



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
BUSINESS AND ADVANCED
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ORGANIZATION
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ABAC ODI JOURNAL Vision. Action. Outcome

ISSN: 2351-0617 (print), ISSN: 2408-2058 (electronic)

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ABAC ODI JOURNAL Vision. Action. Outcome Vol 11(2) pp. 141-152

www. <http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/odijournal>

Published by the
Organization Development Institute
Graduate School of Business and Advanced Technology Management
Assumption University Thailand

ABAC ODI JOURNAL Vision. Action. Outcome
is indexed by the Thai Citation Index and ASEAN Citation Index

The Perception and Attitudes toward Learning English as A Foreign Language of Grade 4 Students, Thailand

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Received: 16 December 2023. Revised: 25 December 2023. Accepted: 27 December 2023

Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to identify whether there are significant relationship and differences in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. A total of 70 students were surveyed in this study. The instruments used to collect the quantitative data were Perception of learning questionnaire developed by Alkaff (2013) and Learning Attitudes Questionnaire by SIL International (Orwig, 1995). Correlational analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship between the research variables and Independent Samples t-test was used to determine the differences between the research variables. The research found that Grade 4 students had nearly positive perception and attitudes toward learning EFL, English as a foreign language, in both low-scoring and high-scoring groups. Also, the research found a significant, positive, strong correlation between perception of and attitudes toward learning EFL in low-scoring students, and a significant, positive, moderate correlation in high-scoring students. Moreover, the research revealed that there was no significant difference between perception of learning EFL in low-scoring and high-scoring students, and also no significant difference between attitudes toward learning EFL in both groups.

Keywords : perception, attitudes, EFL

Introduction

English language is one of the most important and languages in the world as it is widely spoken (Rao, 2019). Education systems in many countries require students to study the language as a compulsory subject and it is expected the students to be able to use it. Although some of the primary students study the language, they do not have an opportunity to use it in real life outside of the classroom. In addition, they are unable to relate the real-life situation with the language and lack confidence to use it. Better perception and attitudes in learning English could increase awareness of the importance of learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, the attitudes toward learning English language could have affect with students' performance as attitudes reflect what they think in their head into their behavior toward learning it. The performances of students whether in proper academic assessment or being dare to use it could come from their attitudes. The influence of thinking that they could

do or could not do in the subject could be the reason that would affect their performance. Colaste (2018) stated that students' attitude toward English language is highly correlated to academic performance. However, attitude is not the only factor that affect students' proficiency in learning language (Falita & Faizah, 2017).

The students at the target school, Witayanont School, seem to have negative perception and attitudes towards learning English in the class. English is not their mother tongue and they seem to be uncomfortable studying it. They do not have effort in trying to understand the lesson. For these reasons the researcher decided to develop a research to examine and find relationship and differences in perception and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand.

Research Objectives

1. To determine whether there is a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand.

2. To determine whether there is a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand.

3. To determine whether there is a significant difference in perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand.

4. To determine whether there is a significant difference in attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand.

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand?

2. Is there a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand?

3. Is there a significant difference in perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand?

4. Is there a significant difference in attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand?

Significance of the Study

This study examined the relationship and differences in perception of and attitudes toward learning EFL of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. It is important for students to have positive perception and attitude towards learning EFL that would help them perform better academically.

Moreover, the results of this study would be beneficial for the teachers in terms of understanding their students about their perception and attitudes toward learning EFL and be able to find or create more effective teaching strategies for students to enjoy and have better learning experiences.

In addition, the school administrators would be able to use the results of this study to look into other learning areas where students tend to have similar problems to develop and implement policies that could enhance the learning of EFL and other subjects.

Lastly, future researchers would be able to study and use the results of this study as references in order to get some ideas or information related to their research.

Literature Review

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English language is in Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E.2551 (A.D. 2008) which requires every student to study as a foreign language starting from primary level to upper secondary level. This implies that Thai students expose to learning EFL since primary level until upper secondary level. A total of 12 years which English Language learning is compulsory for Basic Education Core Curriculum.

