Language Learner Beliefs In An English As A Lingua Franca (ELF) Context

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Abstract

With the advent of learner-centered approaches to second or foreign language teaching, the research on learners' beliefs or what learners bring into the classroom in terms of their prior knowledge and experiences, their expectations, and their attitudes towards different aspects of language learning has gained momentum. Learners may, for example, develop core beliefs about language learning that undergo change or otherwise resist change when moving to a new learning context. This study examines overseas Iranian undergraduate students' (n = 160) beliefs about language learning in an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) context and investigates the impact of the old and new learning environments on shaping or affecting these beliefs. The data form a survey and a semi-structured interview revealed that the students' previous learning experiences and the socio-political factors of the old learning context affected the shaping of the trajectory of their belief development. The results also suggested that the new learning environment hardly affected the students' core beliefs about language learning and in some cases even consolidated them. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings and offers several implications for further research and practice.

Keywords: Beliefs about language learning; learning environment; ELF; Iran

1. Introduction

With the growth of learner-centered approaches in second or foreign language teaching, researchers have focused on investigating learners' factors such as their beliefs about language learning in order to find out how belief matches or mismatches between teachers and learners could affect learners' participation in and contribution to their learning. Indeed, language learners enter a program with a wide range of beliefs about learning tasks and nature of language learning (Wenden, 1991), which could affect their expectations, commitment and satisfaction with their learning experience (Horwitz, 1988). Learners' beliefs about language learning refer to the learners' notions, perceived ideas, insights, perspectives, philosophies, opinions and assumptions about the nature of language learning (Horwitz, 1987; Hosenfeld, 1978; Wenden, 1987, 1991). The debate over learners' beliefs in academic circles arose with the pioneering work of Horwitz (1985) and Wendon (1986). Since then, many researchers have studied the debilitative and facilitative impacts of learners' beliefs on their success or achievement in language learning (Barcelos, 2003; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Horwitz, 1999). Originally, these beliefs were associated with learners' meta-cognitive knowledge and their preferences for language learning strategies (Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden, 1986, 1987). Later, Horwitz (1999) reiterated that insights from learners' beliefs might be useful to educators and language teachers to understand how different learners approach language learning.

More recently, however, research has focused on the interplay or interface between learners' beliefs and other factors affecting language learning (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). Learning context is one of these variables that can influence the development or change in learners' beliefs (Murphey, et al., 2009; Ning, 2008). Previous research has examined learners' beliefs as they interacted with different learning environments such as English as a Second Language (ESL) (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Aragão, 2011; Kunt, 1997; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Peng, 2011; Yang, 1992) and ELF contexts (Baker, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014). The current study intends to expand the literature on learners' beliefs by examining the most common beliefs about language learning among overseas Iranian students, and investigating the extent to which a new learning environment can affect these beliefs. The findings hope to add to our knowledge of the development of a belief trajectory in foreign or second language (L2) learners in order to better make sense of the ways they approach the instructional or learning activities in our classrooms.

2. Literature review

Since the introduction of sociocultural theory to investigating beliefs about language learning, it has been argued that beliefs are meditational means that can lead to enhancing or hampering learning in language learners (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). However, beliefs have been found to be complex and dynamic (Mercer, 2011), contradictory, fluctuating (Peng, 2011), affected by contextual affordances (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011) such as micro- and

macro-political contexts and discourses (Gao, 2010), and related to emotions (Aragão, 2011). Learners' beliefs could also be affected by teachers, friends, and significant others who can influence the way they think, feel, or make sense of the learning process (Navarro and Thornton, 2011). Yet, these beliefs may change as learners reflect on their actions and practices (Borg, 2011; De Costa, 2011), or when they move to a new learning context (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014). Although Horwitz's (1985) original concern with learners' beliefs was to bring to light the negative effects of learners' beliefs on the amount or quality of their language learning, the recent research has attempted to find out about the sources of these beliefs and the development of belief system in language learners (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Negueruela-Azarola, 2011).

