

## **LANGUAGE LEARNING BELIEFS OF INDONESIAN ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM STUDENTS**

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate students' beliefs about language learning. BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) was administered to a total of seventy five first year students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education within Sriwijaya university in South Sumatera, Indonesia. The findings showed that among the five categories of BALLI, the beliefs associated with *motivation* were the strongest, while those associated with the *difficulty of language learning* are the weakest. The findings also support significant difference in *motivation* associated with gender.

**Key words:** *language learning beliefs, motivation, Indonesian college students*

The beliefs that people have may govern the decisions they have made in their lives. For example, the belief that it is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language may make parents send their elementary school children to an English course. For English as a foreign language learner, for instance, learning vocabulary words is the most important part of learning English because he or she believes that having a vast number of vocabulary storage can help him or her in performing the four English language skills. This is in accordance with what Abdi and Asadi (2015) point out, "foreign language learning is almost certainly the subject of many firm beliefs

and convictions among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and these beliefs almost certainly affect language learning" (p. 104).

*Belief* is defined as "something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion" (Merriem-Webster online Dictionary, 2017). Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988), one of the pioneers investigating the beliefs about language learning, did not provide an operational definition of beliefs in language learning in her writings. To explain the term 'beliefs', Horwitz uses terms such as *preconception*, *preconceived ideas* and *preconceived notions*, but gives no

specific explanation of the concept of the term 'beliefs'.

Although Horwitz does not provide a specific definition of 'beliefs about language learning', studies or research in this field provide explanations or explain the definition of the term 'beliefs'. However, it seems to have not reached the same agreement or perception about the definition or the meaning of the term 'beliefs'. This may be due to the complexity of the term 'beliefs'. For example, Pajares (1992) suggests that the following words may refer to the word 'beliefs': *attitude, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, dan social strategy*. However, according Pajares (1992, p. 313), the difference between 'beliefs' and those words is "Belief is based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact".

In previous studies about 'beliefs about language learning', the definition 'beliefs' was given by the researcher. For example, Huang (1997) defines 'beliefs' as "preconceptions language learners have about the task of learning the target language" (p. 29). The term 'opinions' and 'ideas' or 'views' were used by Kunt (1997) and Wang (1996) to refer to the term 'beliefs'. Similarly, in this present study, the term 'beliefs' refers to opinion or view of the students of the English Education Study Program towards the learning of a foreign language (i.e., English).

In BALLI or *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* developed by Horwitz (1987) and which has become one of the most widely used measurements in mapping students beliefs about language learning, the term

*opinions* is used to refer to *beliefs*. As Horwitz (1987, p. 120) states, "The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was developed to assess student opinions [italic] on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning".

In learning English, there may be a language learner who believes that vocabulary plays a very important role in learning English, but there may also be a student who convinces that knowledge about sentence structure or grammar is more important. The students bring to the classroom what they believe and this can have an impact to the process of their learning and also the outcomes. Therefore, it is important for an English teacher to know students' language learning beliefs because it can provide the teacher with the information about what students consider important in learning English. If, for example, the teacher find out that the students consider vocabulary as very important element in learning English, the teacher can provide the students with more activities that can help the students build their vocabulary.

There have been studies investigating students' language learning beliefs. For example, the finding of the study conducted by Peacock (1999), involving pre-service students at one university in Hong Kong showed that high-proficiency learners believed that English learning was not merely about vocabulary and grammar. In another study, Peacock (2001) found that in relation to language learning beliefs, the participants believed the emphasis was on vocabulary and grammar. Other studies (eg, Altan, 2006; Bermat & Lloyd, 2007) found that the factors that make up the 'beliefs' or students' views of English learning were gender, academic level, self-perception and language learning strategies. In relation to gender, the study conducted by Daif-Allah (2012), for example, found that male

students tended to have high self-perceptions in Mathematics subjects and female students have high self-perceptions in English lessons. Another study conducted by Assesfah (2013) showed that the students viewed 'beliefs of motivation' as an important factor in learning English and there were also differences in views based on gender, proficiency level and academic year.

The English Education Study Program is one of the study programs within Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University. Students of English Education Studies Program of FKIP Sriwijaya University are trained to become English teachers at junior and senior high school level.

