

## A study of non-English majoring students' proactivity toward English language acquisition at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry

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### ABSTRACT

Learners' ability and attitude are usually the most important determinants of language acquisition success. If students have passive initiatives in thinking and acting, it might have negative consequences. The study's goals are to investigate students' proactivity in learning English, discover the disparities in factors faced by three specializations, and draw some teaching implications at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI). This study used qualitative descriptive research of 108 non-English-majoring students from Business Administration, Food Technology, and Mechanical Engineering who attended a fifteen-week English 1 course. The survey of three questions with twelve items covers behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of language attitudes. The findings reveal that students generally have an average proactive attitude toward English. On the other hand, the three majors are very different in terms of gender and attitudes toward English. Mechanical students had a little less proactive attitude than students in the other two specializations.

**Keywords:** English, students, teachers, attitude, proactivity

### Introduction

English is usually recognized as a valuable language that should be taught and can help people live better lives. There are several factors to consider in the teaching and learning process, one of which is proactivity. Teachers must be aware of their students' proactivity to give successful teaching and learning. The study of proactive attitude aspects is crucial because proactive attitude variables have been recognized as a key component in predicting second or foreign language performance and achievement. They serve as a motivator to study in the first place and then as a source of encouragement throughout the difficult process of learning a second or foreign language. Baumeister RF& Bushman BJ (2007) assume that "Self-initiated behavior that seeks to address a problem before it occurs," Instead of responding to a circumstance, proactive behavior involves taking action ahead of it. Rather than adjusting to a situation or waiting for anything to happen, it refers to taking control of the situation and initiating early

changes. " In actuality, a student's attitude toward language learning might affect their capacity to learn a language. According to Lightbown & Spada (2006), students will want to interact more with language speakers if they have positive feelings about them (P.63). It means that if students are interested in learning the target language, they will be more motivated to do so. Students will be motivated to learn the target language joyously as a result of their good attitude towards it. In reality, all non-English majoring students are required to take English as a basic official subject. Students' success in learning is dependent on proactive actions and attitudes. The current research is a moderate attempt to address the most important issue for HUFU students: how proactive they are.

### Literature review

Garrett, Coupland & Williams (2003) point out that a linguistic attitude is an attitude toward a language and its speakers. Language attitude includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Prejudices shape the cognitive aspect regarding a language and its speakers, which are established through cognition—both individual and communal efforts. The affective aspect is concerned with how individuals feel about a language, whereas the behavioral aspect is concerned with how people act toward a language, whether consciously or unconsciously. Those three characteristics are not haphazardly developed. A variety of circumstances shapes language attitudes. According to Ciscel et al. (2000), "language attitude" is the socio-personal and social-economic value given to a particular language that is developed through interactions within a speech community. The socio-personal context refers to how a language is linked to sentimental attachment, which means it is linked to personal attachments like personal or group identification and a cultural legacy. The socio-economic context, on the other hand, is connected to instrumental attachment, which indicates that the language is used as a tool to gain easier access to better living conditions, such as being able to secure a better job because of the ability to speak a certain language, stated by Eastman (1983). Like many other behavioral elements, "attitude" is one of the most important features of one's personality. It includes psychological, emotional, and behavioral aspects. It leads to the interpretation of a person's words and actions.

Al-Sobhi et al. (2018) published an article titled "*Arab ESL Secondary School Students' Attitude Toward English Spelling and Writing*," which said that students with a positive attitude are more enthusiastic about learning the language, whereas students with a defeatist attitude are more apathetic about learning the language. Attitude, like many other behavioral factors, is one of the most important aspects of one's personality. It takes psychological, emotional, and behavioral elements into account. It results in a particular level of engagement in certain expected human activities. A person's attitude refers to how he/she sees objects or actions. It examines a person's words and behavior and expresses his/her moods. The learner's attitude is one of the most crucial aspects of learning a foreign language. It is critical to capture children's attention and motivate them to learn, even though numerous investigators exerted efforts to examine challenges related to an EFL setting. Gardner, R.C.(1985) assumes that enthusiasm is

seen as a critical component of language learning success and significantly impacts the efficiency and productivity of English language learning. As a component of motivation, the researcher analyzes attitudes in language acquisition. His concept of motivation includes positive attitudes toward learning the language. He goes on to say that whether or not a student acquires a foreign language is determined by their attitude toward foreign people in general, as well as the target group and language in particular. Furthermore, "a proper and cheerful attitude is vital for language acquisition success," stated Lifrieri (2005). As a result, a thorough understanding of the student's motivation and attitude is essential (p.14).

