

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning: The Role of Sex and Language Proficiency

Elaheh Sotoudehnama

Alzahra University, Iran
esotoude@alzahra.ac.ir

Maryam Heidari

Alzahra University, Iran
mrym_heidari@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see the role of English language proficiency level and sex on Iranian students' beliefs about language learning. This study also investigated the usefulness of the BALLI questionnaire (Horwits, 1988), which checks learners' beliefs, for the context of Iranian English language learners through conducting an interview. A total of 171 Iranian learners from safir institute took a TOEFL test (2003) and filled out BALLI questionnaire. Based on their TOEFL scores, they were divided into two levels of high and low language proficiency and each group was divided into two groups of males and females. Thirty-two participants including all groups were randomly selected for the interview. The results of the data analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in the learners' beliefs about language learning at different language proficiency levels, but there was no significant difference in this regard between males and females. Also, the study did not prove any interaction between the two factors of sex and language proficiency level. The difference in the results of the interview and the questionnaire in three questions reveal that the questionnaire, though useful, is better to be used along with other measuring instruments.

Keywords: BALLI and Sex, BALLI and Language Proficiency, Iranians' Belief about Language Learning

Received: November 2009; Accepted: September 2010

1. Introduction

There are many factors affecting learners' beliefs about language learning, including gender, cultural background, learning strategies and personality factors. Current literature suggests that learners' beliefs have the potential to influence the learners' attitude towards language and learning and shape their experience and actions in the classroom (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005), so they have the potential to either hinder or promote the learners' ultimate success in the acquisition of a new language and reduce the length of time committed to language learning (Bernat, 2006). "These beliefs can control manners, approaches and activities that also comprise learners' attitude towards performance and motivation for cooperating teaching techniques and acclimatizing learning strategies" (Saha and Talukdar, 2008, p. 1). Regarding what was mentioned, beliefs are really important because as Stevick (1980) argued, success depends more on what goes on inside the learner than on techniques and materials used.

White (1999) stresses how awareness of the complexity of learner beliefs and expectations can help us to understand the realities of the early stages of self-instruction in language. Since people are unique in their individual characteristics, it seems that different learners have different beliefs about language learning. Oxford and Ehrman (1993, cited in Williams and Burden, 1997) suggest that teachers of a second language need to identify and comprehend significant individual differences in their learners if they are to provide the most effective instruction possible.

Horwitz (1987), in her Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) has regarded 5 components for beliefs about language learning. Either of these components has been an area for investigation: foreign language

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations.

2. Research Questions

This study is going to answer the following questions:

1. Do English language proficiency level (high vs. low), sex (male vs. female) and the interaction of these two variables make any significant difference in the learners' beliefs about language learning?
2. How does the result of the interview match or mismatch the result of the BALLI questionnaire?

Depending on the first research question, the related null hypothesis was formulated:

English language proficiency level (high vs. low), sex (male vs. female) and the interaction of these two variables make no significant difference in the learners' beliefs about language learning.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were selected randomly from among the upper intermediate and advanced English language learners of different branches of Safir Institute in Tehran because according to the rules of the institute, the students at lower levels have more activities to do in their class and researchers are not allowed to take tests. So the researchers were only allowed to select from among the upper ones which was one of the delimitations of this study. The participants were 171 students from whom 7 who had not filled out the TOEFL test were excluded. The age of these participants was between 16

and 35. They studied different majors at their college and school and they had different jobs.

The remained 164 participants were divided into two groups of high- and low-proficient learners based on their scores in the TOEFL test. The students whose test scores were between 0.5-1.5 standard deviation above the mean were considered as high proficient language learners (70 students), and those with test scores between 0.5-1.5 standard deviation below the mean were considered low proficient ones (71 students). The students whose test scores were not in these two ranges were excluded from the study (23 students). Seventy – seven of these participants were female and 64 were male.

