

Non-English Majored Students' Attitudes and Motivation towards Learning TOEIC

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Abstract

Motivation is an integral part on the way to achieving one's desired goal because it, together with attitudes determines almost all human's success or failure. There are numerous studies into motivation and/or attitudes towards learning English, but research into learners' motives and attitudinal perspectives in learning English in general and TOEIC in particular is still scarce or merely meagre in comparison to a fertile land for investigation. The purpose of this study is to explore (1) motivating factors and (2) types of attitudes that an sample of university students have towards learning TOEIC and (3) whether motivational and attitudinal patterns have influence on learner's TOEIC score achievement. 170 non-English majored university students were invited to partake in this small-scale study by completing a questionnaire on learning motives and attitudes. Collected data were computed and analyzed through SPSS for findings and discussion. Results indicated TOEIC learners' motivation reasons were very intrinsically and extrinsically diverse, but the second type of motivation seemed to be more prominent. The findings from the survey also fore grounded a close relation between motivation and attitudes toward learning outcomes of a TOEIC learner. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications were also proposed to English teachers, and syllabus designers.

Keywords: motivation, attitude, TOEIC-orientation, learning outcome

1. Introduction

No longer is it a trend, but with the increasing need especially for business, English has its own land for survival and development. This so-called lingua franca has been obligatorily included in curricula in hundreds of universities where English is deemed the second language. With the university where this research was conducted is no exception. 'English is no longer considered an optional subject because it is now a very essential key to open the door to a global house,' said by Professor Nguyen, former Vietnamese Minister of Training and Education (MOET). In order to assess their students' English proficiency, many Vietnamese universities have been employing the TOEIC-based examination (Tests of English for International Communication), and Ton Duc Thang university (TDTU) is a typical example to take. At the right beginning when first entering the school, students have to take a placement TOEIC-norm test, and 500 scores of TOEIC is a minimal requirement for all non-English majored school leavers. An eight-course TOEIC-oriented program is applied to help students improve and achieve the required score. Specifically, each course is composed of ninety-hour in-class lessons, and so as to move into a higher level, students are supposed to pass an achievement test at the end of each course. Despite the fact that great efforts had been made by both learners and instructors for a better TOEIC preparation, there were still a significant number of learners who did not show much improvement while others saw

much progress in terms of score gain. In response to this inherent discrepancy, this small-scale study is therefore to explore possible factors that result in such differences. More specifically, the study investigated whether motivational and attitudinal perspectives have any influences on the students' outcomes on TOEIC-based examinations.

1.1 Attitudes

Attitude is really complicated, and numerous definitions have been proposed to depict its essence. Sarnoff (1970) defined it 'deal with a disposition to react favorably and unfavorably to a class of objects'. Wenden (1991) referred attitudes to emotional reaction consisting of three elements: cognition, affection, and behavior. Baker (1992, p.10) also defines attitude as "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and the persistence of human behavior." Moreover, Gardner (1980, p.267) elaborated this concept elaborately by asserting that attitude is the "sum total of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic" (ibid). In line with Baker's (1992) study, Wenden (1991) agreed that attitudes consist of not only two elements: cognativeness and affectiveness but also behaviorialism. Cognatively, he believes that attitudes are formed by beliefs and opinions about the object, and affectiveness is associated with feelings and emotions that one have over the object per ce. For the last component, Wenden opines that a person's behavior results in his or her action or intention towards the object. Attitudes are of internal natures of human beings which cannot be directly observed or gauged, but can be inferred from external, typical manners of behavior (Ajzen, 1988; Baker, 1992). It is unquestionable that attitude plays a crucial role in score gain in L2 studies in particular and in language learning in general now that it has great influence on the learners' success or failure. That is why Karahan (2007, p.84) firmly claims that 'positive attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English'.