### *Research questions*

The following questions were formulated:

1. How often do students present their opinions and questions in the classroom?
2. What drives students to study English?
3. What emotional obstacles do students encounter in their English learning?

We think that by addressing these concerns in this study, we will be able to better understand EFL learners' proactiveness, particularly by encouraging them to converse in the second language.

### *Participants*

This sample included one hundred eight students from the Business Administration, Food Technology, and Mechanical departments. Thirty-six students are in each department. All Mechanical participants were boys. 53 out of 108 are males. The majority of them had started learning English in sixth grade. Additionally, they also followed the book 'Life' by John Hughes, Helen Stephenson, and Paul Dummett (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) for the first semester before the study. In other words, they had nearly four months to study English by the teaching methods of HUFU teachers. Therefore, they had enough experience learning English to express their proactivity clearly. The students were informed that they could still take the course even if they did not want to participate in the research. Students did not receive any compensation for their involvement in the experiment. No one, including university administrators, would have access to the data. They also realized that the data collected would only be used for the study. The survey participants were not subjected to the writer's viewpoint. The interviewees generously shared some useful suggestions for a better solution. The answers to the questions were fully up to the participants. During recess, the researcher interviewed some students in a few classrooms, and the outcomes were meticulously recorded. Some students do an online Google Form survey questionnaire. The result is expressed in figures.

### *Design of the Study*

The researcher uses the research method to get information. Four items were included in each question. There were three questions in the survey. Student's behaviors in learning English were covered in Question 1. Students' Cognition in Learning English was covered in Question 2. Emotion is the final one with the questions. The study expects students to give the author

reliable information to get reliable information affecting the proactive attitudes of HUFU students.

### Results/Findings and discussion

*Findings for the RQ 1: How often do students present their opinions and questions in the classroom?*

Vietnam's Ministry of Education, like that of any other Asian country, has devoted particular attention to this language. Despite major efforts to improve students' English skills through revised school curricula, teacher training courses, and the use of modern technologies, learners' attitudes about learning the language demand more attention. Researchers from throughout the world have discovered that identifying students' attitudes toward learning English is critical in guiding their efforts to improve their language learning prospects (Al Nooursi, 2013; Abidin, Mohammadi & Alzwari, 2012; Tahaineh & Daana, 2013). HUFU has lately expanded to cover over ten majors with over 20,000 students. They are primarily from various parts of the country. They continue their research once the outbreak has passed. English is part of the basic system. Even if students must achieve a TOEIC score of 450 or 500 before graduating, they must all pass three English levels. As a result, learning English during school hours is needed. There are three parts to the focus group items for students. Each portion of the questionnaire was item-by-item evaluated to focus on three factors: attitude, cognition, and emotion.