Horwitz (1999), who reviewed studies that administered *Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) to language learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, reported that learners' beliefs varied according to their cultural backgrounds and previous learning experiences. She further argued that some preconceived beliefs are likely to hamper the learners' scope of strategy use. For example, some language learners believed that they should not say anything while learning another language until they could say it correctly, and some believed that if beginning learners were permitted to make errors at the early stages of the learning process, it would be difficult for them to speak correctly later. These beliefs were assumed to prevent students from adapting to a communicative approach to language learning or using functional language learning strategies. Wenden (1987) also argued that learners' beliefs could determine their approach to language learning and, in particular, their use of meta-cognitive strategies.

The research on learners' beliefs also extended its domain to EFL contexts, where different scholars investigated the relationship between learners' beliefs and other constructs and variables such as motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, etc. For example, Yang (1992) discovered that Chinese learners' beliefs affected their use of learning strategies, and in turn their successful use of strategies enhanced their self-efficacy. In another study on Korean students, Truitt (1995) found that while the participants demonstrated low levels of self-efficacy, they showed strong instrumental motivation to learn English. Additionally, Kunt (1997) reported that Turkish learners placed a high value on grammar and vocabulary, and they had instrumental rather than integrative motivation towards learning English. Diab (2006) also identified a variety of beliefs held by Lebanese learners of English and French languages, attributing these beliefs to the larger political and socio-cultural context surrounding the foreign language education in that country.

Nevertheless, the relationship between learners' beliefs and the learning environment has recently attracted researchers' attention, as an increasing number of students are moving overseas to pursue their studies in different educational institutions in ELF contexts, where speakers of different first languages use English as the medium of communication (Seidlhofer, 2011) or even more than a means of communication (Edwards, 2010). In other words, language learners, in particular at tertiary level, have to write, present, share or publish their work besides communicating with others in this common language. Different researchers have so far investigated the likely impacts of study abroad programs in different ESL and ELF learning contexts on learners' beliefs about language learning (see Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Baker, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Yang & Kim, 2011). However, there is scarcity of research on the beliefs of those learners who wish to pursue their higher education in an ELF context for a period of four or more years. Because learners come to such contexts with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, language teachers have to move through an ordeal to help them abandon some of their misconceptions about language learning to better implement more innovative instructional strategies in their classes. This study is therefore an attempt to find out about those beliefs that could be conducive to language learning, as well those misconceptions that should be kept at bay to help language learners succeed in an era of disciplinary diversity and use of English for an array of purposes.

3. Method

Because learners' beliefs about language learning can affect the ways learners interact with different learning activities, finding about the types of these beliefs could be the first step in accommodating learners' needs and challenges in learning another language. In line with this need, a flurry of studies have been conducted on learners' beliefs with learners from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, no study has been found studying overseas Iranian students' beliefs about language learning in an ELF context. The aim of this study is, therefore, to investigate the most common beliefs about language learning among these students and to examine the impact of the new learning environment on these beliefs. The following two research questions guide the design of this study.

1. What beliefs about language learning do overseas Iranian students hold?

2. In what ways can the new learning environment influence these students' beliefs?

3.1 Setting

This study was conducted at an international university in North Cyprus, where Turkish is spoken as the official language. However, university students from more than 60 countries are using English as their main medium of communication and education in this ELF context. The majority of students in this university, however, come from Turkey or Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Arabic countries. Students who enroll at this university have to take a proficiency test or submit an internationally recognized English proficiency certificate to enter their desired program. Students who fail to offer this certificate or fail the proficiency test must take intensive English courses at English Preparatory School for one or more semesters.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 160 (100 males and 60 females) overseas Iranian undergraduates students who passed the English proficiency test and started their program or failed the test and studied at English Preparatory School for one semester. That is, the participants were all first-year university students who, at the time of the study, had stayed in this context for at least 4 months. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 29 years. They were all born in Iran and were native speakers of Persian. Approximately 40% of the participants had the experience of studying English at private language institutes back home in Iran.

3.3 Data collection instrument and procedures

The BALLI survey (Horwitz, 1988) was translated into Persian and administered to the participants. Previous research in different contexts proved the reliability and validity of this instrument in investigating learners' beliefs (Hong 2006; Kim-Yoon, 2000; Kunt, 1997; Kuntz, 1996; Truitt, 1995; Yang, 1992). This survey consists of 34 items measuring learners' beliefs about language learning in five major areas: (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. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the students' responses to different items on this survey. The results were then tabulated and presented according to the five major belief categories in order to respond to the first research question.

