

# **The Impact of Learning English on Students' Psychological and Sociological Behavior**

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## **Abstract**

Learners usually use their culture, first language, environment, background and personal experiences, among others to learn a second language. This study aims at bringing into attention the influence of learning English as a foreign language on learners' psychological and sociological behavior. Studies have proven that people who speak many languages have the ability to show differences in their personalities depending on the environment, like age and gender for example. Most job advertisements specify that the need multilingual full control of many languages. It is very important for learners who are studying English in a non-English speaking setting to experience real communicative situations in which they will learn how to express their own views and opinions. In addition, they must also improve their speaking skill which is the most essential for the success of foreign language communication.

This study shows whether learning a new language changes the person in different terms or not. It has been shown that during learning a foreign language, learners can feel the difference in their actions, thinking, responses and the way they behave. Kara (2009) stated that positive attitude leads to the exhibition of positive behavior toward studying, and striving to learn more. Such students are also observed to show more enthusiasm to solve problems, to acquire what is useful for daily life, and to engage themselves emotionally. In order to achieve the above aim, a questionnaire is conducted to third year students at Al Mustansiryia University, College of Basic Education, English Department. Also a number of students were interviewed in order to obtain as reliable and authentic data as possible

The analysis of the student's questionnaire and the interviews show that learners are really starting to observe the impact of learning a new language such as English in the case of this research paper, on their characteristics, personalities and the way of thinking. The study demonstrates how learning English helps the students to improve their

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abilities to exchange information and knowledge. This requires them to use the language fluently, by doing so their self-confidence is increased and elevated to higher levels and satisfy their academic needs.

Examining learners' personalities is regarded as an important factor to enhance learner's abilities to acquire language. For that reason, It is recommended to create an encouraging atmosphere in the English classes to help the students' positive attitudes toward English . Accordingly, it is advisable to plan English curriculum and class activities according to students' needs, behaviors and feelings. Similarly students must be inspired by their teachers so they can acquire positive attitudes toward learning English

**Key Words: personality; Motivation ; behavior ; language learning Section One**

### **1.1 Introduction.**

The Personality of the learner is another controversial matter being considered a factor influencing foreign language acquisition. A widely-held belief claims that extroverted learners learn more rapidly and are more successful than introverted learners. Ellis (1985:120) said that Karshen (1981) emphasized wild personalities learn a lot.

Learning a new language cover a variety of learning skills, that is why people who learn a second language or foreign language show a greater cognitive development in their mental, imagination, creativity and higher order thinking skills like problem-solving, conceptualization and reasoning.

Global Language for David Crystal (2003) does not become like this because of its central properties or structural features. Neither of the amount of its vocabulary nor because it was considered as a vehicle that carries a great literature in the past. It may also not become like this because it was once related to a specific religion or culture. These are all factors which can motivate someone to learn a language". (p. 9). It means that learning a language such as English as a foreign language is a key to awareness and human cognitive development. Learning a new language, especially English helps Iraqi learners to develop their future lifestyles includes occupation, travel, and getting foreign friends.

We live in multilingual world and it is very important to know more than one language, many people have studied one or more languages besides their mother tongue. There are many reasons for this: another language can help you to improve yourself, you gain awareness of other cultures, and also it helps to increase our knowledge and understanding of our own language. Being fluent in a foreign language offers numerous opportunities and practical, intellectual and many other advantages.

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In this regard Barth-O'Neill comment by saying that When someone change its language, its personality change too since he needs to cope with the different words in that language. He also says that when someone change its language he enters another domain or part of its self.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Learning a new language is something we are born to do. Learning a new language is a step in which human deal with new concepts. Learning a new language goes with acquiring a new vocabulary and grammar which deals with a new way of thinking and living. When the person's thought changes, his behavior also will be changed and modified. Learning a new language such as French, Spanish, English....Etc. is a powerful process that the human or the person who cannot understand the meaning of the utterances, thoughts, and learning process, he will be able and capable to make a sense and replicate their words, and utterances in which they will create the opportunities to communicate and exchange thoughts and knowledge with foreigners. It gives the person the capacities to move from inside of mind and brain to the context of the community this research project tends to find an answer to how does learning English as a foreign have an effect on students' behavior and personalities.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In order to investigate on the study that shows the effects of learning English as a foreign language on Iraqi learner's behavior. And this paper will basically depend on the following questions.

