



# AN INVESTIGATION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDYING ENGLISH AS A SPECIALIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THAI EFL STUDENTS AND A CONSIDERATION OF THE ROLE OF THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF IDDHIPADA

Varunee Surayotee

Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University,  
Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

Corresponding author E-mail: varunee.s@nrru.ac.th

Received 17 October 2023; Revised 21 December 2023; Accepted 25 December 2023

## Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** English is an international language spoken in many countries. In addition, almost every country in the world teaches the English language in schools and colleges. In Thailand, English is taught and learned as a foreign language at every level of education. It is widely accepted that attitude and set of beliefs about learning a foreign language, especially English, can influence the efficiency of the students in language classes. The objectives of this study consist of: First, investigating undergraduate students' attitudes towards four main aspects or domains that normally contribute to studying English as a foreign language comprising attitudes towards English-speaking people, emotional attitudes, interest in studying English, and motivational orientation; Second, exploring the significant differences between students' responses according to gender and year of study.

**Methodology:** The participants in this study were 190 English-majored students from Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, which included 20 males and 170 females. Among these, there were 44 freshmen, 40 sophomores, 50 juniors and 56 seniors. The research instrument was a questionnaire through which four domains were explored. The SPSS software was used to analyze the data collected from the study participants. A T-test was employed to analyze the significance of the observed differences between male and female students. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also employed to analyze the significant differences in years of study.

**Main Results:** The results showed that the students' motivational orientation was the most influential ( $M = 3.26$ ), which caused them to study English as a specialization. However, it was found that the students were more integratively motivated ( $M = 3.33$ ) to study this language. Results also revealed that the least influential aspect ( $M = 2.54$ ) was related to interest in English. Results showed no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the means of students' responses to the other three aspects. The four aspects, according to the year of study, revealed no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the means of all students' responses to



each aspect. They had the same or relatively the same attitude, interest, and motivational orientation.

**Involvement to Buddhadhamma:** The discovery from this research model found that it had the possibility to utilize the knowledge obtained from this study for contributing to the specialization in terms of attitude towards English-speaking people of Thailand, which differed from previous research that did not incorporate religious principles to empower the specialization in terms of attitude towards English. This research related to the application of Buddhism in terms of the four principles of Iddhipada would support undergraduate students' attitudes towards English as a specialization with modern or recent knowledge. The development of such a collaborative classroom fitted with the concepts of the four principles of Iddhipada.

**Conclusions:** Results showed that students' motivation was the most influential aspect, and interest in English was the least influential aspect, which caused them to study English as a specialization. They also revealed no significant differences according to gender and year of study. The main findings of the study showed that the students were interested and felt the necessity to learn the English language and the causes of learning the language. They especially reasoned that English was international and the link language to share ideas with foreigners. The researcher also concluded that the better motivation orientation to study the four principles of Iddhipada should be given more consideration in the teaching of English in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Undergraduates, Attitudes, English, Specialization, The Four Principles of Iddhipada

## Introduction

English is an international language spoken in many countries as a native, second, and foreign language. It has official status even in countries where it is not the essential language. Moreover, almost every country in the world teaches the English language in schools and colleges. In Thailand, English is taught and learned as a foreign language at every level of education. There are several aspects that affect the learning process in a foreign language context, such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitudes, intelligence, age, and personality. Attitude is considered an important concept to determine the success or failure in English language learning. Attitude holds a crucial role and also affects the students' achievements in English language learning. It is widely accepted that attitude and set of beliefs about learning a foreign language, especially English, are among the determining factors that can influence the efficiency of the students in language classes. Therefore, instructors and educators should be careful in taking these factors into account (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). According to Latchanna & Dagnew (2009), attitude is accepted as an important concept for understanding human behavior and is defined as a mental state including beliefs and feelings. Regarding foreign language learning, Bain et al. (2010) argue that attitude can play a primary motivating factor in student goal attainment. In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, students who consider the learning of English as a positive and rewarding experience are less likely to suffer from foreign language anxiety. An attitude towards studying a foreign language is often connected with motivation, which



