English as a Foreign Language Learning Beliefs and Attitudes of Saudi College English and Non-English Majors

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Abstract

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate EFL learning beliefs and attitudes held by a group of college Business Administration freshmen at a Saudi college. A second aim was to explore the relationship between EFL learning beliefs and attitudes in the same group of learners. Using a comparison group of English freshmen in the same college, the study also aimed to explore the differences in EFL learning beliefs and attitudes between English and non-English majors. Twenty three Business Administration freshmen and 32 English freshmen completed a 44-item questionnaire probing beliefs and attitudes towards learning English. Factor analysis of the questionnaire resulted in a 5-factor solution. The five factors are: self-efficacy, the importance of learning English, the difficulty of learning English, the nature of learning English, and threat to mother tongue/culture. Results revealed that the beliefs of the non-English majors concerning self-efficacy, and the difficulty and nature of learning English were below average. Meanwhile, their beliefs about the importance of learning English and threat to mother tongue/culture were moderate. A significant correlation was found between the non-English majors' EFL learning beliefs and attitudes, indicating that stronger beliefs about a FL are accompanied by more favorable attitudes towards learning it. As to the comparison between English and non-English majors, significant differences in EFL learning beliefs and attitudes were found between the two groups of language learners. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are reported.

Keywords: EFL learning beliefs, EFL learning attitudes, English majors, non-English majors

Introduction

With the advent of cognitive psychology, the role such learner variables as learning styles, strategies, attitudes and motivations play in language learning began to capture researchers' interest. One of the more recently investigated learner variables is learner beliefs about language learning, which refer to "general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language teaching" (Victori & Lockhart, 1995: 224). It has been noted that successful learners develop insightful perceptions about language learning, their own abilities and effective learning strategies. On the other hand, learners can develop uninformed or negative beliefs about language learning, resulting in their reliance on less effective strategies and negative attitude towards learning and autonomy (Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Cotterall, 1995), classroom anxiety (Horwitz, 1989; Kunt, 1997; Truitt, 1995), and poor performance (Peacock, 2001; Mori, 1999). For instance, adults who believe that children are better language learners may begin language learning with some negative expectations of their own achievement (Bernat, 2004).

Influenced by their previous language learning experiences and their own cultural backgrounds (Liao & Chiang, 2003), FL learners often hold different beliefs about FL learning. Knowledge of such beliefs may provide language educators with a better understanding of their learners' "expectation of, commitment to, success in and satisfaction with their language classes" (Horwitz, 1988: 283). Based on this knowledge, teachers can make more informed choices about teaching (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Frugé, 2007) and adopt "a more sensitive approach to the organization of learning opportunities" (Cotterall, 1999, p.494). Another purpose of identifying language learning beliefs is to investigate whether detrimental beliefs contribute to poor performance in a given group of learners, which is the case in the present study.

Research has investigated the relationship between language learning beliefs and such affective variables as anxiety (Tsai, 2004; Kunt, 1998), motivation (Kim-Yoon, 2000; Banya & Chen, 1997), and attitude (Banya & Chen, 1997). Overall, findings revealed that learners who hold positive beliefs about language learning have better affect than learners who hold negative beliefs. The relationship between EFL learning beliefs and attitudes was explored in the present study to identify whether the two variables are interrelated in the current sample. Investigating the relationship of beliefs to other factors, according to Bernat (2006: 203), "bears consequences for possible instructional intervention methods in the classroom attempting to change those beliefs, which may hinder the learning process".

Research findings concerning the relationship between language learning beliefs and proficiency (as indicated by major in the present study) are not consistent. In a study conducted by Tanaka and Ellis (2003) the correlation between students' responses to the belief questionnaire and their TOEFL scores was weak and statistically non-significant. Conversely, Bagherzadeh (2012) found that more proficient participants held strong beliefs in the category of "motivation and expectations" and "aptitude". Similarly, Huang and Tsai (2003) found that there were marked differences between high and low proficiency English learners in four out of the five dimensions of the BALLI. Firstly, high proficiency learners believed that they were more equipped with special abilities for learning English. Secondly, they perceived English learning as an easy task. Thirdly, high proficiency learners perceived access to listening and reading materials, rather than translation, as more important. Fourthly, they enjoyed practicing English

with native speakers. Such inconsistent findings indicate that the relationship between beliefs about language learning and proficiency needs to be further researched.

