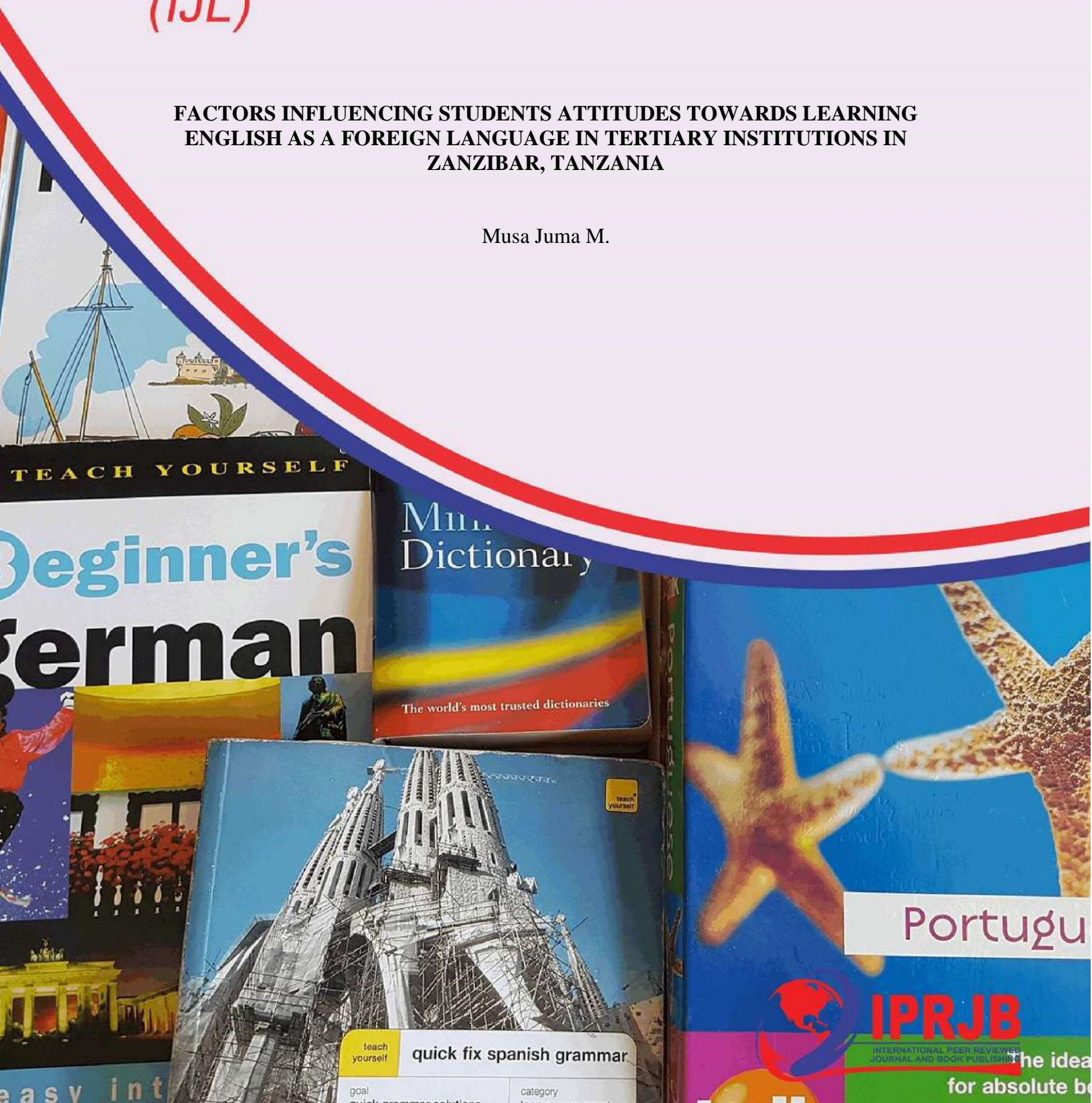


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**FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN
ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA**

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Abstract

Factors Influencing Students Attitudes towards Learning English as a Foreign Language in Tertiary Institutions in Zanzibar, Tanzania



