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# COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KOSOVSKA MITROVICA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY<sup>2</sup>

*Abstract: This study examines the attitudes of secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica toward English language learning. Given adolescents' susceptibility to diverse social, emotional, and contextual influences, a quantitative, empirical, cross-sectional study was conducted to: (1) analyze the cognitive dimension of students' attitudes; (2) explore the emotional dimension; (3) assess the behavioral dimension; and (4) determine whether statistically significant differences exist in students' attitudes with respect to gender, age, school type, school year, and average grade in English. The research involved a convenience sample of 201 students from four secondary schools in Kosovska Mitrovica. Data were collected using an adapted version of the Attitude Questionnaire toward Learning English (Abidin et al., 2012) and analyzed through descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and independent-samples t-tests in IBM SPSS Statistics 20.*

*The findings indicate that: (a) secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica generally exhibit positive attitudes toward English language learning across all three*

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<sup>2</sup> This study was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-66/2025-03/200184).

*examined dimensions; (b) a statistically significant difference was found only in relation to students' average English grade, with no such differences observed for gender, age, school type, or school year; and (c) there is a clear need to implement contemporary teaching approaches and methods designed to enhance students' motivation and engagement in learning English at the secondary level.*

*Keywords: secondary school students, attitudes toward learning English, cognitive dimension, emotional dimension, behavioral dimension.*

## 1. Introduction

The global prominence and widespread use of the English language have substantially contributed to its dissemination and pervasive presence across virtually all spheres of social life, thereby reinforcing its indispensable role within educational systems worldwide, including that of Serbia. Foreign language teaching in Serbian schools was introduced in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, following the adoption of the first School Law and the establishment of the country's initial public schools. Since then, the selection of languages offered within formal education has been shaped by a range of factors, the most influential of which have been the political and cultural relations between Serbia and the countries whose languages were included in school curricula. Consequently, the popularity of particular foreign languages has varied across historical periods and regions of Serbia (Филиповић et al., 2006; Filipović et al., 2007; Filipović & Vučo, 2013). In this context, foreign language instruction has evolved as a structured, goal-oriented process aligned with the broader framework of national educational policy, with English emerging in recent decades as the predominant foreign language taught in nearly all Serbian secondary schools.

Due to globalization, scientific and technological advancement, and the expansion of international economic cooperation, learning foreign languages has become not merely a matter of personal aspiration but also a necessity for educated young people. Upon completing secondary school, students either enter the labor market or pursue further education—both of which increasingly require proficiency not only in general English but also in English for academic and professional purposes. Given the pervasive presence of English in both real and virtual environments, it is unsurprising that students' attitudes toward learning the language vary considerably. Some perceive English merely as an obligatory component of the curriculum, to be mastered for the sake of achieving satisfactory grades. Others regard it as a valuable resource that can facilitate future career advancement, travel, and international

collaboration. A third group, however, may develop negative attitudes due to early exposure and compulsory learning from the first grade, or a perceived lack of linguistic aptitude, which leads them to view English as having little personal relevance.

Regardless of such differences, success in language learning depends not only on learners' intellectual abilities but also on their attitudes toward the target language, its associated culture and community, the teacher and their competencies, and the assessment system. These attitudes are further shaped by learners' age, personality traits, and socio-cultural context. The dynamic interaction of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors was examined by Gardner and Lambert (1972), and later by Padwick (2010), who emphasized that foreign language learning should be understood primarily as a social and psychological phenomenon, and only secondarily as an academic one.

In this regard, the present study examines the attitudes of secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica toward English language learning. Designed as a quantitative, empirical, cross-sectional study, it pursued the following objectives: (1) to analyze the cognitive dimension of secondary school students' attitudes toward learning English; (2) to explore the emotional dimension of their attitudes; (3) to assess the behavioral dimension of their attitudes; and (4) to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in students' attitudes based on gender, age, type of secondary school, year of secondary school, and average grade in English. The research was conducted on a sample of 201 students, selected through convenience sampling, from four secondary schools in Kosovska Mitrovica. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year using an adapted version of the Attitude Questionnaire toward Learning English (Abidin et al., 2012). Given the study's quantitative design, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—including measures of frequency (counts and percentages), central tendency (arithmetic mean), and variability (standard deviation)—as well as inferential techniques, specifically one-way ANOVA and independent-samples t-tests, performed in IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses: (1) cognitively, secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica hold positive attitudes toward learning English; (2) emotionally, students hold positive attitudes toward learning English; (3) behaviorally, they hold positive attitudes toward learning English; and (4) statistically significant differences in students' attitudes are expected with respect to their average grade in English, whereas no significant differences are anticipated based on gender, age, school type, or school year.

