

## ESP and Learners' Beliefs

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### Abstract

The *Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities"* encouraged Japanese universities to shift focus to more practical and communicative aspects. Also, not only the Ministry of Education but also future students, with a broader selection of universities, called upon the accountability of university curriculums. With no required course of study or standards set by the Ministry for universities, curriculum development based on the needs analysis of students and the society is inevitable.

Our business administration department was established with a minimum standard of TOEIC scores, and the TOEIC committee was formed with representatives of the language education center and faculty of business administration and pursued various unique curriculum development strategies. For further expansion, they decided to develop listening-teaching materials based on ESP for the management administration department.

However, not all students are confident of success in learning English. Unsuccessful learning experiences can lead students to conclude that special abilities are required to learn a foreign language. This article reports two empirical studies on the beliefs that influence students' behaviors in selecting learning strategies and on their expectations toward English education at the university.

Students at most universities in Japan are required to take at least one foreign language course so as to obtain practical skills in that language. Due to the lack of standardized benchmarks in these universities, as opposed to middle schools, it is essential to create a syllabus based on the requirements of the learners' needs, society, and the institution.

Our business administration department was established with the intention of setting a minimum standard for TOEIC scores after which, our

language education center and faculty of business administration department developed various strategies and curriculums to clarify it. In order to target further outcomes on students' improvement, new listening materials must be developed based on the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). However, not all students are successful learners of English. Negative experiences in foreign language learning often force the students to give up the course and lead them to believe that they are incapable of learning or do not have a good sense of the language.

Therefore, the present study will investigate students' current beliefs pertaining to foreign language learning and their expectations of the Japanese English curriculum based on the questionnaires developed by Horwitz (1986) and Yokoyama et al. (2004) prior to starting the new project on material development.

### **Review of literature**

#### **The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)**

Second language learners often have different notions or ideas about language learning. These notions or ideas are formed by their past experiences in language learning or from different socio cultural backgrounds (Horwitz, 1986). Further, the learners' beliefs have strong influences on their own learning strategies (Yang, 1999). Horwitz (1986) developed a survey instrument to assess learners' beliefs based on ESL and EFL teachers' free-recall protocols. The instrument consists of thirty-four items assessing the following five categories:

1. The Difficulty of Language Learning
2. Foreign Language Aptitude
3. The Nature of Language Learning
4. Learning and Communication Strategies
5. Motivations and Expectations

BALLI has been used in many research studies and its reliability has been approved (Yang, 1992; Mori, 1996; Sato, 2006; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006). In addition, on the basis of the BALLI instrument, Yang (1996) investigated the relationships between language learners' beliefs and learning strategies, and the result of an exploratory factor analysis revealed the BALLI's reliability and also suggested the conflicting relationship between the learners' beliefs and learning strategies. Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) investigated the reliability of Horwitz's choice of theme by an internal statistical analysis and factor analysis in a multilingual setting.

They administered the survey to students learning Russian at Universiti Malaysia Sabah and determined the factors that supported the categories that Horwitz had chosen for the BALLI. This suggested that the BALLI can be used not only in a monolingual setting but also in multilingual settings.

### **Modified Versions of BALLI in Japanese Settings**

Although BALLI has been employed in many research studies, some researchers have suggested modifications. Mori (1996) investigated the beliefs of students enrolled in a foreign language class to learn Japanese in the US by examining their epistemological beliefs, beliefs about language learning, and the relationship between their beliefs and L2 achievement. She also suggested modifications in the BALLI that were required to increase its suitability in this context. Sato (2006) explored the relationship between beliefs in language learning and strategy use; she added two items as part of the category of Learner Autonomy. Itoi (2002) modified the BALLI to investigate the students' beliefs about language learning and found that the students tend to have strong influences of learning experiences from middle schools on their beliefs about language learning. Tanaka & Ellis (2003) investigated changes in the learners' beliefs during a study abroad program based on the modified version of the BALLI and found significant changes in analytic language learning, experiential language learning, and self-efficacy.

