

## **Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes toward English: A Descriptive Quantitative Study at SMPIT Ar Rahmah Pacitan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to describe students’ perceptions and attitudes toward English at SMPIT AR Rahmah Pacitan. The research employed a quantitative descriptive design and involved all students in Grades 7, 8, and 9 as the sample using a census sampling technique. Data were collected through a 20-item Likert scale questionnaire, which consisted of four dimensions: importance and usefulness, confidence, motivation, and environmental support. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which involved calculating mean scores for each item, each dimension, and the total score. The findings show that students’ overall perception and attitude toward English fall into the high category. The highest dimension is importance and usefulness, indicating that students view English as valuable and relevant to their future needs. Meanwhile, confidence, motivation, and environmental support also fall within the high category, although slightly lower. These results suggest that students at SMPIT AR Rahmah Pacitan have positive perceptions and attitudes toward English learning, which provides a supportive foundation for the development of more effective instructional strategies.

**Keywords:** *Perception; Attitude; English.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of English in the lives of Indonesian children is increasingly evident. Data from the World Economic Forum indicate that advanced English proficiency increases employment opportunities by up to 30%, and 70% of global companies prefer candidates with English skills (Hu & Schuelle, 2015). Beyond the advantages for those seeking employment abroad, English also functions as an “international” language used in communication across the world—both face-to-face and in digital spaces. English serves as a key to accessing broader learning opportunities (Sari et al., 2024). Therefore, English is not merely a school subject but a gateway to success in the global era.

Several reasons underline why English has become essential in life. First, English is a universal language. It is the official language used for communication across many parts of the world, including Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Africa. Second, English provides access to advanced education and up-to-date technologies. Much new scientific knowledge, academic literature, and numerous technological discoveries use English terminology (Hamel, 2007; Marlina & Xu, 2018). Third, English proficiency expands access to decent employment. In

Indonesia, job competition is highly challenging. Many young Indonesians aspire to work abroad, and English is one of the crucial competencies required (Rana & Shaikh, 2024; Su-Hie et al., 2017). Even within Indonesia, a growing number of small to large-scale companies are beginning to require English as part of their recruitment criteria.

The government has acknowledged the urgency of improving English proficiency to develop Indonesian human resources who can communicate effectively with other nations. Nevertheless, English proficiency in Indonesia remains relatively low (Maruf et al., 2020; Renandya, 2018). According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI), Indonesia ranked 80th out of 116 countries, with a score of 468, declining from the previous rank of 79 with a score of 473 (Mukhlisah & Sholihah, 2024). This means Indonesia still has significant work to do to catch up with global standards.

A lack of awareness regarding the importance of English results in many Indonesian youth being unwilling to learn it. One key issue is fear and anxiety (Meliyani et al., 2022; Rodriguez, 2022). Many students feel anxious when learning English and perceive their weaknesses as personal inability or shame. A second obstacle relates to limited vocabulary mastery (Andrian, 2022). It becomes a concern whether low vocabulary knowledge is correlated with English skills (Hartini & Ardini, 2024). A third barrier is the perception that practicing English is embarrassing. Some students still consider English as “the language of former colonizers” and therefore unnecessary (Lukman et al., 2022). This negative mindset leads to rejection of English learning and even negative responses toward peers who attempt to practice. Motivation is also a key factor. Low motivation leads to disinterest, a lack of seriousness in learning, and reduced achievement (Alizadeh, 2016). Many students also find English “boring,” influenced by difficult material, monotonous teaching approaches, materials that are either too easy or too complex, and minimal opportunities to practice (Damayanti et al., 2025; Kholili, 2023). In addition, many schools still emphasize theoretical learning without practical use, leading to anxiety when students are asked to practice. Social and family environments often do not support English, and some parents still believe English is not necessary.

Previous studies have examined students’ perceptions and attitudes toward English in various Indonesian contexts. Marsenda and Susiati (2024) found that internal and external factors influenced students’ interest in rural Klaten, while Meul and Istikharoh (2023) highlighted affective, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes in Sokaraja (Isti, 2019; Marsenda & Susiati, 2025). Studies in Dobo, Aru District (Seni & Lekatompessy, 2021) and in South and West Sulawesi (Uswatunnisa et al., 2025) have shown that students’ attitudes vary, often with lower motivation in suburban

or remote areas. In Jakarta Utara, perceptions of instructional media affected students’ interest in learning grammar. However, research in Islamic private junior high schools in rural Pacitan remains limited, and descriptive quantitative data on students’ perceptions and attitudes are scarce. This study addresses this gap at SMPIT AR Rahmah Pacitan.

## METHODS

### Subjects of Research

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive approach to thoroughly examine the students’ perceptions and attitudes toward the English language. The entire population for this research consisted of all students enrolled in Grades 7, 8, and 9 at SMP IT Ar Rahmah Pacitan. To ensure comprehensive coverage, a census sampling technique was employed, meaning every student within the defined population was included as a research participant.

