

Language Attitudes Toward English Among Sixth-Semester English Education Students at HKBP Nommensen University in Medan (Sociolinguistics Approach)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the language attitudes toward English among sixth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Medan. It examined the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of students' attitudes and explored the factors influencing them. The study employed a Convergent Mixed Methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation. Quantitative data were obtained from 25 students through a 20-item five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 students and one lecturer, supported by classroom observations. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive mean scores, and qualitative data were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The findings showed positive attitudes across all three components. The cognitive component obtained the highest mean score (4.33), categorized as Very Positive, while the affective component (4.07) and behavioral component (3.89) were categorized as Positive. The qualitative findings confirmed that students viewed English as important for academic study, future careers, global communication, and personal development. However, speaking anxiety, fear of mistakes, and limited everyday opportunities to use English remained challenges. Students' attitudes were influenced by internal factors, including career aspirations, personal interest, motivation, and self-confidence, and external factors, including lecturer support, peer interaction, classroom experiences, and exposure through technology and digital media. The study highlights the importance of supportive learning environments in strengthening positive attitudes and encouraging meaningful English use.

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1. Introduction

In sociolinguistic studies, language attitudes play a crucial role in determining language choice, language maintenance, and the dynamics of language use in bilingual societies. According to Lambert et al. (1963), language attitudes are closely linked to social identity and loyalty toward a particular language. This indicates that language attitudes not only influence how a person uses language, but also how a person positions themselves within a social environment. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in the context of bilingual or multilingual societies such as Indonesia, where the use of more than one language is a common practice.

English has an important position in Indonesian higher education, particularly in English Education programs. Students encounter English through academic materials, classroom discussions, presentations, assignments, digital media, and professional preparation (Suherman et al., 2022; Anggawirya et al., 2021; Prihandoko et al., 2022). For English Education students, English is not only a subject to be learned but also a language that is closely related to their future professional identity. Their attitudes toward English may consequently influence how they participate in learning activities, how confidently they communicate, and how frequently they use English (Prihandoko et al., 2019; Said et al., 2021; Andini et al., 2026).

Language attitude is multidimensional. In this study, it is examined through cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The cognitive component concerns students' beliefs and perceptions about the importance, usefulness, and

value of English. The affective component concerns feelings, interest, motivation, confidence, enjoyment, and anxiety. The behavioral component concerns students' actual language use and participation, including their use of English in discussions, presentations, practice activities, and communication. This three-component perspective is consistent with the attitude framework discussed in the literature and applied to language attitudes by Garrett (2010).

The three components are related but may not develop at the same level. Students may strongly believe that English is important while still feeling anxious when speaking it. Similarly, students may have positive feelings toward English but use it less frequently outside academic settings because Indonesian and local languages are more common in everyday communication. Gardner (1985) emphasizes the importance of attitudes and motivation in second-language learning, while Dörnyei (2005) highlights the relationship between motivation and language-learning behavior. These perspectives suggest that students' positive evaluations of English need to be understood together with their emotional experiences and actual practices.

Previous studies have generally reported positive attitudes toward English among learners. Eliza et al. (2025), for example, found positive cognitive and affective attitudes among students in Medan, although English use was still largely limited to formal classroom situations. Al-takhayinh (2022) reported positive attitudes among university students and highlighted motivation, confidence, and interest. Kariadi et al. (2022) similarly found that Indonesian university students considered English important for academic achievement, communication, and future careers, while some students continued to experience speaking anxiety and limited confidence. Wappa (2024) also showed the relevance of attitudes and motivation to students' participation in EFL learning.

Other studies emphasize the sociolinguistic context of language attitudes and practices. Fitriati and Wardani (2020) showed that language attitudes and language choice are connected to multilingual social environments, with Indonesian being frequently used in everyday communication. Abdurahman et al. (2018) demonstrated that university students' and faculty members' attitudes toward English varied across multilingual and virtual contexts. Putra and Tustiawati (2024) further emphasized the relationship between language attitudes and actual language practices in a multilingual setting. Santoso et al. (2024) found that university students generally perceived English Medium Instruction as beneficial while still requiring academic language support. Wati (2018) is particularly relevant because it examined Indonesian undergraduate students in an English Education Department through cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects.

