive Component refers to the informants' knowledge, beliefs, or thoughts about the English language. Based on interviews with students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan, the students' language attitudes towards English from the cognitive component indicate the importance of using English. The students' responses demonstrate their understanding of the cognitive and practical benefits offered by the ability to speak English. For instance, many students mentioned that social media allows them to access more information, communicate with more people, and find friends from various countries. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of English in the academic and professional worlds, and they understand how crucial this language is for their future.

#### *Analysis Question 1*

The majority of informants emphasized that English is an international language widely used around the world. They see that the ability to speak English facilitates communication with people from various countries and is also a valuable skill in the job market. English is an international language that plays an important role in various aspects of life, such as education, career, cross-cultural communication, and globalization development. English language skills allow someone to interact with people from various countries, access global information, and open up opportunities in various sectors, including technology, science, tourism, and economy. In addition to being an important requirement in getting a scholarship or job, English also facilitates travel, understanding directions, transportation schedules, and daily conversations abroad. In the context of a career, English language skills are an added value that is greatly needed in multinational companies and international-based jobs. In the future, English will continue to be an important tool for facing global challenges, taking advantage of economic opportunities, and supporting global connectivity. Mastering English opens up wider career and education opportunities and helps build cross-country relationships that benefit the future. This optimistic view shows that learning English is not just a school requirement or a current need but an important investment to prepare for a successful and globally competitive future.

#### *Analysis Question 2*

Most informants stated that English plays a very important and crucial role in the era of globalization. They view English as an international communication tool and a bridge connecting people from diverse backgrounds and countries.

Informants acknowledge that in today's global work and educational environment, English has become the dominant language used in various fields such as business, technology, science, and education. Proficiency in English facilitates cross-cultural interaction and collaboration and allows access to broader information and opportunities in the global market. Some informants also highlight that English supports international mobility, allowing individuals to expand their career and educational reach. By mastering this language, they feel better prepared to face the challenges of globalization and take advantage of opportunities available internationally. This positive perspective underscores that English is not merely an additional skill but a vital strategic asset in navigating today's increasingly interconnected world.

#### *Analysis Question 3*

They have never felt that learning English is useless. They emphasize the benefits of English for the future, especially in terms of education and career. Many of them also mention that English is an important and useful skill in various aspects of life. Only two informants have ever felt that learning English was not beneficial; one admitted that this view was held when they were younger, and the other experienced difficulties at the beginning of their learning. However, over time, both came to realize the importance of mastering English. Overall, these findings suggest that, despite some initial challenges, awareness of the importance of English increases with time and learning experience.

#### *Analysis Question 4*

Several patterns can be identified regarding their most significant challenges when learning English. The

most frequently mentioned challenges are difficulties understanding grammar and memorizing new vocabulary. Some informants also expressed challenges related to pronunciation and a lack of confidence when speaking. Despite these difficulties, most informants still consider learning English very important for their future. Some felt frustrated initially, but over time, they discovered more effective and enjoyable learning methods, such as watching movies or listening to music in English. These challenges did not diminish their view of the importance of English; instead, they became more motivated to master it. Overall, despite various obstacles, the informants show a strong determination to continue learning and mastering English for better opportunities in the future.

Overall, students believe that English proficiency is essential for their future. They recognize that mastering English will significantly assist them in living in the era of globalization, especially in terms of further education, career, and communication. They also understand that mastering English will make it easier for them to access information and technology.

### *B. Affective Components*

The Affective Component refers to emotions and feelings towards the attitude object. Based on interviews with students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhilah Medan, the students' language attitudes towards English from the affective component show a very positive and supportive view.

#### *Analysis Question 1*

The informants deeply appreciated the benefits they gained from mastering English. They expressed that the most significant advantage is the ability to communicate with more people on social media, even with simple sentences. Some also mentioned that they can gain more knowledge, make friends with foreigners, and easily understand English conversations with foreigners or people from other countries. The informants believe mastering English makes it easier for them to access a broader range of information and entertainment, such as reading books, watching movies, and understanding songs in English without needing translation. This ability also opens doors to better communication in the school environment, understanding foreign news, and increasing opportunities to make friends with people from various countries. The responses from the informants reflect a strong positive attitude towards English. They see English as an important tool for enhancing knowledge, broadening horizons, and opening opportunities in various aspects of life.

#### *Analysis Question 2*

They realize that English is a dominant international language worldwide, allowing them to communicate with people from various countries and understand much information from books and the internet. Some also feel that mastering English opens many opportunities, including academically, for getting accepted into prestigious universities like Oxford and Harvard. Furthermore, some informants noted that in the current technological era, much content, such as films, books, and songs, use English, making it relevant to them. This positive attitude reflects their awareness of the strategic value of English in the era of globalization and advancing technology.

#### *Analysis Question 3*

The informants shared various positive experiences, such as winning an English speech competition, receiving an award as an English Activator, and earning a silver medal in an English Olympiad. English has become a tool for communication and a key to success in understanding academic material, completing school assignments, and interacting with foreigners. These experiences have improved their English skills and strengthened their confidence and motivation to continue developing.

#### *Analysis Question 4*

Some informants stated that their school friends never considered English to be unimportant or even regarded it as very important. They feel motivated to continue learning English because they recognize the strategic value of the language in the current globalization context.