### **Learners' Beliefs and ESP**

According to Dornyei (2001), the expectations toward the final goal through small, continuous, and successful learning experiences will make learners more optimistic and positive toward learning a foreign language, although learners' beliefs once formed on the basis of their past experiences have strong influences on the decisions with regard to their choice of learning strategies, and those once formed are difficult to change. In order to lead learners toward successful learning experiences, Dornyei (2001) pointed out several factors that teachers need to keep in mind, which are as follows: it is essential for teachers to provide students with appropriate preparation, a system that can help students in need, and an environment in which learners can help each other. Dornyei (2001) further mentioned that teachers should provide students with a clear definition of success and examples of the experiences of successful learners. Further, the most important factor that he mentioned was to, as much as possible, remove obstacles that may affect the learners.

Nunan (1988) defines ESP as a learner-centered approach based on

learners' needs analysis. ESP has unique features in the process of developing its curriculum, one of which is a concept of establishing a discourse community, which is a successful group or a final goal as defined by Dornyei (2001). In ESP, students have to be provided with a clear process of their learning. In this sense, the curriculum that is currently being developed based on ESP can contribute to more positive beliefs in the students' about learning English.

### **ESP Questionnaire for Engineering and Medical Students**

Yokoyama et al. (2004) developed a survey instrument consisting of 13 items to investigate engineering students' expectations toward English education in universities. They administered this questionnaire to 1,034 students in six universities in Kyushu. Based on the analysis of the results of the survey, they developed ESP curriculums and model CALL systems. The instrument consists of a total of thirteen items pertaining to the students' requirements of the language, the objectives, and their experiences of learning English.

### **Research Questions**

The current research study is interested in answering the following two questions:

1. What beliefs about language learning do our students hold?
2. What is the relationship between learners' beliefs and their expectations toward the curriculum?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The seventy-nine participants were studying in a TOEIC preparatory class. They were sophomore year students majoring in business management and had already taken the TOEIC introductory course the previous year. All the students were required to obtain a TOEIC score of 400 as a minimum requirement set by the faculty of business management.

#### **Questionnaire**

The learners' beliefs about language learning and expectations of the English curriculum were measured by the modified version of the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) and the modified questionnaire by Yokoyama (2004). The questionnaire consisted of forty-five items; the first thirty-four items were

created as part of the modified version of BALLI. Some items were revised to match the current situation of the study. The latter half of the questionnaire was developed based on the instrument made by Yokoyama (2004). The original version of Yokoyama's (2004) questionnaire had thirteen items, but two items specifically targeted at the engineering students were eliminated from this study. The participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

## **Procedure**

The survey was conducted in the final class of the first term in July. The purpose of the study and the procedure were clearly explained to the participants. The participants were asked to take their time in pondering over and responding to the items and to leave the classroom when they finished the survey. All the data was entered into the SPSS. Descriptive statistics were determined for all the 45 items, and mean scores and standard deviation scores for each variable were determined. To examine the internal reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ,  $N = 79$ ,  $k = 45$ ). Then, the first 34 items were analyzed according to the model of Horwitz (1987). Subsequently, to investigate the relationship between the beliefs about language learning and the expectations toward the English curriculum, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted.

## **Results**

### **The Analysis Based on Horwitz's 1988 Model**

After conducting a descriptive analysis, the first 34 items were analyzed based on Horwitz's (1987) model. The items were categorized into five categories. Items 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 16, 19, 30, and 33 were categorized in Foreign Language Aptitude; items 3, 4, 5, 15, 25, and 34 were categorized in Difficulty of Language Learning; items 8, 12, 17, 23, 27, and 28 were categorized in The Nature of Language Learning; items 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, and 26 were categorized in Learning and Communication Strategies; items 20, 24, 29, 31, and 32 were categorized in Motivation. The results are shown in Tables 1 through 5.

