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篇名：

**Exploring EFL Learners' Beliefs about English
Learning at Bilingual School in Taiwan**

作者：

蘇淳璇。葳格高級中學。應三乙

林佳姿。葳格高級中學。應三乙

指導老師：姜品如

I. Introduction

Language learners' beliefs have been recognized as an important contributor to their successful experiences on foreign language learning (Horwitz, 1999). In other words, beliefs may shape what learners learn and how they learn a language. To be specific, learners may hold different beliefs about language learning in terms of language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, language learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations.

In the past years, a great number of studies on beliefs about language learning have been conducted (Bacon & Finnemann, 1992; Siebert, 2003). As well, researchers have reached a conclusion that beliefs play a major role in learners' language success. On the other hand, there exists a high relationship between gender and beliefs. To prove, Siebert (2003) investigated the relationship between beliefs about language learning and gender. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was administered to 64 female and 91 male language learners of mixed ethnic backgrounds, studying English at a higher education institution in the U.S. The results indicated that a significant difference has been found between gender and beliefs about language learning and strategy use. On the contrary, Bernat and Llyoyd (2007) also invited 155 females and 107 males to explore the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning. The results, however, showed that most of male and female participants hold similar beliefs about language learning. The discrepancy of the two studies may lie in different populations, learning contexts, and age groups. In other words, the gender effect might happen if beliefs that learners hold were examined in different backgrounds and contexts. Since beliefs about language learning are related to contexts and gender, it is necessary to clarify this effect and relationship, EFL context in particular.

Studies on beliefs about language learning have also been investigated in the EFL context in Taiwan. For instance, Huang and Tsai (2003) examined the differences between high and low proficiency learners' beliefs about English learning in senior high school. Cheng (1996) found a discrepancy between the beliefs about language learning of EFL students and teachers. Moreover, Yang (1999) researched 505 Taiwanese college EFL learners' beliefs about learning English and found that most of the learners had positive self-efficacy about speaking English. Although previous studies on beliefs about language learning has provided researchers with valuable information on the effects of proficiency level and gender, the target groups of these studies are various. In particular, a very few studies which examine the

beliefs of learners undertaking bilingual education has been found. That is, the belief patterns of this group are not clear. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a relative study. In addition, findings of learners' beliefs about language learning may offer a reference for English educators, either in teaching or syllabus design. The present study aimed to fill a gap in research on language learning beliefs.

II. Literature review

It is significant that language learners' beliefs play an important role in students' experience on foreign language learning (Horwitz, 1999). In particular, a great number of evidence showed that beliefs have the high relationship with learners' success, failure, and experience (Cotterall, 1999). For example, Yang (1999) recruited 205 university students in Taiwan to examine the beliefs about language learning and the use of learning strategies. The results showed that a significant relationship has been found between learners' beliefs about English learning and the use of strategies in learning English. For this view, learners' beliefs about language learning are highly related to their learning attitude, which in turns brings an impact on their language learning behavior and strategies use. In the similar vein, Cotterall (1995) indicated that learners' beliefs about language learning correspond to their autonomous language behavior. In other words, learners' readiness for learning autonomy may be influenced by their beliefs. Successful learners develop awareness into their beliefs about language learning and simultaneously create related learning strategies, resulting in effective language learning.

Overview of the studies on beliefs about language learning, two significant findings can be concluded. For one side, beliefs that learners hold about language learning may affect their expectations on learning the target language. For another, beliefs about language learning may be easily altered in the learning process. To be specific, Tanaka (2004) investigated the relationship between beliefs and language proficiency in 132 Japanese learners of English. The results revealed that most of the participants who received experimental learning in relation to their beliefs about language learning tended to advance more in general proficiency. Similar to this, Crhová and Domínguez (2014) invited 44 students to respond Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory, developed by Horwitz (1987) and aimed to analyze the change in students' beliefs on language learning. The results found that beliefs of students participating in the research project demonstrated changes over the period of four years. Specifically, students modified their beliefs after the intervention of the new language teaching approach. In this sense, Murhpy and Mason (2006) argued that

students' beliefs about language learning and conceptual knowledge would be adjusted to new experience when involving the exposure to pedagogical intervention. Therefore, beliefs about language learning greatly correlate to learners' expectations on learning language and may be simultaneously changed in the learning process.

With the advent of the study (Hortwitz, 1987) on beliefs about language learning, an important finding has been established: beliefs that language learners hold have influential effects on their learning. To response this, however, Wenden (2001) argued that foreign language learner beliefs, so far, have been less concerned. Researches on the beliefs of those who are EFL learners are not clear. Although a number of studies (e.g., Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Peacock, 2007) on second or foreign language learning were conducted, those learners may hold a more complex web of beliefs, attitudes, experiences, expectations towards foreign language learning. For example, Oz (2007) applied Horwitz's BALLI to investigate beliefs about language learning of 470 Turkish EFL learners in secondary education program. The results demonstrated that learners' beliefs about language learning have obvious variability in terms of social and educational contexts, age, gender, and stages of language. In this sense, beliefs about foreign language learning that learners hold may be affected by not only language learning itself but also in relation to variables such as gender or contexts.

