

# LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF VIETNAMESE UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS ENGLISH: AN INVESTIGATION AT SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDIES OF HO CHI MINH CITY OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

The investigation reported in this paper is carried out with 444 undergraduates enrolled in the first semester of academic year 2014-2015, which seeks to examine language attitudes towards English language achievement and formation of ethnic identity of Vietnamese undergraduates at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU). The investigation surveys this topic by discussing the study of language attitudes, effects of language attitudes on language achievement, English in Vietnam and awareness of Vietnamese ethnic identity and issues about the relationship between language attitudes and language achievement. The questionnaire survey is conducted to examine students' language attitudes, which is adapted from Axler et al. (1998) as cited in Liu & Zhao (2011). The results show that students hold positive attitudes towards English and are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn English. They show their sense of Vietnamese patriotism in preserving linguistic and cultural identity on account of nearly 60 per cent of wishing to learn Vietnamese well. Concurrently, they illustrate their appreciation of English status in light of 40 per cent showing their preference to learn good English first.

**Keywords:** language attitudes; language achievement and ethnic identity.

## 1. Introduction

According to Fasold (1984, p. 148), language attitude is “the attitudes toward language itself.” Gardner and Smythe (1975) assert that attitudes are given of a central role in language learning through their influence on motivation. The usual interaction between language attitudes and motivation becomes of paramount importance in language learning (Liu, 2009; Dornyei, 2001; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). This kind of attitudinal/motivational influence toward a language might be positive or negative. It probably leads to successful language learning since learners will be more attentive, critical and interested in their study. It is futile to attempt to support language learning without sufficiently positive language attitudes (Gardner, 2001; McGroarty, 1996). Besides, it also likely shapes an utterly or partly

discontented state with everything involved with that target language. Therefore, Pierson (1987, p. 52) concludes that language attitude forms “the dispositions or feelings a learner has towards a target language or culture.” Baker (1992, p. 9) is concerned with another side of language attitudes that seem “to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death” in the life of that language.

In addition, Baker (1992, as cited in McKenzie, 2010, p. 26) shows that the term of language attitudes are further identified and respectively categorized into a number of specific attitudes. Some of them are attitude towards (1) “language variation”, (2) “language groups, communities”, (3) “new language learning and language lessons”, and (4) “the uses of a specific language”.

This research will attempt to investigate language attitudes towards language

achievement, especially English, and awareness of Vietnamese ethnic identity. For this reason, the second and the third of the aforementioned categories will be given given OF central importance

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The study of language attitudes**

#### *2.1.1. The nature of language*

The nature of language is viewed in three ways, namely, structural, functional and interactional views (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) in which the purpose of the structural is to master systematic and structural elements of the language such as phonology, grammatical elements and lexical units whereas the emphasis of the functional is on dimensions of communication and language semantics while language is regarded as a means for interpersonal relationship realization and maintenance, and for social transaction performance between individuals in the third view.

In a similar vein, Kumaravadivelu (2003); Mitchell & Myles (2004) and Lewis & Hill (2005) extended and developed systematic and rule-governed characteristics of the structural system of the language by being comprised of phonological rules, syntactic rules and semantic rules. In addition, Bartels (2009, p. 125) adds to the point by relating to the nature of language to the knowledge about language. It comprises not only “grammar, orthography, and language modes (speaking, listening, writing, reading)” but also language usage (e.g., semantics and pragmatics) and language learning. Besides, John (2002, p. 30) points out that “a language is understood as a set of sources that are available to language users for the symbolization of thought, and for the communication of these symbolizations”.

Finally, while Yule (2014, p. 12) mostly agrees on the aforementioned statements, he highlights one of the distinguishing or unique features of human language as “reflexivity” instead of communication. In other words, human language can be used to think and talk about language itself. For example, one

barking dog is probably unable to give some pieces of advice to another barking dog along the lines of “Hey, you should lower your bark to make it sound more menacing”; however, human beings are apparently able to produce reflections on language and its uses (e.g. She wishes he wouldn’t use so many linguistic terms). In brief, the nature of language is comprised mainly of views and characteristics which identify the irreplaceable features of language, users’ reflexivity. Besides, language is a structurally operational system which requires humans not only to learn about it but also to learn to how to use it appropriately.

#### *2.1.2. The nature of language attitudes*

Fasold (1984, p. 146) and McKenzie (2010, p. 21) define the study of language attitudes in two ways, namely “a mentalist (or cognitive) view and a behaviorist view”. Behaviorists generally find attitude in the responses of an individual who makes to social circumstances. Hence, it is observable, easy to measure/ or study, and externalized by actions. However, McKenzie (2010, p. 21) states that this approach is criticized as “the only dependent variable”; consequently, behaviorist view is claimed as the single determinant of an individual’s behavior, and makes no reference to other background factors such as age level, gender, language background, etc. As a result, not many research works on language attitudes are based upon the behaviorist view (Baker, 1992).