The paper is structured into several sections. It opens with introductory considerations that contextualize the topic and articulate the rationale for the study. The next section outlines the theoretical background and reviews relevant research on language learning attitudes, with particular focus on their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. The methodology section details the sample, research instrument, and data collection procedures, followed by the presentation and discussion of results. The final section offers concluding remarks, pedagogical implications, acknowledgment of limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

One of the more accessible conceptualizations of attitudes defines them as systems of cognitive, emotional, and conative tendencies (Rot, 2003:p.353). Attitudes represent a mental predisposition toward specific response patterns, shaping individuals' perceptions of particular objects, related cognitions, and emotional reactions. In this sense, attitudes function as motivational constructs that guide, energize, and influence behavior. From a behavioral perspective, they reflect an individual's beliefs about the outcomes and characteristics of particular actions. Specifically, strong positive beliefs about anticipated outcomes tend to foster favorable attitudes, while negative evaluations may lead to unfavorable ones (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008:p.71).<sup>3</sup>

The concept of attitudes has become an integral component of foreign language learning research, attracting sustained attention from linguists, educational theorists, and practitioners since the late twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have acknowledged that learners bring into the classroom pre-existing attitudes, expectations, and experiences, prompting systematic inquiry into their perceptions of language learning. These investigations aim to clarify individual differences and identify pedagogical implications (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Literature on foreign language

<sup>3</sup>In a manner akin to this conceptualization of attitude—whereby its meaning acquires an evaluative dimension—Gardner (1985) likewise emphasized that attitude constitutes an evaluative response to a given object, shaped by an individual's underlying beliefs or opinions. Consequently, attitudes are intrinsically tied to one's system of values and convictions, which may either support or oppose particular choices across various domains of activity, whether academic or informal.

<sup>4</sup>Among the earliest scholarly inquiries into attitudes toward foreign language learning is the study conducted by Papalia (1978, as cited in Bernat, 2004). Nevertheless, Horwitz is widely regarded as a pioneer of foundational research on language learning attitudes and beliefs. Notably, she developed one of the most prominent and methodologically influential instruments for assessing this construct—the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)—which she used to investigate the attitudinal dispositions of learners, practicing teachers, and prospective foreign language educators (Bernat, 2004).

learning and learner attitudes suggests that the term is often used interchangeably with metacognitive knowledge—one of the three categories of human knowledge, alongside domain-specific and social knowledge (Bojović, 2013). In essence, learners' attitudes reflect the knowledge they have acquired about the learning process, its nature, and their own role as active participants.

Since applied linguists, pedagogues, and foreign language educators consistently underscore the pivotal role of learners in the language acquisition process, learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning have emerged as a critical variable in both empirical research and pedagogical practice (Bojović, 2013). Victori and Lockhart (1995) equate attitudes with the general assumptions that learners hold about themselves as language learners, the factors influencing acquisition, and the nature of the learning process itself. The origins and characteristics of attitudes are heterogeneous, and their influence on language learning is correspondingly variable. Some attitudes are shaped by prior positive or negative learning experiences, others by cultural or familial contexts, and still others by individual differences such as personality traits (Gaoyin & Alvermann, 1995; Langston & Sykes, 1997).

Considering that language learning involves transformations in cognition, affect, and behavior, the construct of attitude is commonly delineated into three inter-related dimensions: cognitive, affective or emotional, and behavioral (Abidin et al., 2012; Wenden, 1991). The cognitive dimension encompasses learners' beliefs, thoughts, and evaluative judgments about the object of the attitude. The emotional dimension refers to learners' feelings and affective responses, indicating whether they experience positive or negative emotions toward the object. The behavioral dimension reflects the tendency to engage in specific actions related to learning. This study aims to examine the prevalence and interaction of these dimensions; accordingly, a concise overview of their core characteristics follows.

The *cognitive* dimension of attitudes toward foreign language learning refers to learners' beliefs about the knowledge they acquire and their understanding of the learning process itself. It comprises four key elements: (1) linking prior knowledge with new information; (2) generating new knowledge; (3) validating newly acquired knowledge; and (4) applying knowledge across diverse contexts (Abidin et al., 2012). In this respect, the cognitive dimension of language instruction is closely tied to knowledge transfer, the exchange of ideas, and learners' comprehension as they engage with a foreign language and the cultural context of its speakers.

Learners are capable of evaluating the rationale for learning a foreign language, as well as its perceived utility for education, communication, general knowledge development, and access to new information. Learning inherently involves integrating

pre-existing skills and knowledge with newly acquired competencies. Given their native language proficiency, learners naturally draw upon this foundation when approaching a foreign language. Through cognitive mechanisms used to discern patterns in their first language, they are able to identify analogous structures in the target language. Moreover, learners rely on existing world knowledge to support comprehension of instructional materials and to transfer previously developed communicative strategies into new contexts. As such, the cognitive dimension remains continuously active throughout the language learning process, exerting a substantial influence on learners' cognitive attitudes toward the target language.