In addition, twenty students volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview. After analyzing the data from the BALLI, those beliefs (items 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 20, 29, 31, 32 and 33) that were strongly supported (with mean score +4) by students were selected and used as a guide to design the interview protocol. The data from the semi-structured interview were used to answer the second research question, which addressed the extent to which a learning context can affect learners' beliefs. The volunteered students were interviewed individually in a friendly manner to ensure they express their opinions with the least possible stress or anxiety. The interview was conducted in Persian and the data were digitally recorded, translated into English, and content analyzed to extract the most frequent themes and responses. These themes were then triangulated with the survey results and discussed in the light of the literature reviewed.

4. Results

RQ1. What beliefs about language learning do overseas Iranian students hold?

In order to respond to the first research question, the analysis of students' responses to the BALLI items was carried out, and the results were grouped and reported under different categories. Table 1 shows the results of students' opinions on the beliefs about the difficulty of language learning. Almost a majority of students believed, "Some languages are easier to learn than others" (item 3). In addition, an overwhelming majority strongly agreed or agreed that they would learn to speak English very well (item 5). However, they disagreed, "It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language" (item 25), and only one third agreed, "It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it" (item 34).

Table 1. The difficulty of language learning (a)

Items	Percentage in a five-point Likert scale					Means and SD	
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	20	48	17	15	0	3.7	0.9
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	43	50	5	0	2	4.3	0.8
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	10	10	37	35	8	2.8	1.0
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	7	25	40	28	0	3.1	0.9

Notes: A five-point Likert scale are shortened as: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), N (neutral), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Table 2 reports the results of students' responses to two other items on the difficulty of language learning. While more than half of the students rated English as a language of medium difficulty, less than one third considered it to be an easy language (item 4). As a result of viewing English as a language of medium difficulty or an easy language, most of the students believed that it would take less than two years to become proficient in speaking English if they spent one hour a day (item 15).

Table 2. The difficulty of language learning (b)

Items	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
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.	0	7	58	30	5	2.7	0.7
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well: 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) you can't learn a language in a hour a day.	28	40	10	7	15	3.5	1.3

Table 3 illustrates the results of students' responses to items on language learning aptitude. The results indicated that a large number of students endorsed the superiority of children over adults in language learning (item 1) and believed, "Everybody can learn to speak a foreign language" (item 33). Additionally, a majority believed, "Some people have a special ability for learning a foreign language" (item 2). The respondents also opined, "People from my country are good at learning foreign languages" (item 6) and supported the belief "It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another language" (item 10). In addition, about a half of the respondents believed, "I have a special ability for learning foreign languages (item 16). The same percentage also agreed, "People who speak more than one language are very intelligent (item 30). However, while students disagreed that there is a difference between foreign learning aptitude and the ability in learning mathematics or science (item 11), they remained undecided about the idea that "women are better than men at learning foreign languages" (item 19).

Table 3. Foreign language aptitude

	Items	Percentage in a five-point Likert scale					Means and SD	
		SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	40	48	7	5	0	4.2	0.8
2.	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	20	58	15	5	2	3.8	0.9
6.	People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	37	48	13	2	0	4.2	0.7
10.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another.	18	55	15	12	0	3.7	0.9
11.	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	10	0	30	38	22	2.3	1.1
16.	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	20	33	45	2	0	3.7	0.8
19.	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	5	5	73	12	5	2.9	0.7
30.	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	15	38	33	12	2	3.5	0.1
33.	Everybody can learn to speak a foreign language.	38	50	10	2	0	4.2	0.7

Table 4 presents the results of students' responses to the beliefs about the nature of language learning. The results revealed that students strongly endorsed, "It is easier to learn a foreign language in a country where that language is spoken" (item 12). However, students varied in their opinions about learning different components of language learning and their use of learning strategies. While a majority rated vocabulary (item 17) and grammar (item 23) as the most important parts of language learning, they did not strongly agree with translation as the most important strategy in language learning (item 28). Students, however, remained mostly undecided about the necessity of knowing about English-speaking culture in order to speak English (item 8) and about the similarity or difference between language learning and other subjects (item 27).

