Undergraduate Students' Attitudes Towards Learning English in Rural University Branches in KSA: A Case Study of Al-Kamil's Branch

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Abstract—The present study was conducted to assess and investigate the attitudes of the Preparatory Year students towards leaning English at rural branch of the University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The author endeavours to examine and measure the University students' opinions and perceptions regarding the importance of Learning English. He also attempts to explore the areas of difficulties in foreign language Learning within the rural context of AlKamil College of Sciences and Arts (Makkah, Saudi Arabia). 75 randomly selected students (40 male and 35 female) participated in this study project. In this study, the researcher opted for a mixed research method. For quantitative data collection a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's 'Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) along with a silent interview for a qualitative data collection in order to assess the participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding learning English. Overall, the results reveal that students in rural university branches in Saudi Arabia hold positive attitudes towards learning English and they are constantly attempting to improve their language proficiency. This study also explores the different obstacles impeding the students' sought progress in language learning along with the possible solutions that may enable them to use and practise English in a more spontaneous way.

Index Terms—Attitude, EFL, language learning, University

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of English as a leading foreign language in this continuously shrinking world is believed to be related not only to the fact that it is spoken by nearly a quarter of the world population but also to its official status in in more than 70 countries. It is a foreign language that is being taught in more than 100 countries around the world (Crystal, 1997). However, being proficient in this language has become key to social, educational, and professional success of the individuals. In addition, it is believed that the foreign language learning process is influenced by a wide range of factors such as the learner's age motivation, attitude, personality, aptitude, intelligence, anxiety, learning style, etc.(Gardner, 1968 ; Brown, 2007). For instance, the learner's attitude towards language learning which has been occupying the attention of many educators and researchers was acknowledged as one of the most predominant factors that have a direct impact on the language learning process.
With that being said

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of Attitude

The concept of "attitude" was defined from different perspectives. For instance, the word "attitude" -in its etymological dimension, as mentioned in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2000), was used in art in the 17th century to describe "a posture of the body supposed to imply some mental state". Later, Franzoi (2003) stated that its etymological meaning changed to refer to a "posture of the mind". However, in a more elaborated definition of attitude is believed linked to "a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing such as an idea, object, person, or situation (Hosseini and Pourmandnia, 2013,p.63).

B. Importance of Attitude

In the context of foreign language learning, the concept of attitude has always been considered as an important factor having a direct impact on the learner's performance (Nunan, 2000; Visser, 2008; Reid, 2003). In other words, it is argued that there is a correlation between the learner's positive attitude and his success in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). However, it is argued that negative attitudes usually have a negative impact on language learning (Ellis, 1994). In addition, contrary to the belief that the learner's negative attitude is an ever-lasting static state, it has been proved that it can be corrected, and it can eventually make it easier for the learners to achieve progress in language proficiency (Lennartsson, 2008).

C. Related Studies

For several decades, the concept of "attitude has attracted the attention of many researchers who believed that a better understanding of the learner 's preferences and orientations has a significant impact on the process of assisting him/her to attain higher proficiency in foreign language. For example, Alkaff (2013) investigated 47 female English learners with pre-intermediate and intermediate levels of language proficiency at the English Language Institute at king Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia. The results indicated that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards language learning despite the fact they do not have enough opportunities to use it outside the classroom environment. Similarly, Al Mamun et al (2012) concluded that Khulna University undergraduates had a positive instrumental attitude. In addition, Al-Quyadi (2000) investigated the attitudes of 518 students who belonged to seven faculties within Sanaa University in Yemen. The results of this study indicated that most of learners had a positive attitude towards English and its utility in Yemen's social context. In a similar vein, Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015) used a questionnaire and an interview to assess the attitudes of 112 English majors Umm Al-Qura University students (Al-Qunfudah branch) towards English as a foreign language. The findings showed that students who have a positive attitude got the highest GPA whereas those with negative attitude got the lowest GPA. Tahaineh and Daana (2013) investigated the attitudes of 184 female Jordanian students towards English. They were majoring in English language and literature in Al Balqa' Applied University and Princess Alia University College in Amman, Jordan. Results indicated that the participants showed highly positive attitudes towards the target language and its users. Similarly, Al-Tamimi, et al. (2009) found that instrumental motivation is behind the learners' positive attitudes towards learning the target language and its use in the social context.

