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The Attitude of High School Female Students towards Learning English: The Case Study of Taliqan High Schools



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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students towards learning English language. It also investigated the motives of female students for learning English language. A questionnaire with 10 items was used to collect the data for the study. The participants of the study were 45 high school female students from three different schools in Taliqan City, who expressed their extent of agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items on a five-point Likert scale. MS Excel in particular charts was employed to analyze the data. The findings of the study showed that the participants had highly positive attitudes towards learning English language. Moreover, a large number of the participants were interested in learning English. It also found that most of the participants wanted to learn English for instrumental reasons such as pursuing their higher education overseas and getting a job. Further studies need to be done and the sample should include participants from different linguistic backgrounds and from rural areas as well.



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INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) is used for non-native English speakers learning English in a country where English is not commonly spoken. The term ESL (English as a Second Language) has been seen by some to indicate that English would be of secondary importance. The way English learners are instructed depends on their level of English proficiency and the programs provided in their school or district. In some programs, instructions are taught in both English and their home language. In other programs, instructions are only in English, but in a manner that is comprehensible to the students (Wright, 2010). Yet, there are other programs in which ELLs (English Language Learners) are pulled out of the classroom for separate English instruction, or the instruction can also be given in the classroom itself (Wright, 2010).

English as a foreign language has great reach and influence; it is taught all over the world. In English-speaking countries, English language teaching has evolved in two broad directions: instruction for people who intend to live in countries where English dominates and instruction for those who do not. These divisions have grown firmer as the instructors of these two industries have used different terminology, followed distinct training qualifications, formed separate professional, and so on. English as a foreign language began at independence and English is now the main foreign language being learned in Afghanistan. English is taught for eight or nine years from primary school (from Grade 4 or 5) through high school (Renandya, 2000).

The English Language has travelled fast and became the most spoken language in the world. English is considered as an important language in Afghanistan. As it is taught as a compulsory language in schools and all stages of education system. It is used mostly in the private sector, private and public education. However, despite learning English at school, many Afghans are not able to use English fluently in real life situations.

English is a compulsory subject in Afghan schools, and thus, students experience 9 years of primary and secondary education prior to entering the tertiary level of education. Regardless of the shift from conventional teaching methods to communicative language teaching, most English Language classrooms continue to treat it as a school subject that needs to be mastered and tested rather than as a tool of communication. Learning English in Afghanistan has been in the spotlight for years and now captures the attention of many of

its people. The progress of English Language education in Afghanistan in the last decade is due largely to the strong and growing conviction of the government that English competence is necessary for the younger generation in the twenty-first century. The article aims to study the attitudes of Afghan high school female students. Another purpose of the article is to explore the motivations of students for learning English.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students towards learning English language. It also wants to explore the reasons why students learn English. The article tries to answer the following questions.

- 1 What are the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students toward learning English language?
- 2 Are Taloqan City high school female students willing to learn English?
- 3 Why are Taloqan City high school female students willing to learn English language?

Language attitudes

Language attitude is an important concept because it plays a key role in language learning and teaching. According to Prodromou (1992), a successful learner is the one who possesses positive attitudes towards the target language. Attitude is a mental or natural state of readiness, shaped through experience or dynamic influence on the response provided by an individual to situations and objects. High motivation and positive attitudes towards a language, its culture and people help to achieve a certain goal but the question is how they could be measured.

Different aspects of language attitudes have been studied such as the relationship between attitudes and motivation (Donitsa-Schmidt *et al.* 2004; Bernaus *et al.* 2004; Williams *et al.*, 2002) and the relationship between attitudes and learning strategies (Gan; 2004). Other researchers studied the relationship between attitudes and level of achievement (Graham; 2004) and beliefs and attitudes towards the target language use, first language use, and anxiety. Moreover, the relationship between attitudes and ideology and culture have been explored as well (Flaitz, 2004). Over the past decades, a lot of attention has been devoted to attitude and Motivation (e.g., Lin & Warden, 1998).

The concept of attitude is incorporated in motivation, meaning that positive attitudes increase motivation. De Bot *et al.* (2005) claimed that teachers, learners and researchers will all agree that a high motivation and a positive attitude towards a second language and its community help second language learning. Baker (1992) believed that attitudes are not subject to inheritance because they are internalized predispositions. Attitudes towards a particular language might be either positive or negative. Some learners may have negative attitude towards the second language and want to learn it in order to prevail over people in the community, but generally, positive attitude strengthens the motivation. Attitudes towards languages are likely to have been developed by learners' experience. They may change during the passage of time. It could refer to both attitudes towards language learning and members of a particular speech community. Fasold (1984) claimed that attitudes towards a language are often mirrored in the attitudes towards the members of that speech community.

Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). Language attitudes are defined as, "The attitude which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language." Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, and social status. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language (Richards, 2013).

Gardner (1985) sees attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. According to him, 'motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language'. He believes the motivation to learn a foreign language is determined by basic predispositions and personality characteristics such as the learner's attitudes towards foreign people in general, and the target group and language in particular, motives for learning, and generalized attitudes (Gardner 1985). Wenden (1991) sees attitudes as including three components: First, attitudes tend to have a cognitive component. This could involve beliefs or perceptions about the objects or situations related to the attitude. Second, attitudes have an evaluative component. This means that the objects or situations related to the attitude may generate like or dislike. Third, attitudes have a behavioral component, i.e. certain attitudes tend to prompt learners to adopt particular learning behaviors.

Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) discuss the current issues, pedagogical implications and new directions in beliefs about language learning including social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors among which attitudes have an important status. Similarly, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) conclude attitude as an important factor in language learning in their study on the internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort, which was put forward previously as the Process Model of L2 Motivation (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection

In this part, the procedure of collection of data of the present study is discussed. More specifically, questionnaire, participants of the study and procedure of collection of data in details are explained.

Data Collection Instrument

There are a number of methods of collecting data to measure language attitudes of a particular group of linguistic group. There are a number of techniques such as the matched guise technique, interviews, questionnaires and observation to collect data for language attitude studies (Agheyisi and Fishman, 1970). According to Fasol (1984), questionnaires can have two types of questions. Closed questions which have a particular set of responses, and they include yes-no answers, multiple choice, and ranking in which the respondents do not have freedom. The other type is open-ended questions in which the subjects have enough freedom. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of the description of the study and purpose of the study. The author briefly described the study and the purpose of the study. He made the participants aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary and they had the freedom to avoid answering any question they didn't want to answer.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section sought the demographic information of the participants including age, and native language. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 statements, which elicited the attitudes of the participants towards learning English. The last part of the questionnaire sought the reasons of the respondents for learning English.

Participants

The participants of this study were 45 high school female students from three different schools in Taloqan City. They were studying in Bibi Maryam High School, No 1 High School and BibiHajira High School at the time of the study. They were between 15 and 20 years old. All the participants were native speakers of Dari. The reason for selecting these schools was the affiliation of the author to these schools. The author's students were working as English teachers in these schools. The English teachers helped the author to fill out the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

I had a session with three English teachers (No 1 High School, Bibi Maryam High School and BibiHajira High School) in which I explained the questionnaire and its purpose to them. They agreed to request their students to fill out the questionnaire. They explained the research and its aims to their students and requested them to fill out the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Data were derived from 15 participants. The data were collected through survey questionnaire consisted of two categories of questions, and each category was aimed to seek particular information.

Likert scales were used to measure the closed questions in the questionnaire seeking information about the subjects' attitudes toward their attitudes towards learning English. The typical Likert scale is a 5- or 7-point ordinal scale used by researchers to ask the participants to indicate the extent they agree or disagree with a number of statements and propositions about "beliefs, evaluations, and actions held by individuals" (Bradburn et al, 2004; Sullivan &Artino, 2013). The following likert scales were used to measure the extent to which the subjects agreed or disagreed with the statements about their language attitudes.

1 – Totally disagree 2 – disagree 3 – neuter 4 – agree 5 – totally agree

The data were entered into an excel sheet and they were encoded. The findings were presented in charts and tables.

RESULT

The main purpose of the paper was to investigate the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students toward learning English language. The results of the study showed that Taloqan City high school female students generally had a positive attitude toward learning English language. Each research question is discussed in details.

Research question 1: what are the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students toward learning English language?

Five items of the questionnaire addressed the first research questions. That is, analysis of the responses of the participants to the five statements reveals whether they have a positive or a negative attitude. Figure No.1 shows that over 90% of the participants have totally agreed and agreed with the fact that English is a beautiful language while only 2% have disagreed with English as being a beautiful language.

