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# Re-examining Horwitz's Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in the Malaysian Context

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**Abstract**

In the past two decades the topic of beliefs about language learning has been attracting considerable research interest. The first to conduct a systematic research into the nature of language learning beliefs was Elaine Horwitz of the University of Texas at Austin, who developed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). This instrument has since been used to assess learners' beliefs by many researchers. However, there have been criticisms regarding the validity of the instrument, especially the delineation of its themes into foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations. This study aims to ascertain whether Horwitz's choice of themes could be backed by inferential statistical analysis and employed factor analysis for this purpose. This study is different from others as it looks at the nature of the language learners' beliefs in a multilingual setting, such as Malaysia. Participants were 107 students learning the Russian language at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). As a result of statistical tests, the following four factors were extracted: (1) motivation, (2) aptitude, (3) strategy, and (4) ease of learning. Overall, these results allow us to conclude that Horwitz's instrument is a suitable tool for research on language learning beliefs in various socio-linguistic settings regardless of the language being learned.

## 1 Introduction

Beliefs about language learning belong in the domain of affective variables, such as attitudes, motivation, anxiety etc. Richardson (1996, p. 103) defines beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true". Assessing beliefs that language learners bring to the language classroom is important for both language instructors and curriculum designers because "beliefs are predispositions to action" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 113). Educational psychology supports the proposition of the importance of beliefs that learners hold as a defining factor of their learning behaviour. Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) maintain that students who believe that their study is interesting and important are more actively engaged in the learning process and more persevering in their academic work. In addition, instructors need to know their audience in order to arrange the classroom procedure in the most effective way for learning.

In the past two decades extensive research in second and foreign language learning and teaching was devoted to beliefs that language learners – and language teachers – hold. Impetus for these studies was given by the pioneering research of Elaine Horwitz of the University of Texas at

Austin. In the 1980s, Horwitz designed an instrument to assess students' beliefs about learning a new language, which she called the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI).

Horwitz conducted her research among students and instructors at the University of Texas at Austin. Subsequent studies employed Horwitz's instrument for inquiries abroad. For example, Yang (1992) explored beliefs about language learning among English language students at six Taiwanese universities; Park (1995) investigated beliefs of English language learners at two universities in Korea; Truitt (1995) also conducted her study in Korea among Yonsei University students learning English.

Not only learners of the English language have been the focus of such studies. Horwitz (1988) conducted research among students of Spanish, French and German at the University of Texas at Austin. Kuntz (1996b) included learners of Arabic and Swahili in her studies. Smith (1989) and Tumposky (1991) investigated beliefs of Russian language learners. Kern (1995) used Horwitz's model to assess beliefs of students learning French. Bacon and Finneman (1990) surveyed beliefs of Spanish language students. Mori (1999) concentrated on learners of Japanese.

It has been recognized that beliefs about language learning are context-specific and learners from different cultures may have different attitudes, approaches to and opinions about learning a new language. Malaysia provides an interesting socio-linguistic background for a study on language learning beliefs. First of all, Malaysia is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. Secondly, students who begin learning a foreign language at universities in Malaysia are bilingual, trilingual or speak four and more languages and/or local dialects. Besides, these students have good English language proficiency since only those who passed the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) can register for a foreign language course at tertiary level. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the language learning beliefs of these learners who grew up in a multi-lingual surrounding and have had an extensive language learning experience.

This study employs Horwitz's BALLI (1988) with the aim to investigate beliefs about language learning held by Russian language students at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The questions of significance here are: (1) Do Malaysian students have the same underlying structure of language learning beliefs as respondents in Horwitz's (1988) study? (2) Is Horwitz's model valid and applicable in the Malaysian context?

This research adopts a different approach to data analysis from Horwitz's studies as she used only descriptive statistics while this study employs factor analysis. This will allow an additional insight into the structure of language learning beliefs.

