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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Language Learning Beliefs and Gender Dynamics  
of University Students in Egypt: An Exploratory  
Study**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Applied Linguistics,  
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

by

**HebatAllah Abdel Aal Mohamed**

May 2015

Under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn Plumlee

The American University in Cairo

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## **Abstract**

The present study contributes to the growing body of research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning. It aims at exploring students' beliefs about language learning in an English-medium university in Cairo, Egypt and examining the gender dynamics that shape and sustain those beliefs. The study adopted a mixed-methods data collection approach, data was collected using a questionnaire and interviews. Sixty-five first year students took a modified version of Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Nine participants were interviewed for an in-depth exploration of their language learning beliefs.

The results showed that the lucrative future careers foreign language learning in Egypt promises is the primary reason students are interested in investing in learning English. The findings also revealed a linguistic tension between Arabic and English in Egypt with English being seen by some participants as more useful for their academic studies and their projected future careers. Others, however, expressed concern about maintaining the status of Arabic as a national language, given the ever-increasing demand for English in academic institutions and in the job market.

In terms of gender dynamics, the findings revealed that gender differences as a variable is not to be assumed. In the specific population which participated in the study, there was little evidence in their intention to follow traditional societal norms proscribing women joining the workforce. Consequently, other linguistic and social variables ought to be taken into account for more significant research findings. The data, however, did reveal intriguing findings regarding gendered associations towards specific foreign languages like French and German which reflect a promising area for future research.

## **Dedication**

*To my parents*

“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.” (Qur’an 30:22).

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**AEF:** Academic English for Freshman

**AUC:** American University in Cairo

**BALLI:** Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory

**EAP:** English for Academic Purposes

**ECA:** Egyptian Colloquial Arabic

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**ESP:** English for Specific Purposes

**FL:** Foreign Language

**GCC:** Gulf Cooperation Council

**GLL:** Good Language Learners

**IGCSE:** International General Certificate of Secondary Education

**IRB:** Institutional Review Board

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**SA:** Standard Arabic

**SAT:** Scholastic Assessment Test

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**TESOL:** Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

**TOEFL:** Test of English as a Foreign Language

**UK:** United Kingdom

**USA:** United States of America

## **Chapter 1- Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

Interest in the notion of autonomy and the characteristics of Good Language Learners (GLL) has drawn attention to the importance of studying learners' beliefs about English language learning as a major factor influencing the language learning acquisition process and outcome. Horwitz's (1985, 1987, 1988) early studies on beliefs about language learning mark the emergence of a plethora of research studying English language learners' beliefs in the field of applied linguistics. She successfully identified beliefs commonly held by both language teachers and learners in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts and developed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), an instrument for assessing beliefs about language learning which, since its development, has been one of the most widely used questionnaires in researching language learners' beliefs.

The significance of studying learners' beliefs about language learning lies in the fact that such studies help language educators understand the reasons behind learners' resistance to specific teaching techniques, lack of motivation and attrition in foreign language programs (Wenden, 1987). In other words, they contribute to “the understanding of student expectations of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their language classes” (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283). Wenden (1986) posits that providing learners with an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their beliefs about language learning is a “precondition to effective learning” (p. 9). Horwitz (1987) suggests using the BALLI as a discussion stimulus in language classes to help in developing a rigorous curriculum that appeals to learners' different beliefs and expectations. Similarly, Dörnyei (2005) suggests that periodical administration of the BALLI helps as a consciousness-raising tool for learners to understand the nature of

language learning.

While research on language learners' beliefs has provided profound insight, Barcelos (2006) identifies two major shortcomings in early research on language learners' beliefs, one of which is analyzing those beliefs within the framework of academically established SLA theories. Such analysis usually results in regarding learners' beliefs as erroneous or counterproductive and obstacles to the implementation of autonomy. Horwitz (1987), for instance, suggests that students base their beliefs on limited experience and knowledge and argues for teachers to “confront erroneous beliefs with new information” (p. 292). Barcelos (2003) also contends that research has failed to identify the social context of learners' beliefs, regarding them as decontextualized metacognitive knowledge. Such criticism is the corollary of the cognitive approach to language acquisition studies, which considers language learning as an individual process that occurs primarily in the learners' mind. In fact, the driving metaphor of this approach, as Ellis (1997) suggests, is that of the learner as a computer “who process[es] input data” (p. 42). Ellis (1997) suggests that this metaphor is reiterated in the terminology of early SLA theories such as the “input” and “output” hypotheses (p. 50).

Such a diversity in approaching learners' beliefs is reflected in the way language learning beliefs researchers define and understand the nature of beliefs. Benson and Lor (1999), for instance, acknowledge both the cognitive and social aspects of learners' beliefs. They suggest that learners' beliefs are best understood as “cognitive resources on which students draw to make sense of and cope with specific content and contexts of learning” (p. 462). They contend that although those beliefs are expressed as general truths, they are still shaped by the specific language learning contexts in which they occur. Similarly, White (2006) emphasizes the social dimension of those

beliefs seeing them as “part of students' experiences and interrelated with their environment” (p. 124).

The emphasis on the social and contextual dimensions of language learning dominates the current body of learner-centered L2 research which, Kramersch (2009) suggests, corresponds to the need to shift the focus of SLA research from the process of language acquisition to “the flesh-and-blood individuals” involved in the learning process (p. 2). A parallel shift is also acknowledged in the driving metaphors of SLA research from the metaphor of learners as a computer to that of the “learner-as-apprentice” (Kramersch, 2002, p. 2) according to which language is perceived as a means for communication than an input into the learners' minds.

Such acknowledgement of the social nature of beliefs has triggered an interest in investigating the interplay between language learners' beliefs and a wide range of constructs including ethnicity (Siebert, 2003), culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Fujiwara, 2011), language proficiency (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003), and learner autonomy (Cotteral, 1995). Gender has recently emerged as the subject of a number of studies researching language learners' belief systems (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Daif-Allah, 2011). Similarly, in addition to studying language learning beliefs of university students in Egypt, the present study seeks to analyze the gender dynamics in which these beliefs exist and their relationship to each other .

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

Overall, previous research findings have provided evidence that gender is a possible variable that might have an effect on language learners' belief system. However, researchers have stressed a need for further in-depth studies analyzing the ways in which gender contributes to shaping language learners' beliefs in different EFL contexts (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Daif-Allah, 2011). Additionally, many of the



studies researching learners' beliefs relied exclusively on reporting gender differences as indicated in the BALLI results.

The purpose of the present study is to go beyond reporting statistical data results about the beliefs male and female learners hold about language learning through adopting a mixed-method data collection approach. The present study also aims at locating learners' beliefs in their appropriate social and academic contexts. In doing so, I will examine gender as a possible variable that shapes and sustains those beliefs through using a contextual framework for data analysis.

### **1.3. Rationale for the Study**

The rising number of English-medium educational institutions in Egypt indicates that the demand for learning English has been increasing. In his comprehensive analysis of the profile of English language learning in Egypt, Schaub (2000) asserts that instrumental motivation has fueled an interest in studying English in Egypt where many Egyptians associate English with “the promise of more money or better jobs” (p.228). The significance of the present study lies in exploring the language learning beliefs of Egyptian learners studying in an English-medium university and their gender dynamics and analyzing them within the social and economic context in which they exist.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What prevalent beliefs do Egyptian university language learners have about language learning?
2. Is there a difference between the beliefs Egyptian male and female university language learners hold about language learning? If so, in what ways do they differ?

## 1.5. Definitions of Constructs

### 1.5.1. Theoretical Definitions of Constructs

**Gender:** Gender is indeed an elusive concept to define since the way it is perceived has been changing over time. As Litosseliti (2006) notes, early research on gender has established the difference between sex as a physiological construct and gender as a cultural and social one. With the emergence of feminist studies, the complex and multi-faceted nature of gender has become more acknowledged. Gender is perceived as something that people “do” rather than a label that someone “has” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 4).

Moreover, contemporary poststructuralist feminist views of gender acknowledge the impossibility of adopting a universal definition of gender as it is “differentially constructed in local contexts” (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 5). Such a tendency to disregard uniformity of gender corresponds to postmodern ideas of deconstructing grand concepts and resorting to more context-dependent localized ones. However, almost all definitions of gender acknowledge its context-dependency and that the way it is constructed varies across different cultures and generations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Litosseliti, 2006; Mills & Mullany, 2011).

Furthermore, research on gender and language learning has acknowledged that the role of gender in language learning is still not very well understood and that more research is needed to “clarify how gender is interpreted and how it takes place in a complex web of characteristics that define us as human beings and as learners” (Nyikos, 2006, p. 97).

**Learners’ beliefs about language learning:** These are general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching (Victori & Lockhart,

1995, p. 224). Learners' beliefs act as “strong filters of reality” which can facilitate or inhibit the language learning process (Bernat, 2012, p. 448). It is important to note, however, that beliefs and attitudes are not synonymous. Rather, clusters of beliefs help in forming attitudes (Bernad, 2012). In other words, beliefs could be considered as a stimulus to attitudes.

### **1.5.2. Operational Definitions of Constructs**

**Gender:** In the present study, gender is assigned to participants through self-reporting. A demographic data section which includes gender among other categories was included in the questionnaire. Although recent poststructuralist feminist frameworks argue for the existence of multiple gendered identities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004), the present study adopts the traditional male/female gender framework which is adopted by the institution in which the study takes place and documented in its factbook. Yet, it is important to note that “even in cultures that view gender as a dichotomous system, the social meanings and ideologies of normative masculinity and femininity are highly diverse” (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 2).

**Learners' beliefs about language learning:** For the purpose of the study, learners' beliefs are identified through their responses to a modified version of the BALLI questionnaire statements. The modified questionnaire seeks to uncover learners' beliefs about a variety of topics related to language learning; these are (1) foreign language aptitude, (2) the nature of foreign language learning, (3) motivation for foreign language learning, (4) gendered associations with specific languages, and (5) English language learning in Egypt.

## 1.6. Definition of Terms

Below are short definitions of the important terms in the study.

**Gendered associations with foreign language learning:** “Gendered stereotypes students hold for languages in particular” (Gayton, 2011, p. 130).

**Instrumental Motivation:** “Motivation that is essentially practical, such as the need to learn the language in order to get a better job” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 64).

**Integrative Motivation:** “Motivation for second language learning that is based on a desire to know more about the culture and community of the target language group and even a desire to be more like members of that group” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 201).

## 1.7. Delimitations of the Study

The present study aims primarily at investigating Egyptian EFL learners’ beliefs about language learning and the possible effect gender has on shaping those beliefs. Consequently, the study does not address the effect of other potential variables be they cultural norms, ethnicity or social class separately since gender is the main focus of the study.

The study stems from an interest in exploring language learners’ beliefs and a belief in their crucial impact on the SLA process. Thus, deeming learners’ beliefs as correct or false falls outside the parameters of this study. Moreover, neurolinguistic accounts of how male and female learners’ brains process language are beyond the scope of the study and are not discussed.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter offers a bird's eye view of the literature on language learning beliefs and the interplay between these beliefs and the dynamics of gender across a variety of language learning contexts. The first section outlines the theoretical frameworks guiding the language learning beliefs research. The second section announces the theoretical framework the present study follows. The third section reviews a number of BALLI-based studies in which gender is either the focus or emerges as a significant factor in analyzing learners' language learning beliefs. The fourth section highlights different research foci with regard to the gender politics of the English language classroom. The chapter then introduces a new trend in gender and language learning research which promises both intriguing and significant findings. The chapter weaves implications of different research findings into the conclusion where the purpose of the present study is proposed and justified.

### **2.2. Theoretical Frameworks of Language Learning Beliefs Research**

In a critical review of the research methodology of language learning beliefs, Barcelos (2003) identifies three predominant frameworks used in the study of learners' beliefs about language learning: the normative framework, the metacognitive framework and the contextual framework. This section provides an overview of the three frameworks of analysis and describes how beliefs are defined and how data is collected within each framework. The advantages and limitations of each framework are also explained and sample studies adopting each framework are reviewed.

**2.2.1. The normative framework.** The normative framework views language learning beliefs through the lenses of learners' readiness to autonomy. It is marked by relying exclusively on questionnaires, either those adapted from the BALLI or

developed independently by researchers, to study learners' language learning beliefs. Horwitz's (1985, 1987, 1988) studies on beliefs about language learning in which the BALLI was piloted are prominent examples of studies adopting a normative approach to exploring learners' beliefs. Although questionnaires serve as a convenient data collection tool for studying language learners' beliefs, especially among large number of learners, the normative approach is criticized for its reliance on questionnaires for exploring language learning beliefs. Another drawback of this approach is that data is analyzed without taking into consideration the context in which learners' beliefs exist. This is because, as Barcelos (2003) contends, the use of questionnaires in researching language learning beliefs prevent learners from articulating their own beliefs through pre-established set of statements which they might interpret in a way that is different from that intended by the researcher. Such an acknowledgement of the importance of providing language learners with the opportunity to voice their own beliefs led to developing the metacognitive framework for studying learners' beliefs.

