Investigating EFL Iraqi Learners' Beliefs about Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract :

   Language learners bring a variety of beliefs to the classroom. The study of learner's perceptions and beliefs of language learning thus constitutes an important area of inquiry. The present study explores the beliefs about language learning of EFL Iraqi learners at the university level. A total of (101) undergraduate students, majoring in English as a foreign language, participated in the study. The Horwitz BALLI questionnaire (1983, 1987, and 1988) was administered to the participants. When surveying the subjects' beliefs about the four language skills, findings revealed that despite the fact that they regarded reading and writing in English easier than speaking and listening, speaking for them is easier than listening comprehension. Other results expose erroneous beliefs held by those learners concerning depending on translation as a learning strategy and the importance of saying everything with correct pronunciation and grammar otherwise they would be embarrassed.

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Introduction :

Studies in second or foreign language learning largely focused on teacher – directed instruction so as to produce effective approaches and methods of teaching the language. However, these studies seemed to have suffered from a major flaw, which is neglecting the learner's active role in such a process. Consequently, research interest has been shifted to student-centered learning. Numerous studies have been conducted from the learners' perspective, which have come to inform the field of language teaching pedagogy. These perspectives would include learners' individual differences, motivation, anxiety, willingness to communicate in the foreign language, beliefs, learning strategies and styles, etc.

Learners' beliefs have been found to be the most important among the perspectives mentioned above since they were proved to have a significant influence on them all as beliefs form a central construct in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen,1988) (in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005 : 1). Learners' beliefs about language learning are a result of a number of factors that shape the learners' thinking and belief formation, including past experience, culture, context and numerous personal factors. The systems of learners' belief cover a number of aspects, including beliefs about the nature of English, the speaker of English, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), teaching activities, language learning, appropriate classroom behaviour, the learners' own abilities and about the goals for language learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) (in Erlenawati, 2002 : 1).

By employing Horwitz BALLI questionnaire (1983, 1987, 1988), the impetus to conduct this study is to answer the following research questions :

1. What are the beliefs held by Iraqi EFL learners about learning English as a foreign language ?

2. How would these beliefs affect those students' learning English process ?

The Origin and Nature of Learners' Beliefs

In foreign / second language learning literature, influenced by different theories and conceptualizations, language learners' beliefs have appeared under different labels and conceptualizations such as learners' metacognitive knowledge, mental and social realizations, self – beliefs, etc. The closest term , as it has been used by most of the researchers in this field, proves to be metacognitive knowledge.

The term *metacognitive knowledge* comes originally from Flavell's metacognitive theory. It simply refers to that " *segment of the child's or adult's stored world knowledge that has to do with people as cognitive creatures and with diverse cognitive tasks, goals, actions and experiences "*. (Flavell, 1979 : 906) (in Goh & Lin (1995 : 42) and Gabillon (2005 : 235)). It, also, represents the specialized portion of a learner's acquired knowledge base, which consists of what learners know about learning, and to what extent a learner has made distinctions, language learning (Flavell, 1979) (in Wenden, 1999 : 435). This knowledge can be effectively manipulated by the learner so as to help him / her guide their cognitive activities as to adopt or abandon a particular activity. Flavell proposed three categories of metacognitive knowledge. They   are : 1) *person variables*

which include the learners' beliefs about themselves and the others. For instance, one can have ideas about his / her weaknesses and strengths in terms of learning a foreign language; 2) *task variables* : these are the learners' assumptions about a given task as to whether it is interesting, difficult, familiar, or even whether it is within the capabilities of the individual to accomplish; and 3) *strategy variables* which involve selection of the appropriate cognitive strategies to fulfill a task (e.g., whether the task requires summarizing, analyzing, expressing personal opinion, etc., or whether the learner needs to ask for further clarification).

