



## Investigating the Attitudes to English Foreign Language Learning among First-Year Students at Hatyai University

Nathaphon Rujiruangrot<sup>1\*</sup> and Chretien Le Keur<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Lecturer, Language Institute, Hatyai University.

\*Corresponding author, E-mail: nathaphon@hu.ac.th

### Abstract

This study examines the attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of first-year students at Hatyai University in Thailand in learning English as a foreign language. Survey findings reveal that students have a cheerful outlook toward English, recognizing its value for academic and real-world communication. Most actively engage in discussions and practice daily, favoring interactive methods such as group activities, role-playing, and integrated skill exercises. Technology, including videos, apps, and online tools, is highly valued for its engaging and supportive role, while traditional methods like grammar explanations and vocabulary drills remain important for structured learning. However, challenges persist, including fear of making mistakes, particularly in speaking and writing, which affects confidence, as well as frustration with difficult concepts. Despite these obstacles, many students adopt a growth mindset, using mistakes as learning opportunities. The study suggests that integrating real-world scenarios, leveraging technology, and offering low-pressure practice opportunities can enhance engagement and confidence. By balancing traditional and modern teaching approaches, educators can better support students in overcoming challenges and achieving their language learning goals in a positive and encouraging environment.

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language, Language Learning Approaches, Student Attitudes toward English

### Introduction

The transition to university represents a pivotal stage for students, particularly those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For first-year university students, proficiency in English is not only an academic necessity but also a critical skill for personal development, career advancement, and active participation in a globalized world. In Thailand, where English serves as a vital medium for international communication and economic progress, the significance of effective EFL education is undeniable. Research has consistently emphasized the role of English in enhancing socio-economic opportunities and fostering intercultural competence (Norton, 2000; Canagarajah, 1999).



Existing studies highlight the complex nature of language learning, which involves current academic challenges. Limited attention has been given to understanding how first-year university students perceive their journey of learning English—specifically their attitudes, motivations, and preferred approaches. This gap is particularly relevant in multilingual contexts like Thailand, where traditional rote-learning methods are gradually being replaced by communicative and interactive pedagogies (Hu, 2002; Butler, 2014).

Current research on this topic is being done in many countries to ascertain what contributes to students' attitude in learning EFL. One study by Arts Department of the University of Kufa in Iraq done in 2023, aimed to establish links between attitudes of students towards EFL learning according to age, gender, program of study and year of study. Their findings pointed out that students recognize the importance of English for academic, professional, and global communication. They are motivated by instrumental reasons such as future job opportunities and integrative reasons such as cultural interest. Students may also struggle with anxiety, lack of confidence and difficulties in mastering the language skills as well as their attitude may be shaped by societal views on English and English teaching methods.

The findings from the research stated above will aid in this research as it provides comparative insights with regards to EFL motivations and barriers as well as the pedagogical implications from the findings to make recommendations for the learning institution.

This study focuses on first-year students at Hatyai University, to explore their current attitudes and approaches to EFL learning. Using questionnaire surveys as the primary research method, it examines students' current attitudes toward language learning in an academic setting. The findings reveal that students have positive attitudes toward learning English but face challenges such as fear of making mistakes and adapting to university-level demands—issues frequently cited in existing literature (Kim, 2011; Hyland, 2006). These insights will inform recommendations for curriculum design and teaching strategies that address students' needs holistically.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on EFL education in higher education settings. It emphasizes the importance of fostering supportive and dynamic learning environments that empower students to overcome challenges and achieve their language learning objectives.

## Objectives

1. To assess the attitudes of the first-year university students at Hatyai University toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).
2. To identify the preferred learning methods and strategies used by first-year



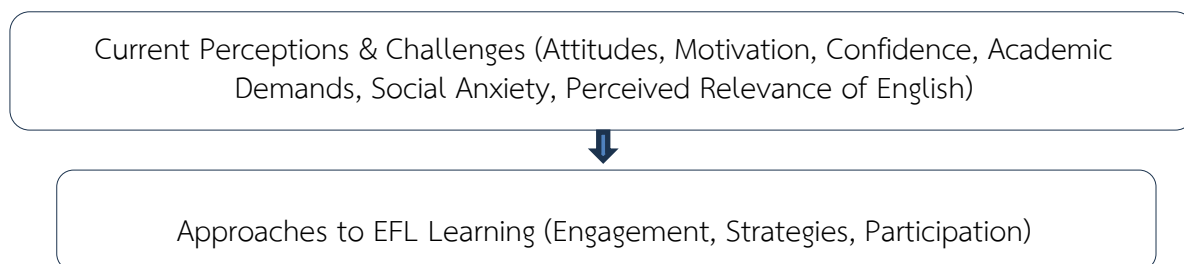
university students in their EFL studies.

### Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of first-year university students at Hatyai University toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?
2. What are the preferred learning methods and strategies used by these students in their EFL studies?

### Concept theory framework

This research investigates the attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of first-year university students at Hatyai University toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The framework posits that students' approaches to EFL learning are primarily influenced by their current perceptions and challenges. This study uses a questionnaire survey to examine the influence of these elements.



**Figure 1:** Research Framework

### Materials and Methods

This study aims to investigate the current attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of first-year university students at Hatyai University toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To achieve this objective, a quantitative research approach using a survey questionnaire was employed. A descriptive survey design was utilized to gather data on students' perceptions and approaches to EFL learning. This design is appropriate for providing a snapshot of the current state of attitudes and practices within the specific population (Creswell, 2014). The study used a cross-sectional survey, administering the questionnaire at one point in time to collect data from the participants (Creswell, 2014).

The participants consisted of 146 first-year university students enrolled in various academic programs at Hatyai University. Participants were recruited from all classes that offered English as a Foreign Language and were instructed to complete the questionnaires honestly. The sampling strategy was convenience sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their availability and accessibility (Bryman, 2012).

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument.



The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using Likert-scale items. The questionnaire addresses the students' attitudes toward the English classes, activities, motivation, and confidence levels in learning English. The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of students ( $n=10$ ) to ensure clarity, relevance, and ease of completion. Based on feedback from the pilot study, minor adjustments were made to the wording and format of some questions.

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from concepts and frameworks presented in Lightbown and Spada (2013)'s *How Languages Are Learned*. While Lightbown and Spada (2013) do not provide a single, ready-made questionnaire, their work informed the development of sections assessing students' attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and perceived challenges in EFL learning. Some modifications were made to include items relevant to the Hatyai University context and to address the research questions.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee prior to data collection. The questionnaires were administered to participants during class time. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. It took approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) to summarize the characteristics of the sample and identify common patterns in students' attitudes and approaches to EFL learning.

The study's reliance on convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of its findings to other populations or contexts. Additionally, self-reported data from questionnaires may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias. Future research should consider using larger, more diverse samples and incorporating qualitative methods to provide a richer understanding of students' experiences. Furthermore, student-teacher familiarity and the class environment may have influenced student responses, which should be considered when interpreting the results.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1: A.** The Demographic Data of 146 Research Participants

	Item	# of Students (146)	% Total Respondents
Gender	Male	32	21.9
	Female	114	78.1
Age	under 20	85	58.2



	Item	# of Students (146)	% Total Respondents
	21	37	25.3
	22	13	8.9
	23	6	4.1
	24	2	1.4
	25	2	1.4
	Over 25	1	0.7
Faculty of Study	Business Administration	17	11.6
	Law	4	2.7
	Education and Liberal Arts	99	67.8
	Science and Tech	6	4.1
	Political Science	0	0
	Communication Arts	19	13
	Didyasarin International College	1	0.7

The study involved 146 first-year students from various faculties at Hatyai University. Most participants were female (78.1%), with most students being under 20 years old (58.2%). The largest representation came from the Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts (67.8%), followed by Business Administration (11.6%) and Communication Arts (13%). The demographic data reflects a young, female student population, which is typical for first-year university students. The overrepresentation of students from the Education and Liberal Arts faculty may indicate a greater interest in language learning among these students or the larger size of this faculty within the university. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the sample may not fully represent the broader student population, particularly older students, or those from other faculties.

**Table 2:** EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning (Behavioral Aspect)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>1. Consistency in Practice</b>	4.01	0.87	Agree
"I practice my English skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) every day, even if only for a short time."			
<b>2. Participation in class</b>	4.08	0.87	Agree



	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
"I actively participate in class discussions and activities to improve my English."			
<b>3. Use of English Outside the Classroom</b>	3.76	0.93	Neutral
"I try to use English in real-life situations, such as ordering food, asking for directions, or talking with friends."			
<b>4. Seeking Help or Feedback</b>	4.22	0.78	Agree
"When I don't understand something, I ask my teacher or peers for help or clarification."			
<b>5. Self-Study Habits</b>	3.96	0.89	Agree
"I set aside time to review class materials, complete homework, or study English on my own."			
Average	4.01	0.87	Agree

Students exhibited positive behavioral attitudes toward learning English. They reported consistent daily practice (mean = 4.01), active participation in class discussions (mean = 4.08), and a willingness to seek help or feedback when needed (mean = 4.22). These findings suggest that students are initiative-taking in their approach to language learning, recognizing the importance of regular practice and collaboration. However, the use of English outside the classroom received a slightly lower mean score (3.76), indicating that students may face challenges in applying their skills in real-life situations. This could be due to limited opportunities or confidence issues, which will be further discussed in the emotional attitudes section.

