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Student and Teacher Beliefs About Language Learning

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The beliefs about language learning held by English as a Second Language (ESL) students and teachers in intensive English language settings at institutions of higher education in the Northwest region of the US were investigated to explore similarities and differences as well as the influence of national origin/ethnicity and gender on these beliefs. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988) and demographic questionnaires were administered to 181 participants: 156 students and 25 teachers. Questions focused on beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, strategies for communication and learning, and motivations and expectations. Results indicate that students and teachers hold definite, albeit different sets of beliefs. Significant differences in beliefs were found on 16 of 28 items **($p < .05$)** ***. The variables of national origin/ethnicity and gender were found to have an effect on student beliefs. Findings suggest that differences in the expectations of students and teachers may contribute to student frustration, hidden resistance to activities, inappropriatelyfocused study skills, and lack of motivation. An application of this research in the language classroom is for students and teachers to identify and assess their individual beliefs about language learning so that mismatches can be brought to light and addressed.***

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Individuals hold strong beliefs about how languages are learned. People encounter these notions daily, whether through advertisements in magazines claiming that a person can learn a language in 1 hour a day, or through talking to friends who believe that females are superior language learners or that children are better language learners than adults. These popular beliefs about language learning can influence all facets of the language teaching profession. Teacher educators, program administrators, and curriculum designers, as well as teachers and students, either consciously or unconsciously apply their unique sets of beliefs to classroom situations, instructional practices, and pedagogical decisions. The belief systems that both ESL students and teachers bring to learning environments are important to our understanding of language learning in institutions of higher education (Kern, 1995). This study investigates the beliefs about language learning of ESL students and ESL teachers from three intensive academic English language programs as well as the effects of the background variables of national origin/ethnicity and gender on those beliefs. The purpose of this comparison and investigation is to identify preconceived notions about what is involved in language learning and teaching in an effort to predict possible areas of difficulty. Investigating these differences and the effects of background variables on beliefs about language learning may help shed light on the selection of instructional practices that might best match different types of individuals.

Background

Over the last two decades researchers have set out to identify beliefs about language learning in an attempt to better understand the language learner and identify dispositional tendencies that may have an effect on language acquisition. Within this realm of second language learning research, two researchers in particular, Wendell (1986, 1987) and Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988), ascertained the types of beliefs that language students hold and have discussed the effects of those beliefs on students' learning behaviors. Wenden (1986, 1987) formally investigated students' beliefs about second language learning by questioning learners about their own learning behaviors in response to specific contexts. Wenden found that learners hold certain beliefs and that those beliefs are reflected in the learners' approaches to language learning. Wenden warned that providing learning environments that are

in direct contrast to learner beliefs may result in lack of confidence, motivation, or interest in studying, thus hampering students' progress. Likewise, Christison and Krahnke (1986) found that learner beliefs and attitudes are valuable sources of insight into language learning, especially when in combination with analysis of teacher behavior and classroom activity.

Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988) was the first researcher to study large populations of students and their beliefs about language learning. Horwitz (1988) stated:

> Although student beliefs about language learning would seem to have obvious relevance to the understanding of student expectations of, commitment to, success in and satisfaction with their language classes, they have remained relatively unexplored. (p. 283)

She expanded the concept of language learning beliefs by asking second language teachers and students to list all beliefs that they or others held about language learning in general. Horwitz proceeded to elicit beliefs in several stages, using free-recall tasks and focus groups of multicultural teachers and students of English and other languages. From these beliefs, she developed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLO. Horwitz's method of addressing beliefs resulted in a broader classification of beliefs than those posited by either Wenden or Christison (1986, 1987) and Krahnke (1986). She found five areas of beliefs that people commonly hold about second language learning: the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, strategies for communication and learning, and learner motivations and expectations.

In Horwitz's 1988 seminal study of first-year university foreign language students' beliefs about language learning using the BALLI, she found that many learners held beliefs that were inconsistent with the underlying pedagogical principles of the institution. Similarly, when she administered the BALL! to a group of 32 ESL students enrolled in the intermediate level of an intensive English program, she found some beliefs were consistent with activities and techniques reflected by the communicative approach and some were not (Horwitz, 1987). Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988) suggested a number of ways that students' beliefs

could influence their learning, including how learners react to particular teaching methods, how they evaluate their learning progress, and how they approach language learning. Horwitz recommended taking disparity between beliefs and classroom practices into account and suggested approaches for dealing with various learner beliefs.

Horwitz's (1985, 1987, 1988) suggestion that students and teachers may view the language classroom differently raises this question: In what ways are the beliefs of students and teachers about language learning similar or different? A few researchers have attempted to answer this question. Kern (1995) conducted a study using the BALLI to investigate the beliefs about language learning of American teachers and students in the foreign language department at a major public university. Kern reported:

> When the analysis focuses on group tendencies, students and teachers appear to be quite similar in terms of their beliefs about language learning. When the analysis examines individual responses, however, more differences between students and teachers come to light. (p. 77)

Kern found that awareness of the beliefs that teachers and students bring to the classroom can help both teachers and students set more realistic goals. He also suggests that beliefs can "shed light on our students' frustrations and difficulties, and can allow us to provide more thoughtful (and ultimately more effective) guidance to our students in their efforts to learn a foreign language" (p. 82).