**2.2.2. The metacognitive framework.** The metacognitive framework for researching language learning beliefs was pioneered by Wenden (1987). Learner beliefs, within this framework of analysis, are acknowledged as “theories-in-action” (Wenden, 1987, p.112) which the learners are entitled to verbalize and reflect on. It postulates that language learners are aware of their language learning beliefs and are able to articulate them. This is why studies adopting this approach rely on semi-structured interviews and self-reports as the primary data collection methods.

Wenden (1987) adopted a metacognitive framework of analysis to study the beliefs of 25 advanced level students enrolled in the American Language Program at Columbia University about the best approach to learn a second language. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, transcribed, coded and categorized into

different themes. The findings indicated that participants endorsed communicate approaches to language learning as well as immersion in a context where the target language is spoken as effective ways to advance in learning a second language. They also seemed aware of the effect of personal aspects, such as self-concepts and emotional factors, on the process of learning of a second language.

Similar to the normative approach, the metacognitive approach also concerns itself with how learners' language learning beliefs facilitate or hinder their "self-directed learning" (Barcelos, 2003, p. 19). Although this approach is endorsed for providing authentic data of language learning beliefs, it is criticized for disregarding the possible effect of the language learning context on shaping learners' beliefs in data analysis. The need to contextualize learners' beliefs drew attention to the necessity of developing a contextual framework for language learning beliefs' analysis.

**2.2.3. The contextual framework.** As the name suggests, the contextual framework which Barcelos (2003) endorses, places primary focus on researching and analyzing beliefs of learners in a specific learning context. Studies adopting this framework, thus, do not aim at generalizing any of their findings beyond the population of the study. The dynamic and social aspect of language learning beliefs are reinforced within this framework which included a variety of data collection techniques such as: ethnographies, classroom observations, diaries and learning journals. These techniques are sometimes consolidated by the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews although these are not the main data collection techniques within the contextual approach. Diverse frameworks such as metaphor, narrative and discourse analysis frameworks also guide data analysis. Although the contextual framework of analysis allows researchers to carefully infer and examine

learners' language beliefs, the inability to generalize the findings of studies adopting this framework is a challenge that still needs to be addressed by language learning beliefs researchers. Recently, a number of interdisciplinary research methodologies have been emerging under the umbrella of the contextual framework which draw on diverse theories such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Negueruela-Azarola, 2011; Yang & Kim, 2011), Bakhtin's dialogic theory (Dufva, 2003; Pan & Block, 2011), complexity theory (Mercer, 2011) and ecological frameworks (Peng, 2011).

Pan and Block's (2011) study is an example of these studies in which Bakhtin's Dialogism was followed as a framework to investigate learners and teachers' beliefs about English language learning in China. The study focused on the discourse of English as an international language and instrumental motivation to learn. It was conducted in summer 2008 when China was hosting the Olympic Games. Pan and Block (2011) posit that this period was "an epoch-making turning point for China with accelerated internationalization" (p. 394) which, they postulate, would impact both students' language learning beliefs and the teaching and learning of English in China.

A questionnaire designed and piloted by the researchers as well as interviews were used to collect data. The results revealed that the participants were motivated to learn English. They did not perceive it as a threat to their national language or identity. They were also invested in its "linguistic capital" (p. 400) in the sense that learning English promises them better employment opportunities. Through analyzing the results within the social and political contexts of the study, Pan and Block (2011) contend that the economic advances in China and its status as major world player, which were reflected in its hosting of the Olympic Games, influenced learners' motivation to learn English in China, which they regarded as an international



language. Interestingly, Pan and Block (2011) conclude their study by questioning the extent to which English will continue to dominate in China given the “increasingly China-led World” (p. 401) and the linguistic vitality that Mandarin has acquired because of the economic development in China.

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Barcelos (2003) acknowledges the possible overlap between the three proposed frameworks and recommends adopting an exploratory approach of data collection and analysis, which allows meaning to emerge from the data and context of the research rather than having preconceived understandings of learners’ beliefs. The present study adopts a contextual framework of data analysis since it examines the language learning beliefs of Egyptian learners in the specific context of an English-medium university and the gender dynamics of this learning context.

### **2.4. Language Learning Beliefs and Gender**

Gender dynamics have been a subject of extensive studies, controversial discussions and popular appeal across a variety of fields and language learning is no exception. In fact, the impact of gender on English language learning is of great interest to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) practitioners (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). This section reviews a number of BALLI-based studies in which gender is either the focus or emerges as a significant factor affecting research results.

Early studies of learners’ beliefs about language learning, including those of Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988), sparked the interest of language learning researchers around the world to explore learners’ beliefs in different contexts with regard to a number of variables, among them gender. There has also been a growing interest among researchers in Arab countries to investigate gender politics and language

learners' beliefs (Diab, 2006; Daif-Allah 2012). While some researchers are interested in exploring both teachers' and learners' beliefs about language learning, others focus primarily on studying those of learners only. Similarly, a number of researchers administer the original version of the BALLI without modifying any of its items, whereas others prefer tweaking some of its items or even administering a translated version of the widely-cited questionnaire for learners to complete in their mother tongue.

Siebert (2003) took the lead in studying the influence of gender on language learners' beliefs using the BALLI. She administered the questionnaire to 156 students whose ages ranged between 17 and 73 and 25 teachers whose experience in teaching English ranged between three and 32 years in three intensive English language programs in the Northwest region of the United States. The study aimed at examining the effects of national origin/ethnicity and gender as background variables on learners' and teachers' beliefs.

The study yielded a number of significant results, one of which is that male students tended to resist communicative approaches to language teaching more than female students through expressing a belief that mastering grammar rules is the best way to learn English. Siebert (2003) suggests that such a belief may lead male students to dedicate their effort to studying grammar rules at the expense of other language skills. The study also revealed a preference for communicative language learning among female students who preferred face-to-face interaction with native speakers to practicing with audio/video materials. Siebert (2003) concludes her study by highlighting the difficulty of convincing learners of the importance of communicative approaches to language learning if only "traditional learning outcomes" (p. 33) like grammar and vocabulary are being assessed. Similarly, it could

be argued that traditional methods of assessing language learning outcomes have a crucial influence on learners' beliefs.

It is important to note that support for the effect of gender on learners' beliefs in L2 literature is not uncontested. In an attempt to replicate Siebert's (2003) study in an Australian context, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) used the BALLI to investigate the potential effect of gender on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning in an Australian context. The questionnaire was administered to 155 female and 107 male undergraduate and graduate students studying English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in an Australian university. The participants' age ranged from 17 to 39 with post-intermediate to pre-advanced language proficiency level. The learners came from 19 different countries with the majority from China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Thailand.

Although the study hypothesized that male and female student participants would differ in their language learning beliefs, no statistically significant gender differences were found in the beliefs participants in the study held about English language learning except for two items in the questionnaire: multilingualism and intelligence. The results showed that female students believed that a relationship existed between multilingualism and high levels of intelligence. However, unlike their male counterparts, they found practicing English with native speakers less interesting.

Given that the majority of the participants in the study came from East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) suggest that learners' cultural background could possibly be a significant variable in contributing to shaping their beliefs about language learning. Similarly, they contend that learners' level of language proficiency might influence their beliefs in the sense that learners with a high level of language proficiency, like the ones in the study, tend to hold realistic

and positive beliefs about language learning regardless of their gender. Thus, acknowledging the fact that the results of their study refute those of Siebert's (2003) study, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) call for additional studies to explore gender and beliefs about language learning in different research contexts before any generalizations can be made from their study.

In response to Bernat and Lloyd's (2007) call, Rieger (2009) examined how learners' gender and target language shape their beliefs about language learning in a Hungarian context. A modified Hungarian version of the BALLI was administered to 109 first-year students enrolled in various academic writing courses at a university in Budapest. The average age of the participants was 19.3. The results indicated that significant statistical differences were only detected in the way females recognized the importance of certain language learning approaches more than their male peers. Rieger (2009) acknowledges that the relatively small number of male participants in the sample of the study might have affected the results. These results draw attention to the importance of having a representative sample that equally reflects both male and female learners' beliefs about language learning in different language learning contexts.

In Iran, Nahavandi and Mukundan (2014) administered a translated Farsi version of the BALLI along with a demographic questionnaire to 369 Iranian EFL learners in Azad University of Tabriz, Iran. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 41. The study aimed at exploring Iranian EFL learners' beliefs about English language learning and the possible effect of gender on shaping those beliefs among other objectives. The results revealed significant statistical differences in the learning and communication strategies items, with female students more likely than their male peers to endorse that specific communication strategies are important in the language

learning process. The results, thus, correspond to those of Rieger's (2009) and accentuate the need for further investigation of the rationale behind female learners' preference of specific approaches to language learning.

Although learners' beliefs remains an under-researched topic in Arabic-speaking countries, a few research studies have been conducted to explore Arabic-speaking English language learners' beliefs about language learning, examining gender as a potential variable (Diab, 2006; Daif-Allah, 2012). Diab (2006), for instance, examined Lebanese university students' beliefs about learning both English and French as foreign languages. A modified version of the BALLI was administered to 284 students in three universities in Lebanon. The results showed that political and socio-cultural factors within the Lebanese educational context affect learners' beliefs about both languages. Most significantly, although gender was not the main focus of the study, the results revealed that significant differences in the students' beliefs were attributed to gender as a background variable in the study. However, no further illustrations are provided, which might be attributed to the fact that gender was not the main subject of the research study. The results, however, further support the necessity of considering gender as a potential variable when studying learners' beliefs about foreign languages in the Arab context.

Daif-Allah's (2012) study examined the beliefs of Saudi English language learners about English language learning and the effect of gender in shaping those beliefs. Two hundred and fifty Saudi first-year students at the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) at Qassim University took a modified Arabic language version of the BALLI. The results indicated statistically significant gender-related differences in 20 out of 34 BALLI items pertaining to English language aptitude, language learning motivation and expectations. Unlike female students in Siebert's

(2003) study who did not endorse the use of audio and video language learning tools , Saudi female students in Daif-Allah's (2012) study expressed a reluctance to practice English face-to-face and a preference to practice it in language laboratories instead. Such preference, Daif-Allah (2012) suggests, is “more of a gender and cultural issue related to situational anxiety and norms of the Saudi conservative society” (p. 32). The study, thus, yields significant results with regard to how the social context along with cultural norms intersect with gender in affecting Arab language learners' beliefs about learning English and foreign languages in general.

In Egypt, Demian (1989) and Taha (2002) investigated the beliefs, attitudes and motivation of Egyptian English language learners studying at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Demian (1989) investigated the sex differences in the attitudes and motivation of Egyptian ESL students. The participants were 61 male and 61 female Egyptian students enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI ) at the American University in Cairo whose average age was 18. A demographic questionnaire and an attitude and motivation test battery were administered to the participants. The study indicated that no significant differences were found in the attitudes and motivations of male and female participants towards learning English language. Both male and female participants were equally motivated to learn English as a key factor for a promising future career. The participants also displayed a favorable attitude towards Arabic, which they perceived as the language of their “affiliation and interpersonal relations” (p. 57).

Taha’s (2002) study aimed at describing the beliefs Egyptian English language learners and teachers hold about the nature of the language learning process among other foci. The participants were 34 teachers and 183 students studying in the Center for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at AUC. The participants’ ages ranged

from 23 to 40. A questionnaire designed by the researcher was administered to the participants to elicit their beliefs about language learning.

The results revealed that both teachers and learners considered speaking as the most important language skill. The teachers and the learners in the study also endorsed the use of cassettes and TV programs to enhance the language learning process. The results also showed that learners perceived vocabulary to be an essential part of language learning. The teachers participating in the study stressed the importance of teaching grammar and vocabulary in a meaningful context. Additionally, the results indicated that although learners did not believe that grammar is the most important aspect of language learning, they highly valued its importance in facilitating speaking the target language. Taha (2002) suggests that this finding indicates that Egyptian learners were keen on improving both the accuracy and fluency of their target language use.