Several studies, on the other hand, indicated that most of the participants had a negative attitude towards the target language. For instance, Abu-Melhim (2009), while investigating the reasons that made choose to major in English at Irbid University in Jordan, discovered that around 50% of students had negative attitudes towards English. Similarly, at the National University of Malaysia, Abd Aziz (1994) discovered that, despite the fact , Malaysian students showed good interest in learning how to use English, they had a very negative attitude towards the English course taught in Malaysian Universities. In a similar vein, in a research conducted on students of two universities in Mexico, Despagne (2010) concluded that most participants ' negative attitudes towards English were ideological rather than accidental. In other words, Mexican students considered English language learning an aspect of "linguistic imperialism", which had a negative impact on their beliefs regarding English as a foreign language in general.

On the other hand, identifying the learner's perceptions of difficulties associated with the educational context, the educational system as well as the experiences related to the educational environment is also considered as an important factor influencing his/her attitude and degree of motivation (Gardner, 2010).

Several studies have been carried out to investigate educational context-related difficulties that may impede language learning. For example, Sehlaoui (2001) points out that the major problems found in Morocco are related to "social milieu" where language learners do not have the opportunity to socialize using a foreign language. He also stated that the students' negative attitude and their real efforts to learn English are considered to be among the major difficulties that impede foreign language learning. In a similar vein, a study by Jeon (2009) found that the lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom along with the system of examination were the main challenges to improve Korean students' proficiency in English. Moreover, Diana Ansarey (2012, p.68), while investigating problems affecting language learning in Bangladesh, points out that the major problem lies in the huge gap between "what the curriculum dictates and what is actually assessed". Additionally, in an attempt to identify the current challenges in English Language Learning in Turkish EFL Context, Ekrem Solak (2015) recommended that special attention should be paid to foreign language teachers and their teaching methods as well as the availability of supplementary learning facilities.

D. Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this study, Saudi preparatory year students' attitudes at the University of Jeddah towards learning English as a foreign language have been addressed. The purpose of this research study is to identify the attitudes of Saudi freshmen enrolled in the University of Jeddah's rural branches towards learning English its usefulness with in an EFL context. Additionally, this study attempts to investigate whether the participants find English a linguistically difficult language, it also seeks to identify the situation-related and contextual barriers impeding progress in language learning. More specifically, the study aims at answering the following research questions:

1) Do the preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah like to learn English ?
2) Do they consider English learning useful? If yes, what is it useful for?
3) Do the students of the rural branches of the University of Jeddah find English a difficult language to learn? If yes where do linguistic difficulties lie?
4) Are there any situation-related or contextual factors that impede language learning at the University of Jeddah's rural branches?

Accordingly, the following four hypotheses were addressed:

1) H_01: It is expected that most preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah do not have any positive attitudes towards learning English.
2) H_02: It is expected that most preparatory year students in the rural branches of the University of Jeddah do not consider learning English as a foreign language useful.
3) H_03: It is expected that most of the preparatory year students at the University of Jeddah's rural branches consider English a linguistically difficult language?
4) H_04: It is expected that there are not any contextual or situation-related factors impeding language learning in the University of Jeddah' branches in rural areas.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The subjects of this descriptive study were 75 freshmen (40 males and 35 females) enrolled at the University of Jeddah (Al-Kamil Branch) for the second term of the academic year 2019-2020. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 22 years old. They and they all share an intermediate level of language proficiency as they are about to finish covering the syllabus New Headway plus Special edition (intermediate level) by (Soars & Soars, 2012)

B. Data Collection

1). Instruments

For several decades, researchers have developed a wide range of measuring instruments which they utilized in assessing the learners' attitudes towards language learning. For this research, and after having reviewed previous studies in an intensive way, a mixed method, often referred to as a "third approach in methodology"(Dorneyi, 2007), was developed to elicit the participants' responses.