### **Foreign language aptitude.**

The participants were asked to describe their aptitude for foreign language learning. Table 1 reveals that several students believe that they are rather unsuccessful learners of English from their past experiences

(Item 16,  $M = 4.43$ ). They have not yet given up, but still want to be good at English. Their success in learning English depends on their efforts (Item 33,  $M = 2.13$ ). Furthermore, they desire to be good English speakers (Item 30,  $M = 2.28$ ).

**Table 1: Foreign Language Aptitude**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. It is easier for children, than adults, to learn a foreign language.	1.99	0.95
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages	3.34	0.93
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	3.38	0.72
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	3.41	0.95
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	3.67	0.92
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	4.43	0.86
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages	3.35	0.93
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	2.28	1.00
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language	2.13	0.95

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

### Difficulty of foreign languages.

As Table 2 shows, the students do not think that English itself is a difficult language, compared to other foreign languages (Item 3,  $M = 3.09$ ); however, they think that learning a foreign language itself is difficult (Item 4,  $M = 1.90$ ). Retrospection on their past experiences in learning English reveals that they do not think that they are successful learners (Item 5,  $M = 3.76$ ). They see the four basic skills—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—as equally important (Item 25,  $M = 2.99$ , Item 34,  $M = 3.11$ ). Participants were given 5 different scales to respond to Item 15—1 as within one year, 2 as one to two years, 3 as three to five years, 4 as five to ten years, and 5 as impossible to accomplish according to one hour of studying per day. The results reveal that students believe that it takes approximately five years to master a foreign language (Item 15,  $M = 2.95$ ).

**Table 2: The Difficulty of Foreign Languages**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	3.09	0.94
4. English is 1, a very difficult language; 2, a difficult language; 3, a language of medium difficulty; 4, an easy language; 5, a very easy language.	1.90	0.67
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	3.76	0.92
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well?	2.95	1.00
25. It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.	2.99	1.03
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	3.11	0.97

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

### The nature of language learning.

Participants were asked to describe the differences between learning English and other subjects.

**Table 3: The Nature of Language Learning**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	2.67	1.05
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	2.14	1.08
17. The most important aspect of learning a foreign language is learning the vocabulary.	2.65	0.89
23. The most important aspect of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	2.95	1.04
28. The most important aspect of learning a foreign language is learning how to translate from my native language.	3.11	0.97

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

As Table 3 shows, with regard to speaking ability, the students believe that studying abroad is one of the efficient ways by which to acquire speaking skills (Item 8,  $M = 2.67$ ). Furthermore, they feel that it is also necessary to learn the culture in which the language is spoken (Item 12,  $M = 2.14$ ). Also, the students think that learning English is different from learning other subjects (Item 27,  $M = 2.62$ ). Although there is a contradiction between the mean scores of Items 28 ( $M = 2.78$ ) and 34 ( $M = 3.11$ ), it can be stated here that students feel that translation is an efficient way to improve their English. The data suggests that the heavy weight of the Grammar translation method administered in high schools might have an influence on the students' beliefs. However, this needs further verification.

### Learning and communication strategies.

Participants were asked to describe their beliefs in learning and communication strategies according to the items shown in Table 4. With respect to learning strategies, students emphasized the importance of repeated practice (Item 18,  $M = 1.75$ ). Further, they indicated that making good use of media such as cassette tapes, CDs, MDs, and iPod are other efficient ways to learn a language (Item 26,  $M = 2.23$ ). Although the students denied the statement, “We should not speak the language till we can say it perfectly” (Item 9,  $M = 4.20$ ), they regard the correctness in pronunciation to be essential as well. Furthermore, students do not find it enjoyable to converse in English (Item 13,  $M = 3.91$ ); although they do not have as much resistance in speaking in the language (Item 21,  $M = 2.91$ ). It is difficult to interpret this outcome since the students who participated in this survey must have had some experience of having conversed with native speakers of English since most of the middle schools have native speakers of English as English teachers. Further research is necessary to clarify this point.

