

Attitudes of Kafkas University EFL Students towards Speaking Skill and Classes

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of present study is to determine the attitudes of Kafkas University EFL students towards speaking skill and speaking classes and if there are significant differences with regard to their ages, genders and grades. The subjects of the study were 80 EFL students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Kafkas University, among whom 43 were preparatory students and 37 were first year students,(63 female and 17 male). The results of the study revealed that EFL students at Kafkas University have positive attitudes towards speaking skill and Classes and that there is no significant difference among their attitudes in terms of their genders, grades, and ages. According to the results of the present study participants agree that speaking skill is the most important of all and they are happy with speaking courses, whereas they are aware that they are not competent enough to speak.*

Keywords: *Kafkas University, EFL, Students, Attitude, Speaking Skill, Speaking Classes*

I. INTRODUCTION

Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior, weighed by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes [1:71]. İnal, et al. [2:41]state that attitude refers to our feelings and shapes our behaviors towards learning. Kim and McGarry [3]stress that attitudes generally relates to a person's desire to study and interest (p. 28). According to Gardner [4:10] attitudes are a component of motivation, which refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language. And this idea is supported by Baker [5:9] as he states that in the life of a language, attitudes to that language appear to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death. Thus, indices of attitudes and motivation are strongly related to success in the second language [6] and second language is a cyclic process; strong motivation and positive attitude may lead to desired level of success in learning a second language process [7,8]. Dornyei [9] asserts that unsuccessful learners' lack of learning attitude and motivation affect their learning in a negative way. Attitude and motivation play a significant role in determining the learners' level of achievement in language learning, and this idea is supported by Gardner [4] as he maintains that there is a strong tie between achievement and language attitude, motivation and anxiety. It is also confirmed that attitude is an important concept lying in its continued and proven utility. That is, within education and psychology, it has stood the test of time, theory and taste[5:10], therefore, individuals having strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude toward the behavior[1], for them, however, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude [p.71].

With respect to attitudes, there has been a good deal of research in educational settings[6, 10, 11, 8, 9, 1, 12, 13]. For instance, in a study carried by Abd Aziz [10] it was determined that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia or the National University of Malaysia students had positive attitudes towards speaking English in general, however, they had negative attitudes towards the courses offered at their university.

Mohd Sallehuddin [11] carried out a study on 137 University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) English non-major undergraduates to evaluate their attitudes towards English and it was concluded that the UKM students had positive attitudes towards English.

In a study by Elkılıç and Akça [12]on 21 students in a private primary school in Turkey, attitudes of the students towards storytelling and motivation were aimed to be determined and the results of the study showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards storytelling and motivation and that both storytelling and grammar were perceived as very enjoyable by a majority of the participants.

In another study conducted by Chalak & Kassaian [14] on 108 English translation major students at Islamic Azad University, Iran, to investigate their motivational orientation and their attitude towards learning English it was found out that EFL learners tended to learn English for both instrumental and integrative reasons and their attitude towards the target language was generally highly positive in nature.

Alkaff [13]studied on 47 pre-intermediate and intermediate level female students at the English Language Institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in accordance with their

attitudes and perceptions towards learning English and discovered that most of the students had positive attitudes towards learning English and the study by Goktepe[15] on 90 first-year business studies undergraduates at a Turkish showed that the learners learnt English mostly for instrumental reasons and also integrative motivation was dominant motivational orientation for the learners in some degree.

The study by Shameem [16] on 238 undergraduate EFL students at a public university in Malaysia revealed that the attitude towards English language learning was fairly positive, however most of the students had negative feelings or fear regarding classroom instructions in their learning experience.

In a study by Akay and Toraman [17] on 293 students who have English language education in preparatory school of Anadolu University it was found out that gender, age, time spent on learning English, and proficiency level variables did not create significant differences in the attitudes .

1.1. Problem

Although tremendous effort has been spent on EFL learners in the Department of English Language and Literature at Kafkas University, desired level of practical English hasn't been reached yet.

1.2. Rationale

The aim of present study is to determine the attitudes of EFL students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Kafkas University in relation to speaking skill and classes. In the study, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Do EFL students at Kafkas University have positive attitudes towards speaking skill and classes?
2. Is there any significant difference between EFL students at Kafkas University in relation to their levels, genders and ages as regards with their attitudes?
3. What language skill is considered to be the most important among the basic language skills?

II. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study was carried out by the purpose of investigating the attitudes of EFL students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Kafkas University towards speaking skills and speaking classes and to explore the variances among their attitudes according to some personal variables such as age, grade, and gender. The data of the study were collected from preparatory and first year students who were asked to state their agreement with 30 statements that aimed to determine the level of their attitudes towards speaking skill and speaking classes.

2.2 Participants

The subjects of this study were 80 of EFL students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Kafkas University. Among these participants 43 of them were preparatory year students and 37 were first year students. About 80% (N=63) of the participants were female and nearly 20% (N=17) of them were male as can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distributions of the participants by gender, age, and grade

	GENDER		AGE						GRADE		Total
	Female	Male	17	18	19	20	21	22	Prep.	First Year	
Frequency	63	17	2	36	27	11	2	2	43	37	80
Percent	79	21	2,5	45	33,8	13,8	2,5	2,5	53,8	46,3	100

It can be seen from **Table 1** that the participants' ages ranged from 17 to 22. However, the number of those who were 18 is the most (N=36) and takes up 45% of the whole, 33.8% of them (N=27) were 19 years old, 13.8% of them (N=11) were 20 years old and 7.5% of them (N=6) were aged 17, 21, and 22.

2.3 Instrument

For the data collection an adaptation of Yeşilyurt's [12] attitude scale has been used. Before applying the questionnaire in accordance with the aim of the study, reliability coefficient analysis was carried out and it was found to be 0,72. Since the scales with reliability result over 0.7 are considered to be reliable, the scale was used without any alteration.

The questionnaire consists of three sections. In section 1, there are 7 questions related to demographic information such as genders, ages, grades, mothers' and fathers' graduation aiming to determine if there are any differences of participants against these variables. There are 8 questions in section 2 in which the researchers tried to find out if they find opportunities to speak other than class times, who they find opportunities to speak with, how often they read and speak, among four skills which language skill they find most important and most enjoyable, which language skill they practice most and in which language skill they find themselves competent.

The aim of the second section is to see if there is a correlation between their involvement in the speaking skill and their attitudes towards it.

The attitude scale in section 3 consists of 30 items that can be divided into four groups related to four sub-dimensions such as importance, stimulation, anxiety and competence aiming to determine students' overall attitudes towards speaking skill and courses. Among the questions, items 2, 3, 11, 13, 15, 17, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 were prepared to find out about their general views on importance of speaking skill and, item 4, 5, 12, 14, 18, 22, and 25 were supposed to discover their stimulation of speaking skill. On the other hand, items 7, 8, 9, 10, 19, 20, 21, and 23 aimed to measure how much anxious they were and items 1, 6, 16, and 27 were designed to determine how competent they found themselves during speaking classes.

2.4 Data Analysis

For data analysis SPSS 20.00 statistical program has been used to find out overall means of the items, general mean, the lowest and the highest scored items, the difference between the groups, and to carry out the analysis of sub-dimensions in terms of variables.

III. FINDINGS

Analyzing the data collected from 80 students all overall means of the items in the questionnaire have been calculated and then the highest and the lowest scored items have been found.

The statement "It is necessary to do speaking activities if one wants to be successful in language learning." The mean of that item is 4, 76 and over 95% of the participants think that speaking skill is a must in second language learning. The second highest scored statement is *item 12* "Speaking English will help me in my teaching career." (M=4, 71) and the third highest scored one is *item 3* "Speaking courses will contribute to our academic achievement." (M=4, 62). It is important that they strongly believe that being able to speak in a foreign language is for their own good to be a successful student.

The lowest scored item, on the other hand, has been found to be *item 10* "I feel a resistance from within when I try to speak English even if I've practiced." (M=2, 58). The second lowest one is *item 8* "I'm afraid people around me will laugh at me if cannot say things right." (M=2, 68) and the third lowest one is *item 7* "I worry a lot about making mistakes while speaking English". So it can be understood that more than half of the participants feel anxious to speak in the target language.

It is surprising that all the three highest scored items belong to importance sub-dimensions and all the three lowest items belong to anxiety sub-dimensions of the attitude scale. Namely, they all think that speaking skill is the most important among four skills but they feel relatively nervous due to some factors before/while speaking in the target language.

As seen in **Table 2**, general mean score of the attitudes of ELT students at Kafkas University towards speaking courses has been found to be 3,62. On the other hand there is no difference of attitude between males (M=3, 63) and females (M=3, 61) and between preparatory students (M=3, 58) and first year students (M=3, 65). Now that the possible highest score is 5, it can be concluded that they have positive attitudes towards speaking skill/courses.