## 2 A critique of Horwitz's model

Three instruments developed by Horwitz to assess language learning beliefs are often employed by researchers. These are: (1) BALLI to measure the beliefs of the students of English as a second language (ESL BALLI); (2) BALLI to explore beliefs held by foreign language teachers (teachers BALLI); and (3) BALLI to assess beliefs of students learning foreign languages (foreign language BALLI). A systematic overview of Horwitz's pioneering research and subsequent studies on the nature of beliefs was done by Patricia Kuntz (1996a). The critique of the BALLI in this section is largely based on Kuntz's study.

As Kuntz (1996a) maintains, Horwitz's BALLI evolved as a result of a brain-storming session that she had with 25 language teachers. Horwitz then compiled a teacher-generated list of beliefs that students might have about language learning and developed an instrument for her study, which she called Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) after consulting specialists in cognitive science and psychology. The first BALLI consisted of 27 statements and was used to assess beliefs of immigrants learning English as a second language in Texas. The second BALLI focused on the beliefs held by teachers of foreign languages; it consisted of 27 statements. The third BALLI comprised 34 statements and was employed by Horwitz to gather the opinions of students learning French, German and Spanish at the University of Texas at Austin. All the different versions of BALLIs employed a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

To give the instrument a structure, questions in the BALLI were divided into groups according to their theme or topic. Initially, Horwitz's BALLIs (Horwitz, 1981, cited in Kuntz 1996a; Horwitz, 1985) comprised four themes, i.e. (1) foreign language aptitude, (2) difficulty of language learning, (3) nature of language learning, and (4) language learning strategies. Then Horwitz modified the fourth theme to "learning and communication strategies" and added "motivation and expectation" to her instrument (Horwitz, 1987). The final BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) to assess beliefs about foreign language learning had this structure.

Despite the fact that Horwitz's BALLIs have been principal tools for extensive research into the subject of language learners' beliefs Kuntz (1996a) raised several issues concerning the instrument's validity. For the present study, the following three problems mentioned by Kuntz (1996a) are of particular significance. Firstly, statements dealing with learners' beliefs were generated by language teachers, not by learners themselves. Secondly, themes under which students' beliefs are organized in Horwitz's inventory were not generated statistically from students' responses, and the choice of those themes and their labeling were never explained. In other words, as Kuntz (1996a, p. 4) observes, "the five present themes represent a belief structure that teachers think students hold and not one that the sample of students actually revealed". Thirdly, Horwitz's research employed only descriptive statistics; therefore there is no statistical backing as to the significance of selected variables. This prompted Kuntz to question the validity of the theme division. Besides, analyses of the BALLI items by factors are lacking, which may indicate researchers' "dissatisfaction or perhaps distrust of the themes which Horwitz's teachers had chosen" (Kuntz, 1996a, p. 21). In our opinion, this may not necessarily be so. Numerous research studies employed the BALLIs as an instrument. This may attest to researchers' general agreement with the separation of beliefs into different areas as proposed by Horwitz. In the following section some of the studies on language learning beliefs are reviewed.

## 3 Other studies on language learning beliefs

Horwitz's work generated considerable research interest in the nature of beliefs held by language learners. A multitude of studies into the subject has been conducted since the 1980s. It would be impossible to review even a small fraction of research on language learning beliefs in this paper. Only the studies most pertinent for the present inquiry will be reviewed with special attention given to research that employed factor analysis.

Bacon and Finnemann (1990, cited in Kuntz, 1996a) were among the first researchers to conduct factor analysis of the students' responses to the instrument items. They developed their own questionnaire that consisted of 109 statements assessing students' beliefs. Their respondents were 938 learners of the Spanish language at two American universities. As a result of the factor analysis, eleven factors emerged and the statements were divided into two themes: (1) use of authentic texts in the language classroom; and (2) approach to language learning. Based on the findings, Bacon and Finnemann recommend that it is equally important for curriculum planners and textbook writers to know students' attitudes towards language learning and be aware of what students expect from the foreign language course curriculum.