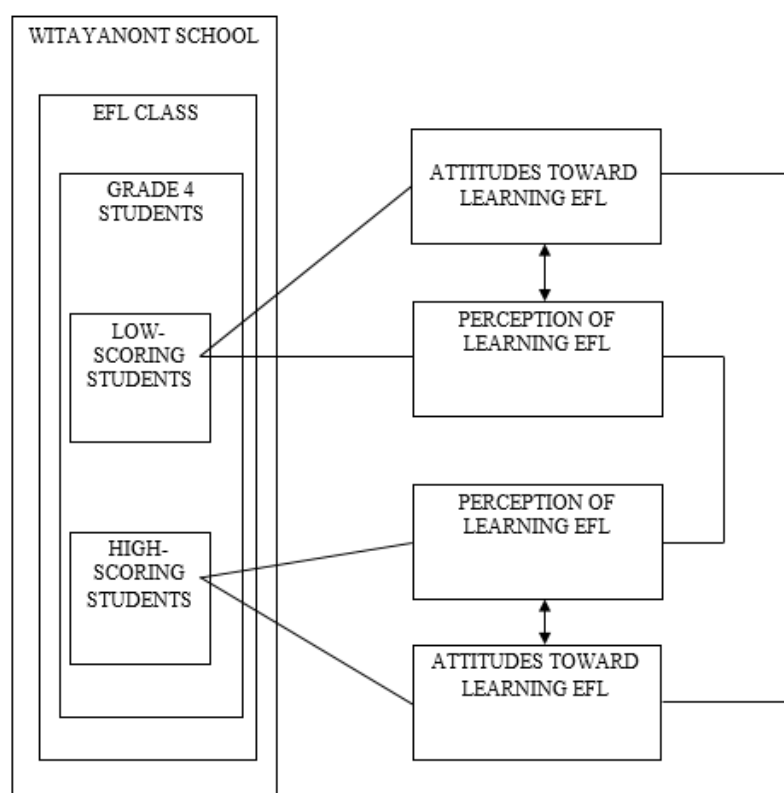
Rote learning methods has been playing a big role in Thai learning system. English subject in Thailand has been also using this method for numbers of time. The unchanged teaching strategy that focuses on memorizing and repeating rather than appropriation learning process, showing that the students unable to think critically as well as using in real life situations. (Kitjaroonchai, 2012)

Perception of Learning English

Perception generally affected by the time and surroundings as Perceptual learning by Adolph and Kretch (2015) stated perception is an ability to get relevant information from the surroundings and can be changed through experiences. The knowledge that people perceive and learn are based on the affordance, events, and distinctive features. Perception of learning English is the way students see or understand regarding learning English that could develop through the time they grow up and experiences they face. The positive perception in learning English results the students to try to improve their English knowledge and also the use of English in a study of Alkaff (2013) about students' attitudes and perceptions toward learning English. While the study from Despaigne (2010) in the difficulties of learning English: perceptions and attitudes in Mexico found out there were negative perceptions and attitudes toward learning English language as a result of colonial of Mexico in the past and linguistic imperialism. In the study of Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari (2010) in Greek young learners' perceptions about foreign language learning and teaching with students who studied English as a school compulsory subject in primary and lower secondary levels. The study showed the results of students' perceptions that came from teachers as students viewed teacher as a main figure of the learning situation to provide guidance in process of learning. The teachers who wanted their students to have better perception in learning language with willingness should adjust an appropriate teaching.