**Table 4: Learning and Communication Strategies**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	2.10	1.03
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	4.20	0.67
13. I enjoy practicing English with the Americans I meet.	3.91	1.08
14. Its O.K. to guess if you don't know a word in English.	2.53	1.00
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	1.75	0.97
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	2.91	1.00
22. If beginners are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	3.15	0.92
26. It is important to practice with cassettes, CDs, MDs, or iPods.	2.23	0.91

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

### Motivations and expectations.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) defined motivation according to two aspects—integrative and instrumental. The person who is intrinsically motivated to learn a language has a positive attitude toward the people who speak the target language and tries to be close to them and befriends them. The person who is instrumentally motivated is basically interested in learning the target language for the purpose of passing entrance exams or obtaining well-paid jobs.



**Table 5: Motivations and Expectations**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	2.25	0.98
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know Americans better.	3.57	0.83
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	1.76	0.77
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	1.81	0.82
32. I would like to have American friends.	2.35	1.05

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

As Table 5 shows, the participants were asked to describe their beliefs in the motivations and expectations toward learning English. This study could not observe a clear cut trend in their motivations. The students seem to be both instrumentally as well as intrinsically motivated since they think that English is necessary for their future jobs (Item 29,  $M = 2.25$ ). At the same time, they all want to be good speakers of English (Item 31,  $M = 1.81$ ) and want to befriend native English speakers (Item 32,  $M = 2.35$ ).

Interestingly, again, they have a strong desire to be good English speakers (Item 32,  $M = 2.35$ ). However, as far as my classroom observation is concerned, the students tend to be really shy with regard to speaking out not only in English but also in Japanese. Further research is required to verify this.

### Result of Factor Analysis

This study investigated an exploratory factor analysis that was conducted to establish a relationship between learners' beliefs and their expectations toward the curriculum by adding eleven items developed on the basis of the survey instrument developed by Yokoyama et al. (2004). The total number of items was 45, but after a descriptive analysis of the 45 items, four items that had floor and ceiling effects were excluded. As a result, forty-one items were included in the factor analysis. Prior to the analysis, a KMO & Bartlett's test was run to confirm the reliability. The KMO sampling adequacy test statistic is 0.654, which is higher than the threshold value of 0.60 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Bartlett's test of the sphericity statistic was significant at the 0.01 level. Accordingly, the results of these two tests supported the validity of the use of factor analysis for this study. This study employed the method of Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE). Although the results of the first exploratory factor analysis before rotation identified nine factors with eigen values over 1.00, it was decided to use with three factors of 30 variables each after

consulting the variances in the eigen values and cumulative contribution. The method of MLE with Promax rotation was employed in this study. After several exploratory factor analyses, the variables that did not indicate significant factor loadings were eliminated. 3 factors with 12 variables were finally extracted after 6 rotations. Cronbach's statistic alpha was used as a measure of the internal consistency of the variables in each factor. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used as a measure of correlation between the factors. The three extracted factors were labeled as:

1. Instrumental Motivation
2. Integrative Motivation
3. Strategies for Improving Communication Skills in English

Table 6 shows the factor patterns after the rotations, the items that were loaded on each factor, Cronbach's alpha for each factor, and the correlation efficient between the factors. The correlation coefficient between Factors 1 and 2 is higher than the other values ( $r = .58$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Furthermore, with regard to Factor 1, no items on the beliefs of language learning according to Horwitz (1987) were contained. However, the items loaded in Factor 1 indicate significant insight; students expect to take courses such as academic reading (Item 35,  $M = 2.27$ ) and listening (Item 37,  $M = 2.19$ ) courses as well as general English courses (Item 37,  $M = 2.19$ ). This suggests the need for further verification since the students' needs might differ from what they are currently provided with in the English class that they are enrolled in; they might be thinking about going to a graduate school instead of getting a job after graduation.

