

# A Comparative Study of the English Language Performance of Islamic Studies and Education Students in KIRKHS and INSTED

## ABSTRACT

*The research is a comparative study of the English language performance among Islamic studies or Education students in the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (KIRKHS) and the Institute of Education (INSTED). The main aim of the research is to observe how the undergraduate students perform in the English language and to examine the standard of English language performance for both kulliyahs. The respondents of this study were taken from the Kulliyah of IRKHS and the INSTED, both at the IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia). According to the figures obtained from the Centre for Languages and Pre-university Academic Development (CELPAD) of the IIUM, it was revealed that many of Islamic studies students were dubbed poor performers in English language. Evidently, the average scores for English language courses were C plus and C as shown by the statistics from CELPAD. The result of study shows that the majority of the respondents considered themselves as competent in terms of English language as compared to other languages, and they indicated that their English competence was mostly sufficient for their academic activities. And finally, the respondents indicated that they would like to improve their English language competence.*

**Key words:** Comparative study, English language performance, Islamic studies or Education students, poor performers, and to improve their English language competence.

## INTRODUCTION

Low English competency among Islamic or Arabic studies students is associated with their educational background at the school level, their attitudes, and also the situation of the Islamic or Arabic studies programme. The use of the Arabic language as a medium of instruction is very common in Islamic or Arabic studies programmes in higher education in Malaysia. Sometimes, Malay is used alongside Arabic as the medium of instruction. However, English is rarely used except for particular subjects. For example, the students in the Islamic Studies IRKHS (Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science) and

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**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adnan bin Abd Rashid** is Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Education IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia), Jalan Gombak, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He is Programme Specialist and Expert in education ISESCO, Rabat, Morocco. For academic purposes, he can be reached at: [adnan@iiu.edu.my](mailto:adnan@iiu.edu.my) and [arashid@isesco.org.ma](mailto:arashid@isesco.org.ma)

Arabic Language INSTED (Institute of Education) programmes receive almost all of their course instruction in Arabic.

Generally, before they join the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in Islamic or Arabic studies programmes, they have completed their secondary schools studies in Malay or Arabic. Therefore, their performance in English is generally lower than their ability in Arabic. The students with a negative attitude towards English language usually attribute their failure or their low achievement if compared to students with a positive style and attitude towards this language to their inability to speak and comprehend the English language. These are considered as the reasons for the poor performance in English among Islamic or Arabic studies students.

### **THE PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The research is primarily a comparative study of the English language performance among Islamic studies or Education students in KIRKHS (*Kulliyah* Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science) and INSTEAD (Institute of Education). The main aim of the research is to observe how the undergraduate students perform in the English language in the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in both KIRKHS and INSTEAD; and to examine the standard of English language performance for both *kulliyahs*.

The study aims also to assist the undergraduate students in Islamic studies and in Arabic studies (B.Ed. TASL) to master the English language and to ensure good caliber graduates when they graduate from the IIUM or join Master's programmes at KIRKHS or INSTED; and also to make employment in the various sectors easier for them against the backdrop of global market competition in the near future. This will also enable the Islamic or Arabic studies programme in the IIUM to not only produce good caliber undergraduates with high competency in Arabic but also competency in English too. In addition, the IIUM authorities strongly encourage students to upgrade their language competency and to become fluent in this language before they enter in the various sectors of the job market.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: ON THE ATTITUDES, MOTIVATION, AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

A substantial number of research studies have been conducted which focus on the corroborating factors that influence second language learning (L2) and performance. One of the established factors is the impact of motivation in second or foreign language learning. Researchers such as R.C. Gardner and W.E. Lambert (1959) and R.C. Gardner, P.C. Smythe and R. Clement (1979) have extensively stressed the influence of attitude and motivation and their correlation with the linguistic performance of learners. By the same token, R.K. Agnihotri and A.L. Khanna (1994) highlighted that the successful learner of L2 (Second Language) must be psychologically prepared to acquire the

symbolic elements of a different ethno-linguistic community, and to impose elements of another culture into one's own life space. On this notion, V. Burr (1995) highlights that the importance of external factors on L2 learning reflects the merits of essentialism, that is the cognitive essence of the individual who observes that the world objectively determines what he or she learns; and social constructivism, that is knowledge is a social contract influenced by historic and cultural variables. A. Firth and J. Wagner (1997) declared that the best predictive models of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) consider the interaction of social activity and psycholinguistic elements.

