

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM AT MAN 2 MODEL MEDAN

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Abstract.. This study explores the complex attitudinal profile of Grade X students at MAN 2 Model Medan toward English classroom interaction and examines how these attitudes reflect in their classroom participation. Operating within a descriptive qualitative design, the study utilized an open-ended questionnaire distributed to ten participants to capture their cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The findings reveal a dualistic psychological pattern where students demonstrate high cognitive appreciation for the utility of verbal interaction, yet this is often obstructed by significant affective barriers, specifically communication apprehension and fear of negative peer evaluation. These internal states directly dictate participation patterns on the classroom continuum, with resilient students manifesting active engagement and anxious students defaulting to defensive silence. The results imply that traditional pedagogical encouragement is insufficient to induce verbal participation when underlying affective barriers remain unaddressed. Therefore, it is suggested that English teachers minimize stressful teacher-fronted elicitation and prioritize the creation of low-anxiety, collaborative learning environments. These findings provide critical insights for EFL educators in Islamic secondary schools seeking to bridge the gap between learner cognition and active communicative performance.

Keywords: Student Attitudes, Classroom Interaction, EFL, Tripartite Model

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, classroom interaction serves as a primary vehicle for language acquisition. Research indicates that language development occurs optimally when learners actively negotiate meaning during verbal exchanges, as this process allows students to receive comprehensible input and modify their linguistic output. Within secondary education, the classroom represents the primary communicative arena where students practice target language structures, making the dynamics of interaction a direct influence on the development of communicative competence. However, a significant gap frequently exists between pedagogical ideals and classroom

realities, particularly in Indonesian Islamic senior high schools where fostering active verbal participation remains a persistent challenge. Preliminary field observations reveal that when teachers initiate interaction, a substantial number of students remain reticent or withdraw from verbal activities, demonstrating that the presence of interaction opportunities does not automatically guarantee active student involvement.

To address this classroom issue, it is essential to investigate the underlying psychological variables that govern how students react to communicative demands. Psychological literature establishes that a primary predictor of a learner's behavior is their underlying attitude, defined by Eagly and Chaiken (1993) as a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating an entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. Researchers apply the classic tripartite model to understand this internal mechanism, conceptualizing attitude as a triadic structure containing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The cognitive component involves beliefs regarding the utility of language interaction, the affective component encompasses emotional reactions such as language anxiety, and the behavioral component represents response tendencies when encountering communicative tasks.

While previous studies extensively analyze general student attitudes, a clear research gap remains concerning how these three specific sub-components manifest as active or passive participation within the EFL framework. Many existing studies rely on closed-ended quantitative surveys that reduce student psychology to numerical values, failing to capture the nuanced, qualitative reasons behind student reticence. Furthermore, there is a lack of localized qualitative evidence examining these specific psychological dimensions among Grade X students in the Islamic high school context of Medan. This study addresses this gap by deploying an open-ended questionnaire to allow participants to describe their internal struggles, anxieties, and evaluations in their own words. Consequently, this research aims to clarify the relationship between internal learner attitudes and outward classroom participation, thereby providing a clear empirical description of the phenomenon without manipulating the natural environment.

THEORETICAL STUDY

Human behavior in educational settings is understood to be driven by internal evaluative tendencies that individuals develop toward specific environmental objects. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define an attitude as a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. In the domain of language pedagogy, attitude serves as a primary internal variable dictating how learners navigate academic instruction. Gardner (1985) emphasizes

that a learner's attitude toward language tasks governs their level of active effort, persistence, and overall classroom performance.

To deconstruct these internal psychological dimensions, this study utilizes the Tripartite Model of Attitude, which posits that an attitude is a complex construct consisting of three interconnected components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive component forms the intellectual foundation, encompassing the beliefs and evaluative judgments a student holds regarding the utility and necessity of classroom interaction for their language development. Complementing this, the affective component captures the emotional dimension. This includes the feelings, anxiety levels, and motivations that act as a psychological gatekeeper, which can either amplify or paralyze rational intent. Finally, the behavioral component represents the operational manifestation of these internal states, encompassing the overt actions and strategies a learner employs when navigating communicative demands.

