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**Attitude of Undergraduate Students in Akwa Ibom State towards English Literature**

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**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was to assess the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. Expost facto research design was used in this study. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State using tertiary institutions in the state (University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State College of Education Afaha Nsit, and Akwa Ibom State College of Science and Technology). The population of the study comprised undergraduate students from the five institutions. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 30 undergraduate students from each of the 5 institutions, giving a total of 150 respondents for the study. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled "Attitude of Undergraduate Students towards English Literature Questionnaire (AUGSTELQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by expert in test and measurement in Akwa Ibom State College of Education to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, completeness. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.79 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. The study reveals that Literature explore the attitudes of learners towards literary texts and different teaching methodologies that benefit from authentic literature in the Nigeria context. It was concluded that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. One of recommendations was that literature teachers should make a conscious effort to make literature teaching more interesting to boys, they tend to struggle with literature activities. Specifically, text topics for discussion should ensure that boy's interest is also met.*

**KEYWORDS: literature, attitude, Students, English, undergraduate**

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**Introduction**

Literature is one major source in this process of nativizing the foreign language into local settings. English literature produced in local contexts can work wonders to enhance this process and motivate learners to achieve the desired competency in English language. Conversely, this production of local English literature is not possible without understanding the basics of the

English language, linguistics, and literary norms of native English people. EFL learners in the KSA need to acquire competency in language and know the literary traditions to develop localized forms of literature for many different purposes. Nevertheless, research in different Arabic contexts (e.g., Shakfa, 2012; Abu-Malhim, 2009) has demonstrated that EFL learners in these contexts usually have a negative attitude toward and poor perception of English literature. In addition to these negative perceptions, English is usually taught using the grammar translation method, with no or little emphasis on authentic material from literature. Learners are trained from the very beginning stages to rate language and linguistics more highly than literature. Writing in a foreign language serves a dual purpose as the writer can bring a fresh perspective to a local context while also offering a new perspective to native speakers of the target language.

Another way of promoting English literature is by adapting language teaching using literature. Students do not always have to learn a foreign language through inductive methods of grammar and rules. This can be tiring, boring, and complex, which burns learners' motivation to exert the required efforts for becoming a competent speaker in English. Nevertheless, literature offers many motivating stories and contexts where students do not necessarily learn through induction. They can enjoy the literature and learn linguistic complexities through deductive methods. If they have enough practice, they become good at language, and literature serves as an igniting force for keeping second language learners motivated for a long time. Therefore, we believe it is truly important to know learners' attitudes and perceptions toward literature and then move in an appropriate direction to achieve the desired standards of English language set by the Ministry of Education in various documents. The recent interest in the field of language learning and its relation to literary studies has resulted in more interest among scholars to carry out research investigating the relationship between literature on one hand and the learning of first (L1) and second (L2) languages on the other hand (Paran, 2008; Carter, 2007). The role of literature as a tool to facilitate L2 learning has gained attention, and scholars are researching possible methods to integrate literary courses into L2 learning environments.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To find out the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature
2. To find out the difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

### **Research questions**

1. What are the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature
2. What are the difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

## Literature Review on student's attitude towards English Literature

Many scholars argue that literature offers a cultural background, expands learners' language awareness, provides motivating content material, educates overall personality, and develops interpretative abilities among learners (Carter & Long, 1991; Spack, 1985; Widdowson, 1975). Scholars like Collie and Slater (1987) have argued that literature is a great source for cultural enrichment, authentic material, personal involvement, and—most importantly—language enrichment. Students in different contexts prefer literature to linguistic and methodology courses. Contrary to these beliefs about literature in many Arab contexts and elsewhere in the world, students majoring in English at Qassim University (QU) prefer linguistics courses to literature courses. The number of scholars in language and linguistics, as compared to literature, completing their master's and doctoral studies abroad and financed by the department represents a picture that necessitates a study of this nature. Therefore, the current study hopes to deepen our understanding of phenomenon.

The kinds of beliefs, perceptions, metacognitive knowledge, and attitudes that accompany learners in the classroom learning environment have been acknowledged as an important factor contributing to the overall learning process and their ultimate success in this process of learning (Breen, 2001). In a good teaching environment, pedagogy has the potential to offer opportunities where students' perspective can have a positive effect on the learning process and might actually help these learners become fully engaged in this language learning process (Breen, 2001; Arnold, 1999).

Many different terms have been used for concepts like beliefs and attitudes within research traditions that view these terms from varying theoretical perspectives. Classical research in psychological aspects of learners' beliefs and perceptions about language learning “opened a whole new Aladdin's cave of personal beliefs, myths, understandings, and superstitions as they were revealed by the persons' thoughts and feelings about their learning” (Thomas & Harri-Augustein, 1983). In psychology, these scholars believe that learners' capacity and internal processes are, in fact, the central forces for understanding learners' learning performances compared to generally believed myths like measures of intelligence and aptitude. However, in cognitive psychology, learners' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions are considered part of the underlying mechanism termed metacognition (Flavell, 1987). Cognitive psychologists have already acknowledged the significant influence of social and personal epistemologies on academic thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and learning (Schommer, 1993) as well as persistence and interpretation of information (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ryan, 1984). Likewise, learners' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions in language learning are regarded as a significant factor in students' metacognitive knowledge (Flavell, 1987). Wenden (1999:436) summarized the total makeup of metacognitive knowledge as “a system of related ideas, some accepted without question and other validate by their experience”.

