

# The Relationship between Student's Beliefs on Foreign Language Learning and Their Speaking Performance in Rural High school English Classes

(Mansooreh Jamali(MA))

Islamic Azad University, Zanjan,Iran

**Abstract:** *Today, it is vital to learn a foreign language, learner's belief and perception of need to foreign language learning. Among the main skills, the speaking plays a crucial role in language learning. Considering students' low performance in English speaking in rural high schools, the need was felt to study the relationship between rural learners' belief in EFL learning and their speaking performance. However, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between rural female high school student's belief in learning English as foreign language and speaking performance in English.*

*The population consisted of all rural female high school students in grades 1, 2, and 3 in Sultanabad village in Zanjan-Iran (N= 45). Due to few numbers of population, all of the population were selected as sample. Using standard BALLI (belief about language learning inventory) questionnaire which was designed by Horwitz (1987), the belief of students in English learning was measured at the beginning of semester. The participants' speaking performance was measured by international IELTS test at the end of semester. The data were analyzed and the results showed that there was correlation between two main variables ( $= +0.831$ ); the hypothesis was confirmed. So, it was confirmed that there was significant relationship between rural female high school students' beliefs and their English speaking performance.*

**Keywords:** *Belief, Foreign Language Learning, Speaking Performance.*

## 1. Introduction

The beliefs play a crucial role in doing any action. When we want to start doing an action, the success won't happen if we don't believe in its nature and don't agree with its ideology. A positive and desirable point of view regarding a phenomenon will help us to proceed step by step with a strong motivation, as we believe in our own endeavor.

Of course, there is difference between attitude, belief, and motivation, so we should care not to mix them up. The Motivation is the desire along with effort to do something and the attitude is what we acquire through a collection of beliefs and it is broader than belief. Eva Bernat- Inna Gvozdenko (2005) believe that the terms such as knowledge and beliefs are treated differently within research population, depending on varying theoretical orientations.

Although there are so many thesis, articles, and researches on effect of belief on EFL learning process in English high school classes, this effect on speaking performance in rural high school classes like villages, is

rarely assessed. So, based on observations and to prove the assumption, this aimed to investigate the relationship between student's belief about EFL learning and their speaking performance.

### **1.1. Purpose**

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between female high school student's beliefs on their EFL learning in rural English classes. The objectives of study include: First objective: To find the relationship between rural high school female students' beliefs about English learning and their speaking performance in English language. Secondary objective: Investigating some factors affecting their beliefs such as parent's level of education, environment culture regarding new FL, past experiences, level of economic welfare, learning material availability, and school's capacity in preparing ICT and other technology devices to help learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

We know that what we believe in through our past experiences from childhood about a topic, event, or process is known as belief. But what about scholars point of view? Magnus Österholm (2009) claims that: "One way to define beliefs is to focus on this claim: a person believes that (or has the belief that) a certain statement is true. The question of what you mean by such a claim deals with definition of beliefs".

Lynne Rudder Baker (1989) explained four approaches to belief as follows:

"Our common-sense understanding of belief is correct- Sometimes called the "mental sentence theory. Our common-sense understanding of belief may not be entirely correct, but it is close enough to make some useful predictions".

### **2.1. Beliefs and their Importance in Learning**

Philip Riley (2000) mentioned two versions of belief in learning: BATs, belief about talking and BALLI, and belief about language learning. Riley believes that BATs set the BALLIs in motion. Also he asserts that all learners should be aware of and have access to their own beliefs including BATs and BALLI.

Again Rana Abdul Settar Abid (2012) stresses on importance of student's beliefs on learning strategies and teaching activities. She claims that growing evidence suggests that learners' beliefs do not only influence their approaches to language learning, but also affect the way they respond to teaching activities.

### **2.2. Speaking Performance**

As Kathleen B. Egan mentions in article: As Utami Widiati (2006) mentions in his study, the communication is an important part of human civilization and it is a means of cultural transformation. Communication using languages may be conducted in two ways: orally and in written form. In the context of language learning, it is commonly believed that communicating in written form is more difficult than orally (speaking), suggesting that writing is a more complex language skill than speaking.

