

**BELIEFS ABOUT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN IN-SERVICE AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS**

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ABSTRACT

Beliefs have been considered to have a crucial importance in learning and teaching process. Pajares (1992) notes that an individual's behaviour is strongly affected by beliefs because beliefs are selecting the cognitive tools with which we interpret, plan, and make decisions. Therefore, teachers' beliefs and similarly learners' beliefs about language learning play an important role in teaching and learning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), since learners' beliefs include opinions about different aspects of language learning, these can have an influence on their attitudes, motivation and learning strategies. Horwitz (1987, 199) also found that knowing learners' beliefs helps teachers understand learners' strategies and their approaches to language learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs of in-service and pre-service teachers, and reveal the differences between them. The study was carried out with 60 students (preservice teachers) and 6 instructors (in-service teacher). In order to collect information on students' language learning beliefs, Horwitz's (1987) 34-item Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) which assesses learners' beliefs in five major areas was used. To gather data about teachers' beliefs, a semi-structured interview which consists of seven questions covering the major areas in the questionnaire was held. This study has identified important language-learning-related beliefs of Turkish in-service and pre-service teachers. The study revealed that there are several differences in in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning in five major areas: (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) the difficulty of language leaning; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations.

Keywords: Beliefs About Language Learning; Learner Beliefs; Teacher Beliefs; BALLI; Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory

INTRODUCTION

There have been various studies investigating the observable factors that affect language learning and teaching. Researchers have worked on different techniques, strategies or theories having significant roles in these areas for many years, but recently there has been a growing interest in the cognitive side of language learning and teaching. In this respect beliefs have been considered to have a crucial importance in learning and teaching process. Richardson (2003) defines belief as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 2). Pajares (1992) also notes that an individual's behavior is strongly affected by beliefs because beliefs are selecting the cognitive tools with which we interpret, plan, and make decisions. Therefore, teachers' belief about language learning play an important role in teaching and similarly, learners' beliefs about language learning play an important role in learning.

Teachers' beliefs are important in understanding their cognitive processes and instructional practices. Their beliefs in language learning affect their way of teaching. The way teachers act spontaneously or the actions resulting from the habits are affected by a deep-rooted belief system, which shows that teachers' beliefs about language learning affects everything teachers do in the classroom (Marion Williams et al., 1997). Clark and Peterson (1986) remark that their decision-making and planning processes, the materials they choose, their relationships

with the students and the approaches they adopt are affected by the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. Borg (2003) states that these beliefs are derived from various sources, including individual personality, prior learning experiences as students, and teaching practices. Experience of teaching, personality factors, educationally-based or research-based principles, and principles derived from an approach or method are also believed to have influence in teachers' belief formation and development (Richards and Lockhart, 1996). Pajares (1992) also emphasizes the importance of teachers' beliefs on the way they plan their lesson, decisions they make and their general classroom practice. For example, if a teacher believes that it is very important to learn new vocabulary in language learning process, s/he spends more probably more time in teaching new vocabulary in her/his classes. For these reasons the study of teachers' beliefs has become an essential part in understanding teachers' cognitive processes (Fenstermacher, 1979).

Learners' beliefs on language learning can also affect language learning process as well as teachers' beliefs. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), since learners' beliefs include opinions about different aspects of language learning, these can have an influence on their attitudes, motivation and learning strategies. Horwitz (1987, 1999) also found that knowing learners' beliefs helps teachers to understand learners' strategies and their approaches to language learning. According to Victori and Lockhart (1995), beliefs about language learning consist of "general assumptions that learners hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language teaching" (p. 224). For some researchers, learners' beliefs play an important role in their motivation as well. Hall (2011) believes that since learners' perceptions influence their motivation a lot, their beliefs and motivation are related to each other. Learners' beliefs affect their attitudes towards language and play a role in their language learning motivation (Csizér&Dörnyei, 2005).

Besides positive effects, some of these beliefs held by learners may have damaging effects on their learning. However, when we talk about pre-service teachers' beliefs, the issue gains more importance because pre-service teachers come to teacher training programs with well-established beliefs about learning and teaching. Pre-service teachers also hold certain beliefs about language learning while they are learning to teach and some of these may be detrimental to their own language learning or to their future students' learning (Peacock, 2001). In order to understand these detrimental beliefs, EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs can be explored and teacher education programs can be regulated accordingly. The beliefs that pre-service teachers hold are shaped during their teacher education and this process of learning a lot about teaching through their experience as learners is called 'apprenticeship of observation' by Lortie (as cited in Freeman, 2002). Such beliefs sustains as filters guiding the way that pre-service teachers perceive and interpret the new information presented to them (Farrell, 1999). Moreover, Pajares (1992) indicates that even if their beliefs are proved to be incorrect or inappropriate, these early-established beliefs pre-service teachers hold may become resistant to change over time. For these reasons, exploring, pre-service and in-service teachers beliefs is important understanding classroom practices and conducting teacher education designed to help them develop their thinking and practices (Richardson, 1996).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