Classroom participation serves as the observable manifestation of student engagement within these instructional frameworks. Finn and Zimmer (2012) define participation as the observable behaviors exhibited during interactions with material, instructors, and peers. This construct is critical for second language acquisition because it allows for the practice of target structures. Within the EFL classroom, participation patterns are structural response choices that reveal how students negotiate linguistic demands along a continuum ranging from active engagement to passive withdrawal. Active participation involves voluntary verbal contributions and risk taking, whereas passive participation functions as a defensive coping mechanism to maintain psychological safety in the face of communicative apprehension.

Empirical evidence further underscores the relationship between these attitudes and classroom dynamics. Rahmad, Husein, and Zainuddin (2021) identified that Grade X students in Medan manifest complex positive and negative attitudes through both verbal declarations and bodily gestures, noting that negative behavioral reactions are often triggered by discomfort with instructional techniques. Similarly, Amir and Pratama (2023) observed a persistent psychological friction in Islamic secondary schools, where students' high cognitive appreciation for English is frequently neutralized by affective barriers, such as communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, leading to passive avoidance behaviors.

Further research by Miswan (2024) highlighted that while Grade X learners generally possess positive cognitive attitudes, successful participation is often managed by students who intentionally plan their conversational strategies despite internal nervousness. In terms of behavioral conation, Kusumaningrum and Ma'mun (2024) documented that senior high school students display inconsistent

engagement, shifting between active and passive roles depending on peer dynamics and teacher fronted elicitation methods. Finally, Lestari and Setiawan (2025) confirmed that affective barriers, specifically the fear of peer ridicule, often dominate the cognitive component, rendering intellectual awareness insufficient to induce active participation without an anxiety free environment. Collectively, these studies establish a clear gap. While the divide between cognitive belief and affective anxiety is well documented, there remains a need for descriptive qualitative case studies that map these specific triadic states directly onto structured interaction sequences within the unique context of Islamic secondary schools in Medan.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to provide a narrative account of student attitudes and participation in English classroom interaction. By avoiding environmental manipulation, this design allows for a deep, contextualized understanding of the students' subjective experiences. The primary data source consists of ten Grade X students from MAN 2 Model Medan who are currently experiencing the English curriculum, chosen to provide a diverse spectrum of active and passive participation patterns.

Data were collected exclusively through a structured questionnaire consisting of ten open-ended items distributed via Google Forms. This instrument was designed to capture students' internal cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions while ensuring participant privacy and minimizing social desirability bias. The questionnaire items were mapped to specific theoretical indicators, with items one to three focusing on cognitive beliefs, four to six on affective reactions, and seven to ten on behavioral participation patterns.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis, involving three concurrent stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Raw responses were first transcribed and translated, then coded based on the tripartite model of attitude and participation theory. These data were subsequently organized into matrices to identify overarching thematic patterns, allowing the researcher to verify the relationship between internal learner attitudes and outward classroom participation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Attitudes toward English Classroom Interaction

The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses reveals that the Grade X students at MAN 2 Model Medan possess a multifaceted attitudinal profile, which is best understood through the Tripartite Model of Attitude. As shown in Table 1,

the students' internal evaluations are categorized into cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions based on their narrative responses.

Table 1. Categorization of Students' Triadic Attitudes

Dimension	Indicator	Representative Response (Data Extract)
Cognitive	Importance for Understanding	"If there is interaction, I understand better and become more confident." (S1)
Cognitive	Focus & Retention	"Active interaction helps students stay focused and not get sleepy easily." (S6)
Affective	Communication Apprehension	"I feel nervous because I am afraid of making mistakes or weird pronunciation." (S1)
Affective	Fear of Evaluation	"I am still shy, especially when everyone looks at me while I speak." (S2)
Behavioral	Active Persistence	"I keep talking even if I make small mistakes." (S3)
Behavioral	Avoidance Strategy	"I often choose to stay quiet even when I don't really understand." (S6)

The cognitive component forms the structural intellectual foundation of the students' attitudes. The data demonstrate a unanimous consensus regarding the functional utility of classroom interaction. Students consistently rationalized that verbal engagement is not merely an institutional requirement but a necessary tool for cognitive development. Participants like S1 and S9 explicitly connected the act of speaking to long-term knowledge retention, noting that passive listening often leads to forgetting the material. This indicates that the students' cognitive attitude is highly positive because they bridge the gap between classroom talk and academic improvement.