In Indonesia, English is *a foreign language*. English as a Foreign Language or EFL according to Gebhard (2013, p.39) is that it is studied by those who live in a place or region where English is not the first language used as a means of communication. This is certainly a challenge for English teachers in Indonesia. Although English is a compulsory subject for junior and senior high school students, the status of English as a foreign language may have an effect on the beliefs or views of students in English learning. For example, because of its status as a foreign language, English is not a means of communication in everyday life in Indonesia. This may allow students to have a negative point of view towards English language which can influence their motivation in learning English.

Studying at the English Education Study Program, the students who got involved in this present study are trained and prepared to become 'prospective English teachers'. It is believed that they also have 'beliefs' or a separate outlook on learning English. Therefore, investigating the students' beliefs concerning language learning is worth doing. This article reports the result of

the investigation focusing on the language learning beliefs of the students of the English Education Study Program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Seventy five (12 male, 63 female) first year students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University participate in this study.

### **Instrument**

The data were collected through the questionnaire, Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), which is developed by Horwitz (1987). As stated by Altan (2006), BALLI "can be helpful to language teacher educators by determining popular beliefs of their students who are going to be teachers in future" (p.50). Likert-Scale from "strongly disagree" scale up to 'strongly agree'. BALLI is not a test, but it measures students' opinions and aptitude toward various language learning beliefs.

BALLI consists of 34 items: 32 elicit responses on a Likert scale that ranges between strongly disagree and strongly agree, while one of the remaining two questions asks about language difficulty, the other asks about the time required for learning a foreign language.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The questionnaire was administered during class time in courses purposefully selected to ensure the comprehensive. Data analysis was carried out using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) 20. The study used both descriptive, mainly the mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics (t test).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

BALLI measures Language Learning Beliefs of students based on five categories: Beliefs about foreign language aptitude, beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, beliefs about learning and communication strategy and beliefs about motivation.

The results of statistical analysis show that students have a view or "beliefs" about foreign language learning (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Mean of each category**

Category	Mean	SD
Foreign Language Aptitude	3.66	.342
Difficulty of Language Learning	3.69	.423
Nature of Language Learning	4.07	.403
Learning and Communication Strategy	3.60	.355
Motivation	4.40	.362

Among the five categories, the dominant beliefs of "Motivation" (M = 4.40, SD = 0.362), followed by "Nature of Language Learning" (M = 4.07, SD = 0.403), "Difficulty of Language Learning" (M = 3.69, SD = 0.423), "Foreign Language

Aptitude" (M = 3.66, SD = 0.342) and "Learning and communication strategy" (M = 3.60, SD = 0.355). The following is the result of statistical analysis for each category.

### Foreign Language Aptitude

Table 2 present the students' responses for beliefs associated with 'foreign language aptitude'. This category aims to determine whether students have views or believe in the existence of special abilities (special abilities) in learning English as a foreign

language. The results of statistical analysis show that students believe that although there are certain people who do have special abilities in foreign language learning, each person can basically or is able to learn a foreign language, such as English.

**Table 2**  
**Students' responses for beliefs associated with 'Foreign Language Aptitude'**

Items	Mean	SD
Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language	4.64	.690
Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages	4.13	.704
It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language	4.11	.764
People who speak more than one language are very intelligent	4.04	.829
It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one	3.77	.831
I have a special ability for learning foreign languages	3.67	.684
People from my country are good at learning foreign languages	3.27	.600
Women are better than men at learning foreign languages	2.88	1.039
People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages	2.51	.921

One interesting point is that although the number of students is dominated by women, the data analysis shows that they consider that women are better than men

foreign language learning. They also do not assume that people who have intelligence in the field of Mathematics

in

do not have a good ability in terms of foreign language learning.

confidence that they are able to master English very well. This implies that they have basic skills in English, believing that they will be able to master English very well. The ability to read as one of the language skills in English learning is also seen as a language ability that is easier than the ability to speak and understand the conversation (listening).

### English Difficulty

The results of data analysis presented in Table 3 show that students have

**Table 3**  
**Students' responses for beliefs associated with "English Difficulty"**

Items	Mean	SD
I believe that I will learn to speak English very well	4.53	.600
Some languages are easier to learn than others	3.84	.754
It is easier to speak English than to understand people say it	3.23	.847
It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it	3.19	1.023

### The Nature of Language Learning

Table 4 presents the students' responses for beliefs associated with 'Nature of Language Learning'. As shown in Table 4, students believe that vocabulary is very supportive in learning a foreign language. This can be understood as having a vocabulary of

English vocabulary will greatly assist students in learning activities and help improve their speaking and writing skills. In addition, knowledge of grammar is also considered important in English learning. Although it has much vocabulary if it is not supported with sufficient grammar knowledge then the vocabulary may not be used properly.