1.2 Motivation

The term of motivation is frequently used in relation with a simple explanation of achievement. Over the past decades (or perhaps centuries), much research has been done concerning motivation in psychology and in L2 studies. It is not surprising that such researchers in both fields all have consensus that it is not easy to define the term 'motivation' most satisfactorily since this term has been considered differently by different schools of thought. For instance, Gardner (2006, p.242) opines that "motivation is a very complex phenomenon with many facets [...]. Thus it is not possible to give a simple definition". In language learning, Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011, p.5) unanimously agree that motivation should be seen as process of 'cause' and 'effect' of learning functioning cyclically, which is seen as "positive cycles of high motivation -> high achievement -> high motivation", or conversely in negative cycles of "low motivation -> low achievement -> low motivation". In other words, the two psycholinguists imply that motivation comprises of a complex process, which passes 'different phases' from "initial planning and goal setting, intention formation, task generation, action implementation, action control and outcome evaluation", (ibid, p.6). Dörnyei (2001, pp.19-21) also accentuates that motivation consists of three distinct phases, which initialize with 'generation' referring to "choice motivation", followed by 'maintenance and protection' known as "executive motivation" and eventually marked

by the third phase – the completion of action which is termed “motivational retrospection”. Saying that, they both denote motivation is not ‘static’, but very “dynamic” and usually ‘go through certain ebbs and flows”. Similarly, Williams and Burden (1997) share the same view towards motivation in L2 leaning when they state that motivation is a complex, multi-dimensional construct which embraces an ‘internal and external” duality. In light of learning outcomes. Dörnyei (2001) also proposed three motivational impacts of learning contexts on a learner’s outcome: *Course-specific* motivational components, *Teacher-specific* motivational components, and *Group-specific* motivational components. There have been numerous studies into factors affecting learners’ English outcomes or what shapes second language learning motivation and its link with score achievement. (e.g., Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2000, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Julkunen, 2001; Noels & Clement, 1996; Seki, 2006). Nevertheless, there are few studies investigating rapport between specific motivational aspects and actual performance on globally standardized tests like TOEIC on global scale. As such, this study is an attempt to scrutinize how attitudes and motivation are related to score gain on TOEIC-benchmarked exams.

2. Research objectives

This paper aims to investigate the roles of attitudes and motivation in L2 learning in general and in learning TOEIC in particular among TDTU non-English majors. To achieve this aim, the present study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What generates motivation in TOEIC-learning among a sample of Vietnamese university students?
2. What attitudes do they have towards learning TOEIC at TDTU?
3. Do motivational and attitudinal constructs have any influence on score achievement in TOEIC-based proficiency tests?

3. Research methodology

3.1 Samples

170 university students (56 males) took part in the present study, and they were taught by the researcher. The participants were all non-English majors, at intermediate level, and their English proficiency was of trivial difference based on their performance of the placement tests. Each in-class lesson took four and half hours, and all of the classes met three times weekly, majority of the class hours was spent on TOEIC preparation. The participants in this study are illustrated as follows.

Table 1
Respondents' profile

Gender		Age	Academic year					TOEIC level		
male	female	Mean	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th & 6th year	General English 1&2	English 1,2&3	English 4,5&6
56 (32.9%)	114 (67.1%)	22	0	19 (11.2%)	85 (50%)	47 (27%)	19 (11.2%)	0	1 (0,6%)	169 (99.4%)
N = 170		N = 170, 100%					N = 170			

3.2 Research Instruments

The theoretical background for this study was sought from relevant books, journals, academic articles, internet etc. The instrument used to measure motivational and attitudinal patterns is primarily based on a questionnaire made up from fifteen questions. The questions are classified into three categories: (1) motivational constructs, (2) attitudinal aspects and (3) the influence of motivational and attitudinal orientations on the learning L2 outcome.

3.3 Data analysis

The questionnaire was written in two types: closed-ended and opened-ended questions. The first type is based on Likert scale composed of 5 scales. Such type is employed in the present exploratory study because it is 'the central component in scientific questionnaire design, [...]'. The core of the issue is that when it comes to assessing abstract, mental variables not readily observable by direct means (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, etc.)', (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012, p.174). The other consists of five open-ended questions which elicit respondents for informational answers supporting the 'multi-item scales' questions. Owing to the respondents' limited English proficiency, a translated and well-administered Vietnamese version of the questionnaire conscientiously reviewed a panel of experts was used in parallel with the English version so that the participants were optional to respond to the questions in either English or Vietnamese. The following section will present statistical results based on the questionnaire aimed to answer the three research questions and be followed by detailed analysis and discussion.