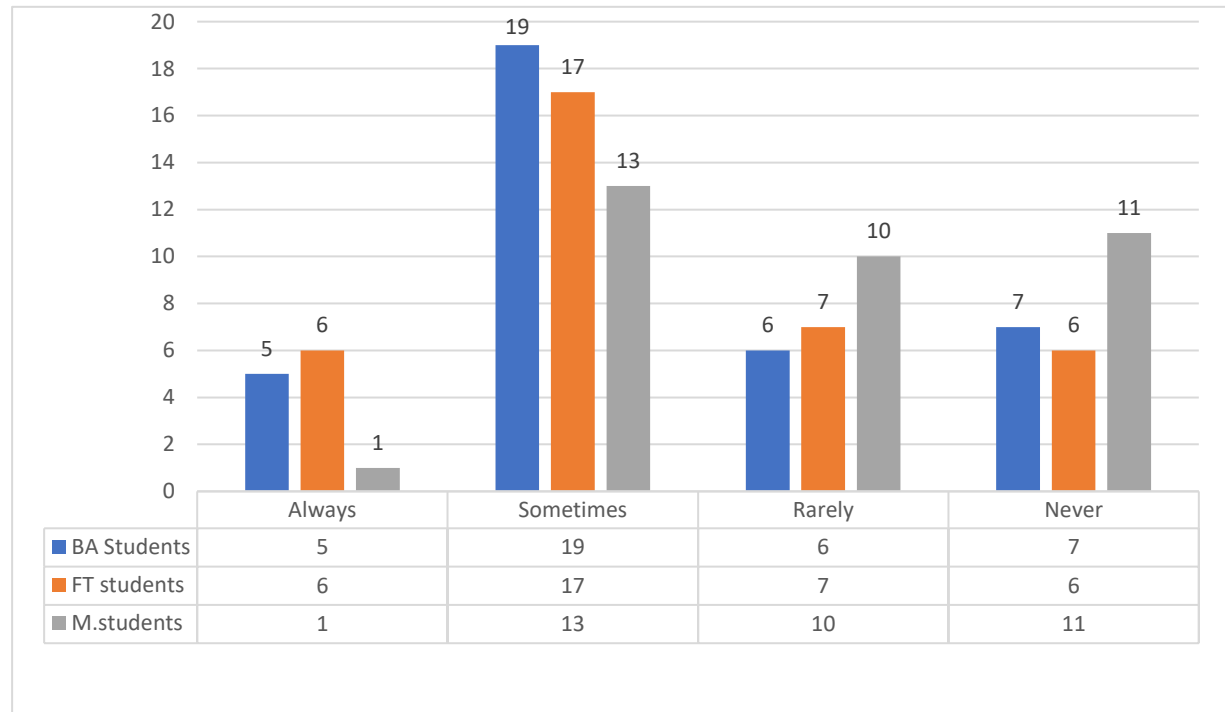


Figure 1. Analysis of the behavioral factors influencing English learning by majors

Question 1 is about behavior towards English learning.

According to the responses of the students. The findings appear to be significantly different from those of 108 research participants from three majors who were under four degrees of frequency. Based on the learners' responses, it was discovered that:

1- Only 12 out of 108 students have an active interest in studying English, with Mechanical students having the least.

2- While 49 students stated that they occasionally raise their hands in class, mechanical students are less likely to do so.

3- There are 23 students who say they rarely participate in English classroom activities, while Mechanical students make up about half of the total.

4- 11 Mechanical students believe that they never offer their thoughts in English classes, although they only do it in the left ones.