Similarly, studies by M. Long and G. Crookes (1992) and I.S. Choudhury (2001) have focused on the types of tasks in which learners might engage to advance acquisition. Various researchers have concentrated on the relative efficacy of implicit and explicit teaching techniques (Fotos & Ellis, 1991; and Fotos, 1994); whether learners' attention should be directed at form during meaning-focused lessons (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Doughty & Williams eds., 1998; and Williams & Evans, 1998); the role of negative feedback (Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998); the psycholinguistic principles of input processing (Van Patten, 1996); and the role of output on development (DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996). The results of their studies revealed that there is no precise best methodology or instructional technique that facilitates acquisition, even if techniques that emphasize meaningful language use are more commensurate with what psychologists know about how the brain internalizes new knowledge (Norris & Ortega, 2001). M. Long (1997) highlights that a wide, context-sensitive, participant-sensitive, and generally socio-linguistic orientation may benefit SLA research.

Similarly, language acquisition has been strongly related to consciousness, evolution, and intelligence that learning of English language must be done intelligibly and with consciousness and only then will the learner be able to strive for greater success in the mastery of the language. Also, some researchers have established the use of English language as a powerful language in order to influence others (Sik Hung Ng & Bradac, 1993), as well as the best approaches for the learner to learn English successfully (Wardhaugh, 1993).

Researchers have reported findings on varieties of factors that have an impact on second language learning. Among the documented ones are: age, attitude, motivation, aptitude, amount of exposure, and anxiety. R.C. Gardner (1985a) highlights that second language acquisition is based on a socio-psychological phenomenon because it is the intercultural development of communication skills between an individual and members of another cultural background. These factors are also responsible for individual differences in learning a Second Language (L2) / Foreign Language (FL). It is a common pronouncement among social psychologists that learners' individual differences have a significant impact on the learners' overall L2/FL learning and performance. Hence, this is the reason why the major focus of research in social psychology has been on

social psychological variables like attitude, motivation, age, aptitude, anxiety, and intelligence, and their impact on Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

In addition, psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, which can strongly enhance or inhibit second language acquisition, have been tested by Stephen Krashen in his study (2002). He reported that an input rich environment is required where the learners can relax, be motivated and have self confidence in acquiring the second language uninhibitedly, and that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are well-equipped for success in second language acquisition (Krashen, 2002).

J. Schumann (1978 and 1986) mentions *attitude* as a social factor along with other variables like "learning group size", motivation as an affective factor alongside "cultural shock". Resultant from this proposition, J. Schumann formulated the acculturation model in which he tested for the effects of personal variables such as relative status, attitude, integration, amount of time in the culture, size of the learning group, and cohesiveness of the group on adult language learning. He suggests that the degree of acculturation determines the level of second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978 and 1986). When an individual chooses to acculturate and experiences success, the motivation to learn the L2 (Second Language) increases. Yet, Hudson (as cited in Ellis, 2002) emphasis that sociolinguistics is interested in variation, be it regional or social variations of language, diachronic change, and intra-individual variation focused on differing communicative situations. Therefore, Kemmer and Israel declared that "the more speakers talk to each other, the more they will talk alike, and so linguistic variation will pattern along lines of social contract and interaction" (in Ellis, 2002).

Further still J. Schumann (1978) expounded that the demonstration of positive and favourable attitudes by L2 learners towards the people of the target language (TL), enhances the learning of the desired language efficiently as compared to normal settings in the classroom. And acculturation, which is the degree to which learners acculturate themselves to the TL group, will control the degree to which they acquire the TL. Acculturation is a major causal variable in second language acquisition (SLA).