A study by Yang (1992) focused on 505 English language students at six Taiwanese universities. Yang used the 34-statement foreign language BALLI and added one open-ended question. She employed principal component and factor analysis to analyze the data. As a result of the factor analysis, the following four factors were identified: (1) existence of self efficacy and positive expectations of learning outcome (BALLI statements # 4, 6, 12, 15, 18, 33); (2) high value of learning English (# 7, 9, 11, 17, 27, 30, 34); (3) endorsement of foreign language aptitude (# 2, 8, 10, 22, 29, 31, 32); and (4) priority to formal, structured study (# 16, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28) (Yang, 1992, cited in Kuntz, 1996a).

Notably, items slotted by Horwitz into the same groups loaded on different factors in Yang's study. This means that they did not represent the same dimensions or themes. For example, Yang's "self efficacy and positive expectations" group included statements that had been identified by Horwitz as "difficulty of language learning" (items # 4 & 6), "learning and communication

strategy" (items # 12 & 18), and "language aptitude" (items # 15 & 33). It has been suggested that the differences in results indicate that culture and ethnicity play a role in shaping students' beliefs. More importantly, Yang's study found that different samples may produce different sets of beliefs that will have their own unique underlying structure. Interestingly enough, statements regarding the existence of foreign language aptitude proved to be strongly interconnected and formed a separate component in Yang's research, just as it had been logically construed in Horwitz's study. In other words, Yang's study validated distinguishing of "language aptitude" into a separate theme.

Other researchers who employed factor analysis to examine language learning beliefs are Park (1995, cited in Kuntz 1996a) and Truitt (1995). Both studies were carried out at Korean universities and involved students learning English as a foreign language. Park's study of the beliefs held by 338 students used the 27-statement ESL BALLI with 10 additional statements. As a result of statistical analysis, the following four themes were identified: (1) motivation and formal English (BALLI statements # 16, 20, 23, 26, 30, 31, 32); (2) self-efficacy and social interaction (# 4, 6, 8, 12, 15, 18); (3) learning spoken English (# 7, 9, 11, 13); and (4) foreign language aptitude (# 2, 3, 22, 29). Similar to Yang's results, the most strongly marked statements by themes in Park's study were those related to foreign language aptitude. Other items that tended to load on the same factors in Park's analysis were Horwitz's statements regarding motivation and learning strategy. These findings lend additional support to the validity of Horwitz's theme configuration.

Truitt (1995) employed the 34-statement foreign language beliefs BALLI with additional open-ended questions to assess the beliefs of 204 students learning English as a foreign language at a Korean University. In her article, Truitt (1995) does not include tables with the results of the factor analysis. So it cannot be assessed with certainty whether some items in her study loaded on more than one particular component. Though 25 statements (out of a total of 34) were retained in Truitt's study after the factor analysis, the researcher did not offer a systematic explanation of the method of reduction of the BALLI items. Five themes that had been discerned as a result of the factor analysis were labeled by Truitt as: (1) value and nature of learning English; (2) self-efficacy/confidence in speaking; (3) the importance of correctness/formal learning; (4) ease of learning English; and (5) motivation.[1] It also should be noted that in Truitt's study each of the factors contained statements that had been placed in different themes by Horwitz. For example, the "value and nature of learning English" factor included items from Horwitz's "aptitude", "strategy", "nature of learning", and "motivation" themes.

Mori (1999) developed her own language learning questionnaire to assess the beliefs of 187 college students learning Japanese as a foreign language in the USA. The instrument contained 92 items separated into 17 themes. She acknowledged that the themes in her questionnaire were partially inspired by research on beliefs and pedagogical literature. This might explain why some of her themes bore strong resemblance to items in Horwitz's BALLI, e.g., "innate ability" ("language aptitude" in the BALLI), "language learning is the same" (BALLI's "nature of learning"), "Japanese is difficult" ("language difficulty" in the BALLI), etc.