In other words, the choice of a mixed method was not arbitrary, but it was related to the belief that combining a quantitative and qualitative approaches in social science studies usually leads to more beneficial and more acceptable findings than "mono-method studies"(Dorneyi ,2007). Additionally, it is argued that the importance of combining a qualitative and quantitative approach lies in the fact that it is directly related to validity issues including the truthfulness as well as the correctness of the data collected (Creswell, 1998). Equally important, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches helps avoiding many of each other's limitations. First, a quantitative method which was used as data collection tool was in the form of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (1985). The researcher utilized this five-point Likert scale and asked the participants to choose responses according to what they see it suitable for them: Strongly, Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire consists of three main parts. The first part (statement 1 to 7) aims at assessing the general attitude of preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah towards English learning. The second part (statement 8 to 13) was designed to explore the participants' attitudes towards the usefulness of the English language. The third part (statement 14 to 20) aims at identifying the linguistic difficulties that the participants face when learning English.

Second, since the present study is investigating

information about attitudes, perceptions, and opinions which cannot be observed, a qualitative data collection tool was believed more reliable (Merriam, 2001). Thus, the students were invited participate in a silent interview which was in the form of a two open- ended questions:

The first question was "what are the reasons / purposes for which you are learning English ". This question again is identifying the participants' attitude towards the usefulness of learning English. The second question, on the other hand, was "what factors, do you think, are impeding your language leaning in the actual learning environment?"

C. Procedure:

Before conducting this study, both the qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments were translated into Arabic to guarantee a good understanding among all the participants. Additionally, the students were also informed that they are not forced to participate in this study. Equally important, to assure the participants that their responses will have no impact on their academic results, they were told that they do not need to mention any references such as their names or university IDs. While the questionnaire and the silent interview were carried out by the researcher during class time at the University branch's males' campus, a female colleague did the same at the females' section of the same branch.

D. Data Analysis

The mixed method that was used in data collection during this study required two different types of data analysis. In other words, the quantitative data that was collected by means of a 20-item questionnaire was analysed through tabulation and calculation of averages and percentages. On the other hand, for the analysis the qualitative data, the participants' answers were first translated into English, then, they were thematically classified into different categories.

IV. RESULT

The questionnaire in this study was divided into three main parts that are related to the research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1 (Statement 1-7): Do the preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah like to learn English?

According to the table above, (83.8%) of the students in this study disagreed that they "hate English" whereas only (5, 4%)of the participants agreed that they do hate it. However, results showed that a large proportion of students (89, 3%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they "like to learn English" while only (1.3%) strongly disagreed and (5.3%) disagreed that they like to learn the target language.

The statement "I enjoy Learning and speaking English" elicited a high percentage of agreement as the total of those who strongly agreed and agreed was 69 students which was equivalent to (74%) of the participants. However, only (13, 3%) disagreed with the statement and (2.7%) did not decide.

The statement "I like to listen to people speaking English" generated (77.3%) of agreement whereas only (10.7%) of participants disagreed and (12%) could not decide.

Unlike the previous statement, a large percentage of the participants (31.1%) strongly disagreed and (32.4%) disagreed that "they only study English because it is an obligatory course at university. The total percentage of those who strongly agreed and agreed with this same statement represented (29.8%) of the total

number of participants.

TABLE I: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS 1-7

	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	I hate English.	37	25	8	4	0
		50.0%	33.8%	10.8%	5.4%	0%
2	I like to learn English.	1	4	3	19	48
		1.3%	5.3%	4.0%	25.3%	64.0%
3	I enjoy Learning and speaking English.	3	7	2	44	19
		4.0%	9.3%	2.7%	58.7%	25.3%
4	I like listening to people speaking English.	3	5	9	39	19
		4.0%	6.7%	12.0%	52.0%	25.3%
5	I only study English because it is an obligatory course at university.	23	24	5	17	5
		31.1%	32.4%	6.8%	23%	6.8%
6	People who speak English are educated.	5	12	5	38	15
		6.7%	16.0%	6.7%	50.7%	20.0%
7	Speaking a good English gives people a good impression about myself	3	5	10	34	22
		4.1%	6.8%	13.5%	45.9%	29.7%

As for opinion about "people who speak English ",(50.7%) agreed and (20%) strongly that they are educated individuals whereas the percentage of disagreement was (22.7 %) only (6.7%) responded with undecided. Similarly, a very high percentage of the participants (75.6%) either strongly agreed or agreed that "speaking good English can create gives a good impression ". However only(4.1 %) who showed strong disagreement and (6.8%) is the percentage of those who disagreed with this same statement. The difference (13.5%) is the proportion of those who did not come to a decision...