### **2.5. Gender and Foreign Language Learning**

In addition to studying gender in relation to language learning beliefs, an extensive survey of studies exploring gender and language learning reveals two conflicting strands of research. Early research on gender and foreign language education concerned itself primarily with disadvantaged female learners who are either misrepresented in language learning materials, denied access to the language classroom or silenced in the classroom by their teachers and/or their fellow male peers when given the opportunity to study foreign languages. Much of the impetus of those studies came from the emergence of feminist linguistics. Litosseliti (2006) contends that feminist linguistics “aims to theorize gender-related linguistic phenomena and language use, and to explicitly link these to gender inequality or discrimination” (p. 23).

Hartman and Judd's (1978) early study on sexism in ESL textbooks informed a plethora of research on gender representation in ESL materials. They examined how males and females are portrayed in a number of American and British ESL publications that were widely used at the time the study was conducted. The results revealed the sexist bias of most ESL publications examined. Examples of such a bias include the scarcity of female images in comparison to those of males, depicting females as the subject of jokes, ridiculing feminism and assigning women stereotypical roles such as those of household work and childcare.

Kelly (1991) analyzed the discourse of male and female learners in a mixed-gender adult classroom at Cranford Community School, London. The participants' age ranged between 22 and 56. Classroom observations and field notes were used to collect spoken data along with recordings of the sessions. Tokens of turns of both male and female learners were transcribed, counted and analyzed. The results revealed that the majority of male students generally dominated the classroom discussion as they took more turns than female learners. Some male students also shifted the discussion topics to discuss topics relevant to their own experiences and exhibited a coarse and emphatic attitude in their spoken discourse which, Kelly suggests, resulted in maintaining the silence of female learners in the classroom.

Recent research, however, marks a backlash against educators directing their full attention to studying female learners' silence in the language classroom through focusing on boys' academic underachievement in and resistance to language learning (see Epstein et al. 1998). Such research is heavily based on the popular belief that females are better language learners and that language learning is a female domain.

One of the pioneering studies on male students' underachievement in language learning is Carr and Pauwels' (2006) comprehensive study in which they compiled a



bank of commentaries by interviewing 200 male K-12 students over a two-year period in Australia. The interview data was complemented with questionnaires, surveys and interviews with female students, language teachers and educators to get their perspective on studying and working with male students. The results confirm that language learning is a highly gendered field of study; male participants in the study expressed a belief that language learning is a more useful and sensible choice for girls than for themselves. For instance, when asked about possible career options for females, male participants in the study reported believing teaching and jobs that involve travel (e.g. flight attendants) are more appropriate for girls. Likewise, their comments on their female colleagues' motivation for language learning revealed a belief that females are under less pressure to do well at school or opt for high-status careers since they most likely would not have to support a family.

The results thus reveal that male students believe certain fields of study are more appropriate for them vis-à-vis their female colleagues. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue against such a pattern of beliefs. They postulate that labeling specific activities as female-appropriate helps promote them as “marked” activities that are “reserved for a special subset of the population” whereas male-appropriate activities are accepted as “unmarked” and “normal” (p. 21). Accordingly, it could be argued that assigning language studies the female-appropriate marked label relegates it to a low status. The results thus shed light on the significance of gendered associations with learners’ choice of fields of study.

## **2.6. Gendered Associations with Specific Languages**

Carr and Pauwels (2006) assert that subject choice is one domain in which learners, especially those in mixed-sex classes, perform the “socially inscribed gender performance” (p. 174) expected from them. In fact, recent research on gender and

learners' beliefs supports their claim by revealing that language learners tend to associate specific foreign languages with having feminine or masculine appeal which ultimately informs understanding of male and female learners' preferences to study specific foreign languages over others. This tendency has been referred to as “gender-based variation” (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 427) in language choice, “gendered beliefs” (Portelli, 2006, p.418) and “gendered associations with foreign language learning” (Gayton, 2011, p. 130) the term which the present study adopts.

Among the recent studies in this research domain is that of Gayton (2011) who was interested in exploring teachers' perceptions of their learners' beliefs about language learning as a part of her preliminary study of gendered associations with foreign languages. She interviewed 11 EFL teachers in Scotland, France and Germany to gain their perspective on the extent to which their learners hold specific gendered associations with different foreign languages. Although the results of the study confirm the notion that language learning is generally perceived as “a female domain”, the study presents interesting findings about a few languages that do not fall under such a domain. For instance, teachers in the study asserted that male students in their classes perceived German as “a masculine language” because of the German achievements in sports and car manufacturing, fields which are perceived to be of great interest to males. Consequently, Gayton (2011) posits that due to “its lack of feminine cultural associations,” (p. 135) German is a top choice for male learners through which they can exercise their masculinity.

### **2.6.1. Phonological Aspects**

In fact, Gayton's (2011) study confirms Carr and Pauwels (2006) findings about the different factors that may contribute to learners' gendered beliefs about a foreign language, one of which is its phonological aspects. For instance, participants

in Gayton's (2011) study reported that the pronunciation of French sounds best suits female learners, whereas male learners associate the guttural sounds of German with masculinity. Similarly, Carr and Pauwels (2006) posit that "French appears to have the monopoly on femininity" (p. 129). In fact, both Carr and Pauwels' (2006) and Gayton's (2011) studies confirm the stereotypical view of French being a feminine language.

### **2.6.2. Motivational Aspects**

Instrumental motivation, Gayton (2011) contends, is another reason for male learners' uptake of specific foreign languages. For instance, the results of her study indicate that Mandarin Chinese attracts male learners' attention for its potential economic rewards since "China's now become a major world player" (p. 135). Carr and Pauwels (2006) also suggest that Japanese, to some extent, appeals to male language learners because they associate it with technology.

As for English, the results of Gayton's (2011) study revealed that learners associate it with music, moviemaking and entertainment, which appeals to both male and female learners. The results also indicated that both male and female learners seem to have neutral gendered associations with English as both male and female learners expressed an interest in learning English for the financial benefits it promises. However, the teachers in the study suggested that female learners are keener on improving their knowledge of the culture of the foreign language culture, including that of English, than their male counterparts.

Likewise, Kobayashi's (2002) study yielded similar results with regard to the financially rewarding careers English language learning brings about. Kobayashi (2002) investigated the different variables that are likely to account for the positive attitude of Japanese female students enrolled in a university preparatory high school

towards current and long-term English language and culture learning. A structured questionnaire was administered to 555 male and female students, aged 15 to 17. The researchers also interviewed one male teacher to further validate the quantitative data results. The results showed that Japanese female students' favorable attitude towards English language learning stems from a belief that English language promises better career options for females. The results also revealed that female students associate English with positive characteristics (e.g. intelligence) more strongly than male students.

### **2.6.3. Sociopragmatic Aspects**

Carr and Pauwels (2006) further explain the reasons for Japanese female learners' preference for studying French and other foreign languages at the expense of their own mother tongue. A Japanese teacher participating in their study proposes that Japanese females are instructed to use only polite forms of their mother tongue whereas their male counterparts are free to use other forms. Such discriminatory language usage practices are instilled into a child's language system which eventually render Japanese, according to the teacher, “a very sexist language” (p. 129). Accordingly, it could be argued that sociopragmatic factors might also contribute to gendering learners' beliefs about both first and foreign language learning. Verschueren (1999) defines sociopragmatics as “general cognitive, social, and cultural perspectives on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior” (p. 7).

### **2.6.4. National Pride**

Furthermore, results of Portelli's (2006) study of Maltese male students' gendered associations with English language learning among other foci suggest that national pride in learners' mother tongue might be one factor contributing to their

gendered associations with foreign language learning. Portelli (2006) used questionnaires and focus group interviews to investigate male students' attitudes towards the two official languages in Malta, Maltese and English, and the factors determining these attitudes, including school management practices and gendered beliefs about language learning. One hundred and twenty six students and fifty-five male and female teachers of an all boys' Catholic comprehensive secondary school in Malta participated in the study.

The results of the questionnaires supported by interview findings revealed a gendered attitude towards both languages. On the one hand, the students consider their mother tongue, Maltese, as an important signifier of their masculinity. Not only do they create peer pressure amongst themselves to speak Maltese instead of English, but they also taunt male students who prefer speaking English to Maltese. Portelli (2006) suggests that such an attitude reflects male learners' belief in "a version of masculinity which is aligned with an outward display of national pride" (p. 426). On the other hand, the results demonstrated that the students associate English with females who, according to the participants in the study, watch English TV shows and manage to imitate the English accent well.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

What the studies reviewed in this chapter reveal is the difficulty of maintaining generalizations about language learners' belief system across different contexts. Rather, the studies confirm the importance of a careful examination of the cultural, social and contextual frameworks in which language learning takes place to gain insight into the big picture of learners' language learning beliefs and the variables that shape and affect them. Similarly, the findings of the studies reviewed demonstrate the difficulty of establishing a uniform relationship between gender and

language learners' beliefs which renders gender as a context-dependent variable.

In light of these findings, the purpose of the present study is to analyze university students' language learning beliefs in a private English-medium university in Egypt and examine gender as a possible variable that shapes and sustains these beliefs through using a contextual framework for data analysis. Accordingly, the present study contributes to the emerging SLA literature on English language learners' beliefs in the Arab region especially in the Egyptian context which is worthy of investigation but still remains under-researched.

Additionally, the preceding review of gender associations with language learning studies shows that learners' choices of which foreign languages to learn are arguably gendered. The results reveal that learners' beliefs are likely shaped by an array of complex factors including the sound pattern of the language and the cultural associations attached to it which all contribute to the gendering of those beliefs. The present study proposes that gendered associations with foreign language learning form an integral part of learners' beliefs about language learning and affect their motivation as well as attitude towards foreign language learning.

There is a paucity of literature addressing gendered associations with foreign language learning among Arabic-speaking language learners. This is why, in addition to examining gender as a possible variable affecting Egyptian language learners' beliefs, the present study also attempts to investigate Egyptian learners' gendered associations towards English along with other foreign languages commonly taught in Egypt such as French and German vis-à-vis their mother tongue, Arabic. Finally, this literature review provided the rationale for the methodology of the present study since it highlights the importance of using different data collection tools to better understand the rationale behind learners' beliefs and place them in their social context.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter details the methodological approach followed to answer the research questions set out in the introduction chapter. The chapter begins with outlining the research design of the study. Participants of the study and the instruments used to collect the data are then introduced. A step-by-step description of the data collection as well as the data analysis procedures follows. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the sections covered.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The design used for this study is an exploratory, basic-applied, mixed-method design. The study adopted an exploratory approach, as it has no hypothesis. It attempts to investigate Egyptian English language learners' beliefs about foreign language learning with special focus on the gender dynamics of those beliefs. In this sense, the study could be placed near the middle of the basic-applied research continuum since it explores psychological and sociological mechanisms that have pedagogical implications to better facilitate the language teaching and learning process (Perry, 2005).

Although many studies investigating learners' beliefs about language learning relied exclusively on the widely-cited BALLI, the present study adopts a mixed-methods approach in order to better address the research questions of the study, triangulate the findings, and increase the results' reliability. While the questionnaire provided insightful results pertaining to the big picture of the participants' beliefs, the semi-structured interviews provided invaluable data for an in-depth understanding of individual learners' beliefs about language learning and the complex intersection of different variables affecting those beliefs.

### **3.3. Participants**

The sample of this study was one of convenience. The participants were freshman students (n = 65) enrolled in an Academic English for Freshman (AEF) program at a private English-medium university in Cairo, Egypt. The number of students in each class ranged from 8 to 15. All the participants in the study were Egyptians, whose native language was Arabic. Although non-Egyptians students were invited to volunteer to fill out the questionnaire in order not to be singled out during the data collection procedures, their answers were excluded from the data of the study since the study focuses primarily on uncovering and analyzing beliefs of Egyptian English language learners.

The program in which the participants were enrolled is an integrated language skills and content course, which prepares students with the necessary language and academic skills for studying in an English-medium university with a special focus on academic writing in mixed-gender classes. Students in the program attend the AEF class for three hours four days a week and take two other core classes of their choice simultaneously.

### **3.4. Instruments**

#### **3.4.1. Questionnaire**

In a series of seminal works, Horwitz (1985; 1987; 1988) developed three versions of the BALLI questionnaire to assess both teachers' and language learners' beliefs about language learning. She first designed the teachers' version of the questionnaire (1985) followed by the ESL learners' version (1987). She later developed a BALLI questionnaire to assess American learners' beliefs about learning foreign languages (1988). Since both teachers' and native English speakers' beliefs



about language learning are beyond the scope of the present study, only the ESL version of the BALLI was administered to the participants in the present study.