However, there is no consensus as to whether these two terms, i.e., beliefs and metacognitive knowledge, can be used interchangeably or not. Researchers like Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005 : 2) view beliefs about language learning as a component of learner's metacognitive knowledge, which focuses on the idea that learners understand themselves as learners and thinkers and identify their goals and needs. This can be ostensibly seen in person knowledge component mentioned above, which *" learners have acquired about how cognitive and affective factors such as learner aptitude, personality, and motivation may influence learning. "* Wenden (1991 : 34) finds metacognitive knowledge to *" include beliefs, insights and concepts that they (learners) have acquired about language and the language learning process "* (in Goh & Lin, 1995 :   41). Yet, Wenden (1999 : 436) seems to have changed her mind later when viewing metacognitive knowledge as making up *" a system of related ideas, some accepted without question and other validated by their experience. "* Accordingly, she now views beliefs as separate from metacognitive knowledge since beliefs are *" value – related and tend to be held more   tenaciously."*

Apart from being viewed as part of metacognitive knowledge, learners' beliefs have been defined as :

1. Learners' *" mini theories "* of second / foreign language learning (Hosenfeld, 1978) (in Ellis, 1994 :   477).

2. Self – constructed representational systems (Rust, 1994) (in Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005 : 3).

3. *"general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about   factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language   learning and teaching "* (Victori & Lockhart, 1995 : 224).

4. *" notions about language learning (the personalization of impressions) "* that learners usually form before being exposed to a systematic instruction of the language either from contact with language speakers or from society. Such beliefs reflect confidence in students' ability to learn a language and the procedures necessary to acquire fluency in a language (Kuntz, 1997a : 5).

5. *ideas learners have concerning different aspects of language, language learning and language teaching, that may influence their attitudes and motivations in learning and an effect on their learning strategies and learning outcomes. Learners' belief system are relatively stable set of ideas and attitudes as how to learn language, effective teaching strategies, appropriate classroom behaviour, their own abilities, and their goals in language learning.*
 (Richards & Schmidt, 2002 : 297)

To sum up, it can be said that learners' beliefs are often described as subjective ideas, assumptions, representations, and notions that learners hold to be true about language learning. These beliefs can either be facilitative for language learning or debilitative ones. They also seem to be stable, strongly held and resistant to change since they are formed and maintained by a complex social and cultural system and they are unique to individuals (Asbjornson (1999 : 1) (in Li (2004 : 24)).

The question that should be raised here is from where learners usually get their beliefs about language learning. Different scholars view beliefs differently. Some consider beliefs to be socially constructed, while others deal with as being mental and individual phenomena. Within the field of language learning, beliefs are thought to be of social nature which are constructed and shaped through interactions between groups in a society. Hence, the society's general vision about language learning , the learner's past educational past and personal experiences influences the formation of learners' beliefs and language learning culture (Gabillon, 2005 : 240). Nearly all the studies being surveyed have agreed that learners bring with them to the classroom, among other complex set of characteristics, their own beliefs about how to learn another language depending on their past experiences.

Wenden (1999 : 436) assumes that learners' beliefs can be both conscious and unconscious at the same time. These beliefs can be acquired unconsciously through observation and imitation, and consciously through listening to teachers, parents or even partners when giving advice about how to learn. When learners grow up and gain *" cognitive maturity "*, they may reflect such beliefs on their process of language learning, and they may even revise earlier assumptions or develop new ones. By doing

this, learners bring their beliefs into consciousness and they may talk about or defend them since they believe them to be true especially if these beliefs have been validated by experience.

Why and How to Study Learners' Beliefs ?

A substantial amount of research has shown the potential of understanding learners' belief systems. Knowledge of students' beliefs provides teachers and even syllabus designers with better understanding of their students' expectation of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their language classes (Horwitz, 1988 : 283). Similarly, Riley (1996 : 128) maintains that what learners believe affect their language learning much more than their teachers do since *" it is their beliefs that hold sway over their motivation, attitudes and learning procedures ".* Investigating learners' beliefs in this context is essential since it has been noted that language learners may develop insightful beliefs about language learning processes, their own abilities, and the use of effective learning strategies, which have a facilitative effect on learning. In his context, Mantle – Bromley (1995 : 382) concludes from her study that learners with realistic or informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively and persist longer with study. On the other hand, students may have erroneous or negative beliefs, which may lead to a reliance on less effective strategies, resulting in a negative attitude towards learning and autonomy, classroom anxiety and poor cognitive performance.