is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course or action. In general, strongly motivated students with long-term goals are probably easier to teach than those who have short-term goals and, therefore, no real drive. Students have motivation that is separated into two main categories: Extrinsic motivation, which concerns factors outside the classroom, and intrinsic motivation. The researcher adds that there are many reasons for studying a foreign language. Probably a major number of language students in the world do it because it is a mandatory subject. Some people want to study English or another foreign language because they think it offers them the chance for advancement in their professional lives. An attitude includes several aspects, such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. The cognitive aspects of attitude involve the beliefs of language learners about the knowledge that they receive and their understanding of the process of language learning (Eshghinejad, 2016). In terms of the affective or emotional aspect of attitude, the learning process offers the teacher and students the chance to engage in various activities, and varied results of emotions are revealed (Feng & Chen, 2009).

Many studies are conducted on students' attitudes towards studying English as a specialization in different teaching-learning contexts in higher education. A few of these studies attempted to explore these attitudes in Thailand. Therefore, the present study has come to the scene to explore undergraduate students' attitudes towards English as a specialization and the factors that cause them to choose this specialization.

The researcher concludes that the four principles of Iddhipada would support undergraduate students' attitudes towards English as a specialization. These could be introduced into both on-campus seminars and workshops and scholarships for further studies, which at the least would raise consciousness of them.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study consist of: First, investigating undergraduate students' attitudes towards four main aspects or domains that normally contribute to studying English as a foreign language comprising attitudes towards English-speaking people, emotional attitudes, interest in studying English, and motivational orientation; Second, exploring the significant differences between students' responses according to gender and year of study.

### **Methodology**

A quasi-experimental study was used to explore undergraduate students' attitudes towards studying English as a specialization in terms of attitude towards English-speaking people, the emotional aspect of attitude, interest, and motivation. The design of the study was quantitative in nature, descriptive, as well as inferential. In order to achieve the aims of this exploration, a questionnaire was employed to collect data from a sufficient sample, including males and females, and involving students from the four study years.

A convenience sampling method was employed for this study. The participants of the study were 190 English-majored students drawn from 330 Bachelor of Arts in English students at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University. Thus, 190 of the population sample may be considered



as a representative sample of the English-majored students. Only 11 % of these participants were males ( $N = 20$ ), whereas 89 % were females ( $N = 170$ ). There were 44 freshmen, 40 sophomores, 50 juniors, and 56 seniors.

The research instrument employed to achieve the aims of the study was a questionnaire through which four domains were explored: 1) Students' attitudes towards English-speaking people; 2) Students' emotional attitudes; 3) Students' interest in studying English; and 4) Students' motivational orientations. The questionnaire items were adapted from Chalak & Kassaian (2010) and Eshghinejad (2016) and were derived from ideas highlighted by L2 researchers. On the whole, the questionnaire included 25 items, of which three were related to students' attitudes towards English-speaking people, four were linked to emotional attitudes, nine were related to interest in studying English, and nine were associated with motivational orientations. These items were distributed randomly throughout the questionnaire.

After drafting the questionnaire, it was offered to a group of experienced professors to elicit their viewpoints about the clarity of its items and if each suited what was intended to be measured. The comments were taken into account, and the instrument was modified accordingly. After the researchers ensured that this questionnaire enjoyed satisfactory construct validity and reliability (Cronbach Alpha: 0.76), the final version was used for the main study. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants.

The SPSS software was used to analyze the data collected from the study participants. The t-test was employed to analyze the significance of the observed differences between males and females. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also employed to analyze the significant differences in their years of study.

## Results and Discussion

This study set out with the aim of investigating undergraduates' attitudes towards studying English as a specialization. The study explored students' attitudes towards four aspects that might have contributed a great deal to making them study English as a foreign language. They were: 1) Attitudes towards English-speaking people; 2) Emotional attitudes; 3) Interest in English or in studying it; and 4) Motivation orientation (Instrumental and integrative). This study also explored if there were significant differences between the means of students' responses according to gender and year of study.