### 3. Methodology

This study used two kinds of questionnaires in survey framework to obtain the results. This approach helped us to save time in providing findings, as it included many topic-related questions in one questionnaire.

#### 3.1. Participants

In present study, 45 high school students were included who were rural girls having English class once a week, about 15 to 18 years old in a village named Sultanabad. As I have been this school's principal, I know all of them well, so the data about their situation is complete.

The sources they have studied were only their school English book. These 45 students were at 3 classes. Their teacher was professional English teacher, having 90 minutes English class a week.

TABLE I: Results of Students' Background Survey

Class	number	Sex	S-L	OSL
A	15	F	3	0
B	16	F	4	0
C	14	F	5	0

Note. S-L= in school learning experience. OSL= outside school learning

#### 3.2. Research tools

##### 3.2.1. Speaking Performance Testing

Of course, I should use an international standard speaking test to evaluate participant's performance in this area. And, as I mentioned, because of students' weak performance, testing by teacher may be more suitable. So, I mixed both of them. The main framework of speaking test was IELTS speaking test, but the content of test was according to participants' level. All of participants have been evaluated orally based on their own capabilities covered in evaluation form, from 0 to 9 in each phase. Sum of three phase's points is the final scale in speaking IELTS test.

##### 3.2.2. Beliefs measurement

This tool consist of 32 items from the "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) designed by Horwitz (1987). It is a known belief testing tool that had been used by some scholars to measure learner beliefs regarding second or foreign language learning (See Appendix A).

### 3.3. Data Analysis

All data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The Quantitative and qualitative analyses of data were performed in present study. The quantitative analysis involved several statistical procedures:

- (1) Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the students' responses to belief items as well as background information of sample;
- (2) Pearson correlations and canonical correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between belief and speaking performance factors.
- (3) ANOVA data was used to find the differences among three groups of participants in speaking performance and their belief in EFL learning based on their grade.

### 4. Results

All of participants were present in tests sessions. The participants responded the BALLI questionnaire at beginning of semester in order to measure their belief in EFL learning. Again at the end of semester, the IELTS speaking test was administered with no absent. According to mentioned reason, the data were analyzed with high sensitivity and accuracy in four parts as follows:

1. Descriptive analysis of sample demographic characteristics by descriptive statistics indices.
2. Descriptive analysis of research main variables by descriptive statistics indices.
3. Data distribution study via inferential statistics.
4. Study of correlation between main variables by inferential statistics

#### 4.1. Reliability Analysis

When both variable's tests were analyzed separately through SPSS software, we found that the reliability of both tests is high and desirable, as their measured Cronbach's Alpha was too close to 1. BALLI's Alpha in 25 items was 0.9761 and IELTS's Cronbach's Alpha was 0.882 for three parts of questions.

TABLE II: BALLI Reliability Measurement

N of Cases =	45.0
Reliability Coefficients	25 items
Alpha = .9761	Standardized item alpha = .9761

In table 2, research's main variables are analyzed by descriptive statistics.

#### 4.3. Inferential Analysis of Research Data

##### How scores are distributed?

To determine data distribution in study's main variables, K-S (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test) was used; the results are shown in table 3.

TABLE III: K-S Test Data in IELTS and BALLI

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test			speaking performance	belief
N			45	45
Normal Parameters(a,b)		Mean	2.7000	50.2444
		Std. Deviation	1.15994	16.96541
Most Differences	Extreme	Absolute	.194	.123
		Positive	.194	.123
		Negative	-.128	-.085
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z			1.299	.825
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			.069	.504

Note. A Test distribution is Normal. B Calculated from data.

Based on table 3, as the K-S test for two main variables is meaningful higher than 0.05, so we found that research data are in normal distribution.

