

# The Rationale behind EFL Students' Fear to Major English Language at Wolaita Sodo University

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**Abstract** It is the fact that most of University Students attend the department of their choice that they think is important for them to achieve their educational goal. However, some of them may be placed in the department that is not their first choice. This implies that the students may attend their field of study either by their own choice or they are placed in a department that is not their first choice. This study was conducted to analyze the rationale behind students' fear to join English department at Wolaiata Sodo University. To achieve the intended goal, the data were collected through questionnaire and interviewing from purposively selected 143 students who were majoring English language at Wolaiata Sodo University. Results of the study showed that majority of the students' were placed in English department that was not their first choice. The major grounds for students' decision to ignore English department as their field of study were the students' poor reasons such as poor English background, the department is difficult, fear of academic dismissal, the instructors in the department are not cooperative, and the department has less job opportunities. The finding of the study revealed that English department was not the first choice for all students because some of the students were feared to join English department as their field of study for their poor justifications. Despite, they were placed in English department though it was not their preference. In conclusion, English department was not the first choices for all students who are attending their study at Wolaita Sodo University.

**Keywords:** *rationale, fear, Wolaita Sodo, major*

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## 1. Introduction

New entrants of university or college in any parts of the world are required to select their fields of study prior to study in it. However, majority of Students joining public universities have unexplained fears and expectations about university life and education [1]. Among them, some fears overcome; others are confirmed with some expectations being met, while others are frustrated. Overall concern on major choice regards how college selection process may influence the degree of success students have in college [2]. Thus, good major choice as the major best capable of helping the student to achieve their educational and post-education goals, they added the matching between the students' abilities and interest and the abilities required for the major is important in selection majors by undergraduate students [3].

This is in Ethiopian case starts as the students pass their entrance exam including good scores in English and math subjects so as to fit the minimum requirements of ministry of education. Hence, pass marks in entrance exam is used to assign students to different fields in higher education in the country [4]. Based on their entrance exam result the

students are placed in different Universities and field studies in the country.

English is taught as a foreign language for Ethiopian students. It is offered as a subject at Ethiopian elementary schools, and media of instruction at secondary and preparatory schools in the country. Besides, English is a field of study in colleges and Universities in Ethiopia. Hence, almost all Universities in Ethiopia issue degree in English language for undergraduate and postgraduate students in different modalities.

Wolaita Sodo University as one of 44 public Universities in Ethiopia offers English language as field of study since its establishment in 2006. Unfortunately, the students' placement in the department is done based on either by the students' own choice or they are placed in it. In line with this A study conducted in Malaysia indicated that students provide a list of their choice of Universities and programmes and ultimately receive an offer from one public University; in some cases, the offer even may be from a University or programme that was not included in the applicant's list of choice [5]. This shows that choices of Universities at large and the department choices are done either by the willingness of the students themselves or they are given. In this regard, it is clear that the students have their own justification for their decision to choose or

not to choose English language department as their field of study. By considering this, the students' decision regarding their department choice seems the consideration that gives advantages for them as being the student of that department.

Though majority of English majoring students at Wolaita Sodo University have shown their interest to join other departments than English department during department selection as they were fresh [first year] students, most of the students were placed to attend the department without their own willingness. In light of this fact, it is appropriate to study the justifications for the students' fear to join English department as their field of study. Hence, this paper focused on studying the reasons for students' fear to join English department at Wolaita Sodo University.

### 1.1. Statements of the Problem

It is no doubt that University students select their major field of study based on their own interest. Otherwise, the students may feel less comfortable to learn as they lose the department of their choice. Consequently, the students may feel fear to attend when they lose the department of their interest.

English as an international language has become field of study for college and university students in many parts of the world. It is taught as foreign language for the students other than its mother tongue speakers. Graduation in English as field of study becomes demanding profession worldwide though some of EFL students at public Universities ignore majoring it by their own willingness. To take experiences from the situations in Ethiopia, not all students in the country attend the department of their choices [6]. For instance, some students may study English language as their field of study though their preference was to attend other department. The students' preference to attend the department of their choice may or may not be compromised because their high school grade point is not sufficient to place them in the department of their choices.