As mentioned above, most of the studies conclude that both teachers and learner have different beliefs concerning language learning which might have both positive and negative

effects on learning and teaching process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs of ELT students and English language instructors at Hasan Kalyoncu University and see the differences by comparing their beliefs. The study did not attempt to see the positive and negative effects of beliefs on learning and teaching process. Rather, it gathers information about in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs and reveals the differences between them. The results might also help to review the teacher education program according to the beliefs of pre-service teachers.

The study intended to address the following research question:

What language learning beliefs do in-service and pre-service teachers hold?

What are the differences between in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs?

Participants

The study was carried out with 60 students studying at Hasan Kalyoncu University English Language Teaching Department and 6 instructors studying at Hasan Kalyoncu University School of Foreign Languages. The students were 1st or 2nd graders who got intensive language education for a year at School of Foreign Languages. The ages of the students differed from 18 to 37, the average age being 20,7. The number of female student was 49 (81,6 %) while the number of male student was 11 (18,3 %). The ages of the teachers differed from 24 to 34, the average age being 29,6. All of the teachers were female.

Data Collection Instrument

To investigate the beliefs about language learning, two instruments were used. In order to collect information on students' language learning beliefs, Horwitz's (1987) 34-item Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was used for the purpose of the study (see Appendix I for the questionnaire). BALLI is a 34-item Likert scale questionnaire, developed by Horwitz in 1987 to identify student beliefs. The BALLI assesses learners' beliefs in five major areas: (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) the difficulty of language leaning; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations. The BALLI instrument has been employed in a number of subsequent studies (Altan, 2006; Peacock, 2001; and Tercanlioglu, 2001) To gather data about teachers' beliefs, a semi-structured interview was held. During the interviews, seven questions which covered the major areas in the questionnaire were asked in order to get data on teachers' beliefs about language learning (see Appendix II for interview questions).

Data Collection and Analysis

The participants of the study were selected by using random sampling. For collecting data from the students, the researcher distributed the instrument during class time after explaining the purpose of the study. If the students had difficulty in understanding any item, the researchers clarified the misunderstanding. Data from the questionnaire was analyzed descriptively using SPSS 22.0 package program. The semi-structured teacher interview was privately held in English. In the qualitative part of the study, transcripts of the interview were analyzed in order to find out about the teachers' beliefs.

FINDINGS

In the study, there were two kinds of findings, one derived from the questionnaires and the other one from the interviews. For the questionnaires, the response frequencies and the percentages of the students' beliefs are presented in tables. The results of the interviews intended to learn the teachers' beliefs are explained following the questionnaire findings and the differences between the findings of students' and teachers' beliefs are highlighted. Five components of BALLI; the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation were discussed in this section.

The Difficulty of Language Learning

Table 1: The difficulty of language learning

Items	1+2		3		4+5		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	56	93,3	3	5,0	1	1,7	60
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	53	88,3	6	10,0	1	1,7	60
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	9	15,0	16	26,7	35	58,3	60
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	31	51,7	13	21,7	16	26,7	60

Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of the student responses about the items (3, 5, 25, 34) in BALLI which are concerned with the difficulty of language learning.

Table 1 provides the belief about the common difficulty of learning a foreign language. Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) for each parameter (1+2, strongly agree and agree; 3, neither agree nor disagree; 4+5, disagree and strongly disagree) are given in the tables. The majority of the students (93,3%) agreed that some languages are easier to learn than others. In response to item 5, 88,3 % of the students were very optimistic and showed a high level of self-confidence in learning English as a foreign language. Only 1 student disagreed with the item 5. With respect to the difficulty of the language skills, more than half of the students (58,3%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language, and only 15,0% of the students believed that it is easier to speak than understand a foreign language, while 26,7% were unsure. Additionally, 26,7% of the students either strongly disagreed or disagreed that it is easier to read than write in a foreign language; however, 51,7% agreed. A further 21,7% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Items 4 and 14 are also about the difficulty of language learning, however they are multiple choice items. Thus, the results are shown separately. In terms of the difficulty of English language (item 4), 38,3 % believed that English is a difficult language, and 25 % believed that English is a language of medium difficulty. Parallel to that question, when they were asked 'if someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?', 45,0 % of the students believed that it takes 3-5 years, and 36,7 % believed that it takes 5-10 years.

