



ISSN:1306-3111

e-Journal of New World Sciences Academy  
2012, Volume: 7, Number: 2, Article Number: 4C0136

#### **NWSA-HUMANITIES**

Received: November 2011

Accepted: April 2012

Series : 4C

ISSN : 1308-7320

© 2010 www.newwsa.com

**Şaziye Yaman**

Mersin University

syaman@mersin.edu.tr

Mersin-Turkey

#### **STUDENTS' BELIEFS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: AREA AND GENDER VARIABLES OF STUDY**

##### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to report on a study that investigated the beliefs about language learning of Turkish EFL learners in Anatolian High Schools. In this study, whether there is any difference among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students in terms of their English learning beliefs, and whether there is any difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among these students are investigated. The population of this study is 637 12<sup>th</sup> grade S, SS and L students in Yusuf Kalkavan Anatolian High School, Mersin Ticaret Sanayi Odası Anatolian High School and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High School in 2008-2009 academic year. The survey instrument that has been administered in this study is Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) which is designed by Horwitz in 1985. All data have been analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). According to the results, there is a significant difference among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs. The other finding of the study reveals that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of their English learning beliefs.

**Keywords:** Beliefs, Language Learning, BALLI, Gender Variables, Language Learning

#### **ALAN VE CİNSİYET DEĞİŞKENLERİNE GÖRE DİL ÖĞRENMEDE ÖĞRENCİ İNANÇLARI**

##### **ÖZET**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Anadolu liselerinde İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançlarına dair yürütülen çalışmanın bulgularını sunmaktır. Çalışmada, 12. sınıf Sayısal, Eşit Ağırlık ve Yabancı Dil bölümü öğrencileri arasında dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançları bakımından bir fark olup olmadığı ve cinsiyet değişkenine göre bu öğrencilerin inanç sistemlerinde farklılık olup olmadığı araştırılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini 2008-2009 eğitim-öğretim yılında Yusuf Kalkavan Anadolu Lisesi, Mersin Ticaret Sanayi Odası Anadolu Lisesi ve Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anadolu Lisesi'nde öğrenim gören toplam 637 12. sınıf Sayısal, Eşit Ağırlık ve Yabancı Dil bölümü öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak Horwitz'in "Dil Öğrenme Hakkında İnançlar Envanteri (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) (1985)" kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen veriler SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda Sayısal, Eşit Ağırlık ve Yabancı Dil bölümü öğrencileri arasında dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançları bakımından anlamlı bir fark olduğu görülmüştür. Araştırmanın diğer bulgusu ise kız öğrencilerin ve erkek öğrencilerin dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançları arasında anlamlı bir fark olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İnançlar, Dil Öğrenimi, BALLI, Cinsiyet Değişkenleri, Dil Öğrenme

## 1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Belief is the psychological state in which an individual holds a proposition or premise (argument) to be true without being able to adequately prove its main contention to other people who may or may not agree" (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). According to Richardson (1996), "Learners' beliefs are psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (cited in Huang, 2006: 62).

Second language learners' beliefs are of importance for learners' success or failure in language learning. These beliefs vary; including the difficulty of the target language, its grammar, learning strategies, the nature of language learning, the role of the teacher, learners' self-efficacy, and their expectations for their future with second language. If learners' negative beliefs are proved to be true in lessons, then that means there will be a high wall which prevents effective learning.

The question of what students believe about second language learning is discussed by Richards and Lockhart (1994:52-72). They have found out that learners' belief system covers a wide range of issue and, can influence their motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, as well as the kind of learning strategies they favor.

The beliefs about language learning stem from many sources including learners' thoughts about their capacity, the thoughts of the people around them about how easy or difficult to learn a second language is, their parents' thoughts about the necessity of a second language and so on. Also, Tumposky (1991) points out that "Learners' beliefs are influenced by the social context of learning" (cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 52). Moreover, in learning process, the language teacher affects students' attitudes toward the second language. Some learners expect teachers to tell what they will do exactly, and to show how to learn; but some of them want to see on their own how best they are learning. If those expectations are not met by the teacher at the very beginning, the learners may begin to develop negative beliefs which cause negative consequences about language learning. The differences about language learning between two genders are discussed by Bernat and Lyod (2007) and Tercanlioglu (n.d.). Both of the studies have revealed that males and females seem to differ significantly in their beliefs about language learning.