There are two forms of acculturation. The first type is when the learner is socially integrated with the TL group, and the second type is when the TL group acts as the reference point. In the former type, the learners' original identities are never at stake. Their social integration leads to sufficient contact, and their psychological openness converts the input they receive into intake. N.C. Ellis (2002) enumerates that much of language learning is the gradual strengthening of associations between co-occurring elements of the language and that fluent language performance is the exploitation of this probabilistic knowledge, because language learning is conscious experience and implicit learning. Furthermore, according to Lado's theory of L2 (Second Language)

learning built on the behaviourist principles of learning, grammatical structure is a system of habits, and L2 acquisition is the learning of patterns of expression, content, and their association (as cited in Ellis, 2002).

## **METHOD OF THE STUDY**

A set of questionnaires and in-depth interview questions are developed for selecting the respondents in the IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia) to represent the entire population targeted in the IIUM. The targeted population is the Islamic studies / Education undergraduate students. The objective is to make sure that from the findings, the researcher will be able to analyze the data about the competency of English performance among the students.

The study employed adapted instruments found in some previous studies. The instrument was the English Language Performance Questionnaire (ELPQ) with 32 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree", which was used for collecting data from a proportional stratified random sample of 150 students studying in the *Kulliyah* of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and the Institute of Education of the International Islamic University of Malaysia. Data was collected and analyzed quantitatively by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The researcher applied correlation analysis, ANOVA and linear regression to test for the interactions among the variables of the study. The content validity and construct validity of the instrument were adequately established through a pilot-study. The alpha Chronbach reliability in the final data analyses was 0.8. The principal component analysis (PCA) revealed that the Bartlett test of spheroid was significant at .000, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.871, while the anti-image correlation matrix revealed that measures of sampling adequacy ranged between 0.702 and 0.925. Furthermore, five factors were extracted with *eigenvalues greater than 1, and they accounted for 66% of the total variance.*

## **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH BETWEEN STUDENTS IN KIRKHS AND INSTED**

This section highlights the effects and implications of the respondents' gender (male and female) and faculty (KIRKHS and INSTED). The researcher employed a Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to examine whether there are significant differences between the means of the two demographic variable groups (gender and faculty) and the five extracted factors of this study.

### ***First, Gender and Faculty on Attitude towards Learning English Language.***

In table 1, the means and standard deviations of the scores on Gender and Faculty on Attitude towards Learning English were presented. The Levene's tests revealed to us that the homogeneity of variance assumption was significant, thus, this assumption has been violated;  $F(3, 138) = 6.213, p = .001$ .

The overall F-test for the combined effects of the two independent variables was statistically significant;  $F(3, 138) = 2.722$ ,  $p = 0.047$ ,  $MSE = 24.102$ . It appears that the variability of Attitude towards Learning English Language was larger among the male subjects in INSTED ( $SD = 7.602$ ). The main effects of gender on Attitude towards Learning English Language were not statistically significant,  $F(3, 138) = .143$ ,  $p = 0.706$ ,  $MSE = 24.102$ . The result revealed that gender has no significant influence on the respondents' Attitude towards Learning English Language. However, the effects of faculty on Attitude towards Learning English Language was statistically significant,  $F(3, 138) = .143$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ,  $MSE = 24.102$ . The result revealed that faculty has a statistically significant influence on the respondents' Attitude towards Learning English Language.

However, with regard to the interactive effects of gender and faculty on Attitude towards Learning English Language, the results revealed that there is no statistically significant effect between the groups and Attitude towards Learning English Language,  $F(3, 138) = 0.299$ ,  $p = 0.586$ ,  $MSE = 24.102$ . This means that gender and faculty have no combined interactive influence on the respondents' Attitude towards Learning English Language.

