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## Language Learning Beliefs of Second Language Learners at Graduate Level in Pakistan

### Abstract:

*The current research aimed at examining the beliefs of Pakistani graduate students towards English language learning and assessing the stability of their beliefs after six weeks. In the process of language learning beliefs play a pivotal role. Students' beliefs about second language acquisition need to be studied so that appropriate approach can be adopted. To collect data, sixty graduate students were selected by purposive sampling. BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, Horwitz, 1987) tool was adopted and administered twice to collect the data. The results showed that the learners are motivated and keen to acquire English language. The respondents were appraised of the significance of foreign language acquisition and highlighted the importance of pronouncing the words correctly, meanings of new words, and the benefits of drills. The results also depicted that there is stability in most of students' beliefs after six weeks.*

**Key Words:** English Language Learning, Stability, Balli

### Introduction

Language is one of the most significant means to express ourselves, to communicate with people, to organize our lives and to remember the past. According to [Cook \(1996\)](#), it is the focus of an individual's life. However, many psycholinguists stress upon the value of beliefs of the learners towards both situation as well as context of foreign language learning. Similar to teachers the students have some kind of beliefs that they have when they step into the classroom world. A belief according to [Pehkonen and Pietilä \(2003\)](#), is knowledge that is both personal as well as based on experience. Hence, the beliefs of a learner towards English Language Learning (ELL) can be stated as an experience towards the learning outcome. Researches on beliefs of language acquisition began with the launch of Horwitz's work in 1985. To measure the beliefs of students towards the language acquisition Elaine Horwitz in 1985 developed a tool; named as BALLI, "Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory". She further explained that BALLI was established to measure the learners 'opinions' towards multiple concerns that were associated with learning language. The word 'opinion' was used by her because this is what the instrument intended to measure.

As identified by [Horwitz \(1987\)](#), that the experiences along with the actions can be influenced by students' beliefs towards language learning. The beliefs of learners might directly have an influence on their performances in a class. For instance, if a student is of the opinion that he/ she does not have an aptitude towards learning a language, there may be a possibility that he

might not work hard enough to learn that language. It is therefore, imperative for teachers to give due attention to the beliefs of students to see if learners' beliefs have a negative effect on their learning.

English in Pakistan is regarded as the most important language after Urdu and hence, is considered as a very important factor for individuals to have better job prospects and social standing in the society. The Pakistani society is categorized into acute class differences that lead to intense class-conscious public. As a result, the parents who belong to lower- and middle-class groups desire and try to get their children admitted in schools that are English medium so that their children can learn to speak English. Although, in the recent

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year's researchers are paying a lot of attention towards the beliefs regarding language learning and specifically English yet, in Pakistan there is very little research conducted in this area ([Barcelos, 2003](#)). By understanding the beliefs of students, the language teachers will be able to plan for effective teaching so as to maximize the learners' learning process towards English language.

There are limited studies conducted in Pakistan that used BALLI after making some changes in it. [Mubeen for example in 2009](#) employed the Horwitz' instrument to explore the Pakistani students' beliefs who were studying in universities and had Arabic as their majors. Another study conducted by [Akhtar \(2011\)](#) discusses that for maintaining Pakistani students' high level of motivation towards English language learning; it is essential that the curriculum is revised in lieu of students' beliefs towards second language acquisition so that desirable outcomes are seen. [Wenden \(1987b\)](#) in her study recommends the language teachers to make use of the beliefs of students' as indicators to cater to the problems with regards to language learning. This strategy can be implemented with success in Pakistani context of English language learning. In Pakistan, English language students not only stress more on memorizing, translating and accuracy but are also motivated in learning this language. Hence, teachers can cater such beliefs which they consider are problematic towards the proficiency of English language and can manage the student's bit by bit in accordance with the new second language learning practices that can bring actual transformation in the Pakistani structure in relation to general English language acquisition. A similar conclusion by [Kausar \(2012\)](#) suggests the English language teachers to carefully observe the beliefs of the learners and then to help them to design suitable strategies to attain their objectives of learning a language.