3.2. Instrumentation

3.2.1. BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory)

From among three distinct BALLI questionnaires, devised by Horwits, which are used today (ESL students BALLI, 1987; foreign language teachers BALLI, 1985; and foreign language students BALLI, 1988), the third one which is related to foreign language students (neither teachers nor ESL students) was considered appropriate for Iranian students learning English as a foreign language. This questionnaire comprises 34 items which measure beliefs about the five above mentioned language areas. Each item is based on a 5-point Likert scale. Thirty-two of the items show the degree of agreement ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). One item ranges from “very difficult” to “very easy” and shows beliefs regarding the degree of difficulty in learning a language, and another item ranges from “less than one year” to “you cannot learn a language in one hour per day” which shows beliefs regarding the duration of learning a language.

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

Cronbach alpha was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire (0.81). According to Hair et al. (1998), the acceptable value of Cronbach alpha is at least 0.70, so Horwitz's BALLI questionnaire used in the present study was regarded as a reliable instrument for the context of Iranian students.

3.2.2. TOEFL Test (2003)

In order to measure the students' language proficiency, a paper-based version of the TOEFL test (2003) consisting of 90 structure and written expressions and reading comprehension questions was used. Based on the results of this test, the participants were divided into two groups of high and low proficient ones as mentioned before.

3.2.3. Interview

An oral interview was held and recorded to be used as evidence to show what really goes on in the students' mind. The interview gave the students an opportunity to reveal those aspects of their beliefs which might not be addressed in the questionnaire. It also helped the researchers to ensure that students really meant what they had said in the questionnaire.

The interviewees were selected randomly from each sub-group. Different participants at the two extremes were selected, i.e. from the low proficiency group, four males and four females who mainly chose "agree" in their belief questionnaire, and also four males and four females who mainly chose "disagree" in their belief questionnaire were selected. This led to the selection of 16 students. The same procedure was repeated for the selection of the students from the other end of the extreme, i.e. the high proficient group. This

included another 16 students in the interview. Thus, totally there were 32 students who were interviewed.

3.3. Procedure

There was not any intervention in this study. To start, 150 students were randomly selected from upper intermediate and advanced levels and from both girls' and boys' classes in an English language teaching institute. The participants were divided into two groups of girls and boys. Then, a TOEFL test was administered. The actual time the participants were given to answer the 90 questions on the TOEFL test was 90 minutes. The total score of the test was 90, i.e. one score was given to each correct answer and there was no negative score.

Then, each group was divided into two sub-groups (high- and low-proficient language learners) based on their scores on the TOEFL test. The students whose test scores were between 0.5-1.5 standard deviation above the mean were considered as high proficient language learners, and those with test scores between 0.5-1.5 standard deviation below the mean were considered as low proficient language learners.

Then the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1988) was administered to the same participants, and the total score of each student as well as his or her score on each sub-division of BALLI were calculated.

Finally, the researchers selected 32 students to conduct an oral interview. Since the questions of the interview were the same as the questions in the questionnaire, to avoid the effect of the retention, it was conducted after a month time interval.

3.4. Design

The dependent variable in this study was students' beliefs about language learning. There were also two independent variables: sex and language proficiency level. Since there was no effect of treatment, and the degree of relationship between the variables was important rather than a cause- and-effect relationship, an ex post facto design was applied (Hatch and Farhady, 1982).

4. Results

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16).

Using SPSS (version 16), the researchers divided the participants into two proficiency groups based on their scores on the TOEFL test, 70 high (0.5-1.5 SD above the mean) and 71 low (0.5-105 SD below the mean). From among 171 participants, 7 were excluded because of their incomplete TOEFL tests, and the statistical analysis was computed for 164 participants. From among these 143 students, 23 were excluded because their test scores were out of this range.

To answer the first research question, i.e. considering the main effects of language proficiency level and sex, and the interaction of these two variables, ensuring of the normality of distribution ($z=0.664$; $p=.770$), a two-way ANOVA was conducted. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for males and females with different language proficiency levels

		Mean	Std.	N
Female	high	84.44	5.990	39
	low	80.24	8.575	38
	Total	82.36	7.629	77
Male	high	83.55	8.382	31
	low	78.30	9.389	33
	Total	80.84	9.231	64
Total	high	84.04	7.107	70
	low	79.34	8.951	71
	Total	81.67	8.398	141

As the above table demonstrates, the means of high and low proficient learners in both groups of males and females are different.