Research detailing differences between ESL students' and teachers' beliefs is limited; however, related studies by Lutz (1990) and McCargar (1993) examined the teacher/student relationship. Lutz (1990) focused on the norms and expectations of Japanese graduate students compared to those of their American teachers. Using both a questionnaire and interviews, Lutz found many mismatches. To study ESL teacher and student role expectations, McCargar wrote the Survey of Educational Expectations. Using this instrument, he found significant differences in expectations across and between eight cultural groups, as well as between the eight cultural groups and ESL teachers. Although these studies suggest that there are differences *between* students and teachers and that those differences have pedagogical

implications, research in the area of ESL teacher and student beliefs about language learning is lacking. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Previous research on beliefs also raises the question of the influence of the background variables of national origin/ethnicity and gender on beliefs about language learning. No published studies have concentrated on the role of national origin/ethnicity of ESL students on beliefs about language learning. However, several studies using the BALL! with culturally homogenous groups of learners have demonstrated that learners from different cultures tend to hold definite, albeit different sets of beliefs about how languages are learned (Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Kern, 1995; Oh, 1996; Truitt, 1995; Yang, 1993). In a study of Korean students' beliefs about language learning, Truitt found that, compared to the American foreign language students in Horwitz's study, Korean participants tend to believe that learning a language requires a greater length of time. The Chinese students in Yang's study were also more likely than Truitt's Korean students to believe that it was easier to speak than understand a foreign language and that they would learn to speak English very well.

None of the reported studies using the BALLI have considered the influence of gender on beliefs about language learning. In a related study about the influence of gender on beliefs about argumentative communication, Rancer and Baukus (1984) administered a questionnaire to 138 participants. Although Rancer and Baukus reported some differences, they found that gender alone was not a powerful discriminator of beliefs about arguing. Studies of beliefs about strategies of communication and learning (one subcategory of the BALLI) have shown some evidence of gender differences in the use of learning strategies. Oxford, Nyikos, and Ehrman (1989), in a review of gender related studies, found that women show a significant advantage overall in using functional strategies in certain environments. Functional learning strategies "involve activities that use the language for communicative purposes, such as conversing with native speakers" (Elbaum, Berg, & Dodd, 1993, p. 320). In general, compared with males, females in these studies tended to engage in more frequent use of strategies associated with language as a social behavior.

Method

Using past research as a base, this study examines similarities and differences in the beliefs about language learning of ESL students and teachers and investigates the effects of background variables on beliefs. The questions to be addressed in this study are the following:

1. What are the prevalent beliefs about language learning among ESL students and teachers in intensive academic English language programs?

2. Is there a difference between ESL students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning?

3. Does national origin/ethnicity have an effect on students' beliefs about language learning?

4. Does gender have an effect on students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning?

Participants

One hundred eighty-one participants from three intensive English language programs took part in this study. Each program—Program A, Program B, and Program C--is an academically focused setting of higher education where students receive from 15 to 25 hours per week of intensive English language instruction.

Of the 156 students who participated in the study, 28 (18%) were from Program A, 36 (23%) were from Program B, and 92 (59%) were from Program C. Student participants ranged in age from 17 to 73, with a mean age of 22.5 years. Approximately 58% of the student participants were male and 42% were female. Twenty-two countries were represented: Angola, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Laos, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. The average length of time students had been in the US was approximately 5 months. A total of 83 students (53%) indicated that they had either traveled to or lived in an English-speaking

country before. Of those 83 students, only 4 had lived in an English-speaking country for longer than 9 months. The English language proficiency of students who participated in this study typically began at the lower-intermediate level with an approximate TOEFL score of 425 or higher, a proficiency level deemed sufficient by a contact person at each program for students to be able to complete the BALLI in English.

Twenty-five ESL teachers from the three programs also participated in the study. Of the 25 teachers, 6 (24%) were from Program A, 6 (24%) were from Program B, and 13 (52%) were from Program C. Twenty-eight percent were male and 72% were female. The length of time teachers had been teaching ESL ranged from 3 to 32 years. Eleven teachers had taught for more than 10 years with an average of 20 years, and 14 teachers had taught for fewer than 10 years with an average of 5.5 years. At the time of the study (January-February 2000), 3 had not yet finished their master's degrees, 3 had received degrees in the 1970s, 5 in the 1980s, and 14 in the 1990s. Ten hold master's degrees in TESOL, 1 holds a master's degree in a related field with a TESOL certificate, 11 hold advanced degrees in fields closely related to TESOL, and 3 hold more than one advanced graduate degree. Approximately 50% indicated other relevant teacher training.

