

● Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that Iranian high-school students held various beliefs and opinions about English language learning. The highest means in all belief categories were in the category of motivation and expectations which suggests that the students were motivated to learn English. Also, they held strong beliefs in using learning strategies. Male and female students' beliefs were found to be slightly different but the difference was not statistically significant. Consistent with Horwitz's (1988) suggestion that certain beliefs about language learning would facilitate or restrict the students' language learning abilities, the results of this study showed that in some cases, high school students had restricted views of language learning which can influence their learning process. For example, the overwhelming majority of the students believed that language learning is mostly a matter of learning the vocabulary and grammar or how to translate into their mother tongue. Gaining insights into the students' beliefs about language learning can lead language teachers to more effective instructional planning and implementation. They can try to modify the students' misconceptions and erroneous beliefs that restrict learning and foster positive beliefs that facilitate it. Since the students in this study reported strong motivational beliefs for learning the English language, the teachers can direct the students' motivation to the right path and use it as a lever to improve their students' language learning abilities.

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permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on". Sixty percent of the participants agreed with this statement. It seems that the students held somewhat contradictory beliefs with regard to this category. This category received a relatively high mean average (M= 3.76, N= 462, SD= 1.16) suggesting that the respondents were willing to use certain strategies in learning a second language.

✓ *Motivation and expectations*

The last category, motivation and expectations, concerns the desire and expectation for language learning opportunities. Eighty-two percent of the students believed in finding better job opportunities after learning English. This is consistent with the findings of Horwitz (1999) who found overwhelming agreement of EFL learners' with this item. When the students were asked whether they would want to speak the language to get to know the native speakers better, seventy-five percent agreed. Also, sixty-five percent of the participants stated that they liked to have native speaker friends and ninety percent agreed that they wanted to learn English well. The highest mean average among all belief categories

was in motivation and expectations category (M= 4.08, N= 462, SD= 1.16) which indicates that high-school students were both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn English.

✓ *Gender-related differences*

The independent samples t-test was done to investigate the existence of any significant differences between male and female beliefs about language learning. The results of the t-tests indicated no significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between boys' and girls' responses to the BALLI items (Table 1). This implies that high-school students' beliefs about language learning are not influenced by gender. This result is in agreement with the findings of Tercanlioglu (2005) and Ustunel and Samur (2010) but contrary to those of Bernat and Lloyd (2007) and Siebert (2003) who found significant differences in male and female beliefs in some of the BALLI items. This might be explained by the fact that gender roles are heavily influenced by culture and social contexts. Yet, more research on the effect of gender factor on language learning beliefs in the Iranian EFL context need to be conducted since the results in this regard are not still decisive.

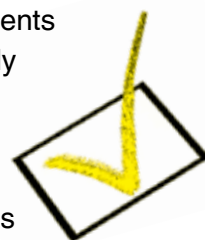
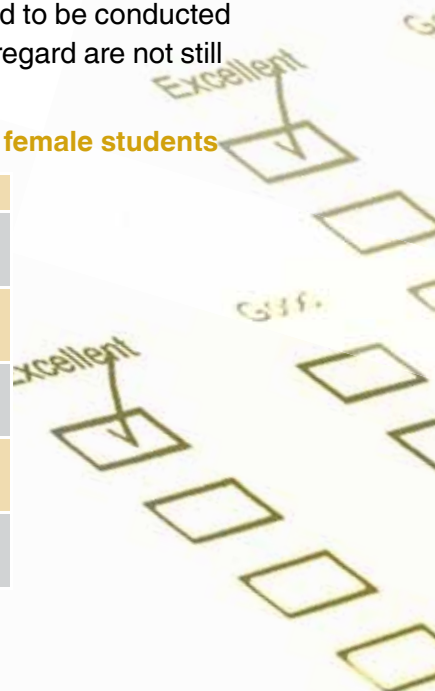


Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and t-test results for male and female students

Categories	Groups	M	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
Beliefs about foreign language aptitude	Female	3.52	.56	.58
	Male	3.35	.70	
Beliefs about the difficulty of language learning	Female	3.54	.54	.70
	Male	3.70	.41	
Beliefs about the nature of language learning	Female	3.76	.14	.97
	Male	3.75	.13	
Beliefs about learning and communication strategies	Female	3.78	.25	.89
	Male	3.73	.28	
Beliefs about motivation and expectations	Female	4.07	.31	.89
	male	4.09	.32	

* $p < 0.05$



of the students believed that they would learn to speak English very well. The mean average of this category was 3.61 (N=462, SD= 1.14) which implies that the students as a whole believed in the concept of relative difficulty of language learning.