Few numbers of students put English department in their first choice as major field of study every year at Wolaita Sodo University. That means majority of students showed lack of interest to major English and selected it as their last choice among other lists of departments during department choices. In addition, the researcher checked English department students' registration slips and observed that English department was not first choice for majority of the students. This implies that some of the students are learning in the department that was not their first choice. They were placed in English department without their own interest. It is the fact that these students ignored to choose English department and feared to major in the field for some reasons

According to [7], majority of students joining Ethiopian public universities have unexplained fears and expectations about university life and education. For this reason, it seemed very important to investigate the reasons for students' fear to join English department as their field of study. Hence, the main focus of this study was investigating the basis for students' fear to join English department as their field of study at Wolaita Sodo University, Ethiopia.

## 1.2. Objectives of the Study

The study has both general and specific objectives.

### 1.2.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was investigating the rationale behind EFL students' fear to major English at Wolaita Sodo University. Specific Objectives of the Study

Specific objectives of the study are:-

- To identify the students' interest towards majoring English as their field of study
- To find out the reasons that hinder the students' interest to join English department.
- To suggest possible solutions that enhance students' preference on English Department.

### 1.3. Significances of the Study

The researcher strongly believes that the finding of this study has great importance to motivate more students to choose English department as their field study at Wolaita Sodo University. First of all, it helps to increase the students' interest towards English department by building positive image of the department through avoiding their misconception about the department. It improves academic success of the students who are currently learning in the department through continual follow-ups and helps from the instructors. Hence, these students can be witnesses for becoming successful in English department. Consequently, placing the students to major English without their interest would become history as it becomes interesting field of study for the students.

### 1.4. Scope of the Study

This study was focused on improving undergraduate students' enrolment in majoring English as foreign language at Wolaita Sodo University through investigating the causes for their fear. So, it was delimited to investigations for the rationale on students' fear to join English department and no other areas of language study was considered.

## 2. Research Design and Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was analysis of the rationale behind students' fear in majoring English at Wolaita Sodo University. Descriptive research design was employed for this study because it allowed the researcher to describe the existing situations explicitly in the study area. It also helped to use qualitative method of data collection.

### 2.2. Target Population of the Study

All regular undergraduate students of English department at Wolaita Sodo University were direct participants of the study. Total numbers of target populations selected for this study were 143. That is, all the Students from year I, II, and III were considered as target populations of the study.

### 2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

Comprehensive sampling method was employed for this study because all students in English department were selected as direct participants of the study. Therefore, the researcher selected total of 143 students as participants of the study from all year levels.

### 2.4. Instruments of Data Collection

Two data gathering tools were employed for current study. Interview and group discussion were employed as data collection instruments for this study. The data gathered through these instruments were qualitative in nature since there were no numerical data. Hence, semi-structured interview was conducted with eight participants of the study. Besides, group discussions with sampled participants were also conducted. Totally, three group discussions with representatives from each batch among English majoring students were conducted. The reason for using these data gathering tools was triangulating reliability of each instrument and the results obtained through it.

### 2.5. Methods of Data Analysis

The data were collected through interview and group discussion. Hence, the data collected by these instruments were qualitative in nature. Therefore, the qualitative method of data analysis was used in this study. Accordingly, the Interview result obtained through recording audio was transcribed verbally and expressed in words. Similarly, group discussion data was analyzed by describing the realities of the researcher observed in words. Finally, findings were reached based on the results of the study and conclusions were drawn.

## 3. Data Analysis and Interpretations

The study employed descriptive research design with qualitative method of “data analysis.” Totally 143 students who were enrolled in English department were participants of the study. The data were collected from the participants of the study by using questionnaire, interview, and observation. The results obtained from the study were discussed and presented as follows.

To begin with, this study was conducted on the students who passed Ethiopian grade twelve entrance examination and joined Wolaita Sodo University. Its main focus was studying the students’ fear to major English department as their field of study. The study showed that English department was not the first choice for most students who are currently majoring in it. Majority of them did not select it by their own interest. That is, the students’ placement in the department was done by some other bodies than their own preference. The reasons for students’ ignorance in majoring English language can be viewed from various angles. According to [8], the students’ majoring decisions were based on expected earnings from their major. That is, the students’ expectations towards successful achievement in the major, the amount of effort needed to complete the program of study, and the expected earnings after graduation played important role

in their decision to major or not. Current study also revealed that the students fear to major English language for its perceived difficulty and job related factors after graduation.