Mentalists, on the other hand, view attitudes as “an internal state aroused by stimulation of some type and which may mediate the organism’s subsequent response” (Williams, 1974 as cited in Fasold, 1984, p. 146). Accordingly, McKenzie (2010, p. 21) points out that attitude in the mentalist view is unobservable and hard to measure, but able to be inferred from “respondents’ introspection”. In addition, McKenzie (2010) and McGroarty (1996) further clarify the make-up of the mentalist view on attitude through the use of the three following components. First, the

cognitive component refers to knowledge and beliefs of an individual (e.g., a Vietnamese person probably believes that high English proficiency will help to seize good job opportunities). Second, the affective component involves emotional responses/ feelings/ reactions to the object's attitude (e.g., love of English culture/ people). Last, the conative component involves the individual's predisposition to behave or act in certain ways (for instance, attending or skipping an English class).

## **2.2. English in Vietnam and Vietnamese identity**

In 1986, there was an enforcement action of economic reforms (hereafter referred to as Doi Moi) in Vietnam, which has involved the growth of English as a tool for multilateral international cooperation (Ngan, 2012). The status of English has ever since replaced several decades of popularity of Russian as a foreign language in Vietnam before Doi Moi (Shapiro, 1995; Denham, 1992). Further before Doi Moi in the beginning decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Toan (2010) documented that when American people visited Vietnam for business, their communication had to depend on the hierarchy procedure of translation and interpretation: from English to French, then to Vietnamese and vice versa. However, with the global integration and rapid development in Vietnam, communication and interaction between Vietnamese with English-speaking foreigners from various countries, ethnics, and cultures grow rapidly (Thin, 2006, 1999).

Since language is given prominence in the establishment of social identity generally (Eastman, 1985), and of ethnic identity particularly (Giles & Johnson, 1987), attitudes towards a foreign language (here refer to English) and a mother tongue (here refer to Vietnamese) has merited major consideration (Ibarraran, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2008). In addition, Gudykunst and Schmidt (1987) mentions, there is a reciprocal relation between language and ethnic identity. More specifically, they highlight that language use

influences the creation of ethnic identity; yet, ethnic identity also affects language usages and language attitude.

## **2.3. The relationship between language attitude and language achievement**

Many studies have been conducted to discover the relationship between language attitudes and language achievement; however, not all their findings are similar. These conclusions come from the many researchers in different countries all over the world, such as India and Hong Kong in Asia, Canada and Australia in western. There are three main tendencies about the relationship between language attitude and language achievement. A number of linguists and researchers, such as Pierson (1987), Gardner & MacIntyre (1991) believe that learner's attitudes affect students' language-learning outcomes. However, Burstall (1975); Hermann (1980) and Strong (1984) believe that learning outcomes influence learners' attitudes. In addition, others believe that there is a reciprocal relationship between them. Although this type of connection has been and still is a controversial issue, the following section of this paper aims at stating in detail the significant influences between positive/negative language attitudes and language achievement.

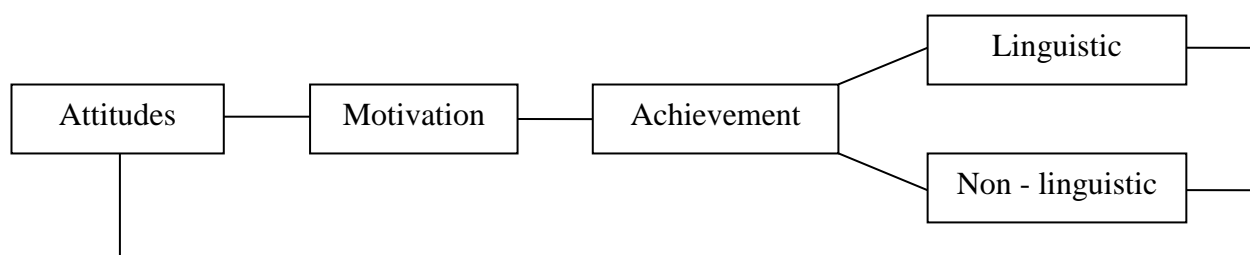
### **2.3.1. The influence of positive/negative language attitudes on language achievement**

Gardner and Lambert (1972) assert that language attitudes are among the personal characteristics of learners. These characteristics influence and determine learner's progress in mastering a foreign or second language. For example, the learners with verbal-linguistic intelligence, whose language behaviors seems more positive and active with words, will love and be talented with target languages too. These individuals are good at writing stories, memorizing information, explaining to others and giving persuasive speeches. They enjoy all linguistic skills and all issues involved to language in general. Obviously, they get an extremely

positive attitude towards the language and their language achievement is a definite answer.