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: (Statements 8 to 13) Do they consider English learning useful? If yes, what is it useful for?

TABLE II: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS 8-13

	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA
8	Learning English is important for my future	2	1	0	29	43
		2.7%	1.3%	0%	38.7%	57.3%
9	Learning English can help me find better job opportunities.	6	1	0	41	27
		8.0%	1.3%	0%	54.7%	36.0%
10	Learning English can help watch movies and TV shows without dubbing.	2	4	5	36	28
		2.7%	5.3%	6.7%	48.0%	37.3%
11	Learning English is important for my current and future studies	0	5	3	29	38
		0%	6.7%	4.0%	38.7%	50.7%
12	Learning English is very useful for travelling outside the kingdom.	1	1	20	51	1
		1.4%	1.4%	27.0%	68.9%	1.4%
13	I need English when I search in the internet	3	11	6	27	28
		4.0%	14.7%	8.0%	36.0%	37.3%

According to the table above, the percentage of the study subjects who either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "Learning English is important for the future" was(96%)whereas only (2.7%) strongly disagreed and (1.3%) disagreed with the idea that learning English plays an important role in the learner's future. Similarly, the number of participants who agreed that "learning English can help in finding better job opportunities" was 68 which represent (90.7%) of the total number of participants. However, only (9.3%) expressed their disagreement when responding to this statement.

Similar results were found in the participants' responses to the statement that "learning English helps watching movies and TV shows without dubbing". In other words, (48%) of the participants

agreed and (37.3%) strongly agreed with this statement. However, (2.7%) strongly disagreed added to those 5.3 % who disagreed and (6.7 %) did not know.

While the statement "Learning English is important for my current and future studies" generated a high percentage of agreement (89.3%), the disagreeing rates were of (6.7%) and only (4%) did not know.

Moreover, the statement "learning English is very useful for travelling outside the kingdom elicited (70.3%) of agreement and only (2.8%) of disagreement. On the other hand, (27%) is the percentage of those who did not know. Like the previous statement, (37.3%) of the participants strongly agreed and (36%) agreed that Learning English is useful for internet users. Only a small percentage of the study subjects, on the other hand, expressed disagreement (4%) strongly disagreed and (4.7%) disagreed and the remaining (8%) did not know.

STUDENTS ANSWERS THE OPEN ENDED QUESTION1: WHAT ARE THE REASONS / PURPOSES FOR WHICH YOU ARE LEARNING ENGLISH?

As shown in the table 3, the participants mentioned a large of variety of reasons and purposes for which they are learning English. In fact, getting better job opportunities appeared in 20 different student's answers. Therefore, it was the most common reason that explains the participants choice to learn English. In addition, building a good future was the second most common answer. It was mentioned by large number of informants. Similarly, a big number of the participants (15) they are learning English learn English because is "the language of the world". Similarly, 15 other participants stated that they are learning English because simply they "like it". However, travelling abroad was another good reason for 9 of the participants to learn it.

Additionally, 7 students pointed out that mastering English can serve as a good means to spread Islam all over the world. The number of those who stated that they are learning English because they need it for their current and future studies was 6.

The remaining answers were as follows: 4 participants mentioned that English is useful for self-improvement while other 4 students stated that they need to learn it because it is the " language of business" . Similarly, 3 students found that learning English help a lot in searching on the internet while 2 stress the importance of learning English as it helps them understand movies and TV series. Finally, the number of the students who stated that they had no reasons/ purposes for which they are learning English was also 2.