✓ *Foreign language aptitude*

The category of foreign language aptitude considers the general existence of a special ability for language learning and beliefs about the characteristics of successful language learners. Seventy-six percent of the students believed that some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages. However, forty-nine percent agreed that they had a special ability for learning foreign languages. This indicates that many Iranian high-school students have fairly positive estimates of their own language learning abilities. When asked whether it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one, fifty-seven percent agreed and twenty-five percent were neutral. Also, fifty-nine percent of the participants believed that people who speak more than one language are very intelligent. The mean average of this category was lowest among all belief categories (M= 3.43, N= 462, SD= 1.15), but revealed that the participants tended to acknowledge the existence of language learning gift and agreed that speaking two languages indicates intelligence.

✓ *The nature of language learning*

BALLI items on the nature of language learning, concern issues related to the nature of the language learning process. Half of the students believed that knowing about culture is important

in foreign language learning. Contrary to the common belief that it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country, only sixty-five percent of the students agreed with this notion. The majority of the students (89%) perceived learning vocabulary as the most important part of language learning, sixty percent favoured grammar, and fifty-nine percent supported translation. Also, half of them believed that language learning involves a lot of memorization. These beliefs and the fact that they are supported by a considerable number of the participants are probably reflecting the prevalence of grammar-translation method in their English classes (Dolati & Seliman, 2011). The mean average of this category was 3.75 (N= 462, SD= 1.12) which suggests that the students had certain approaches, such as focusing on grammar or vocabulary, in English language learning.

✓ *Learning and communication strategies*

Items in the category of learning and communication strategies refer to various strategies learners use to master a second or foreign language. The majority of the students believed in the importance of repetition and practice. Eighty-two percent stressed the importance of speaking with an excellent pronunciation. When the students were asked to comment on the items, “You shouldn’t say anything in English until you can say it correctly” and “It’s OK to guess if you don’t know a word in English”, half of the students disagreed. It can be concluded that the students are aware of the importance of guessing and the inevitability of making mistakes in language learning. However, these beliefs are in contrast with their responses to the statement “If beginning students were

language learning beliefs of students as relates to their gender.

Method

● *Participants*

Four hundred and sixty-two high-school students from different cities in Iran participated in this study. Two-hundred and fifty-two students were female and two-hundred and ten students comprised the male group. Their age ranged from 14 to 18 years. The sample included students of the first grade in high school (25%), second grade (24%), third grade (30%) and fourth grade (21%). All students had studied English for at least three years at junior high-school and they were at a lower intermediate level of proficiency.

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● *Instrumentation*

The instrument in this study was the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI, ESL/EFL version) developed by Horwitz (1987). The BALLI assesses learners' beliefs within five categories: the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations. Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The inventory was translated into Persian by the researchers. A few questions regarding demographic information were also added to the questionnaire. Cronbach alpha reliability for the translated version

was found to be .66.

● *Procedure*

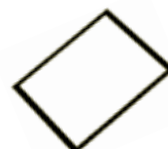
The questionnaire was administered during students' regular class time in February and March 2012 by their English teachers. Before the administration procedure, a brief explanation on the purpose of the study was given to the students. The gathered data were analyzed using SPSS version 18.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed. To find out the significance of the difference between male and female students' responses, independent sample t-tests were run.

Results and Discussion

● *Descriptive analyses of the belief categories*

The results of the descriptive analyses of the five categories of the BALLI are presented and discussed in this section: the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations.