Learners' beliefs have been found to have an impact on a wide range of issues. Wenden (1986 : 4) believes that learners' belief systems can influence their approach to learning in terms of the kind of strategies they use, what they attend to, the criteria they use to evaluate the effectiveness of learning activities and of

the social context that gives them the opportunity to use or practice the language, and where they concentrate their use of strategies.

Beliefs can influence learners' motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, and the strategies they choose in learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1994 : 52) (in Erlenawati, 2002 : 4). Learners may have different goals for language learning. Some learners learn a language, like English as in the present study, for the purpose of communicating with its native speakers. The main goal for others may be to become proficient writers. Learners also show different perceptions of what is considered easy and difficult in language learning. Some may consider grammar as the most difficult task. With regard to learning strategies, learners are found to perform different strategies because they may have different expectations about language learning.

Growing evidence also suggests that learners' beliefs do not only influence their approaches to language learning, but also affect the way they respond to teaching activities. Learners may feel unsatisfied and offer resistance if the teaching methods in which they are engaged differ from what they believed those teaching methods should be. According to Horwitz (1987 : 119) , some students prefer to have more free conversation rather than pattern drills. Some other students insist on their teacher's correction. If language classes fail to meet these kinds of expectations, students may end up being frustrated. This situation can, in some ways, hinder learners' progress in language learning, and may eventually lead to their losing *"confidence in the instructional approach and their ultimate achievement can be limited."*

According to Cotterall (1995 : 195) learners' beliefs are also important particularly in planning for autonomy. She defines autonomy as *" the extent to which learners demonstrate the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning "*. Based on the assumption that every human behaviour is governed by beliefs and experience, Cotterall argues that autonomous language learning behaviour may also be supported by a particular set of beliefs. Thus, the beliefs held by learners may either contribute to or impede the development of learners' potential for autonomy. It is clear that the study of learners' beliefs is so significant for pedagogy which helps learners construct good understanding of their language learning processes.

On the other hand, second / foreign language learners may have been exposed to erroneous beliefs about language learning. They may bring these misconceptions with them, when entering their first language class. Horwitz (1988 : 290) reports that learners in the foreign language classroom indeed hold beliefs which are inconsistent with the principles underlying teaching materials and activities. The majority of the students in her studies still believe that if they make mistakes at the beginning stage, it will be difficult to get rid of them later on. For example, even though a great number of the students disagreed with the statement *" you shouldn't say anything in the language until you can say it correctly "*, some students thought that it was important to speak with an excellent accent. Young (1991 : 428) states that anxiety is created *" when beliefs and reality clash "*. For instance, students who believe that learning another language is merely a matter of translation or learning grammar or new vocabulary words would encounter great frustration and stress in today's communication ESL / EFL classroom. Similarly, a student who believes that a special language aptitude is

necessary for learning a foreign language, but s/he does not possess such aptitude, may begin language learning with a fairly negative expectation of their ultimate success.

There is a need to eliminate these erroneous or conflicting beliefs about language learning because, as Horwitz (1987 : 126) points out, *" erroneous beliefs about language learning lead to a less effective language learning strategy".* If learners believe that errors in their second / foreign language production will impede their language learning progress, they may then refuse to engage in communicative activities, thus hindering their communicative competence. It is, therefore, essential for language teachers to help shape their students' beliefs towards the achievement of success in language learning. This is , of course, a very challenging task for language teachers. In this context, Oxford and Shearin (1994 : 24) assert that *" teachers can inculcate the belief that success is not only possible but probable, as long as there is a high level of effort".*

When identifying learners' erroneous beliefs and guiding them in the language classroom, their frustration can be alleviated. Investigating what learners believe about language learning is *" a process of (self-) discovery which involves the learners themselves as much as the teacher "* (Tudor, 1996) (in Erlenawati, 2002 : 9). It enables the learners to develop *" a critical and informed awareness of learning options "* (Wenden, 1986 : 199).

