

# Cambodian Primary Students' Attitudes Toward Learning English: A Case Study in A Private School in Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia

**Kruy Kroeun**

English Trainer at Kandal Provincial Teacher Training Center (KPTTC),  
Doctoral student at University of Cambodia (UC)

**Abstract:-** Learning a foreign language improves cognitive abilities, personality, job prospects, global knowledge, communication skills, creativity, and cultural engagement. English is essential for global understanding and communication, especially among ESL students in Cambodia. A positive attitude towards learning languages is crucial for personal and professional success, impacting language performance. The study aims to explore the extent of attitudes of primary-level students toward learning the English language. Moreover, the author determined whether there is any difference between male and female students regarding their attitudes toward learning English. According to feedback from English primary students studying in Poipet Town, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia, there is strong support for learning English language skills to pursue international education. The high rankings of value items 13 and 5 emphasize English's significance, which supports this sentiment. These rankings suggest that the students are profoundly aware of the worldwide significance of English language proficiency. Additional findings of the research demonstrate that there is no statistically significant disparity in the extent of attitudes between males and females, as evidenced by an F value of 1.11 and a p-value ( $P = .30$ ). Future studies similar to this topic should be conducted with a larger number of samples in different areas.

**Keywords:-** Attitude, Cognitive, Affective, English, Learning, Behavioral.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a language improves cognitive and analytical ability, personality, job possibilities, and global knowledge. It enhances communication skills, raises exam scores, fosters creativity, and expands work options. It also encourages cultural contact and involvement (PERIĆ & RADIĆ, 2021). English is the global language that we must learn. According to previous studies, English allows for accessible communication across borders. It is used as a foreign language in Cambodia. It is included in public school curricula beginning in Grade 4 and is expected to be included in preschool levels in the future (Phann et al., 2023). English, a world language, was first introduced in Cambodian schools between 1970 and 1975, after which it

was removed from the curriculum until 1989. Until 1997, Cambodian government teachers used popular textbooks such as English for Today, Headway, and Streamline when reintroduced (Ban et al., 2023). The English language is becoming more and more critical in today's multicultural society, as travel and communication with foreigners are becoming easier and more accessible, and it is becoming a talent that is required for understanding the globe (Zuparova et al., 2020).

Since the early 1990s, English has grown in popularity in higher education institutions, particularly in Cambodia. Because of the growing demand for English proficiency in the labor market, English language teaching has become a core subject in most HEIs (Nourn, 2023). Cambodia's preferred foreign language is English due to the influence of the UN Transitional Authority and ASEAN membership. Students with high English scores earn better grades and are better prepared for college. This shows that Cambodia's education system is vital to the country's global competitiveness, with the quality of teachers influencing student learning (Kroeun, 2023). Education is crucial for the economic and educational development of ASEAN, and English has been adopted as the "working language" to cultivate global connections and promote economic expansion (ASEAN, 2009, p. 28), cited in (Lian et al., 2023).

Attitudes are paramount in language acquisition and achievement since they are subject to several influences, such as the quality of instruction, perception of the target language, socio-cultural context, and expectations around English language proficiency. A pessimistic mindset is the primary factor that significantly influences inadequate English performance (ABDOU-RASSIDOU, 2023). Attitude is crucial for teaching-learning success, requiring teachers to understand their students' beliefs about English. According to recent studies, attitudes are related to how people see the world and behave, referring to people, groups, ideas, and objects they like or dislike (Rania, 2022). Attitude is a fundamental psychological term defined by various authors, including Auzmendi (1992), Gómez-Chacón (2000), Gal and Ginsburg (1994), and Gomez-Chacon (2000). The study looks into primary and secondary-level students' attitudes toward English learning and whether there are any differences between male and female students' attitudes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English is gaining popularity in Cambodia, particularly among ESL students, because it facilitates global communication. Cambodia's primary language of communication and instruction is English, but only some are fluent in it. That is why teachers of English in primary schools meet challenges (Kruy, 2023). Since English is the predominant language used in books, courses, and scientific journals, it is essential for students studying abroad. As a result, schools should prioritize the development of students' English language skills. For example, scholarships can encourage Thai students to study in other countries (SOMBOONPUN, 2015). English is also used in the press, on the internet, and in electronic media (Rao, 2019). English is one of the most essential languages in the world since it is widely used to help with relationship building, comprehension of social circumstances, and expression (Zuparova et al., 2020). As a result of Cambodia's membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, English is gaining ground as the country's primary international language. Communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds requires English proficiency, notably among ESL students (Chhoeut et al., 2023). According to the previous study, 79% of Cambodians aged seven and older are literate in Khmer and other languages. English is gaining in prevalence.