Table 2. Tests of between-subject effects for BALLI scores and the two groups of sex and proficiency

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	859.888	3	286.629	4.357	.006	.087
Intercept	931016.163	1	931016.163	14151.528	.000	.990
Sex	69.508	1	69.508	1.057	.306	.008
Proficiency	778.891	1	778.891	11.839	.001	.080
Sex*proficiency	9.560	1	9.560	.145	.704	.001
Error	9013.105	137	65.789			
Total	950428.000	141				
Corrected Total	9872.993	140				

a. R Squared = .087 (Adjusted R Squared = .067)

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

Based on the results, the only variable which makes a significant difference is proficiency level [$F_{(1,137)} = 11.839$; $P = .001$] and neither sex [$F_{(1,137)} = 1.057$; $P = .306$] nor the interaction between sex and language proficiency [$F_{s*p(1,137)} = .145$; $P = 0.704$] shows any significant difference in the learners' beliefs about language learning.

A series of independent samples t-tests were run to investigate the relationship between participants' EFL proficiency level (one of the independent variables) and each category of BALLI questionnaire.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of high and low proficient learners in each theme of the BALLI questionnaire

Proficiency		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Aptitude	high	70	21.73	2.894	.346
	low	71	21.82	3.270	.388
Difficulty	high	70	18.30	2.060	.246
	low	71	16.85	2.931	.348
Nature	high	70	16.44	2.842	.340
	low	71	14.82	2.958	.351
Strategy	high	70	17.36	2.772	.331
	low	71	16.23	3.261	.387
Motivation	high	70	10.21	2.467	.295
	low	71	9.63	2.099	.249

The above table shows that for the first theme, i.e. aptitude, there is no distinct difference between the means of the two groups of high and low proficiency, but for the other four themes, i.e. difficulty, nature, strategy and motivation, the differences between the means are more noticeable. To see if these differences are significant, five independent samples t-tests were conducted between each sub-component of BALLI and the high and low proficiency groups.

Table 4. Independent samples test for proficiency group and the five themes of the BALLI questionnaire

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Aptitude									
Equal variance assumed	1.402	.238	-1.170	139	.865	-.088	.520	-1.117	.940
Equal variance not assumed			-1.170	137.413	.865	-.088	.520	-1.116	.940
Difficulty									
Equal variance assumed	10.968	.001	3.406	139	.001	1.455	.427	.610	2.300
Equal variance not assumed			3.414	125.694	.001	1.455	.426	.612	2.298
Nature									
Equal variance assumed	.068	.794	3.327	139	.001	1.626	.489	.660	2.592
Equal variance not assumed			3.328	138.907	.001	1.626	.489	.660	2.592
Strategy									
Equal variance assumed	1.647	.202	2.219	139	.028	1.132	.510	.123	2.140
Equal variance not assumed			2.222	136.057	.028	1.132	.509	.124	2.139
Motivation									
Equal variance assumed	1.698	.195	1.506	139	.134	.580	.386	-.182	1.343
Equal variance not assumed			1.504	134.917	.135	.580	.386	-.183	1.344

As the above table shows, there was no significant difference between high and low proficient learners' beliefs, neither in their aptitude ($t_{(139)} = -0.170$; $P = 0.865$), nor in their motivation ($t_{(139)} = 1.506$; $P = 0.134$), but there was a significant difference between high and low proficient learners' beliefs in three of the themes: the difficulty of language learning ($t_{(12569)} = 3.414$; $P = 0.001$), the nature of language learning ($t_{(139)} = 3.327$; $P = 0.001$), and learning and communication strategies ($t_{(139)} = 2.219$; $P = 0.028$).

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

Again, a series of independent samples t-tests were run to find the relationship between participants' sex (another independent variable) and each category of BALLI questionnaire.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of males' and females' score in each theme of the BALLI questionnaire

Sex		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Aptitude	female	77	22.01	3.197	.364
	male	64	21.48	2.928	.366
Difficulty	female	77	17.69	2.535	.289
	male	64	17.42	2.753	.344
Nature	female	77	15.82	2.901	.331
	male	64	15.39	3.130	.391
Strategy	female	77	17.03	3.170	.361
	male	64	16.50	2.944	.368
Motivation	female	77	9.82	2.132	.243
	male	64	10.05	2.497	.312

The above table shows that except for the first and the fourth themes, i.e. aptitude and strategy, there is no distinct difference between the means of the two groups of male and female. To see if these differences are significant, five independent samples t-tests were conducted between each sub-component of BALLI and male and female groups.