This research aims to find the students' beliefs at graduate level with regards to English language acquisition. Both male and female learners' beliefs had been explored in this study to get a clear notion of English language teaching. Next, the study aims to examine to what extent were graduate students' beliefs stable over time. It is expected that the present study regarding the beliefs of Pakistani graduates towards second language acquisition using BALLI can improve both the teaching as well as learning process that current research aimed at. Moreover, the outcomes of this research are likely to enhance the literature regarding beliefs of students in the Pakistani setup.

## Research Questions

- 1 What are the beliefs of graduate students about English language acquisition?
- 2 Is there any change in the beliefs of the learners' after six weeks of time?

## Methodology

### Research Design

A descriptive research was conducted to study the beliefs of second language learners towards language acquisition.

### Participants

The respondents selected were the students of English Language and Literature, from a private higher education institution. The questionnaire was administered to the fourth semester students of academic year 2020. The data was collected from sixty students for the study. The age brackets of the respondents were between 19 years to 22 years.

### Instrument

The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1987) comprised of thirty-four items was adopted

to examine the beliefs of students towards second language learning. The tool consists of 5 language learning groups:

- (a) aptitude towards foreign language,
- (b) the difficulty towards learning language,
- (c) the nature of language learning,
- (d) learning and communication strategies, and
- (e) motivation and expectations assess the beliefs of learners ([Siebert, 2003](#); [Bernat & Lloyd, 2007](#); [Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006](#)) on a 5-point Likert scale range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

### Procedure

The data collection procedure consists of two phases; first phase and second phase.

First Phase: In the first phase the BALLI was administered to the sixty participants. The aim of the study was not explicitly elaborated to the respondents. However, the respondents were assured that they may respond according to their beliefs towards learning of English language and hence there were no wrong answers to it. The analysis was conducted with the completion of first phase of data collection.

Second Phase: After one and a half month the same survey form was given to the same students. The students were never told that they will be filling the same form after a few weeks' time. The students were asked to write their names while filling in the forms in both the instances.

### Data Analysis

To calculate the frequency for each response a descriptive analysis was conducted. To make the scoring easier for the viewer, the ratings of the BALLI were narrowed to three sets; that is, agree (for the first two responses), secondly, neutral and thirdly disagree (for the last two responses). To measure the change in beliefs the same form was given to the respondents with an interval of six weeks. A comparison was made of each respondent on the basis of his responses to each statement in the inventory.

## The Beliefs about Language Learning

**Table 1.** Foreign Language Aptitude

Item Foreign Language Aptitude	A %	N %	D %
Item 1	73.5	1.5	25
Item 2	76.5	8.5	15
Item 6	44.9	26.6	28.3
Item 10	28.3	34.8	36.6
Item 11	1.5	30	68.3
Item 16	38	20	41.6
Item 19	45	16.6	38.3
Item 30.	65	16.6	18.3
Item 33	91.6	3.3	5

Table 1 depicts that 73.5% of both the respondents believed that children learn English quickly and easily as compared to adults while only 25% of the participants did not agree to it. The majority participants agreed that acquiring second language age is a vital factor. Their beliefs were aligned with the researches that indicate a positive impact of age on various areas of learning a language for instance phonological improvement ([Patkowski, 1990](#)) as well as fluency ([Donato, Antonek & Tucker, 1996](#)). This result is in accordance with the common knowledge that children have the ability to learn second language well whereas only 15% of the participants did not agree to it. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that the ability to acquire the

knowledge of English language varies from individual to individual. 44.9% of the participants were agreed that Pakistani people are capable of acquiring English language. However, 28.3% of the students disagreed to the statement. It means that participants are of the view that Pakistani possesses special skills to acquire English for many reasons, such as the impact of British rule in the subcontinent. Furthermore, 28.3% of the respondents considered that it is easier for a person to learn a third language only if he has already acquired the understanding of a second language whereas 36.6% of the respondents disagreed with it. Interestingly, 68.3% of the respondents did not agree with the item stated. The participants believed that to acquire English language they do not need special skills and so there is no connection amongst acquiring English language and other discipline abilities. 41.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they possessed a distinct ability for acquiring second language. Only 38% were optimistic about their potential to learn English language and considered they have exceptional ability to acquire English. 38.3% of the respondents disagreed that females acquire English language better than males however 45% of them agreed that women tend to have better language learning ability. However, 65% of the respondents of the opinion that persons who can communicate in multiple languages perfectly are very intellectual as it does affect language acquisition. 91.6% of the respondents agreed that everyone is capable of learning to communicate in English.

