

Group Work and Attitudes of Non-English Major Students towards Learning EFL

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Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of using the group work technique on developing attitudes of non-English major students at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE) towards leaning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The study attempted to answer the following question:

- What is the effect of using the group work technique on developing attitudes of non-English majors at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL

Tools of the study included a questionnaire to measure attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL.

Results revealed the effect of using the group work technique on developing attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL.

Keyword: group work, attitudes, learning EFL.

1-Introduction

Developing students attitudes towards learning is considered to be one of the most important issues that should be taken into account while discussing factors affecting the teaching-learning process. Winne and Marx (1989) noted that motivation and attitudes are both a condition for, and a result of, effective instruction; therefore, studies were conducted in various educational fields to examine strategies and techniques that could contribute to developing students' attitudes towards learning.

1.1. Attitudes

Attitudes could be viewed as a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing, idea, person, situation etc... Gardener (1985) defined attitudes as “ an evaluative reaction to some referent, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent” As for education, Brown (2000) noted that teachers should recognize that all students possess positive and negative attitudes in varying degrees, adding that the negative attitudes can be changed by thoughtful instructional methods, such as using materials and activities that help students achieve an understanding and appreciation of the foreign culture, a fact that might be reflected on the process of learning the foreign language.

Thus, attitudes could highly influence how individuals approach many situations in life, including foreign language learning. It is believed that individuals with positive attitudes usually progress more rapidly in foreign language learning. Attitudes are closely related to our beliefs and are based upon experiences, thus, the researcher believes that effective language teaching strategies can encourage students to be more positive towards the learning process in general and learning EFL in particular.

Furthermore, Rani (2000) noted that students' attitudes towards learning might be developed through suggesting projects which give students experience in problem solving as well as proposing problems that require the collection of evidence for forming conclusions . Hsin and Clyde (1998) stated that the students had either fear or unpleasant feelings about their past English learning experiences, and that students of different majors had different perspectives about English learning As for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field, Anwar (2010) noted that the student-centered approach to improve learners' communicative competence has been adopted by some language teachers, noting that this approach entails adopting communicative techniques and strategies so as to help learners get involved in the teaching- learning process.

Based on what has been reviewed, the researcher believes that using effective and motivating teaching strategies and techniques might help students get involved in the learning process, a fact that might be reflected on their attitudes towards learning EFL.

1.1. Group work

Group work, one of the most important class activities for developing students' communicative ability, is gradually being applied to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Group work refers to any classroom activity in which the whole class is divided up into pairs or larger groups. Research revealed that group work technique is helpful in TEFL classroom, since it contribute to helping students get involved into various interaction types. It also supports a more conducive and cooperative class. Brown (1992) noted that "group work provides a context in which individuals help each other; it is a method of helping groups as well as helping individuals; and it can enable individuals and groups to influence and change personal, group, organizational and community problems". Group work could be classified into two types: heterogeneous grouping and homogenous grouping. Heterogeneous means grouping students of different ability levels together while homogenous grouping means grouping together students that are similar.

2. Need for the Study

In the light of the researcher's observations and experience as English language instructor at W.I.S.E. university, he noticed that university students still need more activities, techniques and strategies to develop their attitudes towards learning English.

In addition, a number of studies, which were conducted in TEFL field called for creating a motivating climate and using suitable technique to develop learners' attitudes towards learning the language.

Thus, the current study comes to examine the effectiveness of using the group work technique in developing learners' attitudes towards learning EFL.

3. Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study could be stated in the negative attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL. Consequently, the present study attempted to answer the following question:

-What is the effectiveness of using the group work technique in developing attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL?

4. Aims of the Study

The current study aimed at:

- To explore attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL.
- Developing attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL.

5. Limitations of the Study

- 1-The study was confined to developing students' attitudes towards learning EFL.
- 2- The study was confined to two classes of non-English major students studying the English Communication Skills 1 course at W.I.S.E. University. (one class for the experimental group and the other for the control group)
- 3-The study was conducted in the first term of the academic year 2011- 2012, two month, three periods per week, 50 minutes each.

6. Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of 64 non-English major students studying the English Communication Skills1 course at W.I.S.E. University. The students were classified into two classes, one served as an experimental group and the other as control.