**Table 1**  
Mean Percentage of Attitude towards Learning English Language

		<b>KIRKH</b>	<b>INSTED</b>	<b>ALL</b>
Female	M	26.10	23.75	25.89
	SD	3.9	4.0	3.91
	N	80	8	88
Male	M	27.17	23.56	25.96
	SD	5.49	7.60	6.43
	N	36	18	54
All	M	26.43	23.62	25.92
	SD	4.43	6.61	5.0
	N	116	26	142

Having achieved a significant interaction in the main effects between faculty and Attitude towards Learning English Language, the researcher conducted an analysis of simple effects (POST-HOC analysis) to reveal the effect of one factor at one level on the other factor. That is to see if the larger variability among male subjects in INSTED ( $SD = 7.60$ ) and the significant effects that were obtained from the main effects (faculty) can be confirmed as genuine. Therefore, a simple One-Way ANOVA was conducted. The Levene results confirmed that there was a significant interaction between faculty and Attitude towards Learning English Language among the male respondents,  $F(1, 142) = 8.229$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ,  $MSE = 24.210$ . Additionally, the results of this test indicated that the mean difference between the male and female subjects in KIRKHIS (*Kulliyah* Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science) and INSTEAD (Institute of Education) was significant.

*On the Assumptions of the Multiple Regression Analysis.* Multiple Regression analysis is the main statistical analysis of the study upon which the predictions of the study were based. Therefore, before each regression analysis was carried out, the assumptions underlying the use of multiple regression analysis such as normality, linearity, *heteroscedasticity* (constant variance of error terms) and cases of outliers were examined with regard to normality of error term distribution and the normal probability plot. As for variances of the criterion variables, they were the same for all the predictors the *Studentized* (SRED) residual plot against the dependent variable was examined. In terms of the linearity of scores distribution, the residual was plotted against the hypothesized criterion variables. Finally, for cases of outliers (i.e. extreme observations), the case-wise diagnosis of the linear regression was scrutinized, and thus several outliers were detected. The result of the diagnostic tests showed that there was no need to delete or eliminate any observation.

J.F. Hair Jr. *et al.* (1998) explained that outliers should be retained unless there is demonstrable proof that they are truly aberrant and not representative of any observations in the population. But their representation of the population necessitates their retention to ensure generality to the entire population. Therefore, outliers were retained and included in the analysis for their representation in the population.

*On Testing for the Predictors of E-learning Adoption and E-learning Readiness.* For this purpose, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The regression analysis examined the predictors of Attitude towards Learning English Language. Initially, the independent variables are: Confidence in Using English, Exposure to English Outside University, and Attitude towards Cooperative Learning. In each of the regression analyses, a detailed report of descriptive statistics, inter-variable correlations, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the regression coefficients, confidence intervals, collinearity statistics, and the thresholds for the practical importance of the results were tabulated and discussed.

*Second, Predictors of Attitude towards Learning English Language.* Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviations) and correlations among the predictors and the criterion variable (Attitude toward Learning English Language) as shown by the outputs from the SPSS. The analysis of the correlations revealed that there were statistically significant linear relationships between Attitude towards Learning English Language, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning, Confidence in Using English, and Exposure to English Outside the University.

Table 3 tabulates the results of the inter-item correlation tests between the extracted factors in this study. The correlation table tabulated four extracted factors of the study, namely: Confidence in Using English, Exposure to English Outside the University, Attitude Towards Learning English, and finally Attitude Towards Cooperative Learning. Therefore, looking at the interactions one by one, it can be observed that there were positive linear relationships between Confidence in Using English and the three other extracted factors, namely:

Attitude towards Learning English and Confidence in Using English [ $r = .542$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $M = 32.67$ ,  $SD = 8.18$ ], Exposure to English Outside the University [ $r = .203$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $M = 32.95$ ,  $SD = 8.23$ ], Attitude towards Cooperative Learning [ $r = .594$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $M = 50.49$ ,  $SD = 9.68$ ]. The correlation test showed that there were statistically significant relationships between Confidence in Using the English Language and the other three extracted factors. The results of this test indicated that all the extracted factors had statistically significant relationships among them.