Beyond these logical justifications, the affective component reveals a striking emotional volatility. The data show that the act of speaking English is frequently perceived as a threat to the students' social ego. For instance, S1 and S8 expressed a visceral fear of negative peer evaluation, specifically mentioning anxiety regarding pronunciation and the potential for being ridiculed for grammar mistakes. This affective state acts as a powerful gatekeeper. Even when students possess the cognitive belief that speaking is important, the immediate emotional response of nervousness often paralyzes their ability to act upon those beliefs.

The behavioral component represents the visible culmination of the cognitive and affective interplay. The findings show that students adopt distinct strategies to navigate these psychological states. Students who exhibit low affective barriers, such as S3 and S4, report persistent behavioral tendencies, such as continuing to speak after errors or intentionally initiating interactions. These students view

mistakes as a normal part of the learning process rather than a reason to withdraw from the discourse.

Conversely, students burdened by intense anxiety, such as S2 and S6, default to defensive silence or avoidance as a primary coping mechanism. This behavioral withdrawal is not a reflection of their lack of cognitive understanding, but rather a deliberate strategy to preserve their psychological safety in a potentially judgmental classroom environment. By choosing to stay quiet, these learners successfully shield themselves from the vulnerability of public linguistic performance.

The interaction between these components illustrates that attitudes are not monolithic. While all participants intellectually valued the benefits of interaction, the internal friction between their cognitive goals and affective anxieties creates a state of psychological instability. This instability dictates their willingness to engage in the classroom, proving that a positive cognitive evaluation is often insufficient to overcome deep seated emotional insecurities in the EFL context.

Ultimately, the data from MAN 2 Model Medan confirm that the tripartite model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding student psychology. The students' responses demonstrate that the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components function as a single, dynamic system. When students successfully align their intellectual goals with a comfortable emotional state, they are able to manifest active behavioral tendencies. However, when the affective barrier becomes too imposing, the behavioral response is predictably avoidant, regardless of the student's high cognitive appreciation for the target language.

The Reflection of Attitudes in Students' Participation

The manifestation of student attitudes into actual classroom behavior is observable through the participation continuum, which delineates the transition from active engagement to passive reticence. The research findings indicate that students' outward actions serve as an immediate physical projection of their internal triadic attitudinal state. As displayed in Table 2, these behavioral patterns vary significantly based on the learner's individual psychological negotiation of their cognitive and affective states.

Table 2. Participation Continuum and Behavioral Indicators

Participation Style	Behavioral Indicator	Representative Response (Data Extract)
Active	Voluntary Initiation	"I ask directly so I won't get more confused." (S4)
Active	Linguistic Risk-Taking	"I keep talking even if I make small mistakes." (S3)
Active	Peer Collaboration	"Quite often with close friends because I am not too shy." (S5)
Passive	Silent Reticence	"I often choose to stay quiet even when I

		do not understand." (S6)
Passive	Avoidance Strategy	"I usually wait for other students to ask first." (S7)
Passive	Withdrawal After Error	"Sometimes I immediately lose confidence to continue speaking." (S6)

Active participation is characterized by overt communicative contributions and the willingness to take risks within the classroom discourse. Students who exhibit this pattern, such as S4 and S9, perceive classroom interaction as an essential academic resource, which fuels their motivation to initiate dialogue voluntarily. These students possess a resilient behavioral attitude that allows them to maintain their participation even when faced with linguistic challenges or misunderstanding. By asking questions immediately, they transform potential communicative breakdowns into opportunities for clarification and learning.

