

Evaluation of English Students' Beliefs about Learning English as Foreign Language: A Case of Kerman Azad University

Neda Fatehi Rad

E-mail: nedafatehi@yahoo.com

Islamic Azad University Kerman Branch, (Iran)

Abstract

In general term beliefs has been defined as an attitudes, opinion and viewpoint which attends in every discipline of human behavior to say that something is true or right and vice versa [1]. In academic definition it can be stated as a learners' viewpoint, judgment or opinion about the influence of their learning in their future success. In other words it means that what would be students' feelings about what they learn as a foreign students and how it helps them to achieve better proficiency in English. For many years researchers have attempted to examine all aspects of English language learning effects. Finally, they found that each individual student has its own perception and cognition about the strategies that has been used by teachers [3, 4 & 5].

Nowadays, English is becoming more important nowadays. More than 300 million people are speaking as native speakers and more than 400 million as second or foreign language speakers. Furthermore English is applying in majority academic situations such as instruction in publishing and international communication [6]. Therefore it can be serious issue to understand, analyze and test English language students beliefs and perception about learning English in order to intensify students' expertise. So that, this study is developed to probe what will be English Language Major Student's beliefs about learning English as foreign not second language. In other words this survey attempted to examine the correlation between students' beliefs, attitudes and norms and students learning. Also, assessing the influence of gender, age and field of study was examined. In order to reach the purpose of this study a sample of 100 English students was selected randomly by researcher from both fields (Literature and Teaching). The data collection method was adapted questionnaire which has been tested before. The results of this study showed to what extend independent variables (age, gender and field of study) affects dependents variables (students beliefs about English leaning) and how learning language strategies that has been applied by teachers influence students learning. Moreover by applying those analyzed information instructors and teachers will be aware of their strengths and weaknesses to up to date and to come up with new strategies which are appropriate to their students.

Key Words: English language aptitude, The difficulty of language learning, The nature of language learning, The learning and communication strategies.

Introduction

Second language researchers believed that EFL/ESL learners bring their norms, attitudes, perception and experiences into the learning task process and learning strategies [7].Accordingly based on them these factors are considered as beliefs variables that are related to the nature of language. In academic discipline beliefs has critical role in human behaviors. From psychology viewpoint beliefs in learning

process have lots of elements in component of cognitive knowledge. Therefore in recent years the researchers switched from teachers' role to the students' functions as second language learners, because it has been proven that learners' attitude and perspective will influence not only the way that they attempt to learn English but also the method that will be used by them. Language experts identified that during the process of learning English as a second language, students bring complex issues such as beliefs, attitudes, norms and expectation into the course syllabus. Based on psychological overview beliefs are considered as a main subject in human science concepts which cope extremely with individuals' behavior in learning [7]. Based on the related researches, each second language learner has his/her beliefs and thought about language learning and many factors will have opportunity to affects students beliefs and they can be considered as affective factors [8]. Previous research about ESL students and Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) proved that there are specific feature about students' beliefs for ESL learners which are: i) English language aptitude; ii) the difficulty of language learning; iii) the nature of language learning; iv) learning and communication strategies; and, v) motivation and expectations [8]. Also, adequate evidences demonstrated that these items influence ESL learners' ability and proficiency in English in long term [8, 9 & 10]. Aptitude, attitude, norms and perceptions have the potential to affect learners' language learning process, their motivation and their ability to cope with English as a second language. Consequently, they can consider as push or pull factor to help learners' ultimate success in attainment of new language in shorter time [11]. To provide more evidence for the influence of beliefs on learners acquisition ability more studies have been found that the learners who have positive and realistic beliefs about learning English reached higher proficiency in English compare to those did not have [11 & 12]. These researches were completely fit to the first research in this area which believed that there was a direct link between BALLI and ESL learners' ability [12].

The first goal of this study was to examine the BALLI test among Iranian students of Kerman Azad University as EFL not ESL learners in order to find out is there any gap between students learning process and their beliefs or not. Furthermore, in order to establish a comparison between this survey finding and U.S or UK university research individual demographic factors (age, gender, field of study) was also examined to analyze the affective factors and their degree of influence on students beliefs. [11 & 12]. Finally the researchers proposed the following research questions:

What are the students' beliefs about learning English language as a foreign language in Kerman Azad University?

What are the effects of gender, age, field of study on EFL learners of Kerman Azad University?

Method

The sample was randomly selected from among English EFL learners of Kerman Azad University from both current field of study, literature and teaching. The 100 participants in this survey represented both genders and variety of ages between eighteen and twenty five.

