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Learner Beliefs in South Korea: Enriching the Description

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Abstract

Understanding learner beliefs facilitates pedagogic planning; however, to date research in the Korean context has been limited to studies using Horwitz's (1988) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), a questionnaire with deficiencies both in terms of its validity and its coverage. This small exploratory study works towards compensating for these shortcomings by seeking beliefs that appear salient for learners, but yet may be outside the BALLI's coverage, and by working towards more valid procedures for data collection. The investigation consisted of two main stages. Firstly, 36 university students wrote to a fictional language learner advising how he could learn English more successfully. This data was used to develop a questionnaire which was administered to 35 university students. As the Cronbach's alpha of questionnaire scales was lower than is considered acceptable, these quantitative results were treated as somewhat provisional. Nevertheless, the triangulated findings of the two data collection stages indicated potentially important beliefs not covered by previous studies that impact on areas such as classroom interaction, input and interlanguage. Finally, by comparing results to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, potential pedagogic implications were also identified.

1 Introduction

Important links have been shown between learner beliefs about SLA and learner behavior. Research has found connections between beliefs and learner autonomy (e.g. Cotterall, 1995), beliefs and anxiety (e.g. Horwitz, 1989; Truitt, 1995) and beliefs and strategy use (e.g. Abraham and Vann, 1987; Yang, 1999) whilst mismatches between student and teacher or institutional beliefs have been shown to have potentially detrimental effects on learning (e.g. Barcelos, 2003a). Thus a description of commonly held learner beliefs is useful in order that activities to negotiate or bridge the disparate beliefs of interested parties in an educational context may be incorporated into pedagogic plans.

This paper will begin by describing previous treatments of this issue in the Korean context (Section 2.1). Then, problems with these investigations will be discussed (Section 2.2), the paper's approach to these issues described, and its research questions identified (Section 2.3).

2 The study of learner beliefs

The issue of beliefs was introduced into the SLA literature by Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988) and to date all major research focused on beliefs in the Korean context has followed Horwitz's approach and used her questionnaire. This questionnaire – the BALLI – was developed "partly to

find out what beliefs students entertain and partly as a teaching device through which teachers [could] modify students' misconceptions" (Stern, 1992, p. 269). It consists of 34 5-point Likert-scales focused on statements in five major areas: "foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation" (Horwitz, 1987, p. 121).

2.1 Major findings in the Korean context

The first BALLI studies in Korea were conducted by Truitt (1995) and Park (1995). As a result of administering a Korean language version of the BALLI to 204 English undergraduates in Seoul, Truitt (1995) found the following:

> [Most participants] seem to have strong motivations to learn English, but not in order to get to know people who speak it. It seems that their motivation is more instrumental than integrative. They believe that culture is important in language learning, but that grammar is not. They support the strategies of repeating and practicing, pronunciation, and guessing, and believe that it is okay to make mistakes, but they feel timid and uncomfortable speaking English. They are optimistic about learning English, but believe that it is difficult, especially in speaking, and takes time. They also believe that anyone can learn a language, but that some have a special ability, which they may feel they personally do not have. (p. 6)

Park (1995) also surveyed Korean university students and found similar results to Truitt (1995). However, Park's participants believed English to be more difficult and that they would ultimately speak English better than Truitt's participants (Truitt, 1995, p. 6). Additionally, Park's study found learners regarded translation less favorably than Truitt's (Horwitz, 1999, p. 566).

Following these studies, others in Korea have used the BALLI to measure the beliefs component of a broader investigation. Examples of this include Finch's (2008) longitudinal research project into learner attitudes and preferences, and Ahn and Yang's (2009) use of the BALLI to examine the links between beliefs and strategy use. Similarly to Truitt (1995) and Park (1995) Ahn and Yang's (2009) participants were university students and, for purpose of comparison, the mean scores of each item in the study were compared with Truitt's (1995) results. The largest differences concerned the nature of language learning. Ahn and Yang's participants were more likely to believe it best to learn English in an English speaking country, that memorization is important, and that grammar is the most important part of language learning. This appears to indicate that Ahn and Yang's learners had more traditional views of language learning than those found 15 years earlier by Truitt (1995). This is surprising given that, over time, it might be hoped these beliefs would have changed. Despite this, it should be noted that the English translations of the two BALLIs used were subtly different suggesting some of the variance may be attributable to differing item wordings.

Overall then, the BALLI studies have produced interesting and pioneering findings and have provided important insights into learner beliefs in the Korean context. However, as will be argued in the following section, these conclusions are limited in scope and, given their questionable levels of validity, should be treated as somewhat provisional.