Language learning is not solely a cognitive endeavor; it also encompasses *emotional (affective)* dimensions, as it is inherently sensitive to emotional influences. Teachers and learners engage in numerous affective interactions during which learners express satisfaction, enjoyment, and engagement with the learning process. Researchers such as Feng and Chen (2009) and Choy and Troudi (2006) argue that internal feelings and emotions substantially shape learners' perspectives and attitudes toward the target language. Emotions permeate all stages of the learning process and are instrumental in explaining instances where learning may be hindered or fail to occur. Stern (1975) contended that the affective component contributes at least as significantly—and often more so—to language learning than cognitive skills alone. For example, learners may experience apprehension about making errors or being ridiculed by peers, particularly in group-based learning contexts. Accordingly, affective factors—such as emotions, anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and interest in learning—must be considered integral to effective foreign language instruction. A positive affective environment fosters risk-taking, persistence, and authentic communication, while negative emotions may inhibit participation and impede progress.

The *behavioral* dimension of attitudes encompasses learners' actions and responses in specific learning situations. It reflects the tendency to adopt certain behaviors or habits, especially within the context of foreign language learning. Learners often strive to emulate native speakers and internalize the behavioral patterns characteristic of the target language community (Abidin et al., 2012). Kara (2009) argues that positive behavioral attitudes foster constructive engagement, motivating learners to sustain effort and pursue their learning goals. Such attitudes enhance goal-oriented focus, support efficient learning, and contribute to the attainment of proficiency. Behavioral engagement is further expressed through responsibility, punctuality, and active participation in classroom tasks. Motivated learners are more likely to engage in communicative and collaborative activities, while those

with lower levels of engagement may exhibit passivity, neglect responsibilities, and divert attention elsewhere. Learners may also be inspired by peers who demonstrate greater proficiency, reinforcing their own commitment to improvement. Behavioral theorists highlight the influence of environmental stimuli on learning, emphasizing the role of observable behavior (Woolfolk, 1995). Accordingly, the learning environment and social context play a crucial role, as they can either facilitate or hinder learners' motivation and performance.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning play a pivotal role in shaping their overall experience and success. The cognitive, emotional (or affective), and behavioral dimensions jointly determine how learners perceive, engage with, and respond to the language learning process. Cognitively, attitudes guide understanding and knowledge integration; affectively, they shape motivation, confidence, and emotional involvement; behaviorally, they influence participation and strategic engagement. Attitudes, therefore, are not peripheral traits but central determinants of learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement. Recognizing their significance allows for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals approach language learning and adapt to its challenges.

### 3. Methodology

Following the theoretical overview of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of attitudes toward foreign language learning, this section outlines the methodological framework of the study. It provides a detailed account of the research sample, the data collection instrument, and the procedures employed in conducting the study, thereby laying the groundwork for the subsequent presentation and interpretation of findings.

#### 3.1. Sample structure

The research sample was selected using a convenience sampling method, involving secondary school students to whom the researchers had direct access. A total of 201 participants took part in the study. Respondents were categorized according to the following variables: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) type of secondary school, (4) year of secondary school, and (5) average grade in English.

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants by gender. Of the total sample, 50.2% ( $n = 101$ ) were male and 49.8% ( $n = 100$ ) were female, indicating an almost equal gender representation.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by gender

| Gender | %    |
|--------|------|
| Male   | 50.2 |
| Female | 49.8 |

With respect to age (Table 2), the largest proportion of participants were 18 years old, accounting for 27.4% ( $n = 55$ ) of the sample. They were followed by 17-year-olds (24.9%,  $n = 50$ ), 16-year-olds (22.3%,  $n = 46$ ), and 15-year-olds (21.9%,  $n = 44$ ). A smaller number of participants were 19 years old (2.5%,  $n = 5$ ), while only one participant (0.5%) was 20 years old.

Table 2. Distribution of participants by age

| Age          | %    |
|--------------|------|
| 15 years old | 21.9 |
| 16 years old | 22.3 |
| 17 years old | 24.9 |
| 18 years old | 27.4 |
| 19 years old | 2.5  |
| 20 years old | 0.5  |

Table 3 provides an overview of participant distribution based on the type of secondary school attended. Of the total sample, 22.9% ( $n = 46$ ) were enrolled in the Social and Linguistic Program of the Grammar School, 18.9% ( $n = 38$ ) attended the Science and Mathematics Program of the Grammar School, 18.9% ( $n = 38$ ) were students of the School of Economics and Trade, 18.9% ( $n = 38$ ) attended the Technical School “Mihailo Petrović Alas”, and 20.4% ( $n = 41$ ) were enrolled in the Medical School (with student dormitory) in Kosovska Mitrovica.

Table 3. Distribution of participants by type of secondary school

| Type of secondary school                         | %    |
|--|------|
| Grammar School (Social and Linguistic Program)   | 22.9 |
| Grammar School (Science and Mathematics Program) | 18.9 |
| School of Economics and Trade                    | 18.9 |
| Technical School “Mihailo Petrović Alas”         | 18.9 |
| Medical School (with student dormitory)          | 20.4 |

Considering the distribution across secondary school years, Table 4 shows that the largest proportion of participants were fourth-year students, comprising 33.3%



( $n = 67$ ) of the sample. This was followed by second-year students at 24.4% ( $n = 49$ ), first-year students at 22.4% ( $n = 45$ ), and third-year students at 19.9% ( $n = 40$ ).