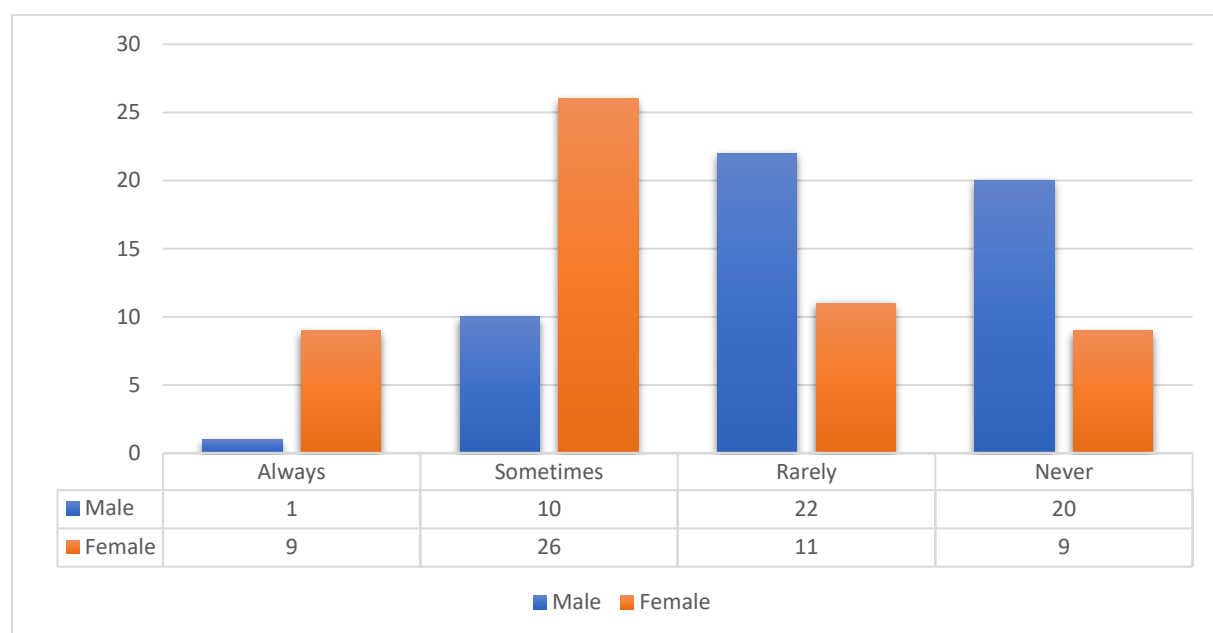


Figure 2. Analysis of the behavioral factors influencing English learning by gender.

Such effects are less common as a function of gender and major, particularly in mechanics. Gender also has an impact on learning; women are more likely to have a positive attitude and be driven to learn a language. Proactivity was judged in the study not only by active attitudes but also by an oral presentation in a second language. Presentations or demonstrating enthusiasm in class are optional activities for participating students, but they demonstrate that understudies who rarely ask questions or give their ideas in class are less proactive. In summary, HUFU students have a moderately engaged approach to English study. Even if they dislike participating in any educational process, the majority of pupils possess a passive attitude.

*Findings for the RQ 2: What drives students to study English?*

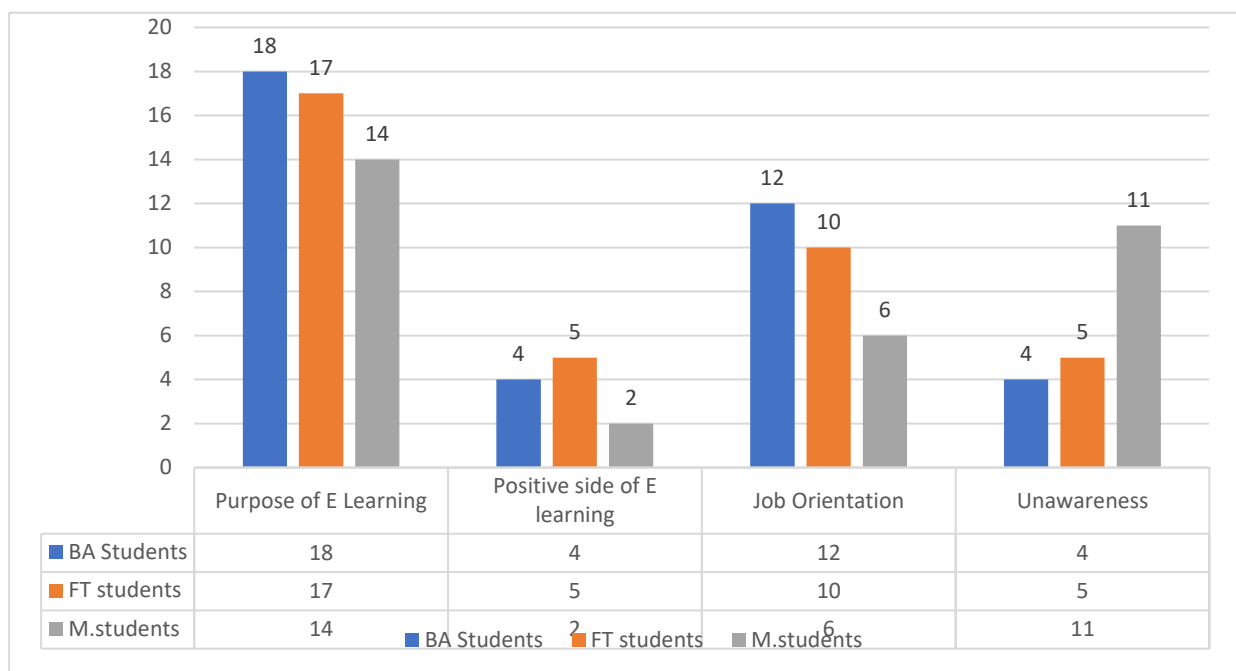


Figure 3. Analysis of the cognitive factors influencing English learning by majors

Question 2 is about the cognition factor towards English learning. Based on the responses of the learners, it reveals that:

- 1- 49 of 108 learners are sure of the purpose of English learning.
- 2- Only 11 students realize the positive side of learning English.
- 3- Only 28 are aware of the relevance of English learning in jobs.
- 4- Unawareness thought of English language learners are a group of 20 students.