Procedure

Students enrolled in lower-intermediate and higher levels at participating institutions, as well as teachers in those institutions, were given the BALLI—Student Version (Horwitz, 1987) or the BALLI—Teacher Version (BALLI; Horwitz, 1985). All also completed background demographic questionnaires. The student version of the BALLI contains 35 items and the corresponding teacher version contains 28 items. The student version contains some linguistically simplified items. The BALLI measures beliefs about language learning in five areas: (a) the difficulty of language learning, (b) foreign language aptitude, (c) the nature of language learning, (d) strategies for communication and learning, and (e) learner motivations and expectations. All items, with the exception of two, are rated by a 5-point Likert scale with the following categories: *Strongly disagree,*

Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and *Strongly agree.* Two other 5-point rating scales are used for the items not rated by degree of agreement or disagreement: one concerning the difficulty level of the target language—A *very difficult language, A difficult language, A language of medium difficulty, An easy language, and A very easy language;* and the other concerning the time needed to learn a foreign language—Less *than 1 year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years,* and *You can't learn a language in one hour a day.* Because the BALLI was designed to assess opinions and beliefs about language learning, there are no right or wrong answers for the BALLI; therefore, no composite score is reported.

The questionnaires were administered in English to students during class time. Teachers had the option of filling out the questionnaire while they were outside of the classroom and returning it to the researcher by campus mail or regular mail. The identities of neither the teachers nor the students were revealed to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study differed fundamentally from that of other researchers (Oh, 1996; Truitt, 1995; Yang, 1993) who have used the BALLI. This difference lies in the classification of the data. It is well known that many researchers who use Likert scales for data collection employ parametric statistical tests for data analysis. Because parametric tests are designed for interval level data, the assumption is that Likert-scale data are interval level data. The interval level of measurement "has the property that the distances between the categories are defined in terms of fixed and equal valued units" (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975, p. 5). In contrast, I contend that equidistance between Likert-scale items in this study should not be assumed. Furthermore, I maintain that it is mathematically impossible to state with any certainty that the distance between *Strongly agree* and *Agree* is exactly the same distance as between *Agree* and *Neutral.* Instead, I consider that each category in the 5-point Likert scale can be said to have only a position relative to the other categories. Therefore, this study treats the BALLI data as ordinal rather than interval level data.

As a first step, descriptive analysis in the form of percentages was computed. Because it is assumed that Likert-scale data are ordinal, means and standard deviations were not computed. Instead, the modal category (category with the highest number of responses) for each BALL! item was identified. Statistical analysis comparing the responses of teachers and students made use of two statistical tests: Cramer's V and Kendall's tau-b. Cramer's V was run to determine whether a systematic relationship existed between teachers and students and beliefs about language learning. Cramer's V also resulted in information that revealed the strength of the degree of association between the variables. Kendall's tau-b was run to compute the number of concordant pairs and the number of discordant pairs in order to indicate directionality of significant results when comparing students and teachers. When a preponderance of pairs is ordered in the same direction on both variables, the final statistical number is expressed as a positive number. When a preponderance of pairs is ordered in differing directions on both variables, the statistic is expressed as a negative number. All tests of significance in this study were set at the .05 level.

The independent variable of national origin/ethnicity and beliefs about language learning was analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the rank of students' responses based on percentage of agreement and disagreement. To quantify the degree to which the variables of gender, beliefs about language learning, and status as student or teacher covaried, nonparametric correlational analysis using a two-tailed Spearman rank-order correlation test was applied.

Results and Discussion

Of the 28 BALL! items answered by both teachers and students, 16 items showed significant differences between teachers and students. Differences were found in each of the five subcategories of the BALL!. The Appendix shows the approximate significance, strength of relationship in percent-of-variance-explained, and the directionality of the comparison of teachers and students on all BALL! items with a significant result. Highlights of each subcategory are summarized below.

The Difficulty of Language Learning

The responses of students and teachers supported the concept of a language learning difficulty hierarchy. Students and teachers agreed that some languages are easier to learn than others. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies utilizing the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987; Kern, 1995; Yang, 1993). Students and teachers differed significantly in their opinions about how difficult it is to learn English. The highest percentage of students rated English *as a* language of medium difficulty, whereas a majority of teachers considered English to be a difficult language. In response to the question "If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well?," 22% of students said *1-2 years,* 29% said *3-5 years,* 19% said *5-10 years,* and 17% agreed with the response *You cannot learn a language in one hour a day.* However, almost half of the teachers answered *5-10 years.* Table 1 illustrates the percentages of student and teacher responses to all BALL! items in this subcategory.

Students' judgments about the difficulty of learning a language play a key role in the development of their expectations and dedication to studying English (Horwitz, 1988). Horwitz (1988) stated:

> **When students rate the task of language learning as being relatively easy and rapidly accomplished, they are likely to become frustrated when their progress is not rapid. On the other hand, a belief that it will take an extraordinary amount of time to learn a language could be discouraging and cause them to make only minimal efforts. (p. 286)**

Interestingly, how students rated the difficulty of the English language did not interfere with their optimistic beliefs about ultimate achievement, with a majority reporting that they expect to learn to speak English very well. This suggests that these ESL students have high hopes for their attainment of English proficiency. However, the findings suggest that teachers may not be surprised when their students do not seem to improve as rapidly as the students expected.