As for how to study learners' beliefs, four different approached, both in bases and means of collecting data, have been followed. Bernat & Gvozdenko   (2005 : 4 – 5) identify three of them, they are :

1. *The normative approach :*

According to this approach, learners' beliefs are seen as general and fixed. The instruments used here are Likert – scale questionnaires. Horwitz's influential research on the nature of learners' beliefs about language learning has resulted one of the most popular scale, which is the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Consequently, the BALLI questionnaire has been used in the majority of the studies conducted to examine learners' beliefs like Fox (1993), Mantle – Bromley (1995), Banya & Cheng (1997), Kuntz (1997a & b), Huang & Tsai (2003), Tercanlioglu (2005), Altan (2006), Diab (2006), Nikitina & Furuoku (2007), etc.

2. *The metacognitive approach :*

Learners' beliefs are often described as fixed, and even sometimes erroneous knowledge that learners have acquired about language, learning and the language learning process. The most prominent researcher here is Wenden (1991, 1999, and 2001) who depends on semi – structured interviews and self – reports to collect data. The results of Wenden's studies proved to share some of the learners' beliefs shown in the BALLI like the significance of practice, cultural contact, learning the target language grammar and vocabulary, error correction, etc.

3. *The contextual approach :*

This approach views learners' beliefs to be varying according to the learners' context. The most important feature of the studies of learners' beliefs in terms of this framework is that they are not only diverse in their theoretical bases, but also depend on variable means of data collection like classroom observation, discussions, discourse analysis, etc.

The fourth approach is labeled as the indirect or metaphorical one. Learners' beliefs, according to this approach,

are viewed to be covert ones and can best be identified by means of metaphor analysis (Ellis, 2002 : 9), (Farrell, 2006 : 238). The procedure followed here is to analyse the metaphors the learners use in their writings about specific topics like expressing their opinions about language learning and the role of the teacher. The most important metaphors the learners used in he studies mentioned above are *" language learning is a struggle "* implicating the difficulty of language learning, and *" the classroom is a battleground and the teacher is General "* indicating the important role done by the teacher in language learning from the learners' own point of view.

Besides, learners' beliefs about language learning have been investigated from different perspectives. Most studies surveyed learners' beliefs in general in order to see what kind of influence these beliefs may have on their learning the foreign language like (Horwitz, 1988), (Truitt, 1995), (Kuntz,   1999), (Sakui & Gaies, 1999), (Harrington & Hertel, 2000), (Erlenawati, 2002),   (Diab, 2006), (Bernat 2004, 2006), and (Altan, 2006). Other studies investigated learners' beliefs in relation to other individual characteristics that may affect the process of language learning like anxiety (Cheng, 2001) and   (Wang, 2005), learners' attitudes (Mantle – Bromley,   1995), culture (Banya & Cheng, 1997), (Horwitz, 1999) and (Yang, 2000), proficiency(Perclova, 2002), (Huang & Tsai, 2003), and (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007a), communicative competence (Fox, 1993), language learning strategies (Xue – mei, 2007), learner autonomy (Cotteral, 1995), and gender (Tercanlioglu, 2005), (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007b), and (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007). Finally, language learners' beliefs are studied together with the ones held by their teachers so as to find out what influence that the similarities or differences between the two systems of beliefs may have on language learning and teaching process (Kuntz,

1997b), Cohen & Fass, 2001), (Levine,   2003), (Davis, 2003), and (Shen, et al. , 2005).

Methodology :

Participants :

One hundred and one undergraduate Iraqi learners at the university level, majoring in English as a foreign language participated in the study. The participants were distributed into (41) students of the third stage and (60) students of the fourth year, Dept. of English, College of Education, University of Basra. The students of these two levels were chosen in particular since it would be easier for them to understand the statements of the instrument to respond to them than the first and second stage students and they would be more able to identify their beliefs about learning English since they have experienced them along all the years they spent learning the language starting from the intermediate schools till the last two stages at university.