The instrument has been used in this survey is adoptive questionnaire in BALLI from previous study to collect information on language learners' beliefs [8]. Originally, the questionnaire consists of 34-items which are related to five areas i) English language aptitude; ii) the difficulty of language learning; iii) the nature of language learning; iv) learning and communication strategies; and, v) motivation and expectations. The questionnaire designed based on five point Likert scale which measures respondents' interest according to their level of agreement or disagreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition to modify and assess the level of reliability of adapted questionnaire a pilot test was

conducted on six students as the test sample. The feedback from the pretest showed that the questionnaire was completely appropriate for research aims. Also Cronbach alpha of this study is 0.74 which shows acceptable consistency of reliability. The collected data was analyzed by using the statistical methods include correlation analysis, reliability measures, mean analysis and regression analysis.

Data Analysis

EFL Students’ General Beliefs about Learning English as a Foreign Language

To assess the students beliefs about learning English a foreign language the mean analysis conducted in order to measure five-Likert mean of respondents rating. According to Likert scale 1 represent high level of disagreement and 5 indicates high degree of agreement. Therefore according to the filled up questionnaire the mean calculated. To elaborate result more understandable mean analysis categorized into 4 parts which represents level of students beliefs. Table 1 represents the level of each categorized group diversification.

Table 1. Scope of students beliefs as a EFL students

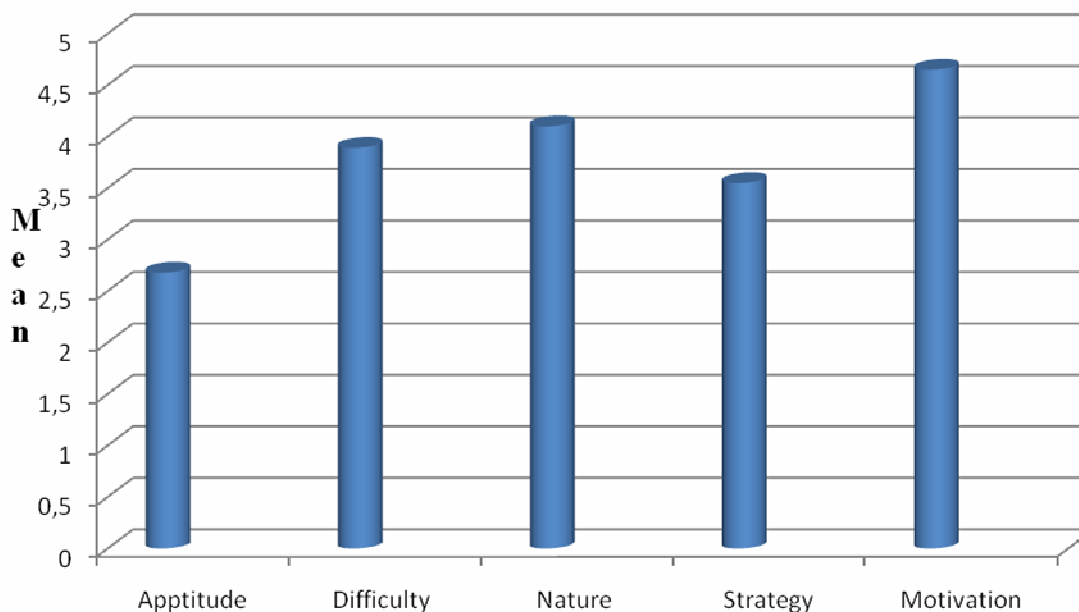
Score Range	Level of beliefs
1.00-1.99	Weak
2.00-2.99	Neutral
3.00-3.99	Strong
4.00-5.00	Very Strong

The mean of Students’ beliefs about learning English represented in Table 2 and Figure 1. As it can be seen students have strong beliefs about motivation item (4.65) whereas they carry lowest degree on aptitude factor (2.68). This finding shows that EFL students believed that the motivation factors have a great role on their learning process while the aptitude items did not consider as their main concern. Accordingly applying motivation factor to encourage ESL/EFL students has a significant relationship with their success [13]. Moreover it has been believed that any improvement in motivation factors directly influences students’ efforts to attain effectiveness in the learning process objective.

Table2. Analysis of students’ beliefs in learning English as a foreign language

Area	Mean	Standard deviation
English language aptitude	2.68	0.27
The difficulty of English language learning	3.89	0.44
Learning and communication strategies	3.55	0.45
Motivation & expectation	4.65	0.63

Figure 1. Means for the five items of students’ beliefs in learning English as a foreign Language