1. What are the different uses of learning English language on learner's social life?
2. Does learning English language make the learner or the person changes his psychological behavior?
3. What are the most characteristics that third year learners are affected by in both ways negative and positive?

### **1.4 The Hypothesis:**

In order to find answers to the previous questions, the following assumption is formulated:

- Learning English as a foreign language affects positively third year students to develop their abilities in different sides of their lives.

### **1.5 Aim of the Study**

This study entitled "The Impact of Learning English on Students' Psychological and Sociological Behavior. The case study: third year students at Al Mustansiriya University, College of Basic Education, English Department aims to:

- To assess the effectiveness of learning English on the third year students' behavior.

### **1.6 Research Methodology:**

This study requires descriptive methods so as to get the accurate information through the usage of the questionnaire and an interview. The researcher chooses to work with Iraqi third year students at Al-Mustansiriya University, College of Basic Education, English Department. Since it is not easy to work with all that large number of students the researcher decides to choose a group randomly with the variety of age and gender.

## **Section Two**

### **2.1 Factors that Influence Language Learning**

The learning environment is affected and influenced by certain factors. Shams (2008) says that the foreign language learning is affected and influenced by the learning context in which it's learned. He also says that there are different factors that affect the learning process. For example motivation, attitude, age, anxiety and personalities.

#### **2.1 Motivation**

When it comes to motivation one may wonder whether the children learn the language by themselves or whether they are forced to learn.

Gardner (1985) notices in his study about motivation and attitude, that these two factors affect and boost the development of second language proficiency. Successful learners are psychologically prepared to embrace different aspect of behaviors which reflects different members of another linguistics or cultural group (Selinker, 2004)

If the children learned and understood the significance of understanding a certain language, then they can learn it faster. And again, if the children recognized the meaningful connection of the language and its impact on their life, then they will be interested in learning it. They will take more risks and efforts to produce the language, which also will help in accelerate learning the language faster. According to Ur (1996, p. 274) "the motivated learner is the one who is willing or even eager to invest effort in learning activities and to progress".

#### **2.2 Anxiety**

Anxiety is also another characteristic of personality that has a great effect on the process of second language learning. It has gained the attention of a big number of linguists in second language acquisition research. It is revealed that higher anxiety affects the language learning negatively, and make its level to be low and make the learners to not be confident, but lower anxiety makes the learners to get a high self-

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confidence that is a good way in attaining second language learning(Saville-Troike,2006)

### **2.3 Support at Home**

The second question that may come to one's mind whether is hearing another language spoken at home may help the children in learning a certain language? What's the degree of their exposure to different languages?

Of course, an exposure to a certain language is a significant factor in language comprehension and acquisition. If the families of the children speak only one language, will they be capable of providing the help when their children need it? Another important thing is the degree and the value that their parent put in learning an extra language. By doing this, Parents can push their children and motivate them even when it feels difficult.

### **2.4 Learning Environments**

What are the feelings of children in their classroom? One of the important factors is whether the students are comfortable in their learning environment. If the children feel relaxed in their classroom, this will increase the chance for learning. Are the culture and beliefs of their school effect the process of their learning? It has been found that the learning environment has a powerful and crucial impact on the motivation of the student as they learn the language since it increases the chance for acquisition.

### **2.5 Student Personality**

Learning is a set of individual's characteristics that make him/her differ from other individuals. English plays an essential role in developing personality, especially for the Iraqi high school learners who are adolescents, in the process of discovering and developing their personalities, Mahatma Ghandi said that "true education is total personality development" which education and learning established and determined the personality of the learner in the society

Learning English as a foreign language provides the opportunity to enhance the individual's abilities to communicate and use a language fluently, increases one's own confidence, and develop a certain wants, it is also the most important factor to affect one's personality since the English language is considered to be the universal language with certain norms and principles in countries all over the world, that is why it is obligatory to give the English the most attention.

Having a good personality is not a matter of being attractive but as P.K Manoharan states "personality is the sum total of physical, mental, emotional, and social characteristics of an individual." (p. 02)

Is the student introverted or extroverted?

