

Examining Bachelor First Year Education Students' Level of Attitudes towards Studying English as a Major Subject

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ABSTRACT: Different students from diverse family backgrounds, cultural variations and varied geographical circumstances are attracted towards studying English as a major subject at the bachelor level in Nepal. The main objective of this study is to examine the bachelor first year education students' level of attitudes towards studying English as a major subject. A cross-sectional survey design which consisted of a standardized questionnaire of five-point Likert scale question items was administered to the mass of students at five campuses in the academic year 2017-2018 in Makawanpur District of Nepal. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 96 students as respondents out of the population of 127 students for the study. The collected data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS. The study revealed the students' positive level of attitudes (Median > 3 and Mode > 3) towards studying English as a major subject. The Mann-Whitney U Test showed that the distribution of the attitude level was the same across categories of sex (Sig=.826). Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test showed that the distribution of the attitude level was the same across categories of Campus (Sig=.922) and Religion (Sig=.327). This research article is assumed to be important for teachers, concerned authorities and parents to discern why the students were interested in studying English as a major English in the Faculty of Education.

KEY WORDS: *attitudes, English, language, learning, Makawanpur.*

I. INTRODUCTION

English is a leading foreign language which holds a prestigious position in Nepal. It is neither a national language nor an official one in Nepal, but it is the most widely taught foreign language at all stages of education system. Many Nepalese learners start learning English from their early stage at primary schools or even pre-schools. English has been taught as a compulsory subject at the Secondary level. It has been taught as a compulsory subject as well as a major subject at the higher Secondary level and the bachelor level. Moreover, students at the master levels in the faculties of humanities and education study English language and literature as a major subject of interest, yet the problem is that most of the students are far from attaining the desired level of proficiency either in comprehensive or productive skills or in both. Despite being exposed to English instruction for a long time at different levels, the reasons for the poor foreign language skills of students have long been a matter of discussion among educators and teachers. Although a huge amount of time and effort are spent on teaching and learning activities, most of the learners cannot go beyond the basics or they experience difficulty in developing their level of proficiency in spite of their keen interest in studying English.

There might be a lot of possible reasons for studying English as a major subject. Some people have a strong desire to study English language because they think that knowledge of English offers chances for advancement in their professional lives. They think that they will get a better job if they know English language and literature. Some people are motivated to learn English because it is an international language of communication, literature, science and technology. Whatever the reasons there may be, the preference of students for studying English language and literature has tremendously increased in the present context in Nepal.

This article tries to examine the bachelor first year education students' level of attitudes towards studying English as a major subject. A cross-sectional survey design which consisted of a standardized questionnaire of five-point Likert scale 15 question items was administered to the groups of students who belonged to five campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal in the academic year 2017-2018. Simple random sampling technique, especially lottery method was used to select 96 students as respondents out of the population of 127 students for the study. The five-point Likert scale question items were the units of analysis. The study units were such questions that tended to highlight the attitudes of students towards English as a major subject. The analysis of the units was performed on the basis of options given from the ascending level of attitude as from Strongly Disagree (SD=1) to Strongly Agree (SA=5).

Makawanpur, which is emerging as an appealing hub for campus education, is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural district. The people of diverse economic positions have been living here. The residents of Makawanpur include Tamang, Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, Tharu, Chepang etc. There were only five campuses where students can pursue the bachelor level in English as a major subject. Major English in the Education Faculty involves linguistics, literary and academic teaching learning materials. Students of this district are motivated towards learning English as a major subject at campuses. Moreover, students from the Terai, the Valley, and the Hill come to this district for their campus / higher education because of its serene and suitable environment for teaching learning activities. It can be considered that the students of these campuses may represent the students of Education campuses situated in this nation. This research study is significant because it assists the people to discern the students' level of attitudes and major reasons having positive attitudes towards studying English as a major subject.