**Table 2**

Inter-Variable Correlations between the Respondents' Attitude towards Learning English and the Extracted Factors

	<b>Attitude towards Learning English</b>	<b>Confidence in Using English</b>	<b>Exposure to English Outside University</b>	<b>Attitude towards Cooperative Learning</b>
Attitude towards Learning English.	1.000			
Confidence in Using English.	.542(**)	1.000		
Exposure to English Outside University.	.203(*)	.278(**)	1.000	
Attitude towards Cooperative Learning.	.594(**)	.597(**)	.379(**)	1.000
M =	25.97	28.31	16.16	26.94
SD =	5.0	6.0	6.3	6.2

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In table 3, the results of the regression analysis for Attitude towards Learning English were presented. In this model, the criterion variable, Attitude towards Learning English, was tested using three predictors, namely Attitude towards Cooperative Learning, Confidence in Using English, and Exposure to English Outside the University. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that the overall model was statistically significant:  $F(3, 139) = 31.372$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $MSE = 15.288$ . The set of independent variables explained 40 per cent of the total variance in Attitude towards Cooperative Learning. The adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted R square) was 0.39, with an estimated standard error of 3.9. Further analysis of the predictive power of the individual predictors indicated that only two predictors were statistically significant, namely: Attitude towards Cooperative Learning ( $t = 5.105$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $Beta = 0.433$ ) and Confidence in Using English ( $t = 3.561$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $Beta = 0.290$ ). And Attitude towards Cooperative Learning was the best predictor of Attitude towards Learning English with the highest Beta value 0.433 (the best predictor is determined by looking at the regression coefficient and  $t$  value). The estimated equation model

can be summarized as follows:

$$\hat{Y} \text{ (Attitude towards Learning English Language)} = 10.158 + 0.347 \text{ (Attitude towards Cooperative Learning)} + 0.245 \text{ (Confidence in Using English)} + -.030 \text{ (Exposure to English Outside the University)}.$$

Note:  $\hat{Y}$  = the predicted Attitude towards Learning English.

**ATLE** = Attitude towards Learning English.

**ATCL** = Attitude towards Cooperative Learning.

**CUE** = Confidence in Using English.

**EEOU** = Exposure to English Outside the University.

**Table 3**  
Summary of Regression Analysis for the Predictors of Attitude towards Learning English Language

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	10.158	1.738		5.846	.000	6.722	13.593		
Attitude towards Cooperative Learning.	.347	.068	.433	5.105	.000	.212	.481	.597	1.674
Confidence in Using English.	.245	.069	.290	3.561	.001	.109	.381	.645	1.550
Exposure to English Outside University.	-.030	.056	-.038	-.538	.591	-.140	.080	.855	1.169

(Alpha is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ )

According to the multiple regression equation, the partial regression coefficient for each variable signifies how much the value of the dependent variable changes when the value of the particular independent variable increases by one unit when other IVs are kept constant (Norusis, 2000).

However, among all of the predictors, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning had the highest coefficient value (0.347). This means that increasing efforts towards cooperative learning among students will improve their attitudes towards the learning of English significantly. Therefore, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning is a very powerful and significant predictor for Attitude towards Learning English as compared with other predictors in the study. Also, looking at the Beta value coefficient, it was confirmed and evident that Attitude towards Cooperative Learning was the best predictor that can influence Attitude toward Learning English.

Additionally, another way of examining the best predictor is through the examination of the (*t*) values. Thus, between the two significant predictors

of Attitude towards Learning English, only Attitude towards Cooperative Learning has the highest value (5.105).