**Table 4**  
**Students' responses for beliefs associated with 'Nature of Language Learning'**

Items	M	SD
The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words	4.27	.600
It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country	4.17	.778
The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar	4.12	.677
Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects	3.96	.892
The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language	3.85	.800
It is necessary to know about English speaking cultures in order to speak English	3.79	.722

Since English is a foreign language, then the translation method of the second language (in this case Indonesian) into English is considered as a way in the process of learning English. Learning about cultures English-speaking countries

are also believed to be important as part of the learning process of English. As foreign language learners, they also have a view of the importance of learning English in countries that use it as a first language.

## Learning and Communication Strategies

Table 5 shows the students' responses for beliefs associated with 'Learning and Communication Strategy'. Practice is what students believe is

important in the process of learning English. Practice can be done with the help of media such as by listening to English tapes or practicing with foreign speakers or native speakers. Practicing with listening to cassettes or conversations with English speakers can help students improve their English pronunciation skills.

**Table 5**  
**Students' responses for beliefs associated with 'Learning and Communication Strategy'**

Items	M	SD
It is important to repeat and practice a lot	4.76	.430
It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation	4.28	.669
It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes or any learning media	4.05	.715
I enjoy practicing English with the English speaking people I meet	3.87	.664
It is O.K to guess if you don't know a word in English	3.67	.905
I feel timid speaking English with other people	3.13	.977
If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on	2.87	1.057
You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly	2.23	1.203

However, the results show that there are also students who feel embarrassed to practice their English with others so that the belief that if you cannot speak English correctly then should practice

first. It is also because of their view that if from the beginning of learning there has been a mistake, for example in the pronunciation of words, then this will be a challenge for them later.

## Motivation

Table 6 shows that students have a strong self-determination to speak English well.

As the students believe, having good English skills can provide a greater chance of getting a job and getting pen pals. Students also have the view that English language skills are perceived as important in Indonesia.

Items	M	SD
I want to learn to speak English well	4.91	.293
If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job	4.64	.536
I would like to have English speaking friends	4.33	.684
I would like to learn English so that I can get to know English speaking better	4.17	.844
People in my country feel that it is important to speak English	3.99	.797

**Table 6**  
**Students' responses for beliefs associated with "Motivation"**

Language Learning Beliefs students are also viewed on the basis of gender. The following table shows the results of the statistical analysis (t test) conducted on the five categories by gender. The result of data analysis shows that the significant difference based on gender is in

'Motivation' category. This shows that female students have more motivation or self-determination than male students. Because the research is quantitative it is necessary to do an interview so that it can get a more accurate answer about this category.

**Tabel 7**  
**Language Learning Beliefs based on gender**

Category	Mean		Mean Diff.	Sig.
	Male	Female		
Foreign language aptitude	3.67	3.66	.009	.932
Difficulty of language learning	3.85	3.66	.187	.162
Nature of language learning	4.23	4.04	.188	.138
Learning and communication strategy	3.54	3.61	.077	.493
Motivation	4.15	4.45	.307	.006

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that among the five categories of BALLI, the students' beliefs associated with *motivation* were the strongest one, while those associated with the *difficulty of language learning* are the weakest. That *motivation* was the strongest beliefs the students have in English language learning can serve as a good indicator of the students' willingness to learn a foreign language. Motivation is the important factor that can make the students keep on learning in spite of the challenges they have in learning the foreign language. As the students' of English Education Study Program,

having the beliefs associated with *difficulty of language learning* as the weakest beliefs also send a good sign. This suggests that they have confidence in learning English as a foreign language and do not the difficulties they have in learning the language as challenges.

In general, the students' responses show that they have beliefs about foreign language aptitude, beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, beliefs about learning and communication strategy and beliefs about motivation. It is important to give the students the chance to reflect on these beliefs so that they can take the advantages of the beliefs they have to support their

language learning. It is also important for the EFL teachers to address the important of these beliefs to the students so that

they will develop positive beliefs about the learning of English.

## **REFERENCES**