Table 4. Distribution of participants by year of secondary school

| Year of secondary school | %    |
|--------------------------|------|
| first year               | 22.4 |
| second year              | 24.4 |
| third year               | 19.9 |
| fourth year              | 33.3 |

Table 5 outlines the average grade achieved by participants in English. The highest proportion of students received the highest grade 5, accounting for 41.3% ( $n = 83$ ) of the sample. This was followed by students with grade 3 (21.4%,  $n = 43$ ), grade 4 (19.4%,  $n = 39$ ), grade 2 (9.5%,  $n = 19$ ), and grade 1 (8.5%,  $n = 17$ ).

Table 5. Distribution of participants by average grade in English

| Average grade in English | %    |
|--------------------------|------|
| one (1)                  | 8.5  |
| two (2)                  | 9.5  |
| three (3)                | 21.4 |
| four (4)                 | 19.4 |
| five (5)                 | 41.3 |

### 3.2. Research instrument

For the purposes of this study, an adapted version of the Attitude Questionnaire toward Learning English (Abidin et al., 2012) was employed. The instrument comprised four sections: (1) the first section collected sociodemographic data, including gender, age, school type, school year, and average grade in English; (2) the second section included 15 statements addressing the cognitive dimension of attitudes; (3) the third section contained 15 statements relating to the behavioral dimension; and (4) the fourth section consisted of 15 statements pertaining to the emotional (affective) dimension. Participants indicated the extent of their agreement with each statement by selecting one of five options on a Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient. The obtained values were as follows: (1) for the entire questionnaire,  $\alpha = 0.92$ ; (2) for the cognitive dimension,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ; (3) for the emotional dimension,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ; and (4) for the behavioral dimension,  $\alpha = 0.64$ . These results indicate that

the overall reliability of the instrument is satisfactory, as  $\alpha$  exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). The emotional and cognitive sections also demonstrated good internal consistency, while the behavioral dimension yielded a slightly lower alpha value, suggesting marginally reduced reliability for this subset of items ( $\alpha < 0.7$ ). Nevertheless, when viewed within the framework of the instrument's overall scale structure, this lower coefficient does not undermine the validity or relevance of the findings.

### **3.3. Data collection procedure**

The survey was administered during English language classes in the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. The researchers conducted in-person visits to the participating secondary schools in Kosovska Mitrovica. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received a comprehensive explanation outlining the study's aims, the anonymity of responses, the procedure for filling out the instrument, and the exclusive use of the data for research dissemination. This approach ensured that participants were adequately informed and that data collection adhered to established ethical research standards.

## **4. Results and discussion**

In accordance with the previously defined hypotheses, the results of the study were categorized into four thematic groups and are presented and discussed in the following order: (1) secondary school students' cognitive attitudes toward learning English; (2) emotional attitudes; (3) behavioral attitudes; and (4) the significance of differences in students' attitudes with respect to selected variables (gender, age, school type, school year, and average grade in English).

### **4.1. Students' cognitive attitudes toward learning English**

To examine the extent to which secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica demonstrate cognitive attitudes toward learning English, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted, including the calculation of the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Degree of expression of the cognitive dimension of students' attitudes

|                                  | N   | Min–Max | AM           | SD    |
|----------------------------------|-----|---------|--------------|-------|
| Cognitive dimension of attitudes | 201 | 15–75   | <b>51.61</b> | 10.75 |

Note: N – number of participants; Min – minimum score; Max – maximum score; AM – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation

The results reveal that the majority of students exhibit a positive cognitive attitude toward learning English. Specifically, a substantial portion of the sample either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements presented. The arithmetic mean of the cognitive dimension of attitudes ( $M = 51.61$ ) exceeds the midpoint of the scale ( $M = 45$ ), corresponding to the total number of questionnaire items (45). Participants expressed agreement with statements emphasizing the instrumental value of learning English, including the enhancement of critical thinking and communicative competence, expansion of knowledge and access to new information, integration of prior and newly acquired knowledge, practical application in real-life contexts, and facilitation of academic progress, among other benefits.

These findings align with previous research. Vergara Burgos (2023) observed that secondary school students in the Philippines similarly hold positive cognitive attitudes toward learning English. Hernández Salinas (2024) emphasized students' favorable dispositions regarding the significance of English for future professional trajectories, access to novel information, and expedited career advancement, corroborating the present results. Zulfikar et al. (2019), despite employing a qualitative methodology, likewise confirmed widespread agreement regarding the benefits of English language learning. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of the present study is supported: *from a cognitive standpoint, secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica demonstrate a predominantly positive attitude toward learning English.*

#### 4.2. Students' emotional attitudes toward learning English

To determine how secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica perceive English language learning from an emotional perspective, descriptive statistical analyses were also employed, including the calculation of the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. An overview of the results is provided in Table 8.