4. Findings and discussion

For ease of reference, the results of the research are presented and discussed according to the order of the research objectives. As can be seen form Table 2 that there numerous reasons why TDTU students studying TOEIC ranging from 'A compulsory subject' to communicative purposes. Specifically, the responses from the table indicate that there is strong for a high-scored TOEIC certificate (at least a score of 500), which account for the 'heaviest' weight: 28.4%. Course obligation share the same weight of importance with employment perspectives which receive 21.6% and 21% of the responses respectively. On the other side of the important scale, personal favorites and reading English materials seem to show fewest responses with 2.5% and 7.6% correspondingly. There is also a strong desire for international communication.

What generates motivation in learning TOEIC among TDTU students?

Table 2
Reasons for studying TOEIC

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
A compulsory subject	110	21.6%	64.7%
The need for 500 scores as a graduation requirement	145	28.4%	85.3%
A good tool for employability	107	21.0%	62.9%
A favourite subject	13	2.5%	7.6%
Expectation of reading English materials	39	7.6%	22.9%
Communication in English	96	18.8%	56.5%
Total	510	100.0%	300.0%

Obviously seen from Table 3 that there are numerous reasons for a student to participate in a TOEIC class, which can be ranged from most preferred reason of teacher’s disposition (20.7%), a pleasurable studying context (18%) to the teacher’s language competence, which is foregrounded by the tips and methods of teaching used by the teacher in charge. Indeed, an almost equal weight (roughly 17%) in learners’ motivation for class participation. It is also worthy of note seeing the reasons for classroom participation go against the common expectation of most TOEIC learners when desire for English communication comes the second lowest point of interest (only 7.8%). That can be the truth for almost all internationally-standardized tests like the TOEIC when the learning materials tend to heavily weigh linguistic competence and provide TOEIC preparers with ‘tips’ or test-taking strategies, and it can be a good explanation for a lowest interest (3.9%) in class participation among the participants.

Table 3
Reasons for interest in partaking in TOEIC classes

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Teacher’s easy-to-understand teaching method	109	17.6%	64.9%
Exposure to new vocabulary	92	14.9%	54.8%
An pleasant learning atmosphere	111	18.0%	66.1%
Teacher’s enthusiasm & friendliness	128	20.7%	76.2%
Chances for communication in English	48	7.8%	28.6%
Authentic & interesting learning materials	24	3.9%	14.3%
Teacher’s tips for TOEIC exam	106	17.2%	63.1%
Total	618	100.0%	367.9%

The findings also reveal the teacher is really a (de)motivator for learners’ keenness on TOEIC classes. Figure 1 and Table 4 below explicate why students (do not) want to attend and participate in class activities.

Table 4
Students' keenness on class activities

	(1) not at all	(2) a little	(3) rather	(4) very	(5) extremely
Responses	0	4	18	67	81
Percent	0.0	2.35	10.59	39.41	47.65

Figures show that majority of learners are willing to participate in the class activities, which reflect more than roughly ninety per cent of the learners (in Table 4) say that they are 'very' or 'extremely' keen on partaking in (e.g., volunteering in giving answers to a question set by the teacher) because they feel that their contribution (whether their answers are correct or not) is well-recognized by the teacher's willingness and enthusiasm, shown by their frequency (almost over 70% of 'openness') in giving feedback (in Figure 1).