**Table 3:** EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning (Cognitive Aspect)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>1. Approach to Learning Vocabulary or Grammar</b>	3.84	0.89	Agree
"I prefer to learn new vocabulary or grammar structures by memorizing rules and definitions."			
<b>2. Problem-Solving with Challenging Texts</b>	4.02	0.83	Agree
"When I encounter a challenging text or concept in English, I use resources like dictionaries or online tools to help me understand."			



	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>3. Practice Outside the Classroom</b>	4.07	0.77	Agree
"I regularly practice my English skills outside the classroom by engaging in activities like watching movies, reading books, or speaking with others."			
<b>4. Learning from Mistakes</b>	4.05	0.86	Agree
"When I make a mistake in English, I reflect on it and try to learn from it to improve my skills."			
<b>5. Staying Motivated</b>	3.92	0.83	Agree
"I find it easy to stay motivated to learn English even when it feels difficult."			
Average	3.98	0.84	Agree

Students demonstrated a positive cognitive attitude toward EFL learning. They valued traditional methods such as memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules (mean = 3.84) but also embraced modern tools like dictionaries and online resources to solve problems (mean = 4.02). Additionally, students showed a strong preference for practicing English outside the classroom through activities like watching movies and reading books (mean = 4.07). This indicates a balanced approach to learning, combining foundational knowledge with practical application. Students also exhibited a growth mindset, as reflected in their willingness to learn from mistakes (mean = 4.05). However, maintaining motivation was slightly more challenging (mean = 3.92), suggesting that some students may need additional support to stay engaged, especially when faced with difficult concepts.

**Table 4:** EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning (Emotional Aspect)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>1. Confidence in Using English</b>	3.53	1.03	Neutral
"I feel confident when speaking English in front of others."			
<b>2. Anxiety or Nervousness</b>	3.92	0.83	Agree
"I feel nervous or anxious when I have to speak English in class or with native speakers."			
<b>3. Frustration with Challenges</b>	3.71	0.97	Agree
"I feel frustrated when I don't understand something in English."			



	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>4. Enjoyment of Learning English</b>	4	0.82	Agree
"I enjoy learning English and find it interesting."			
<b>5. Fear of Making Mistakes</b>	3.84	0.88	Agree
"I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking or writing in English."			
Average	3.80	0.91	Agree

The emotional aspect of EFL learning revealed a mix of positive and challenging experiences. While students reported important levels of enjoyment in learning English (mean = 4.00), they also expressed anxiety (mean = 3.92) and frustration (mean = 3.71) when faced with challenges. Fear of making mistakes was a significant barrier (mean = 3.84), particularly in speaking and writing. Confidence levels were neutral (mean = 3.53), with some students feeling more self-assured than others. These findings highlight the emotional complexities of language learning, where enjoyment and motivation coexist with anxiety and self-doubt. To address these challenges, educators should create a supportive environment that normalizes mistakes and provides low-pressure opportunities for practice.

**Table 5:** EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning (Teaching Methodology)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>1. Interactive Activities</b>	3.92	0.88	Agree
"I learn better when the teacher includes interactive activities like group discussions, role-plays, or pair work."			
<b>2. Use of Technology</b>	4.12	0.81	Agree
"I find it helpful when the teacher uses technology (e.g., videos, online tools, or apps) to teach English."			
<b>3. Grammar-Focused Instruction</b>	3.99	0.81	Agree
"I prefer when the teacher explains grammar rules in detail and provides clear examples."			
<b>4. Real-Life Contexts</b>	3.94	0.80	Agree





	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
"I find it more useful when the teacher uses real-life situations (e.g., ordering food, job interviews) to teach English."			
<b>5. Feedback and Correction</b>	4.23	0.79	Agree
"I appreciate it when the teacher gives me immediate feedback and corrects my mistakes during class."			
Average	4.04	0.82	Agree

Students expressed strong preferences for interactive and technology-enhanced teaching methods. They valued interactive activities like group discussions and role-plays (mean = 3.92) and appreciated the use of technology, such as videos and online tools (mean = 4.12). Detailed grammar instruction (mean = 3.99) and real-life contexts (mean = 3.94) were also highly favored, as they provided clarity and practical relevance. Immediate feedback and correction from teachers received the highest agreement (mean = 4.23), indicating that students value guidance and opportunities for improvement. These findings suggest that a blended approach, combining traditional and modern methods, is most effective in engaging students and supporting their learning.

