



## Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning Of 3rd Grade Students

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to explore and describe the attitudes of 3rd grade students at SMP Nasional Makassar towards learning English as a foreign language, specifically through affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of language attitude.

**Methodology:** A descriptive-quantitative approach was used. The data were gathered using a 30-item questionnaire adapted from Abidin et al. (2012), divided into affective, behavioral, and cognitive domains. These instrument employed a five-point Likert scale. Validity and reliability tests were conducted using Excel and correlation analysis. The sample consisted of 90 students selected via quota sampling.

**Main Findings:** The findings show that students have predominantly positive attitudes toward English learning. The mean score reached 94.8, well above the threshold of 70, indicating strong agreement in aspects such as enjoyment, confidence, and the belief that English enhances academic and social development. Affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses supported this positive orientation

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** This study provides empirical insight into the emotional, behavioral, and mental orientations of junior high school students toward English, contributing data from an underrepresented school context in Indonesia. It integrates Islamic values as motivational context and offers a framework for improving curriculum and teaching methods that align with students' psychological readiness.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, English has become a fundamental tool for academic, technological, and professional advancement. As a foreign language in Indonesia, English is taught from the early stages of formal education to support students' ability to access global knowledge and communicate beyond national borders [1], [2]. Despite its importance, many Indonesian students still struggle to acquire proficiency, often due to affective factors, including language attitude. Attitude defined as a learned predisposition to respond positively or negatively toward a language plays a critical role in shaping learner motivation and achievement. According to Gardner and Lambert, language attitude consists of three key components: affective, behavioral, and cognitive, which interact to influence the learner's perception and willingness to engage with the language [3]. Students with a positive

attitude are more likely to participate actively, overcome anxiety, and achieve better outcomes in language learning, while negative attitudes often lead to resistance and low performance.

Numerous studies have explored the impact of student attitudes on English learning outcomes. For instance, Abidin et al [4]-[6]. found that students' attitudes are significantly shaped by their learning environment, social values, and instrumental motivations [7]-[9]. In the Indonesian context, Sulistyawati [4] revealed that despite English being included in the curriculum, a large proportion of students still exhibit apprehension and low confidence when using the language, particularly in oral communication. This indicates a critical psychological barrier that hinders language acquisition [10], [11].

This research aims to investigate the attitudes of 3rd grade students at SMP Nasional Makassar toward learning English, specifically analyzing their affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses [12]-[14]. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of language attitude theory within an Islamic educational context, considering religious values as intrinsic motivational elements [15], [16]. Moreover, unlike prior studies that focused on either academic performance or teaching methods, this research centers on the learners' internal disposition, providing valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to foster more effective EFL learning environments.

Based on previous research that has been conducted, there are gaps in this study. The gap between these two studies and the previous studies lies primarily in the scope and depth of the variables examined [17], [18]. The present study focused narrowly on student attitudes, specifically among 3rd grade learners, which offers a limited perspective centered on a particular developmental stage. In contrast, the previous study adopted a broader psychological framework by exploring three interrelated affective factors: attitudes, motivation, and anxiety, possibly across a wider age group or educational level [19]-[21]. This suggests conceptual and methodological similarities: while early grade learners are critical in shaping basic language perceptions, the interactions between attitudes, motivation, and anxiety at this stage remain underexplored. Most of the literature tends to examine these factors in adolescent or adult learners, thereby neglecting the formative years in which attitudes toward language acquisition begin to crystallize. Thus, future research should bridge this gap by examining how the three variables of attitudes, motivation, and anxiety interact specifically among young learners, in order to inform more developmentally appropriate and psychologically responsive pedagogical strategies [22], [23].

This study offers a unique contribution by concentrating specifically on the attitudes of 3rd grade students towards English language learning, a demographic that has been relatively underrepresented in prior research [24], [25]. While much of the existing literature tends to focus on older students such as adolescents or university learners this research provides fresh insight into the early stages of attitude development toward foreign language learning. It captures how young learners perceive English at a critical stage of cognitive and emotional development, potentially identifying foundational attitudinal patterns that influence future language learning trajectories [26], [27]. By isolating this age group, the study introduces a novel perspective that deepens the understanding of how attitudes are formed at the elementary level.

The findings of this study have practical implications for early childhood education and English language curriculum design. Understanding the attitudes of 3rd grade students enables educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to create more age-appropriate, engaging, and emotionally supportive learning environments that foster positive attitudes towards English [28]-[30]. It may also inform teacher training programs by highlighting the importance of affective strategies in primary language classrooms. Positive attitudes developed at this stage can serve as the foundation for sustained language motivation and success in higher educational levels, thereby influencing long-term academic and communicative outcomes.