2.2 Limitations of current findings

One consistent problem found throughout BALLI studies is in the way that results are analyzed. As previously noted, the BALLI uses 34 questions to investigate 5 major areas. However, in the analysis of results, the majority of conclusions are drawn about beliefs investigated by single questions and not the major areas. This practice is problematic: as Gliem and Gliem (2003, p. 84) have pointed out, statistically, "single item reliabilities" – and by extension the reliabilities of conclusions that rest on single questions – "are generally very low, and … the validity of the [questionnaire] item is poor at best and at worst unknown". The reasons for this are multiple: firstly, indi-

vidual items are subject to measurement errors. For example, even minor differences in how a question is formulated can produce radically different levels of agreement or disagreement (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 103) and other unpredictable elements such as the emotional state of a participant may also affect responses. Secondly, as Lickert-scale items can only categorize people into 5 or 6 levels of agreement, a single item is unable to discriminate between fine shades of difference in levels of subscription to any given belief (Gliem and Gliem, 2003, p. 83). Thirdly, individual items lack breadth and may be unable to fully represent complex concepts (ibid.). These problems can be mitigated simply with the use of multiple items to investigate each area of interest; but the BALLI does not do this. Revisiting Truitt's (1995, p. 6) claims (quoted in the previous section) illustrates the impact of this failure: her argument that "students … seem to have strong motivations to learn English" is based on responses to five questions and could thus potentially be valid. Every other claim made is based on a single item and so should be regarded as highly tentative in nature. A similar critique may be made of all BALLI results reported in the Korean context (Park, 1995; Finch, 2008; Ahn and Yang, 2009) and many beyond it (e.g. Kuntz, 1996; Horwitz, 1999; Yang, 1999).

This issue of validity is compounded as the BALLI's Cronbach's alpha, assessing the internal validity of results, is also problematic. Properly, when used with Lickert-type questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of responses to different items in multi-item scales and so an alpha is reported for each scale. But as the BALLI does not use multi-item scales this convention is not adhered to and reported alphas are therefore of questionable worth. Yet even if taken at face value reported Cronbach's alphas are still dubious. George and Mallery (2003, cited in Gliem & Gliem, 2003, p. 87) provide a rule of thumb for assessing the Cronbach's alpha of a questionnaire: "_>.9 – Excellent, _>.8 – Good, _>.7 – Acceptable, _>.6 – Questionable, _>.5 – Poor, and _<.5 – Unacceptable". When this is compared to reports of the BALLI's Cronbach's alphas in the literature of between .53 and .71, (Ahn & Yang, 2009, p. 254) it can be seen that the BALLI's internal consistency is, at best, "acceptable" and, we can intuit, more typically "questionable" or "poor". These alphas can be further compared to figures reported in studies using the Strategies in Language Learning questionnaire (SILL) – a tool that is BALLI's well-established equivalent in the study of learner strategies – where reported Cronbach's alphas are between .85 and .95 (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p. 6). It thus becomes apparent that, for an established tool routinely used by researchers, the validity level is somewhat suspect.

With these doubts in mind, it might be expected that researchers in the Korean context would have sought to validate their findings through triangulation of their quantitative questionnaire findings with qualitative data. Instead, the status of the BALLI as the "traditionally" employed tool for beliefs studies (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 214) appears to have led researchers to import the BALLI with little adaptation and feel little obligation to triangulate results: the most notable exception is Finch's (2008) study which – although not focused predominantly on learner beliefs – triangulates a number of research instruments and includes qualitative data from a journal writing task. Nevertheless, the relative absence of triangulating qualitative data may have had further detrimental effects as the nature of a questionnaire is to restrict participants' choices by framing answers within a pre-established set of statements (Barcelos, 2003b, p. 15). It seems possible that, by denying participants opportunities to express themselves freely, this restriction may have obscured potentially important beliefs. Horwitz (1999, p. 576) herself suggested the "BALLI may not address some of the specific views held by [various] cultural groups". This possibility seems especially high in the case of the BALLI where questionnaire items were developed from the insights of teachers of English in Austin, Texas in the 1980s then applied to learners of English in Korea sometimes more than 20 years later.

2.3 Towards a more valid and appropriate treatment

Overall then, although previous studies have provided pioneering insights into the beliefs of Korean learners, they have been deficient both in their methodological rigor and, likely, in the

breadth of their coverage. There is thus a need to allow opportunities for salient beliefs of Korean learners to emerge and to work towards more valid data collection procedures.

The current study will attempt to treat the internal validity problems discussed by triangulating questionnaire results with qualitative data and by using multi-item scales of similarly worded questions to address each area of investigation. Additionally, in order to treat beliefs in a way that is more learner-centered and to begin to identify learner beliefs that may be specific to the Korean context, a new questionnaire will be made based on learners' own statements about language learning rather than teacher insights. The research will also address pedagogic implications revealed by the comparison of learner beliefs to the findings of SLA research.

3 Methodology

The following section describes participants in this study (Section 3.1). It then details data collection procedures for the qualitative stage of the investigation where learner statements were gathered (Section 3.2) and the quantitative, questionnaire stage of the investigation (Section 3.3). Finally, Section 3.4 communicates quantitative data analysis procedures.