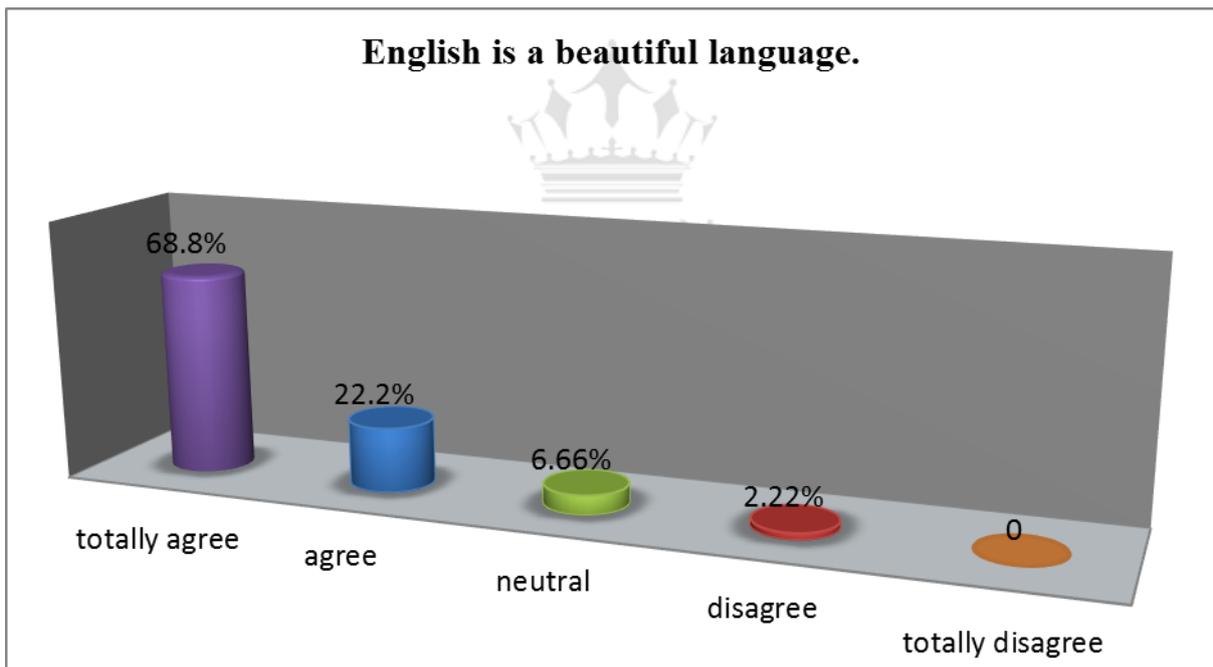


Figure No.1: the participants' view regarding beauty of English

As can be seen in chart 2, 95% of the participants totally disagreed and agreed with the idea of English being an ugly language. Only 2% of the respondents totally agreed with the statement "English is an ugly language".