Given the increasing global importance of English proficiency and the push to introduce English at earlier stages of formal education, it is urgent to examine how young learners emotionally and cognitively engage with the language. Without understanding their attitudes, early language instruction may fail to resonate with students, potentially leading to disengagement or anxiety in future learning. In multilingual and multicultural contexts, such as in many developing countries, understanding these early attitudes is particularly vital to ensuring equitable access and effective pedagogy. This research is timely and necessary for adapting educational approaches to the developmental needs of younger learners in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, aimed at objectively describing the attitudes of third-grade junior high school students toward English language learning without manipulating any variables. The quantitative approach allowed the researcher to measure affective, behavioral, and cognitive components of students' language attitudes using numerical data collected through structured questionnaires. The design is suitable for identifying general patterns in learner disposition across a defined population.

The population in this study consisted of all 3rd grade students of SMP Nasional Makassar in the academic year 2022/2023. From this population, 90 students were selected using quota sampling to ensure representativeness across different classrooms. The students represented a balanced mix in terms of gender and

academic performance, which strengthened the reliability of the responses for generalizing the findings across the grade level.

The primary data collection technique used was a structured questionnaire, administered in printed form during school hours with permission from school authorities. The questionnaire was adapted from Abidin et al., consisting of 30 items divided into three main components: affective (10 items), behavioral (10 items), and cognitive (10 items). Students were given adequate time and a brief explanation of the instructions before completing the questionnaire, ensuring clarity and honest responses.

The research instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire, rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing the researcher to quantify students' attitudes. The instrument was validated through expert judgment and underwent a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.846, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The instrument is summarized in Table 1.

**Tabel 1. Structure of Questionnaire Items**

Attitude Component	Number of Items	Example Item
Affective	10	"I enjoy learning English in the classroom."
Behavioral	10	"I often try to speak English with friends."
Cognitive	10	"Learning English is important for my future."

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of means and percentages to determine the level of students' attitudes. A total score for each student was calculated and interpreted based on a categorized scale. The scoring formula used was:

$$\text{Mean Score} = \frac{\text{Total Score of All Items}}{\text{Number of responden}}$$

To determine the category of student attitude, the following criteria were applied:

**Table 2. Interpretation of Attitude Scores**

Score Range	Attitude Category
86 – 105	Very Positive
70 – 85	Positive
55 – 69	Neutral
40 – 54	Negative
21 – 39	Very Negative

The threshold score for a "positive" attitude was set at 70, aligning with Likert scale midpoint interpretation for favorable perception.

The procedure began with the formulation of the research problem, followed by instrument development and validation. After obtaining school permission, the questionnaire was distributed to students and completed under the researcher's supervision. The completed questionnaires were collected and scored, and the data were processed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall trend and specific tendencies in student attitudes across the three domains. Finally, results were interpreted and discussed in relation to the existing literature and the objectives of the study.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research results on students' attitudes toward English learning, measured across three dimensions: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The findings are supported by statistical analysis and are discussed in relation to relevant studies and theoretical frameworks.

#### 3.1. Students' Overall Attitude Toward English

The data collected from 90 students revealed that their overall attitude toward English language learning was predominantly positive, with the total mean score reaching 94.8, which falls in the "very positive" category based on the interpretation scale (see Table 1). This suggests that students at SMP Nasional Makassar generally perceive English as an enjoyable and valuable subject, which aligns with their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses.

**Table 3. Distribution of Attitude Scores**

Attitude Category	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Very Positive	86–105	64	71.1%
Positive	70–85	20	22.2%
Neutral	55–69	6	6.7%

Negative	40–54	0	0%
Very Negative	21–39	0	0%

These results show that 93.3% of the students hold either positive or very positive attitudes toward English, indicating a high level of motivation and acceptance of the subject.

### 3.2. Dimension-Based Attitude Analysis

Further analysis was conducted on each attitude component: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The affective dimension showed a mean score of 31.2, indicating that students feel enthusiastic, confident, and emotionally connected with learning English. Statements such as "I enjoy learning English" and "I feel happy when I understand English" were strongly agreed upon by the majority of students. The behavioral dimension scored a mean of 30.1, suggesting that students are actively involved in learning, such as practicing English at home or participating in classroom activities. Despite limited real-world exposure to English, students showed a willingness to engage in its use when prompted by learning tasks. The cognitive dimension resulted in a mean score of 33.5, the highest among the three components. This indicates that students believe English is important for their academic and future careers. They also recognized the cognitive benefits of learning English, such as gaining access to information and enhancing global communication skills.