Analysis of quantitative results showed that students' motivational orientation was the most influential aspect that caused them to study English. However, it was found that they were more integratively motivated to study this language. These results also showed that the least influential aspect was related to interest in English or in studying it. In terms of integrativeness and instrumentality, it was found that the results of this study countered those obtained by many researchers, such as Lafye & Tsuda (2002), Chalak & Kassaian (2010), and Tahaineh & Daana (2013). All of them found that students often learned English for instrumental reasons or for utilitarian benefits. However, Fadlalla (2017) found that the Sudanese undergraduates were both instrumentally



and integratively motivated to study English, although instrumental motivation outdid their integrative one.

Table 1 explained all questions by sorting the average values from highest to lowest in order to see the distribution of the data. The students thought they were the causes for them to study English as a specialization. The results showed that the students' motivational orientation was the most influential ( $M = 3.26$ ), which caused them to study English as a specialization. However, it was found that the students were more integrative motivated ( $M = 3.33$ ) to study this language. Results also revealed that the least influential aspect ( $M = 2.54$ ) was related to interest in English or in studying it. Table 1 illustrated the analysis of these results.

**Table 1** Mean (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Students' responses to the four aspects.

Rank	Aspect	M	SD
1	Motivation orientation	3.26	.385
	Integrative motivation	3.33	.432
	Instrumental motivation	3.19	.439
2	Emotional attitudes	2.90	.327
3	Attitudes towards English-speaking people	2.71	.450
4	Interest in English or in studying it	2.54	.298
All aspects		2.88	.251

For further explanation, the means of students' responses to the motivational orientation were close to each other. However, results indicated that the first four reasons which had a great impact on making them study English as a specialization were associated with future careers ( $M = 3.54$ ), interaction more easily with the native speakers of English ( $M = 3.47$ ), making them more educated ( $M = 3.43$ ), and with getting a job later on ( $M = 3.42$ ). The results also indicated that having a better salary ( $M = 3.29$ ), understanding the way speakers of English behave ( $M = 3.26$ ), and appreciating English people and their culture in general ( $M = 3.17$ ) also had that level of impact. As for the least influential aspect (i.e., interest in English or in studying it) which caused the students to study English, results revealed that it was related to desire to know all aspects of English ( $M = 3.20$ ), being more at ease with people who speak this language ( $M = 3.18$ ), being at a great loss if Thailand had no contact with English-speaking people ( $M = 2.97$ ), reading books and articles in English ( $M = 2.91$ ), not paying much attention to the feedback they receive in their English class ( $M = 2.29$ ), having no interest in English ( $M = 2.18$ ), and hatred to the English language ( $M = 1.72$ ).

The items of each aspect or dimension were arranged decreasingly to show which item in each aspect played a more influential role in studying English as a specialization, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Students' responses to each Item in each aspect.

Motivation orientation	M	SD
Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.	3.54	.560
Studying English is important because I will be able to interact more easily with its native speakers.	3.47	.541
Studying English is important because it makes me more educated.	3.43	.676
Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a job.	3.42	.660
Studying English gives me the chance to have a better salary later on.	3.29	.649
Studying English is important because I will be able to understand the way speakers of English behave.	3.26	.686
Studying English allows me to appreciate English people and their culture in general.	3.17	.605
My parents feel that I should continue studying English all through life.	3.00	.777
My parents helped me to study English.	2.72	.886
Emotional attitudes		
Studying English is a pride for me.	3.21	.607
Studying English makes me feel more confident.	3.15	.720
I am calm whenever I have to speak English.	2.94	.644
Studying English makes me feel worried.	2.28	.722
Attitudes towards English-speaking people		
To be frank, studying English is important because native speakers of English are dynamic and easy to communicate with.	3.07	.683
Native speakers of English are very sociable and kind.	2.91	.703
Studying English is important because most native speakers of this language are friendly.	2.78	.819
Studying English is not important because some English-speaking people play down our role in making the world stable.	2.10	.687
Interest in English or in studying it		
I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	3.20	.714
Studying English is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak this language.	3.18	.593
If Thailand had no contact with English speaking countries, it would be a great loss.	2.97	.743
I prefer to read books and articles in English.	2.91	.733
I do not pay much attention to the feedback I receive in my English class.	2.29	.702
To be honest, I really have no interest in English.	2.18	.897
Studying English is a waste of time.	1.89	.885
I hate English.	1.72	.819