Attitudes toward Learning English

Attitudes are the ideas or opinions of students regarding learning that involve feeling and could have influence in their behaviors toward learning. Brown (2000) stated affective factors in second language acquisition that relate to successful language learning introducing the key concepts which encourage students to consider the involvement of behavioral for classroom teaching and learning. The factors included Self-Esteem, Inhibition, Risk Taking, Anxiety, Empathy, and Extroversion could explain the attitudes towards learning a language. The positive or negative attitudes toward learning English could lead to successful language learning as in the study of Dağgöl (2017) about language learning attitude showed positive attitudes toward learning English were found in every aspect; behavioral, cognitive, and affective. He also stated that those aspects in learning could increase or decrease the possibility of success. Moreover, there are other factors influence attitudes to learn English included parents, teachers, and favorable learning conditions. Students' attitudes in the studies of Asmali (2017) and Abu-Snoubat (2017) found out to be mostly positive toward learning English. However, there was a significant difference between female and male attitudes toward learning English that females had more positive attitudes in learning English but not in their field of study (Abu-Snoubat, 2017) and the interest toward learning English (Novianti, 2015). Novianti (2015) compared students' attitudes of science and social students towards English language in different aspects and found out there was a significant difference in motivation to master, difficulty in grammar, and importance of the English language for future careers between the two classes. Lastly, the study of Falita and Faizah (2017) of EFL students' attitudes and perception toward English language learning and their proficiency pointed out that the students still had positive attitudes and motivation in learning even it did not really come from their willingness. They also concluded that positive attitudes were not the only indicators for their language proficiency, but it included other factors. However, positive attitudes could initiate the feeling to learn English.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework of the Research*

The hypotheses of this study were:

1. There is a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand, at a significance level of .05.
2. There is a significant relationship in perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand, at a significance level of .05.
3. There is a significant difference in perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand, at a significance level of .05.
4. There is a significant difference in-attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand, at a significance level of .05.

Research Methodology

The researcher develops a quantitative correlational-comparative research design to determine perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students.

The students were selected using purposive sampling from Grade 4 students enrolled

in academic year 2020. The total of 70 samples consists of 35 high-scoring students and 35 low-scoring students, divided according to their performance in the school English Academic Achievement Test, from a private primary school, Witayanont School, Bangkok, Thailand. The survey was conducted in September 2022, during the first semester of the academic year 2020

To collect the quantitative data, the researcher used the instrument from Perception of learning questionnaire developed by Alkaff (2013) and Learning Attitudes Questionnaire by SIL International (Orwig, 1995). The questionnaires were distributed, and the data were collected in the first semester of academic year 2020.

To analyze the collected data, Correlational analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to address objective 1 and 2, determining the relationship of perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students, and Independent Samples *t*-test was used to address objective 3 and 4, determining the differences of perception in learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students.

Result and Discussion

Perception and Attitudes toward Learning EFL

Research Objective 1 was to determine whether there was a significant relationship of perception of and attitude toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. In order to analyze the data, correlational analysis using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to determine whether there was a significant relationship of perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. Table 1 below shows the research finding of Research Objective 1

Table 1

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of Low-Scoring Students' Perception and Attitudes toward Learning EFL (N=35)

Variables	1	2
1. Perception of learning EFL	–	
2. Attitudes toward learning EFL	.61* (<i>< .001</i>)	–

Note: *denotes a significant relationship (statistical significance level set at $p = .05$, two-tailed). The p -value appears within parentheses below the correlation coefficient.

The result showed in Table 1 that there was a significant, positive, and strong correlation between perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, $r = .61$, $p < .001$.

Research Objective 2 was to determine whether there was a significant relationship of perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. In order to analyze the data, correlational analysis using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to determine whether there was a significant relationship of perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a

foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. Table 2 below shows the research findings of Research Objective 2

Table 2

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of High-Scoring Students' Perception and Attitudes toward Learning EFL (N=35)

Variables	1	2
1. Perception of learning EFL	–	
2. Attitudes toward learning EFL	.50* (.002)	–

Note: *denotes a significant relationship (statistical significance level set at $p = .05$, two-tailed). The p -value appears within parentheses below the correlation coefficient.

The result in Table 2 showed that there is a significant, positive, and moderate correlation between perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 high-scoring students at Witayanont School, $r = .50$, $p = .002$.