As we can see in the discussion thus far, learners' internal beliefs are highly significant in the process of learning a foreign or second language. These beliefs are supposed to “act as very strong filters or reality” (Arnold, 1999). There is no doubt that foreign language learning is influenced by many dynamic factors; however, the most facilitating and significant factor is the learner's positive attitude. In the process of language learning, two non-intelligence factors—namely, attitude and perception—significantly contribute to students' language development.

### *Related Studies of student's attitude to English literature*

Many skills, including social, cognitive, affective, and language skills, can be improved through the employment of stories in EFL classrooms. Britsch (1995) highlighted these benefits by stating that using stories in teaching enhances students' common sense, improves their reading and writing, helps students make sense of the world around them, strengthens literary and reflective skills, suits a whole language curriculum, and enriches students' creative and imaginative skills. Moon (2000) argued that literature offers life history in teaching and learning, improves creative writing, stimulates critical thinking, excites students' involvement and interest, and enlivens the overall teaching process.

Some scholars such as (Tehan, Yuksel, & Inan, 2015; Babae & Yahya, 2014; Lakshmi & Jayachandran, 2012; Paesani, 2011; Fogal, 2010; Ghazali et al., 2009; Ögeyik, 2007) have recently and vehemently highlighted the role of literature in language learning and teaching. Literature occupies a central place in language learning. Interestingly, educational psychologists have contributed extensively to the field of language learning (Karahan, 2007; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Gardner, 1985). Researchers such as Hirvela and Boyle (1988) have investigated the attitude of ESL adult students toward literature courses. The purpose of their study was to explore the kinds of genres that attracted students. Their results explained that students liked prose and fiction the most and disliked poetry. The interpretation of themes appeared to be the most difficult task, followed by linguistic-related points, such as complex syntactic structures and dual meaning of words. Research in Arab world showed mixed attitude toward use of English literature in EFL classes. Shaaban (2015), for example, explored the effects of different types of stories on learners' writing skills (N=152). He used four groups of learners, experimented differently throughout semester, and used pre-/post-tests results to suggest that significant differences exist in learners' writing skills. The experimental groups outperformed the control group learners, thereby defining the impact of literary stories on EFL writing skills.

Adam and Babiker (2015) investigated the role of literature in enhancing learners' creative writing abilities. The data collected from 50 university teachers in KSA suggests that literature has power to enhance learners' creative writing skills and improve their language use while writing. These EFL teachers demonstrated a great awareness of using literature for writing skills. "Using literary texts for the tasks of developing language skills is more stimulating than ordinary textbooks" (p. 116). Fernandes and Alsaeed (2014) reviewed ELT practices in KSA and beyond. In their review, the authors clearly argued in favor of using literature to teach language skills in EFL classrooms. Shakfa (2012) explored the difficulties faced by literature students at the Islamic University of Gaza. His study is relevant to the present work as it showed Arabic-speaking students' attitudes and perceptions toward English drama. The study reported that students perceived English literature to be difficult because of its complex syntactic structure in addition to frequent use of metaphors and other literary devices. Students usually feel frustrated during the lengthy process of learning drama, where symbolism, metaphors, similes, and stylistic features create additional problems.

A good deal of research has examined the impacts of literature for EFL or ESL learning. Different scholars have strongly argued to use literature to enhance target language learning in various settings. For example, in the Turkish context, Tehan, Yuksel, and Inan (2015) explored the attitudes and beliefs of learners toward the application of literature in the classrooms. Data

from quantitative and qualitative sources indicated that students demonstrate a positive attitude (contrary to what authors actually expected) toward the use of literature in EFL classrooms. In the Malaysian context, Babae and Yahya (2014) argued that literature is representational in nature in that it takes learners into consideration as well as their feelings and sensitivities of the real world. The authors stressed that literature is a great source for teaching basic linguistics skills in foreign language classrooms and suits learners with different learning styles. In their review of literature as a source of language teaching, Lakshmi and Jaychandran (2012) presented different ways to teach language through literature. The authors highlighted different techniques that can be of great help for teachers and learners alike. Paesani (2011) reviewed the research on different models that include literature as a necessary part of the curricula. Her review of scholarly studies in the field suggested that language in literature and literature in language courses can lead to a shift toward a multimodal language development.

Fogal (2010) used action research to explore the attitudes of learners towards literary texts and different teaching methodologies that benefit from authentic literature in the Japanese context. The results indicate that learners at an advanced level feel comfortable analyzing literature when material is presented in a teacher-centered manner and this material improves their meta-cognitive awareness, thereby helping students become more actively involved in the process of learning the target language. Ghazali et al. (2009) studied the attitudes of school students toward literary materials in Malaysian schools. Mixed methods data from 110 class five students defined different aspects that motivate learners to develop a positive attitude toward L2 learning. Results have shown that students prefer to read mysteries, adventures, and life experiences. They highlight the need to select suitable materials and texts for learners that meet the needs of various students with different backgrounds and knowledge bases.