**Table 2.** Difficulty of Language Learning

Item Difficulty of Language Learning	A %	N %	D %
Item 3.	91.6	3.3	5
Item 4	30	28.3	41.6
Item 15	70	10	20
Item 25	5	31.6	63.3
Item 34.	90	5	5

The results of Table 2 show that 91.6% of the participants agreed and 5% disagreed with the first item that it is easy to acquire some languages as compared to others. According to the participants some languages tend to be quite challenging as they are from different linguistic families. 30% of the participants agreed that it is easy to learn English language. This depicts the fact that the respondents are not familiar with regard to language difficulty. 70% of students agreed that they could easily and with proficiency converse in English, depicting their interest and confidence. Only 5% of students believed that as compared to comprehending a foreign language it is easier to be able to speak it, while 90% of the students disagreed with it. Hence, the participants proclaimed that as compared to reading and writing abilities it is easier to speak a language. Lastly, 70% of the participants were of the opinion that devoting an hour of a day to practice English would facilitate them to increase proficiency within a year's time. These participants appear to be keen towards the learning of English language since they are conscious of the importance and status of English in Pakistan. English is not only the official language of the country but is also used as the medium of instruction in any postgraduate programs. Hence, the present findings are aligned with the outcomes of the research conducted by [Daif-Allah \(2012\)](#), whose participants were of the view that some of the languages are easier to acquire as compared to others. They were very positive that they would become proficient speakers of English. Furthermore, 21% of the respondents were of the opinion that it was easy to speak rather than to comprehend English. Some of the respondents were not certain of the significance of speaking skills since 45% of the respondents remained neutral in their response.

**Table 3.** Nature of Language Learning

Item: Nature of Language Learning	A %	N %	D %
Item 8	81.6	13.3	5
Item 12	90	1.6	8.3

<b>Item: Nature of Language Learning</b>	<b>A %</b>	<b>N %</b>	<b>D %</b>
Item 17	93.3	5	1.6
Item 23	66.6	21.6	11.6
Item 27	66.6	21.6	11.6
Item 28	76.6	13.3	10

Table 3 illustrates that 81.6% of participants agreed to the notion that to converse in English it is essential to become familiar with its discourse cultures whereas 5% disagreed with the statement. Likewise, 90% of the participants agreed that in order to learn English at its maximum a person needs to be in an English-speaking nation whereas 8.3% of the respondents did not agree to the idea which depicts that they appraised of the importance of the relationship between language absorption and cultural interaction which assists certainly in language acquisition. More than 50% participants felt that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary plays an essential part in learning a language. The results revealed that 93.3% of the participants considered learning new words as the most important fragment of acquiring a second language. 66.6 % of the respondents believed that the most important part of acquiring English is to learn grammar. 76.6% of the participants were of the opinion that the most essential fragment of learning English is to master how to translate from one’s native language. However, 10% disagreed which indicates that translation method is helpful in language acquisition. Thus, it can be deduced that the teaching approach employed by their teachers was the grammar translation method and their beliefs did not favour the communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) method, where the language targeted is focused in the course of functional, reliable, communicative activities, whereby learners’ first language has no specific part in the classes. 66.6% of the respondents agreed that to learn a second language was not the same as to learn other academic matters while 11.6% did not agree with this statement. These inferences are in line with the results of [Jusoh \(2017\)](#) and [Hismanoglu \(2016\)](#), studies who concluded that the respondents have optimistic beliefs on nearly all the statements with regards to the nature of language learning.