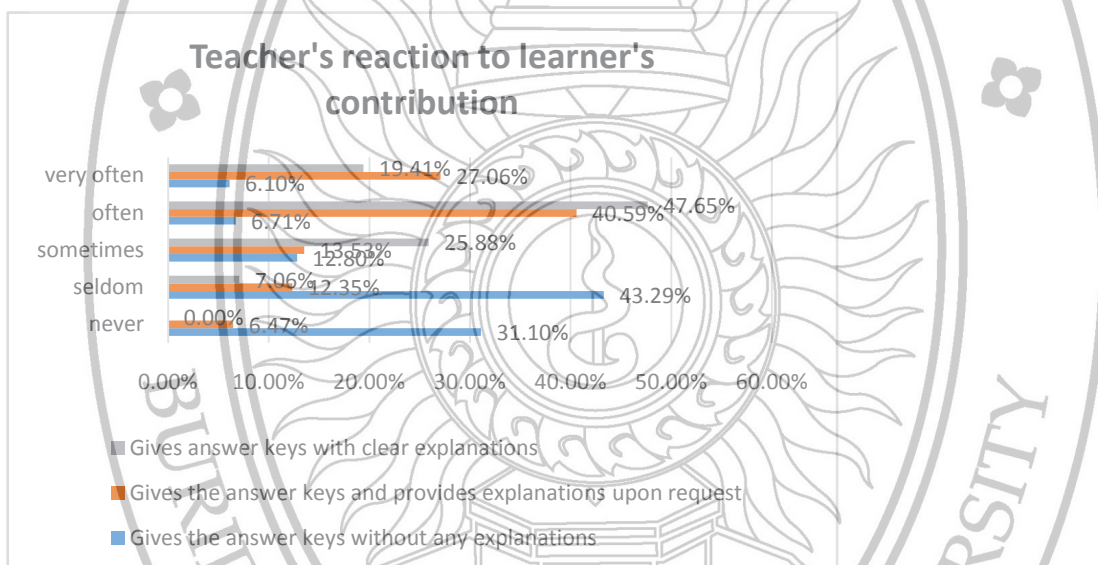


Figure 1. Teacher's reaction to learner's contribution

The following section will illustrate data received by students towards attitudes in learning TOEIC at TDTU.

What attitudes do students have towards learning TOEIC at TDTU?

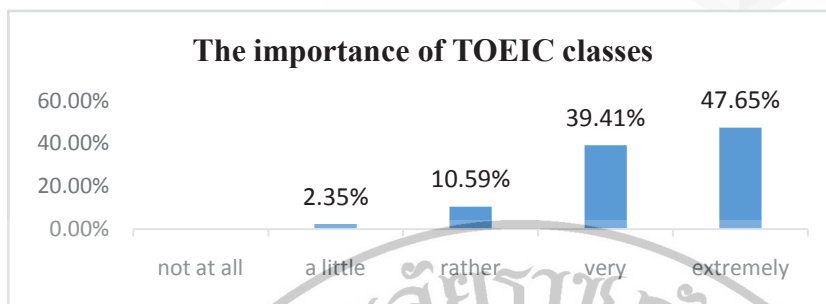


Figure 2. The importance of a TOEIC class

It can be seen from the Figure 2 that 87.1 % of respondents agreed that TOEIC classes are of great importance to them. This number is not surprising to both the researcher and educator since majority of participants are third- and fourth-year students who are going to finish the college life in general at TDTU in particular. This high figure once highlights the importance of a TOEIC certificate undergraduates, which is very stimulating both the learners and the teacher of TOEIC classes as well, and is a worth of attempts for all Non-English majors at TDTU.

Although most participants show their positive attitudes to TOEIC classes, Figure 3 below show that the amount of time they spend on self-studying TOEIC is rather modest.