3.1 Participants

Participants were learners of English at a provincial Korean national university who were enrolled in optional non-credit summer-vacation general English classes. They had been divided by a five minute pre-course interview into levels numbered one, two and three which were considered to resemble – on the basis of a retrospective examination of Council of Europe descriptor summaries – Common European Framework (CEFR) levels A2, B1, and B2 respectively (Council of Europe, 2000). Research was conducted in accordance with British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) guidelines for good practice (BAAL, 2006).

3.2 Qualitative data collection

In order to gather qualitative data from which to develop questionnaire items and to triangulate quantitative results, learner beliefs were elicited. In a process-writing lesson, 36 level one learners were asked to compose an e-mail style letter of advice to a struggling language student and, as learners worked in pairs, 18 e-mails were received by the researcher/teacher. By allowing learners to decide how they would respond it was assumed that results would reflect those beliefs that were most important and salient to them. The lesson began with an introductory reading task which provided scaffolding for learners' own writing: learners studied an e-mail taken from Clare and Wilson (2005, p. 48) where a newspaper agony aunt advised on a medical problem. They were then asked to reply to an e-mail from a fictional student who complained that although he was studying English diligently he was not improving, then asked why he had this problem and how it could be solved. Learners planned their replies using spider diagrams and wrote these responses in pairs. Finally, learners exchanged letters and gave structured peer-feedback. During the writing process, to enrich data and stimulate discussion, the researcher/teacher prompted learners to justify advice given. The task followed Cotterall (1999) who included a similar task at the end of her questionnaire. The task also recycled language for giving advice studied in the coursebook (Lebeau & Rees, 2008, p. 28–29).

Following Barcelos, (2003a, p. 182) collected data were read by the researcher and broken down into units – the smallest piece of relevant information that could stand on its own and remain interpretable in the broader context of enquiry. These units were then entered into a computer and categorized so that areas of enquiry would emerge. Next, the categories were reviewed and used to facilitate the generation of a questionnaire item pool. Learner statements were reused during the analysis of questionnaire results for the purpose of triangulation and so excerpts are reproduced in Section 4.

3.3 Quantitative data collection

Further lines of potentially interesting investigation stimulated by learner statements were added to the questionnaire item pool which was reduced and refined with the assistance of a number of experienced colleagues and mentors. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was piloted with five level one learners. Items that were left blank or multi-item scales which were answered inconsistently were reviewed and those judged to be potentially difficult to understand were re-phrased to ensure comprehension. The questionnaire was then administered to 35 learners (18 female, 17 male): 12 participants were in level one, 13 in level two, and 10 in level three.

While the questionnaire's instructions were written in the participants' native language, the questionnaire items were written in English that had been simplified by extensive revision and with the aid of lexical profiling software (Laufer & Nation, 2006). This allowed the English-language atmosphere of the classroom to be maintained and afforded learners with authentic reading practice. Furthermore, as other questionnaires have been written in English and still maintained a high level of validity (e.g. Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p. 6) it was deemed the use of English need not threaten the integrity of the investigation. Relatively short multi-item scales comprised of three complementary items were used to increase the validity of results while still allowing the questionnaire to cover a broad range of areas. The items were presented in a random order to ensure similar items did not occur adjacently. A third of the questionnaire items were negatively worded to avoid a response set where only one side of the rating scale was marked.

3.4 Quantitative data input and analysis

Collected data were input into Microsoft's Excel spreadsheet software package twice. The first and second entries were then compared for consistency and erroneous data were corrected by referencing the original manuscripts. The data were analyzed using PASW Statistics 18's Statistics Program for the Social Sciences. First, negatively worded items were recoded for inclusion in multi item scales. These scales were then summarized by computing the mean of the three items in each scale. Next, each scale's mean, standard deviation, and range was calculated to describe the data. Finally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale to assess the internal validity of results.

4 Results and discussion

This section will present and discuss results, focusing on those not treated by earlier studies but which appear to be important in the Korean context, the similarities and differences between learners' beliefs about SLA and the findings of SLA research, and the pedagogic implications of any discrepancies (Sections 4.1–4.5). Finally, the limitations of the study will be examined (Section 4.6).

Here, results from Part 1 of the questionnaire together with complementary learner statements are tabulated and have been divided into 5 categories of beliefs: nervousness and language learning (Section 4.1), interlanguage (Section 4.2), individual variation (Section 4.3), input (Section 4.4) and methods of learning (Section 4.5). For quantitative results, tabulated scores represent aggregates that are the mean of the three items on each multi-item scale. These scores correspond to the encoding of data: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Results are given to two decimal places. Findings from the three open questions in Part 2 of the questionnaire were only completed by a small minority of participants and answers were confined in almost all cases to single word negative answers and are thus not further reported here.

It should be noted that Cronbach's alpha was measured for each multi-item scale and this revealed the internally validity of results to be lower than is considered acceptable (see Appendix 2

for the tabulated scores of each scale). Quantitative results presented here should therefore be regarded as tentative. For a further discussion see Section 4.6.