To check whether there was any violation of the results of the analysis due to the effects of multicollinearity, the correlation matrices, tolerance values, and the variance inflation factors (VIF) were examined. According to J.F. Hair Jr. *et al.* (1998), tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF) are two common measures for assessing both the pairwise and multiple variables collinearity. They defined tolerance as “*the amount of variability of the selected independent variables not explained by the other independent variables*” (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 1998:193), and that “*a common cut-off threshold is a tolerance value of 0.10, which corresponds to a VIF value of 10*”. Also, “*cut-off for the tolerance value of 0.10 corresponds to a multiple correlation of 0.95*”. Therefore, by examining the values of tolerance and the VIF, it was indicated that their values were below the cut-off points for collinearity, thus providing more evidence that the effects of multicollinearity were not a threat to the analysis. Precisely, the highest value of tolerance is 0.855, while the lowest is 0.597. Also, the values of the variance inflation factors (VIF) show that the highest value was 1.674, while the lowest value was 1.169. It can be deduced that the prescribed variance inflation factor of 10 has not been violated by any of the independent variables. The correlation matrices also show the independent variables that correlated very well with the dependent variable.

Additionally, to decide whether the results were of any practical importance, the value of the thresholds of practical importance for each analysis was computed and the results were compared with the values of confidence intervals for the respective predictors (Kirk, 1996; and Hansen, 2000). Thus, if the computed threshold is smaller than the upper and lower bounds in the confidence intervals, then the particular independent variables (IV) are considered as having practical importance. A standardized regression coefficient of 0.1 was used as the threshold of practical significance for the predictors in each analysis. To calculate the equivalent threshold of the un-standardized coefficients, the following formula was used:

$$\text{Un-standardized threshold} = (\text{SD cv} / \text{SD p}) \times 0.1$$

Note: SD cv is the standard deviation of the criterion (dependent) variable and SD p is the standard deviation of the predictors (independent) variable.

Based on the result presented in table 3, it was revealed that Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English were of practical importance to Attitude towards Learning English. This was because their computed thresholds were smaller than the upper and lower bounds in the confidence intervals.

However, the above cross-checking was carried out in regression analyses to assess whether there was a violation of the results of the analysis due to the effects of multicollinearity, the correlation matrices, tolerance values, and the variance inflation factors (VIF). There was no violation to the results of the analyses.

**Third, Cross-Validation of the Results of the Predictors of Attitudes towards Learning English Language.** This section focused on validating the results of the previous two regression analyses to determine the predictors of Attitudes towards Learning English Language. Apart from validating the predictors, this section was also concerned with the examination of the replicability of the results that were obtained in this regression analysis.

Therefore, in order to cross-validate the results obtained in the regression analysis, and to assess whether those results were replicable, the data collected for the study with 150 respondents were split into two equal parts by using the SPSS case selection random tool. The data was divided into two equal halves, 75 sub-samples each. Therefore, a sub-sample ( $n = 75$ ) was used to conduct two more regressions with the same predictors and criterion variables.

*On the Cross-Validation of Attitudes towards Learning English.* To cross-validate Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English as significant predictors of Attitudes towards Learning English, data of the sub-sample ( $n = 75$ ) was analyzed. A summarized report of the regression analysis was undertaken and presented in table 4 below.

**Fourth, Summary of the Estimated and Cross-Validated Regression Models.** To sum up the estimation and the cross-validation regression models, a summary of the significant predictors of each of the criterion variables, the significant predictors of practical importance, and the adjusted R squares are presented in table 4 above. From the table it can be seen that Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English were consistently the two most important predictors of the criterion variable, Attitudes towards Learning English.

Categorically, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English were the two predictors that were statistically significant predictors of Attitudes towards Learning English, and they were replicated in the two cross-validation analyses. The cross-validation analyses further showed that at least Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English are the significant predictors of the criterion variables, which are not due to capitalization or chance and that these results are generalisable to the population of the study. If the results are due to chance, these two predictors, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English, will not be replicated, but since the researcher obtained the same results more than once, it is more reasonable to consider that the results are not due to chance. This cross-validation strengthens the precision of the predictors, and the generalisability of the findings to the population, and hence the credibility of the study.

Having reported the estimates and cross-validation of the regression models, the study also highlighted the practical importance of each of the predictors through computation of the thresholds of practical importance. In the regression analysis, both predictors, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English, were statistically significant predictors and

were of practical importance Attitude towards Learning English in this study, and they were replicated in the cross-validation analyses.