As for the second research question, which investigated whether there were any statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the means of students' responses to the four aspects according to gender, the results showed statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) regarding the emotional aspect of attitude in favor of male students. They were more sensitive than female students since they thought that studying English was a pride and made them more



confident, calm, and worried at the same time. The results also showed no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the means of students' responses to the other three aspects and to all together. Table 3 illustrated the results of this analysis.

**Table 3** Results of the t-test on Gender and the four Aspects.

Aspect	Gender	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Attitudes towards	Male	2.73	.428	.246	188	.806
English-speaking people	Female	2.71	.463			
Emotional attitudes	Male	2.96	.340	2.098	188	.037
	Female	2.86	.315			
Interest in English	Male	2.55	.282	.255	188	.799
	Female	2.54	.308			
Motivation orientation	Male	3.30	.358	1.317	188	.189
	Female	3.23	.398			
All aspects	Male	2.92	.246	1.332	188	.184
	Female	2.87	.252			

Regarding the third research question, which investigated whether there were statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the four aspects according to year of study, results revealed no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the means of all students' responses to each aspect and the four together. They had the same or relatively the same attitude, interest, and motivational orientation, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4** Results of One-way ANOVA on Study Year and the four Aspects.

Aspect		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Attitudes towards	Between groups	.596	3	.199	.982	.402
English-speaking people	Within groups	37.602	186	.202		
	Total	38.198	189			
Emotional Attitudes	Between groups	.062	3	.21	.189	.902
	Within groups	20.198	186	.109		
	Total	20.260	189	.109		
Interest in English	Between groups	.305	3	.102	1.145	.365
	Within groups	16.457	186	.088		
	Total	16.762	189			
Motivation orientation	Between groups	.126	3	.042	.282	.839
	Within groups	27.833	186	.150		
	Total	27.959	189			
All Aspects	Between groups	.103	.034	.541	.655	
	Within groups	11.700	186	.063		
	Total	11.863	189			



The results also revealed significant differences in the emotional aspect of attitudes in favor of male students. They thought that studying English was a pride for them and made them more confident, calm, and worried at the same time. However, the results showed no significant differences between the means of students' responses to the other three aspects and to all together. They had the same attitudes towards English-speaking people, the same interest in English or in studying it, and the same motivational orientation. These results did not agree with the majority of those obtained by researchers such as Jafre (2012), and Eshghinejad (2016). All of them found significant differences in favor of female students.

Concerning study year, results revealed no significant differences between the means of all students' responses to each aspect and to the four together. These results agreed with what Jafre (2012) obtained in his study. It was expected that the third-year and fourth-year students would have a greater motivation orientation to study English, a greater interest in it, and a more positive attitude towards English-speaking people. The reason might have lied in the fact that the more students dealt with the language and the more they went in-depth with it, the more they would understand its secrets, be interested in it, and have a better motivation orientation to study it. As mentioned, the four principles of Iddhipada consisted of: First, Chanda, the will or aspiration, satisfaction, and joy in learning; Second, Virya, the diligent energy, effort, and exertion required; Third, Citta, the wholehearted attention to the learning with active thoughtfulness; Fourth, Vimamsa, investigation, examination, reasoning and testing of the language being learned. These principles would support undergraduate students' attitudes towards studying English as a specialization.