Furthermore, peer collaboration plays a vital role in sustaining active participation for these learners. As noted by S5, students feel significantly more comfortable and confident when interacting within the supportive, lower-pressure environment of group work or dialogue practice with close friends. This indicates that the behavioral component of attitude is heavily influenced by the social climate; when the perceived threat of negative evaluation is minimized through collaboration, students are more likely to display active engagement rather than defensive withdrawal.

In contrast, passive participation serves as a deliberate strategy of communicative withdrawal. Learners who default to this pattern, such as S2 and S6, utilize silence as a defensive mechanism to navigate the pressures of public language production. Their decision to stay quiet is not rooted in a lack of comprehension but is a calculated effort to protect their social ego from the perceived risk of making mistakes in front of their peers. This avoidant behavior is highly stable, as these students often wait for others to initiate interactions to ensure they do not become the center of attention.

The immediate reaction to linguistic errors further distinguishes these two participation styles. Active participants treat mistakes as a natural part of the acquisition process, whereas passive participants experience an immediate decline in their willingness to communicate following an error. For students like S6, an error acts as a trigger for conversational withdrawal, causing them to lose their self-confidence and revert to silence. This demonstrates that for passive learners, the fear of error outweighs the desire for language practice, confirming that their behavior is dictated by an avoidant conative tendency.

The data suggest that the classroom interaction framework, particularly the Initiation-Response-Feedback cycle, heavily dictates these behavioral

manifestations. When students feel the pressure of being directly elicited by the teacher, those with high affective barriers tend to experience communicative paralysis. Consequently, the passive participation observed in these learners is a clear projection of their internal psychological struggle, where the need for self-protection dominates their behavioral response to classroom requirements.

Ultimately, the findings confirm that student participation is not a reflection of objective linguistic ability, but rather an outward translation of the tripartite attitude model. Active learners leverage their positive cognitive evaluations to overcome minor emotional discomforts, while passive learners allow their negative affective fears to dictate their behavioral choices. Understanding this psychological mechanism is essential for educators, as it explains why traditional pedagogical encouragement often fails to produce active engagement when the underlying affective barriers of the students remain unaddressed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that Grade X students at MAN 2 Model Medan maintain a complex, dualistic attitudinal profile toward English classroom interaction. In the cognitive domain, all learners hold highly positive evaluations, structurally acknowledging that active verbal communication is a mandatory tool that prevents memory lapses, expands vocabulary, and enhances conceptual understanding. However, this high intellectual awareness is severely undermined by the affective component, where a majority of the students experience intense negative barriers, including acute communication apprehension, nervousness, overthinking, and a persistent fear of making pronunciation or grammar mistakes. This internal friction proves that positive cognitive beliefs do not automatically guarantee emotional readiness during spontaneous oral tasks.

Furthermore, the internal triadic attitudes of the students directly manifest as structured response habits along the classroom participation continuum. Students who possess low affective anxiety or high goal-driven motivation successfully translate their positive cognitive beliefs into active participation, characterized by voluntary initiation, prompt responding, and a resilient willingness to take linguistic risks despite making errors. Conversely, students heavily burdened by negative affective barriers default to consistent passive participation as a self-protective mechanism. To shield their social self-esteem from potential peer ridicule, these passive learners choose absolute silence during lessons, intentionally avoid eye contact with the instructor, and immediately withdraw from the discourse whenever a linguistic error occurs.

Based on these conclusions, several practical suggestions are offered to improve the quality of classroom interaction. For English teachers, it is

recommended that they actively minimize direct, stressful teacher-fronted elicitations and instead design supportive, low-anxiety environments. This can be achieved by utilizing collaborative group work, speaking games, and interactive media, which alleviate individual performance anxiety and encourage passive students to take verbal risks comfortably. Furthermore, teachers should normalize linguistic errors during the learning process and deliver corrective feedback gently to prevent emotional withdrawal. For students, it is encouraged that they develop higher self-awareness regarding their learning attitudes and actively seek low-risk environments, such as practicing English conversations with close friends, to build spoken confidence. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to use the findings of this case study as a functional reference to explore alternative interactive strategies that bridge the gap between high cognitive awareness and low affective comfort.

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