In the Turkish setting, Ögeyik (2007) observed the perceptions and attitudes of university-level EFL learners. Students favored literature and language teaching through literature because literary texts offered them cultural competence, enhanced their individual creativity, and encouraged target language enrichment. Studies have also been carried on the role of positive and negative perceptions towards learning a language. In one study, Block (1994) claimed that a difference existed between the teachers' and students' perceptions in how they describe and attribute purposes to tasks. Block argued that the students were aware of what happened in the class; therefore, teachers must cater to their needs in light of students' perceptions. Another study (Nunan, 1989) determined that students prefer traditional learning activities to communicative learning activities.

## **Method**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State using tertiary institutions in the state (University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State College of Education Afaha Nsit, and Akwa Ibom State College of Science and Technology). The population of the study comprised undergraduate students from the five institutions. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 30 undergraduate students from each of the 5 institutions, giving a total of 150 respondents for the study. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled "Attitude of Undergraduate Students towards English Literature Questionnaire (AUGSTELQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by expert in test and measurement in Akwa

Ibom State College of Education to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, completeness. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.79 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

## Results

**Research Questions 1:** The research question sought to find out the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

**Table 1: Percentage analysis of the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature**

ATTITUDE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Positive	129	86**
Negative	21	14*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

\* The least percentage frequency

**SOURCE: Field survey**

The above table 1 presents percentage analysis of the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that 129(86%) of the undergraduate students showed positive attitude towards English literature while 4(8%) of the respondents showed negative attitude towards English literature.

**Research question 2:** The research question sought to find out the difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

**Table 2: Percentage analysis of the difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature**

Attitude	GENDER		Total
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
<b>POSITIVE</b>	59(78.67)	70(93.33)	129
<b>NEGATIVE</b>	16(21.33)	5(6.67)	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>150</b>

**SOURCE: Field survey**

The above table 2 presents percentage analysis of the difference in the attitude of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that with respect to male respondents, 59(78.67%) of them had positive attitude towards English literature while 16(21.33%) of the respondents were identified with negative attitude. Also, with respect to female respondents, 70(93.33%) of them had positive attitude

towards English literature while 5(6.67%) of the respondents were identified with negative attitude. The result proved that, as regards “positive attitude”, female respondents were rated higher their male counterparts in their attitude towards English literature. While, in reference to “negative” attitude, male respondents were rated the higher than their female counterparts in their attitude towards English literature.

### Hypotheses testing

**Hypothesis One:** The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. To test the hypothesis, chi-square analysis was performed on the data (see table 3).

**Table 3: Chi-square analysis of the difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature**

Attitude	GENDER		Total	X <sup>2</sup>
	Male	Female		
POSITIVE	59(64.5)	70(64.5)	129	6.70*
NEGATIVE	16(10.5)	5(10.5)	21	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>150</b>	

\*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 1; Critical = 3.48

Table 3 shows the calculated X<sup>2</sup>-value as (6.70). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical X<sup>2</sup>-value (3.48) at 0.05 levels with 1 degree of freedom. The calculated X<sup>2</sup>-value (6.70) was greater than the critical X<sup>2</sup>-value (3.48). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature. The result therefore is cognate with the research findings of Breen, (2001) who avowed that beliefs, perceptions, metacognitive knowledge, and attitudes that accompany learners in the classroom learning environment have been acknowledged as an important factor contributing to the overall learning process and their ultimate success in this process of learning. Good teaching environment, pedagogy has the potential to offer opportunities where students’ perspective can have a positive effect on the learning process and might actually help these learners become fully engaged in this language learning process (Arnold, 1999). Fogal (2010) also indicate that learners at an advanced level feel comfortable analyzing literature when material is presented in a teacher-centered manner and this material improves their meta-cognitive awareness, thereby helping students become more actively involved in the process of learning the target language. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

### Conclusion

The study concluded that English literature can lead to a shift toward a multimodal language development and literature has power to enhance learners’ creative writing skills and improve their language. Also, it is important to know learners’ attitudes and perceptions toward literature and then move in an appropriate direction to achieve the desired standards of English language.

Literature explore the attitudes of learners towards literary texts and different teaching methodologies that benefit from authentic literature in the Nigeria context. Therefore, the result reveals that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State towards English literature

### **Recommendations**

According to the study the following recommendation was drawn

1. Teachers of English literature are reminded that teaching of English literature should not be geared towards passing examination only, rather the emphasis should be on competence of students' attitude in writing, reading and speaking as well. This will help in no small measure in making them understand not only English literature but all other subjects that they are being taught.
2. Literature teachers should make a conscious effort to make literature teaching interesting not only to female students but to the male students as well. This is to alleviate the male students of their struggles with literature activities. Specifically, text topics for discussion should ensure that boy's interest is also met, while the female folk should resolute and focus in having positive attitude to literature.
3. Learners of literature should appreciate given opportunities to contribute orally in class discussion and these activities should encourage oral communication and give literature learners a chance to build confidence in the subject matter.



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