

The Relationship between Sudanese Universities Students' Attitudes towards Learning English as a Foreign Language and their Achievement in Reading Comprehension.

A case Study of Bakht-er-Ruda University

Dr. Ahmed Mahil Hassab Elrasool

Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Education, University of Bakht-er-Ruda, Sudan

Abstract

This study aims to identify the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language, the impact of gender on their views towards learning English and their achievement in reading comprehension. The study sample consisted of (120) students (male =45) (female=75) who were selected randomly from a comprehension course in English as a foreign language. They are from Bakht-er-Ruda university batch (15), semester five, English major. The Study showed number of results. The most important of them are that there are positive views for Sudanese universities students towards learning English as a foreign language, there is a significant difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to gender in favour of female, and there is a significant relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language. According to the study findings ,the researcher recommends the following: Exciting curriculum should be built and structured to teach English language for university students in order to obtain positive attitudes towards English language, effective teaching methods and styles should be used in teaching English as a foreign language, experimental studies should be used to identify the amount of development in teaching depending on the level of attitudes towards English language and studies about the factors which develop learning English as a foreign language should be created (interested curriculum, learners' back ground, lecture environment).

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة لتحديد وجهة نظر طلاب الجامعات السودانية نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية ودراسة تأثير الجنس على اتجاهاتهم نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والعلاقة بين تحصيلهم في القراءة الاستيعابية واتجاهاتهم نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من (١٢٠) طالب، حيث بلغ عدد الذكور (٤٥) وبلغ عدد الإناث (٧٥) تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية من جامعة بخت الرضا الدفعة (١٥). وأظهرت الدراسة عدداً من النتائج أهمها وجود اتجاهات ايجابية لدى الطلاب الجامعات السودانية نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية في اتجاهات ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) كلغة أجنبية، وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية عند مستوى الدلالة الطلاب تعزى لمتغير الجنس ولصالح الإناث، ووجود علاقة دالة إحصائية بين تحصيل طلاب الجامعات السودانية في اختبار القراءة الاستيعابية واتجاهاتهم نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كما توصلت الدراسة إلى العديد من التوصيات منها بناء مناهج تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لطلاب الجامعات السودانية من أجل الحصول علي مواقف ايجابية لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية، استخدام طرائق وأساليب التدريس الفعالة لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية، استخدام الدراسات التجريبية لتحديد مدي التطور في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية، وإنشاء دراسات حول العوامل التي تنمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية مثل (المناهج، خلفية المتعلمين، و بيئة المحاضرات) .

Introduction

1-0 Background

English becomes the dominant language in many countries because it is an international language. Many references are written in this language. For this reason, reading comprehension is one of the most important skills to be acquired during learning this language.

As comprehension is a personal creation of meaning, reading comprehension may be considered as a problem that students of English as a foreign language face.

The main aim of teaching reading is to enable students to read and comprehend English in different contexts with ease and accuracy.

Reading comprehension skill in English as a foreign language has been influenced by a psycholinguistic theory. Goodman (1976) describes reading comprehension as a psycholinguistics guessing game . He suggests that a reader begins a reading task by possessing a certain information ,which allows her/him to pick up important fragments of the text in order to reconstruct it .

The information that readers already possess is characterized as attitudes and background knowledge. In order to re-create meaning, the reader should interact with the ideas and language of the author. The reader is not as a blank slate on which the ideas of the author are to be written. There is a true interaction between the ideas and the language of the author and the ideas and language of the reader.

The level of reading comprehension of a text is determined by how well the reader's variables (interest level in the text, purpose for reading the text, relevant background knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, awareness of the reading process, and level of willingness to take risks) interact with the text variables (text type, structure, syntax, and vocabulary) (Hosenfeld, 1979).

The researcher believes that it is important to discuss the relationship between students' attitudes in the Sudanese universities towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievement in reading comprehension.

This deficiency in reading comprehension may be due to some factors such as the teacher, the reading text itself and students' attitudes towards learning English.

1-1 Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the four skills of English as a foreign language, and comprehension is the ultimate goal of teaching reading. Lifrieri (2005) found that many students follow the traditional way; they read stressing sound letter association; they also find difficulties in comprehending reading passage. Students' reading difficulties may not only be due to deficiency in reading skills but also to students' negative attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. To improve reading comprehension, the readers' attitudes towards learning English need to be enhanced, improved and enriched.