**Table 6:** EFL Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning (Preferences of English Skills)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
<b>1. Speaking</b>	4.04	0.8	Agree
"I enjoy practicing speaking English because it helps me communicate better in real-life situations."			
<b>2. Listening</b>	3.96	0.85	Agree
"I find listening to English (e.g., podcasts, movies, or conversations) enjoyable and helpful for improving my language skills."			
<b>3. Reading</b>	3.97	0.84	Agree
"I enjoy reading English texts (e.g., books, articles, or news) because it helps me learn new vocabulary and ideas."			
<b>4. Writing</b>	3.92	0.77	Agree



	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Agreement
"I find writing in English (e.g., essays, emails, or journals) useful for organizing my thoughts and improving my grammar."			
<b>5. Integrated Skills</b>	4.10	0.76	Agree
"I prefer activities that combine multiple skills, such as listening and speaking or reading and writing, because they feel more practical."			
Average	4.00	0.80	Agree

Students showed a strong preference for integrated skills activities (mean = 4.10), which combine listening and speaking or reading and writing. They also enjoyed practicing speaking (mean = 4.04), listening (mean = 3.96), reading (mean = 3.97), and writing (mean = 3.92). These findings reflect a holistic approach to language learning, where students recognize the interconnectedness of different skills and their practical applications. The high agreement across all skill areas suggests that students are motivated to improve their overall proficiency, but they particularly value activities that simulate real-world communication.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that first-year students at Hatyai University are motivated and initiative-taking in their approach to EFL learning. They value both traditional and modern teaching methods, recognizing the importance of foundational knowledge as well as practical application. However, emotional barriers such as anxiety, frustration, and fear of making mistakes can hinder their progress, particularly in speaking and writing. These challenges are consistent with existing literature, which highlights the role of affective factors in language learning (Kim, 2011; Hyland, 2006).

To address these challenges, educators should focus on creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. Incorporating more interactive activities, leveraging technology, and using real-life scenarios can make learning more relevant and enjoyable. For instance, using online platforms for collaborative writing, creating, and sharing videos for speaking practice, or utilizing language learning apps for vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, providing immediate feedback and low-pressure practice opportunities can help students build confidence and reduce anxiety. For example, creating opportunities for students to practice speaking and writing in a non-graded setting, such as informal presentations or journal writing. By addressing both cognitive and emotional aspects of



learning, educators can better support students in achieving their language learning goals.

The study also highlights the importance of balancing traditional and modern teaching approaches. While students appreciate the structure and clarity provided by grammar-focused instruction, they also value the dynamic and engaging nature of technology-enhanced learning. A blended approach that combines these methods can cater to diverse learning preferences and help students develop both accuracy and fluency in English.

While the study provides valuable insights into EFL learning approaches at Hatyai University, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study's reliance on convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of its findings to other populations or contexts. Furthermore, student-teacher familiarity and the class environment may have influenced student responses, which should be considered when interpreting the results.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of first-year EFL students at Hatyai University. By addressing the challenges identified and building on the positive attitudes and behaviors observed, educators can create a more effective and supportive learning environment that empowers students to achieve their language learning objectives.

This study examined the attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of first-year students at Hatyai University toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The findings reveal that students have a positive and initiative-taking approach to EFL learning, valuing English for both academic and real-world communication. They actively engage in daily practice, class participation, and self-study, and prefer interactive, technology-enhanced teaching methods. Traditional approaches, such as grammar instruction and vocabulary memorization, are also appreciated for building a durable foundation.

However, students face emotional challenges, including anxiety, frustration, and fear of making mistakes, particularly in speaking and writing. These barriers can hinder their confidence and willingness to practice, despite their overall enjoyment of learning English. To address these challenges, educators should create a supportive and low-pressure learning environment that normalizes mistakes and encourages growth.

A balanced approach combining traditional and modern teaching methods is recommended. Interactive activities, technology integration, and real-life scenarios can make learning more engaging and relevant. Immediate feedback and low-pressure practice opportunities can help build confidence and reduce anxiety. By addressing these emotional and cognitive challenges, educators can better support students in



achieving their language learning goals.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the attitudes and preferences of first-year EFL students at Hatyai University. By addressing the emotional and cognitive challenges identified and building on the positive behaviors and attitudes observed, educators can create a more effective and supportive learning environment. This, in turn, will empower students to achieve their language learning goals and prepare them for academic and real-world communication in an increasingly globalized world.

## References

- Al-Muslimawi, I. A. J., & Al-Shamarti, A. K. N. (2023). Attitudes of EFL Students towards English Language Learning: A Study at the College of Arts, University of Kufa. *Tasnim International Journal for Human Social and Legal Sciences*, (6), 386-397
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Y. G. (2014). Reexamining the washback effect of high-stakes EFL tests in East Asia: A case study of university entrance exams in Korea. *Language Testing*, 31(2), 165– 186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532213499825>
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(1), 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588361>
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book*. Routledge.
- Kim, Y. (2011). The relationship between anxiety and foreign language performance. *Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 27(1), 1–23.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman/Pearson Education.