Pierson (1987) considers attitudes as the desires or motivation that impel students' efforts to achieve their proficiency in learning a second/foreign language, despite the different kinds of motivation. The

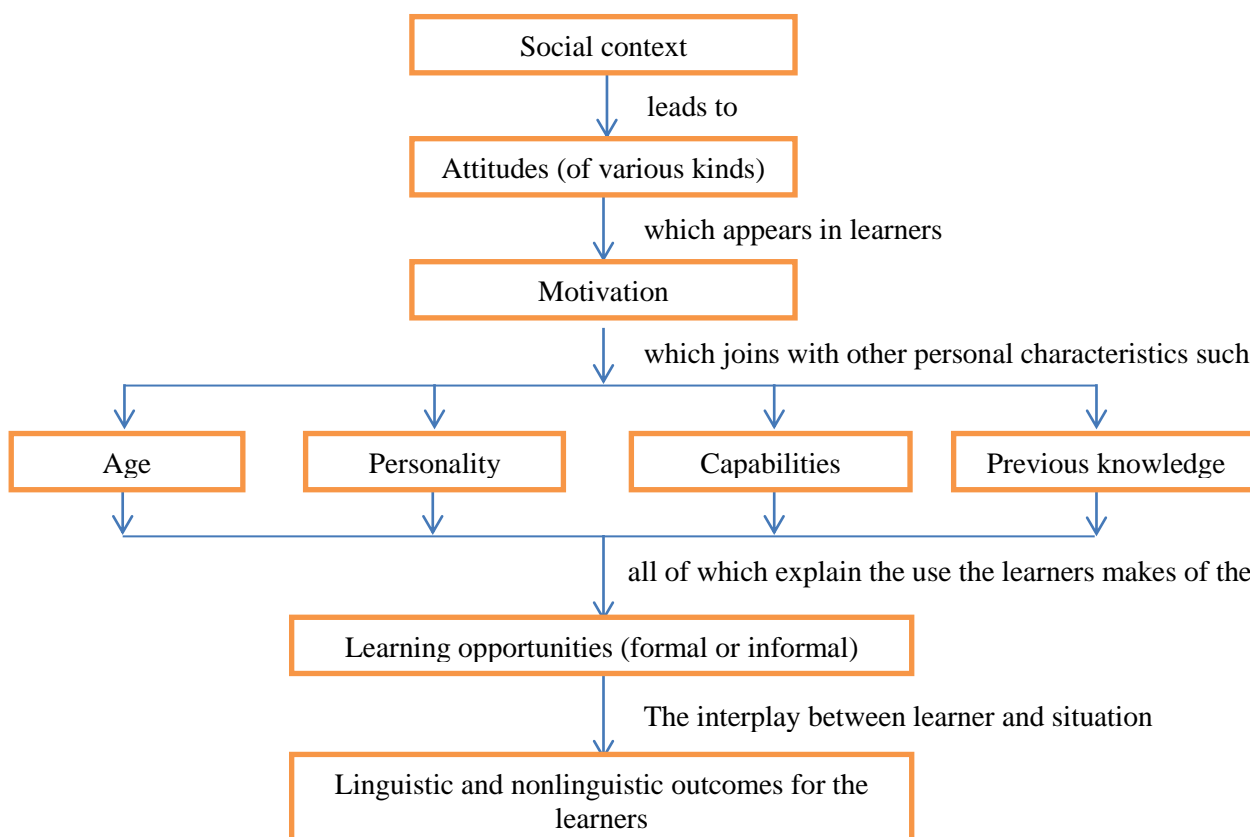
combination of positive attitude and effort expenditure might lead to motivation in learning language or successful English learners. Actually, eight years before Pierson's arguments (1987), Gardner (1979) also proposed a similar relationship between attitudes, motivation and attainment in a schematic representation:



**Figure 1.** Schematic representation of the relationship of attitudes to motivation and achievement

It can be seen from the figure that language attitudes “make a direct link between the cultural milieu and the motivation to acquire a second language, and ultimately proficiency in that language” (Gardner, 1979, p. 206).

This relationship between attitude and motivation can be further explored and interpreted ten years later in Figure 2 according to Spolsky's general model of second language learning (Spolsky, 1989, p. 28):



**Figure 2.** Spolsky's general model of second language learning

As can be seen from the two figures, language achievements/ outcomes are leaded by language attitudes which represents in learners as motivation.

Gardner, Lalonde, & Moorcroft (1985) investigate the role of attitudinal attributes on English learning with 25 new words in the target language and participants' information is obtained with a questionnaire. They find that language attitude is very important since they influence which second language material learners will choose to study. Those with positive attitude learn faster than who are negative because when the students are interested in learning material, they study seriously and actively, tend to work harder, and put more effort on what they want to obtain. In contrast, learners with negative language attitudes or even just low-positive attitudes on language are unable to achieve the learning objectives or seem to be struggling to do so.

### *2.3.2. Significant influences of language achievement on language attitudes*

Lukmani (1972) studies the correlation between English level and motivation for language learning of 60 girls from a high school in India. The information is collected by both direct and indirect questionnaires, and a cloze test. The result shows that students who learn with instrumental motivation (e.g., a certain goal or success in learning English in a certain period of time) get considerably higher scores than those with integrative motivation (e.g., enjoyment in English and its culture; the demand for using English to enrich life). With both types of motivation, all participants achieve a higher outcome than those who learn without any purpose or are forced to learn English.