Mori employed factor analysis to separate the hypothesized beliefs into homogenous sets. After eliminating items of the questionnaire that were redundant or highly correlated with other items, forty-two questions were left for the final analysis. Six factors were detected: (1) Kanji is difficult; (2) analytic approach; (3) risk taking; (4) avoid ambiguity; (5) Japanese is easy; and (6) reliance on L1 (Mori, 1999, pp. 392–393). Among these six factors, four evoke the BALLI themes. Factors "one" and "five" in Mori's study pertain to the "language difficulty" theme in BALLI while factors "two" and "three" concern "learning strategies". Though Mori did not employ the BALLI developed by Horwitz, her results lend some support and statistical backing to BALLI's theme separation.

During the past two decades different aspects of language learning beliefs have been examined, and many of the studies employed BALLI. This fact proves that the researchers recognize BALLI as a reliable research tool with good psychometric qualities. However, there have been comments regarding the complexity of the structure of beliefs and some researchers noticed that some belief dimensions appear to overlap. Mori (1999, p. 381) suggested that this could be due to the "lack of

empirical evidence for the independence of each factor". This indicates that there is a need for further research that employs inferential statistics, such as principal components, factor analysis, cluster analysis and communality estimates to explore the underlying structure of language learning beliefs in greater depth. In the following sections, such an analysis will be carried out followed by a discussion of the research findings.

## 4 Research Method

### *4.1 Participants*

The research presented in this paper was carried out at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) with the participation of 107 Russian language learning students. The Russian language was taught *ab initio* and none of the students had any previous knowledge of the language. 31 students completed one semester and 76 students completed three semesters of the program.

The majority of respondents were science students (71%, n=76); there were considerably more females (60.7%, n=65) than males (39.3%, n=42). The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 42 years, with the majority (97.2%, n=104) between the ages of 19 to 22 years. By ethnic groups, the majority of respondents were Chinese students (42.1%, n=45), Malay students accounted for 14% (n=15), Indian students represented 10.3% (n=11), Kadazan 15.0% (n=16), and others 18.7% (n=20)[2].

Regarding their linguistic background, the majority of respondents (45.8%, n=49) listed the "Chinese" language as their mother tongue; 26% (n=28) of respondents indicated the Malay language, 10.3% (n=11) chose "Indian", 9.3% (n=10) "Kadazan", and 8.4% (n=9) "other". None of the respondents was monolingual. Bilinguals represented 24.3% (n=26) of the cohort. The majority of the students (39.3%, n=41) spoke three languages, while a considerable number of the respondents stated that they spoke four (21.55%, n=23) or five (14.0%, n=15) languages and/or dialects. All respondents learned the Malay and English languages at school, while more then half of them (54.2%, n=58) learned three languages (Malay, English, and Mandarin). As these data indicate, the respondents in this study had extensive prior experience in language learning and might have formed definite language learning beliefs. However, the students' language learning experience had been limited to learning languages that were spoken in their immediate surroundings, and none of the respondents had mentioned learning a foreign language before entering the university.

### *4.2 Instrument*

This study employed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988) to asses the beliefs about learning a foreign language. The 34-statement BALLI employs a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from answers indicating "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

The BALLI was distributed to the students in English. The structure of the instrument was carefully retained and no major changes were made to the design of the original BALLI since the purpose of this study was to assess the reliability of the instrument as developed by Horwitz. Only minor and most necessary modifications were made in order to ensure that the instrument reflects the present study's context with a focus on Russian language students at a Malaysian university. Thus, the expression "English language" (BALLI statements # 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 18, 27, 28, 31) was changed to "Russian language" and the word "Americans" was changed to "Malaysians" (# 30, 33). Additional questions regarding the demographic profile of the respondents were placed before the BALLI items.