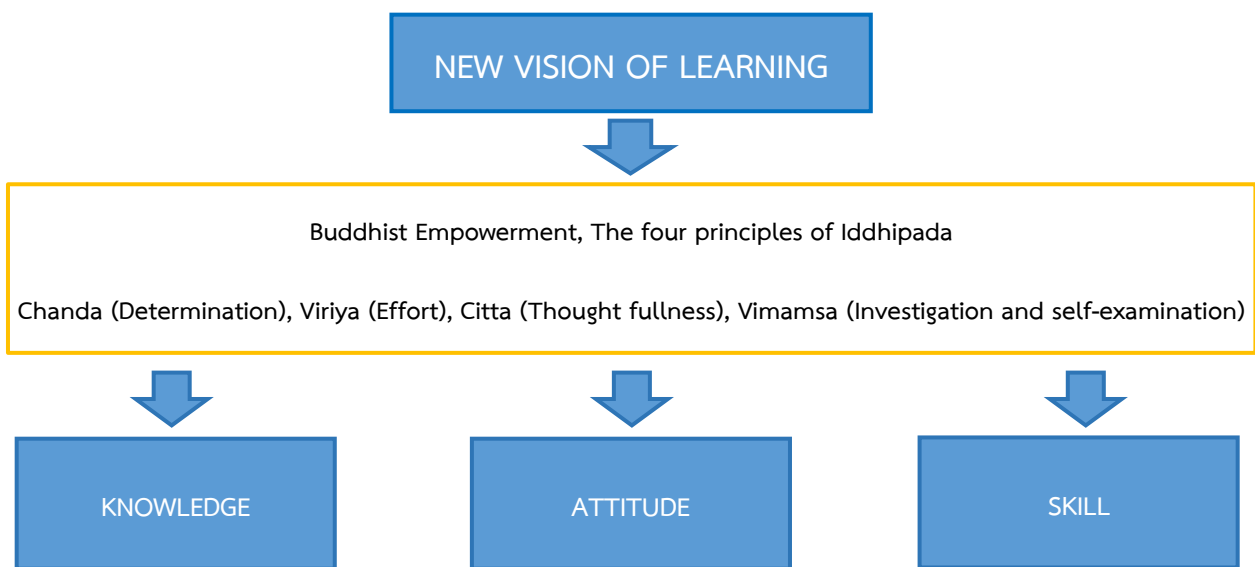
### Originality and Body of Knowledge

The four principles of Iddhipada were recorded in ancient Pali writings. This writer accessed them in English translation in the Bodhipakkhiya Dipana (The Manuals of Buddhism). The first one of the four principles of Iddhipada was Chanda, the will or aspiration, satisfaction, and joy in learning. Second was Virya, the diligent energy, effort, and exertion required. Third was Citta, the wholehearted attention to the learning with active thoughtfulness. Fourth was Vimamsa, the investigation, examination, reasoning, and testing of the language being learned. Iddhipada was a compound Pali word comprising "Iddhi" and "Pada." "Iddhi" was translated as completeness or perfection. "Pada" was translated as the "root" or "basis." Chanda was the concept that there was nothing within or without one's personality that could obstruct the attainment of the goal. "If I do not attain this accomplishment in this life, I shall not rest content." Virya was the energy and effort needed to achieve the goal against all odds, hardships, and setbacks, which was the denial of discouragement.

"He was not discouraged even though it is said to him that he must put forth effort for many days, months, and years." Citta was an extreme, strong, and ardent attachment to the goal. "One attains satisfaction and tranquility only when one's mind is absorbed in matters connected with the Iddhi (Goal)." Vimamsa was the conscious perception of gaining knowledge and wisdom