Table 2. Minimum/maximum scores, means, and standard deviations for the students' attitudes to speaking courses and its subscales, competence, importance, stimulation, and anxiety.

	N	MIN.	MAX.	MEAN	S.D.
Attitude	80	2,50	4,27	3,62	,33
Competence	80	1,50	4,25	3,07	,57
Importance	80	3,11	5,00	4,00	,45
Stimulation	80	1,86	4,86	3,92	,59
Anxiety	80	2,00	4,75	3,27	,57

As for the means for four sub-dimensions such as competence, importance, stimulation and anxiety, it can be seen in **Table 2**, the mean of the importance sub-dimension is the highest (M=4, 00), that of the stimulation is the second (M=3, 92), and competence mean is the third (M=3, 07).

From the means found, we can infer that participants' agreement levels with importance and feeling of stimulation of speaking skill/courses are higher than those of both general mean and other two sub-dimensions. It can, therefore, be thought that they are aware of how important speaking in a foreign language is and they are comfortable with speaking courses, yet they find themselves only moderately competent in speaking.

Although the participants find speaking important and like it very much, they still feel nervous when it comes to speaking in a foreign language. Their anxiety level has been found to be too high as well. While calculating the general mean of the whole scale the scores given for the negative statements have been reversely scored whereas to determine the participants' anxiety level the mean has been found to be 3,27 without reversing the scores given for the negative statements. We can understand from this mean that they feel

resistance against speaking within, they do not feel confident enough as they may be afraid of being laughed at if they make mistakes.

In **Table 3** the responses of the participants in relation to which language skill they find most important, most enjoyable, most competent, and they practice mostly have been given.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages illustrating which language skill the participants found most important, most enjoyable, themselves most competent in, and most practice they had.

		Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Total
Most Important	Frequency	58	6	14	2	80
	Percent	72,5	7,5	17,5	2,5	100
Most Enjoyable	Frequency	47	15	17	1	80
	Percent	58,8	18,8	21,3	1,3	100
Most Competent	Frequency	23	15	32	10	80
	Percent	28,8	18,8	40	12,5	100
Most Practice	Frequency	26	10	41	3	80
	Percent	32,5	12,5	51,3	3,8	100

The findings in **Table 3** shows that speaking is the most important language skill according to 73% of the participants and nearly 60% percent of them agree that speaking is the most enjoyable one to practice among four skills. Namely great majority of the participants give importance to speaking most and like it most.

On the other hand, they do not find themselves competent enough in speaking. For the questions “Which language skill do you practice most?” and “Which language skill do you find yourself most competent in?” speaking comes second. They have stated that speaking is the second skill they practice most and they find themselves competent in after reading.

In relation to students’ attitudes as regards to whom they find opportunities to speak in English, the students’ responses have been given in **Figure1**.

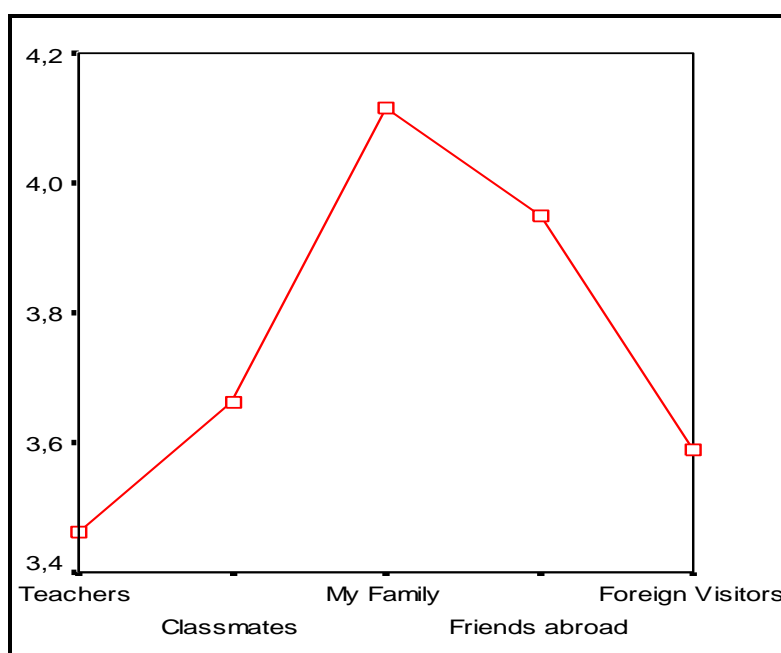


Figure 1. Students’ attitude scores according to whom they find opportunities to speak in English with.