### *4.3 Procedure*

The 34-statement BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) was distributed in March 2005 during the last class of the second semester of the academic year 2005/2006 in the classroom – one per student. The students were requested not to consult their classmates while working with the questionnaire in order to ensure that the answers reflected each student's own beliefs and opinions about learning a foreign language. After completing the questionnaire they returned the forms to the lecturer.

### *4.4. Data Analysis*

Factor analysis was carried out in this study. Factor analysis helps to determine which variables tend to cluster together into homogeneous sets to construct a component. In other words, while researchers employ their own criteria to classify items into components according to the adopted conceptual framework, factor analysis employs a statistical method to confirm whether such classifications are justified.

## 5 Empirical Findings

Factor analysis was employed to determine which items of the UMS students' responses to the BALLI formed discrete, interpretable and independent dimensions. This helped to confirm the appropriateness of the items for each dimension of the conceptual framework of the instrument. Prior to further analysis, two statistical tests were done in this study in order to allow for the application of factor analysis, i.e. the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy test and Barlett's test of spherincity. Table 1 reports the results of these two tests.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy | | 0.666 |
| Bartlett's Test of Spherincity | Chi-square | 159.107 |
| Significance | | 0.000 |

**Table 1: KMO and Barlett's Tests**

The KMO sampling adequacy test statistic is 0.666 which is higher than the threshold value of 0.5 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black,, 1998). Barlett's test of spherincity statistic is significant at 0.01 level. This result indicates that the null hypothesis which states that the correlation matrix is an identity-matrix is rejected. Thus, these results appear to support the validity of the factor analysis usage for this study.

Further tests were performed to determine prior communality estimates. Table 2 shows communality estimates for selected items.

| **Items** | **Communalities** |
|---|---|
| 1. Q30 | 0.705 |
| 2. Q29 | 0.700 |
| 3. Q22 | 0.689 |
| 4. Q23 | 0.665 |
| 5. Q9 | 0.658 |

**Table 2: Communality**

The communality indicates how much of the variance in the selected items has been accounted for by the extracted components. For instance, 70.5 percent of the variance in "Malaysians think it is important to speak a foreign language" is accounted for by the extracted factor; 70.0 percent of the variance in "People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign

languages" is accounted for by the extracted factors etc. Items of the questionnaire with lower communalities were removed (#1, 4, 6, 19, 24, 26).

The next step was to determine the number of components for the analysis. This study used latent root criterion to determine eigenvalue limits. According to the latent root criterion (Cattell, 1966), a component with eigenvalue greater than 1 should be considered for analysis. Table 3 reports the initial eigenvalue for the components. Subsequent factor analysis identified only 4 components which have eigenvalue greater than the benchmark value. The four extracted components explain 63.7 percent of the total variance.

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total** | **% of variance** | **Cumulative %** |
| 1 | 2.605 | 26.00 | 26.00 |
| 2 | 1.481 | 14.81 | 40.81 |
| 3 | 1.265 | 12.65 | 53.46 |
| 4 | 1.030 | 10.30 | 63.77 |

**Table 3: Total variance explained**

Table 4 reports the result of the rotated component matrix. The main purpose of rotation is to reduce the number of the components on which items have higher loading. Rotation is expected to reduce the number of variables and produce a clear structure for an interpretation of the results.

However, in the course of the factor analysis in our study, some variables kept retaining dual or triple high loading after rotation, which maintained complex structures. Those complex structures could pose difficulties in the interpretation of the results. As Coakes (2005, p. 161) puts it, "Complex variables may have higher loading on more than one factor and they make interpretation of the output difficult" [3]. Therefore, we eliminated those variables that had higher loading on more than one component (items # 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 32, 34). In this study, loading of 0.5 and above was considered as higher loading. After eliminating complex structures, each of the remaining variables has higher loading on one component only. This produced a lucid structure of the respondents' beliefs and allowed an unambiguous interpretation of the research results.