7. Tools of the Study

Tools of the study included a questionnaire to measure attitudes of non-English major students at W.I.S.E. University towards leaning EFL.

8. Hypotheses of the Study

- 1-There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post- questionnaire in attitudes towards learning EFL in favor of those of the experimental group.

2-There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- post questionnaire in attitudes towards learning EFL in favor of their post- questionnaire scores.

9. Variables of the Study

1-The independent variable :

The group work technique

2-The dependent variable:

Performance of the experimental group on the post- attitudes questionnaire.

10. Method of the Study

1- The study followed the descriptive method in collecting data on group work and attitudes towards learning EFL.

2 -The study also followed the quasi- experimental design.

11. Definition of Terms

11.1. Group work

Konopka (1963) defined group work as a method of social work that is utilized in order to `help individuals to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences, and to cope more effectively with their personal, group or community problems`. Burdett and Hastie (2009) noted that group work is a technique followed to provide an opportunity for students to engage in peer-to-peer learning. The researcher defines group work in this study as an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning, and develop communication in the EFL class.

11.2. Attitudes

Hashemi (2005) defined attitudes towards the subject as the extent to which students accept the subject as well as their opinions towards it. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001) defined attitudes as “opinions and feelings that you usually have about something”. The researcher defines attitude in this study as responses and reactions that non-English major students at WISE University have towards Learning EFL.

12. Procedures of the Study

To answer the main question of the study, the researcher has:

- 1- Reviewed the related literature in the field of group work.
- 2- Reviewed the related literature in the field of attitudes towards learning EFL.
- 3- Designed a questionnaire to measure students' attitudes towards learning EFL.
- 4- Submitted the questionnaire to specialized jury members to ensure its validity .
- 5-Ensured the reliability of the questionnaire.
- 6-Chosen a random sample (control and experimental groups).
- 7-Administered the attitudes questionnaire to both groups.
- 8-Applied the proposed technique (group work)
- 9-Administered the attitudes questionnaire to both groups.
- 10-Collected and analyzed data.
- 11- Discussed results of the study.
- 12- Introduced recommendations and suggestions for further research.
13. Tools of the Study and Procedures

13.1. Design of the Study:

The study followed the Quasi- Experimental Design. Two classes were chosen randomly from English Communication Skills 1sections at W.I.S.E. University. One class served as an experimental group and the other as control.

Students of the experimental group received instruction through the proposed technique (group work) , whereas students of the control group received instruction through the traditional method.

A pre- post attitudes questionnaire was administered to both groups before and after the implementation of the proposed technique.

13.2. Sample of the Study

The sample of the study, as shown in table (1), comprised 64 non-English majors allocated in two classes.

The students' average age was 20 years old. According to their school files, all the students were from a nearly similar socio- economic environment.

Table (1): Distribution of Study Sample

No.	section	Number of Students	Method of Teaching
1	Section 1	32	Traditional method
2	Section 2	32	Group Work method
total	2	64	

13.3. The Attitudes Scale

13.3.1. Purpose of the scale

The scale aimed at revealing attitudes of non-English major students studying English Communication Skills 1 at W.I.S.E. University towards learning English as a foreign language (EFL) before and after the implementation of the proposed technique.

13.3.2. Design of the scale

Having reviewed a number of studies on students' attitudes towards language learning, the researcher designed an attitudes scale, taking into account the following points:

- Using items that cover the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Using positive and negative items to avoid bias.
- Using clear items.
- Using simple and direct items.

As for students' attitudes on the scale, they were calculated as follows:

- For the Positive Items:

Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
2	1	zero

- For the Negative Items:

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
2	1	zero

13.3.3. Validity of the scale:

To ensure validity of the scale, the researcher submitted it, in its initial form to specialized jury members in the fields of curricula and instruction (TEFL) and educational psychology.

The jury members were asked to comment on:

- Suitability of the scale's items to measure attitudes towards learning EFL.
- Clarity of the scale items.
- Clarity of the scale instructions.

The scale was modified according to the jury members' comments and suggestions.

13.3.4. - Reliability of the scale

To establish the reliability of the scale, it was administered to a sample of 20 students other than the sample of the study. Then, the same scale was administered to the same group after 15 days under relatively the same conditions in terms of the time and place. The reliability coefficient was estimated using Cronbach Alpha Formula. The estimated value was (0.89), which is considered reliable for the purpose of the current study.