Nevertheless, estimating the exact number of Cambodians who speak English takes a lot of work. According to studies, approximately 15% of the country's population speaks English. This number is closer to 5% (Lin et al., 2023).

Attitudes, like cognition and affect, emerge early in childhood and are influenced by the attitudes of parents and peers, interactions with various people, and interacting affective factors. Language learning is a complex interplay of personalities, with students having their own preferences, dislikes, and moods. As noted by Starks and Paltridge in 1996, it is closely related to attitudes toward the language (Starks & Paltridge in 1996, cited in Getie, 2020). Ajzen (2001) defines an attitude as an appraisal of a psychological object expressed in dimensions such as good versus poor, pleasant versus unpleasant, or likable against dislikeable (Svenningsson et al., 2021).

An attitude is a positive or negative reaction to a situation or object. Individual beliefs and feelings about an object are defined as attitudes. Whereas Kind defines attitude as "the feelings a person has about an object based on his or her knowledge and belief about that object." According to the above viewpoint, attitude is an essential component that students in natural science subjects must possess. This is consistent with George's view that one of the most critical factors in learning science is the students' attitude (Kurniawan et al., 2019). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitude is a taught propensity to react consistently favorably or unfavorably toward a specific object, where "object" may refer to either things (people,

groups) or actions (reading, for example) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), cited in (Nootens et al., 2019).

In the classic definition of attitude, it is separated into three components: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components (Breckler, 1984; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), cited in (Svenningsson et al., 2021; Naneva et al., 2020). Cognitive attitudes are people's emotions or thoughts toward an attitude object, whereas affective attitudes are their thoughts or evaluations. Behavioral attitudes are observable or self-reported behaviors, whereas affective attitudes are emotional reactions to an attitude object (Naneva et al., 2020). Gardner (1985) distinguished between three types of attitude: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Affective refers to a person's sentiments and emotions; behavioral refers to a person's propensity to engage in certain learning practices; and cognitive refers to thoughts about the item. A person's values and beliefs are connected to their attitude, which shapes their decisions in various situations (Abidin et al., 2012).

Attitude encompasses beliefs, behavioral predispositions, and evaluative bias and is crucial in the teaching-learning process as it influences personal and behavioral intentions (Dilling & Vogler, 2023). Students' attitudes toward learning English significantly impact their academic performance. A positive attitude encourages students to appreciate speaking English with native speakers and to take pleasure in the success of others. Indicators of motivation include active participation, interest in subject matter, and effort (Phon, 2017).

Maintaining a positive mindset is critical for personal and professional success because it affects the ability to navigate the environment successfully. That is why it is impossible to separate attitudes from education regarding their impact on language performance. A learner's mental ability and attitude toward language acquisition are factors in proficiency in a target language. As such, language acquisition needs to be seen as a social and psychological process instead of an exclusively academic one (Abidin et al., 2012).

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### ➤ *Research Design*

Kruy (2023), Nassaji (2015), Zhou et al. (2021), and Al-Ababneh (2020) have made significant contributions to the domain of descriptive research, which encompasses the practice of elucidating phenomena via observation and surveys while also gathering quantitative data to ascertain relationships. In contrast, quantitative research emphasizes quantifying variables within the social domain using statistical methods and systematic measurement. It involves evaluating factors such as human-machine task performance, reaction time, willingness to deviate, and physiological reactions shown by participants in experimental settings.

### ➤ *Data Collection*

A survey consisting of 14 questions was used to evaluate the opinions of a sample of 20 English private primary pupils enrolled at a renowned private school in Poipet Town, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia. The questionnaire was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Imron Hantari (2019). The study used quantitative research methodologies, namely questionnaires, to gather data and analyze the research issues. In order to identify substantial fluctuations, the dataset was subjected to analysis using SPSS version 22. The findings were assessed using frequency and percentages, descriptive statistics applied to the Likert scale, and correlation analysis, including the correlation coefficient and P-value.

The Likert scale, devised by Rensis Likert in 1932, is a tool for evaluating attitudes. It involves presenting a series of statements ranging from one to five, representing degrees of agreement or disagreement, with one indicating extreme disagreement and five indicating strong agreement. According to the study conducted by Pimentel and Pimentel (2019), the research findings demonstrated the effectiveness of a five-point Likert scale in measuring the variables under investigation.