Table 1

The Difficulty of Language Learning
Frequencies of Response

Item	Group	NR'	1	2	3	4	5	Modal category
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	V'	0	4	13	17	34	31	Agree
	V	0	12	4	12	4	32	Agree
*4. English is (1 = very difficult. 5 = very easy.	S	1	7	30	49	12	1	Medium difficulty
	T	4	16	56	24	0	0	Difficult
5. I believe that I will learn to speak very well.	S	0	3	4	17	42	33	Strongly agree
	T							
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak very well?'	S	1	9	22	29	19	21	3-5 years
	T	0	0	4	8	48	40	5.10 years
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	S	1	15	30	31	19	5	Neutral
	T	0	24	52	20	4	0	Disagree
34. It is easier to read and write a foreign language than to speak and understand it.	S	2	12	20	28	28	10	Neutral
	T	4	4	40	32	16	0	Disagree

Note. Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. Dashes indicate questions that were not asked of teachers. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & I. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies In language learning* (pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

'NR = the percentage of nonresponses per question, 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Neutral,* 4 = *Agree,* 5 = *Strongly agree.* is = Students. 7 = Teachers. d1 = *A very difficult language,* 2 = *A difficult language,* 3 = *A language of medium difficulty,* 4 = *An easy language, 5 = A very easy language.* e1 = *Less than 1 year,* 2 = *1-2 years,* 3 = *3.5 years,* 4 = *5-10 years, 5 = You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.*

*Indicates a significant finding at $p < .05$. For details, see the Appendix.

Foreign Language Aptitude

ESL students in this study generally recognize the existence of foreign language aptitude. Seventy-nine percent showed agreement with the popular conception that "it is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language," and 70% were in agreement with the statement that "some people have a special ability for learning languages." Surprisingly, although the majority believed that some people have a special ability for language learning, only 17% agreed that they themselves have a special ability, almost one-third (29%) showed disagreement with the statement "I have a special ability for learning languages," and 52% answered neutrally. Table 2 shows the percentages of student and teacher responses to all BALLI items related to foreign language aptitude.

Comparisons of the responses of teachers and students reveal significant differences on items 6, 10, 30, and 33. Teachers responded either neutrally or with disagreement to item 6, "People from my country are good at learning foreign languages." Students, on the other hand, were more likely to endorse the statement, with 38% showing agreement. Teachers were more likely than students to agree with item 10, "It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one," although the majority of both agreed. Item 30 seems to indicate that teachers do not generally equate aptitude with intelligence. Only 3 out of 25 teachers agreed with the statement that "people who speak more than one language are very intelligent," whereas 50% of students agreed with the statement. This finding suggests that teachers and students may conceptualize some aspects of foreign language aptitude in significantly different ways.

On item 33, teachers and students held opposing beliefs over the idea that everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well. The majority of teachers (60%) disagreed and the majority of students (56%) agreed. It is encouraging that students in ESL programs hold positive beliefs concerning ability and foreign language learning.

Table 2

Foreign Language Aptitude Frequencies of Response

hem	Group	NW	1	2	3	4	5	Modal category
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	5°	0	4	4	11	21	61	Strongly agree
	ır	0	4	4	12	12	56	Strongly agree
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	S	1	3	3	22	49	22	Agree
	T	0	9	4	12	60	24	Agree
*6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	S	0	6	17	40	29	9	Neutral
	T	4	12	28	56	0	0	Neutral
*10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	S	I	6	16	26	39	12	Agree
	T	0	0	0	16	56	28	Agree
11. People who are good at mathematics and science arc not good at learning languages.	S	1	26	33	23	12	4	Disagree
	T	4	36	24	32	4	0	Strongly disagree
16. I have a special ability for learning languages.	S	0	6	23	52	18	1	Neutral
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	S	1	19	20	33	19	9	Neutral
	T	4	32	24	28	12	0	Strongly disagree
*30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	S	1	6	11	31	33	17	Agree
	T	4	12	20	52	8	4	Neutral
*33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well.	S	2	3	17	22	35	21	Agree
	T	4	12	48	12	16	8	Disagree

Note. Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. Dashes indicate questions that were not asked of teachers. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & 3. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

'NR = the percentage of nonresponses per question, 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Netural,* 4 = *Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. b5 =* Students. 'I' = Teachers.

*Indicates a significant finding at $p < .05$. For details, see the Appendix.

The Nature of Language Learning

Students tend to view the nature of language learning differently than do teachers (see Table 3). Although students and teachers agreed with item 12, "It is best to learn a foreign language in the foreign country," more students strongly agreed. In their combined responses of *Agree* and *Strongly agree,* students differed from teachers in how much they emphasize vocabulary (57% vs. 4%), grammar (39% vs. 0%), and translation (23% vs. 0%). The belief that learning grammar and vocabulary are the most important parts of learning a language will most likely lead students to invest a large portion of their time memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary lists at the possible expense of other learning tasks (Horwitz, 1988). Likewise student emphasis on grammar and vocabulary may conflict with the types of learning activities found in classrooms using the communicative approach.

Although 52% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that translation is most important, a significant minority (23%) emphasized translation. Some models of language acquisition suggest that absorbing meaning directly from textual or spoken language is the primary process in developing second language fluency (ICrashen & Terrell, 1983). If this is the case, then translation may change an important focus of the language learning task and impede acquisition (Horwitz, 1988).