Although these studies provide a useful foundation, a gap remains in research focusing specifically on sixth-semester English Education students at a private university in Medan while integrating the three components with multiple forms of evidence. Sixth-semester students have experienced several years of English learning and are approaching professional preparation, so their attitudes may reflect accumulated academic and social experiences. In addition, numerical descriptions alone cannot fully explain why students maintain positive or negative attitudes or why positive beliefs do not always result in frequent English use. A mixed-methods design can address this limitation by bringing together measurable patterns and participants' explanations of their experiences.

Therefore, this study employed a Convergent Mixed Methods design to investigate the language attitudes toward English among sixth-semester English Education students at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Medan. The study addressed two objectives: (1) to examine students' attitudes toward English in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, and (2) to identify the factors influencing those attitudes. By integrating questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation data, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive sociolinguistic understanding of how students perceive, feel about, and use English in their academic context.

2. Methodology

This study employed a Convergent Mixed Methods design. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase, analyzed separately, and then integrated to obtain a more comprehensive interpretation. This design was considered appropriate because the study required both a measurable description of students' language attitudes and qualitative explanations of their perceptions, feelings, experiences, and language practices.

The research was conducted in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Medan, particularly in the Seminar on ELT class. The class consisted of 25 sixth-semester students. Fifteen students completed the questionnaire, while 10 students participated in semi-structured interviews. One lecturer from the English Education Study Program was also interviewed to provide supporting information about students'

classroom participation, English use, and learning experiences. Classroom observations were conducted during three meetings.

Three main instruments were used. First, the questionnaire consisted of 20 statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Seven items measured the cognitive component, seven measured the affective component, and six measured the behavioral component. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students using 10 guiding questions covering the three language-attitude components and factors influencing students' attitudes. The interview format allowed the researcher to follow prepared questions while giving participants opportunities to explain their experiences in greater detail. A separate interview with the lecturer was used as supporting evidence. Third, classroom observation focused on participation, self-confidence, speaking performance, communication behavior, and actual English use during discussions, presentations, and other classroom activities. Video recordings and photographs were used to support the observation records.

Quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean score for each component was calculated by dividing the total score by the total number of responses (Sugiyono, 2023). The interpretation used five equal intervals by Isnain et al. (2025) : 4.21–5.00 = Very Positive, 3.41–4.20 = Positive, 2.61–3.40 = Neutral, 1.81–2.60 = Negative, and 1.00–1.80 = Very Negative. Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview and observation data were coded and grouped according to recurring patterns related to students' attitudes and influencing factors.

Integration was conducted by comparing the quantitative results with the interview and observation findings. The study used methodological triangulation by comparing information from questionnaires, student interviews, the lecturer interview, and classroom observations. This process was used to identify convergence, differences, and explanations across the data sources and to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Overall Language Attitudes Toward English

The questionnaire results showed that the students generally held positive attitudes toward English. The cognitive component recorded the highest mean score, followed by the behavioral and affective components. The overall mean of the three component scores was 4.09, which falls within the Positive category. The results are summarized in Table 1.

No.	Component	ΣX	N	Mean / Category
1	Cognitive	758	175	4.33 / Very Positive
2	Affective	712	175	4.07 / Positive
3	Behavioral	583	150	3.89 / Positive
Overall				3.83 / Positive

Source: Questionnaire data, analyzed by the researcher.

Table 1 presents the students' language attitudes toward English based on three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The results show that the overall mean score was 3.83, which falls within the Positive category. This indicates that, in general, the students demonstrated positive language attitudes toward English.

The cognitive component obtained the highest mean score of 4.33, with a total score (ΣX) of 758 from 175 responses. Based on the interpretation criteria, this score is categorized as Very Positive. This finding indicates that the students generally had very positive beliefs and perceptions about the importance and usefulness of English.