Table 6. Independent samples test for sex group and the five themes of the BALLI questionnaire

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Aptitude									
Equal variance assumed	.256	.614	1.015	139	.312	.529	.521	-.501	1.558
Equal variance not assumed			1.024	137.670	.308	.529	.516	-.493	1.550
Difficulty									
Equal variance assumed	.907	.343	.597	139	.551	.266	.446	-.615	1.148
Equal variance not assumed			.593	129.692	.554	.266	.449	-.623	1.155
Nature									
Equal variance assumed	.019	.890	.841	139	.402	.428	.509	-.578	1.433
Equal variance not assumed			.835	130.092	.405	.428	.512	-.586	1.441
Strategy									
Equal variance assumed	.062	.803	1.013	139	.313	.526	.519	-.501	1.553
Equal variance not assumed			1.020	137.268	.310	.526	.516	-.494	1.546
Motivation									
Equal variance assumed	.872	.352	-.587	139	.558	-.229	.390	-.999	.542
Equal variance not assumed			-.578	124.562	.564	-.229	.396	-1.012	.554

As shown, no significant difference is observed in the sub-components of the BALLI including *aptitude* ($t_{(139)}=1.015$; $P=.312$), *difficulty* ($t_{(139)}=.597$; $P=.551$), *nature* ($t_{(139)}=.841$; $P=.402$), *strategy* ($t_{(139)}=1.013$; $P=.313$), and *motivation* ($t_{(139)} = -.587$; $P= .558$).

In order to answer the second research question, 32 students were selected randomly, i.e. sixteen students from the high proficiency group and sixteen from the low proficiency group.

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

Since the purpose of the interview was to see if the answers to the BALLI questionnaire matched the oral interview or not, the same questions but in different words were asked. In most cases, the result was the same except for questions which were related to females' aptitude in language learning, the effect of culture in language learning and different sources of motivation.

Regarding the first theme of the BALLI questionnaire, aptitude, all of the participants had rather the same ideas based on what they said in their interviews. Both males and females in high and low proficiency groups said that females are better language learners. They mostly believed that females learn English with a better accent, or more easily than males. Also, nearly all of them believed in the superiority of children in language learning. One of the boys in the low group said,

... I wish I started English the same time I started my school. It is getting more and more difficult for me to overcome the newness of this language...

Learners in the high and low groups had rather different views towards the nature of language learning. However, there were not distinct differences between males and females in this regard.

Most of the interviewees in the low group were in favor of memorizing as many vocabularies and grammar formulas as possible. The interviewees in the high group had completely different ideas. Most of them regarded foreign language culture to be more important than memorizing a bunch of vocabularies and grammar formulas. One of the males in this group said,

... if you really want to learn a foreign language to be able to use it practically, you need to be aware of their culture. Without learning the culture, language learning is the same as trying to make a building just with a bunch of materials without having a plan and...

Regarding strategies, there were some differences between high proficient and low proficient learners. Males and females did not show that much difference, though.

The learners from high proficiency group were in favor of using different kinds of strategies. They really liked those teachers who taught them through posters and pictures and who held a different class by applying the tasks other than the ones mentioned in the book. The learners from the low proficiency group had different ideas. They were in favor of those routine classes they had had in their schools. They really liked their teachers to explain grammar in clear formulas. One of the girls in the low group said,

I do not know why some of the teachers bother us with those non-sense ways of teaching grammar. Don't they realize that using those time-consuming strategies for grammar and vocabulary, they just make things worse? I just like them to be straight...

Most of the learners in the male group had started learning English because they thought it may help them find a better job or the ones who already had a job wanted to get promotion in their jobs. So the main reason for males was only related to job factor. On the other hand, girls usually reported various reasons for learning English. For example, they wanted to learn English because some of their friends were learning the same language or in the same institute; they really wanted to be able to understand movies; they wanted to enjoy more while traveling out of the country, or they liked the language because they thought it was fun for them to come and learn English with one or a group of their friends.