There are some reasons behind the use of the name Instrumental Motivation for Factor 2. Students feel that it is essential to have practical skills in English to obtain a better job in the future (Item 29,  $M = 1.76$ ), and in order to do so, they have to acquire skills in four aspects—speaking (Item 44,  $M = 1.85$ ), listening (Item 45,  $M = 1.73$ ), reading (Item 42,  $M = 1.91$ ), and writing (Item 43,  $M = 43$ ).

Factor 3 was named Strategies for Improving Speaking Skills in English. No items from among the items based on the instrument by Yokoyama et al. (2004) were identified. All these three items were in the BALLI and are associated with improving speaking skills. To be able to speak in English, students think that repeated practice is necessary, (Item 18,  $M = 1.75$ ), learning English in English-speaking countries is the best way (Item 12,  $M = 2.14$ ), and they need to be familiar with the culture of the English-speaking countries.

**Table 6: Factor analyses (factor patterns after rotations)**

Items	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factor loading		
				I	II	III
<b>Factor 1: Intrinsic Motivation</b>						
35. I want to acquire academic reading skills in English class.		2.27	0.86	0.90	0.04	0.09
37. I want to learn general English knowledge in English class.	0.82	2.19	0.77	0.63	0.13	0.01
40. I want to acquire academic listening skills in English class.		2.33	1.00	0.58	-0.17	0.04
<b>Factor2: Instrumental Motivation</b>						
44. I want to improve speaking skills in English class.		1.85	0.68	0.06	0.86	-0.03
45. I want to improve listening skills in English class.		1.73	0.67	0.11	0.78	0.05
42. I want to improve reading skills in English.		1.91	0.70	0.15	0.73	-0.05
43. I want to acquire writing skills such as e-mail exchanges in English.	0.87	2.06	0.81	0.34	0.66	-0.12
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.		1.76	0.77	-0.16	0.55	-0.04
39. I want to acquire basic communication skills in English class.		2.05	0.83	0.16	0.36	0.09
<b>Factor 3 : Learning Strategies</b>						
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.		1.75	0.97	0.05	0.03	0.82
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	0.70	2.14	1.08	-0.31	0.31	0.65
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.		1.73	0.67	0.07	-0.08	0.48
1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree	Correlation			I	II	III
				I	0.58	0.26
				II	0.58	1.00
				III	0.26	0.26
						1.00

## Discussion and Conclusion

Two research questions were to be verified in this study—one is to clarify the beliefs that our students currently hold with regard to learning a language, and the other is to investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs and their expectations of the curriculum. The analyses based on the BALLI model (Horwitz, 1987) clearly illustrated students' beliefs about language learning. It prevailed that students were optimistic toward learning English in the aspect of both integrative and instrumental motivation, although they did not necessarily think that they were successful learners. The results of the factor analysis supported this outcome as well. The factor analysis showed one significant relationship between the beliefs about language learning and their expectations toward our curriculum, i.e., learners' instrumental motivation and their expectations toward our curriculum. Students expect us to provide practical courses to improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills since they need these skills for their future jobs. This is extremely

useful information in improving our English curriculum.

The present study also highlighted an aspect for future research; students did not enjoy communicating in English, although they had had opportunities to meet with native speakers on a daily basis when they were in junior or high school. The Course of Study was set by the Ministry of Education, promising the students that they would acquire practical skills in English. Under such a curriculum, the students were supposed to have exposure to more practical methods of speaking English, especially, with regard to contact with native speakers of English. Therefore, it is necessary to verify the reasons behind why the students did not enjoy communicating in English since those negative experiences might lead them to form a negative belief with regard to communicating in English. Horwitz also (1988) stated that the knowledge of learners' beliefs about language learning encourages teachers to foster more efficient learning strategies in their students.

Overall, this study was informative but not conclusive. Considerable work needs to be done in the future. With further development of more detailed investigations such as classroom observation, interviews, and source triangulation with qualitative data, a clearer picture can be drawn for the future of English curricula in Japan.

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