#### 4.4. Pearson Correlation

TABLE IV: Data Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Speaking Performance and Beliefs of Student.

variables	Correlations	speaking performance	belief
speaking performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.831(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	45	45
belief	Pearson Correlation	.831(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	45	45

According to table 4.4, we observe that the Pearson correlation coefficient between IELTS speaking test and students' belief is +0.831 which is lower than 0.01. So, with a confidence level of 99%, we may claim there is direct correlation between two main variables.

Again as Pearson correlation coefficient is positive, it may be concluded that the correlation is direct and upward; this means that the improvement in belief of students in EFL learning will improve their English speaking performance, vice versa.

This correlation shows a linear and direct correlation between two variables; so, the decreasing of belief of students in learning English as a foreign language through BALLI questionnaire will decrease their speaking performance in English through IELTS test. Of course, when BALLI scores increases, IELTS scores go up accordingly.

## **5. Conclusion and Suggestions**

This study sought to examine the perceived relationship between two main elements in English language learning in rural context. Based on results taken in chapter IV and confirmed hypothesis, there is direct correlation between rural female high school students' belief about EFL learning and their performance in English speaking skill.

The results reflect clear relationship among one psychological stimulus and one of educational skill. Again, the practices of some of educational practitioners, who confirmed the role of belief in learning, have been reflected through proved results.

Based on mentioned results , it may be said that the present study is consistent with some scholars' studies such as Nae-Dong Yang(1999) , Abraham and Vann(1987), Horwitz, 1987, 1988, Rana Abdul Settar Abid (2012); all found a significant relationship between belief and learning or speaking .

### **5.2. Further Suggestions**

Because of mentioned limitations in present research, the conclusions may be were not as comprehensive as it should be. Limitations such as gender of participants, context, living place and culture of students, educational facilitation, human resources, and others were the main reasons that made us to confine participants. .

It would also be worthwhile to investigate the relationship between two main variables in comparison with males. The Female and male high school students comparison would have different results, as the belief in EFL learning may be quite different.

Also, it would be worthwhile to statistically examine the difference of students' belief in EFL learning in urban and rural high schools.. Furthermore, some other tools may be used to achieve desirable data such as observation, interview, and role play to have more accurate results regarding students" belief or speaking performance.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

I would like to show my heartfelt gratitude to all professors and friends who helped me to do present study.

## 7. References

- [1] Abraham, R.G.&Vann, R.J. (1987).Strategies of two language learners: A case study. In A.L Wenden, & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learners strategy in language learning* (pp. 89-101). London: Prentice Hall International
- [2] A.L.Wenden, & J Rubin (1987Eds), *Learners strategies in language learning*, (pp.85-102) London: Prentice Hall International.
- [3] Eva,B & Inna ,G.(2005) .TESL –EJ journal . Pedagogical Implications and New Research Directions. *Beliefs about Language Learning: Current Knowledge*, 9(1). (p.2)
- [4] Horwitz, E.K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall.(pp. 119–129).
- [5] Kathleen B. Egan. (1999). *CALICO Journal*. Speaking: A Critical Skill and a Challenge. *Federal Language Learning Laboratory*, 16(3).
- [6] Lynne Rudder, B.( 1989).*Saving Belief.*, Princeton University PressISBN -978-0-691-02050-1. (pp. 11-13)
- [7] Magnus, Ö.(2009). A Unifying Attempt. Theories of epistemological beliefs and communication Department of Mathematics, *Technology and Science Education*. Sweden. Proceedings of CERME 6, January 28th-February 1st 2009, Lyon France © INRP. (pp. 17-18)
- [8] Nae, D. Y. (1999). *System journal*. The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs
- [9] And learning strategy use. Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, Taipei 10617, Taiwan, ROC, 27. 515±535
- [10] Philip, R. (2000).BATTs and BALLS. Beliefs about talk and beliefs about learning.November1996.Bangkok. International conference *Autonomy 2000*.
- [11] Rana, A. Settar, A (2012). Investigating EFL Iraqi Learners' Beliefs about Learning English as Foreign Language .*Journal of the College of Arts...* University of Basrah, No. (60). (p.53)