4.1 Nervousness and language learning

Results regarding nervousness and its effect on language acquisition were complex: although learners appeared to disagree with the notion "Learners at this school are anxious when speaking in English" (Table 1), they repeatedly recommended relaxation during language learning in their writing thereby implying they assumed the unsuccessful language student would be stressed (Table 2). These findings were further complicated by the apparent tendency of learners to believe that they were afraid of making mistakes (Table 1).

Yet the idea with which participants disagreed concerned "learners at the school," while it is likely that other results referred to language study at a more general level. In other words, the differences in beliefs about anxiety appear to be linked to context. These results thus seem to echo the highly context dependent nature of anxiety that is well documented in SLA literature (Ellis, 1994, p. 480). It is plausible that learners found the classroom a safe place to use English and thus did not believe their peers to be nervous when studying even while they appeared to believe the task of language learning to be, more typically, stressful. These findings partially diverge from the results of earlier studies which argued learners in the Korean context were shy and timid (e.g. Truitt, 1995). Furthermore, they suggest a limitation of the BALLI's treatment of anxiety as the only item related to this area was "I feel shy speaking English with other people," a statement which fails to involve the potentially mediating variable of context.

Another finding outside the purview of the BALLI concerns the implications of anxiety. Here, learners seemed to believe that nervousness inhibits language learning (Table 1), echoing Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (described by Brown, 2007, p. 295). They also seemed to feel that risk-taking – which might be inhibited by nervousness – was beneficial for language learners, a finding that further resonates with SLA research (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 61). Taken together these results indicate that learner beliefs are compatible with classroom practices which seek to avoid face-threatening and stressful experiences in language learning.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Learners at this school are anxious when speaking in English.	2.00	4.33	3.37	.55
Nervousness inhibits language learning.	1.67	3.67	2.77	.43
Errors should be avoided by language learners.	2.00	4.67	3.08	.61
Learners are afraid of mistakes.	1.00	3.33	2.42	.54
Risk taking is beneficial in language learning.	1.67	3.76	2.50	.42

Table 1: Affective variables

Regarding Ideal Emotional States when Studying
"Many Korean are scare about English."
"You need to build up confidence to speak English and always speak English."
"I think you have insufficient confidence. First of all, you need to throwing away nervous mind."
"You should have confident your English skill."
"You enjoy studying English."
"I think you need to be more confident … Many people have fear about speaking English. Don't be afraid of speaking English. English is not your mother language after all."
Attitudes to Mistakes and Errors
"Do not fear mistakes. After mistakes you can learn and remember more longer."

Table 2: Learner statements regarding emotional states, mistakes and errors

4.2 Interlanguage

As can be seen in Table 3, learners seemed to believe grammar is learnt in the order it is studied. This contradicts the consensus reached by SLA literature which concludes: "there are systematic and predictable developmental sequences" which will override the order in which grammar is studied (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 92). Interestingly, learners also tended to believe they use the language they have studied correctly (Table 3) suggesting they perceive little or no variability across contexts or times in their language production. This belief has also been contradicted by SLA literature (see, for example, Brown, 2007, p. 42). Taken together these findings suggest that learners may hold beliefs that are incompatible with some of the core aspects of interlanguage theory, a finding which is also outside the BALLI's coverage.

Furthermore, these beliefs – especially taken alongside a learner's forceful recommendation of grammar-book based study (Table 4) – indicate a traditional view of the grammatical system as something that is rule governed and where language develops through the mastery of rules. For advocates of methodologies such as task-based learning which, according to Willis and Willis (2007, p. 8), seek to maximize opportunities for interlanguage development through a meaning-based approach, these results may have potent pedagogic implications. They may lead some learners to find communicative activities valueless while, reciprocally, teachers who do not foreground grammar may provide lessons that learners might perceive as unhelpful and therefore demotivating. It may therefore be advisable that, before embarking on meaning-based activities, the principles on which they rest be communicated to learners. Alternatively, inclusion of a stage in a task-based learning cycle where learners reflect on the ways their language may have developed could be considered as this could provide opportunities for teachers to fill gaps in learner insights.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Learners learn grammar in the order it is studied.	1.33	3.67	2.24	.51
Learners usually use the grammar they have studied correctly.	2.00	3.33	2.53	.34

Table 3: Interlanguage

Learner Statements Regarding Grammar
"Do you have grammar book? If you don't have, I absolutely recommend you buy it. Then. Study that book over and over. The thing you learn today you must try to practice."