1-2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- 1- identify the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- identify the impact of gender for Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language.
- 3- identify the relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language.

1-3 Questions of the Study

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language ?
- 2- Are there any significant differences in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to their gender ?
- 3- Is there a significant relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language ?

1-4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study tries to test the following hypotheses:

- 1- There are positive views for Sudanese universities students towards learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- There is no significant difference at ($\alpha=0.05$) in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to their gender .
- 3- There is a significant relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language.

1-5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant firstly because it is an immediate response to the urgent needs of the Sudanese universities students in the field of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Secondly, it is an experiment to fill the gaps the students have in learning English as a foreign language. Thirdly, to the best knowledge of the researcher, the achievement of students in reading comprehension will represent their weakness in learning English. Finally, course designers and teachers can make use of the results of this study by drawing the attention to the process of learning English as a foreign language and developing the level of students and their views towards learning English as a foreign language. It also gives the decision makers a clear idea about the relationship between students' views and their achievement in reading comprehension to show the suitable plans to support the students in reading comprehension and solve the problems which face the students in this area.

1-6 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to the Sudanese universities students (students of Bakht-er-Ruda university as a sample) during the academic year (2013-2014.). The generalization of the results will be limited to this population and to the instruments used in this study.

1-7. Instruments of the Study

1- Reading Comprehension Test

For the purposes of achieving the objectives of the study, the researcher designed a Reading Comprehension Test.

2- Attitude Questionnaire

For measuring students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, the researcher designed (28) items as questionnaire after returning to the related literature.

Literature Review

2-1 Theoretical Literature

Gardner (1980, p.267) defines the term attitude as "an inference which is made on the basis of a complex of beliefs about the attitude object". Ajzan (1988, p.4) considers attitude as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event". Baker (1992, p.10) defines attitudes as "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour".

Gardner (1985) considers attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. According to him, "motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus a desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language" (p. 10).

Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). Karahan (2007, p.84) argues that "positive language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English". As such, attitudes play a very crucial role in language learning as they would appear to influence students' success or failure in their learning.

It is important to identify learners' motivation and attitudes towards learning English language. Motivation of the students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language. Another factor is learners' attitudes. This is because an ESL/EFL learner's motivation in language learning is affected by his/her attitudes towards learning the language. The relation between motivation and attitudes has been considered a prime concern in language learning research. Gardner and Lambert (1972, p.3) state that "his [the learner] motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes towards the other group in particular and by his orientation towards the learning task itself".

The importance of motivation in enhancing second/foreign language learning is undeniable. Lifrieri (2005, p. 4) points out that "when asked about the factors which influence individual levels of success in any activity – such as language learning – most people would certainly mention motivation among them". Brown (2000, p.160) states that "it is easy in second language learning to

claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation". With similar views, Gardner (2006, p. 241) argues that "students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels". He further adds that "if one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc" (Gardner, 2006, p. 243).

Brown (2000) asserts that studies of motivation of second/foreign language learners often refer to the distinction between two types of motivation namely, instrumental motivation and an integrative one. Gardner (1983, p. 203) defines instrumental motivation as "learning a language because of someone or less clearly perceived utility it might have for the learner". More specifically, a learner is instrumentally motivated when he/she wants to learn a language "to pass an examination, to use it in one's job, to use it in holiday in the country, as a change from watching television, because the educational system requires it." (Wilkins, 1972, p.184).

An integrative motivation was defined as "learning a language because the learner wishes to identify himself with or becomes integrated into the society of the target language" (Gardner, 1980, p.203). Therefore, a learner is motivated when he/she learns a language because he/she wants to "know more of the culture and values of the foreign language group... to make contact with the speakers of the languages... to live in the country concerned" (Wilkins, 1972, p.184).

Researchers concur with Spolsky (1989, p. 160) in that "a language may be learned for any one or any collection of practical reasons". As such, identifying the petroleum engineering students' motivation will be related to the reasons for which they learn English language. In other words, instrumental, integrative and personal reasons will be considered as far as the students' motivation is concerned. This view is also supported by Gardner (2012) who considers motivation in learning a second/foreign language as "the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language" (p. 10).

Methodology

3-1 Introduction

This part introduces the study design and the methodology used. The aim of this study is to identify the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language as well as to identify the impact of gender on their views towards learning English as a foreign language, and to identify the relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievements in reading comprehension.