Horwitz (1987) developed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to explore EFL/ESL learners' opinions on a wide range of controversies and beliefs commonly held about language learning. She used free recall tasks and focus group discussions with both ESL teachers and learners to compile a 34-item list of beliefs about language learning. Among the 34 items in the questionnaire, 32 are graded on a five-point Likert-scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). The remaining two items have different response scales.

**3.4.1.1. Questionnaire design.** Since it was first designed, the BALLI, with its three versions, has proved successful as a reliable instrument for researching both teachers' and learners' beliefs about language learning. However, it is important to note that almost 30 years have passed since the questionnaire was first designed and that new trends in language learning have been emerging which required adding new items to the questionnaire and modifying the existing ones. This was the *raison d'être* for developing a modified version of Horwitz's (1987) questionnaire (Appendix A). The modified version comprised items targeting eliciting participants' beliefs about possible gendered associations with foreign languages and the profile of English language learning in Egypt. The questionnaire with its new items was then piloted, revised and finally administered to the participants.

The modified version of the questionnaire comprises items presenting three themes from Horwitz's (1987) BALLI in addition to three new themes which are supported by the belief system literature. The themes adapted from the BALLI are beliefs about (1) foreign language aptitude (2) the nature of foreign language learning (3) motivation for foreign language learning. The themes added to the original

questionnaire are beliefs about (1) gendered associations with specific languages (2) English language learning in Egypt.

A detailed description of each subset of the modified questionnaire is provided in the following sections with the corresponding item numbers noted at the beginning of each of section. Following Dörnyei's (2010) suggestion, a "thank you" note is added at the end of the questionnaire.

***Foreign language aptitude.*** Items numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 uncover learners' beliefs about the readiness to learn a foreign language. Item 2 in specific, "women are better than men at learning foreign languages", targets the belief that is most relevant to this study since it directly assesses learners' beliefs about females being better language learners than males. The items also aim at eliciting learners' beliefs about the benefits of bilingualism and the appropriate time for language learning e.g. childhood versus adulthood. Item 6 which states "People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages" highlights the potential effect learners' intended academic major has on their language aptitude beliefs.

The items in this "foreign language aptitude" section also provide respondents with the opportunity to assess their own language learning abilities as well as their group language learning self-perceived image by reflecting on the abilities of their fellow countrymen to learn foreign languages (Horwitz, 1987). However, it is important to note that a slight modification is made to the wording of item 5 which originally states "People from my country are good at learning foreign languages" to "Egyptians are good at learning foreign languages" in an attempt to personalize this item and prime the respondents to provide genuine responses.

***Nature of language learning.*** Items numbered 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 investigate learners' beliefs about the nature of language learning. Item 10, which states "It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures (e.g. American, British) in order to speak English," explores the cultural dimension of language learning. It aims at uncovering respondents' beliefs about the importance of learning what is believed to be the fifth language skill i.e. culture as a necessary requirement for mastering a foreign language. Item 11, which states "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK) ," assesses learners' beliefs pertaining to immersion as the best option for facilitating learning English. Items 13 and 14 examine participants' preference for both communicative and grammar-translation language teaching approaches. Horwitz (1987) suggests that those statements offer a restricted view of language learning and affects learners' study strategies. She posits that if learners believe that learning vocabulary and grammar is the best way to master a foreign language, then they would focus all their attention on memorizing vocabulary lists and grammar rules at the expense of other equally important language items. Item 14 draws a comparison between learning a foreign language as an academic subject as opposed to learning other academic subjects without naming them.

***English language learning in Egypt.*** Items 16 and 17 address communicative aspects of language learning like the importance of mastering pronunciation, repetition and practicing language face-to-face with native speakers of the language or via audio tools. It also examines the extent to which pronunciation affects learners' readiness to communicate using the target language as well as the extent of anxiety they feel when speaking English when communicating with other people (e.g. I feel timid speaking English with other people). Item 14 targets learners'

beliefs about guessing unknown vocabulary items as a compensatory strategy that they may use when communicating using the foreign language. Results of this section, indeed, help language teachers better understand the reasons for some learners' resistance to and concern about implementing a communicative approach to language teaching.

***Motivation for foreign language learning.*** Item 18, which states “I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from other countries better,” addresses learners' beliefs about their integrative motivations for learning English. Item 19 states “If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job” in order to assess instrumental motivations for foreign language learning.

***Gendered associations with specific languages.*** As discussed in the previous chapter, the present study proposes the significance of researching the gendered associations language learners attach to certain languages. The present study proposes adding a new section to the original BALLI questionnaire to elicit respondents' gendered associations with their mother tongue i.e. Arabic, English and other foreign languages they are familiar with. The section is adapted from Portelli's (2006) study and includes only one question: Item number 20. The question lists four languages which respondents are required to rate as suitable for 1. Females 2. Males and 3. No difference. French and German are listed in this section because a number of the students participating in the study are graduates of international French and German schools in Egypt. Participants who took the Thanaweya Amma, the Egyptian high-school-leaving certificate, are also familiar with at least one of those two languages since the Egyptian system requires students to study a third language, in addition to Arabic and English, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the certificate.

**3.4.1. 2. Questionnaire structure.** The questionnaire used in the present study includes three parts: A, B and C. Part A is added to the inventory to collect necessary demographic information about the participants such as gender, educational background and the intended academic major and is adapted from Dörnyei (2010) (Appendix A). Additionally, the section includes items eliciting respondents' nationality in order to facilitate the process of identifying non-Egyptian students' responses in order to avoid contamination of data. An item addressing respondents' length of residence in Egypt is also added to this section. This is because a number of students attending the university in which the study is conducted used to live outside of Egypt especially in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Europe and North America. Although those students are Egyptian, it could be argued that they may hold beliefs different to those of Egyptian students, who have lived and attended school in Egypt, especially if they had lived abroad for long periods of time. Consequently, it is important to add an item addressing this possibility in order to account for these students' responses when analyzing the questionnaire data. Similarly, an item eliciting the language participants' use at their homes is also included to account for any bilingual students who have non-Egyptian parents and might consequently be speaking a language other than Arabic at home.

Part B of the questionnaire includes the 19 statements about common beliefs about language learning. Part C aims at identifying if the participants have any gendered associations with Arabic and foreign languages.

An open-ended question was added to this part of the questionnaire. Dörnyei (2010) recommends adding an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire in order to provide respondents with an opportunity to have their say about the topic of the study. He also posits that “a simple question is often less effective in eliciting a

meaningful answer than an unfinished sentence beginning that the respondent needs to complete” (p.38). This is why a sentence-completion item is added to the end of the questionnaire which states: “In my opinion, the most important thing about learning English language is ....”. By requesting respondents to provide the most important skill they think helps in mastering a foreign language , the study follows Dörnyei’s (2010) suggestion with regard to narrowing down the scope of the question in order to elicit more meaningful responses.

### **3.4.2. Interviews**

**3.4.2.1. Rationale for conducting interviews.** Talmy and Richards (2011) contend that the use of interviews has become inevitable in the field of applied linguistics, given the recent shift from the quantitative/qualitative paradigm conflict of research methodology to mixed-method approaches. Interviews, as explained earlier in chapter one, best serve the purpose of the present study by offering an insight into learners' beliefs rather than relying on the questionnaire quantitative data solely. By the same token, Edley and Litosseliti (2010) assert that interviews provide researchers with a chance to obtain multiple perspectives on their research focus.

**3.4.2.2. Interview structure.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data following Richards’ (2003) recommendation who has argued for the significance of open semi-conversational interviews. According to her, semi-structured interviews deepen understanding of the focus of any research as the interviewers become more responsive to opportunities as the interview progresses. In an attempt to justify her preference of this type of interview, she postulates that what she refers to as “the straightjacket” structure of some interviews affects the data collection process negatively since it “distracts attention from the interactive nature of all interviewing” (p. 64).

### 3.5. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in the Fall 2014 semester on the modified and new items in the questionnaire. The modified questionnaire was administered to 20 learners studying in an intensive English program in the same university where the present study took place. The participants were a convenience sample at the time of piloting the study. The results contributed significantly to the research design of the present study. First, the “Gendered Associations with Specific Languages” section was revisited and rewritten in a more straightforward style to avoid any possible confusion in interpreting the question. The question in this section was worded in the pilot as follows “Kindly indicate whether the study of the following languages is most suitable for 1. Males, 2. Females and 3. Both”. However, while piloting the questionnaire, some participants requested further clarifications of what they are expected to do in this section. Additionally, the words “most suitably” did not properly capture the idea of gendered associations. Consequently, the question was rewritten as follows: “Look at the list of 4 foreign languages; indicate whether you think males or females would be more likely to be interested in learning that language”. The “both” option was replaced with the “no difference” one to allow for the possibility that learners do not have gendered associations with the languages listed.

Second, the research design was modified from a purely quantitative approach to a mixed-method approach through conducting interviews to further investigate participants’ beliefs. Finally, two questionnaire items seemed redundant. These were “I would like to learn English to interact with foreigners and have foreign friends” and “I want to learn to speak English well to interact with foreigners and have foreign

friends”. Both items were removed and replaced by the statement “I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from other countries”.

### **3.6. Data Collection Procedures**

A modified version of the BALLI questionnaire was first administered to the participants in the study. Semi-structured interviews followed to glean insights about the the participants’ beliefs. The data collection process started after the Institutional Review Board (IEB) permission was granted (Appendix D). Data was collected towards the middle of the spring 2015 semester.

#### **3.6.1. Administering the Questionnaire**

Six teachers in the program were contacted to grant the researcher permission to come to their classes and distribute the questionnaire to the students. The researcher introduced herself to the participants and briefly explained the purpose of the study. The participants were informed that the data was collected for research purposes and that participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were also requested to read and sign the consent form attached to the questionnaire (Appendix C).

The researcher was present during the data collection procedure. Dörnyei (2010) argues for the importance of the presence of the researcher as a survey administrator from a motivational perspective. The researcher followed Dörnyei's (2010) guidelines for survey administrators which include maintaining professionalism, sustaining rapport with participants and keeping them motivated throughout the questionnaire completion process. Thank-you emails were sent to the teachers after visiting their classes to collect data.

#### **3.6.2. Setting Up and Conducting the Interviews**

Questionnaire respondents were invited to sign up for in-depth interviews by filling out an interview sign-up sheet. Fifteen respondents expressed interest in being



interviewed. Volunteers were contacted via email and Whatsapp to schedule the interviews. Only nine participants, however, were interviewed, due to schedule conflicts with the rest of the volunteers. All interviews were conducted on the university campus over the course of three weeks. Each interview lasted for approximately 10 minutes.

An interview protocol was developed by the researcher to ensure consistency among the interviews and to further ensure the reliability of the results. The researcher provided the same introduction to the study to all interviewees at the beginning of the interviews. Seven interviewees preferred the interview to be conducted in English while two participants preferred to code-switch between Arabic and English. The participants' consent to audiotape the interviews was obtained before conducting them. Three interviewees volunteered to record the interviews using their mobile phones when the researcher faced some technical problems with the recorder. Interviewees shared the audio files later with the researcher. An interview guide was developed with eight guiding questions (Appendix B). Follow-up questions and probes were used when appropriate to elicit more information from participants.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

#### **3.7.1. Questionnaire Data**

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22 software was used to analyze data gathered from the questionnaire and compute descriptive analysis. Both t-test and Mann–Whitney *U* tests were run for all questionnaire items against gender as a variable to detect any significant differences in male and female students' responses. Two questionnaires were excluded because they were completed by non-Egyptian participants. A third questionnaire appeared to have been answered randomly and thus was also excluded from the data entry and analysis process to

avoid data contamination. The mean and standard deviation for the questionnaire items were calculated and are presented in the results chapter according to the theme according to which they are grouped.

### **3.7.2. Interview Data**

Interview responses were audio recorded and the most pertinent excerpts were transcribed, coded and analyzed for possible patterns and themes. In an effort to ensure the credibility of the emerging themes, the study adopts a number of techniques proposed by Perry (2011) during the process of identifying the patterns and themes as well as advancing explanations and drawing conclusions from the interview data. In addition to triangulation, peer review technique was used to address the researcher's analytical bias when identifying themes and add rigor to the study. A fellow TESOL graduate student volunteered to peer review the interview data. The interview transcripts and the suggested coding scheme were shared with her to verify. The reviewer verified the themes identified by the principal investigator. She recommended taking the overlap of some themes into consideration instead of only categorizing them into separate sets.