It is quite clear from **Figure 1** that there are significant differences among students’ attitudes related to their partners in speaking English. Those students who have opportunities to speak English with their families have got the most positive attitudes towards speaking (M=4, 12), those who have friends abroad as partners to speak have the second highest mean score (M=3, 95) and attitude mean for those who can practice with friends abroad is 3, 95, with classmates is 3, 66 and with foreign visitors is 3, 59. However, the mean values of the attitudes of the participants who have only teachers as partners to speak with are the lowest of all (M=3, 46).

According to the **Figure 1**, students who can speak with their families, friends abroad and classmates have more positive attitudes than those who speak with only foreign visitors and teachers do. This may be due to the facts that (1) they feel relaxed and enjoy speaking when they speak with people who are very close to themselves and (2) students who can speak with their families possibly speak with their friends, classmates, foreign visitors, and teachers.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Question 1: Do EFL students at Kafkas University have attitudes towards speaking skill and classes?

In a study carried by Abd Aziz [10] it was determined that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia or the National University of Malaysia students had shown positive attitudes towards speaking English in general, however, they had negative attitudes towards the courses offered at their university. And the study by Mohd Sallehuddin [11] conducted on 137 University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) English non-major undergraduates also showed that attitudes towards English were positive UKM students had positive attitudes towards English.

In another study conducted by Al-Zahrani [19] to determine the attitudes of Saudi students towards English it was found out that there was not any clear difference among the three years in their attitudes towards Learning.

Momani [20] investigated the secondary stage students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the respondents had neutral positive attitudes toward learning English. Also, there was a strong correlation between the students' attitudes toward learning English and their performance in reading comprehension.

The results of the present study showed that EFL students have positive views on speaking skill and courses and this is in congruence with the results of the studies carried out by [10, 19,20].

Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference between EFL students at Kafkas University in relation to their levels, genders and ages as regards with their attitudes?

Soku, et al. [21] in their study found out that gender had a significant effect on students' attitudes to the study of English while background had a significant effect on students' attitude to the study of French.

In a study carried out by Abidin et al., [22] on 180 Libyan secondary school students in relation to their attitudes towards learning English in terms of the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects, it was found out that the participants had negative attitudes towards learning English and that there were statistically significant attitudinal differences regarding gender and field of study but not year of study.

However, in the current study no significant difference has been found in relation to the ages, genders and grades of the students. As the students have positive attitude towards speaking skill and courses irrespective of their ages, genders, and grades. Although there is no significant difference it should be noted that first year students have slightly higher attitudes than preparatory students do.

Research Question 3: What language skill is considered to be the most important among the basic language skills?

According to the results of the present study participants agree that speaking skill is the most important of all and they are happy with speaking courses, whereas they are aware that they are not competent enough to speak. This may be due to the fact that participants mostly practice reading, yet other skills including speaking are neglected.

4.1. Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study show that general attitudes of EFL students towards speaking are high enough but attitudes of certain students are higher than those of others. Students who are able to speak with their family members at home, friends abroad on the phone or net, classmates in the classes have stronger attitudes than those speak with tourists they do not know already and with teachers whom students do not feel close to themselves.

4.1.1. It can be argued that one of the reasons is the relationship between the teacher and the student that lowers the attitude level and makes them feel stressed about speaking. Probably the students are afraid of making mistakes and being told off by the teachers who are not very friendly with students. Atmosphere in the classroom should be as same as the one at home. The teacher should make the students feel as if they were speaking with close friends and relatives in classrooms so that they come out of their shells.

4.1.2. It can be stated that the other reason of the attitudes of students regarding to whom they are speaking with is that students who can speak with relatives are subjected to English more than those who can speak with only teachers. Turkey is not that kind of country where everybody is directly exposed to a foreign language at home, in streets, so if EFL departments could have a room in which students can watch English movies and news, listen to radios in their free times, it would be a very important facility for them to improve their confidence and attitude.

4.1.3. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to speak and practice English with classmates.

4.2. Limitations

Data of this study have been collected through questionnaires from 80 participants. Therefore, it is quantitative in terms of the data collection instruments and methods. It is also a descriptive study, not an experimental one, namely it aimed to describe the existing situation. More comprehensive studies with different instruments (i.e., interviews, pre-test, post-test) and methods or designs (e.g., qualitative, experimental) to be carried out in the future may offer more generalizable and different findings.

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