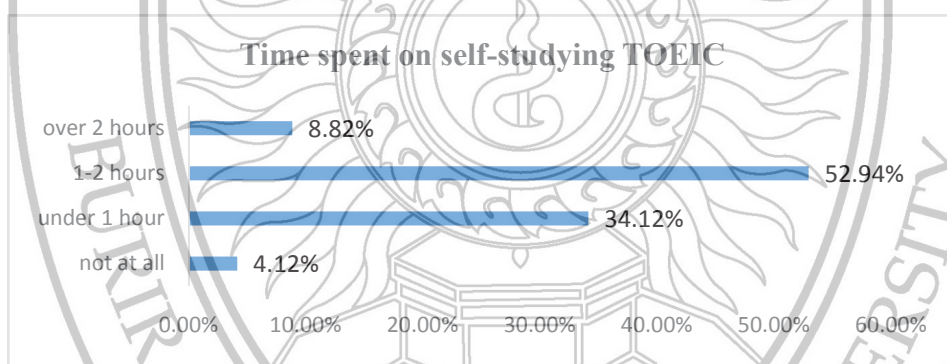


Figure 3. Time spent on self-studying TOEIC by students

38.24% of the respondents in the survey admit that they spend less than one hour a day preparing for a TOEIC test, and the biggest number (52.94%) of students use one to two hours in their time for TOEIC preparation, whereas there are only a minority of participants (8.82%) spending at least two hours daily self-studying TOEIC. That is to say positive attitudes towards TOEIC cannot entail or ensure strong willingness in TOEIC self-study, which may need to be further researched.

Do learners’ attitudes and motivation have any influence on their learning outcomes?

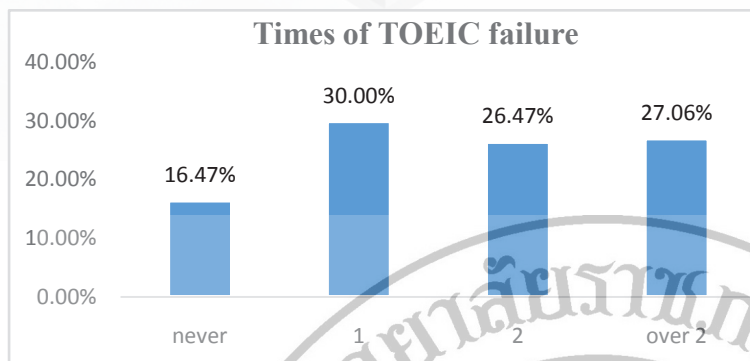


Figure 4. Times of failure in TOEIC exam

Failure in exams is unavoidable for any exam-taker, but 16,5% of the students who show their success in TOEIC exams for the first time in Figure 4 is quite low and alerting to any teacher and institution administrator. It should be noted here that reasons for students to take the TOEIC exam more than once are various, one of which can be explained for their illegibility for exam-taking due to their lack of sufficient class participation/attendance or personal problems such as their health state, schedule conflicts, violation of exam rules and so forth. Anyway, the high percentage (53.53%) students who repeat the TOEIC exam more than two times is worthy concerning and worthy of serious consideration.

Failure in exam can be stemmed from numerous reasons, and Figure 5 below best summarizes them.

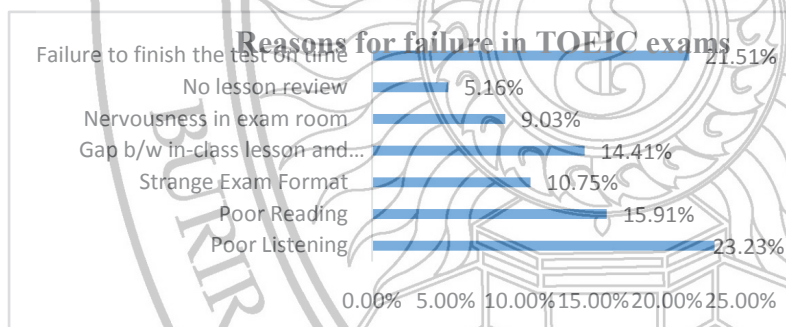


Figure 5. Reasons for failure in TOEIC exams

As illustrated in Figure 5, the two most noticeable reasons lie in students' poor skill in listening (23.23%) and failure to compete the test punctually (21.51%). The first reason may result from age-old grammar-based or reading-oriented high school curricula, and the second reason can easily be explained due to students' lack of self-training and self-studying. 10.75% of failure is also explained by the different test manner. While students are exposed to preparing for paper-based TOEIC exams in classes, they are supposed to take the computer-based TOEIC tests, which more or less influences on the outcomes. What is more, when students who take TOEIC exams again are asked ' **If you ever failed, what were your later scores?**'", roughly 80% of them (equivalent to 142 out of 170 respondents to the questionnaire) report that their second

or even third exam results in the same or even lower scores. Figure 6 below will deal with this issue.

