



Attitudes of Sharia College Students Toward Learning English

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المخلص:

يهدف البحث إلى التحقق من آراء الطلاب تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، والعوامل التي تساهم في التأثير على آرائهم، بالإضافة إلى اقتراح توصيات لتحسين برامج تعلم اللغة بما يتوافق مع آراء الطلاب وتفضيلاتهم. تم استخدام الاستبيان والمناقشات الجماعية مع عدد 82 طالباً، تم اختيارهم بشكل عشوائي من مختلف التخصصات بكلية العلوم الشرعية بجامعة طرابلس، وقد أوضحت النتائج أن آراء الطلاب إيجابية تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية على الرغم من وجود بعض الأسباب التي تعيق استخدامهم للغة، وهذه العوائق تتمثل في عدم وجود أي شخص تمارس اللغة الإنجليزية معه، والخلل من التحدث أمام الآخرين، بالإضافة إلى أنه يتم دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية فقط كمادة إلزامية في الجامعات ولا يتم دمجها في مواقف الحياة الاجتماعية، وهي تُدرّس كمادة عامة ولمدة عام واحد فقط للطلاب غير المتخصصين، كما يجد بعض الطلاب صعوبة في لهجة اللغة الإنجليزية. وأخيراً اقترح الطلاب دمج اللغة الإنجليزية ثلاث مرات على الأقل في الأسبوع ضمن المقررات لمدة أربع سنوات، بالإضافة إلى التركيز على مفردات اللغة ومهارة المحادثة لتحقيق نتائج فعالة ومفيدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الآراء، العوامل، تعلم الإنجليزية، العوائق، طلاب الجامعة

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ABSTRACT:

This study aimed to investigate the students' attitudes towards learning the English language, the factors contribute in affecting their attitudes, in addition to suggesting recommendations for improving language learning programs based on students' attitudes and preferences. A quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to answer the research questions; by distributing questionnaires and conducting focus group discussions with 82 university students who were randomly selected from different majors from sharia college in Tripoli university. The results showed that many university students showed positive attitudes towards learning English. However, there are many obstacles that ban them from using the language; having no one to practice English with, being shy to speak in front of others, English is only given as a compulsory subject and not integrated in the social life situations. English is given as a general subject and only for one year for non-specialized students, some students find the English language accent is difficult for them. The students proposed that English should be integrated three times a week at least and for four years in addition to focusing on vocabulary and speaking for gaining an effective and beneficial results.

Keywords: attitudes, factors, learning English, obstacles, university students.



Introduction:

The English language has become a global medium of communication, playing a significant role in various academic, professional, and personal domains. As a result, the importance of English language proficiency among university students has grown substantially in recent years. Therefore, understanding students' attitudes towards learning English is crucial for educators and policymakers in designing effective language learning programs and interventions. This research aims to investigate Shariah College students' attitudes towards learning the English language, exploring their beliefs, motivations, and perceptions about English language acquisition.

The study recognizes that attitudes towards learning a second language are multifaceted and influenced by a range of individual, cultural, and contextual factors. These factors may include personal goals, perceived relevance of English in academic and career pursuits, societal and cultural influences, past language learning experiences, and perceptions of the difficulty or ease of acquiring English language skills. By examining students' attitudes, this research seeks to shed light on the factors that shape their engagement, motivation, and overall approach to learning English.

The findings of this study have the potential to inform educational institutions, language instructors, and curriculum developers in tailoring language learning programs that meet the specific needs and preferences of university students. By understanding students' attitudes towards learning English, educators can create a supportive and motivating learning environment that enhances language acquisition and proficiency.



Research Problem

According to the researcher's experience in teaching the English language for non-specialist students, the researcher found that some of the students are not motivated and lost passion to learn the English language, this was clearly demonstrated through their performance in the oral and written tests in addition to their passive roles in the classroom activities and tasks. This problem was also maintained by Alwajaj (2023) who stated that "Libyan students still lack the motivation to learn English language. Thus, they have an unfavourable attitude towards English". As a result, students need to be motivated and enthusiastic to learn the English language.

Research questions:

- What are the students' attitudes towards learning the English language?
- What are the possible factors that influence students' attitudes towards English language acquisition?
- What are the suggestions and recommendations for improving language learning programs based on students' attitudes and preferences?

Methodology:

To answer these questions, a mixed-methods research approach will be employed. A questionnaire will be administered to a representative sample of Sharia College students, capturing their attitudes, motivations, and perceptions related to learning English. Additionally, qualitative focus groups will be conducted to gather in-depth insights into students' experiences, challenges, and aspirations in learning the language. The data collected will be analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' attitudes towards learning English.