Table 4: Learner statements regarding grammar

4.3 Individual variation

Contrary to the findings of both Truitt (1995) and Park (1995, as cited in Horwitz, 1999) Table 5 shows learners appear not to believe children are superior language learners to adults. Related to this but outside the coverage of the BALLI is the finding that leaners do not appear to believe in a critical period for pronunciation. These results fit uncomfortably with SLA research which finds adults have advantages over children in some SLA areas such as the initial rate of acquisition (e.g. Ellis, 1994, p. 36) yet finds strong evidence for a critical period in pronunciation (e.g. Brown, 2007, p. 63). It might therefore be argued that learners should be informed of this critical period so that any potential reticence caused by unrealistic expectations could be avoided. Nevertheless, as learners also tended to believe achieving a native pronunciation or accent in their learning was not important (Table 5) it seems unlikely that this potential reticence would manifest. It may thus be advisable for good pedagogic practice to highlight examples of adult learners in the Korean context who have achieved advanced levels of pronunciation and thus provide learners with a non-native-speaker – and therefore realistically attainable – model of excellence.

The results also provided interesting insights into beliefs about gender. Although one learner wrote that language learning is difficult for men (Table 6), quantitative results indicated this view was not generally held (Table 5). Curiously, females appeared to tend towards holding the opposite view (that men are better than woman at language learning). These findings run contrary to both to the belief as previously reported in the Korean context (e.g. Truitt, 1995, p. 6) and the common stereotype that woman are better language learners than men (reported by Schmenk, 2004, p. 515). SLA research tends to conclude that although females frequently outperform males in some contexts, there are multiple intervening variables and thus this will not always be the case (Ellis, 1996, p. 205). Given this, teachers should perhaps seek to minimize the role of broad gender-based generalizations in the classroom and instead ensure that gender-considerations are qualified by an understanding of learners as individuals.

Variable		Minimum	Maximum	Mean
There is a critical period for pronunciation.		2.00	4.00	2.98
Native Accent is important.		2.00	3.67	3.00
Native Pronunciation is important.		1.67	4.00	2.81
Children are superior foreign language learners to adults.		1.67	4.33	3.15
Koreans are good at language learning.		2.00	3.67	2.62
Men are better than women at language learning.	All responses	2.00	4.00	2.97
	Responses from males	2.00	4.00	3.09
	Responses from females	2.33	3.33	2.86

Table 5: Individual variation

Individual Variation and Language Learning
"Honestly, to learn another language is very difficult for men."
"This [not being good at English] is a common problem because you are Korean."
"Many Korean are scare about English."
Pronunciation
"Don't shy about your English pronunciation. Nobody don't laugh your English."

Table 6: Learner statements on individual variation and pronunciation

4.4 Input

Also outside the coverage of the BALLI were items related to the role of input in language learning. While learner statements expressed the benefit of input in relation to receptive skills (Table 8), quantitative data also indicated learners believed input assists output (Table 7) thus implying input is believed to aid general language development. This attitude is confirmed by much research (see Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 143–150). However, in their writing learners tended to recommend forms of authentic input such as watching the US sitcom Friends or listening to pop music to assist language learning (Table 8). Implicit in these statements was a preference for authentic, unmodified input the majority of which would probably be incomprehensible for learners on this course who were below the CEFR C1 level at which "films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage [can be understood]" (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 10). These preferences were corroborated by questionnaire results (Table 7).

Although it is positive that learners considered exposure to English to be beneficial, examination of beliefs suggests that learners may not chose the ideal variety of input. Despite the fact that learners may be motivated by self-selection and, doubtless, some input is better than none, greater benefits may accrue to learners who expose themselves to comprehensible input. Indeed, it is argued that "comprehension of meaningful language is the foundation of language acquisition" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 150). Of particular concern is that these learners were encouraged to read a graded reader each week for the duration of their course. If learners appreciated these readers were simplified, motivation for this program may have been impaired. In future program coordinators might more fully explain the benefits of comprehensible input to learners when introducing extensive reading courses.

Variable	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**
Input (reading/listening) assists output (speaking/writing).	1.33	4.00	2.30	.54
Input that cannot be understood facilitates learning more than input that comprehensible input.	1.67	3.67	2.69	.42
Modified input is superior to authentic input for language learning.	2.33	4.33	3.20	.44

Table 7: Input

Statements Regarding Input
"Listen carefully to native speaker in order to educate my brain, my ear in English."
"Speed reading is understand about the sentence's meaning very fast without translation in Korean."
"If you don't like to see books then you watch drama in America of UK and listen popsongs, too."
"You should also listen English everyday too. In order to open your ears better."
"Read English magazine and newspaper so that you can read English faster and more good at understand English."
"You can watch English T.V. program example foreign movie, drama and BBC."
"You should listen English conversation everywhere."
"Listen to English steadily from news or radio."
"Find some interesting US dramas and watch! It is really helpful."
"Also you should watch English TV program for example movie, drama, comedy etc."
"Just do anything, read English novel, listen radio or write a letter to your foreign friends."
"First, you have to listen about English sound for example watching TV, radio and so on."
"Second, contact English article many. This is grown your reading level."