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TABLE III: STUDENTS' ANSWERS THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 1

Answers	Counts
I am learning English to get better job opportunities.	20
I am learning English to build a good future.	18
I am learning English because the language of the world.	15
I am learning English because I like it.	15
I am learning English because I need it when travel abroad.	9
I am learning English to spread the Islam all over the world.	7
I am learning English because it is important for future studies.	6
I like learning foreign languages.	5
I am learning English because I want to know the language and to benefit from it in my daily life.	4
I am learning English because I want to improve my language skills.	4
Learning English is good for self-improvement.	4
I am learning to use it for the internet search.	3
I am learning English for no reason and no purpose.	2
I am learning because it is the language of business.	2
I am learning English to understand movies easily.	2

TABLE IV: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS 14 TO 20

		SD	D	U	A	SA
14	I think Learning English is difficult.	20 — 26.7%	4 — 5.3%	8 — 10.7%	12 — 16.0%	314 — 41.3%
15	I find English grammar and structure difficult	8 — 10.7%	23 — 30.7%	10 — 13.3%	30 — 40.0%	4 — 5.3%
16	I find reading difficult	13 — 18.1%	37 — 51.4%	7 — 9.7%	14 — 19.4%	1 — 1.4%
17	I find listening difficult	12 — 16.00%	40 — 53.30%	8 — 10.70%	11 — 14.70%	4 — 5.30%
18	I find writing difficult	11 — 14.7%	6 — 8.0%	3 — 4.0%	43 — 57.3	12 — 16.0%
19	I find speaking difficult	13 — 17.8%	17 — 23.3%	4 — 5.5%	35 — 47.9	4 — 5.5%
20	Because I don't know many lexical items, I find understanding and communicating in English difficult	4 — 5.4%	6 — 8.1%	4 — 5.4%	35 — 47.3%	25 — 33.8%

As it is shown in Table IV, 56.3%) of the participants expressed agreement to the statement that learning English in general is difficult whereas (32 %) of the students stated that learning English is a language which is not difficult to learn.

When asked about their opinion about grammar rules and structure, (45.3%) of the participants pointed out that the English grammatical rules and structures difficult. However, those who did not consider that grammar and structures difficult to understand represent 41.4%. The difference of (13.3%) is the percentage of those who did not know.

As for the image of the reading skill, a high percentage of the participants (51%) disagreed with the statement that "reading is difficult" and 18.1% strongly disagreed with the same statement. However, only around one fifth of the total number of those who participated in this study (20.8%) considers reading as a difficult skill and the percentage who did not know was 9.7%. Similar to the previous statement, 52 participants (which represents (69.3%) of the participants) expressed their disagreement with the statement that "listening is difficult". On the other hand, apart from those 10.7% who did not know, only one fifth of the participants expressed their agreement with the statement that highlights the difficulty of the listening skill.

Contrary to this previous statement, 55 students who represent (73.3%) of the participants stated that writing is a difficult language skill whereas only (22.7) disagreed with this statement. Likewise, responses indicated that more than half of the participants find it difficult to speak in English. More precisely, (47.9 %) expressed their strong agreement with the statement that speaking is a difficult skill and also 5.5% agreed with this same idea. On the other hand, (40.3%) of the participants shared the opinion that speaking is not a difficult skill.

The percentage of those who stated their" little knowledge of the English lexical items blocks their understanding and communication in English was very high. In other words, the statement" because I don't know many lexical items, I find understanding and communicating in English difficult" generated (81.1%) of agreement, and (13.5%) of disagreement and only a 4 participants mentioned that they did not know which equivalent to

(5.5%) of the total number of participants.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Are there any situation-related or contextual factors that impede language learning at the University of Jeddah's rural branches?
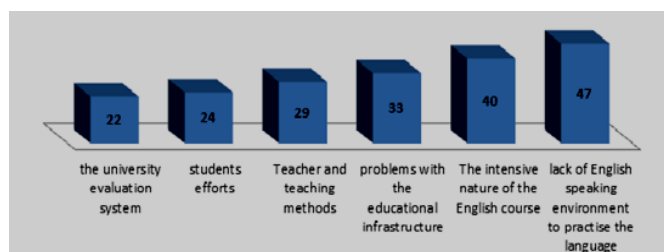

Fig. 1. Factors impeding language learning in the rural branches of the University of Jeddah.

According to Fig. 1, when asked for their opinions about the most significant factors that negatively affect their language learning, the participants mentioned a variety of problems. These problems were thematically classified into six different categories. The first category is related to the lack of an English-speaking environment where students can practise the language outside the classroom environment. This factor was mentioned by 47 participants. Moreover, 40 participants stated being obliged to study an intensive English course was considered as major problem for them. On the other hand, 33 participants showed dissatisfaction with infrastructure available in the learning environment (absence of internet connection, language labs, and poor library). Similarly, 29 participants stated that the teaching staff and teaching methods were among significant factors that hinder the improvement of their language proficiency. However, 29 participants pointed that it is the learner's personal problems, learning habits and personal attitudes that impede his/ her language learning. Finally, 24 participants mentioned that evaluation system used the University of Jeddah to impede English language learning.

