

STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING; A CASE STUDY AT MAN 2 KOTA SERANG

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to identify students' beliefs about English learning and its reflection in English classroom. Questionnaire, observation and interview were employed to collect the data in this research. Close-ended questionnaire was administered to 26 language major students of MAN 2 Kota Serang in order to identify their beliefs. Observations were conducted to three students with different level of beliefs in order to find out the reflections of the beliefs in English classroom. Furthermore, semi-structured interview was also conducted to triangulate the data in this research. This data analysis showed that first, most of the participants (88%) possessed neutral beliefs about English language learning, Second, the students' beliefs were congruent with their learning behavior. In conclusion, students' beliefs about English language learning were obviously reflected in their behavior in English teaching and learning activity.

Keyword: Beliefs, Language Learning, EFL

INTRODUCTION

The amount of language exposure is not the only factor determining students' accomplishments in English learning. There is another factor which exists within each individual that plays a critical role in defining their behavior. This factor is known as beliefs. Beliefs in language learning are defined as students' perception toward what they learn and what they think is the best way to succeed in the learning activity. Horwitz (1987) and Wenden (1987) cited in Abdi and Asadi (2015: 105) proposed that beliefs can indicate what expectations the learners have and what actions in their language learning they will take.

However, students' beliefs have developed long before they entered the language classroom, Horwitz (1987) and White (1999) cited in Abdi and Asadi (2015: 105), suggested that:

These preexisting beliefs are claimed to have influential impacts on learners' approaches and behaviors in the learning process. Some beliefs could be beneficial to students in leading them to a positive attitude toward language learning while some others proposed that some beliefs could give students disadvantages and lead them toward negative attitudes.

Therefore, understanding students' beliefs about English learning could help teacher in profiling the effectiveness of a classroom environment. For that matter, this research was conducted to investigate the beliefs of language students of MAN 2 Kota Serang about English learning and its reflection in English teaching and learning activity.

Beliefs about Language Learning

The beliefs that learners have about language learning have been of interest in the field of second and foreign language learning. Horwitz (1987) cited in Kuntz (1996: 3), proposed several aspects that represents learners' beliefs about language learning. These aspects are representations on how learners' perceive the language in the basis of the language difficulty, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, communication strategies and the motivation and expectation. The aspects of English language learning Beliefs will be elaborated further.

Language difficulty

Learners' beliefs about the difficulty of the language they learn are found to have association with their language achievements. Mori (1999) cited in Vibulphol (2004: 31) found that learners who perceived the target language they were learning as an easy language tended to do better than those who believed that they were dealing with a difficult task. On the other hand, Horwitz (1989) and Truitt (1995) cited in Vibulphol (2004: 32) found that beliefs about language difficulty of the target language were associated with anxiety. Learners who perceived that the target language was relatively difficult were found to have higher anxiety than those who believed they were learning an easy language.

Foreign language aptitude

There have been few studies which discussed that the beliefs that some people have a special ability to learn foreign language may affect negatively to language learning (Abdi and Asadi, 2015). As stated in Vibulphol (2004: 30), Horwitz constantly discussed the negative effects of beliefs about foreign language aptitude in her three studies (1985, 1987, 1988). Horwitz (1988) cited in Vibulphol (2004: 30) argued that learners who believe in the existence of foreign language aptitude but do not think that they themselves have it, risk negative effects on their own language learning. She further explained:

"Students who feel that they lack some capacity necessity to language learning—by virtue of personal make-up or group membership—probably doubt their own ability as language learners and expect to do poorly in language study"

In other words, learners who believe that learning a language is an ability gifted to certain people are more likely to participate less in language classroom.

Nature of Language Learning

The beliefs about nature of language learning indicate learners' perception on what the language learning is about. Researchers have found that learners' preference toward certain language learning technique may lead to negative effect on their language learning process (Vibulphol, 2004). Peacock (1999) for instance, cited in Vibulphol (2004: 33-34) claimed that Learners who agreed that learning a foreign language is a matter of learning certain practice were found to be less proficient in English than those who believed otherwise.