Table 8: Learner statements regarding input

4.5 Methods of learning

Questionnaire responses indicated learners appeared to believe both interaction with native speakers and output to assist SLA (Table 9). These findings were echoed in learners' advice (Table 10). However, learners appeared not to value interaction with other learners (Table 9) and statements recommending this study strategy were conspicuous in their absence from qualitative results. This implies it is interaction with native speakers as opposed to interaction per se which may be believed to be of benefit.

Yet research has argued that interaction itself assists SLA (e.g. Long, 1996, as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 305) as interaction has been shown to both stimulate the negotiation of meaning which may promote interlanguage development (Doughty & Pica, 1986, as cited in Hedge, 2000, p. 281) and allow learners to produce more output (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 214). During the program, learners regularly completed tasks or engaged in cooperative learning where small group work was the dominant mode of interaction. As the arguments in favor of group work are so compelling it may be prudent for teachers to relay to students the advantages of the technique, perhaps focusing on its facilitation of output (which learners seemed to believe to be beneficial) in order to pre-empt any possible dissatisfaction. This area of potentially huge importance for pair and group work in the classroom, and how learners may seek to learn English beyond the classroom, was also outside the BALLI's coverage.

Additionally, questionnaire findings indicated learners believed memorization was not an efficient method of study (Table 9) although learner statements indicated that at least some learners felt it was a strategy worthy of recommendation especially for vocabulary learning (Table 10 and Table 4). Furthermore, learners apparently tended to prefer learning in naturalistic rather than instructed settings (Table 9). However, as the participants were at the time of the survey were study-

ing in a classroom environment, future learners might usefully be informed that it is not known whether classroom learners ultimately attain lower levels of grammatical competence than learners in naturalistic settings (Ellis, 1994, p. 216).

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Interaction with native speakers helps SLA.	1.33	3.67	2.50	.42
Interaction with other learners helps SLA.	1.67	4.33	3.26	.53
Output assists language learning.	1.00	3.00	2.34	.45
Memorizing language assists language learning.	2.33	4.67	3.59	.46
Meaningful learning assists language learning.	1.00	3.00	3.08	.43
Overseas study is essential to learn English.	2.00	3.67	2.86	.36
Naturalistic situations are superior to classrooms for SLA.	1.67	4.00	2.75	.46

Table 9: Methods of learning

Interaction and SLA
"You have to foreign friend. They speak English every day so they helps you learning."
"Conversation with foreigner. This is induced your intrest about Engish and touch with English constantly."
"Make some friend in order to English penpal."
Regarding Learning by Rote
"Memorize more English word to support your vocabulary."
"Recite words 200개 [kae, a Korean counter meaning items or things]."
"Memorize many words and phrases."
"You need to a lot vocabulary so you must have memory work."
Regarding Naturalistic Learning
"If you write a diary at night, you write a diary in English."
"Make some friend in order to English penpal."
"Think it all English. For example, if you see a apple you think there is apple not 사과 ["sagoa": the Korean word for apple]."
"If you have a lot money use it, Go abroad, find a man to man teacher and make a foreign friend by money."
"Last, go to abroad (using English) because you going for abroad must use English during all day."

Table 10: Learner statements regarding methods of learning

4.6 Study's limitations and suggestions for further research

Although the present study was of a small exploratory nature and so broadly generalizable results were not deemed essential, the typical Cronbach's alpha of each questionnaire scale was lower than is considered acceptable (Appendix 2) showing there was substantial variance in individual

participants' responses to the items on each scale. Here, to attempt to find more internally valid values the Cronbach's alpha test was repeated for some scales, omitting some items, but results remained deficient. It was speculated that weaker learners may have had difficulty understanding questions and so have guessed portions of the answers. However, re-running the test excluding level 1 learners (who were deemed to have been most likely to fail to understand questionnaire items) returned similar results. It is likely that, in order to raise Cronbach's alpha scores, a combination of longer multi-item scales, a larger sample size and the rephrasing of some questionnaire items would be needed: a larger sample size would also enable Factor Analysis to be computed and thus patterns in participants' responses to the items on the questionnaire to be examined. It is also conceivable that deficient Cronbach's alpha scores were caused by the random answering of questions due, perhaps, to insufficient participant motivation resulting from the length of the questionnaire. This issue could be treated by administering a Korean language questionnaire as participants could then answer more quickly and thereby maintain motivation levels. Another alternative would be to study smaller more focused subsets of beliefs – such as individual variation or input – which could then be explored through questionnaires with fewer items overall but longer multi-item scales treating each area.

A further limitation of the current study derived from its use of learner statements to formulate questionnaire items and triangulate quantitative findings. This process may be problematic for a number of reasons: firstly, it remains unclear as to whether learner statements constituted reflections of their experiences in a particular environment – what might be characterized as preferences – or, alternatively, whether statements constituted more permanent and deeply seated assumptions about SLA – which can be accurately characterized as beliefs. Secondly, the statements themselves may have dubious levels of reliability: learners' advice was at times flippant or comic in nature and may have been altered or contrived for this effect. Finally, the limited L2 competence of learners may have affected their ability to verbalize underlying beliefs. Future studies might partially compensate for these weaknesses by conducting a letter writing task with higher level learners who would be able to verbalize a wider range of beliefs. This would also allow a comparison of learner beliefs at different levels and, potentially, reveal the impact of the language learning process on beliefs.