V. DISCUSSION

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: Do the preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah like to learn English?

According to the participant's responses, the preparatory year students in rural branches of the University of Jeddah like English and have a positive attitude towards learning English as a foreign language. Their responses to statement 1 (I hate English) elicited (83.8%) of disagreement. Equally important, almost two thirds of the participants expressed disagreement when responding to statement 5 (I study English because it is an obligatory course). The high percentages of agreement that students showed in their responses to statement 2, 3 and 4 indicate that they have a positive attitude towards language learning. More specifically, Reponses to satment2 (I like to learn English) elicited around 90% of agreement. Similarly High percentages of agreement were also found in the learners' responses to statement 3 and 4 which respectively elicited 84% and 77.3% of agreement. These results are supported by the responses to statement 7 in the sense that 56 out 75 participants equivalent to (75.6 %)believe that learning English can grant them a good social image of well-educated individuals. The findings of the first part of the questionnaire are supported by answers to the open-ended question about the reasons for which students are learning English as 11 students out of? Stated that "they like English" and 5 others mentioned that "they like learning foreign languages"

On the whole, it is clear that most of preparatory year students in the rural branches of the University of Jeddah have a positive attitude towards English and its learning. This finding are in line the reviewed literature (Alkaff, 2013; Abd Aziz,1994).

Thus, the hypothesis that preparatory year students of the rural branches of the University of Jeddah do not have any positive attitudes towards learning English was proved to be not true.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Do they consider English learning useful? If yes, what is it useful for?

Responses indicate that students have a positive attitude towards the usefulness of English. Most of students see that learning English is important for their future and this is clear in their responses to statement 8 where rates that indicated agreement reached (96%). These results are notably supported by responses to statements 9 as (90.7%) of students saw that learning English can help in finding better job opportunities. Equally important, responses to statement 10 a very small percentage of participants (6.7%) do not consider learning English as a key factor in determining academic achievement, while 67 students out of 75 acknowledged the importance of English language learning for their academic success. Moreover, responses to statement 12 which elicited 70.3% of agreement show that a wide majority of students consider learning English necessary for anyone who plans to travel outside Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, students have no doubt that learning English is very useful for their daily life. For example, through the students' responses to statement 13, it is clear that 73% of the participants agreed that learning English is necessary for internet users. Similarly, statement 10 generated a percentage of 85% agreement that learning English is useful to understand movies and TV programs.

The students' responses to the questionnaire statements (8-13) about the usefulness of English learning are supported by the student's answers to the open-ended question in the silent interview. In other words, when asked about the most important reasons/purposes for which they learn English, participants gave various answers. However, "getting better job opportunities" was mentioned by 20 students and it appeared to be the most common purpose for which students are teaching English as it. Similarly, the answer "building a good future" appeared 15 times which totally agrees with responses to statement 8. Moreover, 12 students state that they are aware of status of English as the world language. The fourth most important reasons that the students mentioned was the need for English when people travel abroad. This reason appeared in 10 of the students' answers. The other reasons that have been mentioned included the importance of learning English for future studies, the need for the language to use the internet and understand English movies and TV programs. However, 7 students state that they are learning the language for religious and ideological reasons –namely the aim to spread Islam and to make people convert to their religion. Consequently, it is clear that the majority of the preparatory year students of the rural branches of the University of Jeddah consider English leaning is useful for their professional and academic success in the future as well as for their daily life. This finding is in line with the results of the studies by (Al-Tamimi et al, 2009; AlMamun et al, 2012) which indicated that most of the students' instrumental motivation is behind their positive attitude to learn English. Consequently, it is quite reasonable to conclude that aforementioned findings prove that the hypothesis, that most preparatory year students in the rural branches of the University of Jeddah do not consider learning English as a foreign language useful, was not true.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: Do the students of the rural branches of the University of Jeddah find English a difficult language to learn? If yes where do linguistic difficulties lie?