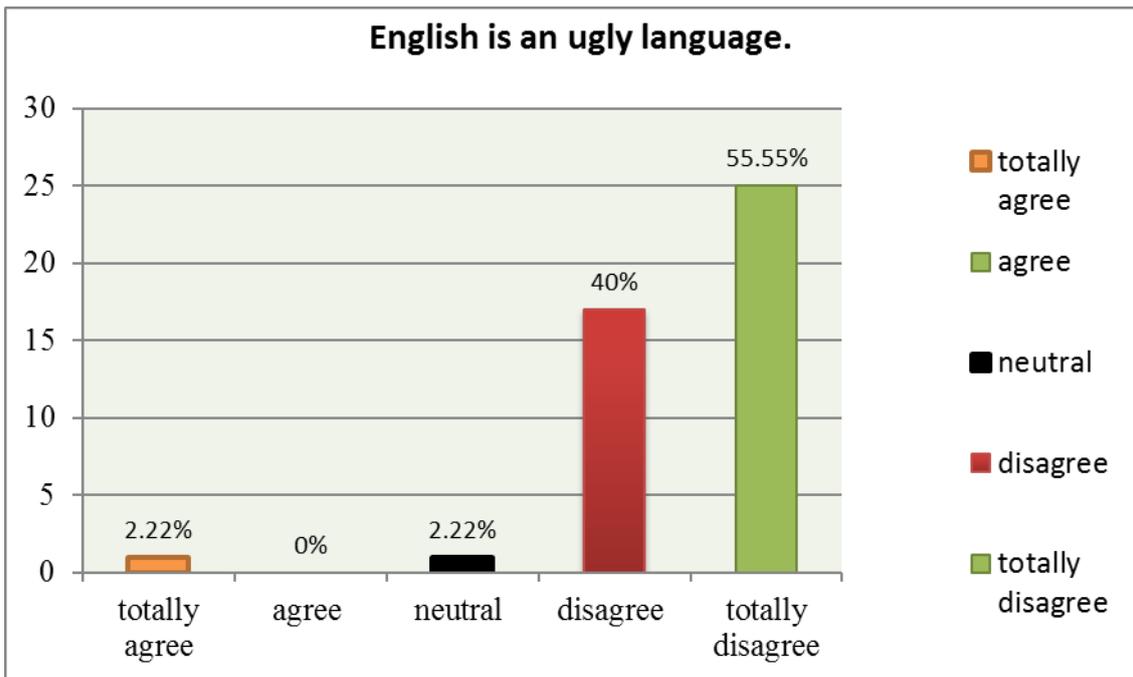


Figure No. 2: the respondents’ view about ugliness of English

Figure No. 3 indicates that almost 98 % of the subjects totally agreed and agreed with the statement “I like English”. However, a very small percentage of the respondents (2%) totally disagreed with the statement.

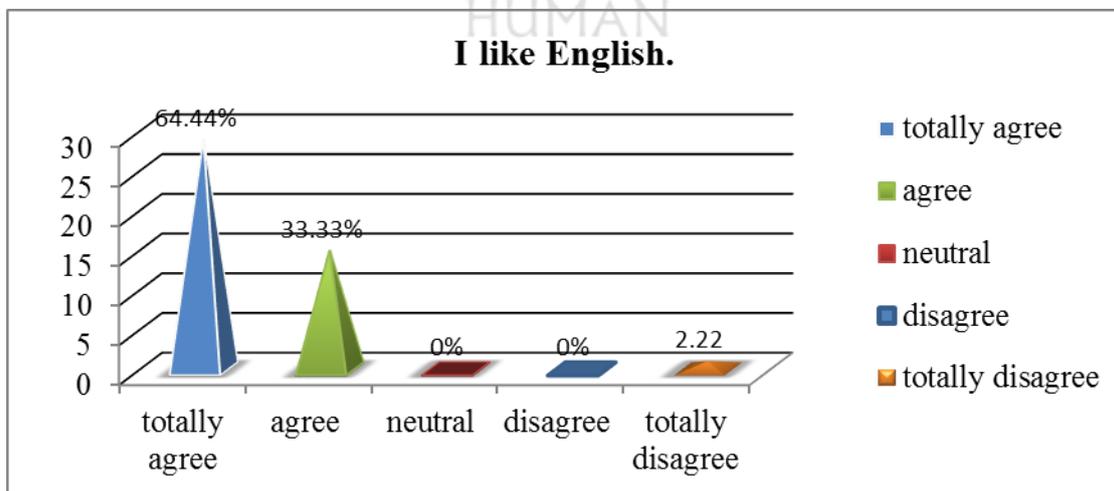


Figure No. 3: The participants’ view about liking English

Figure No. 4 shows that over 86% of the participants totally disagreed and disagreed with the statement “I do not like English”, while a small percentage of the respondents (9%) totally agreed that they did not like English.