To find out the beliefs about language learning, researchers and teachers need some measurements to know what learners believe about themselves or the language they are learning. Of course, generalization is not true; there may be individual differences among learners. But in order to draw the most effective way for teaching, teachers should know general beliefs and general needs of their students. The aim of this paper is to reveal whether the beliefs of the high school students about language learning differ according to their field of study and genders.

In this paper, the following research questions will be tried to be answered:

- Is there any difference among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students in terms of their English learning beliefs?
- Is there any difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students?

Throughout this paper, firstly, the related studies conducted so far will be dealt with in the literature review part. Secondly, the instrument used, the participants involved in, data collection process and data analysis will be explained in the methodology part. Then, the findings of the study will be discussed. Finally, the implications of the study will be mentioned.

## 2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

The importance of this study is that in the learning process, there are many factors distracting the learners from language learning. One of the most important factors is the beliefs that students bring with them. To decide how to teach a language starts with knowing what the students believe about that language. This study will reveal whether there is a relation between students' success in language learning and their beliefs about that language.

## 3. THE METHODOLOGY (YÖNTEM)

### 3.1. The Participants of the Study (Çalışmanın Katılımcıları)

637 students from three schools, Yusuf Kalkavan Anatolian High School, Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Anatolian High School and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High School, have taken part in this study in 2008 - 2009 academic year. Of these participants, 394 are Science students (168 female, 226 male), 201 are Social Sciences students (113 female, 88 male) and 42 are Language students (34 female, 8 male). 315 of them are female and 322 of them are male. The mean age of the participants is 18.

Table 1. The participants  
(Tablo 1. Katılımcılar)

	FEMALE	MALE	N
SCIENCE	168	22	394
SOCIAL SCIENCES	113	88	201
LANGUAGE	34	8	42
TOTAL	315	322	637

### 3.2. The Tool of Data Collection (Veri Toplama Aracı)

The survey instrument that has been administered in this study is Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) which is designed by Elaine K. Horwitz in 1985 (see Attachment. It has 34 items. The BALLI had a Cronbach alpha of .79. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998), the acceptable value of Cronbach alpha is at least .70 (cited in Tercanlioglu, n.d.)

BALLI measures beliefs about five language learning areas: (1) Foreign language aptitude, (2) the difficulty of language learning, (3) the nature of language learning, (4) learning and communication strategies and (5) motivations and expectations. All items were rated on a 5- point rating scale, with 32 items ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The response options asking for the difficulty of the English language ranged from *very difficult* (a) to *very easy* (e), and the one for the item asking about how long it takes to speak English ranged from *less than a year* (a) to *you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day* (e).

### 3.3. Data Collection Process (Veri Toplama Süreci)

The population of this study was 12<sup>th</sup> grade S, SS and L students in İçel Anatolian High School, Yusuf Kalkavan Anatolian High School, Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Anatolian High School and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High School in the district of Mersin city. After

the Ministry of Education's official permission, the scale was administered to the students in the mentioned schools during morning sessions.

### 3.4. Data Analysis (Veri Analizi)

All data have been analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 11.5). In order to find out the difference among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs, one - way ANOVA has been used. In order to find out the difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the participants, independent - samples T test has been used.

### 4. THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS (BULGULAR VE TARTIŞMALAR)

The group statistics that show the number of males and females, mean, standard deviation and standard error mean are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Group statistics  
(Tablo 2. Grup istatistikleri)

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BELIEF FEMALE	315	81,8794	10,33444	,58228
MALE	322	88,5870	14,15491	,78882

The findings and discussions of this study are presented below according to the research questions in the given order;

1. Is there any difference among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students in terms of their English learning beliefs?

Table 3. The difference in language learning beliefs of groups One - Way ANOVA)

(Tablo 3. Grubun dil öğrenme inançlarındaki farklılıklar tek yönlü ANOVA)

BELIEF	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1183,975	2		3,615	,027*
Within Groups	103831,6	634	163,772		
Total	105015,6	636	591,987		

Note. \* $p < .05$

As Table 3 shows, there is a significant difference among 12<sup>th</sup> grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs. Since University Entrance Exam (UEE) is a crucial step for the students in Turkey which will shape their future in terms of having a good job, 12<sup>th</sup> grade students just focus on the subjects which take place in this exam. So the students do not give much importance to learning English since they will not need it in UEE.