Table 8. Degree of expression of the emotional dimension of students' attitudes

|                                  | N   | Min–Max | AM    | SD    |
|----------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|-------|
| Emotional dimension of attitudes | 201 | 15–75   | 53.73 | 13.19 |

Note: N – number of participants; Min – minimum score; Max – maximum score; AM – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation

Table 8 offers insight into the pronounced positivity of students' emotional attitudes, as the arithmetic mean ( $M = 53.73$ ) exceeds the midpoint of this segment of the scale ( $M = 45$ ), which corresponds to the total number of items (45). By indicating their level of agreement with the provided statements, the majority of respondents demonstrated that they do not experience anxiety, stress, or disinterest in learning English. Their responses were predominantly positive, suggesting that, for most participants, English language learning is perceived as an enjoyable activity that promotes well-being, stimulates curiosity, fosters engagement in learning, and enhances self-confidence in communication.

The findings of three additional studies—Abidin et al., 2012; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Vergara Burgos, 2023—corroborate the values presented in Table 8. In contrast, Hernández Salinas (2024) reported that participants predominantly exhibited negative attitudes, primarily due to stress and frustration associated with language learning, while Zulfikar et al. (2019) found a roughly equal split between positive and negative emotional attitudes. Despite the partially divergent results of some earlier studies, the outcomes of the present research, consistent with the majority of the aforementioned findings, indicate that most respondents either agree or strongly agree with statements reflecting the emotional dimension of learning English. In light of these results, the second hypothesis is affirmed: *from an emotional standpoint, secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica hold a predominantly positive attitude toward learning English.*

#### 4.3. Students' behavioral attitudes toward learning English

To assess the behavioral dimension of students' attitudes toward learning English, descriptive statistical analyses were likewise conducted, including calculations of the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The results are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Degree of expression of the behavioral dimension of students' attitudes

|                                   | N   | Min–Max | AM    | SD   |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|------|
| Behavioral dimension of attitudes | 201 | 15–75   | 47.97 | 8.76 |

Note: N – number of participants; Min – minimum score; Max – maximum score; AM – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation

The results indicate that students exhibit predominantly positive behavioral attitudes toward learning English, as the arithmetic mean ( $M = 47.97$ ) surpasses the midpoint of this segment of the scale ( $M = 45$ ), which corresponds to the total number of items (45). The majority of respondents expressed a strong inclination toward active and sustained engagement in English learning, particularly with the aim of understanding native speakers and interacting more effectively with proficient users of the language. They also emphasized that language mastery contributes to more fluent self-expression and fosters improved interpersonal relationships with peers.

These findings are corroborated by previous studies conducted among secondary school students in the Philippines (Vergara Burgos, 2023) and Mexico (Hernández Salinas, 2024). Conversely, the study by Abidin et al. (2012) reported predominantly negative behavioral attitudes, including limited classroom engagement, inattentiveness during lessons, and a general perception of English as a non-essential subject. A small number of respondents in the present study also reported feelings of anxiety when exposed to English, neglecting both in-class and at-home learning activities. Nevertheless, despite the presence of such attitudes, the overall pattern of responses points to a prevailing behavioral orientation that favors English language learning. Accordingly, the third hypothesis of this study is confirmed: *from a behavioral standpoint, secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica exhibit a generally positive attitude toward learning English.*

**4.4. Significance of differences in students' attitudes across selected variables**

To examine whether statistically significant differences exist in secondary school students' attitudes toward learning English with respect to gender, age, school type, school year, and average grade in English, the collected data were analyzed using both one-way ANOVA and independent-samples t-tests.

(a) Regarding potential differences across the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions with respect to gender, the results of the t-test are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. T-test results for differences in students' attitudes with respect to gender

| Dimensions of students' attitudes | F     | p     |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|
| cognitive dimension               | 0.633 | 0.427 |
| emotional dimension               | 0.495 | 0.483 |
| behavioral dimension              | 0.563 | 0.454 |

Note: F – value from the t-test; p – significance level

The results show that there is no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes with respect to gender, as all p-values ( $p = 0.427$ ,  $p = 0.483$ ,  $p = 0.454$ ) exceed the conventional threshold of significance ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that male and female students do not differ meaningfully in their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided. For instance, female students do not exhibit stronger affective attitudes toward learning English than male students, and vice versa. These findings are consistent with previous research and further corroborate the data presented in Table 10 (Abidin et al., 2012; Fakeye, 2010; Shoaib & Dornyei, 2005). Similarly, a study conducted in Dubrovnik yielded comparable results (Didović Baranac et al., 2016).