Responses to statement 14 indicate that most students do find English a difficult language to learn. The statement "I think Learning English is difficult" generated a high percentage of agreement which reached to (56.3%). In terms of language skills, a considerable number of students state neither reading nor listening were difficult for them; but results show that reading is easier than listening and this can be explained by the learners' difficulties with

the accent, and pronunciation issues such as homophones, silent letters, the pace of the listening track, etc.

Responses to statements 18 and 19, on the other hand, indicated that around 3/4 of students stated that writing is a difficult skill. Likewise, more than half of the participants stated that speaking is a difficult skill. Consequently, as it is expected, the majority of students find receptive skills less difficult than productive ones. A reasonable explanation to the students' difficulties with writing and speaking is found in their responses to statement 20 where 80.1% expressed their agreement that vocabulary is difficult. In other words, when the students lack the knowledge of lexical items, they are likely not to be able to produce utterances in both written and spoken forms. Concerning grammar and structure, 45% students stated that grammar is difficult. On the whole, findings related to language skills, vocabulary and grammar prove that the hypothesis that most of the preparatory year students at the University of Jeddah's rural branches consider English as a language which is linguistically difficult to learn.

RESEARCH QUESTION4: Are there any situation-related or contextual factors that impede language learning at the University of Jeddah's rural branches?

The answers to the open-ended question about the Situation-related or contextual factors impeding language learning, the participants listed a considerable number of problems.

A. The Environment Does not Allow English Language Practice

According to students answer, the most common problem that prevents students' progress in language proficiency is believed to the lack of an English-speaking environment that allow the learner of English to make use of the target language in a more natural and social context. The rural and mountainous nature of the research context does not give the opportunity to students to have contact many speakers of English. According to my personal experience, there are no multinational companies or international institutions in the research context. Apart from the university branch or the local hospital where little English is used in communication, it seems that opportunities to speak English are reduced to some occasional talks to some non-Arab uneducated workers in restaurants or in shops who themselves lack the minimum of English language proficiency. Equally important, these very foreign workers, with the passage of time, started to learn the Arabic language, which, in turn, makes the English language practice in social context almost impossible. This finding consequently echoes the argument that Shelaoui (2001) that the 'social milieu' is very important for progress in language proficiency. It also conforms to the results that Jeon, J. (2009) found that the lack of language practice seems to be one of the major problems for English language learners in South Korea.

B. The Problems Related to the Intensive Nature of the English Course

A large number of students expressed their dissatisfaction with the exhausting English course they are taking. Students are constantly complaining studying English for an average of 3 hours daily for the whole week. Some of the participants see that trying covering textbook's four levels (beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate) over two semesters is "counter-productive" . Some students see such a huge number of lectures usually results in boredom which in turn has a bad effect on the learning process. Consequently, as a solution, some participants have suggested that the degree of stress and pressure put on learners can be reduced if the university plans to teach this same English course over two academic years instated.

C. The Infrastructure Available at the University Branch

Many students see that the infrastructure available at the university branch in such a rural area impedes their progress in Language learning. For instance, some students expressed their complaint about the total absence of a wireless internet connection in their campuses. In such a condition, for example, with a constant need to understand new lexical items, students cannot have easy access to online dictionaries. Some other participants acknowledge the role of language labs which the branch lacks in. They similarly argued that having lectures in well-equipped language labs can be beneficial in many ways: it maximizes their exposure to the target language, it allows them to improve their listening skills, their pronunciation, accent, intonation and therefore it improves their English-speaking abilities. Some other students showed their dissatisfaction with the absence of a library, and they consider that restricting language learning to the classroom environment is not always enough. Overall, it is quite reasonable to conclude that the same students who stated that English learning is difficult (research question 3) are not only aware of the reasons behind these difficulties but also, they can clearly see and suggest the most effective and feasible solutions.

D. The Teacher and the Teaching Methods

29 students considered that both the teacher and the teaching methods are among the major problems that negatively affect their progress in language learning. In other words, students state that teaching process is restricted to the completion of the target syllabus , which makes the learning experience meaningless, boring and demotivating. This finding can be related to the intensive nature of the English course taught at university which hinders the teacher's aim to innovate and to create and select and combine more effective teaching methods. This finding agrees with Ekrem Solak's (2015) argument that English language teacher and the teaching methods, when ignored, have a direct negative impact on learners' achievement in language learning.

