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Remedial students' refusal of preferring English department as a major field of study at Madda Walabu University: students' outlook compared to the policy

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The purpose of this study was to find out remedial students' refusal to prefer the English department as a major field of study. The study participants were 99 students who were purposively chosen. For the study, descriptive case study design with a quantitative approach was used. Data was gathered using questionnaires. Using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25, mean and standard deviation were calculated and expressed in words. The findings revealed that there was lack of students' understanding of the advantages of studying English. Other obstacles that hindered students joining the English department were: considering English as the toughest subject, studying aimlessly, lack of exposure to lower grades, lack of guidance from parents and classmates, and believing that there are fewer career opportunities majoring in English. They also received less guidance or rigorous practice. Thus, teachers should play their role in advocating the benefit of joining the English department to attract first-year students who complete the remedial program to the English department.

KEYWORDS

refusal, preferring, major field of study, career opportunity, students' outlook

1 Introduction

One of the academic subjects taught in Ethiopian universities is English as second language. English majors students who meet the requirements and graduate have a variety of opportunities. She or he may be able to earn money, for instance, by taking part in various public and private organizations. Another benefit of majoring in English is the ability to communicate or create public relations in a variety of settings (University of Lynchburg, 2021; Baird, 2018). However, first-year university students find it challenging and intimidating to choose a major (Staff, 2017). As a result, many either detested or neglected to enroll in the English department and pursue it as their primary subject of study.

As a result, Ethiopian universities may not have an English department if students do not study the language there. As a result, there are insufficient English teachers in Ethiopian academic settings, such as kindergartens, primary schools, and high schools, which obliquely affects the country's educational system. This implies that no English topic is taught in our educational system if there is no English department in the universities. If things keep on this way, there will not be any English instructors in our schools.

Few students who wish to be qualified in this field of study are also demotivated by the fall of the English department in Ethiopian universities. The University of Maryland saw a 20% decrease in the number of BA degrees in English, which had an impact on the English department across all universities (Flaherty, 2018). There are several reasons why the English department at universities is gradually declining. Comparably, Madda Walabu University remedial students appear to have comparable circumstances when it comes to attending the English department. This indicates that prior to enrolling in freshman classes and major courses (departments), students were monitored and asked about their needs. After students finished the two semesters of remedial coursework, this remark was made. Consequently, a few concerns need to be investigated in order to determine the cause of their rejection.

Since Madda Walabu University offers English as one of its departments, it should be studied in accordance with the department's curriculum or policies. Like other academic fields, studying English as a major in college offers a wealth of prospects for students. English language study is the most crucial subject for students to take in order to interact with the modern world and learn other courses, even without considering the benefits that other academic disciplines offer. English is the language of instruction at all institutions and secondary schools, in particular. Students should therefore be passionate about and competent in this discipline. But according to experts, students demonstrated that they lacked the knowledge necessary to enroll in the English department. This indicates that, based on observations, students are not very interested in majoring in the English department and would much rather study other disciplines.

Few studies have been done about the reasons why first-year students choose not to major in the English language department, according to researchers' expertise and teaching experience at universities. Few studies have been done about the reasons why first-year students choose not to major in the English language department, according to researchers' expertise and teaching experience at universities.

Masadeh (2021) studied how first-year EFL students at universities felt about learning and discovered that while fear is a barrier to learning English, studying English helps people become respected and educated. Jain et al. (2012) conducted research on first-year undergraduates' views on studying English as a second language and discovered that they had a favorable outlook on the subject.

In local context, Tegenge (2018) did research in Ethiopia on how to encourage students' interest in learning English. He determined that the kids' approach to learning English had changed. Furthermore, Faskal (2019) investigated the reasons behind EFL students' reluctance to major in the English language. His findings indicated that not all students had the English department as their first option since some were afraid to enroll in the department due to inadequate explanations. Furthermore,

Adisu (2018) investigated the variables influencing students' attitudes about studying English as a second language and discovered that while the educational setting had a negative impact on students' attitudes, social aspects had a favorable effect.