The technique of replicating findings was also used to ensure the credibility of the results of the study by reporting studies that yielded the same results. Additionally, excerpts from both the questionnaire and the interview data are cited in the results chapter of the present study in order to provide a rich, thick description of the data. Negative evidence is also reported in the results chapter and its implications are addressed in the discussion chapter to provide the full picture of participants' beliefs even if they do not correspond to the themes of the study. Perry (2011) has asserted that using at least one of these techniques when identifying themes and drawing conclusions helps establish the credibility of the data analysis.

### **3.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the research design of the present study and its technicalities. A mixed-method research approach was adopted to elicit participants' beliefs about foreign language learning from different perspectives. A questionnaire was administered to capture the full picture of learners' beliefs. Interviews were conducted to delve more deeply into the factors that help shape those beliefs. Finally, triangulation, peer review, excerpts of results from interview data, findings replications, and negative evidence were all used as measures to ensure the reliability of the results presented.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, both quantitative and qualitative results from the modified Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and interviews are reported. The chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) Questionnaire results, which reports the descriptive statistics of the results obtained from conducting the modified beliefs about language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and (2) Interview results, in which the major findings of the interview data are highlighted. Visual aids of figures and tables are utilized when necessary to complement the written report.

### **4.2. Questionnaire Results**

This section details the results of the 26 items of the modified BALLI questionnaire. The results are presented according to the themes according to which the different questionnaire items are grouped together. These themes address participants' beliefs about: (1) foreign language learning aptitude, (2) the nature of foreign language learning, (3) English language learning in Egypt, (4) motivation to learn English and (5) gendered associations with specific languages.

#### **4.2.1. Demographic Data**

The first part of the questionnaire included items to the respondents' demographic data (age, gender and duration of stay in Egypt) in addition to their educational background and intended fields of study.

**4.2.1. 1 .Gender.** 71% of respondents reported gender as male while 29% self-reported as female. Table 1 shows the respondents' gender and demonstrates that the male respondents outnumbered the female ones.

Table 1

*Gender Distribution of Questionnaire Respondents*

Gender	Number (N=65)	Percentage %
Male	40	71
Female	25	29

**4.2.1. 2. Age.** Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 21 years old (M = 18.85).

**4.2.1. 3. Duration of stay in Egypt.** When asked to indicate how long they have been living in Egypt, 73% of the respondents indicated that they have been living in Egypt since they were born. The rest of the participants' stay in Egypt ranged from 3 months to 16 years. These participants fall under the category of overseas Egyptians who had lived outside Egypt for a long time before settling in and starting their university studies in Egypt. They constitute a noteworthy part of the population of the university in which the present study is conducted. Therefore, it is important to investigate their beliefs since they might affect the general beliefs of their peers who were born and raised in Egypt.

**4.2.1. 4. Languages spoken at home.** Figure 1 shows that the majority of participants (70%) used only Arabic to interact with their family members at home. Almost one quarter of the participants (22%) indicated that they spoke both Arabic and English at the home. The rest of the participants used a number of foreign languages besides Arabic to communicate at home. However, Arabic was the common language reported in all responses. This was an open-ended demographic questionnaire item, thus participants were not provided with multiple-choice items to choose from but provided their own input to respond to the question "What languages do you speak at home?"

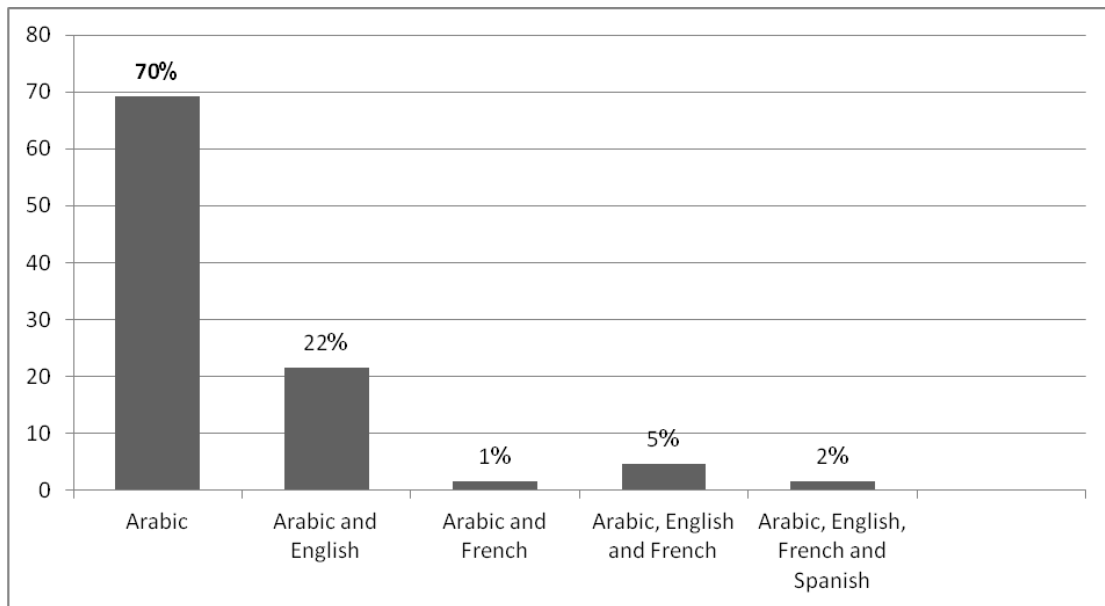


Figure 1. Languages questionnaire respondents speak at home

**4.2.1. 5. Intended major.** As indicated in Figure 2, nearly half (54%) of the participants were planning to major in Sciences and Engineering. Business ranked second (31%) while Humanities and Social Sciences ranked third. Other fields participants planned to major in generally fell under the umbrella of Media and Communications.

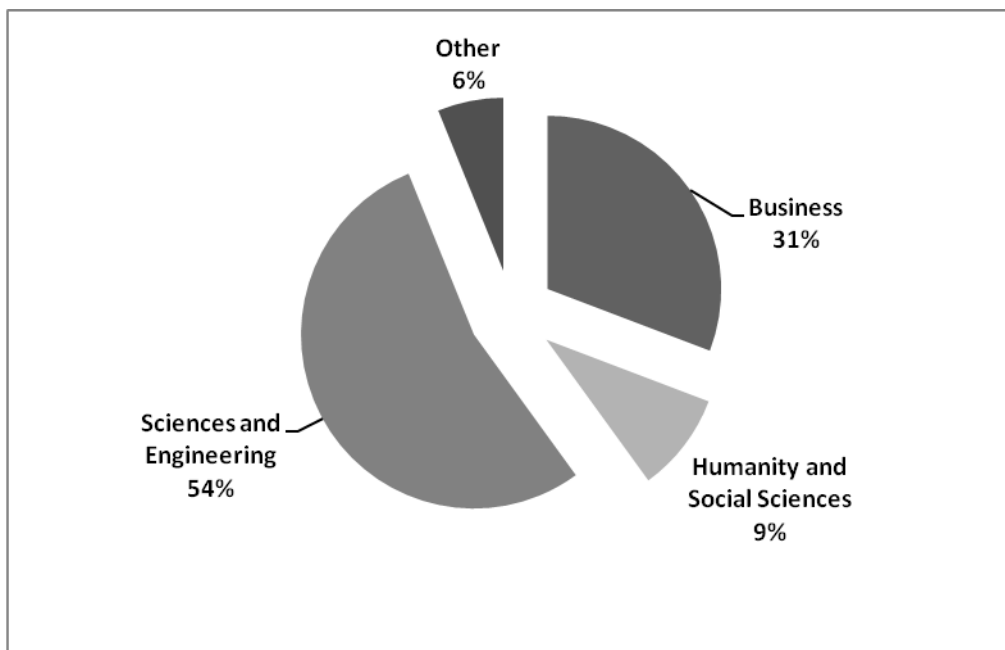


Figure 2. Intended major of questionnaire respondents

**4.2.1. 6. High school degree.** Almost half of the participants (48%) received the Egyptian high school leaving certificate “Thanaweya Amma.” Almost one third of the participants (31%) obtained the ICGE certificate while 14% of the population studied for the American Diploma in high school. Only 8% of the respondents obtained the French Baccalaureate as their high school degree.

#### **4.2.2. Questionnaire Data**

**4.2.2.1. Beliefs about foreign language aptitude.** Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the “Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude” section of the questionnaire. The mean score of 4.49 in response to the statement “It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language” shows respondents’ high agreement with this belief. Almost half of the respondents (43%), however, preferred to remain neutral regarding the statement “Women are better than men at learning languages.” The rest of the participants were divided over this statement with 30% in agreement and 27% disagreeing.

Respondents generally agreed with the statement “Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages,” but their responses to the statements “I have a special ability for learning foreign languages,” and “Egyptians are good at learning foreign languages.” were ambivalent with a mean score of 3.30 and 3.20 respectively. There is a general agreement with the statements, “People who speak more than one language are very intelligent” and “It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one” with mean scores of 3.62 and 3.91 respectively. However, almost half of the respondents (57%) disagreed with the statement “People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages,” with a mean score of 2.47.

Table 2.

*Frequencies of Response (in %), Means and Standard Deviations for the Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude Questionnaire Items (N=65)*

No.	Item	SD <sup>1</sup>	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard deviation
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	5	1	3	22	69	4.49	.986
2	Women are better than men at learning languages.	7	20	43	25	5	2.98	.976
3	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	2	2	15	52	29	4.06	.808
4	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	1	8	58	25	8	3.30	.790
5	Egyptians are good at learning foreign languages.	1	11	62	18	8	3.20	.795
6	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages. <sup>2</sup>	19	38	25	15	3	3.53	1.069
7	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	17	0	23	42	18	3.62	.979
8	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	2	6	15	54	23	3.91	.879

<sup>1</sup>SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neither agree nor disagree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

<sup>2</sup> Reversed-scored item

#### 4.2.2.2. Beliefs about the nature of foreign language learning. The

frequencies of response, means and standard deviations for the “Beliefs about the Nature of Foreign Language Learning” questionnaire items are presented in Table 3.

Overall, the mean scores in response to the statements in this section indicated that



respondents believed in the importance of both accuracy (i.e. learning grammar rules and vocabulary items) and fluency (communication and pronunciation). There is strong agreement with the statements “It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK),” and “The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words and grammar rules,” as well as the statement “The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to use the language to communicate effectively” with mean scores of 4.35, 4.06 and 4.43.

The mean and standard deviation for the statements “Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects” and “It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation” showed a general agreement to these statements. There is a similar degree of agreement with responses to the statement, “English is easier to learn than other languages.” Finally, although half of the respondents (50%) agreed with the statement “It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures (e.g. American, British) in order to speak English well,” almost one third of them (29%) disagreed with the statement. Interestingly, in contrast to the results of the questionnaire, interview data revealed general agreement among participants with respect to the importance of the cultural component of foreign language learning.

Table 3

*Frequencies of Response (in %), Means and Standard Deviations for the Beliefs about the Nature of Foreign Language Learning (N=65)*

No.	Item	SD	D	N	S	SA	Mean	Standard deviation
9	English is easier to learn than other languages.	3	6	28	45	18	3.69	.951
10	It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures (e.g. American, British) in order to speak English well.	3	26	21	42	8	3.25	1.031
11	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK)	2	6	11	18	63	4.35	1.007
12	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words and grammar rules.	9	0	10	47	34	4.06	.906
13	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to use the language to communicate effectively.	2	2	7	31	58	4.43	.829
14	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	4	0	17	48	31	4.05	.818
15	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	3	0	17	32	48	4.25	.848

**4.2.2.3. Beliefs about English language learning in Egypt.** As the mean scores in Table 4 indicate, there is a general agreement with the statements “In Egypt, people think highly of people who speak English well,” and “Although Arabic is the official language of Egypt, learning English is a must.”

Table 4

*Frequencies of Response (in %), Means and Standard Deviations for the Beliefs about English Language Learning in Egypt (N=65)*

No.	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard deviation
16	In Egypt, people think highly of people who speak English well.	3	0	22	48	27	3.98	.787
17	Although Arabic is the official language of Egypt, learning English is a must	2	9	16	42	31	3.92	.997

**4.2.2.4. Beliefs about English language learning motivation.** As indicated in Table 5, there was general agreement with the statement “I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from other countries better.” There was rather strong agreement with the statement “If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job” which shows that instrumental motivation is an important factor that contributes to motivations for learning English in Egypt.

Table 5

*Frequencies of Response (in %), Means and Standard Deviations for the Beliefs about English Language Learning Motivation (N=65)*

No.	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard deviation
18	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from other countries better.	2	3	12	51	32	4.09	.843
19	If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	1	0	5	22	72	4.63	.720

**4.2.2.5. Beliefs about gendered associations with specific languages.** Table 6 presents the results of the suggested “Gendered associations with specific languages” section of the questionnaire. Most respondents indicated that male and female learners would be equally interested in learning Arabic and English. Yet the majority of respondents (78%) indicated that females would be more interested in learning French.