Significant differences on items 17, 23, and 28 confirm that students put more emphasis on structural components in language learning than do teachers. As a result, some students may feel their needs are not being met, and teachers may encounter resistance to communicative activities.

Strategies for Communication and Learning

Students in this study were generally supportive of practices necessary for participation in communicative activities, such as guessing. Frequencies of response for all items in this subcategory can be found in Table 4. The significant difference between teachers and

Table 3

The Nature of Language Learning
Frequencies of Response

Item	Group	NR'	1	2	3	4	5	Modal category
8. It is important to know about the foreign culture in order to speak a foreign language well.	S'	1	3	7	24	35	30	Agree
	TC	0	0	8	20	64	8	Agree
•12. It is best to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	S	1	4	6	6	20	63	Strongly agree
	T	0	0	4	8	48	40	Agree
*17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	S	1	2	11	29	40	17	Agree
	T	0	32	44	20	4	0	Disagree
*23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	S	1	3	22	35	24	15	Neutral
	T	0	24	68	8	0	0	Disagree
*27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	S	1	3	17	26	36	18	Agree
	T	0	0	8	4	60	28	Agree

Note. Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. Dashes indicate questions that were not asked of teachers. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & I. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

'NR = the percentage of nonresponses per question, 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Neutral,* 4 = *Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. bS =* Students. CT = Teachers.

*Indicates a significant finding at $p < .05$. For details, see the Appendix.

students on item 9, "You shouldn't say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly," was the result of more teachers showing strong disagreement (84% vs. 43%). Similarly, for item 14, "It is okay to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language," the significant finding was the result of more teachers than students strongly agreeing (64% vs. 28%). Only 13 % of the students disagreed. These findings demonstrate that ESL students generally support practices necessary for participation in communicative classroom activities.

On the other hand, 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that "it's important to speak with excellent pronunciation," whereas only 4% of teachers agreed. The apparent paradox that students believe it is important to speak with excellent pronunciation, yet acceptable to speak even if they cannot say something correctly, raises questions for future investigation: What kinds of strategies do students use to help themselves overcome pronunciation difficulties? To what degree does overconcern with accent inhibit their communication attempts? McCargar (1993) states that some approaches and methods for language learning so violate students' expectations that in some cases more traditional methods might be better. For the 13% of students who agreed that "you shouldn't say anything unless you can say it correctly" or who believe that it is not okay to guess, their concern about correctness will probably make it difficult to accept the communicative approaches common in intensive ESL programs (Horwitz, 1987). Teachers should be aware of this as they prepare students to participate in activities that some may perceive as contradicting their preferred strategies for communication and language learning.

The discrepancy between student and teacher opinions about the importance of excellent pronunciation deserves attention. Kern (1995) brings up an important point when he states, "Pronunciation is not emphasized in many teacher education programs, nor is it frequently discussed in the recent professional literature. For learners, however, it remains an important goal" (p. 77). This leads educators to an important question: Should we teach learners what *we* believe about language learning and what *we* believe they need? Or should we teach learners what *they* believe they need concerning language learning?

Table 4

Strategies for Communication and Learning Frequencies of Response

Item	Group	Nits	1	2	3	4	5	Modal category
*7. It is important to speak a foreign language with excellent pronunciation/ *accent.*	S	0	4	5	14	41	36	Agree
	T	4	8	44	40	4	0	Disagree
'T. You shouldn't say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.	S	0	43	31	13	8	5	Strongly disagree
	T	0	84	16	0	0	0	Strongly disagree
13. I enjoy practicing English with people who speak English as a native language.	S	0	3	4	7	38	48	Strongly agree
	T							—
*14. It is okay to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.	S	0	3	10	13	46	28	Agree
	T	4	0	0	8	24	64	Strongly agree
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	S	0	4	1	5	38	51	Strongly agree
	T	0	0	0	4	60	36	Agree
21. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	S	0	19	27	28	22	4	Neutral
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors, it will be difficult to speak correctly later.	S	1	13	33	31	17	5	Disagree
	T	0	32	36	24	8	0	Disagree
*26. It is important to practice with cassettes, videotapes, or computers.	S	1	4	10	30	38	17	Agree
	T	0	8	16	52	24	0	Neutal

Note. Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. Dashes indicate questions that were not asked of teachers. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wendcn & 3. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

'NR = the percentage of nonresponses per question, 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Neutral,* 4 = *Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. bS =* Students. 1.' = Teachers.

*Indicates a significant finding at $p < .05$. For details, see the Appendix.

Learner Motivations and Expectations

Only two of the questions in the learner motivations and expectations subcategory of the BALLI were on both the teacher and student versions (see Table 5). Both represent significant differences.