Hermann (1980) also asserts that successful experience in second language learning plays a role as a stimulating force on learner's attitudinal systems. Learners with high language achievement might develop an interest or inspiration and incentive toward the target language. On the contrary, learners with

low language attainment may generate the prejudice or animosity towards the speakers of that language. In his research, Strong (1984, p. 1) finds that advanced English speaking learners possess "greater integrative motivation towards the target language than the beginners". Hence, he confirms that "integrative attitudes follow second language acquisition skills rather than promoting them" (Strong, 1984, p. 1).

### *2.3.3. Reciprocal relationship between language attitude and language attainment*

There are studies which manifest that not only language attitude but also language achievement can promote second/foreign language learning. Atkinson (1964, p. 297) suggests that language achievement "is related in interesting and complex ways to feelings about language and its use in this society". In Canada, Gardner & MacIntyre (1991) examine the effects of language attitude and language attainment on the learning of new French words with their meaning in relevant English. Language attitude or instrumental motivation is measured by giving a ten-dollar reward to the learners who are successful in learning French-English word pairs at the end of experiment. Language attainment or integrative motivation is measured by combining attitudinal scores on the tests. The results show that all those students learn French better than subjects with negative language attitude/attainment or low levels of motivation. Besides, during the research time, they also recognize that the effect of language learning is only guaranteed when language attainment still remains. Thus, their conclusion is that language attitude and language achievement have a mutual influence and both can affect second/foreign language learning and use. This research has supported the previous study of Gardner & Lambert (1972, p. 142) which proposes that "both instrumental and integrative orientation toward the learning task must be developed".

Lin & Detaramani (1991) also explore the relationship between motivational patterns

and language attainment by investigating 524 freshmen in Hong Kong. Among the findings in their research, they also find that those students who are forced to learn English or who learn it for instrumental reasons (e.g. getting high scores) do not achieve high English comprehension. On the contrary, those who feel less forced to learn English or learn it for integrative motivation (e.g. becoming a global citizen) acquire higher English proficiency. The statistics show that language attitude bears a significantly positive relation to language achievement.

Le (2000) reports that Vietnamese learners of English language are extrinsically motivated due to the pressure to pass exams. Ellis (1996) further highlights the extrinsic motivators of Vietnamese learners of English as a result of not only learners' succeeding desires but also teachers' initiatives. In contrast, according to Tran (2007), exam marks do not portray motivation of English-major students in writing at a university in central Vietnam. More specifically, teachers' expectations, enthusiasm, teaching techniques, audience, and linguistic needs are motivators to them. In a similar context, Tuan (2012) conducts a questionnaire survey investigating motivational factors and perceptions influencing Vietnamese students' English learning performance of 295 undergraduates and 07 teachers in Ho Chi Minh city. The results reveal that undergraduates are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn English; nonetheless, they face many difficulties to succeed in their English learning mainly influenced by their personal ways of learning and difficult textbooks in the heavy curriculum.

This chapter has presented the importance and influence of learners' language attitude towards language achievement and recognition of their ethnic identity. However, few studies on the relationship between language attitude and ethnic identity are situated in Vietnamese EFL context for university students. To bridge this gap, the

present study seeks to explore university students' attitudes towards English and Vietnamese with regard to their learning motivation and their consciousness of ethnic identity formation by using the Language Attitudes Questionnaire adapted from Axler et al. (1998) as cited in Liu & Zhao (2011). Consequently, the research question in this study is:

What is language attitude towards English language achievement and Vietnamese identity of undergraduate students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University?

### **3. Methodology**

Since the researcher collects data at a point of time and investigates current attitudes towards English language, he uses cross-sectional survey as a main type among other ones of survey designs (Creswell, 2012). Consequently, a questionnaire survey is conducted.

#### **3.1. Research site and participants**

The study is conducted at a main campus of Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU) where undergraduate students from School of Advanced Studies take up their courses. The research is taken place in semester 1 of 2014-2015 academic year, which starts from October 2014 to January 2015. A nearly number of 900 students, a research population, are enrolled to undertake courses in this semester.

Creswell (2012) asserts that among two types of sampling strategies, probability sampling is the most rigorous form of sampling in quantitative research since the researcher can select representatives of the population for data generalization. However, he further states that it seems impossible to use probability sampling technique in the field of education research. Consequently, non-probability sampling techniques are going to be applied during the study. More specifically, convenience sampling technique apart from non-probability strategies is chosen for selecting a sample which includes individuals being available, willing and the most

convenient.

Four hundred forty four (444) students with 246 females (55,4 per cent) and 198 males (44,6 per cent) participated in the present study. Their age level mainly ranges from 18 to 22 comprising of 98,4 per cent while the remaining of 1,6 per cent represents a number of 7 students aged under 18. In

addition, they come from three different levels of academic years with the largest percentage of freshmen constituting 41,7 per cent, following by 35,4 % of juniors and 23 % of sophomores. They come from six various majors in which the largest majority of students' major are Business Administration with 33,3 per cent as following.