Students' Beliefs in Learning English as a Foreign Language according to Gender

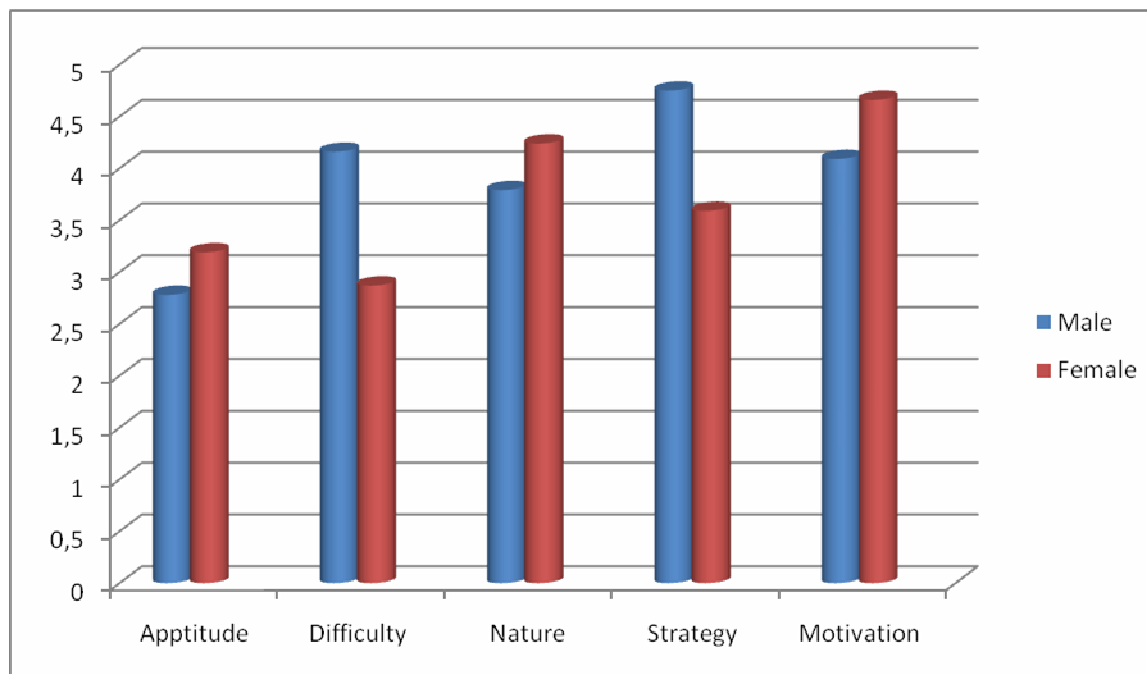
In Table 3 and Figure 2 the mean analysis result of students' beliefs about learning English and its relationship with gender is represented. As it is obvious in results female students have higher mean in three items compare to male students which are English language aptitude, the nature of language learning and motivation and expectation. However by applying regression to test significant relationship between gender and five aspects of mentioned model is revealed. The result was significant for all five beliefs items. English language aptitude, $\beta=0.35$, $p=0.01$; nature of language learning, $\beta =0.49$, $p=0.01$, learning and communication strategy, $\beta=1.96$, $p=0.01$, difficulty of learning language strategy $\beta=3.87$, $p=0.01$ and motivation $\beta=2.87$, $p=0.73$; indicated significant relationship. In other words the regression analysis implied that there are differences between male and female (gender) beliefs about learning English in all aspects of [8] model. It means that both genders that are under this survey analysis did have significant concern in terms of proposal items. The results showed that male student's beliefs have higher concern about difficulty of language learning and learning communication strategy compare to female, while female students carry higher mean value in three remained factors.

Table 3. Analysis of students' beliefs in learning English as a foreign language according to gender

Item	Male		Female	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
English language aptitude	2.78	0.38	3.19	0.22
The difficulty of English language learning	4.16	0.22	2.87	0.64
The nature of language learning	3.79	0.45	4.24	0.46
Learning and communication strategies	4.75	0.39	3.59	0.54
Motivation and expectation	4.09	0.56	4.66	0.31

Figure 2. Means for the five aspects of students' beliefs in learning English as a foreign

Language according to gender



To justify why male and female students have differences in their beliefs about mentioned items , the study by [14] proved that two parts of female brain (Broca and Wernicke lobes) are obviously larger in women, that provide them higher ability in language learning thoughts, and also found that psychologically men' reflection to the communication skills and communication program is more positive than female students and male students believed that by more addressing learning and communication strategies they directly help their actual language learning practices [15]. In case of English language aptitude, nature of language learning and motivation female students showed higher agreement with previous study which released that female students in Azad University reflect consistency between those items and their genders and it may comes from cultural influences, regional backgrounds and external factors from society. [8]

EFL Students' Beliefs in Learning English as a Foreign Language according to Field of Study