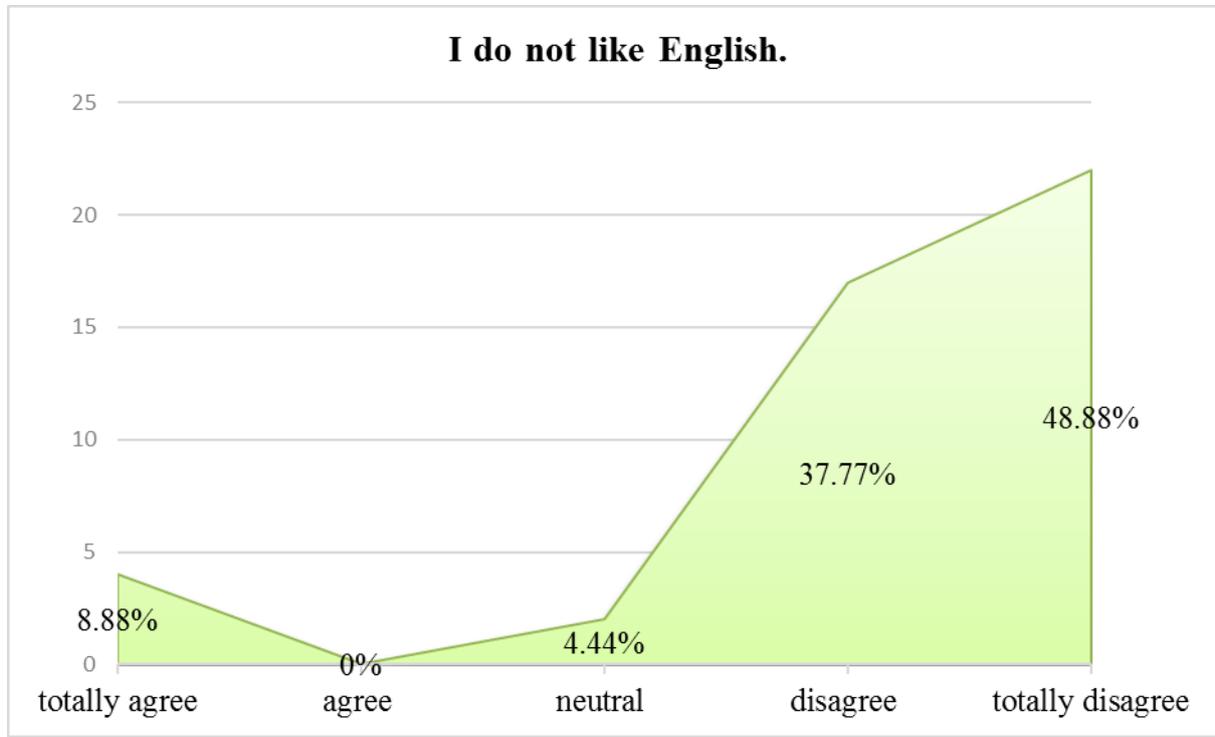


Figure No. 4: The subjects' view about disliking English

As it can be observed in Figure No. 5, a large percent of the participants (64%) totally agreed that they enjoyed speaking English with friends, and 31% agreed that speaking English with friends was enjoyable. However, a very small percentage (2%) totally disagreed that they did not enjoy speaking English to their friends.

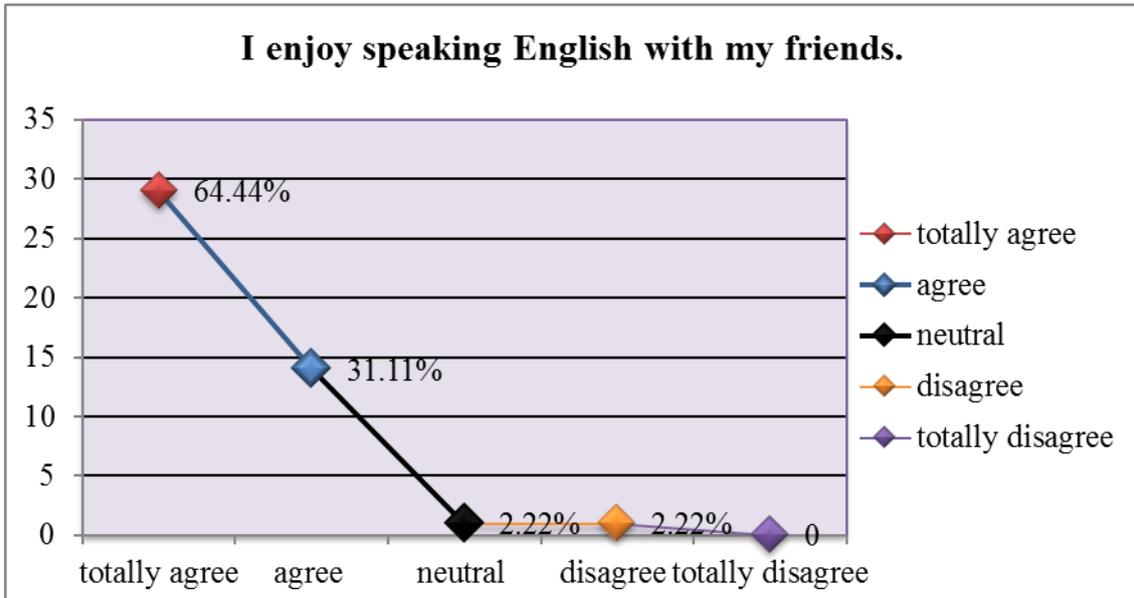


Figure No. 5: The subjects view about enjoyment of speaking English with friends

Over 92% of the participants totally agreed and agreed with three positive statements (English is a beautiful language; I like English; I enjoy speaking English with my friends) of the questionnaire. Moreover, higher than 86% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with two negative items of the questionnaire (English is an ugly language; I do not like English). However, a very small number of the subjects (2%) totally disagreed and disagreed with the positive items of the questionnaire. Less than 10% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with negative statements of the questionnaire. These analyses show that high school female students have high attitudes toward the English language.