The results suggest that nearly half of students (45,5%) said learning English is important for passing school final examinations. They study English for practical purposes. They cannot foretell the future, and it is difficult to know whether their activities will have positive or negative implications. Many HUFU students are not proactive in their English learning for this reason. This is one of utilitarianism's limits. Similarly, the findings reveal that nearly 20% (20) of learners who study English in an unconscious condition do so for the sole purpose of being forced to do this because they have no other option. In other words, unfocused English learners have not received defined their goals and are not sure what they really want. Some students simply lack the ability to learn languages. They perform poorly in English, and as a result, their total grades suffer.

The results reveal that the other goals of HUFU students are to focus on the positive aspects of English study. They said they learn English because it is a universal language and that they use it for things like traveling, watching a movie, listening to music, and so on. Unfortunately, only 11 students (approximately 10%) of the students responded. At the same time, 28 students (approximately 25,9 %) of HUFU acknowledged that learning English will enable them to get a career in the future. Students in Business Administration have the best learning approach, but Mechanical students have the least. Economic students, on average, are more proactive about English acquisition than technology students. However, the author wishes that the cognition component's HUFU students will be improved in the future. As a result, learners with a clear aim perform at an average level; they lack a long-term strategy and hence lack a vigorous youth with such a passion for language learning.

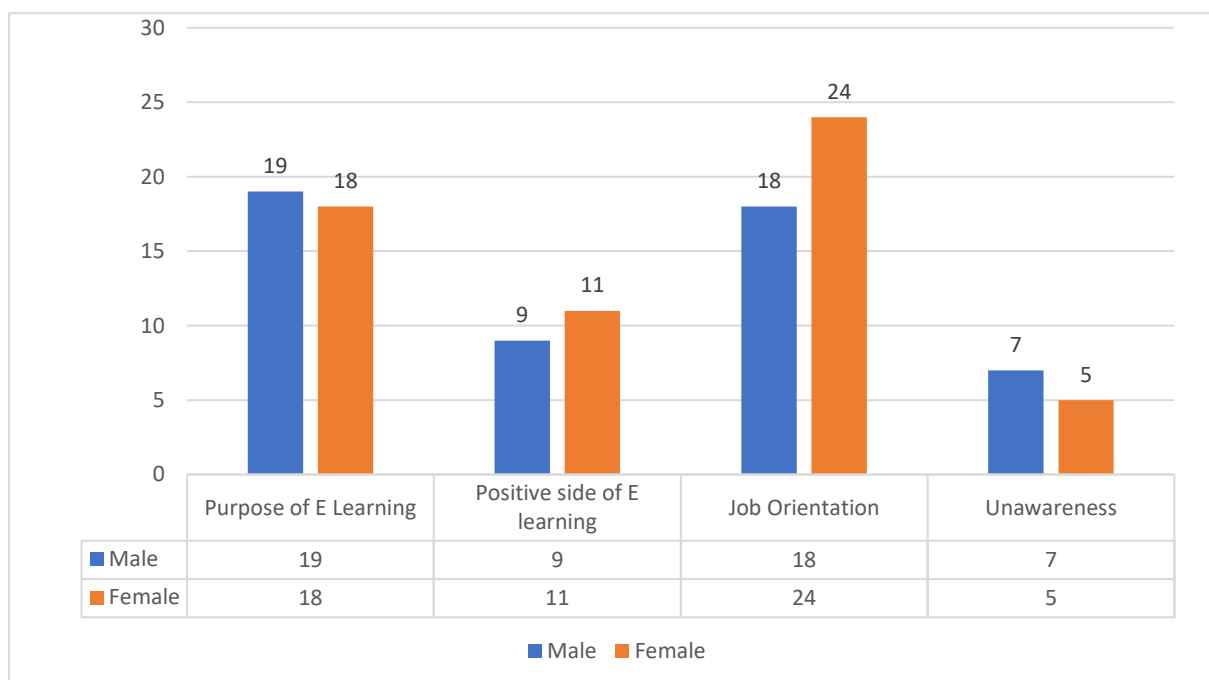


Figure 4. Analysis of the cognition factors influencing English learning by gender