**Table 4.** Learning and Communication Strategies

<b>Item: Learning and Communication Strategies</b>	<b>A %</b>	<b>N %</b>	<b>D %</b>
Item 7.	85	15	0
Item 9	5	6.6	88.3
Item 13	80	16.6	3.3
Item 14	88.3	5	6.6
Item 18	88.3	6.6	5
Item 21	53.3	25	21.6
Item 22	11.6	8.3	80
Item 26	91.	8,3	0

Table 4 results revealed that 0% of the respondents did not agree that it is necessary to converse in English with perfect pronunciation, whereas 85% of the respondents agreed to this item. They were of the opinion that to learn new words and grammar alongside with their correct pronunciation play a significant part in language acquisition. On the contrary, only 5% of them were of the view that they should not communicate anything in English unless they can speak it properly. 80% of the participants admitted that they liked practicing English with individuals whose mother language is English or those who could fluently speak in English whereas 16.6% remained neutral in their response and 3.3% disagreed with idea. Findings also revealed that 88.3% of the participants were of the opinion that it is fine to guess a word in English if you are not sure about it while 6.6% did not agree to it. Moreover, more than 80% of the respondents recognized the significance of repetition and practice towards language learning. As stated by [Griffiths \(2003\)](#) that other than literal translation, thoroughly,

and accurately looking up at every unfamiliar word, good language students infer meaning and keep on going. Hence, guessing the meanings of new words is an important skill other than depending a lot on mono or bilingual dictionaries. However, 50% of the participants were shy to speak in English with others, as they might commit errors while speaking. Non-English students felt anxious while speaking in English as did not implement effective techniques to overcome these problems. This finding is similar to [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#), results who proclaimed that tension or anxiety is created when it comes to speaking and listening in a second language. 11.6% of the participants agreed to the idea if novice learners are allowed to commit errors regarding English, it will result in difficulty in speaking the language correctly later on. This notion depicts that the learners seemed to be conscious of the significance of speaking a language in a correct manner. Finally, 91% of the students believed that practicing a language with the help of audio-visual materials is significant. These findings are similar to Daif-Allah (2012), who found that his participants held beliefs that were unrealistic regarding error correction and precision which affect the process language acquisition.

**Table 5.** Learning and Communication Strategies

Item: Motivation and Expectations	A %	N %	D %
Item 5	95	5	0
Item20	75	10	15
Item 24	88.3	3.3	8.3
Item 29	86.6	10	3.3
Item 31	93.3	6.6	0
Item 32	80	8.3	11.6

Table 5 revealed results regarding beliefs towards motivation as well as expectations category, 95% of the participants believed that Pakistani are of the view that speaking English is essential no participant disagreed with its importance which determines their mindfulness of importance of English in Pakistan. Thus, 88.3% liked English and were in favor of learning English as it would help them understand native speakers of English better. Apart from knowing these people better, English would help them in getting a better job and only 3.3% disagreed with this idea whereas 86.6% of the participants agreed to it. Furthermore, 93.3% of the respondents were in favor of learning to speak correct English and gave the ability to speak a great importance. This determines that the participants had a great wish to be proficient to speak correct and fluent English as 80% of them were keen to have links with pupils from countries with an English-speaking background. These findings are similar to many studies like [Asassfeh \(2013\)](#) who determined that the participants were optimistic towards their beliefs regarding motivation as well as expectations.

### Change in Beliefs about Language Learning

The BALLI was disseminated to the same respondents after six weeks of time and the results (see Appendix 1) showed that there was change observed in three groups, however no change was noticed in the two groups: aptitude towards foreign language and motivation and expectations.

**Table 6.** Learning and Communication Strategies

Item: Difficulty of Language Learning	A		N		D	
Item 15	42	(34)	6	(8)	12	(18)
	70%	56.6%	10%	13.3%	20%	30%
Item 34	54	(40)	3	(5)	3	(15)
	90%	66.6%	5%	8.3%	5%	25%

Table 6 showed the results regarding a change in the belief with regard to the time duration required to acquire a language. It might be probably because of the knowledge and the experience gained during the span of one and a half months' time. A 13.4% more participants agreed that it is impossible that a particular language can be learned by devoting only one hour daily towards learning that language. There was one more change in belief found in statement 34. There was an increase of 3.3% in the number of participants who remained neutral in their response while there was reduction of 23.4% in the response of the participants who previously were in favor of the statement and there was a rise of 20% in the response of the respondents who did not agree with the statement.