-Following is the final form of the questionnaire:

No.	The items	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1-	I feel happy because I am learning English.			
2-	I like learning English because it helps me know more about others’ cultures.			
3-	I like to master English because it helps me get a suitable job in the future.			
4-	Learning English helps me use the new technologies such as internet and databases.			
5-	Learning English is not important.			
6-	I think learning English is very hard.			
7-	I feel bored when I listen to others while they speak in English.			
8-	I feel unwilling to speak in English.			
9-	I like to master English to help me resume my education.			
10-	I like learning English because it helps me travel abroad.			
11-	Mastering English develops my friendships.			
12-	I dislike reading in English.			
13-	I don’t like English lessons.			
14-	I like listening to English.			
15-	I can understand what others say in English.			
16-	Studying English causes fear and unpleasant feelings.			
17-	I try to speak in English.			
18-	Speaking in English increases my self confidence.			
19-	English is one of my best subjects.			
20-	I don’t like reading notes, instructions and advertisements in English.			
21-	In the future, I like to read more stories, plays and poetry in English.			
22-	Writing in English is a hard task.			
23-	I don't enjoy watching English programs on T.V.			
24-	I feel happy when I write in English.			
25-	I try to write English correctly.			

14.4.. The Statistical Methods:

The current study used the following statistical methods:

1- T- Test:

- To measure the difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- post attitudes scale.
- To measure the difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post – attitudes scale.

15. Findings of the Study

15.1. - The first hypothesis

There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post- questionnaire in attitudes towards learning EFL in favor of those of the experimental group.

Table (2) Scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-attitudes scale.

Pair	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	D.F	T	η2	P-Value	Level of Significance at 0.05
Exp.	32	37.59	9.44	62	2.263	0.046	0.028	1.66
Cont.	32	33.19	10.86					

Based on the above table, it is clear that there was statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post –attitudes scale in favor of the experimental group. T value (2.2630), η2 value (0.046) and level of significance at 0.05 equaled (1.66).

Based on table (2) , it could be concluded that the proposed technique had a positive effect on developing attitudes of the experimental group students towards learning EFL.

During the implementation of the proposed technique the students were encouraged to work in groups and discuss the activities jointly, a fact that might have affected their attitudes towards learning the subject.

15.2. The second hypothesis:

There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- post questionnaire in attitudes towards learning EFL in favor of their post- questionnaire scores.

Table (3) Scores of the experimental group on the pre- post attitudes scale.

Pair	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	D.F	T	η ²	P-Value	Level of Significance at 0.05
T1	32	31.81	11.26	31	5.715	0.381	0.000	1.67
T2	32	37.59	9.44					

Based on table (3), it is clear that there was statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- post attitudes scale in favor of the post–attitudes scores. T value (5.715), η² value (0.381) and level of significance at 0.05 equaled (1.67). Table (3) clearly refers that the proposed technique had a positive effect on developing attitudes of the experimental group students towards learning EFL. This proves that the use of the group work technique had led to developing students' attitudes towards learning EFL. This could be attributed to the motivating environment created by the technique through which the students were provided with enough opportunities to express themselves freely with embarrassment, a fact that might have contributed to developing their attitudes towards learning EFL. Thus, results of the study supported the two hypotheses presented by the researcher. It was proved that the experimental group performed much better on the post- attitudes scale than the control group. Consequently, the group work had a positive effect on developing attitudes of non-English majors studying English Communication Skills 1 at W.I.S.E. University.

16. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions could be reached:

- The effectiveness of using the group work technique in developing students' attitudes towards learning EFL.
- Giving students enough opportunities to express their opinions, ideas and reactions in EFL class could lead to developing their attitudes towards learning the subject.

17. Recommendations

Based on findings of the study, the researcher recommends:

- 1- Placing more emphasis on developing students' attitudes towards learning the language in general and EFL in particular.
- 2- Take the group work into account while designing English language curricula due to its role in motivating the students to get involved in the learning process.
- 3- Provide students with enough opportunities to express their unique ideas, opinions, and reactions freely.

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