One question may be asked is the personality of the student can have an impact on the way he learns another language. This question is important since there are introverted and extroverted students. Introverted students take more time to acquire the language while extroverted students learn as fast as possible and use their new acquired vocabulary (Celce-Murcia, 2001). No matter what the type of the student is, a good learning environment is really appreciated since it boosts the students' ability to acquire the new language.

#### 2.6 Age

What is the age that the children start in learning a foreign language? It is believed that the young learners will be better in acquiring a second language rather than the older learners. This is supported by Ellis (1999: 484) that *"there is a widely-held lay belief that younger L2 learners generally do better than older learners."*

However, some students find it hard to obtain a foreign language as they grow. However, this is not a true fact for everyone.

#### 2.7 Attitude

According to Fakeye (2010) the learner's attitude is agreed on as one of the most crucial factors that affect learning any language. Learning will not be achieved easily only if the students bring positive attitudes. Different attitudes are brought from different life experiences. Since attitude plays a significant role in the process of learning then it can affect the failure or the success of it. Tella, Indoshi, and Othuon (2010) studied the effect of the negative attitudes in learning English language is considered as the most affective and psychological factor since it leads to a poor performance in English.

### Section Three

#### 3.1 Procedure

To achieve the purpose of this research, an interview plus a questionnaire were adopted to collect the data.

The questionnaire includes 9 questions which are set and arranged in a logical way. They are either closed questions requiring from the students to choose "Yes" or "No" answers, or to pick up the proper answer or open questions requiring them to give their own answers and justify them.

The total number of the students who participated in this research is 40 students. They were mixed student from the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, both males and females. All of them were from the University of Al-Mustansiryia, Faculty of Basic Education, Department of English. Their age ranged between 20 and 22.

As for the interview, ten students are chosen randomly to answer open –ended questions so as they feel more freely in providing their opinions.

### **3.2 Results and Discussion**

Different answers are provided in the questionnaire. These answers are illustrated in separate charts.

From a total of 40 students, 65% carried negative features that affect their language mastery. On the other hand, only 36% carried positive features that contribute in their language mastery.

Personality and anxiety are recognized by the students as a main cause of their failure in communication in the classroom. The level of English mastery is negatively affected by the factor of anxiety. Again, this was shown by the results of the interview. One of the student said that he feels shacked in his boots when he is called by the teacher to speak in front of the class. This feeling is magnified if those students are better than him or unfamiliar to him.

Another one said that he cannot interact in a proper way with the other students because his personality fails him or prevents him in doing so, especially if he is talking to more capable students. Not only that, but his personality is the major drawback that makes him not confident in what he is saying

The analysis of the questionnaire shows that 22 of the student which is nearly about (55%) of them are extroverted ones. On the other hand, out of 10 of the students 6 of them declared that they belong more into the extroverted realm. This boosts their language mastery. Another one said:

*“Being an extroverted learner helps me and encourages me to exert more efforts to interact with other students and with my teacher without hesitating or being afraid of communication.”*

Celce-Muricia (2001) says that the extroverted type of people gain their confidence from the outside sphere. Extroverted types of students are surrounded with a lot of friends. While introverted type of students gain their confidence from the inside sphere.

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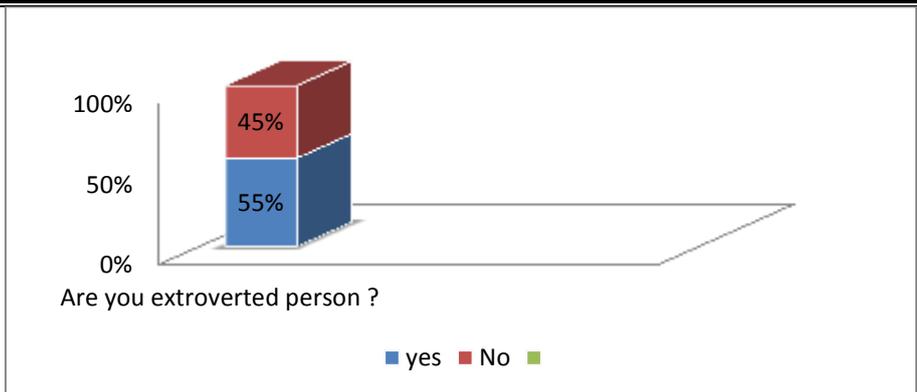


Chart 1

This confirms and demonstrates that the majority at AL-Mustansiriya University are extroverted students. In addition, to confirm the result of questionnaire, a lot of students were asked about their type. Amazingly, all but two students said they are extroverted type of students.