However, some face negative views. For example, some informants have experienced friends who downplay the importance of learning English because they feel the language is not relevant in the context of daily life in Indonesia. Despite this, most informants demonstrate a strong determination to keep learning English without being influenced by these negative opinions.

Overall, the informants show that learning English at their school is not only a requirement but also appreciated and valued. This reflects their school's vision and mission, emphasizing the importance of

mastering English as part of a comprehensive education and preparation for broader global challenges. The students believe that learning English enables them to communicate with people from various countries and access information from around the world. They recognize the emotional and social benefits of English proficiency, such as boosting their self-confidence and increasing opportunities to make friends with foreigners.

### *C. Conative Components*

The Conative Component refers to how people behave and react in certain situations related to the language being learned.

#### *Analysis Question 1*

Many informants use English in school to communicate with friends and teachers. Some informants also use English when watching videos, playing games, and accessing information online. Some of them also read books or watch movies in English to improve their language skills. Some speak English at home with family members, such as siblings. In general, English is widely and diversely used in the informants' daily lives, showing that they learn English in an academic context and apply it in various aspects of their lives to deepen their understanding and language skills.

#### *Analysis Question 2*

Regarding the frequency and impact of difficulties in using English on their motivation, there are variations in their experiences and perspectives. Most informants admitted experiencing difficulties, especially in pronunciation and grammar, and facing new situations or speaking with native speakers. Despite these challenges, many feel motivated to continue learning and improving their English skills. Some informants view these difficulties as exciting challenges that spur their enthusiasm for learning. Others feel that the difficulties in using English make them more diligent in practicing and finding ways to master the language. Some informants do not find it too difficult because they are already accustomed to it or have been taught well from an early age, so these difficulties do not significantly affect their motivation. Despite various difficulty levels, the informants still show high motivation to learn English, whether for academic needs, career opportunities, or scholarships.

The students' conative attitude demonstrates a strong commitment and genuine effort in learning English. The students use English in their daily lives. Watching movies, playing games, and communicating in English at school and home show that they are learning theoretically and applying it in real life.

### *2. Negative Language Attitude*

Negative language attitudes occur when students doubt, underestimate, or do not appreciate the importance of using English and feel insecure. Reviewing interview questions about the conative component shows how students actively use English daily. However, some students acknowledge facing difficulties such as pronunciation, lack of confidence, memorizing vocabulary, and complex grammar. These difficulties sometimes cause frustration and doubt about the relevance or difficulty of learning English. Negative attitudes from this component can be seen from the response of a student who mentioned that learning English is difficult and questioned why English was created with so many rules. This reflects doubts that can lower motivation if not addressed correctly. Some students find it challenging to pronounce correctly and feel insecure when speaking with native speakers. These obstacles can lead to feelings of insecurity and doubt in their abilities.

While the conative component shows a strong commitment and genuine effort in learning English, most negative attitudes among students appear. This can happen due to the practical challenges they face daily in using English. However, it is important to note that despite the negative attitudes, students still show high motivation to overcome difficulties and continue learning.

#### *3.1.1.2 Observation Results*

This observation was conducted by directly observing the classroom and recording student activities during the teaching and learning process. From the observations, it was seen that the informants generally showed a positive attitude towards English. They always used English while in the classroom, as did the teacher who was teaching. They used proper and correct English. The question-and-answer sessions between the teacher and students were also conducted in English.

This is consistent with the results of the interviews, which indicated that the students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhillah Medan appreciate the importance of English, and their school also mandates the use of English in all activities within the school.

#### 4. Conclusion

Students of SMP Hikmatul Fadhilah Medan who were respondents in this study had positive language attitudes towards English. They also had positive language attitudes among the three cognitive, affective, and conative components. Cognitively, students recognize that learning English is very important for their future. They realize that mastering English will be very beneficial in the era of globalization, especially in terms of further education, career, and communication. They also realize that mastering English will make it easier for them to access information and technology. Effectively, students believe that mastering English allows them to communicate with more people and gain more information. They also experience emotional and social benefits from English proficiency, such as increased self-confidence and improved chances of making friends with foreigners. They also view their English proficiency as an achievement to be proud of. Conatively, students actively use English both inside and outside of school. They play games, watch movies, and speak English with friends and family. They strongly desire to continuously improve their English skills and use them in various aspects of their lives. They have this positive attitude because they understand the importance of English in the modern world and globalization. The students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhilah Medan are very aware of the benefits of English and have a strong desire to keep learning and improving. This shows they are ready to face the challenges and opportunities in a future filled with stronger global connections. These findings can serve as a basis for the school to continue supporting and developing useful English learning programs that meet the student's needs.

Negative language attitudes among the students at SMP Hikmatul Fadhilah arise when they doubt, underestimate, or do not appreciate the importance of using English and feel insecure. Although some students actively use English daily, interviews reveal difficulties such as pronunciation, lack of confidence, memorizing vocabulary, and complex grammar. These difficulties cause frustration and doubts about the relevance of learning English. For instance, one student finds learning English difficult and questions the numerous grammar rules, reflecting doubts that can lower motivation. Difficulties in pronunciation and lack of confidence when speaking with native speakers also pose significant barriers. All these factors indicate that students' negative attitudes towards English need to be addressed with a more supportive approach to boost their confidence and skills.

Overall, this study shows that despite the challenges and pressures, most students have a positive attitude toward English and strong motivation to keep learning and mastering the language. However, some aspects need attention, especially in boosting students' confidence and reducing anxiety related to using grammar in English.

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