The data gathered from the teachers' questionnaires revealed that the majority of students are uninterested in English study in general. No significant component compelled learners to think positively about their educational achievements. It was determined that the learners' backgrounds played a role in their negative attitudes about education in general and English in particular. Furthermore, it was discovered that only a few students had a vision for their future careers that was not related to entertainment. They are unaccustomed to trials or hard labor. There are no behavioral responses at all. That, too, appears to be a compulsion. In terms of gender, finding cognition lowers. Gender also reflects learning as well; females often have parent strategies in English learning than males.

*What emotional obstacles do students get in their English learning?*

The impact of emotional experiences on motivation and conduct in academic environments varies, according to Pekrun and Perry (2014). Negative activating emotions (e.g., despair and boredom) are frequently (but not always) related to avoidance. They hence might weaken achievement motivation due to low-control evaluations (hopelessness) or perceived lack of incentives to engage in academic tasks. Depending on the study assessments, negative activation emotions might lead to approach or avoidance behaviors. Fear and anxiety, for example, are both negative activating emotions, but fear is approach-related—often prompted by assessments of obstruction and unfairness—while anxiety is linked to avoidance of risky situations.

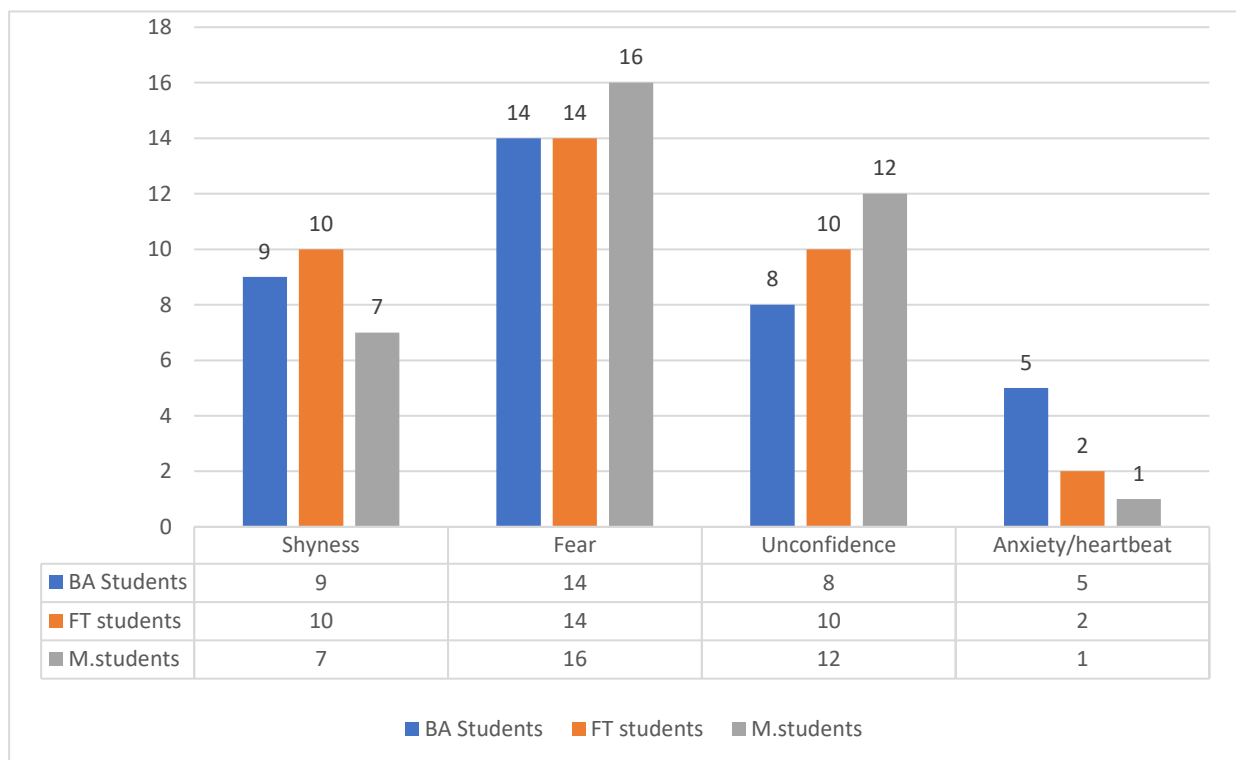


Figure 5. Analysis of the emotional factors influencing English learning by major

Table 5 reveals the negative emotions of three majors, with 44 replies (40,8%) stating that they are terrified of making mistakes in the classroom. Because they lack confidence, the majority of 30 respondents (27.8%) avoid interacting with their peers and professors. Similarly, 26 (24%) of respondents said they are afraid of standing out in class by expressing their thoughts or asking questions. Furthermore, 8 (7.4%) respondents acknowledged their anxiety and higher heartbeats when conversing in a foreign language with other students or professors. In overall, the findings revealed that the level of emotional variables changes based on the learner's psychology. In particular, mechanical students deal with the fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence more than business administration students and food technology students, but they endure feelings of shyness and anxiety less than the other ones. The issue is that some negative emotions act as a barrier to students' classroom engagement and test performance. An



interesting similarity was found in the findings of the paper's Islam, Ahmad, and Islam (2022). The results show that about 40% of both public and private schools face anxiety in speaking English. The writers also suggested that the EFL learners should be more self-motivated. At the same time, the teachers should motivate them in the class so that they take the initiative and willingly start trying to overcome their speaking problems. In addition, another finding from Le, X. M., & Le, T. T. (2022) revealed nearly 20% of participants responded that their anxiety made it extremely difficult to participate in-class activities. As a result, individuals may be scared to study English, particularly when it comes to presentation skills.