✓ *The difficulty of language learning*
BALLI items on the difficulty of language learning category concern the general difficulty of learning a foreign language. The students showed seventy-two percent endorsement of the idea that some languages are easier to learn than others. This is in line with Horwitz's (1988) result in which the Asian learners' agreement with this item ranged from 63% to 72%. Forty-six percent agreed on the statement "It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language". Also, fifty-two percent





Introduction

Since the mid 1980s, the growing interest in the role of individual learners in language learning led researchers to investigate affective variables as a means of explaining success differences in learning a foreign or second language. Learners' beliefs about language learning are among these affective factors which have been explored and investigated for more than twenty years in the field of second language acquisition.

Language learning beliefs have been defined as "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). Barcelos (2000) defines belief as a way of perceiving the world that generates confidence to act upon matters accepted as true, but which may be questioned in the future. Beliefs in such a contextual approach are dynamic, socially constructed, situated, paradoxical and related to action. Learning beliefs tend to shape students' perceptions as well as influencing what students do in the classroom. He suggests that teachers should understand beliefs as resources the students use to make sense of their context and to deal with it. Horwitz (1999) also insists that it is important to understand learner beliefs in order to better understand learner approaches to language learning, and learners' use of learning strategies to better plan language instruction.

So far, belief studies have been mostly concentrated on English language learners' beliefs using BALLI as the instrument in different ESL and EFL contexts. These studies have investigated

the link between beliefs and gender (Diab, 2006; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), language proficiency (Abedini et al., 2011), language learning strategies (Yang, 1999), the effect of culture on beliefs (Horwitz, 1999), and the dimensions underlying language learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaines, 1999).

Regarding the gender factor, Tercanlioglu (2005) found that the difference between males' and females' beliefs was not statistically significant. However, Siebert's (2003) BALLI-based study, examining international university students in the United States, showed significant gender-related differences. Also, Bacon and Finnemann (1992; cited in Rieger, 2009) found that the women in their study were more motivated, more open to authentic input and had a more positive attitude to target language speakers. Furthermore, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) found significant differences in male and female beliefs in only two BALLI items.

To date, most of belief studies in Iran have focused on the relationship between learners' beliefs and learning strategy use or language proficiency (Ghabanchi & Meidani, 2012; Ghavamnia Kassian Dabaghi, 2011; Dehghan Harati, 2011; Yamini and Dehghan, 2005; Zare-ee, 2010; Khodadadi, 2009; Abedini et al., 2011). These studies have been done almost exclusively with students at tertiary levels. Also, there has been a scarcity of empirical research that investigate the difference between beliefs of Iranian male and female students. Therefore, this study aimed to (a) investigate the language learning beliefs of Iranian high-school students, and (b) to compare the

High School Students' Beliefs About Language Learning

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چکیده

تحقیق حاضر به بررسی باورهای دانش‌آموزان دبیرستانی درباره یادگیری زبان انگلیسی می‌پردازد. این تحقیق همچنین امکان وجود تفاوت میان باورهای دانش‌آموزان دختر و پسر را مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد. ۴۶۲ نفر دانش‌آموز دختر و پسر دبیرستانی از ده استان مختلف کشور، به نسخه فارسی پرسش‌نامه باورهای زبان‌آموزی پاسخ دادند. آمار توصیفی نشان داد که دانش‌آموزان باورهای مختلفی درباره یادگیری زبان انگلیسی دارند. بالاترین میانگین در میان زیرگروه‌های پرسش‌نامه باور، در زیرگروه انگیزه و انتظارات زبان‌آموزی دیده شد که نشانگر انگیزه بالای دانش‌آموزان برای آموختن زبان است. هیچ تفاوت معناداری میان باورهای دانش‌آموزان دختر و پسر یافت نشد. کاربردهای آموزشی نتایج تحقیق در انتها توضیح داده شده است.

کلیدواژه‌ها: زبان‌آموزی، باورهای زبان‌آموزی، پرسش‌نامه باور

Abstract

The present study investigates high-school students' beliefs about English language learning. It also addresses the possible difference between males and females regarding their language learning beliefs. The participants (n=462) completed the Persian version of Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Descriptive analyses of the students' responses to the BALLI items revealed that the students held various beliefs concerning English language learning. The highest means in all belief categories belonged to the category of motivation and expectations which suggests high motivational beliefs among students. No gender-related differences were found in the students' beliefs. The educational implications of the results are also discussed.

Key Words: language learning, beliefs about language learning, BALLI.