1.1 Null Hypotheses of the Research Study

The null hypotheses of the research study were:

- 1.1.1 There is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of attitude level across categories of sex.
- 1.1.2 There is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of attitude level across categories of campus.
- 1.1.3 There is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of attitude level across categories of religion

1.2 Objectives of the Research Study

The objectives of the research objectives were:

- 1.2.1 To examine the bachelor first year education students' level of attitude towards studying English as a major subject.
- 1.2.2 To find out if there is any significant relationship between the students' sex and the level of attitude towards studying English.
- 1.2.3 To discern if there is any significant relationship between the students' campus and the level of attitude towards studying English.
- 1.2.4 To determine if there is any significant relationship between the students' religion and the level of attitude towards studying English.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review encompasses definition of language, language and literature, language attitudes, learning and some studies on language attitudes.

2.1 Language

Language is a set of symbols being used primarily for communication. The symbols may be spoken or written. Language is an aspect of human behavior. Language is all at once a tool and the mechanism that determines how we relate to the world, to each other, and even to ourselves. Language is a unique property of human beings. Language is what makes us human. One of the distinctive features to differentiate us from animals is the use of language for expressing ideas, opinions, emotional states, information, past experiences, future plan, imaginations and so on. Sapir (1921) asserts that language is a "primarily human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (p.8). Nicholas (1982) views language to be social and "we are constantly involved in the process of social interaction" (p.56). This social interaction is possible because of language.

2.2 Language and Literature

Literature is rooted in language and language gets life through Literature. So Literature and language are closely interconnected. Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four language skills -speaking, listening, reading and writing- in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. English is a West Germanic language that was first spoken in Anglo-Saxon England in the early Middle Ages. English has become the most important language around the world. There are more people who need to learn this language in order to improve their professional and academic lives. English have become very important in our day to day life. English speaking has become a necessity in the modern time. English language furnishes to the needs of various section of the society. English has been used as the first language in some countries such as United States of America, Britain, Canada etc. It has been used as the second language in Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland etc. It has been used as a foreign language in Nepal.

2.3 Language Attitudes

Language attitudes are the feelings people have about their own language varieties or language varieties of others. Language attitudes are the attitudes which speakers of “different languages or language varieties have towards each other’s languages or to their own language” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 297). Attitudes are crucial in language growth or decay, restoration or destruction. From a practical perspective, our language attitudes are important because they affect our behavior. From a theoretical perspective, language attitudes are important because they show how people connect particular aspects of language to social meanings. Many studies on language attitudes have revealed that there is a strong relationship between attitude and achievement (Hough & Piper, 1982; Simpson & Oliver, 1990; Visser, 2008). Attitude is a vital factor that influences language performance (Fakeye, 2010; Visser, 2008). Learners’ attitudes, apart from opinions and beliefs, towards learning strongly affect their learning behaviors and consequently on their performance (Hohenthal, 2003; Kara, 2009). They mean to state that learners’ attitudes towards learning strongly affect their learning behaviors. In the simple words, language attitudes may have an effect on second language or foreign language learning. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity.

2.4 Learning

Learning may be regarded as a process of bringing some relatively enduring changes in the behaviour of the learners through experience and training. Pressey, Robinson and Horrocks (1967) consider learning as “an episode in which a motivated individual attempts to adapt his behaviour so as to succeed in a situation which he perceives as requiring action to attain a goal” (p.232). Similar concept of learning is expressed by Crow and Crow (1973) who opine that “learning represents progressive changes in behaviour and it makes an individual able to satisfy his interests to attain a goal” (p.225). Learning is purposeful and goal-oriented. It is a continuous process. Learning is retention of information or skill. Retention implies storage systems, memory and cognitive organization.

2.5 Reviews on Attitudes

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Plenty of research studies revealed students’ positive attitudes towards learning English language. The research studies carried out by (Mohd Sallehudin, 1994) with 137 University Kebangsaan Malaysia English non-major undergraduates, (Kaharan, 2007) with 190 eighth grade students of a private primary school in Adana, Turkey, (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010) with 108 English translation major students at Islamic Azad University, Iran, (Yang, 2012) with 20 University Malaya Master students, (Al Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, & Hossain, 2012) with 79 randomly selected non-major English undergraduate students from Khulna University, Bangladesh, (Bobkina & Fernandez de, 2012) with 72 EFL engineering students at the Technical University in Madrid, (Chew, 2013) with 111 students at the University of Malaya, China and (Tahaineh & Daana, 2013) with 184 Jordanian EFL female undergraduates depicted that students had positive attitudes towards learning English.