Literature Review

Introduction:

English is a universal language that is widely acknowledged as a mean of communication, education, and social mobility. Accordingly, the significance of ESL should not be underestimated. Adha (2021) has asserted that "language is our significant source



of communication. It is the way through which we share our ideas, feelings, views and thoughts with others".

Moreover, The dominant discourse is that "English is the language of business" and it remains a fixed and unquestioned corporate language (Cogo, Yanaprasart, 2018, p.1), it is considered as an important mean in the business context. English also occupies a prominent position as the language of the study in most universities and institutes. According to Ethnologue (2017, 20th ed) there are more than 371 million speakers of English as a mother tongue, and more than 611 million as a second language. Thus, it is clear that the importance of this language is reflected in the number of those who use it more. However, according to Alwajwaj (2023) in the Libya context, English language is taught as a compulsory subject from grade 1 up to the university level, It is regarded as a foreign language because it is not commonly used in Libya. Moreover, it is obvious that most Libyan undergraduate students are not competent enough in English because they only interact with English in classrooms. Belaid & Murray (2015) observed that Libyan EFL learners are facing many problems and difficulties while learning English language particularly in the university level. Perhaps there are certain factors that affect the students passion in learning the language.

Factors Affect English language Learning:

Various significant internal and external factors that influence the learning process of English as a second language (ESL) were provided by Asim & Juhi (2023). Understanding these factors is crucial for educators and learners to effectively address potential challenges and optimize the language learning experience.

Internal factors refer to characteristics inherent in the learner or teacher, such as their motivation, cognitive abilities, personality traits, and prior language knowledge. Motivation plays a vital role in language learning, as learners with high motivation tend to actively engage in the learning process and persist in face of difficulties. Cognitive abilities, including memory, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, contribute to the learners' language proficiency. Moreover, individual personality traits such as extroversion, openness to experience, and self-confidence may influence the learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities and use English in real-life situations.



External factors encompass a wide range of influences that exist outside of the individual, including cultural, social, and environmental aspects. Cultural differences may affect ESL learners' language learning experiences, as language is interwoven with cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Social factors, such as peer interactions and the attitudes of family members and community towards language learning, can either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of English as a second language. Additionally, the learning environment, including the availability of resources, teaching methods, and classroom activities, also plays a crucial role in the learning process.

Furthermore, (Adyaksa, 2020, p.1) pointed out that "the most sensitive period of language development in a person's life is between the ages of two and seven. All aspects of language must be introduced to children before this sensitive period ends". hence the age at which the learners are taught the language plays an important role.

Social life:

Spolsky (1989) views that languages are primarily social mechanisms since languages are learned in social contexts. He further indicates that while the language learning is individual, it takes place in society, and though social factors may not have direct influences, they have strong and traceable effects on the attitudes and motivation of the learners.

The effect of curriculum on students attitudes:

According to IBE (2013), Expected learning outcomes define the totality of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, or behaviours a learner should master upon the successful completion of the curriculum. With this legacy in mind, OEI (2015) stated that it is important to give indigenous and minority populations new opportunities to decide what knowledge and abilities are to be valued and included in the official curriculum. (Echevarria et al, 2006) maintained that curricula should support teachers in understanding and implementing appropriate practices for these students.

The teaching methods effect on students' perception:



A language teaching strategy is defined as a conceived set of pedagogical procedures imposing a specific learning strategy on the learners, directed to the development of competence in the target language (Mehrgan, 2013). Research conducted by Exley (2005) shows that most Indonesian students are categorized as less than good in spoken and written English proficiency. Setyadi (2001) suggests, this phenomenon can be caused due to non-English department students are not taught how to learn English with appropriate teaching strategies. Additionally, Trajanov (2016) conducted a research about the relationship between teaching styles and strategies and foreign language learners' motivation. The results showed that the students whose teacher had a democratic teaching style and strategies were more motivated to learn English than the students whose teacher had an autocratic teaching style. On the other hand, Zaim et al. (2019) conducted a study concerning students' perceptions on teachers' teaching strategy and their effects towards students' achievement, the findings showed that there was no significant effect of student's perception of teaching strategy towards students' achievement in learning English as a general subject.

Previous studies:

Many researches have been conducted to investigate students attitudes towards learning English language. Different results have been showed by the following studies.

Speaking in different varieties of English has also become a part of national identity. Liou (2010) compared attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students in Taipei towards English as an international language in different social contexts. Additionally, students were questioned about having native speaker teachers as part of language education policy program. It was demonstrated that teachers and students were in favor of using the standard form of English rather than a local English accent. Students were likely to read books and materials written by native speakers. Accordingly, good pronunciation and use of grammar are considered to be characteristics of a good language teachers from students' perspectives.

Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) conducted a study to find petroleum-majored students' attitudes towards English on three major constructs: "instrumental motivation, integrative motivation and personal motivation". The study was conducted in a Yemeni



context and intended to explore the role of English in social, educational and cultural situations. Among the three chief constructs, instrumental reasons received the highest amount of attention and consideration from the students. At the same time, students hold positive beliefs on personal reasons. However, integrative reasons as part of a cultural attitude towards learning English received the least significance. It was also discussed that a large number of participants had positive feelings towards English speaking cultures and communities. It is implied from this study that because students are instrumentally motivated in learning English, courses should be designed to meet students' academic and professional needs. The inappropriateness of course materials is a factor which has to be taken into account as well.

Hashwani (2008), studied Pakistani students' attitudes toward English language learning in Karachi. Because of their extrinsic motivational purposes which are directly connected to their upcoming professional prospects, students hold strong positive attitudes towards language learning process.

The kind of attitudes which is derived from students can change over time i.e. the stability of language program can clearly reshape students' minds and their motivations as well. Shabani (2013) found that students' positive attitude remained stable over a time interval.

However, attitudes concerning language learning has not always been positive and constructive. In a study in a Libyan context, Zainol Abidin et al. (2012) demonstrated that regarding three cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors, participants reacted negatively towards English language learning which was statistically significant. It was assumed that negative response to learning English was probably because of participants' obliviousness to the prominence of learning English.

A further study was conducted by Tsuda (2003) in Japan to examine Japanese students' attitudes towards learning English. In that research project, it is revealed that the majority of students do not like learning English simply because they feel learning English is not related to their success in future. However, many of students had a positive feeling towards English speakers overseas. The implications of the study show that in order to facilitate the language learning process, it is necessary to provide a stress-free environment in which students can communicate easily with each other. Besides, teachers should raise



students' awareness on different varieties of English in the world and it should be discussed that English is a language which is functional in all over the world and not restricted to native speakers of a particular country.

Another study was conducted by Asghar et al (2018) for Libyan students in Pakistan. The study is conducted to evaluate the attitudes of the students of University of Gujrat towards ESL about emotional, behavioral and cognitive factors. It is also investigated what attitudes students show towards ESL regarding their gender. There were 158 (95 females and 63 males) Libyan students from three different departments including Fine Arts, Design, and Architecture. The questionnaire is used as an Instrument that contains 30 items to meet our goal. Findings reveal that the students of the University of Gujrat have a negative attitude to learn English as a second language. Moreover, gender has no such effect on attitude because there is no significant difference between male and female attitude towards ESL.

Methodology

Context and participants:

This study took place in an academic context specifically in Sharia Sciences College at Tripoli University. The sample of the study were randomly selected from different academic majors; the population were students at the first academic year with the average age of 19. 82 students were selected to respond to the questionnaire items and 23 students were chosen and distributed into 3 groups to undertake the focus group discussion. The implementation of focus group would enrich the study with a large amount of in-depth qualitative information in a short period of time hence gaining more insightful results.

Study design:

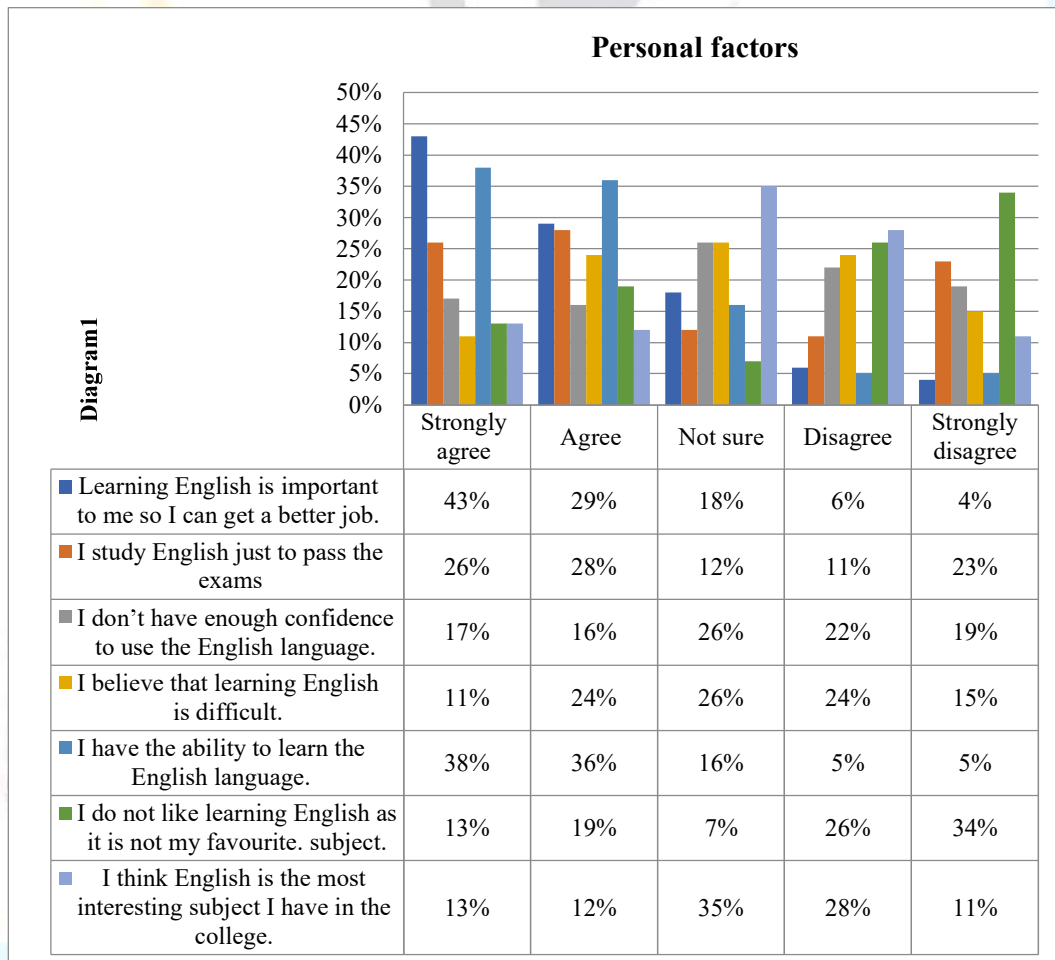
This is an analytical study in which the researcher used a triangulation approach of both quantitative and qualitative design. Using this design of study increases the reliability of the study and strengthens the quality of the results. A closed ended questionnaire and focus group methods were adopted to enrich the study with the required data. The questionnaire comprises of four main elements: the personal factors, English language curriculum, methods of teaching English, and social life. All the questionnaire and focus