Nonetheless, this investigation differs from the others in that it examines the obstacles that prevent students from choosing English language studies as their primary subject of study.

Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate remedial students' rejection of the English department as their primary subject of study. In particular, it planned to close this deficit based on the following goals, which were to:

- Find out the extent to which students know the benefits of studying English as a major field of study.
- Pinpoint challenges that impede students from studying English as a major field of study.
- Identify the likely strategies that can increase students' interest in studying English.

The process by which first-year undergraduate students choose their major at institutions may be challenging. Upon entering the university, first-year students are offered a variety of courses to prepare them for their future employment, such as biology, economics, and English, but many of them struggle to choose (Staff, 2017). They are also compelled to select the major that their friends have chosen since they have no idea which field to pursue; yet, this may have depressing effects.

It might be daunting for first-year undergraduate students to select a major. This is because the subjects that students choose to study will have a significant impact on their lives in the future. Selecting an appropriate major can help you find employment that provides a livable income (Wickline, 2021). Similarly, while majoring in English is one area of study that should be selected per university policy, the University of Maryland saw a 20% decrease in the number of BA degrees in English, which had an impact on the English department across all universities (Flaherty, 2018).

Since English is the language of people and is used in all fields, including business, science, the arts, and technology, studying it can help you land a position in a multinational corporation. It is also a means by which an individual might obtain employment to support himself.

Although there isn't a universal language in the world, English is the language of choice for many different kinds of communication. Because of this, studying English has several advantages, one of which is that it greatly increases your job prospects (University of Lynchburg, 2021). It has been statistically demonstrated that learning English improves one's job prospects. This indicates that a person with a degree in English is advantageous to his company.

Because English has had a long-lasting influence on the corporate sector, several academics and organizations make this assertion. Additionally, majoring in English offers great preparation for jobs in public service, business, teaching, law, and many other fields (Simon Schuster, 2001; University of Lynchburg, 2021). Some students study in English because they want to become teachers; however, the majority of English majors choose to follow other professional choices, as demonstrated by Simon Schuster (2001). In

Abbreviations: BA, Bachelor of Art; EFL, English as Foreign Language; E.C., Ethiopian Calendar; PhD, Philosophy of Doctor; SPSS, Statistical Package for Social Science.

addition, mastering English equips us for a wide range of careers in the creative arts, teaching, media, law, publishing, and medical. Our technical analysis and interpretation, creative and critical writing, historical synthesis, and other English major talents have equipped us for a variety of potential occupations. These professions might include instructing, writing, and acting in dramas and films for both public and private institutions.

Speaking English fluently in addition to our native tongue might be helpful if we look for work with multinational corporations. Proficiency in writing and speaking English is preferred or required by many employers. English is frequently used during job interviews for positions in international companies (Baird, 2018). English offers a wide choice of specialties and prospective job routes for its graduates, making it one of the finest majors for students who aren't sure what to major in. English majors have a variety of career options after graduation, including technical writing, news reporting, copywriting, and journalism (Staff, 2017).

English can also be used for entertainment and media there is English speech in a lot of the world's television series and films. If the individual seeing the film speaks English, it will be easier to follow the narrative (Baird, 2018; Simon Schuster, 2001). However, students who studied English are more advantageous than other students who studied other disciplines to comprehend the content without translating print sources like books or magazines.

Since English is the language that is most often spoken worldwide, speaking it may make traveling more straightforward for visitors from other countries (Baird, 2018; Simon Schuster, 2001). The majority of staff members at hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments most likely speak some level of English. Students who study English as a major are more prestigious and may have meaningful conversations with such folks in many circumstances.