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodology includes research design, population of the study, sampling design, sample size, nature of data, sources of data, data collection procedure, pilot study, validity and reliability of instruments.

3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used to carry out the study. The researcher collected data to investigate the bachelor first year education students’ attitudes towards studying English language from five campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal at one specific point in time.

3.2 Population / Universe

The population of the study consisted of 127 bachelor first year education students studying at five campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal in the Academic Year 2017-2018.

Table 1: Population / Universe of the Study

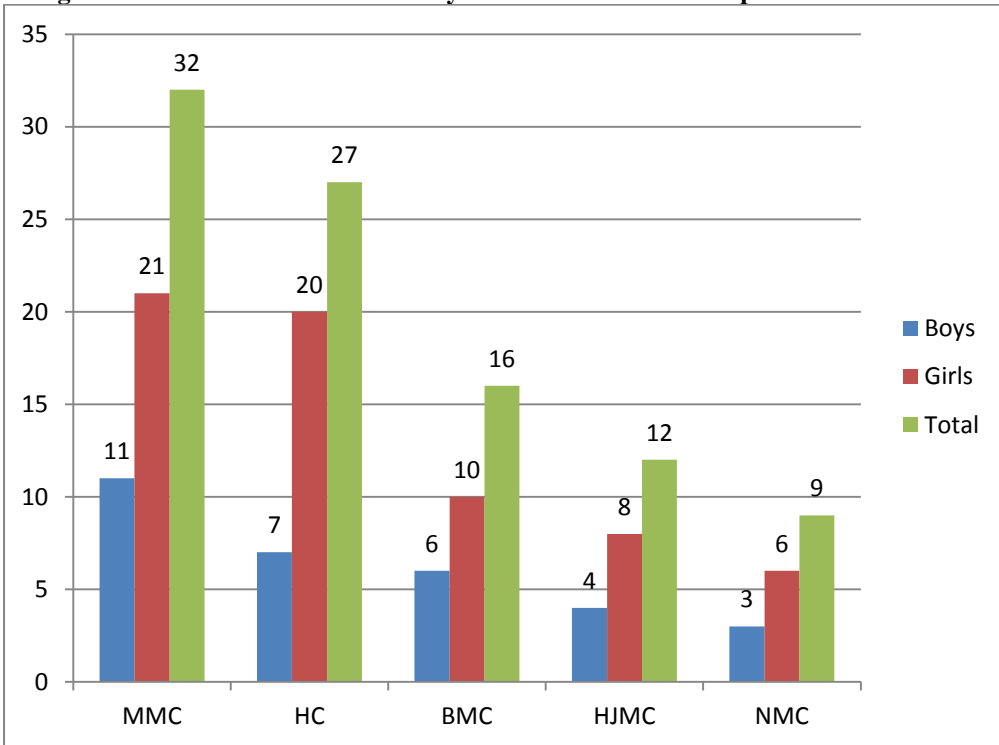
Students	MMC		HC		BMC		HJMC		NMC		Total		Grand Total
	Number of Participated Students												
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
	14	26	12	23	8	12	5	12	6	9	45	82	127

(MMC: Makawanpur Multiple Campus, HC: Hetauda Campus, BMC: Banshgopal Multiple Campus, HJMC: Hatiya Janapriya Multiple Campus & NMC: Nirmal Multiple Campus)

3.3 Sampling Design and Sample Size

Simple random sampling technique / design, especially the lottery method was used to select 96 respondents (31 boys and 65 girls) for the study according to the sample size calculator maintaining the margin of error 5 % and the confidence level 95% from five campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal.

Fig 1: Number of Students Randomly Selected from Five Campuses



The Figure 1 shows that there were 32 respondents (11 boys and 21 girls) from Makawanpur Multiple Campus, 27 respondents (7 boys and 20 girls) from Hetauda Campus, 16 respondents (6 boy and 10 girls) from Banshgopal Multiple Campus, 12 respondents (4 boy and 8 girls) from Hatiya Janapriya Multiple Campus and 9 respondents (3 boys and 6 girls) from Nirmal Multiple Campus.