group items were designed in accordance with the research questions and the study objectives.

Data analysis Procedure

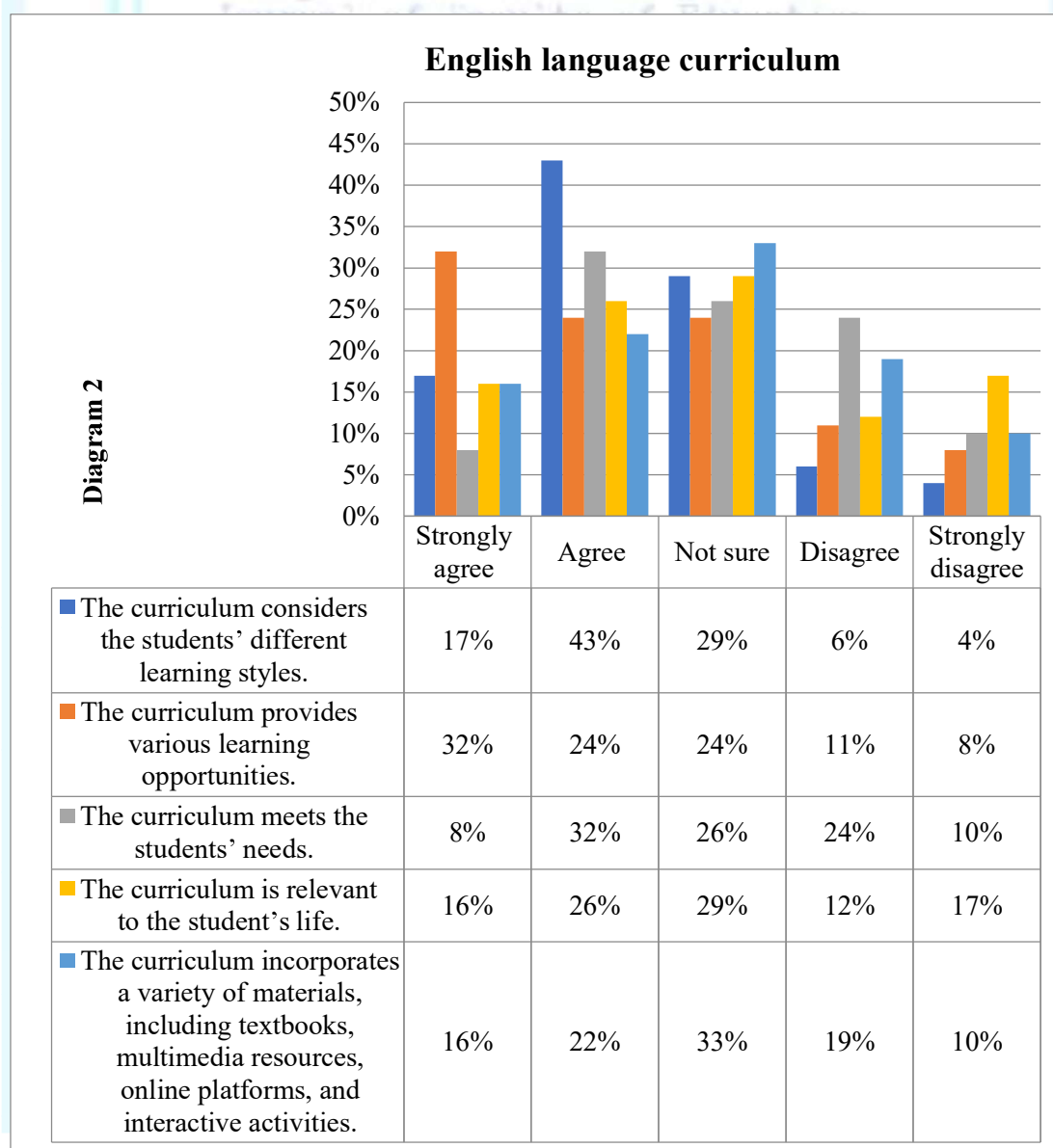
The questionnaire included 22 items to which the participants responded, the responses were statistically and quantitatively analyzed and displayed using tables and charts; the data were visualized using tables and charts with brief conclusion for each item. The focus group discussion was based on certain questions related to the study objectives and the responses to those questions were qualitatively analyzed.