However, several studies conducted in the United States, Europe, and Australia have reported findings that diverge from those obtained in the present research (Bacon & Finnemann, 1992; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Rieger, 2009). Based on the interpretation of these data and the publication years of the aforementioned studies, it may be inferred that such discrepancies reflect the sociolinguistic context of the time, when English was not as pervasive in everyday life as it is today. At present, students are exposed to English in school, at home, in virtual environments, on social media, and across the Internet—regardless of gender. Work, education, travel, and daily life have become largely unimaginable without English. As participants in a globalized world, individuals are increasingly required to adapt to the evolving demands of society, within which English language proficiency has become one of the essential competencies of the twenty-first century. Consequently, the respondents in this study—irrespective of gender—appear to be aware of this necessity, which may account for the absence of significant differences in their responses.

(b) To assess the potential associations between each dimension of students' attitudes and the variables of age, school type, school year, and average grade in English, an ANOVA analysis was performed. The results for the cognitive dimension of students' attitudes are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. ANOVA results for the cognitive dimension of students' attitudes

| Variables                | F     | p     |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| age                      | 1.15  | 0.334 |
| type of secondary school | 1.35  | 0.252 |
| year of secondary school | 1.28  | 0.281 |
| average grade in English | 39.49 | 0.000 |

Note: F – value from ANOVA; p – significance level

The results reveal that statistically significant differences in the cognitive dimension of students' attitudes toward learning English exist only in relation to their average grade in English ( $F = 39.49$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that students with lower grades tend to exhibit more negative cognitive attitudes, while those with higher grades display more favorable dispositions toward learning English. Comparable findings have been reported by Aravind and Rajasekaran (2020) and Al-Zahrani (2008, as cited in Abidin et al., 2012), thereby reinforcing the relevance of these results to the objectives of the present study.

(c) An analysis of the associations between the emotional dimension of students' attitudes and the variables of age, school type, school year, and average grade in English yielded the ANOVA results presented in Table 12.

Table 12. ANOVA results for the emotional dimension of students' attitudes

| Variables                | F     | p     |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| age                      | 1.31  | 0.261 |
| type of secondary school | 1.24  | 0.294 |
| year of secondary school | 0.96  | 0.411 |
| average grade in English | 70.77 | 0.000 |

Note: F – value from ANOVA; p – significance level

The results indicate that statistically significant differences in the emotional dimension of students' attitudes occur only with respect to their average grade in

English ( $F = 70.77$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Specifically, students with lower grades tend to exhibit more negative affective dispositions toward learning English, while higher-achieving students demonstrate more positive attitudinal orientations. These findings are consistent with prior research, which identified a positive correlation between the affective dimension of learners' attitudes and their academic performance in English (Pishghadam et al., 2016).

(d) Subsequently, an analysis of the potential associations between the behavioral dimension of students' attitudes and the variables of age, school type, school year, and average grade in English was conducted, with the results summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. ANOVA results for the behavioral dimension of students' attitudes

| Variables                | F     | p     |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| age                      | 1.31  | 0.259 |
| type of secondary school | 0.76  | 0.551 |
| year of secondary school | 1.16  | 0.326 |
| average grade in English | 13.36 | 0.000 |

Note: F – value from ANOVA; p – significance level

The results show that statistically significant differences in the behavioral dimension of students' attitudes are observed once again solely in relation to their average grade in English ( $F = 13.36$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In other words, students with higher grades tend to exhibit more positive behavioral dispositions, while those with lower grades show less favorable orientations toward learning English. This positive association between academic performance and behavioral engagement has likewise been documented in earlier research on learners' attitudes toward English language learning (Jafri, 2012), thereby reinforcing the reliability and relevance of the present findings.

Investigations into general attitudes toward English language learning in relation to students' age have been conducted by Didović Baranac et al. (2016) in Croatia, who found that no statistically significant differences exist in students' responses, indicating that age does not influence the degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided. The present study's results across all three dimensions of attitudes are consistent with these findings and suggest that twenty-first-century students represent a generation that has been exposed to English instruction from



the first grade of primary school. Given the continuity and prolonged exposure to English as the first foreign language throughout both primary and secondary education, it may be reasonably concluded that the respondents of this study have developed well-established and clearly articulated attitudes toward learning English.

The final hypothesis is supported: *statistically significant differences in students' attitudes toward English language learning were found only in relation to their average grade in English, with no significant effects observed across gender, age, school type, or school year.*

## 5. Concluding remarks

The concluding section of this study presents final reflections alongside broader implications of the findings. Recommendations are proposed for enhancing English language instruction aimed at fostering the development of positive attitudes toward English language learning among secondary school students. Furthermore, the limitations of this cross-sectional research are acknowledged, and directions for future research on related topics are suggested.

The analysis of the results reveals consistently positive attitudes toward learning English across all examined dimensions—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—among secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica. From a cognitive perspective, students expressed high agreement with statements concerning the utility of English for educational advancement, access to new information, the cultivation of critical thinking, and its application in everyday contexts. This suggests that students recognize both the academic and practical value of English. These findings corroborate prior research demonstrating that a positive cognitive perception of foreign language learning enhances both engagement and motivation (Hernández Salinas, 2024; Vergara Burgos, 2023).