3.3.1 Projection of the Sample Size by Campus

Five education campuses situated in Makawanpur District, Nepal comprised the sample size. Two campuses were situated in the urban areas, whereas three campuses were located in rural areas.

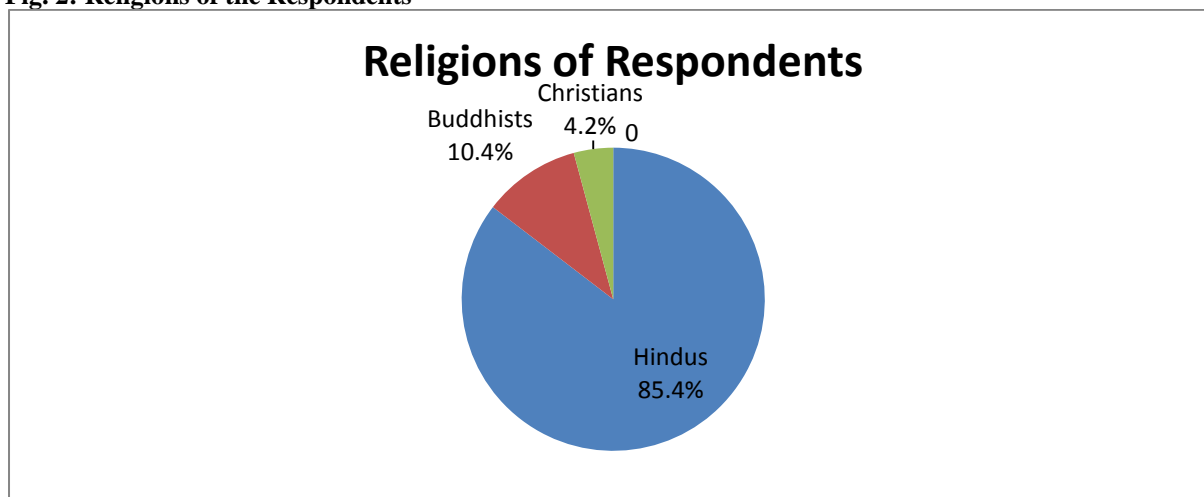
Table 2: Campuses in Two Areas

S.N.	Campuses in Urban Areas	Campuses in Rural Areas
1.	Makawanpur Multiple Campus	1. Banshgopal Multiple Campus
2.	Hetauda Campus	2. Hatiya Janapriya Multiple Campus
3.	3. Nirmal Multiple Campus

3.3.2 Projection of the Sample Size by Religion

Nepal, a small developing nation, welcomes diverse religions, cultures, castes, varied democratic principles and religious values.

Fig. 2: Religions of the Respondents



The figure shows that most of the students who were studying at the five campuses belonged to Hinduism. A very few students were Christians.

3.3.3 Projection of the Sample Size by Sex and Age

There were 31 male and 65 female students aged between 17- 23 years. 5 students belonged to the age group between 17-18 years, 80 students between 19-21years and 11 students between 22-23 years.

3.3.4 Nature and Source of Data

The researcher employed ordinal scale data which are qualitative in nature. Students' attitudes towards English language were obtained through the use of five-point Likert scale question items with Strongly Agree (SA) =5, Agree (A) = 4, Undecided (UD) = 3, Disagree (D) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The numbers assigned to them indicated only the order of preference. The primary source of data was questionnaire. The secondary source of data included books, journal articles, web-sites etc.

3.3.5 Data Collection Technique

The modified survey questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's (1985) 'Attitude Motivation Test Battery' (AMTB). The underlying principle of selecting Gardner's AMTB is its established validity and reliability. There were fifteen question items based on attitudes. The students were asked to provide their opinions on the statements regarding their attitudes towards studying English as a major subject.

3.3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Pilot Study

To measure the validity of the instruments before conducting the research study, the researcher received opinions and judgments from subject experts and authorities. The reliability of the pilot study questionnaire based on the attitudes of thirty bachelor first year education students' attitudes towards studying English as a major subject was found to be .967 according to the Cronbach's alpha, and it was very highly reliable.