Instrument :

The survey instrument used in the present study is Horwitz Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (1983, 1987, and 1988). Horwitz (1988 : 284) states that the BALLI *" was developed to assess student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning ".* It is a 35 – Likert questionnaire, containing statements to assess the following items : 1) foreign language aptitude; 2) the difficulty of language learning; 3) the nature of language learning; 4) learning and communication strategies; and,   5) motivation and expectations. Table (1) shows the distribution of the BALLI statements according to these five items. There is no

right or wrong answer, for instance the statement no. (1) : *" Children are better than adults at learning a foreign   language "*, although it expresses a common belief, Horwitz   (1988 : 284) comments, the issue addressed here is not whether this is a fact or not, but *" the extent of such a belief among students and its consequences for language learning and teaching".*

So, The aim of employing the BALLI scale is not to identify which beliefs can be correct or not, but rather to survey them and then discuss their potential impact on the process of language learning and teaching. The respondents are required to rate their agreement to each statement on a   likert –   type scale ranging from 1 *(strongly agree)* to 5 *(strongly disagree)*. The response options asking for the difficulty of the English language in item (4) range from 1 *(very difficult)* to 5 *(very easy)*, and the ones for item (15) asking about how long it takes to speak English range from 1 *(less than one year)* to 5 *(you can't learn a language in one hour per day)*.

Table (1) : Classification of the BALLI Items

No.	Category	Items No. In BALLI
1	Foreign Language Aptitude	1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 16, 19, 30, 33
2	Difficulty of Language Learning	3, 4, 15, 25, 34
3	The Nature of Language Learning	8, 12, 17, 23, 27
4	Language Learning & Communication Strategies	7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26, 28, 35
5	Learners' Motivation & Expectation	5, 20, 24, 29, 31, 32

Analysis of Results :

 1. Foreign Language Aptitude :

   BALLI items 1, 2, 6, 11, 16, 19, 30, and 33 are related to foreign language aptitude and beliefs about the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful learners. Frequencies of responses to these items are reported in Table (2). In item 1, 87.13% of the subjects overwhelmingly agreed that *" It is easier for children than adults to learn English "*, reflecting their belief that they would have been successful learners of English if they had started learning it at earlier age. This finding closely compares with the results reported . Thus, learners hold beliefs consistent with the studies showing a positive effect of young age on phonological development and fluency (Bernat, 2006 : 210). However, when adult learners hold the belief of the supremacy of children in learning foreign languages, they would probably begin language learning with negative expectations of their own achievements (Bernat 2005 : 40).

   The participants endorsed the concept of foreign language aptitude or the necessity of having special abilities for learning foreign languages since item 2 scored 75.25% of respondents believing that it requires special abilities to learn English. However, in item 16 only 26.74% agreed that they did have these special abilities. Similarly, in item 33 only 28.71% believed that *" everyone can learn to speak English ".* These responses indicate that the participants had fairly negative assessment of their language learning abilities and they did not see themselves as *" gifted learners, but that an average ability is adequate to the task of language learning "* (Horwitz, 1988 : 287).

In respect to whether language learning aptitude is culture or gender specific, items 6 and 19 scored different responses. While the majority of the participants, namely 74.26% feel that people from their country are good at learning English, 44.55% believed that learning English as a foreign language is not influenced by the learner's gender and women are not necessarily better than men at learning foreign languages in spite of the fact that more than 80% of the respondents were females.

Item 11 states that *" people who are good at mathematics or sciences are not good at learning foreign languages "*. 67.33% of the respondents disagree strongly with this item believing that learning a foreign language requires intelligence which should necessarily be available to the people who are good at mathematics or other sciences. This reinforces the subjects' beliefs concerning the necessity of having special abilities in order to learn a foreign language. This result seemed to be supported by the (61.39%) responses of agreement registered to item 30 which states that *" People who speak more than one language are very intelligent "*. Therefore, Peacock (2001 : 179) believes that when learners have such a belief, they may blame slow progress / failure on the lack of intelligence, which may lead to more frustration.

Table (2) : Foreign Language Aptitude : Frequencies of
Response

No.	Item	A	N	D
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	87.13	4.95	7.92
2	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	75.25	18.81	5.94
6	People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	74.26	9.9	15.84
10	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	73.27	9.9	16.83
11	People who are good at mathematics or sciences are not good at learning foreign languages.	18.81	13.86	67.33
16	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	26.74	24.75	48.51
19	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	25.74	26.74	44.55
30	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	61.39	13.86	24.75
33	Everyone can learn how to speak a foreign language.	28.71	23.77	47.52
Note : Values represent percentages. A = collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree, N = Neutral and D = collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.				