5 Conclusion

This small exploratory study worked towards compensating for the failings in terms of coverage and methodological rigor of earlier studies in the Korean context. The investigation elicited beliefs about SLA from 36 learners through an e-mail writing task then used these data to facilitate the construction of a beliefs questionnaire and to triangulate quantitative results. The questionnaire was administered to 35 university students at a Korean university and findings analyzed. The questionnaire's usage of multi-item scales and the triangulation of questionnaire results with quantitative data allowed the study to begin overcoming some of the methodological shortcomings of earlier investigations. However, work is still needed in this area as results from the developed tool displayed lower levels of internal validity than usually consider acceptable.

Furthermore, through the development of a questionnaire based on learner statements, beliefs emerged that were outside the coverage of previous studies yet of apparent importance to learners while quantitative results indicated many of these beliefs were widely held. This process revealed deleterious beliefs regarding the ideal type of input and the usefulness of peer-to-peer interaction as well as beliefs that appear incompatible with interlanguage theory. More neutral beliefs regarding the effect of anxiety on language learning and the role of context in anxiety were also found. The relevance of these beliefs to study was further highlighted by the seemingly important implications for teachers revealed by their comparison to the findings of SLA research. These implications ranged from the apparent need to ensure that learners perceived the developmental benefits for interlanguage of meaning-based pedagogic tasks to recommendations regarding the implementation of extensive reading programs.

The study also has broader implications for the construction and evaluation of questionnaires and for pedagogic planning. The BALLI's weaknesses in terms of statistical validity and coverage highlight the potential for interesting research to be undermined by a failure to adhere to principles for good questionnaire design as identified by, for example, Dörnyei (2003). Similarly, these weaknesses further suggest that a critical view should be taken in evaluating and re-deploying even established questionnaires in the research literature. Additionally, the mismatches evinced by the current study between learners' beliefs and both SLA theory and local pedagogic practice suggest the continued value of efforts to locate and raise-awareness of learner beliefs. At present there appears to be – at least in the Korean context – a lamentable absence of a coordinated effort by materials developers, policy makers and teacher trainers to integrate a consideration of beliefs into EFL teaching. Yet the diversity and frequency of deleterious beliefs indicated by this study suggests that just such a systematic approach may be required in order to transform beliefs or otherwise mitigate their potentially negative effects.

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Appendix 1

The Beliefs about Language Learning Questionnaire [English Version]: "Welcome" and "instructions" sections were originally in the participants' native language, Korean. All other sections were in English and are presented in their original form.

THE BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING QUESTIONAIRRE

Welcome

Dear All,

Welcome to the "Student Beliefs Questionnaire"! This questionnaire is designed to investigate what Korean Students believe about how English language learning works. I will use the results of this survey to help complete some research on Korean students' beliefs about language learning.

Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions below. Also, when collecting and reporting data, no names, student numbers or other identifying labels will be used and that any data or other information will not be traceable to any particular individual.

Thank you all for your help!

Best Regards,

[RESEARCHER'S NAME]

Instructions

- Please answer all questions.
- The questionnaire is four pages long and there are questions on the front and back of the pages.
- If there are any questions you don't understand please ask a teacher or another student.

- Answer the questions by putting a circle in the appropriate box. For example:-

	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Highly intelligent people are good language learners.				O	

Part 1: Questions

	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neither Agree nor Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
1. It is easier for women to learn foreign languages than men.					
2. Adults are better at foreign language learning that children.					
3. Koreans are generally good at learning languages.					
4. After students have learnt some grammar they generally use it correctly.					
5. Mistakes are embarrassing.					
6. Using English is scary for students on this course.					
7. Talking to other learners helps language learning.					
8. It is important to connect new language to what you know.					
9. Students learn grammar in the same order that they study it.					
10. More language learning occurs when talking to people in English than when studying books.					
11. Reading English I don't understand is more helpful than reading English I understand.					
12. Reading in English helps me to write English better.					
13. It is OK to guess if you don't know a word or grammar in the foreign language.					
14. It is possible to learn English to a very high level in Korea.					
15. Men learn English with less effort than women.					
16. To learn English it is important to speak a lot.					
17. It is easier to learn a language when you're relaxed.					
18. Children learn English as a foreign language more quickly than adults.					
19. People learn more when they are listening to a real conversation than one for learners on a CD or tape.					
20. Speaking to foreigners is not helpful in English learning.					
21. Grammar is learnt in the order that it is studied.					
22. Mistakes can help learning.					