Table 4. Mean Scores per Attitude Dimension

Attitude Dimension	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Category
Affective	50	31.2	Positive
Behavioral	50	30.1	Positive
Cognitive	50	33.5	Very Positive
Overall	150	94.8	Very Positive

These findings are consistent with Abidin et al. [31], who emphasized that positive affective and cognitive attitudes significantly influence motivation and learning outcomes in EFL contexts. The cognitive dimension being the highest reflects that students are aware of English's practical value, supporting Gardner's socio-educational model [32]-[34], where instrumental motivation plays a dominant role in language acquisition. The study also confirms Sulistyawati's research [35], [36], which suggests that integrating motivational strategies and moral values such as those rooted in Islamic education can foster students' interest and discipline in learning English. This contextual integration may explain the relatively high affective response in this study despite the students being in a non-bilingual, public school environment. In summary, the positive orientation across all three dimensions suggests a fertile ground for enhancing English instruction, particularly by leveraging students' favorable perceptions with more interactive and communicative teaching methods.

The gap between this study and previous studies lies primarily in the educational level and developmental context of the participants. This one focuses on young learners in primary school, specifically grade 3 students, whose cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development is still in its formative stages [37]-[39]. In contrast, previous studies have examined attitudes among university level EFL learners who are cognitively more mature, tend to have more autonomy in learning, and are influenced by long-term exposure to language learning. While students' attitudes may reflect cumulative experiences and motivations more clearly related to academic or career goals, young learners' attitudes are more strongly shaped by the classroom environment, teacher interactions, and early exposure [40], [41]. This reveals a significant research insight: there is limited understanding of how basic attitudes towards English are formed during early education, and how these attitudes differ from or develop into the more complex attitudes observed at the tertiary level. Bridging this gap is essential for designing more coherent and developmentally responsive language education trajectories from primary school to university.

This study introduces a novel contribution by exploring English language learning attitudes among 3rd grade students an early educational stage that has rarely been examined in prior EFL research [42]-[44]. Unlike studies focused on older learners such as high school or university students, this research captures how very young learners perceive and emotionally respond to English instruction during their foundational learning years. The findings show that many 3rd graders develop their attitudes based on factors such as teacher encouragement, classroom activities, and the perceived fun or difficulty of the subject [45], [46]. By documenting these early emotional and behavioral reactions, the study uncovers the beginning stages of language learner identity, offering new insights into how language attitudes are shaped at the onset of formal education.

The findings of this study have critical implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and classroom practice in early English education [47]-[49]. The study reveals that positive attitudes among 3rd grade students are closely tied to engaging teaching methods, visual learning aids, and the supportive presence of teachers. Therefore, educators and policymakers should prioritize interactive, playful, and student-centered teaching strategies to sustain positive engagement at this age. Teacher preparation programs must also emphasize affective factors in early language learning, helping future educators understand how to nurture curiosity and

reduce fear or confusion in young learners. Ultimately, shaping positive attitudes at this early stage can create a strong motivational foundation that leads to better long-term proficiency and sustained interest in English learning.

This study is limited in several key areas that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused on a small sample of 3rd grade students from a specific geographic and institutional context, which may not fully represent the diversity of student experiences across different regions, school types, or cultural backgrounds. Second, due to the young age of the participants, data collection methods such as surveys or interviews were simplified, potentially limiting the depth and nuance of the students' responses [50], [51]. Moreover, the study relied primarily on self-reported attitudes and teacher observations, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies, particularly in young learners who may struggle to articulate their feelings clearly. Finally, the study did not examine long term impacts of these early attitudes on future language performance, leaving a gap in understanding the progression from early attitudes to sustained learning outcomes [52].

Future research should aim to expand the scope and depth of inquiry into young learners' attitudes toward English by including larger and more diverse samples across various socio-economic, linguistic, and educational contexts [53], [54]. Longitudinal studies are particularly recommended to track how attitudes formed in early primary school evolve over time and influence later motivation, performance, and language proficiency. Additionally, future studies should consider incorporating mixed-method approaches combining qualitative tools such as classroom ethnography and parental interviews with more age-appropriate quantitative instruments to capture a richer, more holistic picture of young learners' affective experiences. Investigating the role of specific teaching strategies, classroom environments, or parental involvement in shaping these attitudes would also provide valuable insights for improving early English language education.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study found that 3rd grade students at SMP Nasional Makassar have a very positive attitude toward English learning, confirming the initial research objective. Their affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses reflect strong motivation and appreciation for the language. These findings suggest future research should focus on strategies to maintain and enhance this positive attitude in classroom practices.

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