Based on the data collected and analysis, the findings revealed that there was a significant, positive, and strong correlation between perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. Findings for Grade 4 high-scoring students revealed that there was a significant, positive, and moderate correlation between perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language at Witayanont School, Thailand. The results suggest that the students in both groups seem to have nearly positive perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. As the perception and attitudes are closely related to each other, the positive and negative outcomes could indicate increase or decrease of one another or the other. If the students have positive perception of learning EFL, they would have positive attitudes toward learning EFL. If they have negative perception of learning EFL, they would also have negative attitudes toward learning EFL. The positive perception and attitudes could assist students to embark on a lifelong learning process, while the negative perception and attitudes could hinder the learning process (Dağgöl, 2017). Even though their perception and attitudes do not result from academic achievement, they could determine the possibility of success in learning (Dağgöl, 2017). Therefore, the teachers should provide favorable guidance and support in their learning process to encourage the positive ones and eliminate the negatives.

The findings revealed that there was no significant difference between perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students. Similarly, there was no significant difference between attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students. The results suggest that low- scoring and high -scoring Grade 4 students seem to have similar level of attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language regardless of their scores. The perception of and attitudes toward learning EFL may not influenced by the academic achievement. The students in both groups have been exposed to similar ways and context of learning English thus, recognizing the importance of learning English and would like to improve their English. However, other factors could play important roles, besides the perception and attitude toward

learning EFL, during the process of learning that could result in different academic achievement.

Results of the study align with the findings of which implies that sharing common age and similar environmental awareness have effect on increasing positive or/and negative perception of learning and attitude. (Aminrad et al., 2011).

Perception of Learning EFL

Research Objective 3 was to determine whether there was a significant difference of perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. In order to analyze the data, an independent samples *t*-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in the perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. Table 3 below shows the research findings of Research Objective 3.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-Test of Students' Perception of Learning EFL

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade 4 low-scoring students	35	3.74	68	-.30	.77
Grade 4 high-scoring students	35	3.77			

The result showed in Table 3 that there is no significant difference between perception of learning English as a foreign language of Grade4 low-scoring, $M = 3.74$, and high-scoring students, $M = 3.77$, at Witayanont School, $t(68) = -.30$, $p = .77$, two-tailed.

The findings of this study suggested that Grade 4 students in both low-scoring and high-scoring groups showed favorable perceptions of learning English as a foreign language at Witayanont School, Thailand. According to the result of the study developed by Alkaff (2013) on student's attitudes and perceptions toward learning English, it revealed that the majority of the students in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia showed favorable attitudes and perceptions toward learning English.

However, as the result of this study indicates that both groups of students with lower and higher scores hold the same level of perceptions of learning English as a foreign language and that there was no difference among both groups, this implied that the students' academic achievement scores did not indicate whether they would have positive or negative perceptions of learning EFL. In other words, there might be other factors influencing the perceptions of learning EFL, for instance, teachers and their instruction strategies as Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari (2010) mentioned in a study of Greek young learners' perceptions about foreign language learning and teaching. The teachers were viewed as main figures and whose appropriate pedagogy could influence the willingness of the students to learn the language. Moreover, the history of a country could be another factor that might shape the perceptions of learning English as Despagne (2010) found in a study of the difficulties of learning English: perception and attitudes of university students in Mexico. It was found that negative perceptions and attitudes toward learning English language of university students in Mexico were the result of colonial experiences in the past and linguistic imperialism.

Attitudes toward Learning EFL

Research Objective 4 was to determine whether there was a significant difference of attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. In order to analyze the data, an independent samples *t*-test used to determine whether there was a significant difference in attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. Table 4 below shows the research findings of Research Objective 4.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test of Students' Attitudes Toward Learning EFL

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade 4 low-scoring students	35	5.21	68	-.33	.74
Grade 4 high-scoring students	35	5.15			

The result in Table 4 showed that there is no significant difference between attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring, $M = 5.21$, and high-scoring students, $M = 5.15$, at Witayanont School, $t(68) = -.33$, $p = .74$, two-tailed.