Table 4. The nature of language learning

	Items	Percentage in a five-point Likert scale					Means and SD	
		SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
8.	It is necessary to know about English-speaking culture in order to speak English.	18	17	45	15	5	3.2	1.0
12.	It is easier to learn a foreign language in a country where that language is spoken.	75	20	0	3	2	4.6	0.7
17.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	17	63	7	13	0	3.8	0.8
23.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	12	45	10	33	0	3.3	1.0
27.	Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects.	7	15	68	10	0	3.2	0.7
28.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to translate from my native language.	10	28	30	27	5	3.1	1.0

Table 5 illustrates the results of students' responses to the beliefs about learning and communication strategies. The results indicated that a majority of students disagreed with remaining silent until they can speak correctly (item 9). They

were also in favor of practicing with CDs and videos (item 26), as well as speaking with excellent pronunciation (item 7). In addition, they endorsed the beliefs on the use of communication strategies such as practicing English with native speakers (item 13) and guessing the unknown words (item 14). Students also strongly supported repeating and practicing to learn English (item 18). However, while approximately half of the students reported that they were bold enough to speak English with others (item 21), only one third agreed with the error correction at the beginning of language learning (item 22).

Table 5. Beliefs about learning and communication strategies

Items	Percentage in a five-point Likert scale					Means and SD	
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	55	33	12	0	0	4.4	0.7
9. You shouldn't say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.	0	2	12	43	43	1.7	0.8
13. I enjoy practicing English with the native speakers of English I meet.	43	42	10	5	0	4.2	0.8
14. It's ok to guess if you don't know a word in English.	17	63	10	10	0	3.8	0.8
18 It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	78	22	0	0	0	4.7	.04
21 I feel timid speaking English with other people.	5	33	15	35	13	2.8	1.1
22 If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	17	25	33	23	2	3.3	1.0
26 It is important to practice language learning CDs and videos.	40	45	8	5	2	4.1	0.9

Finally, Table 6 shows the results of students' responses to the beliefs about their motivations and expectations of language learning. The results indicated that a majority of students had both instrumental and integrative motivations towards learning English. For example, almost all students were in favor of knowing native speakers of English (item 32) and believed that learning English would bring them better job or career opportunities (item 29). As a result, an overwhelming majority wanted to learn to speak English well (item 31). They also reported, "People in my country feel that is important to speak English" (item 20) and reported the need to learn English so that they could understand native speakers better (item 24). In general, the results from students' responses to different items on this survey revealed that they held positive beliefs about language learning and were confident about their ability and talent to learn to speak English. However, they were ill-informed about many realities about language leaning such as the difficulties of different skills and sub-skills (e.g., items 23, 25 & 34).

Table 6. Motivation and expectations

Items	Percentage in a five-point Likert scale					Means and SD	
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
20. People in my country feel that is important to speak English.	23	65	10	2	0	4.0	0.6
24. I would like to learn English so that I can better understand native speakers of English.	22	43	25	8	2	3.7	0.9
29. If I learn English well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	65	28	5	2	0	4.5	0.7
31. I want to learn to speak English well.	73	20	5	2	0	4.6	0.8
32. I would like to get to know native speakers of English.	60	35	5	0	0	4.5	0.6

RQ2. In what ways can the new learning environment influence these students' beliefs?

Students' responses to the interview questions corroborated the findings from the survey, suggesting the impact of both the old learning context and the new learning environment on their beliefs in different ways. Most importantly, the results indicated that the educational system and policies, as well as the socio-political and socio-economic forces of the previous learning environment seemed to have shaped students' core beliefs, which remained, to a large extent, unchanged or consolidated under the influence of the new context. That is to say, these students perceived the learning opportunities in the new learning environment more negatively than positively. For example, the students expected their teachers to focus mainly on grammar to help them build their ability in other areas of language learning such as speaking. Resisting more learner-centered instructional or learning strategies in the new learning context, one student, for example, said:

> I expected the teacher to focus on grammar, but unfortunately he insisted on using games and funny activities in the class . . . I brought a grammar book from Iran, which explained everything in Persian. I used to study this book to improve my grammar.