Research Question 2: Are Taloqan City high school female students willing to learn English?

Three items of the questionnaire sought information about the respondents' interest in learning English, and they are analyzed in detail. As it can be seen in table 6, 98% of the participants totally agreed and agreed that they were interested in learning English. However, only 2% of the participants totally disagreed with the statement "I eager to learn English".

I eager to learn English.

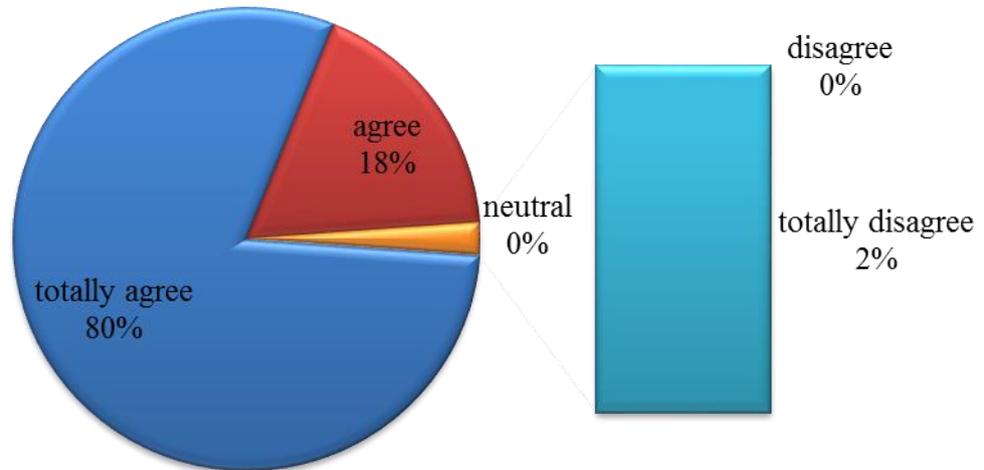


Figure No. 6: The participants’ interest in learning English

Figure No.7 indicates that almost 70% of the participants totally agreed and agreed they were willing to spend their time and money to learn English. However, only 4% of the participants totally disagreed and disagreed with the fact they were not interested their time and money on learning English.

I am willing to invest my time and money on learning English.

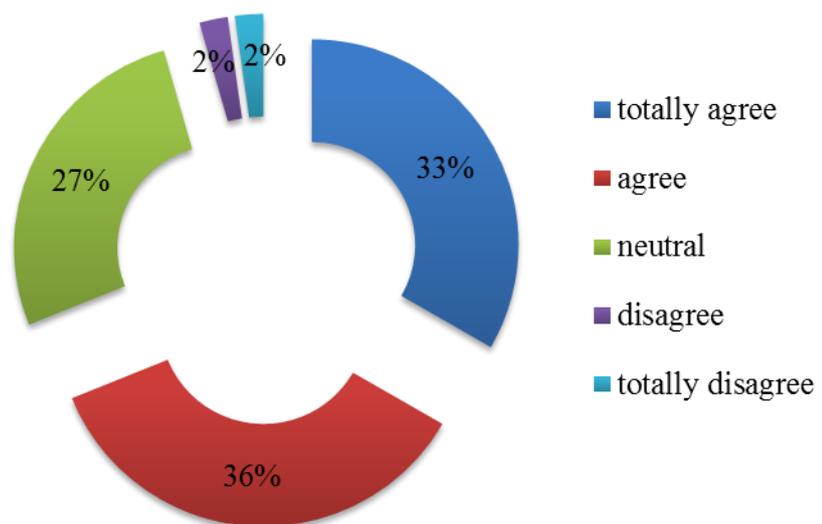


Figure No. 7: The participants’ willingness to invest on learning English

Figure No. 8 shows the extent of the participants' agreement and disagreement with the idea of needing English. A large number of the subjects (90%) totally disagreed and disagreed with the statement "I do not need English at all". However, a very small number of the respondents (4%) totally agreed that they did not need English at all.

Over 80% of the participants on average strongly agreed and agreed with the positive statements of the questionnaire that elicited information about the participants' interest in learning English while a very small number of the respondents (2%) strongly disagreed with them. On the other hand, 90% of the participants strongly disagreed and disagreed with the negative item of the participants that enquired their interest in learning English. These analyses show that the participants are highly interested in learning English.