The result of this study indicates that Grade 4 students in both low-scoring and high-scoring group showed nearly positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language at Witayanont School, Thailand. Similar results toward learning EFL were found in previous studies; for instance, a study of young learners' attitudes and motivation to learn English by Asmali (2017) found that Grade 2 students in Turkey had mostly positive attitudes toward learning English. Moreover, a study on an evaluation of EFL students' attitudes toward English language learning by Abu-Snoubar also found positive attitudes toward learning English from Al-Balqa Appiled University students. In addition, a study of language learning attitude: ingrained or shaped in time? by Dağgöl (2017) revealed similar result that university students' attitudes toward learning English were positive. Furthermore, a study of EFL students' attitudes by Falita and Faizah (2017) pointed out that the students in Indonesia had positive attitudes and motivation in learning English.

Many previous researchers determined and measured attitudes in different variables as there were various possible factors that could influence students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. In this study, the researcher examined the attitudes of both low-scoring and high-scoring students in learning EFL to determine whether different levels of academic achievement could be one of the possible factors that could indicate their attitude toward learning EFL. Result indicated no difference in the level of attitude toward learning EFL between the two groups. The findings of the current study implied that low and high academic achievement did not suggest that the students would have positive or negative attitudes but it could stimulate the learning of English (Falita & Faizah, 2017). Factors such as parents, teachers, and favorable learning conditions were factors which determine students' attitudes (Asmali, 2017) that increase participation and motivation in learning English. Similarly, Dağgöl (2017) stated that favorable learning context provided by teachers could enhance favorable and positive learning experiences for students in order to diminish

their negative conceptions about learning English. Moreover, the attitudes in the aspects of interest in learning, motivation to master, difficulty in grammar, and importance for the future were factors observed by Novianti (2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research was conducted on a sample of 70 Grade 4 students 35 of which were low scoring students and 35 were high scoring students from a private primary school, Witayanont School, Bangkok, Thailand. Results showed that low-scoring and high-scoring students had the same nearly positive perception and attitude in learning English as a foreign language. Although the correlation between perception of and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language for low-scoring students and high-scoring students has slight difference there was positive and strong correlation of these variables in low-scoring students. On the other hand, there was positive and moderate correlation of these variables in the high-scoring students the high-scoring student. There is no significant difference between perception and attitudes of learning English as a foreign language for low-scoring and high-scoring student.

This study presented recommendations for students, teachers, school administrators, and future researchers. For students, the findings would help to understand their perception and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language along with the academic achievement. Expectedly with the understanding of teacher in students thought, attitude and perception towards EFL will help encourage the better vision in students' perspective, as well as they would be able to recognize possible factors that could influence their perception and attitudes and able to make changes and improve English learning.

For teachers, the findings showed that Grade 4 students in both low-scoring and high-scoring groups had satisfying perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language regardless their academic achievement scores. However, some items received moderate response (e.g., "I find English grammar and structure difficult, lack of understanding and communicating in English difficult and I don't have any idea about how to go about learning a language"). The items may neither being negative nor positive, to compare the majority stems which the results are more satisfied and thus, teachers should not look over those statements and put these into considerations. This provides teachers to prepare and develop appropriate and favorable pedagogy as well as create friendly environment and adjusting teaching methods in order to advance students' language learning process according to their perception and attitudes.

The school administrators would be able to adapt and deliver the findings with other levels of the students in the school. Moreover, the school administrators should take the consideration on having seminar by professional training or/and encouraging teachers to get more information in exchange with other teachers from different school by sending them to seminar outside the school which trained by professional trainers to improve on research evaluation. From that teachers would increase their ability to design and utilize different effective approaches to enhance the students' language learning. This could apply to teachers in other subject areas as well. In addition, the school should provide all the resources for teachers and students to accomplish the successful teaching and learning process.

For future researchers, this research was designed to examine the relationship and comparison of perception of and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language of Grade 4 low-scoring and high-scoring students at Witayanont School, Thailand. However, this study was expected to be supportive and helpful to future researchers in similar topics and contexts whether it would be smaller scale or larger scale. Therefore, it is recommended to do variety methods research to get better performing in certain areas and more accurate results as well as expand to different learning areas and include other private or public schools in order to have more generalized outcomes.

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