**Table 1**  
Students' Majors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business Administration	148	33.3	33.4	33.4
	Finance - Banking	74	16.7	16.7	50.1
	Accounting - Auditing	53	11.9	12.0	62.1
	English	102	23.0	23.0	85.1
	Construction Engineering	22	5.0	5.0	90.1
	Law of Economics	44	9.9	9.9	100.0
	Total	443	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
Total		444	100.0		

Regarding to another demographic characteristic of the participants, all of them speak Vietnamese as a first or mother tongue language. Besides, they (i) have learned English for the same system of seven-year high school education and (ii) are taught the same English textbooks from Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Moreover, they have passed a national university entrance test to be offered at a public university in Vietnam like HCMCOU. Most importantly, they have to sit another entrance test designed by the School of Advanced Studies to get an offer of place for taking up courses. In general, in spite of employing the non-probability sampling strategies, it is reasonable to assume that participants share the homogeneous background; consequently, the researcher can

significantly make generalization of the population.

### 3.2. Instruments

The Language Attitudes Questionnaire used in the study is adapted from Liu & Zhao (2011). To fit the current study in Vietnam, the questionnaire's items were modified by changing all of the words in the original items of Liu & Zhao (2011) – Chinese and China into Vietnamese and Vietnam. The questionnaire was also added with two more items – these are item 23 and item 24 which are adapted from a questionnaire' statements from Pierson et al. (1980). Item 7 from the original questionnaire of Liu & Zhao (2011, p. 965) "To read English magazines is a kind of enjoyment" is changed to the statement - "I enjoy reading English magazines or books." The questionnaire is divided into 03 parts:

**Table 2**

Structure of the questionnaire

	Types of items	Number of items	Code of items/ statements
Part one	Background information	5	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5
Part two	Instrumental/ Extrinsic statements	8	B1-Ex1; B2-Ex2; B4-Ex3; B6-Ex4; B13-Ex5; B17-Ex6; B22-Ex7; B23-Ex8
	Integrative/ Intrinsic statements	7	B7-In1; B11-In2; B24-In3; B9-In4; B15-In5; B19-In6; B23-Ex8
	General attitudinal statements	2	B8 -Ge1; B16 -Ge2
	Ethnic identity statements	7	B3-Eth1, B5-Eth2, B10-Eth3, B12-Eth4, B14-Eth5, B20-Eth6, B21-Eth7
Part three	Open-ended questions	3	C25-O1, C26-O2, C27-O3
	Total	32	

The first part contains five (5) questions, which are background information of the students such as major, gender, age range, level of academic year and first language. The second part consists of 24 items using 5-point Likert scale ascending from number 1 to number 5 in which 1 equals “strongly disagree”, and 5 represents “strongly agree”. In addition, the 24 items in the second part are categorized into four (4) groups. The third part comprises of three (3) adapted open-ended questions from Liu & Zhao (2011) “to probe a little deeper and explore the many possibilities that individuals might create for a question” (Creswell, 2012, p. 386). In addition, the open-ended questions are employed in this study to (a) help participants with more spaces to contribute to their individual viewpoints and (b) reveal a wide range of their attitudes (Chamot, 1995).

As stated in Liu & Zhao (2011)’s questionnaire, there are six categories in the 5-point-Likert-scale items, namely, (1) English high status support, (2) personal commitment, (3) intrinsic motivation, (4) English-using confidence, (5) English

associated with education and (6) ethnic identity. However, since this study seeks to investigate undergraduates’ attitudes in relation to not only intrinsic but also extrinsic motivation, and to formation of Vietnamese identity awareness, the researcher would like to arrange the second part into 04 categories subsequently:

First, the design of instrumental/ extrinsic items seeks to study students’ learning English for external reasons – good job prospect, social status, usefulness of learning English. On the other hands, the design of integrative statements aims to study students’ intrinsic motivation in learning English. The statements intend to (1) investigate the pleasant experience of students’ exposure to English, (2) to gather participants’ opinions on students’ interests in English language, (3) to find out students’ admiration of western culture and (4) to understand their desire of learning English. The third category consists of two items related to confidence of using English. These two ones are categorized into to general attitudinal factors since we are not sure of whether students are confident in



using English because of intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. The fourth category comprises of 7 statements indicating an examination into students' awareness of Vietnamese ethnic identity.

The last part consists of three open-ended questions, namely, "C25. What do you think of the status of English in Vietnam?", "C26. Is it helpful to the development of Vietnam if the status of English is raised? How?", and "C27. Which of the two is more important to a Vietnamese, to learn English well or to learn Vietnamese well? Why?". Generally, the questionnaire is comprised of three parts in which there are (i) five questions in the first part, (ii) four categories in the second one and (iii) three open-ended questions in the last one.

### 3.3. Procedure

The questionnaire given to students was written in Vietnamese. More than 600 undergraduates were invited after their classes to fill in and respond to the questionnaire. Finally, 444-completed questionnaire were

eligible for further analysis; and 373 students briefly responded to the open-end questions.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The cross-sectional survey data are generally analyzed in terms of mean scores, standard deviation and rank by SPSS software to reveal overall statements of attitudes of students towards English and Vietnamese language. Then the different categories are investigated. The open-ended responses are examined into occurred themes in which percentages and frequency are counted to indicate their views on the status of English in Vietnam, its support to Vietnam's development as well as the importance of English and Vietnamese language learning.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1. Analysis of overall statements

The undergraduates' reported overall pattern of attitudinal statements towards English and Vietnamese are presented here in the forms of mean scores (M), standard deviation (SD), and rank ordered from the means.