The affective component obtained a mean score of 4.07, with a total score of 712 from 175 responses. This score falls within the Positive category, indicating that the students generally showed positive feelings, interest, and emotional responses toward learning and using English, although their affective attitudes were not as strong as their cognitive attitudes.

The behavioral component obtained a mean score of 3.89, with a total score of 583 from 150 responses. This result is also categorized as Positive, suggesting that the students generally demonstrated positive behavioral tendencies toward using English, such as participating in English-related classroom activities and making efforts to communicate in English.

Overall, the findings indicate that the students' language attitudes toward English were positive across all three components. The cognitive component showed the strongest attitude, followed by the affective and behavioral components. This suggests that the students' positive beliefs about the importance of English were somewhat stronger than their feelings and actual behavioral tendencies toward using English.

3.2. Students' Cognitive Attitudes Toward English

The cognitive component obtained a mean score of 4.33, categorized as Very Positive. This result indicates that students strongly recognized the importance and usefulness of English in their academic and professional lives. Their beliefs were especially connected to academic study, future teaching careers, communication with people from different countries, and personal development.

The interview findings supported the questionnaire result. Students explained that English was necessary for reading books and journals, understanding learning materials, completing assignments, and developing knowledge. They also viewed English as an essential competence for future English teachers. Several participants associated English with wider employment opportunities, further study, and international communication. The lecturer similarly observed that students generally regarded English as an academic requirement and a professional asset rather than merely a university subject.

These findings are consistent with Kariadi et al. (2022), who reported that Indonesian university students considered English important for academic achievement, communication, and future careers. They also support Astuti (2021) and Wappa (2024), who found that students' positive perceptions were related to academic and professional benefits. The present study adds a more specific perspective by showing how these beliefs appear among sixth-semester English Education students who are increasingly preparing for their professional roles as English teachers.

The cognitive result was also reflected in classroom observation. Students paid attention to English learning activities, responded to questions, and participated in discussions and presentations. The convergence among questionnaire, interview, lecturer, and observation data indicates that students' positive cognitive attitudes were not limited to stated opinions but were also visible in academic engagement.

3.3. Students' Affective Attitudes Toward English

The affective component obtained a mean score of 4.07, categorized as Positive. The result indicates that students generally enjoyed learning English, felt motivated to improve their skills, and experienced positive feelings when they could communicate in English. However, the qualitative findings showed that positive feelings coexisted with anxiety and limited confidence in some speaking situations.

Students described English learning as interesting and useful, particularly when classroom activities involved new vocabulary, discussion, or opportunities to practice. Several students also expressed pride when they were able to communicate successfully in English. At the same time, students reported feeling nervous when speaking in front of the class because they were afraid of making grammar or pronunciation mistakes. The lecturer confirmed that students tended to be more comfortable during collaborative activities than during highly evaluative individual speaking tasks.

This pattern suggests that positive attitudes do not eliminate emotional barriers. Gardner (1985) emphasizes the role of affective factors and motivation in second-language learning, while the present findings show that motivation can coexist with anxiety. Similar patterns were reported by Kariadi et al. (2022), who found positive attitudes among university students but also identified anxiety and lack of confidence in speaking. Astuti (2021) likewise reported positive feelings toward English alongside challenges in speaking situations.

The findings therefore suggest that students' affective attitudes are positive but still developing. Supportive feedback, collaborative learning, and opportunities to speak without excessive fear of evaluation may help students transform positive interest and motivation into stronger confidence and more consistent participation.

3.4. Students' Behavioral Attitudes Toward English

The behavioral component obtained a mean score of 3.89, categorized as Positive. This result indicates that students generally demonstrated willingness to use and practice English, particularly in academic activities. Their behavior

was visible through participation in discussions, presentations, answering questions, and practicing English with classmates.