5. Discussion

In this study it was tried to provide a better understanding of the role of Iranian students' sex and proficiency level in their beliefs about language learning.

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

Based on the results, it was proved that there is no significant difference between males' and females' beliefs regarding language learning. Also, it was shown that there is no interaction between learners' sex and proficiency level in forming their beliefs but it was revealed that students at different proficiency levels may have different beliefs towards language learning.

From what was mentioned above, it can be concluded that most of the differences were related to the two proficiency groups and not to their sex. The findings of the study in this regard were in line with those of Oz (2007). He demonstrated that grade level (similar to proficiency level) can be an important variable in the development of language learning beliefs. The same as this research, Oz (2007) conducted his research on a limited context. His research included only Turkish students, so more studies need to be done in other contexts.

Statistically, based on the learners' questionnaires, in the present study no relationship was found between learners' beliefs about *aptitude* in language learning and their sex or proficiency level. Both groups of sex and proficiency level had rather the same ideas regarding people's aptitude in learning a second language.

Comparing the results of the questionnaire and the interview with regard to the learners' beliefs about "females' superiority" in language learning, different results can be observed. Based on the questionnaire, there were a few students believing in women's superiority in language learning, while it was different in the interviews. Most of the learners (about 70%) believed that women are better language learners and that they learn the language with better pronunciation. This difference can be due to the possibility of elaborating the ideas in the interviews. Speaking of the females' superiority, the interviewees referred to different aspects of language learning like accent and pronunciation. It may be

possible that the participants did not agree with the ability of females in language learning in general, but in some special aspects of language. In the questionnaire, this factor was mentioned generally without covering different aspects of language learning.

The result of the interview in this item is in line with that of the study conducted by Bernat and Lloyd (2007). They did not have any interview, but the results of the BALLI questionnaire in their study revealed that most of the men and women believed in the superiority of women in language learning. So, in this case, interview was more revealing than the questionnaire.

The present study also proved that there is a difference between students' beliefs about the "difficulty of language learning" based on their proficiency level. On the other hand, the related literature shows differences for both groups of sex and language proficiency. For example Gaer et al. (2007) found that boys have more difficulties in language learning and they have lower language achievement than girls because they have more negative attitudes toward schooling. Wharton (2000) and Khaldieh (2000) proved that the higher the level of education, the more self-efficacious the students are and the more achievement they have in language learning. Magogwe and Oliver (2007) achieved the same result in their research on the learners of Bostwana.

According to the results of the questionnaire in this study, males and females had rather the same beliefs regarding the level of difficulty, but there were differences between the two proficiency groups. The interviews showed up rather the same results. Although there were not noticeable differences between male and female interviewees at this point, the interviewees in high and low proficient groups revealed rather different ideas. Most of the participants from the low proficiency group (about 80%) thought of English as a difficult

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

language, at least more difficult than their mother tongue. However, the interviewees in the high proficiency group did not feel so.

Altan (2006) used the same questionnaire for a group of male and female university students with different native languages, i.e. Japanese, Arabic, French and German. All of the students in that study rated their native language as being very difficult to learn, with the Japanese students ranking their mother tongue as the most difficult. Except for a few numbers, all other students in that study claimed that English was an easy language to learn. So the results of Altan's study are similar to those achieved from the high proficient learners in the present study. The participants in Altan's study were selected from among the students of the first, second, third and fourth year of the university. So their proficiency levels were not the focus of attention.

The same as difficulty for language learning, there were proved some differences and similarities between learners' beliefs about the "nature of language" based on their proficiency level. The differences were mostly in terms of learning vocabulary and grammar formulas and translation. The similarities were related to learning the foreign language culture. More than half of the students in both proficiency groups agreed that it is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak a foreign language.

The results of the interviews were somehow contradictory. Although there were not differences between male and female interviewees regarding the effect of culture in language learning, the participants in the high and low proficient groups showed up completely different beliefs in this regard. Most of the interviewees in the high proficiency group, i.e. six out of eight, were in favor of the effect of culture in language learning, but the ones in the low proficiency group had rather different ideas. Culture is an abstract concept that can be defined in different ways. It was better if this item was divided into different

components in the questionnaire. While they were interviewed, some of the participants asked about the concept of culture which was elaborated for them, but in the questionnaire there was not such a possibility, so it was better if there were more items related to different aspects of culture.