Diagram1



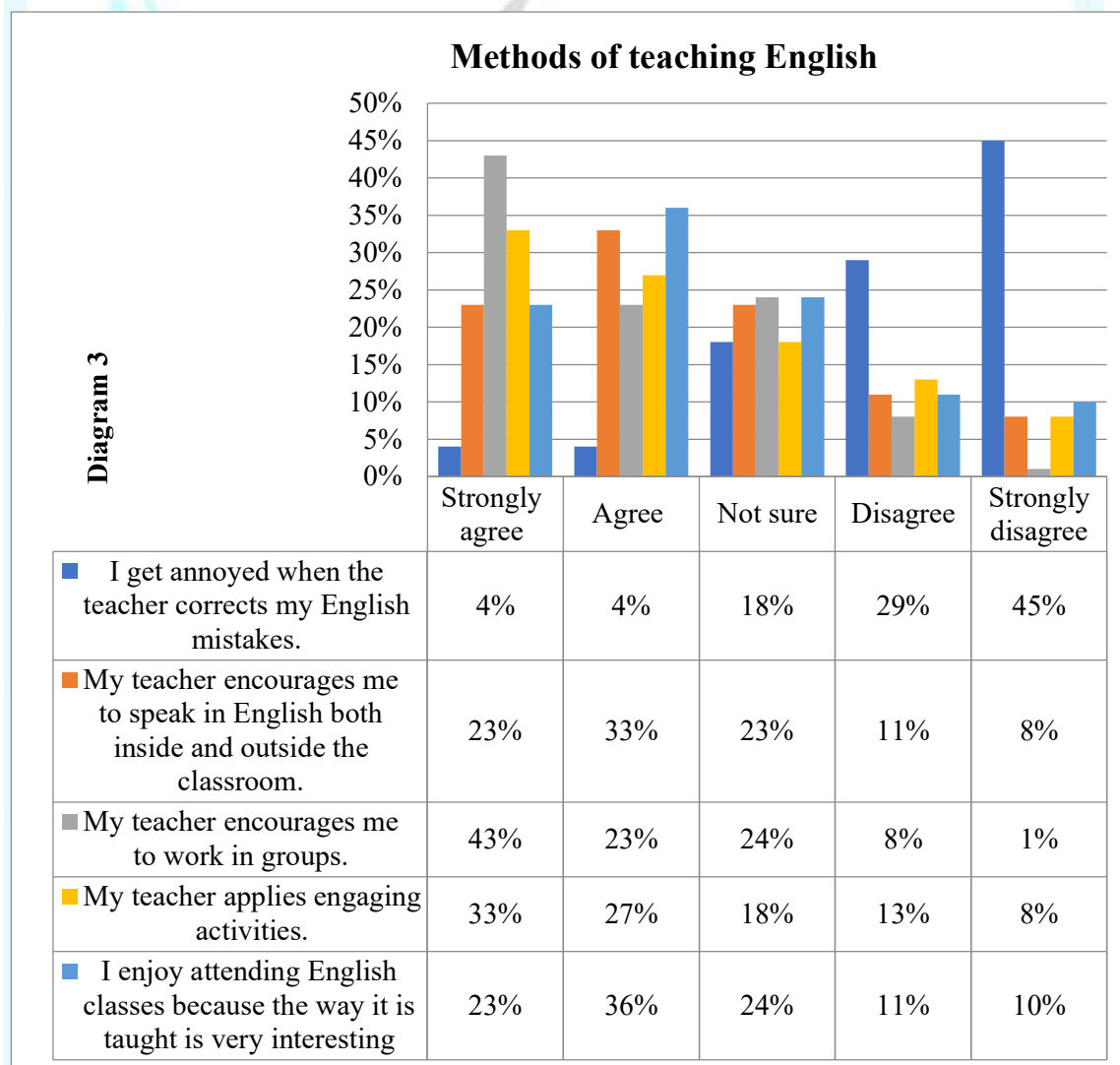
This diagram shows that 43% participants strongly agree that they are learning English to get better job opportunities. 35% of the participants are not sure if English is the most interesting subject in the college, although 38% of the respondents strongly agree that they have the capability to learn the English language. Hence, these factors are expected to affect students attitude towards learning English.