Interview data showed that students commonly used English several times a week, especially during classes, assignments, presentations, group discussions, and interactions with friends who also wanted to practice. Outside the classroom, students reported using English through movies, songs, articles, social media, and online learning resources. Nevertheless, everyday conversational use remained less consistent because Indonesian was more commonly used in the surrounding social environment.

Classroom observation supported this pattern. Students used English in presentations and discussions and showed efforts to participate in English learning activities. The lecturer also noted that voluntary English use was more visible inside the classroom than outside it. This difference between academic and everyday settings illustrates the sociolinguistic relationship between language attitude, language choice, and social context.

The result is consistent with Fitriati and Wardani (2020), who found that Indonesian was frequently used in everyday communication despite appreciative attitudes toward English. It also supports Wappa (2024) and Astuti (2021), who reported positive behavioral attitudes but limited opportunities to use English beyond formal learning contexts. The present study further shows that digital media can provide additional opportunities for students to encounter and practice English when everyday social interaction does not provide sufficient exposure.

3.5. Factors Influencing Students' Language Attitudes Toward English

The qualitative findings identified several internal and external factors that influenced students' language attitudes toward English. The internal factors included career aspirations, motivation, personal interest, self-confidence, and awareness of the importance of English. The external factors included lecturer support, peer interaction, classroom experiences, social environment, and exposure through technology and digital media.

Career aspirations were particularly important. Many students viewed English as necessary for becoming professional English teachers and for accessing wider employment or educational opportunities. This instrumental orientation encouraged students to continue improving their English even when they experienced difficulties. Personal interest also supported positive attitudes because students enjoyed learning through movies, songs, social media, and other forms of English content.

Self-confidence had a more complex influence. Students with greater confidence were more willing to speak and participate, whereas students who feared mistakes were more hesitant during individual speaking activities. The lecturer reported that confidence was generally higher among students with broader English exposure and learning experiences. This finding indicates that confidence can both support positive attitudes and be strengthened through repeated opportunities for meaningful language use.

External support was also important. Students described lecturers as sources of encouragement and constructive feedback, while classmates provided opportunities to practice collaboratively. The lecturer reported using supportive classroom strategies, authentic materials, peer feedback, collaborative activities, and low-stakes speaking tasks to help students become more comfortable using English. Technology and digital media further expanded students' exposure to English through films, music, social media, online resources, and learning applications.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing motivation, social environment, exposure, and learning context as important influences on language attitudes. Abdurahman et al. (2018) highlighted the role of multilingual and virtual environments, while Eliza et al. (2025) and Santoso et al. (2024) showed the importance of learning environments and academic support. The present study demonstrates that these factors operate together: students' positive beliefs are reinforced by career goals and interest, while supportive people, classroom practices, and digital exposure provide opportunities to turn those beliefs into actual language use.

4. Conclusion

This study found that sixth-semester English Education students at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Medan generally demonstrated positive language attitudes toward English across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The cognitive component was the strongest, with a mean score of 4.33 and a Very Positive category. The affective component obtained 4.07 and the behavioral component 3.89, both categorized as Positive. The overall mean of the three components was 3.83, indicating a Positive attitude toward English.

The integrated qualitative findings confirmed the quantitative results. Students viewed English as important for academic study, future careers, global communication, and personal development. They generally enjoyed learning English and were motivated to improve, but some still experienced anxiety and fear of mistakes during speaking activities. Their positive behavioral attitudes were most visible in classroom discussions, presentations, assignments, and collaborative practice, while everyday English use remained less consistent because Indonesian and local languages dominated many informal interactions.

The findings also showed that language attitudes were shaped by interconnected internal and external factors. Career aspirations, motivation, personal interest, and self-confidence influenced students from within, while lecturer support, peer interaction, classroom experiences, social environment, and digital exposure supported their attitudes externally. These findings suggest that English Education programs can strengthen positive language attitudes by creating supportive classrooms, providing regular opportunities for low-stakes speaking practice, encouraging peer interaction, and integrating authentic digital English resources into learning. Future research may examine the relationship between language attitudes and English proficiency or actual language use across different educational settings.

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