3.2 Population of the Study

The study population consists of all the students of the Sudanese universities who study English as a foreign language to identify their views towards learning English as a foreign language.

3-3 Sample of the Study

The study sample consisted of (120) students (male =45) (female=75) who were selected randomly from students of Bakht-er-Ruda university batch (15) semester five,(English major) .

3-3 Methodology

Through this study, the researcher adopted a descriptive and analytical approach. The researcher also used a statistical software package (SPSS) in order to extract the results.

3-4 Instruments of the Study

a) Reading Comprehension Test

For the purposes of achieving the objectives of the study, the researcher designed a reading comprehension test to measure students' achievement in reading comprehension.

To collect correct answer for the test questions: one mark is given to the correct answer but (0) to the incorrect answer within four choices as a multiple choice test. In designing the test, the researcher depends the following range to determine means degree (three equality ranges):

- Means (less to 0.33) weak degree.
- Means (0.34 – 0.66) Medium degree .
- Means (more than 0.67) high degree.

b) Attitude Questionnaire

For measuring students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language , the researcher designed (28) items as a questionnaire after returning to the related literature (Table 2).

3-5 Variables of the Study

(Independent Variables)

0- -Gender (male, female).

1- Students attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

(Dependent Variables)

2- Reading Comprehension.

3-6 Data Collection

Data was collected through the distribution of the questionnaire about Students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and a Reading Comprehension test. To collect correct answers, five likert scale was used, the answer (strongly agree) takes (5) degrees, agree (4) degrees, (Neutral) (3) degrees, (Disagree) (2) degrees, strongly disagree (1) degree. The researcher depends upon the following quality ranges to determine means degree for attitude questionnaire items.

- Means (less to 2.33) weak degree.
- Means (2.34 – 3.66) Medium degree .
- Means (more than 3.67) high degree.

3-7 Statistical Analysis Process

After data collection process was finished, quantitative data entry by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program (VS 11.5), multiple tests and methods were used which include frequency and percentage for demographic variables, means and standard deviation for items and domains, Pearson correlation coefficient, multiple regression, independent sample t. Test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe) and Cronbach Alpha were applied.

Qualitative interview data were organized for each participant. A phenomenological analysis procedure was applied to analyze the data generated from participants' interviews with the development of general then more specific themes.

3.8 The Stability of a Reading Comprehension Test

To insure the validity and reliability of a Reading Comprehension Test, the researcher distributed it to (11) teachers who teach English as a foreign language to draw their own point of view about the questions of the Reading Comprehension test, to check the language, questions ability to measure students' achievement in Comprehension Reading and any notes about them as a following:

1. Affiliation questions to test objectives.
2. Safety paragraphs from the linguistic point.

3. Delete or add any notes.

A comprehension reading test was applied twice through two weeks to (21) students. The correlation was computed (kuder Retchardson- 20) to test the reliability. The results indicate high correlation which was: (0.88), (kuder Retchardson- 20). These values are acceptable for a scientific research. Discriminate and difficult index for each question was applied. Table (1) shows that:

Difficulty Index				Discriminate Index			
Q No	Value	Q No	Value	Q No	Value	Q No	Value
1	0.54	10	0.31	1	0.62	10	0.43
2	0.51	11	0.34	2	0.57	11	0.45
3	0.57	12	0.51	3	0.65	12	0.62
4	0.43	13	0.43	4	0.54	13	0.59
5	0.41	14	0.42	5	0.52	14	0.48
6	0.34	15	0.35	6	0.46	15	0.52
7	0.35	16	0.57	7	0.44	16	0.69
8	0.51	17	0.48	8	0.69	17	0.58
9	0.36	18	0.38	9	0.43	18	0.44
Total	0.43			Total	0.58		

Table (1) reveals acceptable Difficulty Index for each question of reading comprehension test whenever were between (0.31-0.57), the difficulties index for total was (0.43). This value indicates that the test is suitable for students because of the acceptable difficulties value between (0.27-0.70).

The above table reveals the Discriminate Index for each question of reading comprehension test whenever were between (0.43-0.69), the difficulties index for total was (0.58). This value indicates that the test is suitable test for students because the acceptable difficulties value: (more than (0.30)).

3-9. The Stability of Attitude Questionnaire

To insure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher distributed it to (11) specialists who teach English as a foreign language to view their points about its items that deal with students' Attitude towards learning English as a foreign language.