In the Chinese context, Huang and Tsai (2003) invited 89 EFL learners in Taiwan to examine their beliefs on English learning. In particular, the study compared the high and low English proficiency learners' beliefs and the results revealed that high achievers and low achievers perceived English learning differently. That is, low proficiency learners believed that English learning is difficult while high proficiency learners believed that they were more equipped with abilities for learning English. From this, beliefs that learners hold on language learning indeed play a crucial role in accordance with their learning. Along this line, Chen (1997) specifically examined the beliefs on language learning between students and teachers. The findings showed that there is a significant difference of beliefs between teachers and students in the nature of language learning. Most importantly, the study found that most of the students believed that foreign language learning was an apart of vocabulary and grammar learning; whereas most of the teachers concerned language learning in relation to gender, language aptitude, and intelligence.

Although the reviewed studies surveyed the learners' beliefs on language learning by examining the factor of language proficiency and the different beliefs between students and teachers, different participants' background may bring effects to

their beliefs on language learning (Bagherzadeh, 2012). Specifically, as far as EFL learners who have learned English at bilingual school are concerned, their beliefs about language learning are not fully understood. In addition, it is not clear about the beliefs that learners who studied at English bilingual school in Taiwan usually hold toward English learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study aims to investigate EFL learners' beliefs about English Learning at bilingual school in Taiwan and specifically attempts to examine the five areas in terms of a) English language aptitude, b) the difficulty of language learning, c) the nature of language learning, d) learning and communication strategies, and e) motivation and expectations. Based on these attempts, two research questions have been established:

1. What beliefs do bilingual school EFL students in Taiwan have about learning English as a foreign language in English language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations?
2. What beliefs do bilingual school EFL students in Taiwan concern about?

III. Methodology

3.1 Participants

113 EFL students at a junior high school in Central Taiwan were recruited to participate in the study. The participants of the study were in the first semester of high school. Among all the respondents, 55 were females and 58 were males. In terms of participants' English learning experience, participants have studied English for six years at least. However, none of them were native speakers of English. In particular, most of the participants have shared common characteristics of studying at a bilingual school with Chinese and English before. For the survey, all participants were given a brief illustration of the purpose of the study before conducting the questionnaire.

3.2 The instruments and Procedures

To examine the participants' beliefs about English learning, Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was adopted as a research tool. In particular, this survey was significantly used to assess language learner beliefs in relation to foreign language learning. In addition, 34 items of the BALLI specifically measures beliefs about five language learning areas, including (a) foreign language

aptitude, (b) the difficulty of language learning, (c) the nature of language learning, (d) learning and communication strategies, and (e) motivations and expectations. For the design of the question type, 32 items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5). Additionally, Item 4 and Item 14 were concerning learners' rating of the difficulty level of English, and the amount of time needed to learn English well. More information was detailed in Table 1

Table 1

The distribution of the items of beliefs about language learning

Construct	Items
Foreign language aptitude	1,2,10,15,22,29,32,33,34
The difficulty of language learning	3,4,6,14,24,28
The nature of language learning	5,8,11,16,20,25,26
Learning and communication strategies	7,9,12,13,17,18,19,21
Motivation and expectations	23,27,30,31

As for the study procedures, 131 participants were recruited from different classes in the same high school. The questionnaire was distributed among the participants after getting permission from the participants' teachers. To begin with, all participants were asked to read the illustration and the direction of the questionnaire. Then they were required to fill in Part I of the questionnaire, including personal information, gender, and experience on English learning, travelling and living abroad. After that, Part II of the questionnaire was distributed to participants. To complete the questionnaire, 30 minutes was given. Finally, the collected data were computed and analyzed by SPSS.

3.3 Data analysis

After summarizing and tabulating the information obtained from the questionnaire, the descriptive statistical approach was used to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaire. In particular, the analytical procedures employed to explore the research questions were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0. Moreover, frequencies, standard deviation, percentages and means were used to analyze the items in the questionnaire on the student responses to the beliefs about English learning.

IV. Results

The purpose of the present study is to explore the overall beliefs about learning English of EFL students in Taiwan. The descriptive statistical results from the questionnaire on the student responses to the beliefs about English learning were showed in Table 2. In each category, mean, percentage, and standard deviation were presented.