From an emotional standpoint, the predominance of positive responses reflects strong affective motivation, satisfaction with the learning process, and genuine interest in acquiring English. The presence of positive emotional attitudes among most participants suggests a favorable psychological framework for effective knowledge acquisition and the development of language competencies. The low incidence of negative emotions, such as anxiety or disinterest, further underscores the importance of affective motivation as a key factor for sustained learning and long-term retention.

In the behavioral domain, the findings indicate that the majority of students demonstrate active engagement, responsibility, and consistent participation in

language learning. Positive attitudes in this dimension reflect students' willingness to invest effort, complete assignments conscientiously, and actively use English in communicative contexts. Such behavioral tendencies point to a high level of functional language use and successful integration of knowledge into authentic situations.

The observed finding that significant differences in attitudes were evident only in relation to students' average grades can be explained by the relationship between motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Students with higher grades typically display greater commitment to learning, adopt more systematic approaches to tasks, and exhibit more positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes toward the subject, which in turn is reflected in their overall dispositions (Al-Zahrani, 2008, as cited in Abidin et al., 2012; Aravind & Rajasekaran, 2020; Грыбop, 2012; Pishghadam et al., 2016). Conversely, the absence of significant differences in attitudes with respect to age, school type, school year, or gender may be attributed to the widespread and sustained exposure of contemporary students to English—through formal education as well as media and digital environments. Regardless of these demographic factors, students today have similar opportunities from an early age to acquire knowledge, cultivate interest, and develop positive orientations toward English, resulting in comparable levels of agreement across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that secondary school students in Kosovska Mitrovica maintain constructive and productive attitudes toward learning English, which positively influence their motivation, academic success, and overall language competence. This underscores the need for instruction that continually nurtures all three attitudinal dimensions in order to optimize learning outcomes and maximize the effectiveness of English language education.

The three dimensions of attitudes are conceptualized within the ABC model (Oblic, 2022), which encompasses what individuals feel, do, and think in relation to a given object or phenomenon. For instance, statements such as "I am afraid of the English teacher," "I will avoid English classes because of him," and "I think the teacher is too strict" illustrate these interrelated components. Johnson (2014) emphasized the interconnectedness of emotions, behavior, and cognition, noting that the latter two are generally more amenable to change than emotions, as individuals have greater control over what they think and do than over what they feel. Therefore, special attention should be devoted to the affective or emotional component in instruction, as it facilitates English language learning and mitigates potential barriers, thereby positively influencing students' cognitive and behavioral

attitudes. The subsequent section outlines practical strategies for improving the organization and planning of English language lessons in line with these insights.

### **5.1. Pedagogical implications**

According to the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia (Министарство просвете Републике Србије, 2022), the overarching goal of foreign language education is to develop students' communicative competence in the target language. This goal can be achieved through the use of diverse instructional methods, approaches, and resources, with particular attention to students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes. In accordance with the Rulebook on the Curriculum and Educational Program for Common Subjects in Vocational and Art Schools (Министарство просвете Републике Србије, 2022) and the Rulebook on the Curriculum and Educational Program for Grammar Schools (Министарство просвете Републике Србије, 2019), pedagogical implications are formulated as clear guidelines for improving English language instruction through an integrated approach that cultivates all three attitudinal dimensions.

Positive cognitive attitudes demonstrate that students recognize both the academic and practical utility of learning English. Accordingly, curricula should incorporate activities designed to further develop metacognitive skills, critical thinking, and the capacity to apply linguistic knowledge in authentic communicative contexts. Such practices reinforce intrinsic motivation and promote learner autonomy.

Positive emotional attitudes reflect affective motivation, satisfaction, and genuine interest in learning. This highlights the importance of creating a learning environment that fosters emotional security and enjoyment. Particular attention should be given to reducing anxiety and stress through interactive activities, collaborative work, learning games, and creative tasks, as affective factors play a crucial role in sustaining long-term language learning and retention.

In the behavioral domain, students' high levels of engagement and responsibility point to the need for pedagogical strategies that encourage the practical application of knowledge. Project-based learning, simulations, debates, and digital or multimedia tasks should be integrated into instruction to stimulate active participation and foster a sense of ownership in learning. These approaches not only enhance proactive and responsible behavior but also enable the integration of cognitive and emotional knowledge into functional language skills.

As significant differences in attitudes were observed only in relation to students' English language grades, it is crucial to provide individualized support for

lower-achieving learners. This may involve motivational interventions, adapted instructional materials, and strategies aimed at fostering positive attitudes, thereby enhancing engagement and building self-confidence.

Within the framework of the ABC model (Oblie, 2022), teachers are encouraged to prioritize the affective component of learning. Adjusting cognitive and behavioral aspects becomes more effective once positive emotional associations with the subject and learning process are established. Therefore, implementing strategies that reduce anxiety, encourage positive emotions, and strengthen self-confidence can help remove psychological barriers and improve overall English language learning outcomes and retention.