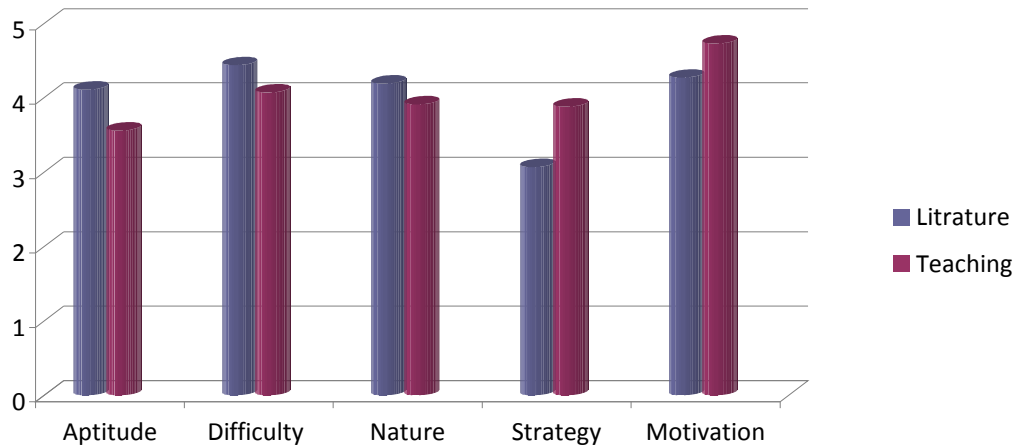
As it can be seen in Table 4 and Figure 3, the mean analysis of students' beliefs about learning language and its relation with students' fields of study indicated that the literature students carried higher mean in the first three elements: English language aptitude, the difficulty of English language learning and the nature of language learning aspects of Beliefs about foreign language compare to the teaching students. In the other hand the teaching students' posses higher mean in learning and communication strategies and motivation compare to literature students. Hypothesis testing and regression analysis supported mean analysis result and represented that the differences were significant for English language aptitude, $\beta =0.66$, $p=0.00$ for literature students and $\beta =0.55$, $p=0.00$ for teaching students; the difficulty of English language learning for literature students, $\beta =0.83$, $p=0.00$ and for teaching student, $\beta =0.40$, $p=0.00$, for the nature of language learning, literature students $\beta =0.63$, $p=0.00$ and $\beta =0.31$, $p=0.00$ for teaching

students proved that there were significant differences between literature and teaching student beliefs according to their course of study. For learning and communication strategy, $\beta = 0.76$, $p = 0.00$ for literature and $\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.00$ for teaching students, and finally for motivation, literature student $\beta = 0.59$, $p = 0.00$ and $\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.00$ for teaching students, represented the significant relationship between these two groups and their beliefs as well.

Table 4. Analysis of students' beliefs in learning English as a foreign language according to field of study

Item	Literature Students		Teaching Student	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
English Language aptitude	4.11	0.28	3.56	0.47
The difficulty of English language learning	4.44	0.44	4.07	0.64
The nature of language learning	4.19	0.51	3.91	0.24
Learning and communication strategies	3.07	0.37	3.88	0.17
Motivation	4.27	0.29	4.73	0.33

Figure 3. Means for the five aspects of students' beliefs in learning English as a foreign language according to the field of study. According to the result, literature students have stronger beliefs about the first three items of study. It



shows that they believed that sub items in those three parts are most important parts to create beliefs about learning language as a foreign language. This study also supported that based on the environmental factor in every society different English major showed different beliefs [2]. It seems that literature students are more motivated and interested in those three aspects (aptitude, difficulty, and nature) and they apply them during their learning process. For motivation and strategy items, teaching students showed higher responsiveness to strategy use which reflects their overview about those items based on their beliefs about their future job as an English teacher, and the role of market environmental factors on their beliefs about motivation represents why they have higher mean value compare to the literature students.

The Relationship between the EFL Students' Beliefs in Learning English as a Foreign Language and Age

To assess the relationship between age and beliefs about learning English correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicated that there were no significant relationship between age and beliefs about learning language in all five aspects. English language aptitude, $r = -0.50$, $p = 0.41$; difficulty of English language learning, $r = -0.23$, $p = 0.30$; nature of language learning, $r = -0.12$, $p = 0.19$; learning and communication strategies, $r = -0.02$, $p = 0.63$; and, motivation, $r = -0.46$, $p = 0.31$. These figures implied that from the students' overview age did not consider as an interval factor. In other words there is no significant difference between younger and older students' beliefs about learning English language.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provided adequate information about current student of Kerman Azad University. The results showed that the students general beliefs about learning English as a foreign language according to English language aptitude was slightly neutral, regarding Difficulty of English language and learning and communication strategy was slightly strong and for motivation and nature of English language aspect was strongly agree.

This study also found that gender influence students belief about learning language. The female students of Azad University believed that learning English strategies and courses would be easy to them, and male student tendency to have and use superior and higher communication technology and strategies to learn English. The comparison between field of study and students beliefs showed that literature students beliefs about three aspects of study English as a foreign language (aptitude ,difficulty, and nature) is located at higher level than teaching students whereas for motivation and strategy items teaching students showed higher responsiveness . It probably comes from motivational factor in society about this major or the future of this field of study in job market. Finally data implied that age does not affect Azad University students' beliefs in learning English as a foreign language.

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