Table 1. Five-point Likert scale

Likert Scale Interval	Interval	Difference	Description
1	1.00-1.79	0.79	Never
2	1.80-2.59	0.79	Rare
3	2.60-3.39	0.79	Sometimes
4	3.40-4.19	0.79	Often
5	4.20-5.00	0.80	Always

➤ *Data Analysis*

A questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the questionnaire in the study by Kifayatullah et al. (2023). The author studied the items of his questionnaire carefully before starting data collection. Data was collected from a sample of 20 students via a survey that consisted of a questionnaire

Table 4. Result of Primary students’ attitudes toward learning English

No.	Items	N	M	SD	Min	Max
13	I want to learn English to study abroad.	20	4.25	0.91	1	5
5	I think all students in Cambodia should learn English.	20	4.2	0.83	2	5
1	I feel excited when I learn English.	20	4.15	0.87	1	5
11	I want to learn English to get maximum advantage of the modern technologies and internet.	20	4.15	0.87	1	5
12	I want to learn English to help me in my University Education.	20	4.1	0.91	1	5
3	English is one of my favorite subjects.	20	4	0.91	2	5
10	I want to learn English to get a good job.	20	4	1.07	1	5
2	I practice English when I find an opportunity to do so.	20	3.8	0.89	1	5
9	I learn English because it can help me in understanding other academic subjects.	20	3.6	1.09	1	5
4	I think English is the most difficult language to learn.	20	2.85	0.93	1	5
14	Truly speaking, I want to learn English just to pass exams"	20	2.6	1.09	1	5
Total of items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12,13, 14)		20	3.79	0.94	1.18	5.00
7	I feel embarrassed and uneasy when studying English.	20	2.3	0.97	1	5
8	I don't consider learning English important.	20	2.15	1.13	1	5
6	I dislike English subject the most.	20	1.9	1.2	1	5
Total of Items (6, 7, 8)		20	2.12	1.10	1.00	5.00

including 14 items. Quantitative data analysis was conducted, and the author used SPSS 22 to calculate the extent of their attitudes toward learning English. The research investigation centered on attitude dimensions, aiming to compute each item's average and standard deviation.

**IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

English primary and secondary students’ demographic information

Table 2. Gender

Demographic	Value	N	Frequency %
Gender	Male	8	40.00%
	Female	12	60.00%
Total		20	100%

Table 2 shows that the number of all the participants is 20. There are 8 (40%) male students, and the other 12(60%) students are female. The number of female students is 20% larger than the number of male students.

Table 3. Age

Demographic	Value	N	Frequency %
Age	below 15	16	80.00%
	15 - 16	3	15.00%
	17 - 18	0	0.00%
	19 - and over	1	5.00%
Total		20	100%

Table 3 informs that more students are below 15 years old, about 80% or 16 students of all the numbers. Then there are three students, about 15%, between 15 and 16 years old. Strangely, the other student is 19 years old and over, which is about 5%. Thus, most English primary school students are below 15 years old.

Based on Table 4, the English primary students learning at one of the well-known private schools in Poipet Town, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia, value item 13 the highest (M=4.25, D= .91). This can be explained that most of the primary students in that area of the country which are nearer to Thailand need English to pursue their education abroad. Item 5 (M=4.20, D= .83) tells us that they highly recommend that students around the country of Cambodia learn English. This can be because of their critical understanding of the value of English around the globe.

Undoubtedly, English is often regarded as vital for individuals across several domains. Meanwhile, the data obtained from the primary students in the research, as shown in Table 4, indicates a prevalent sense of excitement among them throughout English language learning activities (M=4.15, D= .87). Equally, their aspiration typically lies in harnessing the full potential of contemporary technology and the internet (M=4.15, D= .87). Furthermore, acquiring proficiency in the English language may potentially benefit individuals when they embark on their university journey (M=4.10, D= .91), during which they may choose to study English as their preferred discipline (M=4.00, D= .91). The students' aspirations for a promising future, characterized by gainful employment (M=4.00, D= 1.07), motivate them to diligently engage in continuous English language practice whenever opportunities arise (M=3.08, D= .89). In conclusion, the use of the English language instills a sense of optimism and excitement in individuals, particularly in the context of academic accomplishments. This is attributed to the language's capacity to facilitate comprehensive mastery of many academic subjects, as it serves as the primary medium of understanding (M=3.06, D= 1.09).

According to the survey results, it can be seen that students perceive English as a language that is somewhat challenging to acquire, with a mean score of 2.85 and a standard deviation of .93. This research may serve as crucial insights for school administrators, educators, and parents to collectively reassess and explore alternative, engaging teaching methodologies that may be effectively implemented inside English classes. Notably, primary-level English students are inclined towards learning English to succeed in their examinations (M=2.60, D=1.09). These examinations may include monthly assessments, semester examinations, and the national English test, a pivotal factor throughout the educational transfer to a higher level.

Table 4 presents a significant finding indicating that the participants did not express embarrassment or unease while instructed in English (M=2.3, SD=0.97). What is particularly noteworthy is their consistent appreciation for the English language in their lives (M2.15, SD=1.13) or their infrequent aversion to the topic of English (M=1.9, SD=1.2).