It was also to applied to (21) students from study population out of study sample. Correlation was also computed and (Cronbach Alpha) to check the questionnaire's reliability. The results indicate high correlation (0.76), (Cronbach Alpha) reached (0.86). These values are acceptable for a scientific research, (more than 0.60).

Analysis and Discussion

This part tries to discuss the results of the study which aim to identify the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language as well as to identify the impact of gender on Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English and to identify the of relationship between Sudanese universities student's achievements in reading comprehension. The result views depend on the study questions and hypotheses.

4.1 The Results

4-1. What are the Sudanese Universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language?

To answer this question, means and stander deviations were computed for each items of attitude: (table 2) shows that:

Table (2)

Means, stander deviations and degree for each items of attitude :

Item	Item	means	stander deviations	Degree
1	I would like to study English because it will make me more educated.	4.02	0.86	High
2	I am seeking to study English language because it will help me to improve my personality.	4.00	0.94	High
3	I am not relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class.	4.02	0.92	High
4	I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of	3.93	0.94	High

	other students.			
5	I like to give opinions on the subject at hand using English language during the class.	3.67	0.98	High
6	Being good at English will help me study other subjects well.	3.86	0.90	High
7	I feel proud when studying English language.	4.08	0.90	High
8	I feel excited when I communicate in English with others.	4.11	0.80	High
9	Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried.	3.73	0.97	High
10	I have more knowledge and more understanding when studying English language.	3.91	0.89	High
11	I look forward to studying more English in the future.	3.88	0.97	High
12	Studying foreign languages like English is enjoyable.	3.73	0.98	High
13	When I hear a student in my class speaking English well, I like to practice speaking with him/her.	3.38	1.09	medium
14	I prefer studying in my mother tongue rather than any other foreign language.	3.34	1.19	medium
15	Studying English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself.	3.78	0.90	High
16	Studying English helps me getting new information in which I can link to my previous knowledge.	3.33	1.08	medium
17	I do not like studying English language.	3.62	1.12	High
18	Frankly, I study English language just to pass the exams.	3.80	0.92	medium
19	I am not relaxed whenever I have to speak English language in the class.	3.93	0.92	medium
20	I wish I could speak English fluently.	3.68	0.98	medium
21	I am interested in studying English language as a second language.	3.80	0.92	High
22	In my opinion, people who speak more than one language are very knowledgeable.	3.98	0.89	High

23	Studying English helps me communicate in English effectively.	3.95	0.86	High
24	Studying English subject makes me feel more confident.	4.02	0.86	High
25	I like to practice English the way native speakers do.	4.00	0.94	High
26	I am able to think and analyze the content in English language.	4.02	0.92	High
27	In my opinion, English language is difficult and complicated to learn.	3.93	0.94	High
28	Knowing English is an important goal in my life.	3.67	0.98	High
Total		3.83	0.43	High

Table (2) shows that the range means for Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language between (3.33-4.11), the Highest means for item (8) which indicate to "I feel excited when I communicate in English with others", then item (7) "I feel proud when studying English language", by means (4.08) in High degree. The total items which have been High degree reached (22) items out of (28) and (6) items have been medium degree.

The lowest means for item (16) "Studying English helps me getting new information in which I can link to my previous knowledge" in medium degree.

The total means for Sudanese Universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language was (3.83) in high degree.

4-2. Are there any significant differences in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to their gender?

In order to explore significant differences in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to their gender, Independent sample- t. test was applied.

Table (3)

The result of independent sample- t. test to explore significant differences in views towards learning English as a foreign language due to gender variable:

Gender	N	Means	St.dev	t. value	Sig
Male	45	12.11	3.41	5.16	0.00
Female	75	14.76	2.22		

Table (3) shows that there are significant differences in Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to their gender to favor of female by means (14.76), but means for male was (12.11) out of (18).

4-3. Is there a significant relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language ?

To answer this questions ,means and stander deviations were computed for each question of reading comprehension test as(table 4) shows . Also correlation coefficients between Sudanese students' achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language was applied as table (5) shows .