2. Difficulty of Foreign Language Learning :

BALLI items 3, 4, 15, 25, and 34 concern the general difficulty of learning a foreign language. Table (3) shows the responses to these items. Item 4 is related to identifying the learners' beliefs about the difficulty of English as the foreign language they are trying to learn. As for the responses, 64.36% of the participants believed that English is a difficult language and 31.68% believed that English is a language of medium difficulty, whereas only 3.96% of the respondents said that English is an easy language.

Time requirement for language learning is requested next. Item 15 surveys the subjects' expectations about the length of time it takes them to learn English. Depending on their beliefs that English is difficult or a language of medium difficulty, the subjects seemed to have agreed that spending one hour per day learning English would not be enough so as to learn the language in a short time. Thus, a substantial number of respondents, i.e., 54.46%, believed that learning English would take 3 – 5 years , 39.60% said that it would take 5 – 10 years, whereas only 5.94% believed that one hour per day would never enable them to learn English properly.

Items 25 and 34 assess the relative difficulty of different language skills. As for which skill can be easier for them speaking or listening for understanding, the majority of the participants, i.e., 94.16% believed that it is speaking which is easier for them than listening for comprehension. This result should be understood within the context of teaching English in the departments of English at the university level in Iraq where the skill of listening comprehension is totally neglected and the students are assumed to be exposed to spoken English through listening o their teachers who are nonnative speakers of English during lectures only. Such a result could be really changed when EFL Iraqi learners, represented in the sample of the present

study, are put in genuine situations of listening to and speaking English. The subjects' responses to item 34, which states that *" It is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it "*, confirm the above result since 58.42% agreed with it.

Table (3) : Difficulty of Language Learning : Frequencies of Response

No.	Item	A	N	D
3	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	20.79	31.69	47.52
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.	64.36 (1 + 2)	31.68 (3)	3.96 (4 + 5)
15	If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him to speak the language very well? a. less than one year. b. 1 – 2 years. c. 3 – 5 years. d. 5 - 10 years. e. he / she can never learn a language well.	54.46 39.60 5.94		
25	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	94.16	5.84	
34	It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	58.42	13.86	27.72
Note : Values represent percentages. A = collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree, N = Neutral and D = collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree. *A = A very difficult or difficult language, N = Language of medium difficulty, D = A very easy or easy language.				

3. The Nature of Language Learning :

BALLI items 8, 12, 17, 23, and 27 deal with a wide range of issues related to the nature of language learning process. These items frequencies of responses are exposed in Table (4). Items 8 and 12 talk about the role of culture in language learning. 84.16% of the subjects believed that it is necessary to know the culture of English in order to be able to speak it. This highly reflects that the learners are aware of the importance of acquiring both *" linguistic and pragmatic awareness for effective communication "* (Bernat, 2006 : 214). 76.24% of respondents agreed with the statement in item 12 *" It is best to learn English in an English – speaking country "*, realizing the significance of learning English where there is a great exposure to the language, its culture and its people.

Items 17 and 23 are related to which component of English, namely, grammar or vocabulary, the participants believe it to be the most important to learn. The results came to prove that the subjects believed if they mastered both components, they would be good users of English. That is why, item 17 scored 87.13% of the respondents who strongly agreed with it and 80.19% for item 23. This is mainly due to the traditional approaches, followed in teaching English whether in schools or at the university level in Iraq, which are based on emphasizing the role of grammar and memorizing vocabulary in learning English. Unfortunately, such a belief would cost the learners a lot since they would invest the majority of their time memorizing lists of vocabulary and grammar rules instead of engaging themselves into serious communicative activities in English. Item 27 determines if learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects. A large number of participants, viz. 74.26 %, endorsed this statement strongly, believing that the strategies,

tactics followed and even the efforts required to learn a foreign language are totally different from learning any other subject like mathematics or physics.

Table (4) : The Nature of Language Learning :
Frequencies of Response

No.	Item	A	N	D
8	It is necessary to know about English – speaking cultures in order to speak English.	84.16	8.91	6.93
12	It is best to learn English in an English – speaking country.	76.42	10.89	12.87
17	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	87.13	6.93	5.94
23	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	80.19	6.93	11.88
27	Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects.	74.26	18.81	6.93
Note : Values represent percentages. A = collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree, N = Neutral and D = collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.				