When asked about the difficulty of language learning, almost all of the teachers stated that language learning is not a difficult process, but like most of the students they also agreed that some languages are easier to learn. Although students believed that speaking is more difficult than understanding and it is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it, most of the teachers stated that listening is the most difficult skill to learn. Besides listening, writing is also considered to be difficult to learn for teachers.

Beliefs About Foreign Language Learning Aptitude

BALLI items (1, 2, 10, 15, 22, 29, 32, 33, and 34) concern the general existence of specialized abilities for language learning and beliefs about the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful language learners. Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of this category.

Table 2: Beliefs about foreign language learning aptitude

Items	1+2		3		4+5		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	55	91,7	1	1,7	4	6,7	60
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	54	90,0	5	8,3	1	1,7	60
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	2	3,3	18	30,0	40	66,7	60
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	56	93,3	4	6,7	0	0	60
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	6	10,0	16	26,7	38	63,3	60
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	33	55,0	18	30,0	9	15,0	60
19. Women are better than men at language learning.	19	31,7	23	38,3	18	30,0	60
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	42	70,0	8	13,3	10	16,7	60
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	41	68,3	13	21,7	6	10,0	60

The items shown in Table 2 focus on the students' beliefs about foreign language aptitude. Most of the students (91,7 %) agreed with the statement 'It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language'. Similarly, the majority of students (90,0 %) believed that some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages (Item 2). Despite their belief in having a special ability for learning foreign languages for some people, around half of them (55,0 %) perceived themselves as having a special ability for learning foreign languages and 30,0 % were not sure about that. 68,3 % of the students agreed that 'Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language' whereas they do not think the same for the people in their country because 66,7 % disagree with the statement 'People from my country are good at learning foreign languages' (Item 6), and 30,0 % of the students are unsure about this. Most of the students (93,3 %) have a general belief that 'It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one' (Item 10) and 70,0 % of the students similarly believe that 'People who speak more than one language are very intelligent' (Item 30). When asked whether women or men are better learners (Item 19), 31,7 % agreed and 30,0 % disagreed with the statement that 'Women are better than men at language learning'. On the other hand, 63,3 % of the students disagreed with the item 11 'People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages'.

All the teachers except one believed that it does not require a special ability to learn a foreign language. They do not think that it depends on the gender, but they also emphasize the importance of motivation and social and economical factors that affect language learning. Most of the teachers also stated that there is a critical age to learn language and they believed that it is more difficult for adults to learn English than children because of their age.

The Nature of Language Learning

Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages of the student responses about the items (8, 12, 17, 23, 27, 28) in BALLI which are concerned with the nature of language learning.

Table 3: The nature of language learning

Items	1+2		3		4+5		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking countries' cultures in order to speak English.	22	36,7	23	38,3	15	25,0	60
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	51	85,0	5	8,3	4	6,7	60
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	53	88,3	7	11,7	0	0	60
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	20	33,3	15	25,0	25	41,7	60
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	50	83,3	7	11,7	3	5,0	60
28. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.	11	18,6	29	49,2	19	32,2	59

Table 3 illustrates the students' beliefs about the nature of language learning. While 88,3 % of the students believe that learning vocabulary words is the most important part of learning a foreign language (Item 17), 33,3 % of the students believed that learning the grammar is the most important part of learning a foreign language (Item 23). 41,7 % disagreed with the item 23. For the most important part of learning English, 49,2 % of the students were unsure about translating from their native language and 32,2 % disagreed with the item 28. BALLI items 8 and 11 emphasize the role of cross-culture awareness in the language learning. While 85,0 % of the students believed that 'It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country', only 36,7 % agreed with the statement 'It is necessary to know about English-speaking countries' cultures in order to speak English'. 38,3 % of the students were unsure about this item (Item 8). Finally a great majority of the students (83,3 %) believed that learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.

Both students and teachers believed that learning English in an English-speaking country is better, but teachers also stated that people can learn English in their own country as well. Agreeing that learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects, teachers also believed that learning new words is an important part of language learning. Another difference between the students' and teachers' beliefs was about learning culture. Unlike students teachers believed that culture is an inseparable part of language learning.

Language and Communicating Strategies

BALLI items (7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26) address the language and communicating strategies, and Table 4 presents the frequencies and percentages of the student responses about these items.