One of the introverted was asked, and he replied that he feel shy most of the time and that he is not capable of making friends or interact with his mates and this draws him back a lot in his language mastery. Worst of all, he cannot overcome this obstacle, or as he calls it “my big problem”.

Chart n.(2) clarifies that nearly about 60% of them are anxious. This means that anxiety hinder their language learning. Yet, nearly (40%) of them are not anxious. Nevertheless, anxiety, as stated by some of the students as a factor that helps them in their language mastery. One of the students said that he feels more comfortable while he speaks in front of the class even with the teachers. This is a normal thing for him inside or outside the class whether with familiar or unfamiliar people.

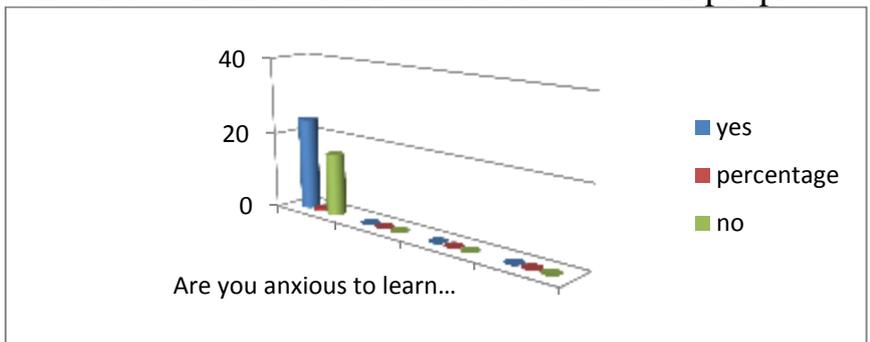


Chart n.2

*Q/ Are you motivated to learn English?*

Results obtained from this question showed that a great number of the students in Al Mustansiriya University, English Department are more capable in learning the English language. It is confirmed by the interviewee's answers who indicated that they feel motivated because of their family and because of the prestige of learning a language like English.

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Gardner and Lambert study (1972) confirms that motivation is a major factor that facilitates English acquisition in a strong way.

My Arabic language affects my language learning.

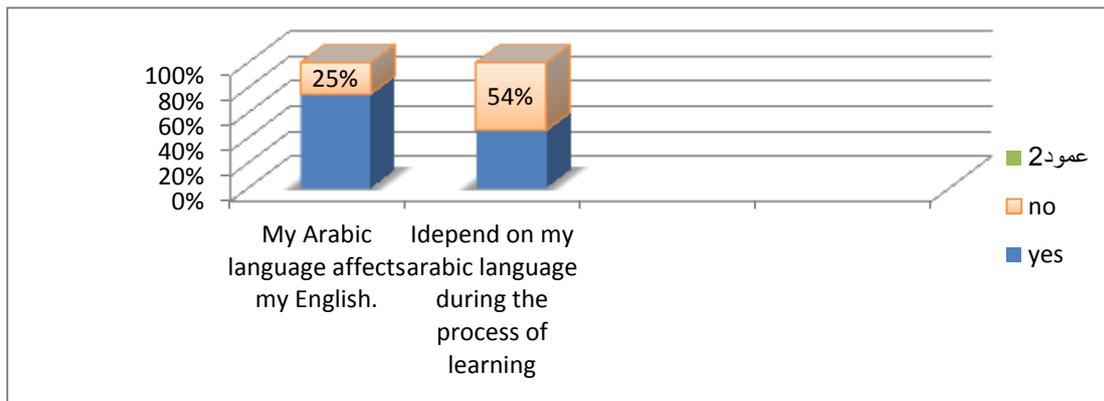


Chart n.3

The questionnaire also showed that nearly 75% of them don't like their Arabic language since it hinders their language master, while (25%) disagreed with them. In addition, (46%) of them use their Arabic to boosts their English, while 54% do not do that.

Age is also a crucial, secondary type of factors. The questionnaire results showed that nearly (90%) of them consider age as a booster not a problem to them in their language mastery. One of the students said that he loves his age since his age carries with him a lot of experience that help him in his language mastery.