**Table 3**  
Statistics of Overall Pattern Description

		N	Mean	SD	Rank
B1-Ex1	It is a good thing that English is enjoying a high status in Vietnam.	444	4.21	0.98	6
B2-Ex2	English is the mark of an educated person.	444	2.78	1.18	17
B3-Eth1	When using English, I do not feel that I am Vietnamese any more.	444	1.91	0.96	22
B4-Ex3	If I use English, I will be praised and approved of by my family, relatives, and friends.	444	4.15	0.97	8
B5-Eth2	At times, I fear that by using English I will become like a foreigner.	444	1.84	0.89	23
B6-Ex4	I should not be forced to learn English.	444	2.61	1.18	19
B7-In1	I enjoy reading English magazines or books.	444	3.48	0.95	14
B8-Ge1	I do not feel awkward when using English.	444	3.06	1.09	15
B9-In4	I love conversing with Westerners in English.	444	3.96	0.95	10
B10-Eth3	The Vietnamese language is superior to English.	444	2.91	1.13	16
B11-In2	I like to see English-speaking films.	444	3.90	1.01	11

		N	Mean	SD	Rank
B12-Eth4	If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic.	444	1.67	1.12	24
B13-Ex5	If I use English, my status is raised.	444	3.89	1.08	12
B14-Eth5	I feel uncomfortable when hearing one Vietnamese speaking to another in English.	444	2.63	1.21	18
B15-In5	I wish that I could speak fluent and accurate English.	444	4.58	0.98	1
B16-Ge2	I feel uneasy and lack confidence when speaking English.	444	3.64	1.09	13
B17-Ex6	The use of English is one of the most crucial factors which have contributed to the success of the prosperity and development in today's Vietnam.	444	4.37	0.94	3
B18-In7	The English language sounds very nice.	444	4.10	0.96	9
B19-In6	I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject in school.	444	4.28	0.96	5
B20-Eth6	I feel uneasy when hearing a Vietnamese speaking English.	444	2.27	1.02	20
B21-Eth7	English should not be a medium of instruction in any school in Vietnam.	444	2.12	1.14	21
B22-Ex7	The good command of English is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their culture.	444	4.39	0.90	2
B23-Ex8	The main reason for learning English is to get a good job in future.	444	4.16	1.02	7
B24-In3	I enjoy listening to English songs.	444	4.36	0.94	4
Valid N (listwise)		444			

As can be seen from the means, the language attitude among the undergraduates is found positive because most of the statements' mean scores are above 3.00. Although some items showing the low mean scores comprises of negative meaning, these items consequently describe positive attitudes of the respondents.

As can be shown from the ranks, the highest ranking are items B15, B22, B17, B24 with the mean above 4.36 representing strong agreement. With the mean ranging from 3.06 to 4.28, items B1, B4, B7, B8, B9, B11, B13, B16, B18, B19, B23 imply moderate agreement. In contrast, items B2, B6, B10, B14, B20, B21 (mean range from 2.12 to

2.91) show moderate disagreement while the other ones (B3, B5, B12) scoring below 2.00 indicate strong disagreement.

The analysis shows that the participants reflect the most positive attitude towards the wish to speak fluent and accurate English (B15,  $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). The extrinsic attitudinal statements, B17 ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) and B22 ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) representing the usefulness of learning English for the success in developing the country's prosperity and in understanding foreigners and their culture, hold the second most positive attitudes of the students. Besides intrinsic motivational factor like item B15, enjoyment in English songs, B24,

present students' attitudes in a significantly positive light.

Meanwhile, the respondents moderately agree (a) that they would take English even if not mandatorily required, (b) that it is good for English language to achieve a high status in Vietnam, (c) that a competent user of English should be commendable. Besides, they show their agreement on (d) that good job in the future instrumentally motivate them to learn, (e) that English sounds very nice, (f) that they love conversing with Westerners in English, (g) that reading English magazines/books or watching English movies are their enjoyment, etc.

## 4.2. Analysis of distinct categories

### 4.2.1 Analysis of extrinsic motivation category

**Table 4**

Statistics of Extrinsic Motivation Description

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
B1-Ex1	444	1	5	4.21	0.98	3
B2-Ex2	444	1	5	2.78	1.18	7
B4-Ex3	444	1	5	4.15	0.97	5
B6-Ex4	444	1	5	2.61	1.18	8
B13-Ex5	444	1	5	3.89	1.08	6
B17-Ex6	444	1	5	4.37	0.94	2
B22-Ex7	444	1	5	4.39	0.90	1
B23-Ex8	444	1	5	4.16	1.02	4
Valid N (listwise)	444					

Table 4 illustrates the descriptive analysis of eight items in relation to the instrumentally attitudinal factors of HCMCOU students' English language learning. As can be noted from the table, the most influential factors in students' attitudes are items Ex7 ( $M = 4.39$ ) and Ex6 ( $M = 4.37$ ), which highlight the usefulness of learning English, followed by a high social status statement (Ex1 with  $M = 4.21$ ). Other three remaining extrinsic statements illustrate the moderate agreement of students with the  $M$  from 3.89 to 4.16.