which the development of such a collaborative classroom fitted with the concepts of the four principles of Iddhipada. Exploring a "New vision" of learning suggested four characteristics of successful learners: knowledgeable, self-determined, strategic, and empathetic thinking. Though not an exact fit, these were not dissimilar to the Chanda (Determination), Virya (Effort), Citta (Thoughtfulness), and Vimamsa (Investigation and self-examination) of the four principles of Iddhipada. The challenge was to introduce students to the concepts of shared knowledge among teachers and students, shared authority between teachers and students, the role of the teacher as mediator, and the benefits of having heterogeneous groups of students. The concept of shared authority might have proved particularly worrisome to some Thai students in a society that held teachers in high respect with Buddhist empowerment language learning in Thailand, as depicted within the following diagram in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** New Vision of learning.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study discussed some of the factors that were the normal influences on EFL students in choosing English as a specialization. It investigated undergraduate students' attitudes towards studying English as a specialization with respect to attitudes towards English-speaking people, the emotional aspect of attitude, interest, and motivation. The study was quantitative in nature. It used the questionnaire as an instrument that could collect data from a relatively large sample of students. Therefore, it was necessary for the researchers who were interested in attitude and motivation to conduct further studies in higher education institutions, using another research instrument such as interviews so that the results could provide the public with a clearer picture regarding the factors that enhanced and prohibited studying English as a specialization. Since students' attitudes towards studying English as a foreign language were important, it was of vital importance for the Ministry of Education to empower English language teachers with more teaching strategies through continuous in-service programs. The reason was based on the fact



that the school was regarded as the base for having more interested, more motivated, and better-skilled English language specialists at the university level. As mentioned in the four principles of Iddhipada, it would support the practice of reaching excellent wisdom. On the basis of the findings of the study, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations and suggestions:

- 1) The English language teacher should have improved their teaching methodology by applying a communicative approach, student-centered method, and participatory methods in the classroom;
- 2) Learning English as a second language was more difficult than the mother tongue. So, English could be learned as a mother tongue if the learners were laborious and also provided a favorable environment;
- 3) All people were curious to learn everything in a similar way. Students were also interested in learning about English culture and religion, but it did not mean that the explanation of English culture and religion was necessary to learn the English language. As such, cultural and religious phenomena should not have been brought up while teaching and learning the English language; and
- 4) Future research should explore in-depth factors that were linked to the students' attitudes towards language learning, such as classroom interactions, linguistic knowledge, teaching strategies, and learning environment.

## Acknowledgement

This research is supported by the Bachelor of Arts English Program, Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University. I am appreciative of the help given by Assoc. Prof. Netchanok Buanak and Dr. Chayapol Phupatt during the questionnaire and research distribution. I would also like to give my sincere thanks to many colleagues for proofreading this study.

## References

- Bain, S. K., Mc callum, R. S., Bell, S. A., Cochran, J. I. & Sawyer, S. C. (2010). Foreign language learning aptitudes, attitudes, attributions, and achievement of postsecondary students identified gifted. *Jaa*, 22(1), 130-156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X1002200106>.
- Chalak, A. & Kassaian, Z. (2010). Motivation and attitudes of Iranian undergraduate EFL students toward learning English. *Gema Online Journal of Language Studies*, 37(10), 37-56.
- Eshghinejad, S. (2016). EFL students' attitudes toward learning English language: The case study of Kashan University. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1236434>.
- Fadlalla, E. H. (2017). Students' attitudes and motivation toward English language-Dongola University. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 7(2), 55-64.
- Feng, R. & Chen, H. (2009). An analysis of the importance of motivation and strategy in postgraduates' English acquisition. *English Language Teaching*, 2, 93-97. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n3p93>.
- Jafre, M. Z. (2012). EFL students' attitudes toward learning English Language: The case of Libyan secondary school students. *Asian Social Sciences*, 8(2), 119-132. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n2p119>.



- Lafaye, R. E. & Tsuda, S. (2002). Attitudes toward English language learning in Higher Education in Japan, and the place of English in Japanese society. *International Communication Studies*, XI(3), 145-161.
- Latchanna, G. & Dagnew, W. (2009). Attitude of teachers towards the use of active learning methods. *ELT Journal of All India Association for Educational Research*, 21(1), 71-82.
- Oroujlou, N. & Vahedi, M. (2011). Motivation, attitude, and language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29(2011), 994-1000. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.333>.
- Tahaine, Y. & Daana, H. (2013). Jordanian undergraduates' motivation and attitudes towards learning English in EFL context. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(2), 159-180.