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Purpose: This study aimed at investigating the factors influencing students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in tertiary institutions in Zanzibar.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results revealed that there exist conceptual and contextual gaps relating to the study on the factors influencing students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in tertiary institutions in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Based on initial empirical analysis, it has been determined that attitudinal factors can be categorized into two primary domains: internal and external factors. The internal factors that were taken into consideration comprised of the students' level of interest, self-assurance, vocabulary knowledge, anxiety, and willingness to take risks, inquisitiveness, and awareness of the role of English.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Affective Filter hypothesis, Cognitive theory and the Social learning theory may be used to anchor future studies in the acquisition of second foreign language in tertiary institutions. This research will provide valuable insights for educators of Foreign Languages in tertiary institutions, as well as school administrators and policymakers. Specifically, it aims to identify effective strategies for creating a supportive learning environment that facilitates learners' comprehension and adjustment to foreign language instruction.

Keywords: *Foreign Language (FL), Second Language Acquisition, Attitude, Learners, Tertiary Institutions*

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INTRODUCTION

One of our most precious abilities as a species is our capacity for communication. We wouldn't be able to build our own civilizations or carry out the kinds of routine tasks that enable them without it (Hossain, 2016). One of the most important stages in one's academic development is learning a second language. For instance, De Wilde *et al.* (2020) asserted that language is essential to education because it is the main method for disseminating information. According to the American Educational Research Association (2005), "Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything in education is nothing." Due to the importance of language in learning, learning is highly unlikely to occur if the instructor or teacher and the learner cannot interact with one another (Samson *et al.*, 2012).

Making ensuring that kids learn a second language in class is not simply the teacher's job. As a result, the students themselves are under more responsibility (Xu, 2012). Through intellectual and practical activities, teachers and students work together to shape the appearance and content of their subject matter (Lampert, 2013). As the lecture method predominates in secondary schools and results in passive learning, such a situation is uncommon, especially across all subjects. When I hear, I forget, Cummings (2002) said, according to Wang *et al.* I don't recall things I don't do, but I do remember things I watch. Cummings noted that interactive learning significantly increases student engagement in the classroom. This means that the success of language training in the classroom depends on the pedagogical toolkits of the teachers. This idea supports Pritchard's (2017) claim that student achievement is favourably connected with a teacher's subject-matter expertise.

The English professor also contributes significantly to the linguistics programme. The tenor of discussions and exercises in the classroom are set by the instructor, according to the literature that is currently available (Ellis, 2013). Since effective communication is at the core of effective education, English teachers must possess great communication abilities. To decide what to teach, to whom, and how, a teacher must also be proficient in the language of instruction. It has been established that the characteristics of teachers play a role in pupils' poor academic performance (Stronge, 2018). Furthermore, research has shown that no amount of additional support in later grades will be able to help a child achieve his full academic and personal potential if the first few years of schooling don't create a strong foundation for learning (WHO, 2018).

Students' mentalities are unquestionably important to their ability to learn the target language. The reasons EFL readers choose to read English books are influenced by their opinions on the matter. Additionally, the way in which pupils think has a significant impact on their academic progress (Le *et al.*, 2022). As a result, students' attitudes towards learning English are strongly tied to how well they perform in class. A person's attitude might include a variety of emotions, including those related to their personal identity and relationships with others. Whatever the case, Judge (2017) defines attitude as the tendency to respond favourably or unfavourably to objects, people, institutions, and events.

In his definition of attitude, Hornsey (201) posited that attitude is a cognitive construct utilised by individuals to rationalise their endorsement or repudiation of a concept. To conclude, a positive perspective can serve as a motivating factor in enabling an individual to attain their goals. The

disposition of students towards the language and the subject matter being taught has a significant influence on their motivation to exert effort in the classroom and make progress in their English language proficiency. To effectively tackle the origins of unfavourable language learning attitudes among their students and subsequently foster more favourable attitudes in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, it is recommended that EFL instructors enhance their comprehension of the determinants that impact their students' attitudes.