**Table 7.** Nature of Language Learning

<b>Item: Nature of Language Learning</b>	<b>A</b>		<b>N</b>		<b>D</b>	
Item 23	40	(53)	13	(4)	7	(3)
	66.6%	88.3%	21.6%	6.6%	11.6%	5%
Item 27	40	(54)	13	(4)	7	(2)
	66.6%	90%	21.6%	6.6%	11.6%	3.3%
Item 28	46	(51)	8	(6)	6	(3)
	76.6%	85%	13.3%	10%	10%	5%

The results shown in Table 7 are about a change in result in three statements 23, 27 & 28. According to item 23, there was a rise of 21.7% with regards to the respondents' beliefs towards the importance of grammar while acquiring a second language and a decrease of 15% in the response of the participants who remained neutral in their response and a decrease of 6.6% who did not agree with the statement. Similarly, an increase of 23.4% was noticed in the participants who agreed that one cannot acquire language in the same manner as one acquires knowledge of the other subjects. A decrease of 15% in the participants who remained neutral in their response and there was a decrease of 8.3% was noticed in the response of the respondents who did not agree with the statement. Moreover, there was a rise of 8.4% in the response of the students who accepted that a language can be learned by translating it into their native language. There was a decrease of 3.3% in the response of the participants who remained neutral in their response while there was a rise of 5% in the respondents' number who disagreed with the item.

**Table 8.** Learning and Communication Strategies

<b>Item Learning and Communication Strategies</b>	<b>A</b>		<b>N</b>		<b>D</b>	
Item 7	51	(58)	9	(2)		0
	85%	96.6%	15%	3.3%		
Item 9	3	(1)	4	(3)	53	(56)
	5%	1.6%	6.6%	5%	88.3%	93.3%
Item 21	32	(13)	15	(10)	13	(37)
	53.3%	21.6%	25%	16.6%	21.6%	61.6%
Item 22	7	(9)	5	(1)	48	(50)
	11.6%	15%	8.3%	1.6%	80%	83.3%

The results shown in Table 8 illustrate the major changes in the respondents' beliefs with regard to learning and communication tactics. An increase of 11.6% was calculated in the participants' number who accepted that it is essential to speak with correct pronunciation whereas 11.7% decrease in the response of the participants who remained neutral in their response was noticed. The results for item 9 that one must not speak in English unless one can pronounce it with proficiency showed the participants who accepted this statement had reduced by 3.4%, there was a rise of 5% in those who did not agree to this statement. A variation



in learners' belief was noticed for item 21. There was a decrease of 31.7% for the participants who agreed with the statement. They seemed to have overcome their shyness as 40% of the participants disagreed with the statement. Another item which reflected change in their belief was item 22 there was increase of 3.4% who accepted it and a rise of 3.3% in those who did not agree with this item. Though the percentage variation in beliefs is slight, the respondents seem to be more divided on the concerns put forward in the items regarding learning & communication techniques. In general, the results of the present research coincide with the earlier researches ([Chawhan & Oliver, 2000](#); [Ellis, 2008](#)) wherein the beliefs of learners can change with the passage of time as a result of new experiences & learning along with attitude change.

## Conclusion

The analyses of the results in this research provide a number of interesting perceptions into beliefs of EFL learners regarding the five language domains presented in BALLI. The nature of the beliefs of students is situational as well as dynamic. These findings would be helpful to teach educators while activities concerning the planning would be beneficial for both. The administration and the learners seeking to increase their awareness and adjust their beliefs towards comprehension of the language. Simultaneously, it is significant to pay due consideration to the beliefs regarding learning of language marked by the respondents in this study as indicated in BALLI. As noted by Bernat (2006) that in cognitively and effectively rich construct such as one's belief system it is quite an uphill task to sketch a whole picture exclusively through collecting answers to a set of normative statements. In coming days, the contextual approach might be employed by the researchers while keeping an eye on the qualitative data collection methods including unstructured interviews, observations and questionnaire to get glimpse of both the learners as well as teachers' beliefs and variation in their beliefs with the passage of time.

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