| Items | Components | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
| Q30 learning FL is important | 0.829 | | | |
| Q31 want to know native speakers | 0.788 | | | |
| Q23 opportunity to use the language | 0.787 | | | |
| Q27 good job prospects | 0.728 | | | |
| Q22 learning FL is gender related | | 0.825 | | |
| Q29 math aptitude vs. FL aptitude | | 0.820 | | |
| Q9 do not speak unless correct | | | 0.803 | |
| Q13 it's OK to guess | | | -0.786 | |
| Q28 easier to read than write | | | | 0.804 |
| Q33 Malaysians are good at FL | | | | 0.600 |

**Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix**

As seen in Table 4, four factors were extracted within the students' beliefs based on their responses to the questionnaires. After considering items that loaded on these factors, the factors were given the following headings:

(1) Factor 1: "Motivation".
(2) Factor 2: "Aptitude".
(3) Factor 3: "Strategy".
(4) Factor 4: "Ease of Learning".

To compare the findings of the current study with Horwitz's division of themes, items that loaded on three factors (i.e. Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 3) matched Horwitz's separation of themes (see Table 5).

| Author | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Horwitz (1988) | **Language Difficulty** (theme 1) 14 24 28 * | **FL Aptitude** (theme 2) 1 2 10 15 22 29 32 33 34 | **Nature of Learning** (theme 3) 8 11 16 20 25 26 | **Learning Strategy** (theme 4) 7 9 12 13 17 18 19 21 | **Motivation** (theme 5) 23 27 30 31 |
| Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) | **Ease of learning** (factor 4) 28 33 | **Aptitude** (factor 2) 22 29 | ----- | **Strategy** (factor 3) 9 13 | **Motivation** (factor 1) 23 27 30 31 |

Note: numbers indicate statements in Horwitz's BALLI (1988)

**Table 5: Comparison of Grouping in Horwitz's BALLI (1988) and Current Study**

The two items that loaded on Factor 4 ("ease of learning") belonged to different themes in Horwitz's instrument; item # 28 belonged in the similar "difficulty" category in BALLI while item #33 was from the "language aptitude" theme.[4] Nevertheless, considering the contents of the statements Factor 4 could be labeled "ease of learning".

Items forming the "nature of language learning" theme in the BALLI did not form a separate factor in the present research. As these results show, selected items that had been combined into the same themes in the BALLI questionnaire formed discrete independent dimensions in two instances in the present study. Also, the factor analysis revealed that interrelationships between some of the original BALLI items are strong, especially the "motivation" theme. This result indicates that theme patterns in Horwitz's BALLI could be considered quite cohesive.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this research lend support to the proposition that language learning beliefs are systematic. Items that describe beliefs can be separated into distinct, interpretable and independent dimensions. This attests to the multidimensionality of language learning beliefs. In other words, statistical backing was obtained to support Horwitz's separation of beliefs into separate themes. Thus, the research results show that the BALLI items representing "motivation", "aptitude", "strategy" and "language difficulty" formed statistically independent factors based on the students' answers to the questionnaire.

Moreover, the validity of Horwitz's choice of themes is supported by the tenacity of certain students' beliefs as reported in different studies, including the present study. For example, Yang's

(1992) research clearly identified the "foreign language aptitude" dimension in the students' beliefs. That finding endorsed Horwitz's rationale to group BALLI's items into this particular theme. In Park's (1995) study, the "motivation", "strategy" and "aptitude" themes were clearly discernable. Interestingly, just like in Yang's study, items forming the "foreign language aptitude" theme tended to cluster in the same group in Parks' inquiry. The present research identified "motivation", "aptitude", "strategy" and "ease of learning" as dimensions in Malaysian students' language learning beliefs.

A difference between our findings and those of Yang's and Park's is that "motivation" – and not "aptitude" – proved to be the most cohesive of the BALLI's themes. This may be due to the fact that the participants in the current research did not believe in the existence of a special ability for learning a new language as all of them grew up in a multi-lingual environment and speak more than one language. The participants in this study were motivated to learn Russian as they believe that knowledge of a foreign language will enhance their job prospects. Also, they were keen to learn the language in order to meet native speakers of the Russian language. These results may indicate that "language aptitude" and "motivation" could be viewed as universal language learning beliefs. However, prominence of a particular theme may be determined by the socio-linguistic environment where language learning takes place.