The other use of English is to master academic content. Proficiency in English is beneficial for mastering other subjects through interacting with educators and fellow students, particularly in international studies (Baird, 2018; Simon Schuster, 2001). Additionally, these kids will find it simpler to do their coursework, which includes reading lengthy materials and looking up subjects for class discussions. In Ethiopia, no topic is taught without the use of English, particularly in high school and university settings. English is crucial to learning these courses.

Furthermore, English is used in computers and technologies. The majority of software is written in English. Reading and understanding English is an important skill for anyone looking to advance their computer expertise (Baird, 2018; Simon Schuster, 2001). Engineers and technicians can easily become used to new software technologies if they speak English. Therefore, English may be used to interpret digital communications that are used in today's society, in addition to academic settings.

An excellent method to get exposed to excellent writing if we are language and literature lovers is to major in English. Nonetheless, a lot of students think that English is a challenging topic, and getting excellent grades in college is challenging (Wickline, 2021). As a result, it is regarded as the most difficult course to graduate from, and possessing this degree makes it challenging to get employment.

Many students study English without considering what field they want to work in. Without these goals, studying English is tedious, irritating, and exhausting. By holding themselves to high standards in their instruction, instructors may pique students' interests (Nilson, 2010; Jain et al., 2012).

Personal experience is another issue. Students studying English who have previously engaged with the language through activities such as viewing English-language movies or reading a variety of English-language books, periodicals, and fiction will have an edge over those who have not (Kuther, 2020). These students are enthusiastic about studying English, while individuals who do not have these possibilities could be afraid and decide not to enroll in the English department.

Kuther (2020) states that many graduate programs in English have strict admission requirements and that applications to pursue further education are required. For example, a PhD program requires a better grade of 3.7. As a result, pupils would rather study other things, including music.

According to Frank (2020), a student's experience and the pressures they face from their parents and peers have a significant impact on whether or not they select the right degree. For instance, based on this information, kids enjoy copying their father's visual English teaching style. English may influence a different student to not enjoy English, similar to that student who dislikes a particular topic. Senior friends who pursue other subjects, such as accounting or economics, might also serve as poor role models for newcomers who wish to major in English.

To enhance the number of students joining English departments, as Dalton (2018) put, students may be interested in studying the English department as a field of study if the following things are done.

Students should receive advice from all relevant parties, including English instructors and other experts, in order to pursue enrollment in the English department. This can be achieved by explaining to them the advantages of earning a degree in English that are comparable to those of graduating from other courses.

The mistakes that first-year college students make when they study only for fun. Naturally, by the middle of their studies, English majors may be producing thousands of words each week. In order to be successful students, pupils are likely to have a drive to love and study with purpose when they do this. English is one of the easiest majors to list, and studying it is just as important as studying other subjects (Wickline, 2021). Therefore, from the very beginning of the semester, students should begin their studies with the intention of becoming proficient English speakers.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Research design

To address the intended research objectives, a descriptive case study research design with a quantitative approach was employed (Creswell, 2012). This method was used to obtain numerical data which was obtained from the subjects of the study.

2.2 Sample size and sampling techniques

The subjects of the study were the 2015 E.C. remedial students of Madda Walabu University. These subjects were selected because they are closer to the problem, and they can provide enough information regarding what they think about the issue because it concerns them directly.

Two classes of remedial students were taken using the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique is employed based on the researcher's experience with the group to be sampled (Gay et al., 2012). The classes consisted of 99 students who were selected to fill out the questionnaire. On the other hand, all students in the two classes were selected using a comprehensive sampling technique (Davies, 2022).

2.3 Instruments

A questionnaire is a data collection tool that is considered to be the most flexible of tools and possesses a unique advantage over others in collecting both qualitative and quantitative information (Creswell, 2012). Besides, it is economical and convenient to describe the existing conditions of the characters. Therefore, based on the review of related literature and stated research objectives, closed-ended questions were designed and piloted. The Likert scale, which ranges from 1 to 5, "very low (1), low (2), medium (3), high (4), and very high (5)," was used for research question 1, whereas the Likert scales (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) undecided, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002) were used for research questions two and three.