In the first case, not surprisingly, 78% of the students indicated agreement with item 20, "People from my country feel that it is important to speak foreign languages." Not a single teacher agreed with the statement; 84% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the second case, teachers and students weighed differently the connection between English ability and better job opportunities for students. A plurality of teachers (40%) responded neutrally to the item, whereas a majority of students (51%) responded with strong agreement. In fact, 86% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed. Because motivation plays a significant role in the development of second language competence (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), it is important that teachers become aware of what is motivating their students so they can build on that motivation in the classroom to make language learning a more cooperative endeavor. In this study, teachers seemed unaware of the extent to which students perceived learning English to be important for improving their job opportunities, evidence of instrumental motivation.

Other results related to motivations and expectations reveal that 79% of students strongly agree and 15% agree that they want to learn to speak English well. Integrative motivation appears to be slightly lower than instrumental motivation in this study as 78% said that they would like to get to know people who speak English as a native language and 86% reported they enjoy practicing English with people who speak English as a native language (item 13).

National Origin/Ethnicity as a Variable

The variable of national origin/ethnicity, using data from the background questionnaire, was compared with answers on the student version of the BALL! to produce descriptive findings ranked by percentages of agreement or disagreement. The variable of national origin/ethnicity was coded and grouped into four categories with the highest number of participants: (a) Middle Eastern (from United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria), 33 respondents; (b)

Table 5

Motivation and Expectations
Frequencies of Response

Item	Group	*NW*	1	2	3	4	5	Modal category
*20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak foreign languages.	S*	0	5	3	14	42	36	Agree
	7	0	44	40	16	0	0	Strongly disagree
24. I would like to learn English so that I can better understand people who speak English as a native language.	S	1	2	6	18	42	31	Agree
	T							
n9. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	S	2	3	3	7	34	51	Strongly agree
	T	4	0	12	40	36	8	Neutral
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	S	1	4	0	1	15	79	Strongly agree
	T							
32. I would like to get to know people who speak English as a native language.	S	2	3	3	15	33	45	Strongly agree
		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note. Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and *thus* may not add up to 100. Dashes indicate questions that were not asked of teachers. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

'NR = the percentage of nonresponses per question, 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 2 = *Disagree.* 3 = *Neutral,* 4 = *Agree,* 5 = *Strongly agree.* °S = Students. ═══ Teachers.

*Indicates a significant finding at $p < .05$. For details, see the Appendix.

Chinese (from People's Republic of China and Taiwan), 21 respondents; (c) Japanese, 44 respondents; and (d) Korean, 25 respondents. The remaining respondents were not included in the analysis because of low participant populations.

These preliminary findings suggest that national origin/ethnicity does have an effect on students' beliefs about language learning. Some of the most striking differences were found in the areas of ability, length of time it takes to learn a language, and the difficulty of the English language. Middle Eastern students, for example, while rating the English language as a language of medium difficulty, also reported that someone who spent 1 hour a day learning a language would be able to speak the language well in 1-2 years. In accordance with this short estimated time reported to learn a language, a majority of Middle Eastern students (53%) reported that they have a special ability to learn languages. Only 5% of the Japanese students, on the other hand, reported that they have a special ability for language learning. Because a cultural convention in Japanese society is to downplay one's abilities (Ritts, 2001), it is difficult to determine whether these students actually believe they lack ability. Likewise, only 10% of the Chinese students reported they had a special ability, suggesting that Chinese students also downplay ability (Ritts, 2001). Forty-eight percent of the Chinese students also reported that a person cannot learn a language in 1 hour a day.

Other similarities and differences were observed among the four groups in this study. For example, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese students tend to disagree more strongly with the importance of the role of translation in language learning than do the Middle Eastern students. Only the Korean students did not rank the enjoyment of practicing speaking English with native English speakers in their top five responses. They did, however, rank the importance of speaking with an excellent accent in the top five (as did the Middle Eastern students). Future studies are needed to analyze how cultural background interacts with other factors to explain why some students apparently let their concern with accent inhibit their communication attempts and others do

not. Possible factors include the learning environments from which the students came, cultural differences, or differences between students' native languages. In conclusion, these preliminary results suggest that national origin/ethnicity is a variable that has an effect on beliefs, but further studies are needed.

Gender

To quantify the degree to which the variables of gender and beliefs about language learning of students and teachers covaried, nonparametric correlational analysis using a two-tailed Spearman rank-order correlation test was utilized. The findings suggest that men and women differ in some areas of reported beliefs about language learning. Table 6 illustrates the gender differences on eight BALLI items in percentage and category.

Male students were more likely than female students to rate their abilities highly. For example, male students were twice as likely to agree that people from their country were good at learning foreign languages (47% *vs.* 23 %); $r_s = -.21$ ($n = 156$, $p < .05$). Likewise, male students were more likely to respond that they had a special ability (item 16) for learning languages (25%), but only 10% of females agreed and no females strongly agreed, $r_s = -.22$ ($n = 156$, $p < .05$). Male and female students also significantly differed in their assessments of how long it takes to learn a language. When answering the question of how long it would take if someone spent 1 hour a day studying a language, females replied either 5-10 years or that a language cannot be learned in 1 hour a day. Male students, on the other hand, answered that it would take 1-2 or 3-5 years, $r_s = .29$ ($n = 154$, $p < .05$). These findings suggest that male and female students differ in their assessments of beliefs related to ability. One explanation of the origin of these gender differences in beliefs is that they are "presumably located in the socio-cultural behaviors of the two genders" (Baker, 1992, p. 42).