Respondents were divided over male and female learners’ interest in learning German. While almost half of the participants (46%) suggested that males would be interested in learning German, nearly the other half of the participants (43%) indicated that no difference existed between male and female learners with this regard. A few respondents (11%) however indicated that females would be interested in studying German.

Table 6

*Frequencies of Response (in %), Means and Standard Deviations for Beliefs about Gendered Associations with Specific Languages (N=65)*

Item	Males (1)	Females (2)	No Difference (3)	Mean	Standard deviation
Arabic	14	2	84	2.70	.710
English	8	8	84	2.77	.584
French	0	78	22	2.22	.417
German	46	11	43	1.97	.950

### 4.2.3. Gender Differences

In an attempt to answer the second research question of the study regarding the possible differences between the beliefs male and female language learners have, t-test was run for all of the questionnaire items. Only one statement yielded significant

statistical differences in the beliefs about the nature of foreign language learning section as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

*Questionnaire Items of Significant Difference between Male and Female Participants*

Item	Mean of Male Participants	Mean of Female Participants	Significance
It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK)	4.68	3.84	.001

The statement “It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK)” had a mean score of 4.68 for males and 3.84 for females and was significant at  $p = .001$ . Male participants indicated that they agreed more with immersion as an effective method for English language learning as none of them disagreed with the statement.

To further analyze any possible gender differences, a Mann–Whitney  $U$  test was conducted to evaluate the possible differences between the responses of male and female respondents across grouped questionnaire items categorized by theme. The results are listed in table 8 below.

Table 8

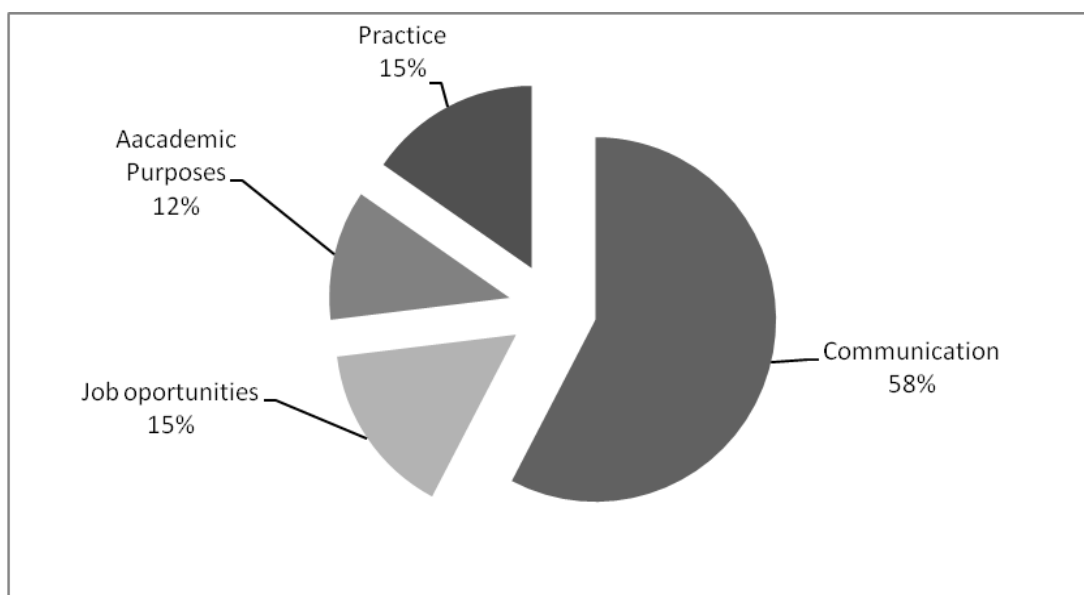
*Grouped Questionnaire Items of Significant Difference between Male and Female Participants*

Item	Mean of Male Participants	Mean of Female Participants	Significance
Questions 22 through 25	28.56	38.64	.040

The items investigating beliefs about gendered associations with foreign languages had a significant difference, Mann-Whitney  $U = 2.103$ ,  $p = .040$  with a mean score of 28.56 for males and 38.64 for females. Generally, male participants tended to have more gendered associations with languages than their female peers.

#### 4.2.4. Open-ended Question

The questionnaire concluded with a general open-ended statement for participants to complete, “In my opinion, the most important thing about English language learning is ...” Out of the 65 questionnaire respondents, 56 recorded a response. Data was coded and categorized into different themes; each of these themes was then counted and tabulated. A peer reviewer also coded the responses to provide confirmation to coding responses. The results are reported in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Question 21. In my opinion, the most important thing about learning English language is ...

More than half of the participants (58%) emphasized the communicative aspect of using English as a lingua franca. Firth (1996) defines English as a lingua franca as “a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native

tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (p. 240). This is reflected in the way participants perceived English by referring to it as an “international language” and “the language of the world.” For instance, one participant noted, “It is an international language and this will help us communicate anywhere I travel outside of Egypt.” Another participant wrote, “It will help you in everything in your life because it actually became the language of the world.” A third participant indicated, “It is the common language in the whole world. Learning it is a must to learn and communicate.”

Participants also highlighted how studying English helps in avoiding possible cross-cultural misunderstandings. One participant explained, “the opportunities that open up once we learn the language. It also helps us to understand the different cultures of English-speaking countries through communication with them and their people.” Another participant noted, “Learning English helps in broadening the mind and empowering one's skills and helps us engage and interact with diverse cultures more and better.”

A number of participants also noted the promise of job opportunities learning English offers. As one participant put it, “English is essential for career life.” Another participant stressed this idea, but also highlighted the importance of learning other foreign languages for better job opportunities, stating, “it will help us be qualified when searching for a job in addition to other languages.”

Some participants also noted the importance of practicing the language to master. One participant noted, “Practicing a lot as any other language; English needs constant care and practice.” Another participant pointed out the significance of practicing language in authentic contexts stating, “We have to practice what we learn in our daily life throughout conversations and life situations.” Finally, 15% of the

participants indicated that learning English helps them in their academic career. For example, one participant wrote, “it helps me have the ability to know [sic] field of studies in college and after graduation.”

It is important to note, however, that the results revealed that the wording of the open-ended question was quite vague since some participants provided what they believed were the most important reasons for studying English (e.g. communication and job opportunities) while other participants noted what they believed was the most important technique to study English effectively (e.g. practice). Thus, rewording the open-ended question of the questionnaire used in the present study is recommended to obtain more insightful results.

### **4.3. Interview Results**

This section reports in detail the results of the nine interviews conducted to gain insights into participants’ beliefs about foreign language learning. Efforts were made to ensure interviewees included both female and male students to compensate for the fact that male questionnaire respondents outnumbered their female counterparts. The participants were four female participants and five male participants between 18 and 19 years old. Six participants received the Thanaweya Amma high school certificate while two participants studied for the IGCSE certificate. Only one participant took the French Baccalaureate. Most interviewees studied either French or German as a foreign language additional to English in high school. Two participants studied Spanish and Italian as additional foreign languages in high school. Participants were varied in their intended majors. Table 9 provides brief background information about the interview participants.



Table 9

*Profile of Interviewees*

Number	Name	Self-reported Gender	Age	Intended Major	Foreign Languages Studied in High School	Secondary Diploma
1	Mahmoud	Male	19	Finance	German	Thanaweya Amma
2	Ahmed	Male	19	Business	French	Thanaweya Amma
3	Basma*	Female	19	Psychology	French, German	IGCSE
4	Sarah	Female	19	Chemistry	French	Thanaweya Amma
5	Alaa	Female	19	Architecture	French	IGCSE
6	Samuel	Male	18	Mechanical Engineering	French	Thanaweya Amma
7	Kareem	Male	19	Engineering	French, Spanish	French Baccalaureate
8	Menna	Female	18	Mass Communication	Italian	Thanaweya Amma
9	Khaled	Male	18	Engineering	French	Thanaweya Amma

\*Note pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

It is important to note that significant results regarding participants' beliefs about the Arabic language emerged although Arabic was not the initial focus of the study. Consequently, the principal investigator and the peer reviewer agreed that these results were worthy of analysis and they will thus be reported in this section.

Interview themes identified by the principal investigator and verified by the peer reviewer are listed in Table 10, taking into account that some themes may overlap.

Table 10

*Interview Data Themes*

Number	Theme
1	Instrumental Motivation for Language Learning
2	Importance of Immersion in Language Learning
3	Gendered and Cultural Associations with Specific Foreign Languages
4	Mixed Attitudes Towards Arabic Language
5	Gender Differences in Language Learning

**4.3.1. Motivation**

Almost all participants indicated that the necessity of learning English to secure decent job opportunities when they graduate as the reason for their enrollment in an English-medium university. Mahnoud thought that foreign language proficiency outweighed any other skills required in the job market as he stated, “Learning languages is very good cause in a lot of companies if you don’t know anything but you can speak several languages they may take you cause languages are the future and computers of course!” Alaa offered a comprehensive account of the different possible advantages of studying English both inside and outside of Egypt. She explained, “Maybe If I decide to travel abroad, it will help. Mainly every aspect and every job opportunity is involving essentially English. It’s a necessity for being applicable to any job or dealing with people or communication. In anything English is involved”.

Kareem, a French school graduate, emphasized the necessity of learning English in Egypt and mentioned, “I think it will be more practical to study in an American university because, in Egypt, English is the dominant language. So any field will be related to talk well in English and study in English.” Kareem’s account of the status of English and French provide insight into the dominance of English in

Egypt. This is revealed when he stated, “If I want to live in France I would have more opportunities but in Egypt I think the companies don’t really care about French and after all it depends on where you gonna work but I’m talking about the majority of the companies.” He lamented the time he spent studying French. His words are very telling of how disadvantaged some students who do not study in English language schools feel:

I won’t repeat the same mistake my parents did. Of course, it’s really not unique but different to speak French here in Egypt but in the real world what really matters is to do what will make you reach faster your goals. So I took the French baccalaureate but at the end I needed SAT and TOEFL and a lot of other English exams so I will make my children take the shortcut and enter an American system or an IG.

#### **4.3.2. Beliefs about Arabic Language**

Samuel, who took the Egyptian school-leaving certificate, expressed a similar pattern of thought. His words reflect the extent to which the rise of and the demand for English language education has affected some Egyptian attitudes towards studying Arabic language:

I want my kids to enter international language school in the future, God willing because I want them to learn from their childhood the basis of language French, German, English, whatever. I suffered when I came to this university, my Arabic background will not benefit me anymore so I will not benefit from Arabic language which I take from primary to Thanaweya Amma.

Menna, who also studied the national curriculum, noted the possible change in the status of Arabic language in Egypt. She stated:

Arabic is my language and I am talking with my parents with this language with Arabic language but maybe in the work life I think it will be affected. Like nowadays, we talk with mixture of English and Arabic and in the same sentence so I think it will be affected somehow.

Sarah, also a graduate of a national school, did not seem disappointed by her study in an Arabic school. In fact, she expressed concern about her Arabic language getting negatively affected by her study in an English-medium university. She noted:

Your country forced you to speak another language instead of your native language because it's better. Sometimes you feel like when you speak when you study in Arabic, this is something bad or something uncivilized but it's not like that because if you are in the US or in any country they are speaking their native language so they are more developed because they are holding their culture holding their civilization but we don't. Sometimes you forget your culture you forget your native language you forget your civilization you forget your history when you used to speak English all the time. I'm trying to read in Arabic as I'm trying to read in English also to improve the two languages not to reinforce one and forget another one.

She seemed aware of the linguistic conflict in Egypt. Her words revealed her discontent with the status of Arabic language at the expense of the rise of English language in Egypt. Her words also reflect her pride in her native language.

Ahmed, who studied in Saudi Arabia up through secondary school before joining university, expressed a similar pride in his mother tongue:

I think Arabic is the best language because in Islam you have to learn Arabic well to learn Qur'an well and to be more religious. Actually, we need to learn Arabic we don't need to lose our own language. It's useful and helpful and recommended to learn other languages English French but the main point is Arabic .We have to still catch our language and that's what I like about our university; they have courses in Arabic. I was living in Saudi Arabia and I have been to many Saudi schools and it was very good at this point, actually.