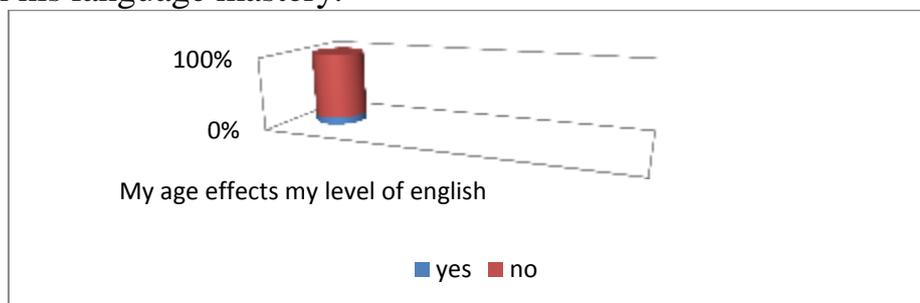


Chart n.4

In this research, it was found that nearly the attitude of nearly (80%) is a positive one .While the attitude of (20%) of them is a negative one. The interview showed this percentage,

The last student said that his dream was to be enrolled in this beautiful section so as to speak English with others who share his same dream

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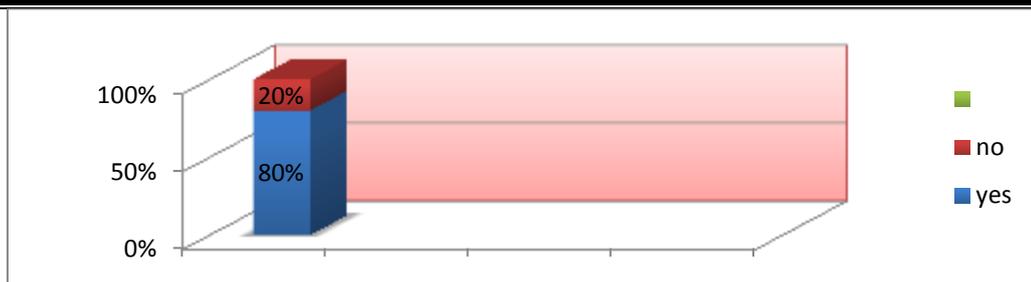


Chart n.5

Regarding students attendance, It is found that (70%) of them in Al-Mustansiriya University, English Department are affected since some students feel afraid to speak in front of such massive number of students.

## Major Findings

The interview and the questionnaire of this research were carried in Al- Mustansiriya University, English Department. The analysis of this research showed a lot of students have some disadvantages and characteristics that reduce the learning capacity and their language control. Some of these characteristics are personality, anxiety, age, attitude and motivation. Moreover, it seems that the characteristics of those learners can affect their process of learning in both positive and negative ways, in addition the degree and the level of learning English language. For example, the level of learning for those anxious students is lower than those non-anxious ones. Also, some students have good characteristics so they are capable and more successful than other students in the process of learning the language. Such characteristics can affect them and encourage them to learn the English language more and more.

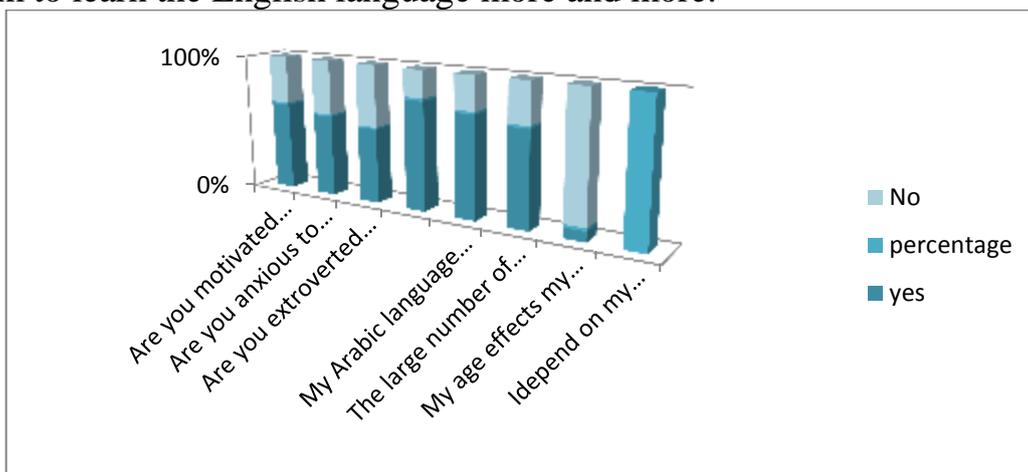


Chart n.6

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was aimed to target the learners of the third stage in Al- Mustansiriya University and examine how their characteristics affect their learning process. The results have shown that those students

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carry different features that disturb their language mastery in a positive and a negative way.