4. Learning and Communication Strategies :

BALLI items 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26, 28, and 35 show variable learning and communication strategies that can be used by EFL learners. Hence, Bernat   (2006 : 9) saying these items are *" probably the most directly related to a student's actual language learning practice "*. Responses to these items are reported in Table (5). Items 18, 26, 28, and 35 address language learning strategies, while the other mentioned items shed the light on communication strategies.

Item 18 registered 97.03% of the respondents who strongly believed in the fact that *" It is important to repeat and practice a lot "* in order to learn English. This finding seems to support the result got with item 15, which stated that practicing English for only one hour per a day would not be enough to learn the language within a short period of time. Item 26, which is related to practicing English with cassettes, tapes or CD ROMs, scored 84.16% of the participants who strongly agreed with it compare with only 15.84% of them who neither agreed nor disagreed with it. Anyhow, the majority of the subjects strongly believed in the importance of practicing English with technology, listening to English as it is used by its native speakers and should not be satisfied with being exposed to the language from their teachers who are non – native speakers of English. This finding comes to stress the importance of teaching the skill of listening comprehension from the EFL Iraqi learners' point of view so as to ensure building a sound communicative competence for them.

Items 22, 28 and 35 address the issue of which learning strategies those learners would prefer to adopt in learning English. Item 22 is related to the role of the teacher in correcting the errors committed by his / her learners. 97.03% of the respondents strongly agreed with the this statement, whereas only 2.97% were not sure of it. This reflects the fact that those learners depend completely on their teachers in the process of

learning English, leaving no chance for any possible degree of autonomy on their part. Furthermore, one can notice from the percentages of the participants' responses who agreed with the statements mentioned in items 28 and 35, 61.39% and 67.33% respectively, that these learners are still following the traditional approaches in learning English represented in the importance of the role translation from Arabic when speaking or writing in English and memorizing rules and expressions in the foreign language. So, when translation and memorization become the primary concern of learners, they will be distracted from their most important learning tasks. These are, in fact, two of the dangerous erroneous strategies that EFL learners have always thought to be successful strategies to follow in learning English.

As for the communication strategies, the percentages of the responses, whether showing the participants' approval or not, would also reveal more of the erroneous beliefs held by EFL Iraqi learners. For instance, those learners would highly favoured speaking with excellent pronunciation and not to say anything in English unless they are sure what they say is one hundred percent correct whether in pronunciation or grammar. The results of these two items, viz. 7 and 9, obviously expose the communication apprehension or anxiety that the participants in the study are suffering from when trying to communicate in English through speaking. Such results would also justify why 81.19% of the respondents reported in item 21 that they feel timid or shy to speak in English in front of other people like their classmates since they are afraid to be laughed at when committing mistakes in English. Eventually, one would not be surprised when the majority of those non – confident learners, namely 81.18 %, report in item 14 that they would not favour guessing words meaning from context. Such finding clearly states that the participants would largely prefer to over – rely on

dictionaries and not to depend on their abilities to infer the meaning of new words they would come across from their context.

Table (5) : Learning and Communication Strategies :
Frequencies of Response

No	Item	A	N	D
7	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	74.26	9.9	15.84
9	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	70.29	7.92	21.79
13	I enjoy practicing English with native speakers.	80.19	10.89	6.93
14	It is O.K. to guess if you don't know a word in English.	8.19	9.9	81.19
18	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	97.03	2.97	
21	I feel timid speaking English with other people.	81.19	7.92	10.89
22	If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English without corrections, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly(to correct errors later on).	97.03	2.97	
26	It is important to practice with cassettes, tapes or CD ROMs.	84.16	15.84	
28	The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from Arabic.	61.39	8.91	29.70
35	Language learning involves a lot of memorization.	67.33	20.79	11.88
Note : Values represent percentages. A = collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree, N = Neutral and D = collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.				