### Instruments

The primary instrument used for data collection was a standardized 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire. This instrument was meticulously designed to cover four critical dimensions concerning language learning attitudes: Importance & Usefulness (Items 1-5), Confidence in using and trying the language (Items 6-10), Motivation drivers, whether internal or external (Items 11-15), and the level of Environmental Support provided by the school (Items 16-20).

### Data Collection

The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. The core of the analysis involved calculating the mean scores for individual items, for each of the four dimensions, and finally, for the overall total score. To interpret these numerical findings and contextualize the students’ level of perception and attitude, the mean scores were categorized into the classification system developed by Widoyoko (2012), which defines the results as being in the very high, high, medium, low, or very low categories.

**Table 1.** Research Instrument

Dimension	Operational Definition	Indicator Meaning / Item Focus	Item No.
Importance & Usefulness	Students’ belief that English is essential, practical, and relevant to their lives and future	usefulness, relevance, perceived benefits, general interest	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Confidence	Students’ self-belief in trying, using, and learning English	willingness to try, not afraid of mistakes, paying attention, and initiative to learn	6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Motivation	Students’ motivational drivers	peer support, social comfort, family encouragement, optimistic	11, 12, 13, 14, 15

	(internal/external) to view of friends who are good at learn English	English	
Environmental Support	Support from the school environment in providing opportunities and facilities to practice English	facilities, access to learning media, resources, space for practice, and school English programs	16, 17, 18, 19, 20

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis of students’ perceptions and attitudes toward English was conducted by calculating the mean score of each questionnaire item. The mean values provide an overview of how strongly students agree with each statement in each dimension of the instrument. To present these findings systematically, the results are grouped into four major dimensions: (1) Importance and Usefulness, (2) Confidence, (3) Motivation, and (4) Environmental Support. Each dimension is presented in the form of tables showing the mean score of every item. These tables offer a clear picture of which aspects of perception and attitude are rated the highest and which indicators still need improvement. The following tables summarize the mean scores obtained from each item within each category:

**Table 2.** Research Funding

Category	Value
<b>Importance &amp; Usefulness</b>	<b>Mean</b>
English is an important language for future life.	04.53
English can increase my self-confidence.	04.06
I feel that English becomes easier to learn when it is used frequently around me.	04.03
I believe that English ability can help me achieve my goals.	04.37
I find learning English to be an enjoyable experience.	04.11
<b>Confidence</b>	<b>Mean</b>
I try to pay attention during English lessons.	04.20
I enjoy trying to speak English even though I am not fluent yet.	04.04
I want to improve my English skills.	04.67
I keep trying to use English even if I am afraid of making mistakes.	03.94
I look for my own ways to learn English outside the classroom.	03.84
<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Mean</b>
My friends support me in learning English.	03.73
I feel comfortable using English in front of my friends.	03.18
My parents encourage me to learn English.	04.03
I feel happy when my friend can speak English.	04.33
I believe that the school environment encourages students to use English.	03.73
<b>Environmental Support</b>	<b>Mean</b>
The school provides a comfortable atmosphere for learning English.	03.75
I have access to English books or learning resources at home or at school.	03.89

I can watch English videos or listen to English songs as a way to improve my language skills.	04.28
I have opportunities to practice English outside the classroom.	03.75
My school provides activities that make learning English more interesting (such as competitions, English Day, games, etc.).	03.53

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### **Importance & Usefulness**

The findings indicate that students strongly perceive English as a meaningful and valuable part of their lives. The mean values in this dimension consistently fall within the “high” category, demonstrating that they do not view English merely as a school subject but as a skill that has a direct impact on academic achievement, future opportunities, and global communication. The highest value in this dimension (Item 1) reinforces that students already possess a future-oriented awareness regarding English, particularly in terms of its relevance for career and global access. Overall, this implies that students’ mindset toward English is not passive; they have internalised the idea that English serves an instrumental function (usefulness for achieving goals) and a value function (the placement of English in students’ cognitive belief system).

### **Confidence**

The confidence dimension also shows a generally strong tendency. Despite variations, the means remain in the upper range, with the highest value found in Item 8, suggesting that students hold a strong belief in their ability to develop and improve their English skills over time. This indicates that their self-efficacy in English is relatively high. However, there is a slight decrease in items related to independent practice (e.g. Item 10), which suggests that confidence in potential ability is not always followed by real action outside classroom settings. This gap between cognitive confidence (the belief that “I can improve”) and behavioural engagement (actual effort to practice) is commonly observed in English learners in EFL contexts. The overall trend implies that students do not experience crippling anxiety or fear of making mistakes, which is beneficial because confidence directly influences speaking attempts, willingness to communicate, and risk-taking, all of which are essential for language development.