Overall, the pedagogical implications of this study highlight the importance of a holistic and balanced approach to language instruction—one that simultaneously develops students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes. Such an approach not only promotes academic achievement but also nurtures sustainable motivation and long-term positive dispositions toward language learning, essential for students' success in an increasingly globalized world.

## **5.2. Limitations of the study**

Although the study was successfully conducted and provided valuable insights into secondary school students' attitudes toward English language learning, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research sample comprised 201 secondary school students, which, while adequate for statistical analysis, remains relatively limited in scope. A larger and more diverse sample could have increased the statistical reliability of the results and improved their generalizability. Moreover, the study was geographically confined to schools in Kosovska Mitrovica. This regional focus restricts the applicability of the findings, as variations in educational environments, teaching practices, and sociolinguistic contexts across different parts of the country may influence students' attitudes toward learning English. Finally, the exclusive reliance on quantitative methodology imposed certain interpretative constraints. The integration of qualitative methods—such as interviews, focus groups, or open-ended questionnaires—could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors shaping students' attitudes. A mixed-methods approach would allow for deeper exploration of individual experiences and contextual influences that cannot be fully captured through quantitative analysis alone.

### 5.3. Suggestions for future research

Future research should continue to explore students' attitudes toward foreign language learning, as this domain remains both vital and dynamic. Promising avenues for further inquiry include examining attitudes toward English language learning among students in vocational programs across diverse urban contexts, investigating the relationship between attitudes and digital literacy, and comparing students' perceptions with those of English language teachers. Such studies could offer more comprehensive insights into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of language learning attitudes.

To underscore the profound significance of attitudes in foreign language learning, Baker (1992:p.9) emphasized that attitudes play a crucial role in the life and survival of a language, shaping its revitalization, preservation, and potential decline or extinction. The link between attitudes and the learning process is unequivocal: students who are sufficiently motivated and hold positive attitudes toward language learning tend to achieve higher results and demonstrate greater success in knowledge acquisition. Conversely, a lack of interest and the presence of negative attitudes can lead to demotivation, reduced engagement, and weaker language attainment. If such negative orientations become widespread, there is a potential risk of reduced language use—posing a threat to linguistic pluralism and underscoring the importance of fostering positive attitudes toward all languages. These findings reaffirm that attitudes toward language learning play a pivotal role not only in individual knowledge acquisition but also within the broader socio-cultural context of language preservation. Positive attitudes promote motivation, active engagement, and learning effectiveness, whereas disinterest and negativity may result in diminished linguistic competence. For this reason, special attention should be devoted to the affective dimension of learning—stimulating learners' interest, self-confidence, and active language use—in order to ensure long-term learning outcomes and safeguard the linguistic and cultural richness of society.

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## КОГНИТИВНИ, ЕМОЦИОНАЛНИ И БИХЕВИОРАЛНИ АСПЕКТИ СТАВОВА УЧЕНИКА СРЕДЊИХ ШКОЛА У КОСОВСКОЈ МИТРОВИЦИ ПРЕМА УЧЕЊУ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА: СТУДИЈА ПРЕСЕКА

### *Резиме*

Предмет овог рада јесте анализа ставова ученика средњих школа у Косовској Митровици према учењу енглеског језика. С обзиром на то да су адолесценти посебно подложни друштвеним, емоционалним и контекстуалним утицајима, спроведено је квантитативно емпиријско истраживање са следећим циљевима: (1) испитати когнитивни аспект ставова ученика средњих школа према учењу енглеског језика; (2) испитати емоционални аспект ставова ученика средњих школа према учењу енглеског језика; (3) испитати бихевиорални аспект ставова ученика средњих школа према учењу енглеског језика; и (4) утврдити да ли постоје статистички значајне разлике између ставова ученика у односу на пол, узраст, тип средње школе, годину средње школе и просечну оцену из предмета Енглески језик.

Истраживање је спроведено на узорку од 201 ученика, а одабрани су методом погодног узорка из четири средње школе у Косовској Митровици. Подаци су прикупљени помоћу прилагођене верзије упитника за испитивање ставова (ученика) према учењу енглеског језика (Abidin et al., 2012), а обрађени су применом одговарајућих процедура дескриптивне статистике, једнократне ANOVA анализе и t-теста за независне узорке у оквиру програма IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Резултати показују: (а) да ученици средњих школа у Косовској Митровици испољавају позитивне ставове према учењу енглеског језика у све три испитиване димензије – когнитивној, емоционалној и бихевиоралној; (б) да статистички значајна разлика међу ставовима ученика постоји само у односу на просечну оцену из предмета Енглески језик, док такве разлике код преосталих варијабли – пола, узраста, типа и године средње школе – нису утврђене; (в) да постоји наглашена потреба за увођењем савремених наставних приступа и метода са циљем

повећања мотивације и интересовања ученика средњих школа за учење енглеског језика.

► *Кључне речи:* ученици средњих школа, ставови према учењу енглеског језика, когнитивни аспект, емоционални аспект, бихевиорални аспект.

Preuzeto: 30. 9. 2025.  
Prihvaćeno: 18. 11. 2025.