2.4 Procedures

The data was collected using the following procedures: First, respondents were appointed and given questions. After that, the questions were collected and entered into SPSS computed.

2.5 Data analysis

Using SPSS version 25, the mean and standard deviation were computed for each item according to the research questions. Then, the result obtained was described in words, and finally, summary of the major findings and a conclusion were drawn.

3 Results

3.1 Benefits of studying English as a major field of study

As can be seen from the above table, the first question tried to ask whether students know the benefit of studying English is for making money after graduating, and most of them ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.49403$) rated under the rating scale "very low and low," and didn't understand the benefit that joining the English department has. This means the extent to which they understand

TABLE 1 Benefits of studying English as a major field.

Studying English is important for:		N	M	SD
1	making money.	99	2.49	1.49403
2	employment opportunity.	99	2.47	1.41669
3	touring.	99	2.43	1.27904
4	succeeding education.	99	2.46	1.57993
5	communicating using technology internationally and locally.	99	2.51	1.45948
	total	99	2.47	0.76962

the advantage of studying English in obtaining money is low among students.

Item 2 in Table 1 was designed to identify whether students recognized as studying English are important for the opportunity of being employed after completing the program. Accordingly, most of them ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.41669$) replied that they weren't given awareness regarding the issue. This implies that they are far from the information, and they think that studying English at the university isn't important.

Item 3 in Table 1 was prepared to ask students whether they knew English was used in tourism or not. As a result, they replied ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.27904$) that English is not important in tourism. This indicates that students are not informed about the use of English, either for touring or guiding people who want to tour.

Item 4 in Table 1 was prepared to ask whether students understand the use of English in succeeding education, and most of them ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.57993$) replied that they didn't understand the use of English to do so. In other words, for them, English is not important for learning other subjects like mathematics, physics, and biology.

The last item in Table 1 tried to ask whether joining the English Department is good for communication both internationally and locally. As they replied ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.45948$), English is nothing for them to do so. This means they simply learn English in lower grades as they learn other subjects. Generally, except they showed improvement on item 5 ($M = 51$), they generally showed the benefit of studying English is low ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.76962$).

3.2 Challenges that impede students studying English as a major field of study

In the Table 2, item 1 tried to ask respondents whether they perceive English as the hardest subject or not. As a result, they ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.70514$) replied that English is the hardest subject. This implies that their view is negative toward the subject; however, there may be other problems behind this problem. Therefore, this is seen as a problem.

Item 2 in Table 2 was prepared to know whether students learn without purpose and interest. They stressed that most of them ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.70514$) answered that they learn English without purpose or interest. This indicates that learning without

TABLE 2 Challenges that impede students studying English as a major field of study.

Challenges		N	M	SD
1	English is viewed as the hardest field of study.	99	4.18	0.70514
2	I learn without interest or purpose at the university.	99	4.15	0.70514
3	I have less exposure to English in lower grades.	99	2.42	1.40037
4	Competition for entry into further education in English is hard for me.	99	4.14	0.70514
5	Job opportunities are less in English.	99	4.16	0.70514
6	My parents and friends advise me to study English at a higher education.	99	2.22	1.40037
Total		99	3.04	0.70514

identifying the subject they are going to study is perceived as a challenge.

Item 3 in Table 2 was designed to ask whether students have less exposure to English in lower grades. As a result, they answered that most of them ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.4037$) didn't have much practice with English in lower grades. In other words, they hated the subject because they were not provided with the rigorous practice expected of them at that level.

As can be seen in Table 2, the aim of item 4 was to ask and identify as competition for entry to further education in English is hard. As a result, they replied ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.78259$) that English is considered a hard subject to study in the future, and this indicates that viewing English as a hard subject is seen as one of the major problems that blocked them from studying English.

From Table 2, item 5 was designed to identify whether students' job opportunities are less with majoring in English, and they said ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.77863$) that getting a job with majoring in English is rare. This means this issue is one of the problems because they are blocked by the idea that the opportunity to get a job after completing the course is difficult for them.