Overall, Table 4 can critically conclude that the English private students have highly positive attitudes toward learning English with the proof (M=3.79, D=.94) they provided through the questionnaire. Next, we look at

items 6, 7, and 8, which are used to check the students' negative attitudes (M=2.12, D=1.10).

In comparing the positive and negative attitudes toward learning English, it can be concluded that the English private students of the studied area have higher positive attitudes than negative ones towards learning English. This can be consistent with the research conducted by Soleimani and Hanafi in 2013. It was observed that a significant proportion of medical students in Iran exhibit favorable attitudes towards the acquisition of English language skills. The whole results of this study are conversed from the study by Huwari (2021). His research investigated the linguistic attitudes of 300 English as Foreign Linguistic (EFL) students in Jordan. The findings indicated that the participants' attitudes were moderate, with female students revealing greater levels of attitudes. In the meantime, the research conducted by Alharbi in 2022 examined the views of Saudi health students regarding the acquisition of English language skills for specific objectives. The survey findings indicated that the participants had a generally satisfactory attitude towards this particular aspect of language learning. However, the study supports Burgos and Molina (2020)'s study. Their study analyzed 131 Chilean university students' attitudes towards English as a foreign language, finding a positive attitude, but the behavioral aspect had the lowest agreement.

Table 5. Result of different attitudes of Primary students toward learning English between male and female. Items (13, 5, 1, 11, 12, 3, 10, 2, 9, 4, 14)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	8	3.77	.23	.08417
Female	12	3.80	.72	.20840

Table 5 reveals the Mean difference of genders between male and female students' attitudes toward learning English. Since items 6, 7, and 8 show negative concepts, which are the low value given by the students, the higher their attitudes, the author excludes them for further explanation and comparison. The findings reveal that the female students (M=3.77, D= .23) have slightly higher attitudes toward learning English than the male (M=3.80, D=.72).

Table 6. Result of different attitudes of Primary students toward learning English between male and female. Items (6,7,8)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	8	1.91	.58	.20654
Female	12	2.25	1.20	.34846

Even though the girls previously explained that they have higher attitudes toward learning than the boys, According to Table 6, the boys (M=1.91, D= .58) are more confident because they show lower negative value to the positive attitudes of learning English than the girls (M=2.25, D=1.20)

Table 7. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances of difference between male and female of the primary students' attitudes

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
1.11	.30	-.42	18	.67	-.095	-.19157	1.43944
		-.49	15.78	.62	-.095	-.24766	1.49552

Lastly, we examine the disparity in attitude extent between males and females. Based on the information shown in Table 7, which examines the mean differences between male and female attitudes, SPSS 22 indicates an F value of (F=1.11), with a corresponding p-value of (P=.30). It is noteworthy that the p-value above the conventional threshold of .05. This finding suggests that the observed value lacks statistical significance, indicating that there is no significant change in students' attitudes towards both genders of the students of the English language.

The result conforms to the study by Kifayatullah et al. (2023). His study highlighted no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes by gender. However, female students displayed slightly more positive attitudes towards English than their male counterparts. The study also agrees with the research task conducted by Soleimani and Hanafi in 2013. The study additionally revealed that male students tend to have more positive views than female students. Despite some fear and problems, Pizzaro's 2017 research on engineering students at the University of the Balearic Islands discovered a positive attitude toward English and an integrated desire for learning.

## V. CONCLUSION

English is an essential worldwide language for mental and physical development, with educational programs and written materials providing self-improvement opportunities. Understanding attitudes about English learning is critical since it enhances cognitive abilities, personality, career chances, global knowledge, communication skills, and creativity. English is taught in Cambodian public schools and will soon be taught at preschool levels. According to survey data, pupils regard English as tricky, with a mean score of 2.85. Students at the primary level show gratitude for the role of language in their lives, while unfavorable views highlight the need for alternate teaching methods. This study may assist school administrators, teachers, and parents improve English teaching techniques. With a mean score of 3.79, students show a favorable attitude toward learning English.

## RECOMMENDATION

Teachers should create a friendly and inclusive atmosphere in the classroom that promotes passionate English language learning via engaging games, music, and amusing activities. Remarkably, students' enthusiasm and interest in learning English may be increased by using real-life examples and genuine resources such as news articles or films. Teachers should also offer helpful feedback to

students in order to enhance their attitudes about studying English. Teachers may raise students' confidence and drive to practice their English abilities by identifying their strengths and areas for growth.

In the context of a suitable private school inside Cambodia, the students want the school to hire enough foreign teachers. Moreover, new interesting learning programs of the 21st century should be applied. More importantly, these students need to be understood to have enough chance to engage in the lessons taught in the class. They need more critical learning activities to stay tuned to the education provided by teachers.

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