Diagram2



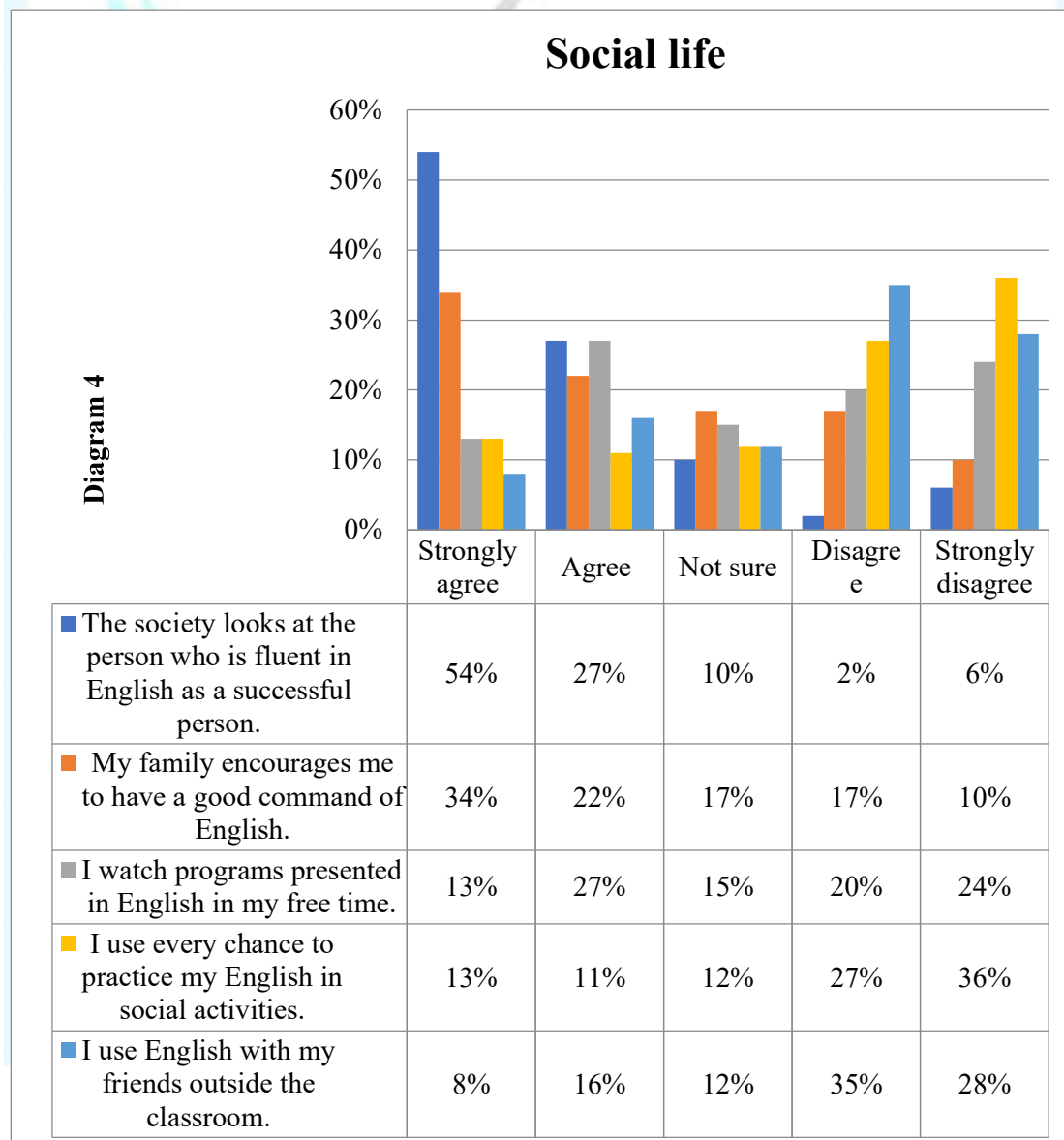
In terms of the English language curriculum, the findings reveal that 34% of the participants agree that the curriculum considers the students' different learning styles, where 32% strongly agree that the curriculum provides various learning opportunities and 32% agree that the curriculum meets the learners' needs. Therefore, the findings maintain the compatibility of the curriculum to the learners' needs and to the learning objectives in general.