**Table 4**

Summary of the Results of Regression Models for the Predictors and their Cross-Validations

Estimated Regression Models (Sample 1, N = 75)				Cross-Validated Regression Models (Sample 2, N = 75)		
Criterion Variable	Statistically Significant Predictor(s)	Predictors of Practical Importance	Adjusted R Square	Statistically Significant Predictor(s)	Predictor(s) of Practical Importance	Adjusted R Square
Attitude towards Learning English	Attitude towards Cooperative Learning	√	.525	Attitude Towards Cooperative Learning	√	.490
	Confidence in Using English	√	.525	Confidence in Using English	√	.490
	Exposure to English Outside the University	X		Exposure to English Outside the University	X	

Note Key:

√ = Significant predictor of Attitudes towards Learning English with practical importance.

X = Significant predictor of Attitudes towards Learning English with no practical importance.

## DISCUSSION

The respondents of this study were taken from the *kulliyah* of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (IRKHS) and the Institute of Education (INSTED), both at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). According to the figures obtained from the Centre for Languages and Pre-university Academic Development (CELPAD) of the IIUM, it was revealed that many of IRKHS students, especially those who specialized and were studying for a degree programme in *Fiqh* and *Usul Fiqh*, and *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* were dubbed poor performers in English language. Evidently, the average scores for English language courses were C plus and C as shown by the statistics from CELPAD. However, the expectation of the University authorities is to see all its students performing very well in their language courses, both Arabic and English. But the worrying situation is that on the average IRKHS students are becoming weaker at English.

In the light of this perturbing situation of English language performance among IRKHS students, many reasons were cited for these weaknesses which included among others, lack of confidence in using English, lack of exposure to English outside of the University campus, attitudes towards learning English, attitudes towards cooperative learning among students, and probably, a weak

background in preliminary or pre-university English language acquisition, and finally, lack of day-to-day practice in English.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, nationality, *kulliyyah*/ faculty/ institute/ center, and specializations showed that the majority of the respondents were females (n = 91), representing 62% of the total respondents, while there were 57 (39%) males in the selected sample. The majority of the respondents were within the age range of 20-24 years, which accounted for 111 (74%). As for the respondents' area of specialization, the majority (62 or 41%) were from *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. As for English language, the majority of respondents (54 or 36%) have taken not less than five courses using English language as the medium of instruction, while (66 or 44%) claimed that they used English for academic purposes several times a day in their courses.

In terms of the types of communication needs for academic purposes, the majority (104 or 69%) declared that they needed both oral and written communications equally and they opted for Arabic, English, and Malay as their preferred languages for communication. The majority (91 or 61%) of the respondents indicated that they were sometimes limited in their ability to communicate when using English. As for respondents' feeling of comfort when speaking English, the majority (74 or 49%) responded that they were sometimes uncomfortable when using English in the classroom / group discussions, and they also indicated that they sometimes felt intimidated or scared to talk to a native speaker in English.

For the self-assessment of language competence of the respondents, for spoken English, the majority (91 or 61%) rated themselves as fair/average in spoken English, also (79 or 52%) of the respondents rated themselves as fair/average in writing, but the rating was different for reading (62 or 41%) and listening (60 or 40%) where the respondents rated themselves as good at both skills respectively. On average, the majority of the respondents considered themselves as competent in terms of English language as compared to other languages, and they indicated that their English competence was mostly sufficient for their academic activities. And finally, the respondents indicated that they would like to improve their English language competence.

As for overall responses to the factors, the majority of the respondents agreed with all items under the factor (*Confidence in Using English*), with the highest percentage of agreement being 93% and the lowest being 39% respectively. This finding is consistent with Kemmer and Israel's statement that "*the more speakers talk to each other, the more they will talk alike, and so linguistic variation will pattern along lines of social contract and interaction*" (as cited by Ellis, 1985).