Learning and Communication strategies

Beliefs about learning and communication strategy are found to have influence on learners' achievement in language learning. These beliefs influence learners' preference in choosing the strategy used to practice English. The beliefs include beliefs about how to speak the language, correct pronunciation, and the best way to practice English. In the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) created by Horwitz (1987), the items in this category are focused on the use of learning strategies and are concerned with communication strategies and all are related to measure students' beliefs during actual classroom practices. (Ariogul et al, 2009).

Motivation and Expectation

Beliefs about motivation and expectation that learners have may facilitate their success in language learning. In this case, motivation refers to students' perception about the importance of learning English and what triggers them to think so. Expectation refers to learners' perception toward the result of their language learning and its relevance to their success.

A Research suggests that students who are interested in a topic or those who value learning a particular skill or topic are more likely to work hard and engage themselves in learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Therefore, learners who have high value and realistic expectation toward their language learning may accomplish more than those who perceive English as unnecessary and irrelevant to their future success.

METHOD

Participants

The research was carried out in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (Islamic Senior High School) 2 Kota Serang. This particular site was purposively chosen because the school has language major which is infrequently found at the other schools in Serang, Banten province.

Twenty six language students of MAN 2 Kota Serang were selected as participants in this study. Their major in language was taken into consideration in selecting the participants of the study. Thus, purposive sampling was employed to carry out the study of students' beliefs about English learning.

Instrumentation

Four different instruments were employed in this research. Those are close-ended questionnaire, observational sheet and semi-structured interview. First, the close-ended questionnaire was adapted and modified from Horwitz' Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). It consists of 5 aspects of English learning beliefs. The aspects are conveyed into 28 statements that reveal students' beliefs concerning English learning. The close-ended questionnaire was written in Bahasa Indonesia to make it easier for the participants to thoroughly understand each statement in the questionnaire. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

Second, the observational sheet was developed in order to see the reflection of students' beliefs about English learning. The sheet consists of thirteen items which designed to reveal students' engagement in English teaching and learning. Each item is divided into three categories based on Gronlund (1981). The categories are willingness to receive or attend, ability to listen and respond in interaction and ability to demonstrate knowledge. Each item was measured with Likert's four point frequency scale. A field notes was also installed in the observational sheet in order to increase its intelligibility. The observational sheet can be seen in appendix 2.

Lastly, Semi-structured interview was conducted to look for an in-depth explanation concerning students' stated beliefs and their reflection in English language teaching and learning. Fourteen questions which revealed beliefs and its reflection were addressed to the participant. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to enable the participants to express their opinion thoroughly. The semi-structured interview protocol can be found in Appendix 3.

Procedure

1. Close-ended questionnaires were distributed to the participants to find out their beliefs about English Language Learning.
2. The data from the questionnaire was tabulated. To find out each participant's beliefs, participant's answered questionnaire was scored based on their respond to each items provided in the questionnaire. The participants' beliefs were categorized into high, neutral and low.
3. A participant was selected from each of the beliefs category. Therefore, three students were selected to be observed in order to find out the reflection of their beliefs in English teaching and learning activity by conducting classroom observation using observational sheet.
4. The data from observational sheet was tabulated. Each selected student was scored based on their behavior in the classroom.
5. Semi-structured interview was conducted to the selected students. The interviews revealed students' direct overview concerning their beliefs and behavior in the classroom.

RESULTS

Findings from Close-ended Questionnaire

To start with, the table below shows participants' overall beliefs about English language learning.

Table 1. Participants' Overall Beliefs about English Language Learning

Participants	Average	Level of Beliefs
1	3.36	Neutral
2	3.50	Neutral
3	3.36	Neutral
4	3.21	Neutral
5	3.57	Neutral
6	3.54	Neutral
7	3.32	Neutral
8	3.43	Neutral
9	4.25	High
10	3.54	Neutral
11	3.50	Neutral
12	4.00	High
13	3.68	Neutral
14	3.36	Neutral
15	3.46	Neutral
16	3.32	Neutral
17	3.36	Neutral
18	3.43	Neutral
19	3.25	Neutral
20	4.00	High
21	3.43	Neutral
22	2.32	Low
23	3.43	Neutral
24	3.56	Neutral
25	3.54	Neutral
26	3.96	Neutral

The data analysis revealed that the participants' beliefs about English language learning were neutral. The tabulation of participants' score is presented below.