The study also revealed that the trends of Students’ Enrolment based on their willingness to major English at Wolaita Sodo University has been declined since its establishment in 2006. The statistical data obtained from English department regarding the last three batch students (2016/17-2018/19) indicated that the numbers of students who selected English department as their first choice was only 27 out of 143 students. Specifically, freshman students who selected English department by their own willingness were ranked as the least by having only five students. Accordingly, the graduating class students who selected English department by their own interest exceeded the number of sophomore students by having thirteen and nine students respectively. Hence, it was found that students’ interest towards majoring English language in the study area is becoming low. Therefore, some concerned bodies are taking actions like placing students in the department without their interest to fill the gap and avoid termination of the department. In general, this makes English department as the least chosen field of study among other fields of study in collage of social sciences and humanities at Wolaita Sodo University.

In this regard, the major factor for low intake in English department was resulted from the students’ preferences to major fields which demand high score entrance exam achievement. As the students loss their chosen fields, they are placed in English department. During interviewing, the participants of the study reported that all of them were low achievers in their entrance exam and they could not get the department of their choice. Besides, their low English result in their entrance exam was also decisive factor that pushed the students not to major English because they feared not to score the same grade as what they did in entrance exam. Despite, the students were placed in one of their next department choice which is English department that fit their entrance exam result even if it was not their preference.

The study also identified low level of students’ English proficiency as another factor for their reluctance in majoring English language. According to interview and group discussion results, many students feared to join English department because their English is poor to specialize in it. By taking their level of proficiency in to account, only few students selected English department in their first choice but the remaining vast majority put it as last choice. The results of the study also showed the students’ justification for their reluctance in majoring English as feared of their poor English background affects their academic achievement if they major in it. This implies that the students are not willing to join English for their lack of proficiency in it. However, most of the students who participated in this study reported that their preference to join other department was canceled and they were given their final choice, which is English department.

Besides, the study revealed that the students perceived English department as difficult to achieve their educational goals. For this reason, they place it as their last choice in department list to show their lack of interest. The interview result also indicated that the students perceived

it as difficult department to succeed. Therefore, they were searching for someone who was interested in English department and willing to change his/her department with them. Unfortunately, they could not find anyone and decided to register to major English language. Interestingly, the results of this study showed that the students had misperception because they did not have clear understanding about the courses they would learn together with the difficulty level of the courses. Besides, they also feared it because their senior student told them that English department is difficult field to succeed. One can understand from this result is that the students' decision was affected by ambition to succeed in their learning and wrong perception of regarding English language. However, the reality is quite different from what the students perceived about English department because it is not difficult field of study. It is very interesting and multidisciplinary field that helps students to be effective learners through continuous guidance and follow up by the department instructors. In light of this, it could be judged that students who want to major English language can surely become effective if they select it as their field of study than merely avoiding the chances to join the department.

Furthermore, the study identified the fear of academic dismissal as another rational behind students' reluctance in majoring English. The results obtained through group discussion indicated that the students never believed their success in the department when they were placed in it because they felt that their fate was dismissal from the university. According to [9], students' collage majoring choice can be affected by their preparation for college work and the amount of effort required obtaining specific degrees. This shows that the students' readiness for their learning is decisive factor in dynamics of their learning. No student is dismissed out of university in any field of study if the student studies his/her lesson effectively. Similarly, the results of this study revealed that the participants of this study were English department students and they are becoming successful in their study because they have studied it effectively. The respondents reported that they do not fear academic dismissal because they have studied hard and score good grades. As the respondents said they improved their weak sides through each continues assessment to become competent students. Based on continuous assessment, the instructors identify weak students in the class so as to provide them special supports like tutorial classes, and re-examinations. Instructors also provide short handouts and reference materials to improve such students' academic achievements. Consequently, the respondents were very happy as students of English department because they are getting support from all their instructors. Interestingly, most of them are high scorer in their respective year level. Therefore, what matters is their active involvement in their learning than simply judging the department as difficult field.