Table 2

Analysis of students' beliefs about English learning

Construct		<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Total</i>
Foreign language aptitude	<i>f</i>	130	151	289	200	247	3.27	1017
	%	12.78%	14.8%	28.41%	19.66%	24.28%		100%
The difficulty of language learning	<i>f</i>	50	105	269	153	101	3.82	678
	%	7.37%	15.48%	39.67%	22.56%	14.89%		100%
The nature of language learning	<i>f</i>	41	107	321	175	147	4.08	791
	%	5.18%	13.52%	40.58%	22.12%	18.58%		100%
Learning and communication strategies	<i>f</i>	80	89	267	246	222	4.04	904
	%	8.84%	9.84%	29.53%	27.21%	24.55%		100%
Motivation and expectations	<i>f</i>	4	15	112	139	182	4.04	452
	%	0.88%	3.31%	24.77%	30.75%	40.26%		100%

Note. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = strongly Disagree, M = mean, f = Frequency, % = Percentage

As seen in Table 2, beliefs of the nature of language learning ($M= 4.08$) revealed the highest mean average among the five constructs of beliefs about language learning, followed by belief of learning and communication strategies ($M=4.04$), and belief of motivation and expectations ($M=4.04$). To be specific, in the student responses to the nature of language learning, 40% of the students (18% strongly agreed and 22% agreed) agreed and considered vocabulary and grammar learning as an important part of English learning. The outcome also responses to the study finding of Yang (1999) that learners' beliefs are important for their language learning. In the student responses to the belief of motivation and expectations, 70% of the students (40% strongly agreed and 30% agreed) agreed and understood that speaking English well

may have better opportunities for a good job, for example.

To compare the five constructs, bar graph analysis was applied and the results from the student responses to beliefs about English learning were shown in Figure 1.

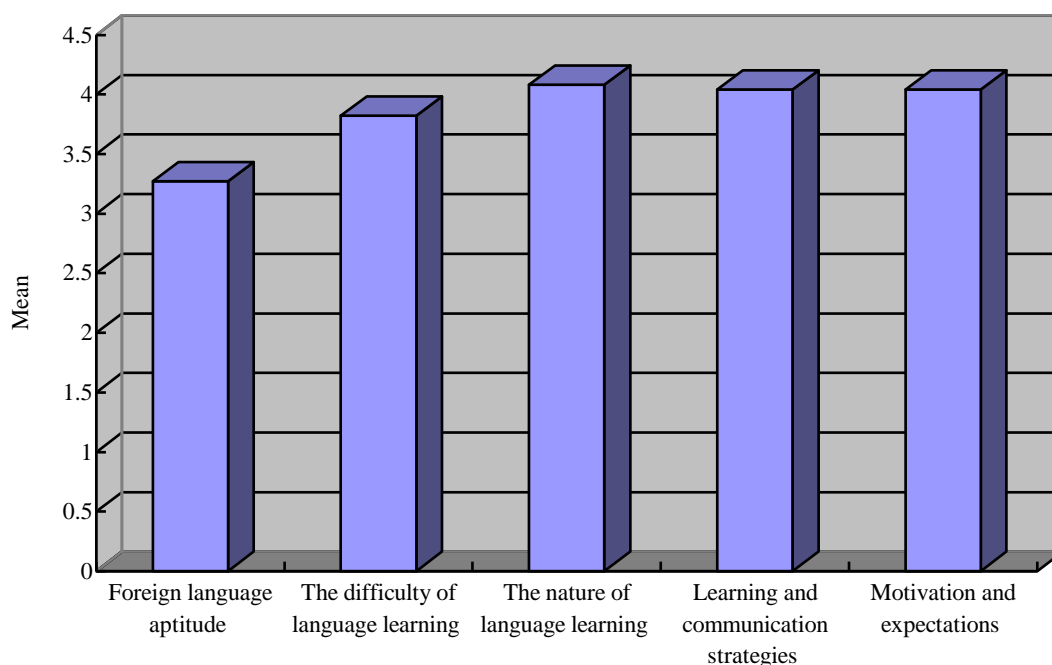


Figure 1. *The bar graph analysis of students' beliefs about English learning*

As seen in Figure 1, results from the student responses to beliefs about English learning are positive with the average mean of 3.85. From this, it could be inferred that EFL learners held positive beliefs in learning English and considered English as significance in language learning. In addition, the results also corresponded to Horwitz's (1999) claim that learners' beliefs play an important role in students' experience on foreign language learning. In the five constructs, belief of the nature of language learning ($M= 4.08$) was rated as the highest factor in English learning. Considering how learners perceived English learning, most of the respondents believed that English learning mostly covers learning grammar rules and vocabulary. Overall, Figure 1 revealed that EFL students at bilingual school in Taiwan held positive attitude toward to the nature of language learning which was consistent with the study of Yang (1999).

V. Conclusion and implications

The aim of this study was to explore EFL learners' beliefs about English learning at bilingual school in Taiwan. Five important findings can be drawn as follows. First, with better understanding of the beliefs held by EFL students at bilingual school, teachers and educators can better understand the condition of language learning. Second, we use some methods to explore learners' beliefs about language learning. For example, we apply question survey to the classroom observation. Third, teachers can set goals for students in learning English, and encourage students to learn. Fourth, students may understand their weakness and try to improve it. Finally, teachers can give students opportunities to share their own beliefs and discuss them in the class. It may help enhance language learning.

However, the present study contains a few limitations. First of all, the number of the participants in this study is relatively small ($N=113$) for the findings to be generalized to the whole population of EFL students in Taiwan. Only EFL students from one bilingual school participated in this study. Secondly, some confounding factors such as gender or proficiency are not taken into account. Last but not least, a long term study is needed in order to confirm the results.

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