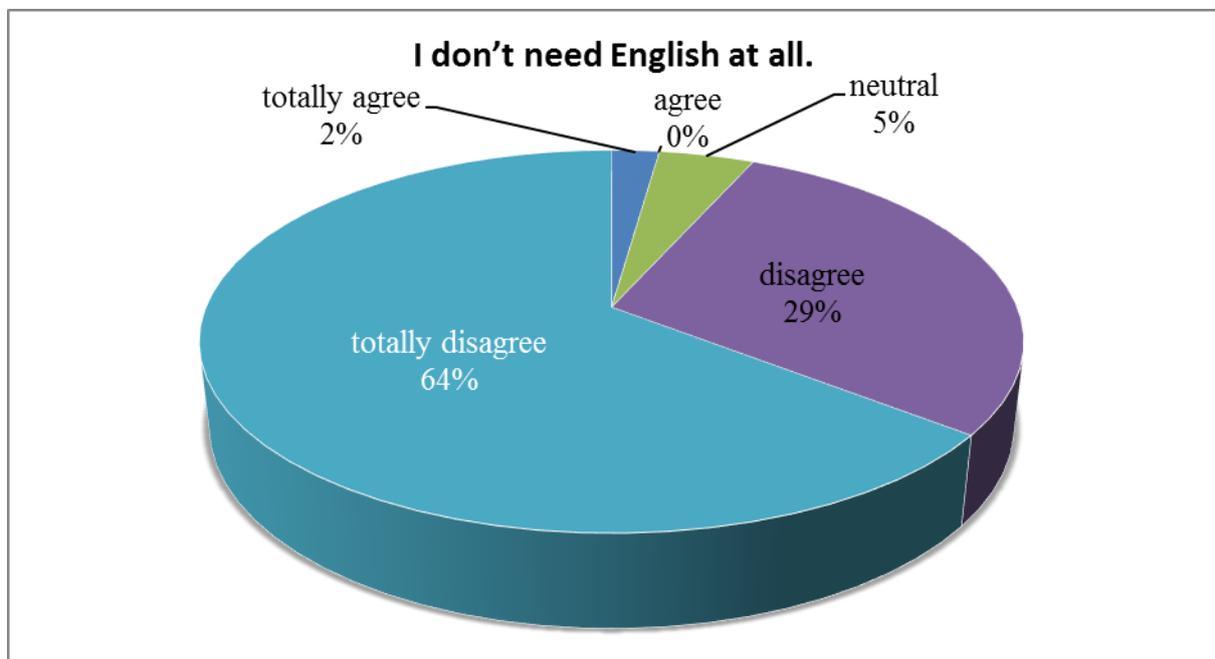


Figure No. 8: The participants' need to learn English

Research question 3: Why are Taloqan City high school female students willing to learn English?

The last two items of the questionnaire sought the respondents' reasons for learning English. As Figure No. 9 shows, 78% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they learned English because they liked reading English books and watching English moves while a small percentage stated otherwise.