His words indicate that the high value he associates with the Arabic language is related to its status as the language of the Qur'an, the holy book of the Islamic religion. In fact, both Sarah and Ahmed expressed a keen interest in the necessity to preserve their Arabic identity through continuing to use, and learn in the case of Standard Arabic, both Colloquial and Standard Arabic in their daily lives. It is important to note however, that Ahmed's stay in Saudi Arabia might have affected his beliefs about both Arabic and English language learning.

### 4.3.3. Beliefs about Immersion

Participants indicated that living in an English-speaking country is the best way to acquire a language and stressed the importance of speaking the language. “Just live in the place of the language,” Ahmed noted. He reflected on his experience with learning English during an intensive summer program in London. He recounted, “In London, don’t even think to talk in other languages except English and that is the best way to learn English, actually.” Mahmoud seemed convinced that immersion is the fastest way to master English as he explained, “If you speak English in Egypt, it will be okay. But if you went to US or United Kingdom, within a year you will speak more British [sic] than the ten years you are speaking in Egypt cause you are always speaking the language”. Interestingly, he recommended an internet chat program as a medium through which students could experience interaction in English with the target-language community as he suggested, “There is a Skype community. It’s about language exchange so I teach others Arabic and I learn English. So you need to speak the language more in order to master it not just reading. It’s about more speaking than more reading.”

Alaa, however, seemed quite concerned about feeling homesick and the poor treatment she felt immigrants receive as she reflected on her friends’ experience of studying abroad. She recounted:

I don’t like to feel like an immigrant. I have friends who are studying abroad. They are suffering. Really, it’s tragic. It’s a global issue that immigrants are not well welcomed. It’s bad. We are missing all the benefits from having a multicultural community or society.

Her comments highlight the vital role the target-language community plays in supporting or blocking access to its language.

#### 4.3.4. Gendered Associations with Specific Foreign Languages

Interview data provided interesting findings pertaining to gendered associations towards French and German languages. Most of the participants indicated that they thought French was more of a “feminine language”. Ahmed referred to the “Gendered associations with specific foreign languages” section of the questionnaire to illustrate his belief that females would be more interested in studying French. He explained, “I don’t think French is good for men. It’s a more feminine language. In your survey, I said that. Maybe the pronunciation of the words. I think it’s more suitable for females.” Menna, also referred to the phonological differences in the pronunciation of both French and German as a possible reason for such associations as she said, “When a girl talks with this language I feel it’s really feminine and cute. Like German, some people think that boys prefer German because it has some...not difficult word... but the pronunciation is very difficult and tough. So it’s for boys.”

Khaled, also referred to a phonological resemblance between German and Arabic. He noted “Arabic and German have tough sounds like the /x/ and the /dʒ/ in Arabic”. However, he did not suggest any possible gendered associations with both languages. Alaa’s comments best describe the possible gendered associations with French and German that were reflected in both the interview and questionnaire results as she noted:

Females tend to love certain languages more than males. Like French, I think females love French and males don’t and males tend to take German. In my school, we were separated. There is French and German. Most of the girls went to take French and most of the males went to take German. I think French is more feminine. I love French. I love how I pronounce French words. I love to hear someone talking French, but when I hear someone talking Deutsch I freak out (laughs). It’s tough. It’s a tough language. English is in between. It’s modest but French is more feminine, it’s more quiet. You don’t have to shout. I tend to take it because I think it’s more feminine.

However, Kareem, who studied in a French school all throughout his life, provided a counterargument to associating French language with being feminine and stressed his belief that associating femininity or masculinity to a language could depend on a person's background. He explained his beliefs about possible gendered associations:

The people living in France, they all speak French men and women.  
The women speak French and the men won't speak another language.  
So a language is a tool to communicate for both genders...that depends on the point of view of the person. If a French man was listening to English people, of course he would have remarks to say about the language so it depends on the point of view.

It is important to note, however, that he referred to the native speakers of French to prove his point about disregarding gendered associations. Interestingly, he then suggested that if non-native speakers of a language (in this case a French person) observe the native speakers of that language speaking, they might have some "remarks" about the language. His comments might indicate that there could be differences between the gendered associations native speakers of a language have about their mother tongue and those of learners of the language.

Basma, who studied French as a foreign language in high school, put a different spin on the issue when she said "I think specifically French in Egypt not everyone knows. It's like the *crème de la crème* that knows it. So you get a language that you can communicate if you want someone not to understand." Her remarks suggested that she saw sociocultural characteristics associated with French in Egypt rather than gendered associations.

#### **4.3.5. Beliefs about Gender Differences in Language Learning**

Participants seemed quite ambivalent when asked about their opinion about the stereotype of females being better at language learning than males. Mahmoud

reflected on his personal observations and knowledge of psychology to support his view that females are better language learners:

In psychology, female is better because they can do more than one thing at a time because that's why more secretaries are females not males because they are unique at it but men have more confidence to talk [...] Boys love to play. Like girls, girls love to play but boys play harder. Even in jokes, we tend to hit each other. We tend to run from each other. But girls don't do this. They don't hit each other. They don't fight. But we do this. Our jokes are heavy. We are like ... a lot of energy is wasted on playing. That's why girls mostly have a lot of energy because they don't waste it on anything. They only waste it on studying and like make-up or something.

The idea of females' ability to multitask is echoed in Alaa's remarks, though she did not seem to completely agree with such a stereotype, as she stated: "Any human being is able to develop and enrich their language by effort. [...] We are all equal in everything but I think women can multitask and men can't multitask. Men are more focused and systematic. Females can multitask in language."

Samuel reflected a similar pattern of thought to that of Mahmoud with regard to studying languages being a female domain. He explained, "I think females love to learn languages. It makes a prestige for them. I think males have other things they prefer to do like gym sports friends they don't care about these languages from my perspective." Menna's remarks about the language learning differences between her and her brother seconded Samuel's ideas as she stated, "For example me and my brother. I feel that I love English more than my brother a lot. I feel the gap". She also referred to psychology to provide a possible interpretation of gender differences in language learning as she explained, "Also when I studied psychology I studied that concept that girls learn the language better than boys." However, it is important to note that neurolinguistic differences between how male and female learners acquire language fall outside the parameters of this study.



Although Basma also referred to the idea of females as multitaskers, she rejected any possible relationship between gender differences and language learning. She indicated, “I think doing language is like a goal and you should accomplish. If you are not accomplishing, that’s because you are not concentrating or you are not interested in this accomplishment but not a gender thing.”

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of key research findings of the questionnaire and interview data presented in Chapter 4, with reference to the two research questions which guided the study. Discussion of the themes inferred from the data collected is presented. The limitations and pedagogical implications of the study are then sketched out. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

### **5.2. First Research Question**

The first research question aimed at investigating the prevalent beliefs Egyptian university students hold about foreign language learning. The results of the beliefs elicited through administering the questionnaire and conducting the interviews revealed interesting findings with regards to the learners' motivation to learn English, the status of both Arabic and English languages in Egypt and the gendered associations they had with English, French and German languages.

#### **5.2.1. Motivation**

The triangulation of the questionnaire and the interview indicated that instrumental motivation is a key factor for motivation for English language learning in Egypt. Participants seemed aware of the importance of English to their future career referring to it as the “dominant language” in Egypt and considering learning it as a “must” or a “necessity” to survive in “the real world,” i.e. the job market. Some participants even lamented the years they spent studying in non-English medium schools such as Arabic or French schools because eventually the job market in Egypt primarily demands English language proficiency. Those participants also indicated that they would not repeat the same “mistake” their parents did i.e. not sending them

to English schools and that they would send their children to international English schools as a “shortcut.”

The results echo the findings of Kobayashi's (2002) and Gayton's (2011) studies which revealed that learners were interested in learning English for the financially rewarding careers it brings about. Within the Egyptian context, the results are also supported by Schaub's (2000) study in which he maintained that instrumental motivation has fueled an interest in studying English in Egypt where many Egyptians associate English with "the promise of more money or better jobs" (p. 228). In fact, although Arabic is the official language of Egypt, English competence has become crucial for Egyptians involved in many sectors of the economy like aviation, tourism and international trade to name a few. Haeri (2003) notes that even for some of the high-ranking positions in state institutions, mastering foreign languages has become mandatory. The results thus suggest that the promise of lucrative job opportunities will most likely continue to be a primary motive for English language learning among Egyptian learners. The high rate of youth unemployment in Egypt provides insight into the participant's instrumental motivation to study English. Assaad and Barsoum (2009) highlight how crucial it is for young adults to secure a decent well-paid job in Egypt since it facilitates their transition not only to career advancement but also to personal independence, family formation and active citizenship.

In addition to being instrumentally motivated, participants also expressed an interest in learning English to communicate with the rest of the world. These findings lend support to a number of L2 motivation studies (Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). Lamb (2004) questioned the feasibility of the instrumental/integrative motivation dichotomy, suggesting that the relationship between both kinds of motivation is complex given the possible overlap between

them. MacIntyre, MacKinnon and Clément (2009), for instance, contend that “there is no good reason to believe that a person who sees the value of the target language as a means of communication and social interaction would not also see the value of the language in instrumental terms” (pp. 58-9).

The results of the present study indicated that participants believed that learning English will not only help them secure job opportunities, but also enable them to connect globally. In fact, participants seemed aware of the concept of English as a lingua franca by referring to English as “the dominant language” and “the language of the world” and by explicitly stating that it is through mastering English that they would be able to communicate with people who do not speak their native language. In this sense, participants in the present study expressed a different pattern of integrative motivation which is traditionally understood as “a positive interpersonal/ affective disposition towards the L2 community and the desire for affiliation with its members” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 96). Instead, participants’ motivation to learn English for communicative purposes aligns with McClelland’s (2000) proposed definition of integrativeness which, he postulates, should focus on “integration with the global community rather than assimilation with native speakers” (p. 109). It is recommended therefore to explore both types of motivation on a continuum rather than two mutually exclusive concepts.

### **5.2.2. Gendered and cultural associations with French and German**

Interestingly, both male and female participants described French with stereotypical adjectives that are usually associated with femininity such as “feminine”, “cute” and “quiet”. Similarly, participants described the way German is pronounced as “tough” and “difficult,” suggesting that male learners would be more interested in learning it. This finding in specific might lend support to Gayton’s

(2011) postulation regarding “the possibility to demonstrate a performance of masculinity through the sounds of [a] language” (p. 138). Interestingly, no gendered associations were ascribed to Arabic language in spite of the fact that some participants noted that standard Arabic is “tough” and “strict”, with one participant noting a resemblance between some Arabic and German sounds, believing they are hard to pronounce such as the /x/ sound.

By triangulating the interview results with those of the questionnaire, gendered associations with French and German were further reinforced. The majority of participants indicated that females were most likely to be interested in studying French. It is important to note that not a single response was recorded for the possibility that males would be more interested than females in studying French. These findings corroborate the earlier cited Carr and Pauwels’s (2006) claim that “French appears to have the monopoly on femininity” (p. 129) and Gayton’s (2011) note of German’s lack of feminine cultural associations as well as the masculine attributes associated with its guttural sounds.

Moreover, stereotypical images of the country in which the target language is spoken seemed to have an effect on learners’ motivation to learn the language. The results revealed that some male participants in the study were learning German because they were planning to travel to Germany to see how the BMW and Mercedes cars are manufactured and benefit from the scholarships available there. This also echoes the results of Gayton’s (2011) study in which participants noted male learners’ interest in learning German as part of their admiration of the German advances in sports and car manufacturing.

Interestingly, similar to participants in Gayton's (2011) study, participants in the present study had neutral gendered associations towards English, or, as one

participant put it, “English is in between.” Although participants in Gayton's (2011) study did have cultural associations with English being the language of entertainment, music and moviemaking, participants in the present study associated English primarily with its potential economic rewards and its communicative function more than any cultural associations.

The findings thus appear to provide interesting insights into participants’ motivations for choice of foreign languages to learn as they seemed to reveal that the phonological aspects of specific foreign languages as well as the stereotypical images of the country of the target language might color how they are perceived by learners and consequently affect their motivation to study those languages.

### **5.2.3. Beliefs about Arabic Language**

Although Arabic was not the initial focus of the present study which targeted eliciting Egyptian university students’ beliefs about foreign language learning, the study yielded significant results regarding their beliefs about the status of Arabic language in Egypt through comparing it to English. First, participants seemed to conflate Standard Arabic (SA) which they learned in school and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) which they mostly use to communicate with fellow Egyptians and is traditionally not written. Standard Arabic (SA) is the official language of the state and used in official settings like political speeches and news broadcasts. Egyptian Colloquial Arabic is a variety that Egyptians acquire from childhood as a mother tongue but never study at school. Some participants, however, seemed aware of the difference between the Arabic they study in school and the Arabic they speak in their everyday lives in spite of their lack of the linguistic terminology used to describe both varieties.