3.3.7 Reliability of the instruments of the Research Study

The Cronbach's alpha' was used to check the reliability of the survey instruments. The overall internal consistency estimated 0.901 highlighting the instrument to be highly reliable in measuring students' attitudes towards studying English as a major subject. .

4. Descriptive Analysis of Data and Results

The researcher designed a series of Likert scale question items to examine attitudes of students towards studying English as a major subject. Being the ordinal data, it was appropriate to use mode, median and percentage to describe the scale. All the data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4.1 Median

Median is the value that occupies the middle point of a distribution. It is the point that divides the distribution in half. The median of the most of the individual questions must be greater than 3 to reveal the positive attitude towards something in the five point Likert scale question items.

4.2 Mode

Mode is a statistical term that refers to the most frequently occurring number found in a set of numbers or observations. If the mode in most of the individual questions is above 3 in the five point Likert scale question items, it may show the positive attitude towards something.

Table 3: Median and mode of the statement items responded by 96 students

Q.N.	Statements / Question Items	Median	Mode	Attitude Level on Based Median
1.	You think that the major English syllabi prescribed for education students are more practicable than those prescribed for Humanities students.	5	5	Strongly Agree
2.	Studying English as a major subject enables you to understand cultural values, norms and assumptions of other nations through texts prescribed for education students.	4	5	Agree
3.	Taking English as a major subject in the education faculty fulfils your desire for studying both linguistics and literature in English.	5	5	Strongly Agree
4.	You think that your knowledge of linguistic and literary skills in English provides you an opportunity to earn more money when you get involved in some work.	4	4	Agree
5.	Major English in the education faculty assists you to enhance the language of written and oral communication.	5	5	Strongly Agree
6.	You want to be an academic writer to write articles and carry out researches on English language teaching and learning in the days to come.	4	5	Agree
7.	You want to be an English language trainer in English language teaching centers or institutes in the days to come.	4	5	Agree
8.	You want to be an English teacher with sound knowledge of English language teaching methods and skills.	4	5	Agree
9.	You think that learning English as a major subject in the faculty of Education will help you in higher academic achievement.	4	4	Agree
10.	You think that learning English as a major subject in the faculty of Education will open more job opportunities for you.	5	5	Strongly Agree
11.	Studying English as a major subject can be important for you because it will make you a more knowledgeable person in English language.	4	4	Agree
12.	Studying English as a major subject can be important for you because other people will respect you more if you have sound knowledge of English grammar, literature and linguistics.	4	4	Agree
13.	Studying English as a major subject enables you to participate confidently in academic and teaching- learning activities.	4	4	Agree
14.	Studying English as a major subject enables you to evaluate language, linguistic style, literature, sound patterns or any writings written in English language.	4	4	Agree
15.	Studying English as a major subject gives you satisfaction that you can write grammatically correct sentences and have correct pronunciation of English words.	4	4	Agree

This table shows that median of every attitude question was greater than 3. Similarly, the mode of every question was also greater than 3. Both median and mode values of the questions were greater than 3. The median and mode values indicate the students' positive attitudes towards studying English as a major subject. Moreover, the above data also show that the students took education English as a major subject, because it was more practicable (Q.1), it fulfils your desire for studying both linguistics and literature in English (Q.3), it assists you to enhance the language of written and oral communication (Q.5) and it will open more job opportunities (Q.10).

4.3 Percentage

A percentage is a number or ratio expressed as a fraction of 100. The percentage can be used to describe a change and to make comparison. If the percentages of “Agree” and / or “Strongly Agree” are greater than those of “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree” and “Undecided”, they indicate the positive attitude towards something.