Nonetheless, the students reject the statements of being not patriotic or not Vietnamese if they use English. More specifically, Vietnamese students strongly disagree that they are not Vietnamese when using English with  $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = 0.96$  (item B3). In addition, Item B12 witnesses the similar pattern of strong disagreement on that they are not patriotic when using English ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). These findings are remarkably consistent with those Chinese counterparts with  $M = 1.61$  for item 3 and item 12,  $M = 1.46$ . In general, university students do not think that a threat to Vietnamese linguistic identity is a consequence from using English.

However, statements Ex2, "English is the mark of an educated person", and Ex6, "I should not be forced to learn English", show a strong disagreement from a majority of the students.

This finding indicates a similarity with Lin & Detaramani (1991)'s result in examining freshmen students in Hong Kong that English should not be learned mandatorily. Students should learn it with another extrinsic reason such as its usefulness. This also personally implies that English

teachers should prepare a persuasive story of a real person being competent at English and his or her own success related to English competence to tell undergraduate students during his or her teaching periods. From my own belief and experience of teaching general English as a foreign language at HCMCOU for the undergraduates, that person must be real, approachable and known by most of the students so that the story is effective in convincing and motivating them. The teacher can be a convincing example even if he or she is confident in modeling because this teacher is real and approaching to them. The finding is also similar with the pronouncement of Liu & Zhao (2011) that students do not consider English is a label for a literate person.

This result is significantly consistent with the responses in the open-ended questions. Among 373 brief responses, the status of English in Vietnam from C25-O1 answer is believed to be substantially high by 92 % of the students (N = 343). They respond to the question by a variety of adjectives describing the status apart from “high”, e.g., very important, especially important, increasingly common, very popular, primarily concerned, and international. The remaining percentage goes to the opinions (i) that Japanese or Spanish becomes of more popular because of their high investment in Vietnam, and (ii) that English is

only popular in the central cities of Vietnam.

In addition, for the second open-ended question, 100 percent of the undergraduates (N = 373) answer “Yes” – English supports the development of Vietnam with a variety of reasons. These contributed reasons with high frequency of students’ ideas are influence of global integration, attraction of foreign investment, importance of English as an international language, benefits for joining World Trade Organization and Asian community, usefulness for perceiving new world knowledge and high technologies, intercultural exchange, and appropriateness with the era development. Some with low frequency of their opinions are that high status of English in Vietnam is productive for advancing external relations of the country, reducing unemployment rates since there are several foreign investments, enhancing human resources, civilizing Vietnamese people.

Generally, the descriptive analysis in this category reveals that the students show their strong agreement to learning English for its usefulness in the country’s development and career advancement, for understanding foreign culture and people, and for its high social status. Therefore, they are certainly and highly motivated to learn English because of these external reasons, especially of the usefulness of learning English.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis of intrinsic motivation category

**Table 5**

Statistics of Intrinsic Motivation Description

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
B7-In1	444	1	5	3.48	0.95	7
B9-In4	444	1	5	3.96	0.95	5
B11-In2	444	1	5	3.90	1.01	6
B15-In5	444	1	5	4.58	0.98	1
B18-In7	444	1	5	4.10	0.96	4
B19-In6	444	1	5	4.28	0.96	3
B24-In3	444	1	5	4.36	0.94	2
Valid N (listwise)	444					

This category presents the seven integrative statements of the students' attitudes. As can be illustrated from table 8, students hold the most positive attitude to Item B15-In5 ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). That the strongest agreement on a desire to learn and use English fluently and accurately shows a concordance with the same item in Pierson, Fu, & Lee (1980), which followed by a statement of enjoyment in English songs (Item B24-In3,  $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Enjoyment in reading English magazines/books and watching English-speaking films, however, ranks the lowest in the category.

The result denotes that although they generally have positive attitude to English with the mean scores above 3.48 across the intrinsic group, their enjoyment degrees vary

in different activities of reading, listening, and watching. This further indicates that their English competence requirement to respond to the proficiency demand of different activities prevents them from being interested in these ones. Due to their competence limited to satisfy the tasks, they probably find these boring and meaningless. Therefore, they seem to generate hostile attitudes gradually towards English (Hermann, 1980). As a teacher, we should eliminate this possibility of animosity towards English of the students by giving them suitable learning tasks that should be tailor-made for building up their confidence and providing them with interesting learning materials to sustain and maintain their intrinsic attitude towards English.

#### 4.2.3 Analysis of general attitudinal statement category

**Table 6**  
Statistics of General Attitudinal Statements

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
B8-Ge1	444	1	5	3.06	1.09	2
B16-Ge2	444	1	5	3.64	1.09	1
Valid N (listwise)	444					

These general attitudinal statements in this category seek to measure students' confidence in using English. As can be seen from the table, students moderately agree more on that they are uneasy and unconfident in speaking English than they do not feel

weird when using it. This suggests that HCMCOU students are not confident in using English. As a teacher, we should know how to intermingle more with them for clarifying some reasons and encourage them to speak out for learning and improving.