Item 6 in Table 2 aimed to ask students whether their parents and friends advise them to study English at a higher education level, and most of them replied ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.32137$) that they were not accustomed to this fact. This means that, though appropriate peers' and parents' pressure is important in putting positive ideas in students' minds, either at a lower or higher grade, they do not get such input.

3.3 The strategies that increase students' interest in referring to English as a major field of study

In the Table 3 above, item 1 was designed to ask and identify whether teachers use advice to study English, and they answered ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.40969$) that they didn't. Though advising is one of the solutions to making students love English, teachers do not play their role in doing so.

TABLE 3 Strategies that increase students' interest in preferring English as a major field of study.

Strategies		N	M	SD
1	The teacher uses advice to motivate me to study English.	99	2.49	1.40969
2	The teacher creates a desire in my mind to study.	99	2.33	1.43570
3	I am provided with much practice in learning English.	99	2.22	1.25808
Total		99	2.35	0.83078

Item 2 in Table 3 was designed to determine whether creates a desire in students' minds to study English, and their response ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.43570$) showed that they were not familiar with such a strategy. Although creating interest in students' minds plays a vital role in loving to study English at the university, teachers, especially English teachers, do not do that.

Last but not least item, item 3, in Table 3, was designed to ask whether students are provided with rigorous practice in the classroom. They replied ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.25808$) that they were not provided with such a strategy for attracting students to study English. This means that students do not believe in rigorous practice to master English.

4 Discussion

4.1 Benefits of studying English as a major field of study

The awareness of remedial program students from multilingual backgrounds at Madda Walabu University about the benefits of studying English is very low. They did not understand the benefits like making money, having job opportunities, studying other subjects, and having communication as a major subject. They did not fully understand that studying English is important for different purposes. On the other hand, it can be said that they refrain from joining the department because of a lack of awareness. Conversely, one finding showed that majoring in English is considered as appealing subject for students in many ways (Pugh, 2023).

4.2 Challenges that impede students studying English as a major field of study

Remedial students' interest in joining the English department was affected by different challenges. Among these challenges, considering English as the hardest subject, not having a purpose to study, lack of exposure at lower grades, lack of advice from their peers and parents, considering studying English results in a lack of job opportunities, and perceiving that pursuing further education in this subject is difficult are major ones. Heller (2023) also adds that majoring in English is affected by students' disinterest in the subject because of the above challenges.

4.3 The strategies that increase students' interest in referring to English as a major field of study

Students are expected to be provided with a vision of the benefits of studying English as a major subject at the university. However, they were not provided with such strategies, which attracted them to be English major students. This means they do not get input like advice and rigorous practice, either at a lower or present level of education. However, [Magee \(2023\)](#) put that the traditional way of teaching English may no longer align with the evolving needs of students and the job market; instead, an interdisciplinary and project-based curriculum should be designed for twenty-first century students because such an approach may provide English major students with many opportunities.

4.4 Limitations and future directions

The study has a crucial contribution in academic settings though there are limitations. First, the study used only a quantitative approach which may result in a lack of triangulation for the sake of increasing the trustworthiness of the results. Second, the study focuses on the student participants which may lack participant triangulation ([Creswell, 2014](#)). However, others can add the qualitative method to search for the issues that are not studied to fill the gap.

4.5 Pedagogical implications

The findings of the study reveals several pedagogical implications. Students from different multilingual backgrounds should motivated in order to mitigate the reluctance they have toward joining the English department. To attract students' interests toward studying English as major, they should be exposed to practice when they attend remedial program before joining the English department. This can be effective by using project-based approach which can make students independent learner. In line with this, teachers should work with the government in the way that students should be attracted by the department.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because the participation in the study was voluntary,

and informed consent was provided prior to the commencement of the assignment. The anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MD: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Writing – original draft. TT: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. ZR: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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