Patterns were observed in the data in relation to the factors of behavior, cognition, and emotion, which are components of proactivity. In terms of behavior, HUPI students have average active behaviors, and most learners are unwilling to participate in study activities. Business Administration students and Food Technology students are more motivated than mechanical students. Furthermore, they show a better awareness of English learning than mechanical students. Females disclose active attitudes toward studying. Another factor revealed in the article is that nearly half of the respondents' emotions relate to the state of fear of making mistakes. Some emotional obstacles lead to a limitation of language acquisition.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It was concluded that the students don't possess proactivity towards education in general. The issue of behavior becomes more crucial in the case of learning English due to many levels. There are multiple reasons why students are generally disinterested in learning as a whole. Items identified several mediating factors as affecting the direction of impact on learning and achievement following the experience of negative emotions. These were mostly mentioned in relation to fear, and a few were mentioned in other feelings.

Three implications could be considered based on the research findings. To begin, non-English major students should be excited about learning practice; repetition of particular acts makes their language acquisition easier, allowing them to overcome some psychological barriers. Second, HUPI students should identify particular English learning objectives. Consider some of the beneficial aspects of English that will benefit them in the future. Finally, the encouragement they receive from their teachers, parents, and friends is crucial to our emotional development. If a student adopts the mindset of "always giving it their all and learning from their mistakes," they will have a more optimistic outlook on their capacity to learn. They have long-term techniques for learning the language as a result of this. All of the above, the article realizes that with active behaviors, thorough cognition, and positive emotions, HUPI students can get proactivity in English learning.

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**Biodata**

Ngo Thi Ngoc Hanh was born in Ben Tre, Vietnam, in 1977. From 1999 to 2004, she was a high school English teacher in Ben Tre. Then, from 2004 to 2022 she worked as a teacher of English at the Department of Foreign Languages, HUFU, as a Lecturer. She received her Master of BA from Apollos University in 2007. She is now in charge of topics such as speaking, English for Basic Marketing, and commercials. Her current research interests include non-English majoring students' proactivity toward English language acquisition.