Another clearly distinguished theme is formed by beliefs regarding strategy use. Those beliefs were discerned as a discrete factor in a number of previous studies and the present inquiry. In Park's (1995) study, "learning strategy" concerned learning spoken English; in Yang's (1992) it pertained to the formal study of the English language. In Mori's (1995) research, as well as in the present inquiry, use of strategy related to the learners' readiness for linguistic risk taking.

Further, the BALLI theme pertaining to the perceived difficulty – or ease – of language learning was a discernable variable in several inquiries (Truitt, 1995; Mori, 1999) including the present study, though somewhat less unequivocally. Mori (1990) identified two factors pertaining to the difficulty of the language under study, namely. "Kanji is difficult" (5 items) and "Japanese is easy" (4 items). In our study, two items (# 28 and 33) that loaded on the factor "ease of learning" belonged to two different groups in BALLI, namely "language difficulty" (#28) and "language aptitude (#33). However, from a broader perspective, both statements could be viewed as dealing with the perceived ease of learning a foreign language.

Only one of the themes of BALLI – beliefs concerning the "nature of language learning" – did not form a separate factor in the present study. A plausible explanation could be found in the insufficient number of participants (n=107) in relation to the number of variables (n=34), which is the greatest limitation of the present research. It also may indicate problems with the respondents' understanding of the meaning of the questionnaire items. Though BALLI was distributed in English, and all the respondents had a very good knowledge of the language, it is possible that some of the items were misconstrued. This could be seen as another limitation of this research. For future studies, a greater number of participants and the inclusion of open-ended questions to the instrument could be considered.

Based on our research findings, it can be concluded that despite criticisms and doubts regarding the reliability of BALLI (Kuntz, 1996) Horwitz's instrument can be considered to be a suitable tool for conducting research on language learning beliefs in different socio-linguistic settings. Despite the fact that statements in BALLI were generated by language teachers rather than learners numerous inquiries that adopted Horwitz's instrument were able to reflect students' perspective on language learning and offer useful insights for language teaching pedagogy.

A number of studies show that there are gaps and mismatches between teachers' and learners' beliefs about what language learning involves and how the language classroom should be organized (Kern, 1995; Banya & Cheng, 1997; Peacock, 1998). The present research did not intend to explore the differences in teachers' and learners' beliefs; offering advice regarding the incorporation of students' language learning beliefs into the pedagogical practice was not among the objectives of this study. However, some of our findings shed additional light on language learners' perceptions which could be insightful for language teachers. First of all, though language learning beliefs are complex and multidimensional, they are also universal. Students of different

languages in different cultures hold quite similar collective sets of beliefs about language learning. This could be a useful point of departure, especially for expatriate language teachers with a different educational experience from that of their students. Second, in order to ensure an effective teaching/learning process it is important for a language teacher to consider what learners are expecting from their language classes and what learning behaviour they are likely to adhere to. The results of this study endorse the applicability of BALLI as a research tool for assessing learners' beliefs and evaluating a unique environment of the language classroom.

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**Notes**

[1] Numbers for statements forming factors in Truitt's study are not cited here because of a numbering error in the original article (see Truitt, 1995).

[2] "Others" include other ethnic groups, such as "Bajau", "Bajau-Dusun", "Sino-Kadazan", "Sino-Dusun", "Bidayuh", and "Iban".

[3] In some of the previous studies, researchers did not remove items that had higher loading on more than one component which retained complex structures and could be a hindrance for a clear interpretation of the findings. For example, in Mori's (1999) research, there was a double loading on the "Kanji is difficult" factor.

[4] Item # 33 had a low communality below 0.5.

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