In terms of this factor (*Exposure to English Outside of University*), the majority of the respondents disagreed with it, with the highest percentage of disagreement being (71%) and the lowest being (45%) respectively. As for this factor (*Attitudes towards Learning English*), the majority of the respondents agreed with it, the highest percentage of agreement being (84%) and the lowest being

(59%) respectively. Finally, regarding this factor (*Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning*), the highest of agreement of the respondents being (57%) and lowest being (41%) respectively.

D.W. Johnson, R.T Johnson and B. Stanne (2000), in their analyses of studies on cooperative learning, found that instructional methods of cooperative learning had a significant positive impact on student achievement and they concluded that as compared to other instructional methods, cooperative learning has been validated as superior to all other instructional methods in the SLA (Second Language Acquisition) process, with over 900 research studies having validated the effectiveness of cooperative learning. Likewise, the study by Humphreys, Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Abu & Flowers, 1997) which compared cooperative learning, competitive, and individualistic learning strategies in Science classes found that students who were taught CL (Cooperative Learning) methods learned and retained more. This finding was also congruent with Sherman and Thomas' reports on cooperative learning in Math classes; Johnson *et al.* in their meta-analysis of 122 studies showed strong evidence for cooperative learning's superiority in promoting achievement compared to over competitive and individualistic strategies (as cited in Johnson *et al.*, 1981; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1995a and 199b; and Slavin, 1995).

However, as for analyses of variance, the means and standard deviations of the scores on Gender and Faculty on Attitude towards Learning English showed that the overall F-test for the combined effects of the two independent variables was statistically significant. The variability of Attitude towards Learning English was larger among the male subjects in INSTED ( $SD = 7.602$ ). The main effects of gender on Attitude towards Learning English were not statistically significant. The result revealed that gender has no significant influence on the respondents' attitude towards learning English. Nevertheless, the effects of faculty on Attitude towards Learning English were statistically significant. The result revealed that faculty has a statistically significant influence on the respondents' attitude towards learning English. Meanwhile, the interactive effects of gender and faculty on Attitude towards Learning English Language revealed that there are no statistically significant effects between the groups and Attitude towards Learning English. This shows that gender and faculty have no combined interactive influence on the respondents' attitude to learning English.

As for the results of the regression analysis for Attitude towards Learning English, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the overall model was statistically significant. The set of independent variables explained 40 per cent of the total variance in Attitude towards Cooperative Learning. The adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted R square) was 0.39 with an estimated standard error of 3.9. The predictive power of the individual predictors indicated that only two predictors were statistically significant, namely: Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English. Indeed,

Attitude towards Cooperative Learning was the best predictor of Attitude towards Learning English with the highest Beta value 0.433 (the best predictor is determined by looking at the regression coefficient and *t value*), **while the predictors**, Attitude towards Cooperative Learning and Confidence in Using English were of practical importance to Attitude towards Learning English and they were replicated in this study.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that to assist the undergraduate students in Islamic Studies and B.Ed. TASL to master the English language and to maintain the good caliber graduates when they branch off later as M.Ed. students at INSTEAD (Institute of Education), and also to make employment in the various sectors easier for them against the backdrop of global market competition in the near future, efforts to improve their attitude to learning English and their attitude to cooperative learning and confidence in using English would be worthwhile. Therefore, improved attitudes towards cooperative learning and more practice in using the language regularly in the classrooms, during their interactions among themselves and outside the campus will lead to a better performance in English for academic purposes and future employment after they have completed their various programmes of studies. Also, as shown by the study, helping students to improve their confidence in English and their attitude to cooperative learning must be given adequate emphasis since they are the significant predictors of Attitude towards Learning English.

However, as far the exposure to English outside of the university is concerned which was not significant, efforts should be stepped up to ensure students get involved in various programmes such as participating in literary and debating competitions, symposia, seminars, conferences etc. which will allow them to interact with students and non-students from the outside world in the community. Additionally, off campus programmes such as extra-curricular activities will provide an environment where students can interact without the pressures of their lecturers' supervision and can provide a good milieu for quick language learning.

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