Furthermore, the students also believed English department instructors as less cooperative. That is, the students thought that the instructors are not approachable and feared to talk and share ideas with them though the instructors were happy to discuss with their students. However, the reality is beyond what the students perceive that most instructors are very happy when their students come and discuss academic or personal issues to be solved.

Consequently, the instructors provide advice by allotting consultation hours in addition to teaching them in classroom. When instructors are sociable, it surprises some students because they think that instructors are unapproachable and not cooperative. On other hand, instructors who are very sensitive in teaching their courses are perceived as bad and not cooperative because they do not allow any time to be wasted. In case, such kinds of instructors punish their students when the students misbehave in the class so as to shape their bad behavior. In line with this, Scholars pointed out that college instructors are often more interested in their own fields. They are also passionate about their subject and want their students to be as well [10]. In fact, all English department instructors at Wolaita Sodo University are highly committed to teach the courses they offer so as to make their students competent English language professionals. However, these blessed actions of the instructors are negatively perceived by some students as English department instructors are not cooperative.

Moreover, seeking job after graduation was another justification for students' reluctance to major English. According to [10], getting education for the purpose of broadening one's intellectual capacity is no longer the reason for the students' attending Universities; rather, there has been a conscious paradigm shift from this notion to the idea that a college education paves the way to high paying job. Therefore, the students who participated in this study did not want to major English because they thought English graduates have less job opportunities to be employed either in government or private sectors after successful completion of their studies. They expect to acquire knowledge and skills in a particular field so they will be marketable for the jobs they want to pursue [11].

Accordingly, the result of this study also showed that the students fear in majoring English was based on fear of getting job opportunities after graduation. In line with this, [5] suggested that the major determinant of career paths is the college major that a student chooses in college. This study revealed that most of the participants were eager to get job opportunities after graduation. So, that, they critically analyzed English language as their major field of before studying it. It could be clear from the students' response that they had fear regarding lack of job opportunities related for English majoring graduates. However, there are so many exemplary jobs for English graduates. For instance, they can be teachers, journalists, translators, lecturers, and even orators are to mention among others.

It is the fact that the students' fear was resulted from their ambition to get job and foster their economy. For this reason, they want to join the department that has wide job markets to employ them. Therefore, the students must identify their field of study before they attend in the department. For so many employment opportunities, English department has high demand and vacancies in Ethiopian job markets.

### 3.1. Findings of the Study

This study was focused on the rationale behind students fear to major English language at Wolaita Sodo University. To achieve the intended objective, data was collected and

analyzed. The finding of the study showed that the students' were not interested in majoring English language and it was their last choice among other departments in selection lists. Unfortunately, the students were placed in it. It was also identified that the students were low achievers in their entrance examination. Besides, the students also believed that their English proficiency is poor to major in it. Hence, they perceived themselves as unfit to major English. General, the students' decision not to major in English language was fear of academic dismissal and job related justifications.

## 4. Summary and Conclusions

### 4.1. Summary

Investigating the Students' fear in majoring English language at Wolaita Sodo University was the main objective of this study. To achieve the intended objective, descriptive research design was employed. The data was collected from the participants through interviewing and group discussion. Qualitative method of data analysis was employed in this study. Based on the results of the study, findings were drawn and conclusions were reached.

### 4.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher reached on the following conclusions. The students have no interest to major English language as their field of study. They placed it in their last choice though few of them were interested in it. That is, students have fear to major English language. The justification for the students fear was mainly developed from fear of failure. Besides, the students were low achievers in entrance examination, lack English proficiency, misperception on English department as well as the instructors. The students also feared academic dismissal because they thought the department is difficult for them. Moreover, the students have uncertainty on getting employment opportunity after

graduating in the field. Contrary to this, most of the students were placed in the department even if it was not their interest to major. In general, the students' interest towards majoring English language in the study area was low. Hence, it is recommended that the student should avoid confusion and choose the department to major in it.

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