In addition, students were concerned about their speaking ability and were looking forward to opportunities to further improve their speaking ability. They mostly associated learning English with speaking rather than with other sophisticated academic skills such as writing and reading, or sub-skills of summarizing and paraphrasing. Indeed, several students mentioned that their expectation of moving overseas was visiting a place where they could meet native speakers of English and practice their speaking skill. As a consequence of this expectation, they could hardly cope with learning challenges in the new environment. This is perhaps best reflected in one student's comment:

> I think learning environment is very important. For example, if you study in America, you will   learn
English automatically. You don't need to work hard . . . There aren't many native speakers of English here. I see some Africans, but they seem to speak another language.

By the same token, assuming an L2-rich context as an optimal language learning environment, one student's interpretation of studying English in an ELF context was a situation in which a blind is leading another blind cross the street:

> In my opinion, learning English from Turkish students is more like blind leading another blind cross the street. Their grammar is not bad, but most of them can't say a sentence in English . . . They also use a combination of English and Turkish, expecting us to learn to speak Turkish rather than English.

Moreover, students reported a preference to identify with Anglo-American culture rather than regional cultures. Even, a majority preferred to learn to speak English more with American than British accent. This prompted these students to distance themselves from other language learners and their communities. One student, for example, said:

> I think Iranians can learn English faster and speak English better than other nationalities here because they can pronounce everything in English. Arabs and Turkish lack this potential . . . Even our accent is different when we speak English.

Overall, the interviewees underlined the importance of accent, pronunciation, culture, and native speakerhood, as the model and goal of language learning, reflecting their belief in a folk theory that associates knowing a foreign language with an ability to speak it and identify with its culture. Because of their failure to meet these expectations, they expressed dissatisfaction with learning English in an ELF context because of the misconceptions about language learning they developed in their previous learning environment.

4.1 Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate overseas Iranian students' beliefs about language learning and to explore the impact of the new learning environment on these beliefs. The findings from the BALLI revealed that students held strong beliefs about learning English in a country where it is spoken and were motivated to speak this language well, with excellent pronunciation. In addition, they liked to meet, communicate, and know native speakers of English. They also believed that people from their country value knowing and speaking English, and have a talent for learning English. Results from students' responses to the interview questions supported these findings, offering more insights into the sources of these beliefs and the likely reasons for their development. In particular, students did not have realistic expectations of language learning in an ELF context, and were to some extent unaware of their learning goals at a higher level of education. They commented on their interest in socializing with native speakers of English, rather than acknowledging learning English for academic purposes for which they had left their country. These unrealistic goals pushed them to the point where they became skeptic of communicating with other language learners because of their foreign accent or unacceptable pronunciation.

These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Gao, 2010; Horwitz, 1999) regarding the impact of contextual affordances and micro- and macro-political contexts on the development of learners' beliefs. These beliefs also stood as scaffolds and resources to help students interact with their new learning environment (Yang & Kim, 2011). In addition, the findings indicate several similarities and points of departure in learners' beliefs between these students and their counterparts, such as Arab (Diab, 2006) and Turkish learners (Kunt, 1997), in similar contexts. Regardless of cultural similarities, learning or using English serves different purposes in these contexts, prompting educational authorities to craft different policies as far as English education is concerned; these policies, in turn, have thus far affected learners' beliefs and their approach to language learning. For example, since Iran is politically and economically isolated in today's international community, language learners have the least contact with users or native speakers of English, and therefore they have strong intrinsic motivation to learn this language in order to find out what is happening beyond the borders. By contrast, tourism is a booming industry in Turkey and Lebanon alike, and many learners have the prospect of ending up working in this industry. Thus, learners in these contexts have strong instrumental motivation to learn English because of the need to be able to communicate with others in a common language.