The importance of one's attitude towards language study is a significant concept. Gardner's (2001, 2002) research on learner attitudes and motivation demonstrated a correlation with their linguistic performance, highlighting the significance of these factors as determinants of language acquisition. According to Fathema's research (2015), there is evidence to suggest that students who possess a positive attitude towards learning tend to exhibit higher levels of academic achievement, despite the fact that attitude may not exert a complete influence on behaviour. Attitudes can be considered both a means of acquiring knowledge and a result of the learning process. According to Gardner (2014), there exists a positive correlation between the learner's attitude towards the language learning task and their success in acquiring a second language. According to their statement, students who exhibit a positive attitude towards the language they are studying are more inclined to achieve success in fulfilling prerequisites such as excelling in language assessments.

Amharic is the predominant language spoken by the majority of Ethiopians, despite the fact that English is utilised for various purposes in certain industries such as the Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and Ethiopian Airlines. In Ethiopia, English is predominantly utilised as a foreign language rather than a secondary language. The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon is the infrequency with which students are afforded the chance to acquire English language skills beyond the confines of the educational setting. The assertion that English holds the position of a secondary official language in the country is deemed to be misleading, as per Trudgill (2017). In Ethiopia, English is utilised in a manner akin to countries where it is regarded as a foreign language, such as Sweden, as opposed to regions where it is considered a second language and employed quite commonly as a lingua franca, such as certain urban locales in Nigeria. Consequently, the primary mode of language acquisition for students is through the utilisation of English as a vehicle for instruction. The efficacy of English as a medium of instruction has been subject to scrutiny by certain members of the academic community, who have raised concerns regarding the extent to which students can attain academic success under such circumstances. Given that English is the predominant medium of instruction across secondary and postsecondary educational settings, students' linguistic competence in the language during instructional hours is typically inadequate.

The medium of instruction in Tanzania's secondary and higher education institutions is English, while elementary school pupils are taught English as a subject. The government establishes the benchmark for educational media. As per the Education and Training Policy of 1995, it is mandated that students who have completed their primary education must possess a certain level of proficiency in the English language to enable them to comprehend and participate in secondary

school lessons that are conducted in English. Despite the policy being in place for over two decades, secondary school students continue to encounter difficulties in both speaking and comprehending the target language. According to the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (1996), the reason behind the secondary school teachers' inability to communicate effectively with their students was attributed to their inadequate English language skills. According to allegations, students were reportedly ill-equipped to transition from Kiswahili, which served as the primary language of instruction in first grade, to English. The aforementioned factor had a detrimental impact on the academic achievement of students in Zanzibar across all subjects that were instructed in the English language, not solely limited to English language itself.

Researchers have found a variety of factors that are related to students' subpar performance. For instance, Ghabool (2012) pointed out that both teachers and students in high school may have trouble using the language correctly. Language, whether spoken or written, is still the main way that the business of education is conducted, according to Havránek (2014). Learning cannot take place if there is a communication gap between the student and the teacher due to a language barrier. For this reason, debates about whether English or Swahili is a better language to teach in Tanzanian classrooms have taken place. The choice to instruct in English rather than Kiswahili at the secondary level was predetermined for many academics, including (Rutalemwa, 2018). The children suggested using Kiswahili because they were having trouble speaking English clearly.

As it will be extremely expensive to translate textbooks and train teachers in Kiswahili terminology, and as it will deter students and their families who prefer English, Mosha (2014) believes that employing Kiswahili will not help the educational system. Tanzania has not been able to use Kiswahili as a teaching language in educational institutions beyond primary schools, despite several claims to the contrary.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous findings pertaining to the viewpoints of students regarding the study of English language have been revealed through local research. Abidin (2012) conducted a study on student attitudes towards learning a foreign language and found that students held negative perceptions towards their English language learning. The current study aims to gain a deeper comprehension of the various factors that impact students' attitudes towards the study of English as a foreign language (EFL). This distinguishes the present study from prior research endeavours that focused exclusively on exploring students' emotions towards English coursework. Contrary to prevailing assumptions, the perspectives of students are not the sole focus of global research endeavours pertaining to the domain of second/foreign language acquisition. The confirmation of the distinctiveness of the researcher's present work in comparison to that of other researchers has been established.