The degree of these characteristics can affect those learners in different ways, according to the characteristics they own. It is also concluded that there are different characteristics that affect students in a good or a bad way, one of these characteristics is anxiety. Anxiety hinders them in a negative way since it impedes their acquisition. This happens because the students find themselves in a situation where they do not know what to in a comfortable way.

In addition to anxiety, Personality is also regarded as another factor that may hinder or boost the learning process. When the talk is about personality, then two types of students appear the extrovert and the introvert. These types are opposite to each other. For example, extroverted students are affected in a positive way by this factor, since their personality helps them in learning more and gives them the confidence to communicate interact and with other students or even with the teachers. The introverted students are affected in a negative way by this feature.

Concerning motivation, this characteristic positively affect student's learning since it inspires them a lot. While for Age, it is an additional factor affects that positively boosts students in their learning. The reason for this is that young students try all their efforts to learn English language, while older students are equipped by their experience and more cognitive powers. Attitude in learning any language is a factor that gives a positive effect, because students will be more interested in learning what they love to learn.

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## تأثير تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية على تصرفات الطلاب النفسية والاجتماعية

### الخلاصة

عادة ما يستخدم المتعلمون ثقافتهم ولغتهم الأولى وبيئتهم وخبراتهم الشخصية، من بين أمور أخرى لتعلم لغة ثانية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى لفت الانتباه إلى تأثير تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على سلوك المتعلمين النفسي والاجتماعي. وقد أثبتت الدراسات أن الناس الذين يتكلمون العديد من اللغات لديهم القدرة على إظهار الاختلافات في شخصياتهم اعتماداً على البيئة، مثل العمر ونوع الجنس على سبيل المثال. وتحدد معظم إعلانات الوظائف الحاجة إلى التحكم الكامل بالعديد من اللغات. من المهم جداً للمتعلمين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في البلدان غير الناطقة باللغة الإنجليزية تحسين مهاراتهم في التحدث والتي هي الأكثر أهمية لنجاح التواصل باللغة الأجنبية.

وتبين هذه الدراسة ما إذا كان تعلم لغة جديدة يغير الشخص بمصطلحات مختلفة أم لا. وقد تبين أنه أثناء تعلم لغة أجنبية، يمكن للمتعلمين أن يشعروا بالفرق في أعمالهم، والتفكير، والاستجابات والطريقة التي يتصرفون بها. ذكر كارا (2009) أن الموقف الإيجابي يؤدي إلى معرض السلوك الإيجابي نحو الدراسة، والسعي لمعرفة المزيد. ويلاحظ هؤلاء الطلاب أيضاً لإظهار المزيد من الحماس لحل المشاكل، لاكتساب ما هو مفيد للحياة اليومية، والانخراط أنفسهم عاطفياً. من أجل تحقيق الهدف المذكور أعلاه، تم إجراء استبيان لطلبة السنة الثالثة في الجامعة المستنصرية، كلية التربية الأساسية، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. كما تم إجراء مقابلات مع عدد من الطلاب من أجل الحصول على بيانات موثوقة وأصيلة قدر الإمكان وبيّن تحليل استبيان الطالب والمقابلات أن المتعلمين بدأوا حقاً في مراقبة تأثير تعلم لغة جديدة مثل اللغة الإنجليزية في حالة هذه الورقة البحثية، على خصائصهم وشخصياتهم وطريقة التفكير. وتوضح الدراسة كيف يساعد تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية الطلاب على تحسين قدراتهم على تبادل المعلومات والمعرفة. وهذا يتطلب منهم استخدام اللغة بطلاقة، من خلال القيام بذلك يتم زيادة الثقة بالنفس ورفعها إلى مستويات أعلى وتلبية احتياجاتهم الأكاديمية.