Table 6

Gender Differences Between Male and Female Students on Eight BALL! Items in Percentage and Category

Item	Females (n = 64)	Males (n = 91)
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	23% Agree or strongly agree	47% Agree or strongly agree
7. It is important to speak a language with excellent pronunciation.	25% Strongly agree	43% Strongly agree
15. If someone spent 1 hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him or her to speak the language very well?	54% 5-10 years or You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day	60% 1-2 years or 3-5 years
16. I have a special ability for learning languages.	10% Agree or strongly agree	25% Agree or strongly agree
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	23% Agree or strongly agree	47% Agree or strongly agree
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	35% Disagree	26% Disagree
26. It is important to practice with cassettes, videotapes, or computers.	7% Strongly agree	24% Strongly agree
32. I would like to get to know people who speak English as a native language.	92% Agree or strongly agree	70% Agree or strongly agree

Note. Each value represents the percentage of participants who gave the answer(s) indicated directly below it. Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning (pp.* 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.

Men were also more likely than women to endorse beliefs indicative of a restrictive view of language learning. Male students were almost twice as likely as female students to strongly agree with the statement that it is important to speak a language with excellent pronunciation (item 7; 43% vs. 25%), $r_5 = -.16$ ($n = 156$, $p < .05$). Male students' overconcern with accent may inhibit their communication attempts in a communicative classroom, whereas female students may be more comfortable with the types of communicative activities often found in intensive language programs in the US. Furthermore, male students were more than twice as likely as female students to agree that grammar (item 23) is the most important part of learning a language, $r_s = -.17$ ($n = 155$, $p < .05$). A belief that mastering grammar rules is the best way to learn English may lead these male students to invest a lot of time focusing on grammar rules at the expense of other language learning practices. These findings indicate that male students could have more difficulty than female students adjusting to the communicative approach that U.S. teachers often employ.

Other fmdings suggest that female students are more interested in the social aspects of language learning than are males. Ninety-two percent of the females in this study agreed that they wanted to get to know people who speak English as a native language (item 32) compared to 70% of the male students, $r_5 = .28$ ($n = 153$, $p < .05$). This fmding is consistent with strategy studies (Oxford et al., 1989) that show females are more likely to be involved in activities that *use* the language for communicative purposes. Furthermore, 35% of female students disagreed that it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language (item 25), whereas 26% of the male students disagreed, $r_s = -.17$ ($n = 155$, $p < .05$). This suggests that females may be more comfortable with receptive tasks in language learning. Farhady (1982) and Eisenstein (1982) found similar results in studies relating to females outperforming males on a listening comprehension test and females significantly outperforming males on a dialect discrimination task.

Finally, it seems that female students place limited value on practice with cassettes, videotapes, or computers (item 26); only 7% strongly agreed compared to 24% of the male students, $r_s = -.24$ ($n =$

155, $p < .05$). Again, this difference might lie in the finding that females are more likely to view language in terms of communication than are males. The results suggest that female students do not consider mechanical/technological language learning devices as beneficial to language learning as do male students.

Only one gender difference was found in the male and female teacher sample. Female teachers disagreed more strongly than did male teachers with the belief in not saying anything in a foreign language until it can be said correctly. This finding may suggest that female teachers value communicative attempts by students more highly than do male teachers. It is important to note that although many gender differences were found in the multicultural student population, only one difference was found in the American teacher population. It is possible that students' national origin and ethnicity and gender together may have had an effect on students' responses to beliefs as measured by the BALL!.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. First, this study is based on a sample of 156 students and 25 teachers from three intensive academic English language programs in the northwest region of the US. Although the characteristics of students and teachers in these programs are similar to those of students and teachers in intensive English language programs around the US, the generalizability of these results may be limited. However, with some cautions it is expected that these results would apply to other intensive academic English language programs in the US with similar student and teacher populations, curricula, and instructional methods.

A second limitation involves the validity of assessing beliefs with a questionnaire. Kern (1995) pointed out that there are methodological problems of objectivity, sampling, and validity inherent in all questionnaires. It is possible that the language used in the student version of the BALLI, for example, was too difficult for some of the learners to understand well, thereby possibly influencing responses. Second, owing to the characteristics of self-report data, the results are

dependent on the participants' willingness to accurately and truthfully respond to the items. Open-ended interviews with a structured set of topics might yield more valid findings. In the *present* study, however, comparison of students and teachers would have been difficult without a common list of statements to which each group responded.

Third, although the BALLI was considered satisfactory for assessing language learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning, the results should be interpreted carefully. It is important to question the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the sets of beliefs described in this study. The BALL! does not provide data concerning all current issues in foreign language pedagogy. Additionally, some of the questions on the BALLI appear to be flawed in that they seem to address more than one belief; for example, questions 18, 26, and 34 address more than one construct.

Finally, this study has suggested some possible relationships between beliefs and behavior, but the data can only provide a set of hypotheses. More definitive statements about the relationship between beliefs and behavior require more research. One needs to remain cautious about attributing teachers' and students' language learning behaviors exclusively to their beliefs about language learning.