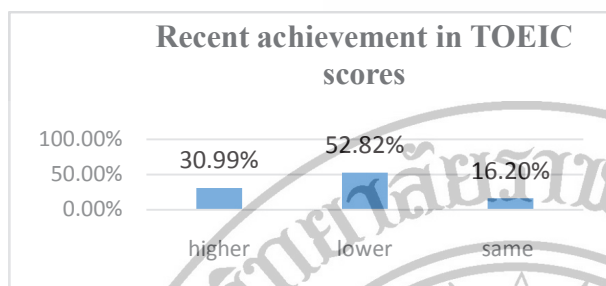


Figure . Recent achievement in TOEIC scores

Results shown in Figure 6 once stress the strong correlation between motivation-attitude and achievement: high motivation leads to positive attitudes which in turns results in high achievement, and vice versus. Nearly forty percent of passing scores show that their recent score gain is higher than their previous ones whereas more than sixty percent of repeated test-takers sadly report equal or lower scores after the first failure.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The present study aimed to investigate TDTU students' attitudes and motivation towards learning TOEIC and examine whether these two factors have any impact of learner's TOEIC score gain. Results show that there are a lot of factors motivating TOEIC learners, which ranging from such extrinsic motivations as a concrete TOEIC high scores, employment potentiality, prerequisite for graduation to intrinsic ones like global integration in communication, fulfillment of reading English materials or mere a favorite subject at school. Though motivated by various factors, majority of TDTU students are extrinsically stimulated by strong desire for achievement. As far as students' attitudes to learning TOEIC are concerned, the findings indicate that a spate of participants in the survey have positive feelings or moods for learning TOEIC. Such type of attitudes is signaled by how important students think participating in TOEIC classes and their contributions to TOEIC activities in classes are. Though negative attitudes among TOEIC learners might also be inferred from findings, they are not very marginal and outweighed by the positives. In reference to the relationship between motivational - attitudinal constructs and the learning outcomes, the results also reveal that motives and moods for studying greatly affect a learner's TOEIC score achievement. It's the high motivation leading to strong desire for a high TOEIC score gain that results in students' time and effort devotion to learning in TOEIC classes. There are still, according to the findings, a body of students who are reported to have repeated TOEIC exams, but those who pass the first exam or never fail any exam show that they find it very motivated and in very good mood for taking part in TOEIC classes. The findings hopefully provide certain implications that should be considered by both English teachers and school administrators in teaching and designing curricula for TOEIC orientation. The following issues should be taken in account. Firstly, certain amount of tasks for self-studying or self-assessment should be allocated besides in-class lessons. Also, listening skills should be more considered since this part accounts for

score weight in a TOEIC test but tends to receive less attention by learners. Secondly, TOEIC lessons are believed to be 'hard' and less 'exciting', which easily demotivates or even reduces learners' motivation, so more provoking and stimulating supplementary materials should be recommended. Last but not least, means of performance assessment is also very important in generating, maintaining and developing a learners' attitudes and motivation. What is recommended here is that if students are trained and familiar with paper-based TOEIC formats, they should be assessed through paper exams rather than through computer-based ones. Put it in a nutshell, this study has been conducted with a view to exploring the possibilities of motivation and attitudes towards learning TOEIC and the link between motivational and attitudinal aspects with the learning outcomes. The study results show that students are numerous reasons for studying TOEIC and have quite positive attitudes towards the significance of a high TOEIC score, and their score gain is likely affected by their motives and feelings for studying TOEIC, which probably draws TDTU TOEIC Center's trainers attention to designing TOEIC- driven syllabi.

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