Table (4)

Means, stander deviations and degree for each question of reading comprehension test :

No	Means	Stander deviations	Degree
1	0.75	0.43	High
2	0.63	0.48	Medium
3	0.68	0.47	High
4	0.83	0.37	High
5	0.78	0.41	High
6	0.73	0.45	High
7	0.75	0.43	High
8	0.83	0.37	High
9	0.80	0.40	High
10	0.85	0.36	High
11	0.91	0.29	High

12	0.78	0.42	High
13	0.81	0.40	High
14	0.65	0.48	Medium
15	0.82	0.39	High
16	0.73	0.45	High
17	0.68	0.47	High
18	0.77	0.42	High
Total	13.77	4.51	High

Table (4) reveals that the range means for Sudanese students' reading comprehension questions test was between (0.63-0.91) out of (1) the Highest means for question (11) in High degree then question (10) by means (0.85). The total questions which have been High degree reached (16) questions out of (18), therefore (2) questions have been medium degree.

The lowest means for question (2) in medium degree.

The total means for reading comprehension questions test was (13.77) out of (18) by (76%) in high degree.

Table (5)

Correlation coefficients between Sudanese universities students' achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language:

Variable	Means	Stander deviations	Degree of freedom	Correlation coefficients	Sig
Comprehension Reading	13.77	4.51	119	0.66	0.00
Attitudes	3.83	0.43			

Table (5) reveals high Correlation coefficients between Sudanese universities students' achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language (0.66) by statistical significant (0.00), this indicates a significant relationship between students' achievements in

reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language at statistical significant level (0.05), therefore, third hypotheses is true.

4.4 The Verification of Hypotheses

Depending upon the above statistical results, the researcher comes to the following:

- 1- There are positive views for Sudanese universities students' towards learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- Depending on the result of Hypotheses Two :“There is significant difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in Sudanese students' views towards learning English as a foreign language due to gender variable to favor of female” .
- 3- There is high Correlation coefficients between Sudanese student's achievement in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language.

4.5 Discussion of Results

Through the results above, it is clear that students' attitudes towards language learning is high, because English language learning becomes more interested than before. Students have high tendency in learning as a foreign language. The learners of English language feel happy when they communicate with each other .

The above result indicates that the achievement test receives high achievements, because they have a positive trend towards English as foreign language.

The results also reveal that there are significant differences in views towards learning English as a foreign language due to gender variable in favor of female, because females are more excited than the males in learning second language and have more ability to depend upon mind properties, therefore they have high positive attitudes towards learning English more than males.

Summary, Results and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The Objective of this study is to identify the Sudanese universities students' views towards learning English as a foreign language and the impact of gender for their views towards learning English as a foreign language and the relationship between Sudanese universities students' achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language.

The study sample consisted of (120) students (male =45) (female=75) who were selected randomly from students of Bakht-er-Ruda university, batch (15) semester five, (English major).

5.2 Through the statistical analysis and the investigation of the study hypotheses , the researcher summarizes the following results:

- 1- There are positive views for Sudanese universities students towards learning English as a foreign language. The range means for their views towards learning English as a foreign language was between (3.33-4.11), the Highest means for item (8) which indicate to “I feel excited when I communicate in English with others”, then item (7) “I feel proud when studying English language”, by means (4.08) in High degree. The total items which have been High degree reached (22) items out of (28) therefore (6) items have been medium degree. The lowest means for item (16) “Studying English helps me getting new information in which I can link to my previous knowledge” in medium degree. The total means for Sudanese universities students’ views towards learning English as a foreign language was (3.83) in high degree.
- 2- The range means for Sudanese universities students’ reading comprehension questions test was between (0.63-0.91) out of (1) the Highest means for question (11) in High degree then question (10) by means (0.85). The total questions which have been High degree reached (16) questions out of (18) , (2) questions only have been medium degree.
- 3- There is significant difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in Sudanese universities student’ views towards learning English as a foreign language due to gender variable to favor of female.
- 4- There is high Correlation coefficients between Sudanese student’s achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language (0.66) by statistical significant (0.00). This indicates that there is a significant relationship between Sudanese universities students’ achievements in reading comprehension and their views towards learning English as a foreign language at statistical significant level (0.05).

5-3. Recommendations

According to the study results ,the researcher recommends the following:

- 1- Exciting curriculum should be built and structured to teach English language for universities students in order to get high attitudes towards English language.
- 2- Teachers should use effective teaching methods and styles through teaching English language.

- 3- Experimental studies should be used to identify the amount of development in learning depending upon the level of attitudes towards English language.
- 4- Studies about the factors which develop learning English as a foreign language should be created (interested curriculum , learners' back ground, lecture environment).
- 5- Studies about the impact of learning facilities on learning English as a foreign language should be created.

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