E. The students' Learning Habits

22 students state that learners in general are not exerting the required effort to attain good language proficiency and they argue that they need more motivation and encouragement on the part of the teachers and the parents as well. Additionally, most of the participants are aware that more sufficient efforts usually have a benefit impact on their progress in language learning.

F. The Assessment Systems and Methods

Some answers stated most students' primary goal is to pass the exams and to get better marks at the expenses developing a good. Similarly, there is always a disparity between the curriculum requirements and the content of exams. In other words, although the course objectives are to develop the learner's communicative and linguistic skills, examinations are still gramma- based. This finding therefore echoes the results that by Diana Ansarey (2012) found in her attempt to investigate the major problems in the EFL context in Bangladesh.

On the whole, the lack of an environment where students can practice the language, the intensive English course, the lack of internet facilities, language labs, a rich library, and others were mentioned by students as factors that have a direct negative impact on their language learning. Thus, it has been the hypothesis that there are not any contextual or situation-related factors impeding language learning in the University of Jeddah' branches in rural areas is not true.

VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is multi-fold. First it aimed at examining the attitude of Saudi preparatory year students in rural the branches of the University of Jeddah (Al-Kamil Branch) towards learning English and its utility. Second, it aimed at identifying the different areas of linguistic difficulties that the learners are facing.

Additionally, the attempted to identify a number of contextual factors impeding language learning and hindering learners progress in language learning.

Results indicated that students' instrumental motivation was behind their positive attitude towards learning English. In other words, the large number of reasons why students are eager to learn English as a foreign language is a proof that they are aware of the utility and importance of the English language, and they consider it key to success in their academic, social and professional life. When it came to the linguistic difficulties that the learners face, results, expectedly, showed that productive language skills, vocabulary and grammar rules were considered as the main areas of difficulty. However, findings indicated that students' limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar have a direct negative effect on developing his productive and communicative competences.

Equally important, according to the findings of this study, it is quite reasonable to conclude that the learners progress in language learning was affected by two forces moving into two opposite directions: positive attitude towards language learning versus unfavourable learning conditions and context-related difficulties. More specifically, results indicated that are many contextual factors impeding students' improvement in language learning such as the inability to use the target language outside the classroom environment, the intensive nature of the English course taught at university, the teachers and their teaching methods, etc.

On the whole, despite the huge number of challenges that the learning context includes, and the linguistic difficulties they face the results of this study indicated that the students in the rural branches of the university of Jeddah have a positive attitude towards English learning.

A. Limitations of the Study

This research covered 40 male and 35 female learners at the University of Jeddah (A-Kamil branch). It is quite reasonable to consider its findings were specific to the context where it was carried out. In simpler terms, the fact that English is being taught in large number of the institutions (public and private colleges, schools, institutes, etc.) and for a variety of purposes leads to the conclusion that the findings of this study - to some extent- limit its external validity.

B. Recommendations

The findings of this suggest that assisting students to improve their language proficiency is the responsibility of students, teachers, and the educational institutions.

First, students, should be aware that sufficient efforts and hard work are always needed to achieve better levels of language proficiency. As for the teachers, it is recommended that teachers should not reduce their teaching to the completion of the syllabus. However, they are required to find ways to maximize the learner's exposure to the target language and to make learning experience more enjoyable, challenging, and meaningful.

As for the educational institutions (the university) , it would be very beneficial if the university reduces the number of English lectures and give more opportunities for learners to learn the language at a pace which is adequate to their learning styles and to their age. Additionally, adopting a less intensive course could a positive teacher's creativity and innovation in selecting ways to improve their teaching methods and their classroom instructions. The researcher recommends that more attention should be paid to vocabulary teaching giving sufficient time for the learners to practise and understand the meanings and the uses of the new lexical items they learn. Thus, they can improve their speaking and writing skills.

C. Suggested Research

The aforementioned findings suggest that further studies can be carried out to substantiate the theoretical claim that there is a correlation between adult age and language learning. It is also possible to conduct a research to compare the attitudes of freshmen in rural areas and those in urban centres.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

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