### **Motivation**

Motivation demonstrates more fluctuation compared to the other dimensions. Although some items are still categorized as high, there is also a noticeable decline in items related to social comfort (e.g., willingness to speak English in front of peers, Item 12). This suggests that social evaluation, peer judgement, and self-image factors still influence students’ motivation to perform English publicly. Nevertheless, the highest item in this dimension (Item 14) shows that students feel supportive and appreciative when peers can speak English. This means that

motivation exists, but it may be more introverted: students admire English skills but may hesitate to demonstrate their English ability in social environments personally. The motivational structure here is therefore conditionally positive: strong internally, but socially fragile.

### **Environmental Support**

Environmental support appears to be moderately strong, especially in relation to media exposure (Item 18). This suggests that students actively engage with English media, including music, videos, and digital content, outside the formal classroom. This is a significant finding because informal input exposure is one of the most substantial contributors to vocabulary growth and listening comprehension in EFL learning. However, the relatively lower mean in Item 20 shows that structured institutional English initiatives (English Day, competitions, English-themed school activities) are not yet maximally present or at least not strongly perceived by students. Therefore, the environment still relies heavily on individual initiative rather than institutional scaffolding. In other words, there is an informal exposure environment (self-initiated input), but there is less systemic, organized, or programmed English culture in the school context. Enhancing school-based English activities can significantly strengthen this dimension.

The data show that most students spend a relatively short amount of time studying English daily: 45.6% study less than 1 hour, 49.4% study 1–2 hours, and only 5.1% study 3–5 hours. This indicates that formal learning time is limited for the majority of students. Limited study time may constrain language skill development, particularly productive skills like speaking and writing.

### **Environmental Support: Informal Media Exposure vs. Need for Formal Institutional Initiatives**

#### **Discussion**

The findings on the Importance and Usefulness dimension indicate that students strongly perceive English as meaningful and valuable for their lives. The mean values in this dimension consistently fall within the “high” category, demonstrating that students do not view English merely as a school subject but as a skill that has a direct impact on academic achievement, future opportunities, and global communication. The highest mean value (Item 1) confirms that students already possess a future-oriented awareness of English, particularly its relevance for career development and international access. This implies that students’ mindset toward English is not passive; they have internalised both the instrumental function of English (its usefulness in achieving goals) and the value function of English (positioning English as necessary within their belief system). Such a strong perception is a positive foundation for English learning, because perceived

usefulness is one of the strongest predictors of sustained effort and persistence in language learning.

The Confidence dimension also shows a generally strong trend. Although there are slight variations, the mean scores remain in the upper range, and the highest value (Item 8) indicates that students believe they can continually improve their English skills over time. This suggests that their level of self-efficacy is relatively healthy. However, there is a slight decline in indicators related to independent learning activities outside the classroom, as seen in Item 10. This suggests that confidence in one’s ability is not always accompanied by actual learning behaviour beyond formal instruction. This gap between self-belief and real practice is commonly found in EFL learners. The trend suggests that students do not experience excessive anxiety or fear of making mistakes, which is a positive finding because confidence influences willingness to communicate, speaking attempts, and risk-taking, all of which are crucial for language development (Leeming et al., 2024; Nakamura et al., 2021).

The Motivation dimension shows more fluctuation compared to the other dimensions. Although several items remain in the high category, a noticeable decline is evident in social comfort indicators, such as the willingness to speak English in front of peers (Item 12). This suggests that peer judgement, social evaluation, and self-image concerns still influence students’ motivation to express English publicly. Meanwhile, the highest item (Item 14) reflects that students appreciate and feel positive when their friends can speak English. This means motivation exists, but it may be more inward-oriented: students admire English ability, yet hesitate to demonstrate their own English in social contexts.

Finally, Environmental Support appears moderately strong, especially in terms of media exposure (Item 18). This indicates that students engage with English input outside the classroom through videos, songs, and digital content. This is a valuable finding because informal exposure contributes significantly to vocabulary growth and listening development in EFL contexts (Anggraini, 2025; Zhang, 2023). However, the relatively lower score in Item 20 suggests that institutional English initiatives, such as English Day, competitions, and school-based English activities, are not yet highly present or strongly perceived by students. Therefore, the learning environment still relies more on individual student initiative than on school-organised scaffolding. In other words, students benefit from informal exposure, but the formal cultural support from the institution needs to be strengthened. Increasing structured English events and activities may significantly enhance this dimension.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals that students at SMPIT AR Rahmah Pacitan hold a strong and positive perception of English across several dimensions. Firstly, in terms of Importance and Usefulness, students recognize English as meaningful and valuable for their academic, career, and global opportunities, reflecting a future-oriented and goal-driven mindset that supports sustained learning efforts. Confidence levels are generally high, indicating healthy self-efficacy, although independent practice outside the classroom is slightly lower, highlighting a gap between belief and action. Motivation exhibits fluctuations, with students admiring English proficiency and being internally driven; however, social concerns, such as peer judgment, may limit their public demonstration of their skills. Finally, Environmental Support is moderately intense, particularly through self-initiated media exposure, while structured school-based English activities remain limited, suggesting room for institutional enhancement.

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