Table 2. Participants' Score on Beliefs about English Learning

Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	1	4%
Neutral	23	88%
Beliefs	2	8%

Findings and discussion of each aspect of participants' Beliefs about English learning are elaborated further.

Language Difficulty

The table below shows the tabulation of the finding pertaining to language difficulty.
Language Difficulty

Table 3. Language Difficulty

Language Difficulty		
Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	0	0%
Neutral	22	85%
High	4	15%

Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the participants possessed neutral beliefs about language difficulty. Participants' neutral beliefs to language difficulty indicated that they did not perceive English as an easy task but were confidence that they will ultimately learn it.

Foreign Language Aptitude

The following table shows the tabulation of the finding pertaining to foreign language aptitude.

Table 4. Foreign Language Aptitude

Foreign Language Aptitude		
Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	4	15%
Neutral	20	77%
High	2	8%

In conclusion, the participants possess neutral beliefs about foreign language aptitude. They believed in the existence of special ability to learn English but do not perceive that the ability will ensure higher achievement than those who did not have such ability.

Nature of Language Learning

The following table is the tabulation of the finding pertaining to the nature of language learning.

Table 5. Nature of Language Learning

Nature of Language Learning		
Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	4	15%
Neutral	21	81%
High	1	4%

In conclusion, the participants' beliefs about the nature of language learning were neutral. The beliefs indicated the participants' lack of understanding about the nature of English learning.

Language and Communication Strategy

The table below shows the tabulation of the finding pertaining to language and communication strategy.

Table 6. Language and Communication strategy

Language and Communication Strategy		
Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	1	4%
Neutral	23	88%
High	2	8%

To conclude, the language students' beliefs on language and communication strategy was neutral. This can be an indication of their uncertainty on what they believe. The indication may be caused by their lack of understanding of English learning strategy.

Motivation and Expectation

The table below shows the tabulation of the finding regarding participants' motivation and expectation.

Table 7. Motivation and expectation

Motivation and Expectation		
Level of Beliefs	Number of Participants	Percentage
Low	1	4%
Neutral	10	38%
High	15	58%

In conclusion, the participants were found to possess high expectation and moderate motivation to learn English. Therefore, the participants' beliefs about motivation and expectation were positive.

Findings from Observation

Three participants were selected to be observed using observational sheet. The selection was based on the different beliefs possessed by each student; positive, neutral and negative beliefs. The participants are later identified as Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3.

The acquired data pertaining participants' classroom engagement can be found in appendix 12. The table below shows the tabulation of the finding.

Table 8. Participants' Behavior in English Classroom

Student	Average Score	Behavior
1	3.18	Positive
2	2.45	Moderate
3	1.82	Negative

Based on the observation, it was found that there was a congruency between the students' beliefs and their behavior in English classroom. A student who possessed high beliefs was found to have a positive behavior in English classroom. The student scored 3.18 in observational sheet which was categorized to positive behavior. The second student who possessed moderate beliefs scored 2.7 which categorized her to having moderate behavior in English classroom; on the other hand, the third student who was found to possess low beliefs scored 1.8 which categorized him to having negative behavior in English classroom.

Findings from Interview

The interviews revealed students' direct overview concerning their beliefs and behavior in the classroom. The table below showed the finding from interview.

Table 9. Students' Beliefs about English Learning.