#### 4.2.4 Analysis of ethnic identity category

**Table 7**  
Statistics of Ethnic Identity Description

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
B3-Eth1	444	1	5	1.91	0.96	5
B5-Eth2	444	1	5	1.84	0.89	6
B10-Eth3	444	1	5	2.91	1.13	1
B12-Eth4	444	1	5	1.67	1.12	7

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
B14-Eth5	444	1	5	2.63	1.21	2
B20-Eth6	444	1	5	2.27	1.02	3
B21-Eth7	444	1	5	2.12	1.14	4
Valid N (listwise)	444					

This last category in the second part presents seven statements investigating students' ethno-linguistic identity of Vietnamese. As can be noted from table 10, students generally disagree with all the aforementioned items apart from the statement about the superior of Vietnamese to English, B10-Eth3 for which they are almost undecided in showing their consensus ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ , Rank = 1). They show their strongest disagreement on the point they are not patriotic if they use English, item B12-Eth4 with  $M = 1.67$  ( $SD = 1.12$ , Rank = 7). The responses in this study are quite similar to those in Liu & Zhao (2011) except for statements that they agree (i) on the superior of Chinese to English and (ii) on the unpleasant feeling of hearing one Chinese speaking to another in English. In contrast, Vietnamese are undecided for (i') the superior of English to Vietnamese and (ii') uneasy feeling of hearing Vietnamese conversing in English.

This finding, on the whole, reflects a positive awareness of Vietnamese ethno-linguistics identity that the undergraduates at HCMCOU do not agree on the points (a) that they will become a foreigner or will be not nationalistic if they use English and (b) that they are uncertain of making decisions about the unpleasant feeling of hearing Vietnamese conversing in English. This result is also in accordance with the result from Ibarraran, Lasagabaster, & Sierra (2008) that students' positive attitudes towards their mother tongue are undeniable.

The result is additionally highlighted and supported by the answers to the item C27-O3

concerning students' choices of importance of good language learning - English or Vietnamese, and the reasons. The answers fall into 3 main themes, particularly, (1) equal importance of learning both English and Vietnamese well with the largest percentage of 44 % ( $N = 164$ ) followed by (2) a priority of learning good English first with 40 % ( $N = 149$ ), and (3) a preference of learning good Vietnamese with 16 % ( $N = 60$ ). For the first theme, the high frequency of the reasons are (a) that learning only English gradually leads to a loss of national identity, (b) that learning only Vietnamese certainly results in obsolescence. In addition, they highlight (c) that it is not a matter of preferring to learn any of the two well, but it is a concern of appropriate learning and using Vietnamese and English to show their integration yet insolubility.

For the second one with 40 percent among 373 responses, the high frequency of the answers go to the viewpoints (a) that Vietnamese should not been laid a learning emphasis since it is a mother tongue language, and we can use it well without much learning. Besides, they assert (b) that being excellent in Vietnamese is giftedly reserved for some specialists such as poets and linguists. In addition, (c) that being competent at English helps them with seizing better job opportunities, accessing international intellectual properties, and developing the country.

For the third one with 16 percent of 373 answers, these responses' high frequency lies in the points of view (a) that learning good Vietnamese first will lay the foundations for

learning a second/foreign language well and (b) that preserving the purity of Vietnamese helps to confirm the national identity. Besides, the viewpoint (c) that proficiency in Vietnamese language and culture can facilitate introducing the distinct Vietnamese identity to foreigners more effortlessly.

In brief, this category visibly reveals a picture of patriotic Vietnamese students. Using English language is not a danger to Vietnamese identity as also found in Liu & Zhao (2011); Axler, Yang, & Stevens (1998). The finding further recommends that ethnic awareness should be intergrated in the the language teaching curriculum since the social status of a foreign language as English is so high in Vietnam and nearly half of the research population wish to be successful in learn English rather than Vietnamese.

### 5. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this present study is conducted to investigate undergraduates' attitudes towards English with regard to their learning motivation and national identity formation. The results reveal that HCMCOU students hold positive attitude towards English and they are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn English. They show their sense of Vietnamese patriotism in preserving linguistic and cultural identity on account of nearly 60 per cent of wishing to learn Vietnamese well. Concurrently, they

illustrate their appreciation of English status in light of 40 per cent showing their preference to learn good English first.

The findings further suggest (1) that instead of forcing students to learn English, teachers should encourage their learning with a practical, real, and convincing story of typical users' success, (2) that their learning materials should be interested and unchallenging. In addition, (3) teachers should know how to build up their confidence in expressing English; and (4) ethnic identity component should be included in the teaching program.

In the meantime, the study is conducted in the center of Vietnam with the participants from the School of Advanced Studies at the university. This picture of findings seems different if being conducted in different groups of students in the normal training, in other remote area of Vietnam, in other levels of study (secondary or high school, graduate, etc.), for example. Hence, further research in different settings is called to find out their language attitudes towards Vietnamese and English in a variety of backgrounds.

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