Implications

For Teachers

Many researchers who have looked at beliefs agree that beliefs about language learning should not be ignored in the language-learning classroom. A plausible application of beliefs research in the language classroom would be to help students identify and assess their individual beliefs by exposing them to beliefs assessments such as the BALL!. Wenden (1986) stated that activities in which learners examine and evaluate their beliefs may lead to increased awareness and/or modification of their expectations concerning language learning. Horwitz (1987) noted that ESL teachers have used the BALLI as a discussion stimulus at the beginning of ESL classes to help students develop more effective approaches to language learning. She wrote, "[The teachers] report that this discussion not only helped their students

clear up some misconceptions about language learning, but also that the activity was one of their most successful discussions as students (and teachers) were vitally interested in the topic" (p. 126). Horwitz further stated that students' beliefs are often based on limited experience and knowledge. She recommended, "The teacher's most effective course may well be to confront erroneous beliefs with new information" (p. 126). Wenden (1987) supported Horwitz and further explained:

> The beliefs listed by students . . . point to learning-teaching issues that classroom teachers must confront and resolve. They provide us with learners' views on methodological questions and can be a source of insight into their learning difficulties and to the overt and hidden resistance to some of the activities we organize to help them learn. (p. 113)

Teachers must still realize that no matter what types of explicit messages students receive, they are not likely to just "learn" that language learning is more than grammar and vocabulary and that it is not really very important that they speak with an "excellent" accent. When one looks at this issue more closely, it is especially hard to influence students' beliefs when only traditional learning outcomes such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are evaluated in the language class. Horwitz (1988) suggested that "teachers must show students by example and instructional practice the holistic nature of language learning and reward students accordingly" (p. 292).

For Teacher Educators

Just as it is important for teachers to allow students opportunities to reflect on their beliefs about language learning, it is important for teacher-educators to give prospective teachers the same opportunity by administering some sort of beliefs assessment. Horwitz (1985) stated:

> It is a commonly neglected truism that the students in a methods class have preconceived ideas about language learning and teaching. These preconceptions inhibit the prospective teacher's receptiveness to the information and ideas presented in the methods class particularly when the perspectives are not in consonance with the student's own experience as a language learner. (p. 333)

This would suggest that articulating methods students' belief systems in an explicit way is one of the first steps in their development as language educators.

Another application of beliefs and beliefs research in teacher education programs is to provide teachers-in-training data on the beliefs of groups who have already been studied. Providing teachers information on beliefs of different cultures, for example, could help prospective teachers select methods compatible with various teaching situations. Furthermore, teacher-educators could help teachers learn to work with students by helping them build learner training skills. A methods course might provide information concerning the assessment of beliefs and profiles of teachers' and students' beliefs.

Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for further research in the area of beliefs about language learning would certainly include replication of this study. In order to make the results more generalizable, this study should be replicated with other programs around the US. Secondly, because the questionnaire used in this study was administered to a multicultural student population in English, in future studies, translated questionnaires might be used to ensure greater understanding of items and more accurate self-reporting. Future studies could also be supplemented by observations or interviews in order to more fully describe students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. An array of quantitative and qualitative techniques may help facilitate the identification of reliable patterns of teachers' and students' beliefs. Lastly, future studies will also need to consider a large number of variables in order to address the breadth of complexity of the beliefs of teachers and students. Researchers may want to study the interaction of ESL students' beliefs with other variables such as the acquisition and use of learning strategies, anxiety, motivation, or cognitive style to better understand how these variables impact language learning.

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APPENDIX

Significance, Strength Value (in %), and Directionality Value for BALLI Items

Item	Value	Significance
4. English is:	16.37' -0.249b	.012*
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	16.7 -0.237	.007*
7. It is important to speak a foreign language with excellent pronunciation/ accent.	23.91 -0.433	.000*
9. You shouldn't say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.	17.14 -0.272	.003*
10. It's easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	16.12 0.237	.016*
12. It is best to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	15.52 -0.115	.034*
14. It is okay to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.	16.94 0.246	.005*
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	24.04 -0.435	.000*
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak foreign languages.	26.22 -0.497	.000*
23. The most important part of learning a language is learning the grammar.	22.51 -0.411	.000*
26. It is important to practice with cassettes, videotapes, or computers.	15.36 -0.206	.040*

27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	**15.55 0.183**	**.032***
28. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to translate from the native language.	**22.29 -0.393**	**.000***
29. If I/students learn English very well, I/they will have better opportunities for a good job.	**21.14 -0.336**	**.000***
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	**16.3 -0.223**	**.013***
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well.	**18.02 -0.247**	**.001***

Note: **Questions were adapted from The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory in E. Horwitz, 1987, Surveying student beliefs about language learning, in A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.),** ***Learner strategies in language learning*** **(pp. 119-129), London: Prentice-Hall International. Copyright 1987 by Elaine K. Horwitz. Reprinted with permission.**

***Cramer's V statistic = top number (strength of relationship/percent-of-variance-explained). 'Kendall's tau-b = bottom number (indicates directionality).**

***p* < .05.**