	Code	Note
Student 1	Difficulty	Student 1 perceived English as an easy task. This was in line with the result of questionnaire analysis which showed that the students possessed high beliefs about English difficulty.
	Foreign Language Aptitude	Student 1 did not believed in the existence of special ability to learn English. This finding was in line with his response in the questionnaire item pertaining to the issue.
	Nature of Learning	The student stated that the lesson was mainly focused on grammar learning. This statement was in contrast with his response in questionnaire which stated that the he perceived English learning was about grammar, translation and vocabulary learning.
	Language and Communication Strategy	The student's strategy to learn English was by repeating and practicing. It was in the line with his response in the questionnaire which stated his agreement of the importance of repeating and practicing.
	Motivation	Student's motivation to learn English was for the practical use of it. It was in line with his response in the questionnaire which stated that he learn English to understand the speaker better.
	Expectation	Student expected more opportunity to speak English.

	Code	Note
Student 2	Difficulty	Student 2 perceived English as a difficult task. This was in line with her response in the questionnaire which stated his disagreement that English is easier to learn than other language lesson.
	Foreign Language Aptitude	Student 2 believed in the existence of special ability to learn English. It is in line with her response in the questionnaire which stated her agreement to the existence of such capacity.
	Nature of Learning	Student perceived the English lesson was about grammar learning and translating. It was not in line with her response in the questionnaire which stated her beliefs that English learning was about grammar and learning new vocabulary.
	Language and Communication Strategy	The student believed in the importance of repeating and practicing.
	Motivation	Student was motivated to learn English to understand the speaker better.
	Expectation	Student expected more opportunity to speak English.

	Code	Note
Student 3	Difficulty	Student 3 found many difficulties in learning English. It is in line with his response in the questionnaire which stated his disagreement that English is easier to learn than other language.
	Foreign Language Aptitude	The student believed in the existence of special ability and denied his possession of such ability. This is in line with his response in the questionnaire which stated his strong agreement of the existence special ability to learn English.
	Nature of Learning	Student 3 did not perceive that environment give much of an influence to English learning. The similar response was gained from the questionnaire. Pertaining what was learnt in the lesson, the student stated that grammar and vocabulary being the main focus of the lesson.
	Language and Communication Strategy	The student did not have a particular way to learn English. However, he acknowledged the importance of practicing in English learning.”
	Motivation	Student was motivated to learn English to understand the speaker better.
	Expectation	Student expected to get a better job by speaking English.

Based on the interview, it was found that the close-ended questionnaire and observational sheet successfully revealed students' beliefs about English learning.

CONCLUSION

This research found that students' behavior in teaching and learning activity is in lined with his/her beliefs about English language learning. The research showed that participant's beliefs were reflected in their behavior in English teaching learning activity; student who possessed high beliefs was proven to possess positive behavior. On the other hand, student who possessed neutral beliefs was found to have moderate behavior and students who

possessed low beliefs was identified as having negative behavior in English teaching and learning activity. Therefore, it was concluded that beliefs about English language learning contribute to students' learning behavior. Thus, it can be inferred that teacher should play an active role in promoting positive beliefs in English language learning.

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APPENDIX 1
CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS
BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING INVENTORY
(Horwitz, 1988)

Nama :
Kelas : X IBB
Sekolah : MAN 2 Kota Serang

No.	Pernyataan	Sangat Tidak Setuju	Tidak Setuju	Netral	Setuju	Sangat Setuju
1	Saya mempercayai ketidakberadaan bakat khusus yang dimiliki beberapa orang sejak lahir untuk berbahasa Inggris					
2	Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa yang lebih mudah dipelajari dibandingkan bahasa asing lainnya					
3	Bahasa Inggris memiliki struktur bahasa yang berbeda dengan bahasa Indonesia					
4	Saya yakin bahwa saya akan bisa menggunakan bahasa Inggris dengan baik					
5	Saya menggunakan Bahasa Inggris dengan logat saya sendiri					
6	Saya perlu mengetahui budaya Amerika/Inggris untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris					
7	Saya harus mengetahui pronunciation yang benar sebelum saya berbicara Bahasa Inggris					
8	Bahasa Inggris lebih baik dipelajari di Negara berbahasa Inggris					
9	Jika saya mendengar seseorang berbicara bahasa Inggris, saya akan mendatanginya untuk berlatih berbicara bahasa Inggris					
10	Boleh-boleh saja untuk menebak arti suatu kata dalam bahasa Inggris					
11	Saya memiliki bakat untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris					
12	Belajar bahasa Inggris umumnya adalah tentang mempelajari kosakata baru					