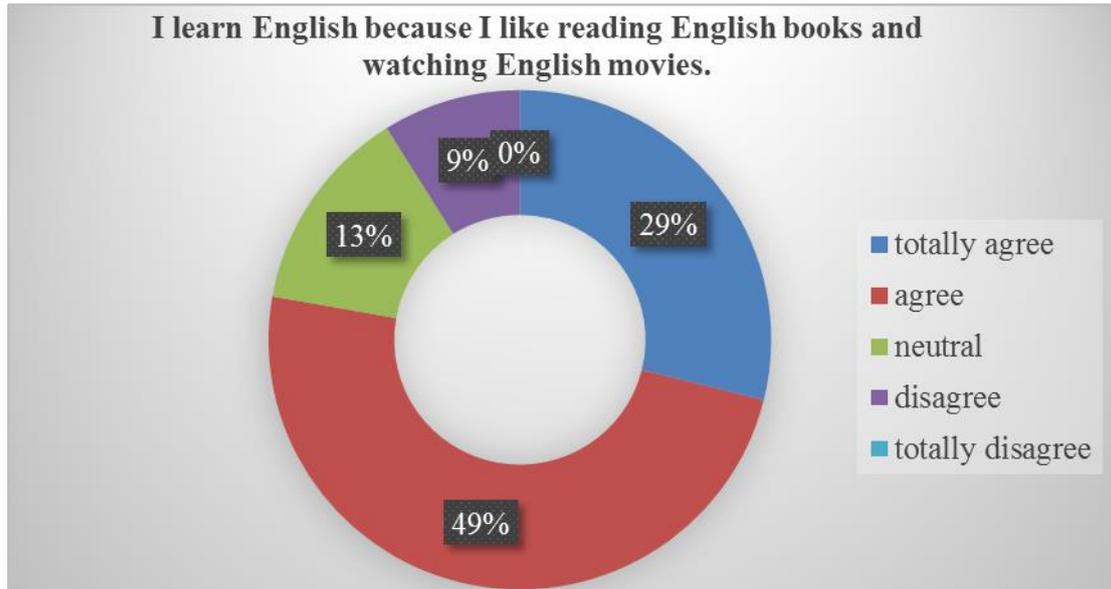


Figure No. 9: The participants' interest in reading English books and watching English movies

Figure No.10 reveals that all the participants learned English for particular reasons. Most of the participants (87%) learned English because they wanted to pursue their higher education. In other words, they prefer English to be the medium of instruction for their higher education program. Moreover, 11% of them wanted to learn English because they wanted to get a job, and a small number of them (2%) wanted to learn English since they wanted to travel overseas. The analysis of the statements, which enquired the respondents' reasons for learning English, shows that a large number of the participants learn English because they like reading English books and watching English movies. Furthermore, most of the participants learn English for instrumental reasons including getting a job and getting higher education.

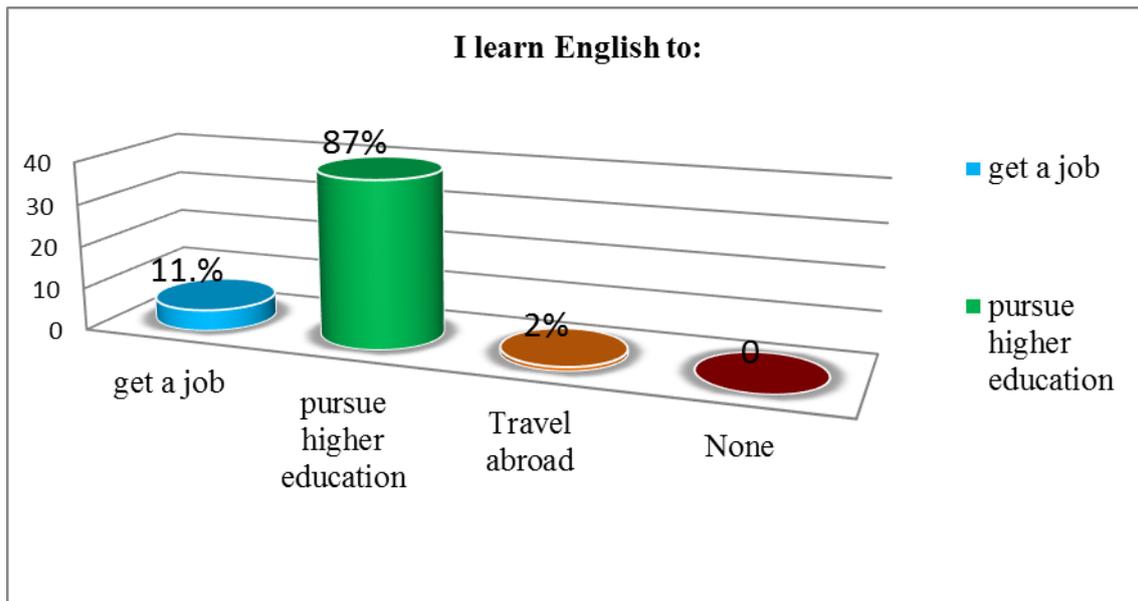


Figure No.10: The respondents' reasons for learning English

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the attitudes of Taloqan City high school female students towards learning English and their motives for learning English. As the findings show, the majority of the participants hold highly positive attitudes towards learning English language. Furthermore, most of the participants are not only willing to learn English but also interesting in investing their time and money on learning English. The respondents want to learn English for various reasons, but a large number of them want to learn English because they want to pursue their higher education overseas.

Limitations and Future Studies

The study had a small number of participants (45 female students). The author cannot generalize the findings of the study to all other Afghan high school female students due to the small size of the sample and the fact that they all spoke the same language. Hence, more studies should be carried out to investigate the attitudes of high school female students, and data should be collected from a large number of students from different schools. The participants should be from different linguistic background and they should be selected from the urban areas and rural areas.

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