In the Tanzanian context, it is imperative to conduct research on factors that can enhance language learning outcomes for students, given their suboptimal language proficiency. As indicated, the influence of students' attitudes has a significant impact on their academic performance (Komba, 2015). Thus, the main focus of the present study is concerned with the investigation and

establishment of the factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language among tertiary institutions

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is a theoretical framework within the field of second language acquisition that posits that the emotional state, attitudes, and motivations of a learner can exert an influence on their capacity to acquire a novel language. As per the theory, an elevated affective filter has the potential to impede the process of acquiring a language, whereas a reduced affective filter can expedite it. The concept of the affective filter pertains to a psychological obstacle that may arise due to negative emotions, including but not limited to anxiety, fear, and boredom. According to Ni (2012), in the event that a language learner encounters adverse emotions during the process of acquiring a second language, their affective filter may become elevated, potentially resulting in decreased capacity to effectively process and retain newly acquired linguistic input.

Conversely, when a learner experiences positive emotions, their affective filter tends to decrease, leading to heightened receptivity towards novel linguistic input. Successful acquisition of a new language is more likely to occur when a learner exhibits motivation, engagement, and comfort within the language learning environment. The affective filter can be influenced by various factors such as individual personality traits, prior language acquisition encounters, and cultural heritage. According to Nath *et al.* (2017), individuals who exhibit elevated levels of anxiety or low self-esteem may be more susceptible to a heightened affective filter, whereas those who possess favourable attitudes towards language acquisition and are situated in a supportive learning milieu may be more prone to a diminished affective filter.

The affective filter hypothesis underscores the significance of establishing a favourable learning atmosphere and providing emotional support to learners in the process of acquiring a second language. Educators can enhance language learning outcomes by mitigating negative emotions and fostering positive attitudes, thereby enabling learners to overcome the affective filter.

The Cognitive Theory

The Cognitive Theory is a theoretical construct that elucidates the process of learning through the active construction of knowledge, which is based on prior experiences and mental processes. The theory posits that in the domain of acquiring a second language, learners leverage their pre-existing knowledge, cognitive aptitudes, and tactics to assimilate and interpret novel information pertaining to the target language (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

As per the Cognitive Theory, individuals who are acquiring a second language undergo a tripartite progression consisting of the input stage, the processing stage, and the output stage (Dewaele, 2018). During the initial phase, individuals acquire novel linguistic knowledge pertaining to the desired language by means of auditory or visual comprehension. During the processing stage, individuals utilize their cognitive faculties to comprehend the novel linguistic input. This may involve recognizing patterns, establishing connections between new information and pre-existing knowledge, and drawing logical conclusions. During the output stage, language learners generate linguistic output by means of either oral or written communication.

The Cognitive Theory places significant emphasis on metacognition, which pertains to the learners' consciousness and regulation of their individual learning processes. The implementation of metacognitive strategies, namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating, can facilitate learners in regulating their learning process and enhancing their proficiency in language. The Cognitive Theory posits that learners' language learning outcomes can be influenced by their beliefs regarding language acquisition, including their perceived ability, motivation, and attitudes towards the target language. According to Bursalı and Öz (2018), the acquisition of language can be facilitated by favourable beliefs and attitudes, whereas unfavourable beliefs and attitudes can impede it.

To summarize, the Cognitive Theory posits that the acquisition of a second language is a cognitive process that requires active engagement, whereby learners construct knowledge through the integration of prior experiences and mental processes. The significance of metacognition, learners' beliefs, and attitudes in fostering efficacious language acquisition is emphasized.

The Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory is a theoretical construct that places significant emphasis on the influence of social interaction and observation in the process of learning. Within the realm of second language acquisition, this theoretical framework posits that individuals have the ability to attain novel linguistic competencies by means of engaging in discourse with fellow learners and proficient speakers of the desired language. Allan (2017) is cited. As per the Social Learning Theory, the acquisition of language takes place through three fundamental mechanisms, namely observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Language acquisition involves the process of observing and emulating the linguistic patterns of others, followed by receiving feedback and reinforcement on one's language proficiency. Various modes of interaction, including face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication, and exposure to media in the target language, can facilitate social learning. The acquisition of language can be enhanced through the assistance of peers who offer both encouragement and support. The Social Learning Theory places emphasis on the significance of modelling, which pertains to the exhibition of language usage by individuals. According to Fang *et al.* (2017), individuals can acquire knowledge by means of observing and emulating the linguistic patterns of proficient speakers, including native speakers and highly skilled second language speakers.