Diagram3



Concerning the methods of teaching English, 43 % of the respondents strongly agree that the teacher encourages them to work in groups, while 33% assure that the teacher applies engaging activities, the study findings also display that approximately 36% of the participants enjoy attending English classes because the way it is taught is very interesting. Overall, the results indicate that the participants are satisfied with the methods that the teacher adopts in teaching English.

Diagram4:





When examining the effect of the social life on learning English, it appears that 54% of the participants strongly agree that the society looks at the proficient person in English as a successful person. In addition, 34% strongly agree that their families encourage them to have a good level in English. 36% of the participants do not avail any opportunity to practice English in their social life. Thus, learners are supported by the society and by their families to acquire the language however they are not self-motivated to use it in social life.

Findings discussion

Questionnaire findings discussion:

The results obtained through the personal factors of learning English showed that 43% of the targeted sample assured that they are learning English to get better job opportunities, hence 38% of the participants highly agreed that they are capable of learning the language although 35% of them are not sure if English is the most interesting subject in the college.

With reference to the English language curriculum, the findings maintained that the curriculum is compatible with the learners' needs and to the learning objectives in general. This assumption was demonstrated by 34% of the participants who assured that the curriculum considers the students' different learning styles, 32% students who highly maintained that the curriculum provides various learning opportunities and also 32% who assured that the curriculum meets the learners' needs.

Regarding the methods of teaching English, the findings showed that the participants are content with the methods that the teacher integrates in teaching English. 43 % of the respondents strongly assured that the teacher encourages them to work in groups, 33% approved that the teacher applies engaging activities, and 36% of the participants confirmed that they enjoy attending English classes because the way it is taught is very interesting.

The findings related to the effect of social life on learning English reveal that learners are fundamentally encouraged by the society and by their families in order to acquire the language, however they are not self-motivated to use it in the social life, Pariyanto et al. (2020) found that positive attitudes, strong internal motivation, and supportive environments are essential for successful language learning. This was illustrated by the findings that



showed that 54% of the participants strongly assured that the society looks at the proficient person in English as a successful person. In addition, 34% strongly agreed that their families do encourage them to have a good level in English. Although 36% of the participants agreed upon not availing any opportunity to practice English in the social life situations.

Discussion of the group discussion

The response to the first question showed that the majority of the participants stated that they like learning English as it is a universal language and a mean of communication between people around the world, Adha (2021) has also asserted that "language is our significant source of communication. It is the way through which we share our ideas, feelings, views and thoughts with others". most of the respondents asserted that English gives value to the people who speak it, and is a source of earning money, and it is important to be acquired for travelling purposes, Cogo et al. (2018) have asserted that the dominant discourse is that "English is the language of business" and it remains a fixed and unquestioned corporate language. Some other participants had an opposing opinion by stating that they learn English only for passing the exams.

When asking the participants about what they like in terms of the methods used by the teacher, the majority of the participants believed that relying on the students to prepare and explain lessons using data show by their own in front of their partners is a beneficial way that helps them to learn and develop. In addition, engaging the weak and strong students alike to participate in the classroom activities, is an effective procedure that render the pupils to be more encouraged and motivated to like learning English. Trajanov (2016) when conducted research about the relationship between teaching styles and strategies and foreign language learners' motivation, concluded that the students whose teacher had a democratic teaching style and strategies were more motivated to learn English than the students whose teacher had an autocratic teaching style. Furthermore, involving the students to achieve certain relevant tasks during and after the class is a very motivating way for gaining knowledge and developing.

Why don't you use the English language outside the classroom?, the findings of this question reveal that the majority of the participants believed that the main reason that prohibit them from using English outside the classroom is that they have no one to speak



or practice English with, and that some people find it strange to find someone who speaks another language, Pariyanto et al. (2020) found that positive attitudes, strong internal motivation, and supportive environments are essential for successful language learning. In addition, English is considered as a secondary language not a primary language and thus is not highly desired in our society, this goes with what Alwajwaj declared in (2023) in the Libyan context, English language is taught as a compulsory subject from grade 1 up to the university level, it is regarded as a foreign language because it is not commonly used in Libya. Some participants added that there are some other priorities in life that ban them from practicing English.