13	Berlatih dan mengulang itu penting dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris.					
14	Saya merasa percaya diri berbicara bahasa Inggris di depan orang lain					
15	Jika dari awal saya diperbolehkan membuat kesalahan, maka saya tidak akan mengulangi kesalahan tersebut					
16	Belajar bahasa Inggris umumnya adalah tentang mempelajari aturan tata bahasa (grammar)					
17	Belajar bahasa Inggris di laboratorium bahasa itu penting					
18	Perempuan dan laki-laki memiliki keunggulan yang sama dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris					
19	Jika saya berbicara bahasa Inggris dengan baik, maka saya akan mendapatkan banyak kesempatan untuk menggunakannya					
20	Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa yang lebih mudah digunakan daripada dipahami					
21	Cara saya belajar bahasa Inggris berbeda dengan cara saya belajar pelajaran sekolah lainnya					
22	Belajar bahasa Inggris umumnya adalah tentang menterjemahkan dari bahasa Indonesia ke bahasa Inggris					
23	Jika saya berbahasa Inggris dengan baik, saya akan lebih mudah mendapatkan pekerjaan yang baik					
24	Membaca dan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris itu lebih mudah daripada berbicara dan memahaminya					
25	Orang Indonesia menganggap berbicara bahasa Inggris itu penting					
26	Saya ingin mempelajari bahasa Inggris agar saya dapat lebih mengerti orang yang menggunakannya					
27	Orang yang berbahasa Inggris adalah orang yang sangat pandai					
28	Semua orang dapat belajar berbahasa Inggris					

APPENDIX 2
OBSERVATIONAL SHEET AND FIELD NOTES
FOR RESEARCHER'S APPLICATION

Student's Name :

Class : X IBB

School : MAN 2 Kota Serang

1. Willingness to receive or attend (Number 1-4)
2. Ability to listen and respond in interactions with others (Number (5-8)
3. Ability to demonstrate knowledge (Number 9-11)

No.	Action	Frequency				Notes
		Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Some of the time (3)	Most of the time (4)	
1	Student attends the lesson					
2	Student shows interest to learn English					
3	Student immerses him/herself in English teaching and learning activity					
4	Student follows the teacher's instruction					
5	Student attempts to speak English					
6	Student responds to what the teacher says					
7	Student answers to the question asked by the teacher					
8	Student asks questions pertaining to the material discussed in English teaching and learning activity					
9	Student communicates with his/her classmate in English					
10	Student manages to finish the task given in class					
11	Student helps his/her classmates in understanding the lesson					

APPENDIX 3
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Beliefs about English Language Learning

Language Difficulty (5)
Foreign Language Aptitude (9-10)
Nature of Learning (1-2)
Language and Communication Strategy (6-8)
Motivation and Expectation (3-4)
Self-reflection in English Classroom (11-14)

1. Menurut anda, bagaimanakah pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas?
2. Hal apakah yang anda pelajari dari pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di dalam kelas?
3. Menurut anda, apakah penting untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris?
4. Apa yang akan anda dapatkan jika anda dapat berbahasa Inggris?
5. Adakah kesulitan yang anda temui dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris?
6. Bagaimanakah cara anda mempelajari bahasa Inggris?
7. Menurut anda, apakah cara ideal untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris?
8. Apakah lingkungan mempengaruhi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris?
9. Menurut anda, adakah bakat khusus yang diperlukan untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris?
10. Jika iya, apakah anda memiliki bakat tersebut?
11. Apakah yang anda lakukan di dalam kelas selama pembelajaran bahasa Inggris berlangsung?
12. Apakah anda mengikuti pelajaran bahasa Inggris dengan baik?
13. Bagaimana dengan hasil nilai bahasa Inggris yang anda dapatkan di semester sebelumnya?
14. Apakah nilai tersebut sesuai dengan kemampuan anda? Mengapa demikian?