On the other hand, language teaching system and the goals of English courses in Turkey is mostly considered as grammar teaching of the target language by ignoring the other basic skills. The use of the traditional methods makes the lessons boring for the students. On the one hand less/no emphasis is given on the basic skills as well as grammar teaching in Turkish education system, on the other hand it is an undeniable fact that language teachers are not expected to scan what their students' needs and interests are before start teaching a foreign language. It is the duty of Turkish Ministry of National Education.

In three schools from which the data have been collected, it has been witnessed that there are 595 S and SS students; whereas there are only 42 L students. One of the reasons behind the fact that the S and SS classes are more crowded than the L classes at each school may be the family authority on the students' career choices. In Turkey, the families generally want their children to choose some striking jobs such as doctor, engineer, teacher and so on. They think that the graduates of S and SS areas can have much more job opportunities than the graduates of L area. This traditional idea leads students to give less importance to/ignore learning English.

It is an undeniable fact that knowing English is not a criterion to have a good job in developing countries. Since the students are aware of this fact, they think that they can have a job in their area without needing to learn English. For instance, it does not mean that one cannot be a doctor, one of the most favourite jobs, if s / he does not know English very well. That the education policy of Turkey does not require the graduates to have a definite level of proficiency in English makes the students just focus on the subjects that take place in their areas but not English. If there was a proficiency exam with different criteria for each job, the students would give more importance to learning English at each level. Consequently, the significant difference among S, SS and L students has been an expected result.

2. Is there any difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students?

Table 4. The difference in language learning beliefs between two genders independent samples t- test)

(Tablo 4. İki cinsiyet arasındaki dil öğrenme inançlarındaki farklılıklar bağımsız gruplar t- testi)

Equality of Means		Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t- test for		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2- tailed)
Mean	Std. error	95%Confidence				
Difference	Difference	Interval of the				
Difference						
Lower	Upper					
BELIEF	Equal variances assumed	12,516	,000	-6,818	63	,000**
6,7076	,98375	-8,63938	-4,77580			-
	Equal variances not assumed			-6,841	587,833	,000**
6,7076	,98045	-8,63321	-4,78197			-

Note. \*\*p<.01

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of their English learning beliefs. The reason behind this result may be females' position in the society. As stated above, the students of each field of study just deal with the subjects of their own areas. However, when this situation is considered in terms of genders, it can be seen that females differ from males at this point. In other words, females have more tendency to different areas which will be useful for them such as learning

English. They may think that it can be better for them if they know English beside the other academic subjects that they know and this can help them with their career.

##### **5. CONCLUSION (SONUÇ)**

Since this is a unique study which deals with the difference in English learning beliefs among the three areas at high schools and reveals the difference among these three areas in terms their language learning beliefs, the finding of the first research question cannot be compared or contrasted with the findings of previous studies. Although a significant difference has been found out between genders in this study, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) have found out no difference among the students enrolled in an Academic English Program in terms of genders. In the same way, Tercanlioglu (n.d.) has not found out any difference between the two genders in her study she has conducted on preservice EFL teachers.

For further steps, a study can be conducted with the same students both at 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade in order to find out whether the students' beliefs about learning English change during their high school education if time is available. Moreover, in order to see whether there is any relationship between beliefs about language learning and success in that language, participants' English exam marks and scale scores can be compared if conditions are available.

This study has been carried out with the students of only three anatolian high schools in Mersin. If more anatolian high schools in Turkey are included in a further study, the results may be varied, and there can be more generalizable points for all anatolian high school students. Moreover, a similar study can be conducted on students in all high schools in Mersin and the results can be compared with the results of anatolian high schools. Lastly, this study may reveal different results in other regions of the country.