Additionally, the findings suggest that lack of these students' faith in other learners' ability to help them improve their English arises from the assumption that while interaction or communication in English between students from different first language (L1) backgrounds may help them improve their communication skills, this may not specifically lead to the pushed output in case of two lower level learners. Thus, students may develop fossilized errors because of the

interlocutors' lack of confidence to give feedback on each other's output. That's why they used code-switching as a strategy to get their message across. However, previous research has shown that English users in ELF contexts use expressions and phrases from their L1 to express their identity (Fiedler, 2011; Pitzl, 2009), which was stronger among Turkish students in this study because they formed the majority in this context. The corpus studies also revealed that uses of figurative expressions from learners' L1 background could not be regarded as errors; rather they are linguistic innovations used to facilitate the flow of communication (Pitzl, 2009).

Although learners' identity is fluid in ELF contexts (Kalocsai, 2009), participants in this study preferred to identify themselves with Anglo-American rather than a regional culture. Previous studies have shown that speakers will accommodate or converge with their interlocutors' accent easily if they like them and, on the other hand, diverge from their accent if they do not like them (Babel, 2009; Mather, 2012). Thus, native-like accent can give language learners a stronger identity and sense of cultural empathy. This finding is consistent with students' responses to the survey regarding learning English in a country where it is spoken (item 12), a preference to identify with Anglo-American culture rather than regional cultures (items 13, 24, 32), and modeling native speakers as the goal of language learning, indicated also by their concern with native-like accent and excellent pronunciation (item 7). However, while it is good to be optimistic about learning to speak English with an excellent accent, this could become a source of disappointment and frustration when learners encounter challenges and difficulties in achieving this goal, especially when the focus of a program is on building their academic language learning skills such as reading and writing. All things being equal, the findings also revealed that the students reported strong self-confidence and self-efficacy in language learning, an openness to English language and culture or a lack of ethnocentrism, as well as awareness of the benefits of bilingualism in the new millennium, which is generally associated with social, educational, and economic well-being and prestige.

5. Conclusions and implications

The results of this study indicated that learning context could function as one of the strongest variables in language learning. The results suggested that not only do learners' may develop misconceptions about different aspects of language learning that could cause belief conflicts between teachers and students (Brown, 2009; Peacock, 1998; Schulz, 2001), but these beliefs may or may not be also affected by new learning environments. Affected by their previous learning context, students developed some core beliefs about learning English, which remained unchanged encountering an ELF context. In other words, since "language learning does not happen in a culture-vacuum context and learner beliefs are born out of particular sociocultural contexts" (Peng, 2011, p. 315), learners used their already shaped beliefs as resources to deal with their new context of learning.

The findings imply that it is imperative for teachers to be aware of their students' beliefs in terms of their views towards the difficulty of language, the nature of language learning, the common communication and learning strategies they use, and their expectations as well as the degree and type of their motivation in language learning. In addition, while teachers may not be held accountable for their students' development of unrealistic beliefs, their use of ineffective learning strategies, and having unrealistic goals, they should be committed to guide their students while facing the challenging tasks of learning a different language. This can be achieved only through discussing these beliefs with students to raise their awareness of the facilitative and detrimental impacts of having unrealistic or idealistic beliefs about language learning, which could affect their use of learning strategies, as well as their participation in and contribution to the learning activities.

However, it seems that beliefs are complex, dynamic, contradictory, fluctuating, and related to contextual affordances (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011), suggesting that while it is crucial to know about learners' beliefs, seeing them as stable constructs, as the early approaches did (Navarro & Thornton, 2011), goes against the mission of education to promote positive changes and attitudes in learners. Indeed, beliefs are affected by and related to action; to what teachers do in their classroom; and to the curricular policies and priorities, which are themselves determined by other socio-political decisions. Further studies, therefore, need to investigate how different forces help these beliefs develop, change and interact with learning and teaching processes.

The present study was carried out with a sample of overseas Iranian students studying in an ELF context. Due to a small sample size, compared with the population of overseas Iranian students, the findings cannot be generalized to other similar contexts. Therefore, further research is needed to replicate this study in other ELF contexts and to compare overseas learners' beliefs with those of their counterparts in their home countries. Another limitation of this study was that only students who spent four months studying in this context were selected, and this might be an insufficient time for the change in learners' beliefs (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014). Also, participants' age, their educational background, gender, and field of study might affect the type of beliefs they hold. Thus, future studies need to take into account these meditational variables within a longer timescale. .

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