Table 4: Level of Attitude of each Question with Number and Percentages

Attitude Level→	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Questions						
Q.1	9 (9.4%)	9 (9.4%)	9 (9.4%)	9 (9.4%)	60 (62.4%)	96 (100%)
Q.2	9 (9.4%)	9 (9.4%)	11 (11.5%)	28 (29.2%)	39 (40.6%)	96 (100%)
Q.3	1(1%)	4(4.2%)	1(1%)	39 (40.6%)	51(53.1%)	96 (100%)
Q.4	14(14.6%)	9 (9.4%)	11 (11.5%)	32 (33.3%)	30(31.3%)	96 (100%)
Q.5	8 (8.3%)	20 (20.8%)	1(1%)	10 (10.4%)	57 (59.4%)	96 (100%)
Q.6	10 (10.4%)	2 (2.1%)	16 (16.7%)	28 (29.2%)	40 (41.7%)	96 (100%)
Q.7	6 (6.3%)	11(11.5%)	11(11.5%)	29 (30.2%)	39(40.6%)	96 (100%)
Q.8	7 (7.3%)	11(11.5%)	10(10.4%)	20(20.8%)	48 (50%)	96 (100%)
Q.9	7 (7.3%)	11(11.5%)	10(10.4%)	38 (39.6%)	30 (31.3%)	96 (100%)
Q.10	17 (17.7%)	9 (9.4%)	11(11.5%)	8 (8.3%)	51(53.1%)	96 (100%)
Q.11	7(7.3%)	8(8.3%)	6 (6.3%)	51 (53.1%)	24(35%)	96 (100%)
Q.12	7(7.3%)	7(7.3%)	20 (20.8%)	46 (47.9%)	16(16.75)	96 (100%)
Q.13	0 (0%)	20 (20.8%)	1(1%)	64 (66.7%)	11(11.5%)	96 (100%)
Q.14	27(28.1%)	17(17.7%)	1(1%)	43 (44.8%)	8(8.3%)	96 (100%)
Q.15	9 (9.4%)	14 (14.6%)	2(2.1%)	45 (46.9%)	26 (27.1%)	96 (100%)

The Table No.4 shows that percentages of either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” were greater than those of “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree” and “Undecided” of the questions. This indicates that the students had the positive attitudes towards learning English as a major subject.

5. Inferential Analysis of Data and Results

This research study adopted Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test and Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis H Test to perform the inferential analysis of data.

5.1 The Mann-Whitney U Test

It is the nonparametric test selected as the alternative to the Independent Samples T Test. The Mann-Whitney U test uses the data measured at the ordinal level. This test is employed to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two groups of an independent variable on an ordinal dependent variable. In this study, boy students and girl students (Sex) stood for two independent samples or variables or Groups; whereas the attitude level functioned as a dependent variable.

Table 5: Test Fields: Attitude Level & Group: Sex

Hypothesis Test Summary			
Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1. The distribution of attitude level is the same across categories of sex.	Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.826	Retain the null hypothesis

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

This figure shows that the probability figure marked as Sig (2-tailed) in the table was .826 which was larger than 0.05. It implies that the distribution of the attitude level towards English as a major subject was the same across the categories of sex. It accepts the null hypothesis.

5.2 Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis H Test

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test is a rank-based non-parametric test that can be used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between more than two groups of an independent variable on an ordinal dependent variable. The parametric equivalent of the Kruskal-Wallis test is the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Table 6: Test Fields: Attitude Level & Group: Campus

Hypothesis Test Summary

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1. The distribution of attitude level is the same across categories of Campus.	Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.922	Retain the null hypothesis

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

This figure shows that the probability figure marked as Sig (2-tailed) in the table was .922 which was larger than 0.05. It implies that the students of five campuses had the similar attitude level towards studying English language and literature. It indicates the condition of accepting the null hypothesis.

Figure 7: Test Fields: Attitude Level & Group: Religion

Hypothesis Test Summary

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
2. The distribution of attitude level is the same across categories of religion.	Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.327	Retain the null hypothesis

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

This figure shows that the probability figure marked as Sig (2-tailed) in the table was .327 which was larger than 0.05. It implies that the students of three religions had the similar attitude level towards studying English. This test hints at the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

Median and mode scores of individual questions were greater than 3. Either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" retained the highest percentage of the attitude level. It shows the students' positive attitudes towards studying English as a major subject. The research study discerns the main four reasons of the students for taking English as a major subject: English in education is more practicable, it fulfills the students' desire for studying both linguistics and literature in English, it assists them to enhance the language of written and oral communication and it opens more job opportunities. The Mann-Whitney U Test shows that the distribution of the attitude level was the same across categories of sex (Sig=.826). Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test shows that the distribution of the motivation was the same across categories of Campus (Sig=.922) and Religion (Sig=.327).

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