5. *Motivation and Expectation :*

BALLI items 5, 20, 24, 29, 31 and 32 are related to learners' motivation and the opportunities that learning a foreign language would provide them with. Table (6) reflects the participants' responses to these items. In this category, the vast majority of responses reflected the subjects' strong desire to learn English as well as their optimism to be good speakers of this language one day. While the majority of participants', 85.15%, in item 31 expressed their strong desire to learn speaking English, only 61.39% of them in item 5 believed they would eventually learn to speak it pretty well. This supports the finding arrived at earlier when analyzing the results of the items related to foreign language aptitude that the subjects are not confident of their own abilities in learning English.

A strong instrumental motivation is exposed by the respondents in item 29 when 81.19% of them believed that learning English would guarantee them getting better job opportunities. By investigating the subjects' desire to get to know the native speakers of English better through learning their mother tongue, item 24 deals with the learners' integrative motivation. The responses to this item reveal that 51.49% of the subjects reported that getting to know the native speakers of English well could be one of their motives to learn this language, 30.69% were not sure of that and 17.82 % showed no interest. In spite of that 87.13% of respondents expressed, in item 32, their desire to have friends whose native language is English.

Finally, in item 20 64.35% of the participants believed that the people of the their country, namely, Iraq, highly valued the importance of learning English since this language has proved to be the international language used by all the people

around the world from different cultures and variable mother tongues as a medium of communication and understanding. Hence, English has become the language of science, literature, trade, industry, … etc. Consequently, learning it is one of the features of the age of globalization in which we are living today.

Table (5) : EFL Learners' Motivation & Expectation :
Frequencies of Response

No	Item	A	N	D
5	I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	61.39	22.77	15.84
20	People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	64.36	19.80	15.84
24	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know the native speakers better.	51.49	30.69	17.82
29	If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	81.19	18.81	
31	I want to learn how to speak English well. (If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it .)	85.15	8.91	5.94
32	I would like to have English – speaking friends.	87.13	12.87	
Note : Values represent percentages. A = collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree, N = Neutral and D = collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.				

Conclusions

The present study has addressed two important issues, first identifying what EFL Iraqi learners believe about learning English as a foreign language, and secondly discussing the potential impact of these beliefs on how those learners would approach the language.

The results arrived at earlier exposed that the EFL Iraqi learners, represented by the sample of the study, strongly demonstrated that children are better than adults in learning a foreign language. Holding such belief strongly would, as some researchers assume, negatively affect the learners' own points of view concerning their potentials and expectations of their achievements. This can be seen clearly when the subjects in the study reported that they believed that they did not have the special abilities required to learn a foreign language. Learners' belief that some people are less than others or even unable to learn languages can presumably lead them to question their own capabilities and make them believe they lack the necessary capacity to succeed. Despite these adversities, the learners are highly optimistic since they presumed that they would eventually learn to speak English pretty well.

The study also revealed a number of misconceptions that the EFL Iraqi learners have about learning English as a foreign language. Those learners have incorrect beliefs about how English as a foreign language should be learnt, which may be detrimental on their learning. These erroneous beliefs include memorizing lists of vocabulary and grammar rules, but they would never know how and when these vocabulary and grammar rules should be used, avoiding guessing the meaning of words depending on context showing no confidence in their abilities to

derive meaning from context without checking up the dictionary for every new word they come across and this would cause them anxiety especially in reading comprehension tests, saying nothing in English unless they were sure it was fairly correct in pronunciation and grammar, and over – reliance on their teachers in correcting every mistake as soon as they committed it, otherwise they would never be able to correct it later.

The learners' beliefs about language learning surveyed in this study are difficult to change since they are formed as a result of the many years of the students' prior learning experience, and some of them have even become theories the learners strongly believe of their usefulness since they have been validated by experience due to the erroneous teaching strategies followed by EFL teachers at schools and even sometimes at university. In spite of the high degrees of motivation the subjects in this study exposed, they would be frustrated especially when they would discover that however they worked hard, they would never accomplish their objectives because of the faulty learning strategies they followed in learning English. They would face such truth when they are put in genuine situations of communication in English with its native speakers. So, The earlier the EFL teachers diagnose their students' beliefs and trying to help them learn the language properly, the better outcome they will get since they would be able to know their learners closely, their needs, individual differences, motives and expectations so as to design classroom activities which are going to be suitable to the level and expectations of the learners.

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