Table 4: Language and communicating strategies

Items	1+2		3		4+5		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	25	41,7	24	40,0	11	18,3	60
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	1	1,7	9	15,0	50	83,3	60

13. I enjoy practicing English with the English-speaking people I meet.	50	83,3	9	15,0	1	1,7	60
14. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	39	65,0	17	28,3	4	6,7	60
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	60	100	0	0	0	0	60
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	25	41,7	17	28,3	18	30,0	60
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	15	25,0	9	15,0	36	60,0	60
26. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.	56	93,3	2	3,3	2	3,3	60

The items shown in Table 4 deal with learning and communication strategies. Items 18 and 26 are related to learning strategies, and items 7, 9, 2, 13, 18 and 19 concern communication strategies. All of the students agreed on the importance of repeating and practicing a lot (Item 18), and a great majority of the students (93,3 %) believed the importance of practicing with audio materials. For item 7 'It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation', the percentages of the participants who agreed and who were unsure are not very different from each other. Despite the fact that 25,0 % of the students agreed, most of the students (60,0 %) disagreed with the statement 'If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on'. Similarly, a majority of the students (83,3 %) disagreed with the item 9 'You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly'. While most of the students (83,3 %) enjoy practicing English with the English-speaking people they meet, nearly half of the students (41,7 %) feel timid speaking English with other people, and 30,0 % were not sure about this. More than half of the students (65,0 %) believed that it's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English, but 28,3 % neither agreed nor disagreed.

All the students and teachers believed that practicing a lot helps in learning foreign language. However, teachers do not support the importance of speaking English with an excellent pronunciation unlike students. They saw mistakes as natural in language learning process. Teachers also stated that it is very important to communicate and use the language without the fear of making mistakes.

Motivation and Expectations

Table 5 presents the frequencies and percentages of the student responses about the items (20, 24, 29, 31, 32) in BALLI which are concerned with the participants' motivation and expectations.

Table 5: Learner motivation and expectations

Items	1+2		3		4+5		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	20	33,3	15	25,0	25	41,7	60
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know the English-speaking people better.	46	76,7	11	18,3	3	5,0	60
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	58	96,7	1	1,7	1	1,7	60
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	59	98,3	0	0	1	1,7	60
32. I would like to have the English-speaking friends.	54	90,0	5	8,3	1	1,7	60

BALLI items Table 5 deal with participants' motivation and expectations of learning English as a foreign language. Almost all of the students (98,3 %) wanted to learn to speak

English well. If they learn English very well, they believed that they would have better opportunities for a good job (96,7 %) and 76,7 % of the students stated that they would like to learn English so that they could get to know the English-speaking people better. A great majority of the students (90,0 %) agreed with the statement ‘I would like to have the English-speaking friends’ (Item 32), but only 33,3 % believed that people in their country feel that it is important to speak English and 41,7 % of the students disagreed with this item.

Teacher stated that most people in Turkey believed that if they learn English, they can get better job opportunities as the students believed. While students mostly disagreed with the statement ‘people in my country feel that it is important to speak English’, most of the teachers thought the opposite, but they also stated that they may not be always successful even if they think that it is important to learn.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has identified important language-learning-related beliefs of Turkish in-service and pre-service teachers. The study revealed that there are several differences in in-service and pre-service teachers’ beliefs about language learning. One of the most significant differences is on the beliefs about the difficulty of language learning. While language learning is considered as a difficult process by pre-service teachers, in-service teachers believed that it is not difficult to learn language. Another difference is about the most difficult skill in language learning. For pre-service teachers, the most difficult skill is speaking, but for in-service teachers, it is listening. Unlike students teachers believed that culture is an inseparable part of language learning, which is another difference between in-service and pre-service teachers’ beliefs. Unlike students, teachers do not support the importance of speaking English with an excellent pronunciation. While in-service teachers mostly agreed with the statement ‘people in my country feel that it is important to speak English’, most of the pre-service teachers thought the opposite.

The study has several limitations. The students participated in the study were 1st or 2nd graders and the number of the students was limited as the ELT department is new. Despite the limitations, the findings of this study provide important information for teacher education programs to be revised according to the beliefs of in-service and pre-service teachers’ beliefs about language learning. Further study should be conducted to understand the sources of these beliefs. Moreover, a qualitative study should be carried out to understand the in-service and pre-service teachers’ beliefs about language learning.

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APPENDIX I

Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.
4. English is: (a) a very difficult language (b) a difficult language (c) a language of medium difficulty (d) an easy language (e) a very easy language.
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning a foreign language.
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.
13. I enjoy practicing English with the Americans I meet.
14. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well:
 - (a) less than a year
 - (b) 1-2years
 - (c) 3-5 years
 - (d) 5-10 years
 - (e) you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.

21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know Americans better.
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.
26. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.
28. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.
31. I want to learn to speak English well.
32. I would like to have American friends.
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.

APPENDIX II

Teachers' Belief Interview

1. Is it easy or difficult to learn English?
2. Which skill is the most difficult to learn?
3. Does it require a special ability to learn a foreign language?
4. Can everybody learn a foreign language?
5. What is the most important part of learning a foreign language?
6. What is the best way of learning a foreign language?
7. Why do people in your country learn English?