Moreover, the Social Learning Theory places significant emphasis on the role of context and culture in the process of acquiring language skills. The utilisation of language is impacted by societal conventions, cultural customs, and the communicative objectives of language. In order to proficiently communicate in the target language, it is imperative for learners to possess a comprehensive comprehension of the cultural and social contexts in which the language is utilised. The Social Learning Theory posits that the acquisition of language is facilitated by social interactions, observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement. This statement underscores the significance of modelling, peer influence, and cultural and social environments in facilitating successful language acquisition.

Empirical Review

Bulolo (2022) conducted a study on the factors affecting students' attitude towards learning Chinese as a second language: a case study of the Confucius institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College in Uganda. The scholarly article examined individuals' attitudes towards acquiring Chinese as a secondary language and their desired outcomes from the learning process. The present research employed a quantitative approach to collect data by administering surveys to students enrolled in Chinese language courses at the Confucius Institute, Makerere University, and Luyanzi College. The study involved the participation of 50 students from Makerere University and 32 students from Luyanzi College. The research findings indicate that maintaining a positive attitude remains the most crucial factor in acquiring proficiency in Chinese as a second language at both the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College. The majority of responses indicated that students expressed a favourable disposition towards acquiring proficiency in the Chinese language, citing career advancement and entrepreneurial prospects as primary motivating factors. There exist certain factors that impede students' motivation to acquire proficiency in Chinese, including insufficient learning resources and opportunities for language practise, as well as demographic variables such as age and gender.

Xuan and Thang (2022) studied the factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in a tertiary institution of Vietnam. his study was conducted qualitatively, using structured interviews to collect data from 69 first-year students. The findings of the research indicated that the viewpoints of students were impacted by both their internal and external surroundings. The perspectives of students regarding English study were influenced by various factors such as their confidence, willingness to take risks, anxiousness, curiosity, and understanding of the future significance of the language. Nonetheless, the study has revealed several extraneous factors, including educational materials, subject matter, and course structure, in addition to personal attributes of instructors, such as attitude and proficiency.

Getie (2020) studied factors affecting Ethiopian high school students' attitudes towards English learning. The data utilised for the investigation was obtained through the completion of a survey by a total of 103 distinct students. Furthermore, group interviews were utilised as a means of discussing the topic at hand. The survey results indicate that the participants exhibited positive attitudes towards enhancing their proficiency in the English language. Social circumstances were thought to have a positive impact on the perspectives of pupils. Conversely, students exhibited a greater prevalence of unfavourable attitudes towards acquiring English language skills when educational environmental factors were considered. The variables under consideration encompassed English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors and instructional settings. Conversely, students were incentivized to attain elevated levels of knowledge by means of their course materials.

Ahmed (2015) conducted a qualitative analysis to investigate the attitudes towards English language learning among EFL learners at UMSKAL in Malaysia. A total of 238 participants were administered a questionnaire consisting of 19 items for the purpose of data collection. The findings exhibited a highly positive perspective towards acquiring proficiency in the English language and

employing it in diverse settings. The results of the study indicated that a significant proportion of students experienced feelings of anxiety or apprehension when it came to adhering to classroom directives. The diverse viewpoints of students across different academic fields regarding the significance of acquiring English proficiency, and the particular areas in which they perceive its applicability, underscore the inadequacy of a uniform syllabus or pedagogical approach.

Abidin *et al.* (2012) in the Libyan educational context, aimed to explore whether there is any difference in students' attitudes towards English learning regarding their demographics, including gender, field, and years of study English. The study was conducted with the involvement of 180 students from secondary schools. The study's results indicate that the students from Libya exhibited unfavourable attitudes towards the acquisition of English as a second language. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that the perceptions of the participants were impacted by their gender and professional domains.