The participants in the study expressed conflicting beliefs about Arabic language in Egypt. Some participants seemed to believe that Arabic has become irrelevant to the context of their future career. One interview participant, for instance, lamented the years he spent studying Standard Arabic which did not seem to benefit him in his current studies in an English-medium university.

Other participants however expressed a concern over Arabic being marginalized and the effect of this possible marginalization on their Egyptian and Islamic identity. They made explicit references to Arabic being the language of the Qur'an as well as their conscious effort to preserve their Arabic language. Arabic to those participants is, as Haeri (2003) puts it, a "sacred language," for which every effort should be exerted to maintain and cherish it. These results are supported by Meyerhoff's (2006) postulation that a language that is not used for daily conversations but is maintained for religious purposes and cultural events does retain a degree of linguistic vitality that secures its long-term maintenance.

Interestingly, participants in Demian's (1989) study, which was also conducted in the same English-medium university, showed a positive attitude towards Arabic which they perceived as "the language of affiliation and interpersonal relations" whereas English was perceived as "the language of school and work" (p. 57). In fact, the results of the present study and that of Demian's (1989) highlight the changes in the beliefs and attitudes of some of Egyptian EFL learners towards Arabic language over the past twenty years and the different factors that contributed to such changes. The findings of the present study therefore indicate that the status of Standard Arabic could have been affected by the rise of English language as a necessary requirement for better work and education in Egypt.

Having said this, it is important to note that the findings of the present study also suggest that despite the rise of English, there are some domains in Egypt where no foreign language can dominate, such as those of the public sector and Islamic practices. These results corroborate Schaub's (2000) postulate that the centrality of Arabic in the daily life of Egyptians would decrease the likelihood of the spread of English into Islamic and governmental business domains in Egypt.

#### **5.2.4. Beliefs about Learning Grammar**

The results of the "beliefs about the nature of language learning" section of the questionnaire indicated that the participants believed that learning grammar rules and vocabulary items along with learning how to use the language to communicate effectively constitute an important part of language learning. The results in the present study therefore correspond to those in Taha's (2002) study in which learners believed that learning vocabulary items was an integral part of language learning and emphasized the importance of grammar in achieving fluency in speaking the target language. Both the results of Taha's (2002) study and those of the present study suggest that language fluency and accuracy should not be perceived in binary oppositions. Instead, it is more enlightening to consider them as two opposite ends of a spectrum where learners are placed according to their proficiency levels in both of them. In fact, the results show that Egyptian language learners are aware of the importance of both aspects in language learning and are keen to attain proficiency in.

### **5.3. Second Research Question**

The second research question posed was "Is there a difference between the beliefs Egyptian male and female language learners hold about language learning? If so, in what ways do they differ?" Overall, no significant differences were found between the beliefs male and female participants had about language learning except



for one questionnaire item regarding studying English in an English-speaking country. Unlike their male peers, a few female participants disagreed with the statement. In an interview, a female participant expressed her concern over being unwelcomed by the host community when studying abroad and reflected on her friends' unpleasant experiences as international students.

Brown's (2009) ethnographic study in which she investigated the failure of communication between a group of postgraduate international students and the host community at a university in the South of England sheds light on the problems international students face when studying abroad. The results of the study revealed that members of the Asian and Muslim cohort were the subject of racial and Islamophobic abuse. For instance, a number of veiled female students, one of which was Egyptian, reported being harassed by members of the host community. Brown (2009) suggests that such attacks might result from the international students' "visible manifestation of affiliation" (p. 448) which did not align with that of the host community. Another possible reason for some female students' rejection of the idea of studying abroad is that the idea of young females travelling alone to study or live abroad is still not welcomed by the majority of the Egyptian society, which is quite conservative about the lifestyle Egyptian females are expected to lead. This analysis is supported by Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, and El-Gibaly (2003) who assert that, unlike their male counterparts, some Egyptian females experience restrictions on their mobility by the age of puberty.

The lack of significant differences between the beliefs of male and female participants in the present study corresponds to the results of Demian's (1989) study in which both male and female participants expressed similar attitudes and motivation to learn English. One interpretation such lack of gender-based differences is that

Egyptian learners' motivation to invest in learning English seems to outweigh any possible gender differences that might exist between the participants.

Sieverding (2012) contends that the Egyptian society has always considered females' participation in the workforce as a choice while males' participation is seen as a necessity economic and social wise which contributes to "the fulfillment of widely held gendered ideals" (p. 1). Yet, the equal degree of motivation among male and female students in the present study suggests a possible change in such socially prescribed gender roles in Egypt. Amr, El Gilany and El-Hawary (2008) , who investigated the gender differences between Egyptian male and female medical students but found no significant differences between both groups of students, provide an explanation for such a change. They posit that globalization and exposure to Western culture have given rise to alternative gender ideologies in Egypt.

In this sense, it might be more enlightening, perhaps, not to think of the participants in this study as members of two opposite groups based on sex and gender differences. Instead, it is more informative to consider them as members of a community of practice; that of the Academic English for Freshman (AEF) program. Eckert (2005) defines a community of practice as a group of people who share a common interest that brings them together regularly and who, during their gatherings, develop their own practices which "involve the construction of a shared orientation to the world around them" (p. 16). Accordingly, participants in the present study are freshman students studying in an English-medium university who, irrespective of their gender, share a similar interest in learning English to increase their chances of accessing speech communities that do not speak their mother tongue and securing lucrative job opportunities once they graduate.

#### **5.4. Limitations of the Study**

There were a number of limitations when conducting the present study, most noteworthy of which is the fact that male participants outnumbered the female participants. Such an unbalanced number of participants in each group of students might have affected the results especially with regard to gender differences. It is advisable thus that researchers in future studies recruit a sample that is as representative as possible of the target population. The limited number of interview participants constituted another limitation to the study since only few questionnaire participants expressed an interest in being interviewed.

Bernat and Lyloid (2007) postulate that “there is evidence to suggest that learner beliefs differ by institutional context” (p. 88). Accordingly, the institutional context in which the present study was conducted might be considered a limitation to generalizing its findings. The English-medium university context in which the participants studied might have affected their language learning beliefs especially their motivation to learn English and their conflicting beliefs about the relevance of studying Arabic to their future careers. It is important to note that students in the Academic English for Freshman (AEF) program are not typical ESL students. This is because their language proficiency is considered advanced enough to allow them to enroll in two core classes while attending their language classes, which focus primarily on improving their academic writing and presentation skills with no explicit grammar or vocabulary instruction.

The final, and perhaps most important, limitation noted is the fact that almost one quarter of the population of the study used to live abroad before starting their university studies in Egypt which might have resulted in data contamination. Consequently, caution should be exercised in attempting to generalize the findings of

the present study beyond its population. In fact, the relatively small sample size of the study is another limitation to generalizing its findings. However, it is important to note that, from the outset, the study did not aim at generalizing findings to all Egyptian university students. Rather, the study aimed primarily at looking closely at Egyptian students' beliefs about language learning in one specific context: that of freshman advanced students studying academic English at a private English-medium university in Egypt. In this sense, such a perceived limitation may also be considered as a strength of the study.

### **5.5. Pedagogical Implications**

Horwitz (1987) recommends using the BALLI as a discussion stimulus in language classes which helps in providing insights into developing a rigorous curriculum that appeals to learners' different beliefs and expectations. Similarly, Dörnyei (2005) suggests that periodical administration of the BALLI helps as a consciousness-raising tool for learners to understand the nature of language learning. Another implication that is specific to the context of the study is incorporating a business English component into the AEF curriculum given that learning English for better careers constitute a main source of motivation for participants in the study. This could be beneficial to the students especially when they apply for internships.

Moreover, identifying possible gendered associations the students may have towards a specific foreign language can provide teachers with an understanding of students' choices to study specific languages and inform foreign language material designers on how to address such associations. It is also recommended to address language learning beliefs in teacher training programs by raising the student teacher's awareness of the possible impact such beliefs have on their students' expectations of language teaching approaches. Teachers are encouraged to consider the gender

dynamics along with the institutional and social contexts in which their learners are situated to better understand the factors shaping their learners' language learning beliefs.

### **5.6. Suggestions for Further Research**

The exploratory nature of the present study yields a myriad of ideas for further academic research. It would be worthy of investigation, for instance, to compare the beliefs of learners attending mixed classes to those attending single-sex classes and note any possible gender differences. Studying learners' beliefs across different language proficiency levels and age groups would provide insight into the degree to which learners' language proficiency level and age shape their ideas and expectations about language learning. Similarly, investigating both learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning would provide significant results for pedagogical implications. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine how learners' beliefs about language learning progress over the course of time and language instruction. It is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to investigate the possible changes in learners' beliefs about Arabic in Egypt especially when they join the labor force and recognize the necessity of mastering both Arabic and English, rather than English only, to advance their careers in the local and international job markets.

Gendered associations with foreign languages provide a promising area for further research. It would be interesting to conduct a comparative study examining the gendered and cultural associations native speakers of Arabic have with their L1 and those of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) learners.

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## Appendix A

Modified Beliefs About Language Learning Questionnaire with Demographic Data  
Questionnaire and the Suggested “Gendered Associations with Specific Languages”

### Section

**What is your gender?**    Male    Female

**What is your age?**

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**What is your nationality?**

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**How long have you been living in Egypt?**

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**What language(s) do you speak at home with your family?**

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**What field of study are you planning to major in?**

- Business
- Global Affairs and Public Policy
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Sciences and Engineering
- Other

**What high school degree do you hold?**

- American Diploma
- French Baccalaureate
- German Abitur
- IGCSE
- Thanaweya Amma

**Directions:** Below are some beliefs that people have about learning foreign languages. Read each statement and then decide if you: (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) neither agree nor disagree (4) agree (5) strongly agree. There are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your opinions. Mark each answer on this sheet. Questions 20 and 21 are slightly different and you should mark it as indicated.

<b>Example: If you strongly agree with the following statement, write this:</b> The weather is too cold these days.	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
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**REMEMBER:**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages .	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I have a special ability for learning foreign language .	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Egyptians are good at learning foreign languages.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages .	1	2	3	4	5
7.	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent .	1	2	3	4	5
8.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one .	1	2	3	4	5

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9.	English is easier to learn than other languages.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures (e.g. American, British) in order to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country (e.g. USA, UK).	1	2	3	4	5
12.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words and grammar rules.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to use the language to communicate effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	In Egypt, people think highly of people who speak English well.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Although Arabic is the official language of Egypt, learning English is a must.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people from other countries better.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	1	2	3	4	5



20. Look at the list of 4 foreign languages below; indicate whether you think males or females would be more likely to be interested in learning that language:

	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>No difference</b>
<b>1. Arabic</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>2. English</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>3. French</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>4. German</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. In my opinion, the most important thing about learning English language is

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**Thank You for your Cooperation ☺**

## **Appendix B**

### Interview Questions

1. Why are you interested in studying in an English-medium university?
2. Do you enjoy your classes the Academic English Program? Why/why not?
3. What suggestions do you have to make language learning more interesting to you?
4. What foreign languages, other than English, did you study at school? Why did you choose to study them?
5. What type of schools will you send your kids to (national, language, international...)? Why?
6. Are you planning to stay in an English-speaking country in the future?
7. In your opinion, what is the best way to master a foreign language?
8. There is a popular belief that females are better language learners than males, do you agree with this statement or disagree? Why?

## Appendix C

### Consent Form



### **Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study**

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**Project Title:** Egyptian University Students Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning: An Exploratory Study

**Principal Investigator:**

HebatAllah Mohamed; hebamohamed@aucegypt.edu

\*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to investigate Egyptian learners' beliefs about English language learning and the possible effect gender has on shaping those beliefs., and the findings may be published and presented. The expected duration of your participation is 10-15 minutes.

The procedures of the research will be as follows :

1. You will answer the questionnaire items.
2. You will be invited to volunteer to sit for an interview.

\*There *will NOT be* certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

\*There *will NOT be* benefits to you from this research.

\*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential.

\*The data and recording will be saved on a password-protected computer to be only seen by the researcher.

\*Questions about the research, your rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to HebatAllah Mohamed at 2651-1932

\*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

## Appendix D

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

CASE #2014-2015-78



To: HebatAllah Mohamed  
Cc: Sara Tarek  
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB  
Date: Feb 2, 2015  
Re: Approval of study

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This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled **“Language Learning Beliefs and Gender Dynamics of University Students in Egypt: An Exploratory Study”** and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Amr Salama. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

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T: 02-26151919  
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