It is a fact that there is no fixed belief system which covers all learners. For teachers and researchers, it is necessary to find out the invisible beliefs by using some measurements. For a teacher to know what his / her students think or believe about language learning is a good way to create a suitable classroom environment and to choose teaching techniques/ strategies which make the lessons much closer to their objectives. Also, since the teachers are key characters in learning process of their students, by choosing different strategies according to the students' beliefs, they can make the lessons more enjoyable, and the teachers should be able to make their students believe that they can learn English. So, the wall on the way of learning will be disappeared with the help of knowing what students believe about the lesson.

##### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (TEŞEKKÜR)**

This study has been carried out as a compulsory part of "Current Issues in Language Teaching-Graduation Theses" under the supervision of Asst. Prof. Dr. Şaziye YAMAN. We would like to thank to participants and the school administrators for their contributions.

##### **REFERENCES (KAYNAKLAR)**

1. Altan, M.Z., (2006). Beliefs about language learning of foreign language- Major university students. Australian Journal of Teacher Education. 31. No. 2.
2. Bernat, E., Assessing EAP learners' beliefs about language learning in Australian context. Retrieved October 13, 2007, from
3. [http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/June\\_06\\_eb.php](http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/June_06_eb.php)

4. Bernat, E., (2007). Investigating Vietnamese ESL learners' beliefs about language learning. *EA Journal*. 21. No. 2. Retrieved October 13, 2007, from
5. <http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/index.cgi?E=hsshowjnl&efile=admin&M=art&X=getdoc&Lev1=5&Lev2=3&Lev3=4>
6. Bernat, E. and Llyod, R., (2007). Exploring the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*. 7. 79-91.
7. Cotterall, S., (1999). Key variables in language learning: what do learners believe about them?. Pergamon. System 27. 493- 513.
8. Erlenawati, S., (2002). Beliefs about language learning: Indonesian learners' perspectives, and some implications for classroom practices. *Australian Journal of Education*. Retrieved November 2, 2008, from
9. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb6475/is\\_3\\_46/ai\\_n28968689/pg\\_14?tag=artBody;coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6475/is_3_46/ai_n28968689/pg_14?tag=artBody;coll)
10. Gabillon, Z., L2 learners' beliefs: an overview. *Journal of Language and Learning*. 3. No 3. ISSN 1740 - 4983. 233- 260.
11. Horwitz, E.K., (1999). Cultural and situational influences on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning: a review of BALLI studies. Pergamon. System 27. 557- 576.
12. Huang, S.C. and Tsai, R.R., (2003). A comparison between high and low English proficiency learners' beliefs. Retrieved October 13, 2007, from
13. [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1b/90/7a.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/90/7a.pdf)
14. Huang, Z., (2006). Learner beliefs of language learning revisited. *Sino- US Teaching*. 3. no. 3. Serial no: 27. 62- 67.
15. Tercanlioglu, L., Pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language learning and how they relate to gender. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, No. 5-3 (1), 145-162.
16. Peacock, M., (2008). The links between learner beliefs, teacher beliefs, and EFL proficiency. 125- 159. Retrieved November 1, 2008, from
17. <http://sunzil.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/10/1000134.pdf>
18. Richards, J.C. and Lockhart, C., (1994). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 52- 72.
19. Sakui, K. and Gaies, S.J., (1999). Investigating Japanese learners beliefs about language learning. Pergamon. System 27. 473- 492.
20. Wikipedia, (2007). Retrieved November 27, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belief>



**ATTACHMENT**

**Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory**

Below are beliefs that some people have about learning foreign languages. There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your opinions and trying to find out whether there is any difference among the beliefs of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students about learning English according to their areas. Read each statement and decide if you:

**strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.**

School:

Class / Area:

Gender:

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.					
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.					
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.					
4. English is: (a) a very difficult language. (b) a difficult language. (c) a language of medium difficulty. (d) an easy language. (e) a very easy language.					
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.					
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.					
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.					
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.					
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.					



10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another.					
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning a foreign language.					
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.					
13. I enjoy practicing English with the Americans I meet.					
14. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.					
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well: (a) Less than a year (b) 1-2 years (c) 3-5 years (d) 5- 10 years (e) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day					
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.					
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.					
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.					
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.					
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.					
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.					
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.					
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.					
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know Americans better.					
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.					
26. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.					
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.					



28. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.					
29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.					
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.					
31. I want to learn to speak English well.					
32. I would like to have American friends.					
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.					
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.					

Source: Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 72.