23. Students' language learning is helped by talking to other students.					
24. Students should not guess when they don't know language that they need.					
25. Memorizing new language is useful for language learners.					
26. Natural situations (like a shop in a foreign country) are better places to learn than classrooms.					
27. Once students study some grammar they use it the same way in all situations.					
28. Classrooms are the best places to learn languages.					
29. Listening to real films, music or conversation helps learning more than listening to things that are made for language learners.					
30. When it comes to language learning, men are better than women.					
31. For learning English, listening to things for learners is better than listening to things for native speakers.					
32. Students in this program are usually nervous when using English.					
33. It is not important to speak with a native accent.					
34. Language can be learnt by speaking to people from countries like America or Britain in English.					
35. Connecting knew language and old language is not important.					
36. Koreans' ability to learn English is usually low.					
37. You can learn well by speaking to a native speaker of English.					
38. It is important not to make mistakes when learning.					
39. Talking to other learners is not helpful when learning English.					
40. Overseas experience is essential to learn English.					
41. It is best to learn language by connecting it to what you know.					
42. People learn language more slowly when they are stressed.					
43. I feel fine when I speak incorrectly.					
44. It is impossible for adults to learn to speak English with a native English pronunciation.					
45. Listening or reading English does not help me to speak or write better.					
46. Students at [NAME OF SCHOOL] are usually relaxed when they speak English.					
47. It is not important for language learners to pronounce words the same as native speakers.					
48. Accurate pronunciation is essential for language learners.					
49. Mistakes should be avoided by language learners.					
50. People who are quiet in English class can learn as well as people who speak a lot.					

51. Trying to memorize language is a waste of time.					
52. Speaking with a native-like accent is important.					
53. The best way to learn new language is to memorize it.					
54. Generally, Koreans are good at learning English.					
55. Students should avoid making mistakes when they're learning English.					
56. People who speak a lot of English during class learn quicker than people who only speak a little.					
57. Students learn to use grammar in an order different to the one they study grammar in.					
58. It is possible for people who start learning English as adults to learn a native pronunciation.					
59. Students often use the same grammar correctly in one situation but incorrectly in other situations.					
60. To learn English students need to live abroad.					
61. It is best for language learners to read or listen to things that they understand.					
62. Being very nervous makes learning slower.					
63. To practice reading, it isn't important to understand what I'm reading.					
64. Listening to English helps me speak English better.					
65. It is important to speak with a native-like accent.					
66. Children are better at learning foreign languages than adults.					
67. Guessing helps in language learning.					
68. Only children can learn languages with a native pronunciation.					
69. It is very important to pronounce the sounds of English accurately.					

Part 2: Other questions

Are there any questions you wish had been asked? What were they?
Are there any questions that did not understand? Which numbers?
Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Part 3: Personal Information

Gender: Male Female
Level: 1 2 3

Part 4: Closing Comments

Finally, if you have any questions or comments please feel free to ask me at any time. You can use my e-mail ([RESEARCHER'S E-MAIL ADDRESS]) or visit the staff office. I look forward to speaking to you. And finally:-

Thank-you for your help!

Appendix 2

Cronbach's Alphas of Questionnaire Scales

Multi-Item Scale Titles	Questionnaire Item Numbers	Cronbach's Alpha
Affective Variables		
Learners at this school are anxious when speaking in English.	6, 32, 46	.165
Nervousness inhibits language learning.	17, 42,62	-1.159
Errors should be avoided by language learners.	22, 38, 49	.332
Learners are afraid of mistakes.	5, 43	-.169
Risk taking is beneficial in language learning.	13, 24, 67	-.664
Interlanguage		
Learners learn grammar in the order it is studied.	9, 21, 57	.223
Learners usually use the grammar they have studied correctly.	4, 27, 59	-956
Individual Variation		
There is a critical period for pronunciation.	44, 58, 68	.049
Native Accent is important.	33, 52, 65	-.922
Native Pronunciation is important.	47, 48, 69	-.653
Children are superior foreign language learners to adults.	2, 18, 66	-.211
Koreans are good at language learning.	3, 36, 54	-.170
Men are better than women at language learning. (all)	1, 15, 30	-.155
Input and Output		
Input (reading/listening) assists output (speaking/writing).	12, 45. 64	-.348
Input that cannot be understood facilitates learning more than input that comprehensible input.	11, 61, 63	-.207
Modified input is superior to authentic input for language learning.	19,29, 31	-.710
Output assists language learning.	16, 50, 56	-.138
Methods of Learning		
Interaction with native speakers helps SLA.	20, 34, 37	-.565
Interaction with other learners helps SLA.	7, 23, 39	.274
Memorizing language assists language learning.	25, 51, 53	-.354
Meaningful learning assists language learning.	35, 38, 41	-.114
Overseas study is essential to learn English.	14, 40, 60	-.619
Naturalistic situations are superior to classrooms for SLA.	10, 26, 28	-.381