The questionnaire showed that most of the students in the low proficient group believed that learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning new vocabularies, but it was different for the high proficient group. This belief makes low proficient learners use mistaken strategies and spend most of their time and energy for only one aspect without paying enough attention to more important and necessary aspects. Teachers need to help these students get a better view of the nature of language and language learning. It will help them learn the language in a more systematic way.

More than half of the learners in both male and female groups agreed that learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects. The same happened in their interviews. More than half of the high proficient learners either strongly disagreed or disagreed that 'learning a language is mostly a matter of translating from your native language'. It was not the same for the low proficiency group. Most of them agreed with this item. The result of the study in this item was different from that obtained from Bernat's (2006). Using the same questionnaire in an Australian context, Bernat (2006) concluded that the majority of the students did not believe in translation as an important part of language learning. Of course it is worth mentioning that the proficiency level of the learners was not controlled in her study.

The interviews showed the same results on this point. Although there were not differences between males and females, the learners in the two groups of proficiency reported different ideas. The low proficient learners thought of translation as having a key role in language learning, while the ones in the high

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

proficiency group believed in the usefulness of this skill (translation) mostly for passing different written exams and not for learning how to speak a language.

Difference was proved to exist between the learners' beliefs about "learning and communication strategies" based on the level of their English language proficiency. The ones in the low group were too attentive to their mistakes, but those students from the high proficiency group did not agree with the way some of their teachers paid so much attention to their mistakes.

It is too dangerous for the low proficient learners to believe in this way because "human learning is fundamentally a process that involves making mistakes ... Language learning, in this sense, is like any other human learning" (Brown, 2000, p. 216). Fear of making mistakes is the reason why some of the students are not willing to start speaking in class and do not volunteer in speaking tasks. As language teachers, we need to stop learners thinking in this way and help them overcome their fear of making mistakes in class. Doing this, we can make these students take part more openly in class activities and tasks and communicate more actively in class. The results of the interview matched with those of the questionnaire.

No difference was found between learners' beliefs about "motivations and expectations" in learning a foreign language considering their proficiency level. The interviews did not show a distinct difference between high and low groups in terms of their beliefs related to motivations and expectations. But in the male and female groups, the females mentioned different sources of motivation some of which were not stated in the questionnaire. For example, one of the girls mentioned the effect of her friends on her learning the language or another female interviewee talked about learning English for having more fun while traveling or watching movies in English language. Most of the males, however, said that they started to learn English because of their jobs. The same was

concluded from their questionnaires. It can be a shortcoming of the questionnaire not to cover different sources of motivation. Females may have reported different results if there were other choices in the questionnaire regarding 'motivation'.

Beliefs about language learning have a significant impact on language learning and teaching. The beliefs some learners bring with themselves to the learning environment may have a strong influence on their attitude and motivation and they can determine their success or failure in language learning (Kuntz, 1996). It will be really helpful for the teacher to be aware of these beliefs, so he/she can strengthen the positive beliefs and remove the negative ones. Supportive and positive beliefs help to overcome problems and maintain the learners' motivation, while negative or unrealistic beliefs will decrease motivation and increase frustration and anxiety (Kern, 1995).

Horwitz (1987) reported some teachers' experiences of how discussions about beliefs at the beginning of an ESL course helped their students to remove some of their misunderstandings about language learning. Horwitz stated that these mistaken beliefs are often originated from the learners' limited experience and knowledge. So we can infer that teachers' awareness of the learners' beliefs may help to promote success in the learning environment.

Wenden (1986) proposes that if we want to find out what characterizes successful language learner, we should find out what students believe or know about their learning and provide activities that would allow them to examine these beliefs. The students have different beliefs because they have different educational backgrounds, personalities, preferences and different needs. They may have mistaken beliefs about language learning and spend their time and energy in the wrong way getting no satisfactory results. These mistaken beliefs may originate from different sources such as the students' past classroom

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

experience and they might make the students withdraw from their language learning. Providing opportunities for the learners through tasks in a way that they can state and show their beliefs helps the teachers to become aware of these beliefs and help the students promote in their work by removing the harmful beliefs and strengthening the positive ones.