Why do you think that learning English is difficult?. The response to this question showed that the complexity of the language accent is one of the problems that makes the process of learning English difficult for many students, many studies indicated that the challenges caused by English accent for the students are twofold: (1) the accent on the part of students causing communication difficulties and (2) the accent on the part of other people such as lecturers and other pupils, which caused comprehension difficulties for the students (Campbell et al, 2008). The language was not being taught effectively since early stages which negatively affected the process of language acquisition in general, (Adyaksa, 2020, p.1) pointed out that "the most sensitive period of language development in a person's life is between the ages of two and seven. All aspects of language must be introduced to children before this sensitive period ends".

Why don't you think that English is a more interesting subject in the college?

Most of the participants responded that English is always given as a general subject for non-specialized students, for instance, in our case, Arabic is the medium of instruction and English is only given as a general subject and just for one year. as a result there is not much attention to learn English.

How does the syllabus meet your needs in learning English? The answers showed that most of the participants proposed that for the syllabus to meet their needs, it should be given three times a week and for four years. In addition, the respondents also added that the syllabus needs to focus more on vocabulary and speaking to be more beneficial and effective.



Conclusion & Recommendations:

Learning English is desirable by many university students as it is a universal language and a mean of communication, however there are many obstacles that ban them from using the language; having no one to practice English with, being shy to speak in front of others as some surrounded people find it strange to find someone speaks another language, English is only given as a compulsory subject and not integrated in the social life situations. English is given as a general subject and only for one year for non-specialized students, some students find the English language accent is difficult for them. Eventually, English should be integrated three times a week at least and for four years, focusing on vocabulary and speaking is necessary for gaining an effective and beneficial results.

On the light of the findings obtained, the researcher recommends the decision makers in the ministry of education should set a plan to integrate the English subject through the whole period of university study so that students competence in English develop and improve. In addition, specialized educational centers should be assigned for teaching English from childhood stage.

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Appendix

Read the statements and choose the suitable scale.

No	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Personal factors					
1	I think English is the most interesting subject I have in the college. أعتقد أن اللغة الإنجليزية هي المادة الأكثر إثارة للاهتمام في الكلية.					



2	I do not like learning English as it is not my favourite subject. لا أحب تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأنها ليست مادتي المفضلة					
3	I have the ability to learn the English language. لدي القدرة على تعلم اللغة الانجليزية					
4	I believe that learning English is difficult أعتقد أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية أمر صعب					
5	I do n't have enough confidence to use the English language ليس لدي الثقة الكافية لاستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية					
6	I study English just to pass the exams أدرس اللغة الإنجليزية من أجل اجتياز الامتحانات فقط					
7	Learning English is important to me so I can get a better job إن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مهم بالنسبة لي حتى أتمكن من الحصول على وظيفة أفضل					
	English language curriculum					
8	The curriculum incorporates a variety of materials, including textbooks,					

	multimedia resources, online platforms, and interactive activities. يشتمل المنهج على مجموعة متنوعة من المواد، بما في ذلك الكتب المدرسية وموارد الوسائط المتعددة والمنصات عبر الإنترنت والأنشطة التفاعلية					
9	The curriculum is relevant to the student's life. المنهج مرتبط بحياة الطالب					
10	The curriculum meets the students' needs. يلبي المنهج احتياجات الطلاب					
11	The curriculum provides various learning opportunities. يوفر المنهج فرص التعلم المختلفة					
12	The curriculum considers the students' different learning styles يأخذ المنهج في الاعتبار أنماط التعلم المختلفة للطلبة					
	Methods of teaching English					
13	I enjoy attending English classes because the way it is taught is very interesting أستمتع بحضور دروس اللغة الإنجليزية لأن طريقة تدريسها مثيرة للاهتمام للغاية					



14	My teacher applies engaging activities. يُطبق أستاذ المادة أنشطة جذابة					
15	My teacher encourages me to work in groups. يشجعني أستاذي على العمل في مجموعات					
16	My teacher encourages me to speak in English both inside and outside the classroom. يشجعني أستاذي على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية داخل الفصل الدراسي وخارجه					
17	I get annoyed when the teacher corrects my English mistakes. أشعر بالانزعاج عندما يقوم المعلم بتصحيح أخطائي في اللغة الإنجليزية					
	Social life					
18	I use English with my friends outside the classroom. استخدم اللغة الإنجليزية مع أصدقائي خارج الفصل الدراسي.					
19	I use every chance to practice my English in social activities. أستغل كل فرصة لممارسة لغتي الإنجليزية في الأنشطة الاجتماعية.					
20	I watch programs presented in English in my free time.					



	أشاهد البرامج المقدمة باللغة الإنجليزية في وقت فراغي.					
21	My family encourages me to have a good command of English. تشجعتني عائلتي على إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل جيد					
22	The society looks at the person who is fluent in English as a successful person. ينظر المجتمع إلى الشخص الذي يتقن اللغة الإنجليزية على أنه شخص ناجح.					