Rahimi (2012) also conducted a study on the attitude towards EFL textbooks as a predictor of attitude towards learning English as a foreign language. The study involved the administration of the Student English Book Evaluation Scale (SEBES) and Attitude towards Foreign Language Learning Questionnaire to a sample of 244 high school students (A-FLL). The study involved the participation of 244 secondary school students. The results of the study revealed that Iranian students exhibited a predominantly positive attitude towards the acquisition of English as a non-native language. However, their perceptions regarding the efficacy of English textbooks were somewhat ambivalent. Research has demonstrated that one's disposition towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks can serve as an indicator of their general attitude towards learning the English language.

Chalak and Kassaian (2010) investigated factors affecting students' attitudes towards English learning in the Iranian context. The study comprised a total of 108 participants who were pursuing a major in English Translation. The Attitude, Motivation Test Battery, comprising of eight distinct domains, was employed by the researchers. The aforementioned domains encompassed factors such as interest in the English language, encouragement from parents, level of motivation, attitudes towards learning English and English-speaking individuals, integrative orientation, desire to acquire English language skills, and instrumental orientation. Based on the results, it can be inferred that both the instrumental and integrative methodologies had a noteworthy effect on the participants' degree of motivation towards education.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

FINDINGS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Contextual Gaps and Geographical Gaps

Studies by Bulolo (2022); Ahmed (2015); Xuan and Thanh (2022); Rahimi (2012); Chalak and Kassaian (2010); Abidian (2012) and Getie (2020) presented a geographical gap because none of the above studies were conducted anywhere in East Africa. This implies that the findings may not be applicable in Zanzibar, Tanzania since the social systems and economic growth statuses differ from country to country. This current study seeks to address this gap.

Conceptual Gaps

Bulolo's (2022) study identified a conceptual gap in the literature, prompting an investigation into the factors that influence students' attitudes towards learning Chinese as a second language in Ugandan institutions. In contrast, our present study is concerned with the learning of English as a foreign language. The present study is centred on the examination of the attitudes of learners in tertiary institutions towards the acquisition of a foreign language, in contrast to the investigations conducted by Getie (2020) and Rahimi (2012) which explored the attitudes of high school students towards the same subject matter. The study conducted by Rahimi (2012) aimed to examine the correlation between students' attitudes towards English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks and their overall attitude towards learning the language. The present study endeavours to address this void by examining the attitudes of students towards the acquisition of English as a second language, specifically their individual characteristics and personality traits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was intentionally designed to examine the factors that impact students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in tertiary institutions located in Zanzibar. Tertiary institutions are widely recognised for their crucial role in fulfilling societal demands for human resources. The literature analysis reveals that attitudinal factors can be categorised into two primary domains: internal and external factors. The internal factors that were considered in this study encompassed variables such as the students' level of interest, self-confidence, knowledge of lexicon, anxiety levels, willingness to take risks, curiosity, and awareness of the role of English. The attitudes of students towards their English learning were significantly impacted by external factors, including teaching and learning materials, teaching contents, a heavy curriculum, and teacher-related factors.

This research endeavour holds potential benefits for a multitude of stakeholders. Initially, it is imperative for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to acknowledge their impact on their pupils' perspectives regarding the acquisition of the English language and their academic achievements as a whole. It is recommended that individuals refrain from engaging in disruptive

behaviours both within and outside of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructional settings. Such behaviours may include tardiness, unexplained absences, and the use of humour that is deemed inappropriate. In addition, it is imperative that individuals cultivate their passion, amiability, pedagogical expertise and aptitude, professionalism, communicative tactics, dispositions towards learners and the field, conduct, and instructional obligations.

School administrators and policymakers possess an opportunity to comprehend the inclination of students towards language acquisition and the factors that influence this inclination. Consequently, it is possible to strategize additional professional development training for EFL instructors to mitigate the negative influences that impede students' favourable dispositions towards English language acquisition. This approach can also facilitate the enhancement of teaching efficacy among instructors. Additionally, it is imperative to elucidate the students' discontentment regarding the rigorous curriculum and unsuitable pedagogical resources. As a result, educators have the ability to modify these elements in order to align with the varying aptitudes of their pupils.

The current findings can provide a profound understanding of the Tanzanian educational context for researchers interested in investigating the factors that influence the attitudes of EFL students towards their language learning. Additionally, the present investigation proposes potential enhancements based on its identified constraints.

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