It is also helpful for the learners to be aware of themselves and the way they think about language learning. Being more conscious in this way helps the learners to overcome their negative beliefs with the aid of their teacher and broaden the positive beliefs.

6. Conclusion

Learners come to language learning situation with some beliefs about language learning which will inevitably affect their learning process. Using BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1988) certainly can be of great help for both teachers and learners to show them what they might not be conscious of in the situation of language learning. Based on the results of the interview in this study, it was revealed that the BALLI questionnaire needs some slight changes to suit the context of Iranian students. By changes, it is meant breaking the three above-mentioned parts more specifically into their sub-components.

On the other hand, the results of the interview differed from those of the questionnaire only in three aspects which might be due to the use of the exact questions of the questionnaire in the interview with the only difference that the interviewees had more opportunity for elaborating their ideas in the interview. It is possible that in case triangulation was used instead of the interview based on the items of the questionnaire, more items were needed to be changed. In other words, it seems it is more logical to use BALLI questionnaire along with other sources of information.

References

- Altan, M. Z. (2006). "Beliefs about language learning of foreign language major university students", *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 31(2), pp. 45-52.
- Bernat, E. (2006). "Assessing EAP learners' beliefs about language learning in the Australian context", *Asian EFL Journal*, 8 (2), pp. 202-227.
- Bernat, E., and Gvozdenko, I. (2005). "Beliefs about language learning: Current knowledge, pedagogical implications and new research directions", *TESL-EJ*, 9 (1), pp. 1-21.
- Bernat, E., and Lloyd, R. (2007). "Exploring the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning", *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 7, pp. 79-91.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (4th ed.), New York: Longman.
- Hair, J., Anderson, R., Tatham, R., and Black, W. (1998). *Multivariate Data Analysis* (5th ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hatch, E., and Farhady, H. (1982). *Research Design and Statistics for Applied Linguistics*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1987). "Surveying students' beliefs about language learning", in A. L. Wenden and J. Rubin (eds.), *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*, London: Prentice Hall, pp. 119 -129.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1988). "The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students", *The Modern Language Journal*, 72 (3), pp. 283-294.
- Kern, R. G. (1995). "Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning", *Foreign Language Annals*, 28 (1), pp. 71-92.
- Khaldieh, S. A. (2000). "Learning strategies and writing processes of proficient vs. less-proficient learners of Arabic", *Foreign Language Annals*, 33 (5), pp. 522-533.
- Kuntz, P. S. (1996). Beliefs about language learning: The Horwitz model, Retrieved February 20, 2012, from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED397649.pdf>

Iranians' Belief about Language Learning...

- Magogwe, J. M., and Oliver, R. (2007). "The relationship between language learning strategies, proficiency, age and self-efficacy beliefs: A study of language learners in Botswana", *System*, 35 (3), pp. 338-352.
- Oz, H. (2007). "Understanding metacognitive knowledge of Turkish EFL students in secondary education", *Novitas-ROYAL*, 1(2), pp. 53-83.
- Saha, M., and Talukdar, M. A. R. (2008). Beliefs and concepts brought by the learners in EFL class: An observation at undergraduate level in Bangladesh, Retrieved February 20, 2012, from <http://www.articles-on-the-web.com/languages/beliefs-and-concepts-brought-b-238733.html>
- Stevick, E. W. (1980). *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- TOEFL Practice Tests. (2003). Educational Testing Service.
- Van de Gaer, E., Pustjens, H., Van Damme, J., and De Munter, A. (2007). "Impact of attitudes of peers on language achievement: Gender differences", *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101(2), pp. 78-92.
- Wharton, G. (2000). "Language learning strategy use of bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore", *Language Learning*, 50 (2), pp. 203-243.
- White, C. (1999). "Expectations and emergent beliefs of self-instructed language learners", *System*, 27 (4), pp. 443-457.
- William, M., and Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenden, A. L. (1986). "Help language learners think about learning", *ELT Journal*, 40 (1), pp. 3-12.