Statement of the problem

Learners' poor performance in language learning can be attributed, in part at least, to their holding negative beliefs about themselves as learners, factors influencing learning and the nature of language learning. This contention is what urged the researcher to investigate EFL learning beliefs of a group of Saudi college freshmen majoring in Business Administration (N = 23). The investigation was also inspired by the fact that students occasionally voiced negative beliefs about EFL learning, i.e., "English is complicated and difficult to learn", "Only students majoring in English should study it", "Some students have a special ability to learn English", and "poor learners of English will remain so throughout years of study". The present study therefore aimed to explore those students' EFL learning beliefs and the relationship that might exist between their beliefs and their attitudes. In addition to this main sample, another sample of English majors (N = 32) was used as a comparison group. The aim of using that second sample was to explore if there were significant differences between the two samples in EFL learning beliefs and attitudes. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the beliefs that non-English majors hold about EFL learning?
2. What is the relationship between EFL learning beliefs and attitudes of non-English majors?
3. Are there differences between English and non-English majors in EFL learning beliefs and attitudes?

Literature Review

With the advent of cognitive psychology, research interest in FL has shifted from teacher-directed instruction to student-centered learning. It is now agreed upon that FL learners bring to the language classroom a complex web of attitudes, experiences, expectations, and beliefs about language and language learning (Benson, 2001). That such beliefs affect language learning has been supported by research studies over the past few decades (e.g. Parviz, 2013; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Siebert, 2003; Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000; Mori, 1999). Beliefs about language learning are often described as subjective assumptions, representations, and notions that learners hold to be true about language learning. Such beliefs form a metacognitive framework with certain conceptions that learners hold about themselves, the nature and difficulty of language learning, the role of variables such as age, gender or aptitude on the learning process, and the usefulness of certain learning strategies (Öz, 2007; Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

Researchers identified several sources that shape learners' beliefs about language learning. These include family and home background (Dias, 2000), cultural background (Alexander & Dochy, 1995), classroom/social peers (Arnold, 1999), interpretations of prior repetitive experiences (Gaoyin & Alvermann, 1995; Kern, 1995), and individual differences such as gender (Siebert, 2003) and personality (Langston & Sykes, 1997). For instance, Gabillon (2005) asserts that beliefs are of social nature in that they are constructed and shaped through interactions between groups in a society. Accordingly, the society's general vision about language learning, the learner's past educational and personal experiences influence the formation of his/her beliefs and language learning culture. In this same respect, Wenden (1999) confirms that learners' beliefs can be both conscious and unconscious. They 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.

Regardless of their origins, beliefs FL learners hold about language and language learning can be positive or negative. Positive or supportive beliefs help to overcome problems and thus sustain motivation, while negative or unrealistic beliefs can lead to decreased motivation, frustration and anxiety (Kern, 1995; Oh, 1996). Negative beliefs are therefore debilitative to language learning. An example of negative beliefs that learners may hold is beliefs about the difficulty of language learning. These beliefs were found to associate with foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 1989; Truitt, 1995) and poor performance (Mori, 1999). Learners who perceived the target language as difficult were found to have higher anxiety than those who believed they were learning an easy language (Horwitz, 1989; Truitt, 1995). Mori (1999) found that learners who perceived the target language as an easy language tended to do better than those who believed that they were dealing with a difficult language.

Another set of negative beliefs relate to foreign language aptitude. Learners who believe that they lack given skills will not engage in tasks in which those skills are required, and these beliefs about their competencies will affect "the choices they make, the effort they put forth, their inclinations to persist at certain tasks, and their resiliency in the face of failure" (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000: 215). Mori (1999: 408) hints to another risky consequence of the belief in the existence of language learning aptitude. She maintains that learners who perceive language learning ability as "uncontrollable" or "fixed" may not exert the required effort to proceed in learning. In her study of learners of Japanese as a FL, she found that learners who believed that foreign language learning ability was innate and could not be improved tended to achieve less in language learning than those who "perceived their own ability as a controllable, increasable entity". Other beliefs can be facilitative to language learning. Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) found that certain beliefs about language learning have significant effect on learners' motivation to learn the target language. Similarly, Banya and Chea (1997) revealed that students with positive beliefs about foreign language learning tend to have stronger motivation, hold favorable attitude and use more strategies, which leads to better achievement.

Admitting the significant role that beliefs play in language learning (Frugé, 2007), researchers and practitioners have stressed the importance of identifying learners' beliefs. Riley (1996) maintains that what learners believe affect their language learning much more than their teachers do. 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, classroom anxiety and poor performance. Language teachers with an understanding of learners' beliefs about language learning can help enhance learners' success in language learning in two ways: by reinforcing their students' beliefs that are facilitative to language learning and challenging those that are debilitative. Teachers who have access to their learners' beliefs are better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogues about learning with their learners (Cotteral, 1999).

Four approaches are used to identify beliefs (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005: 4-5). The normative approach is characterized by the use of Likert-scale questionnaires in the investigation of learner beliefs. Horwitz (1985, 1987) is generally credited with initiating significant research

into beliefs with the development of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Since developed, the BALLI has been used extensively in research conducted to examine learner beliefs. The inventory covers five areas of language learning: foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations. The metacognitive approach employs semi-structured interviews and self-reports to collect data about learner beliefs. The contextual approach is based on variable means of data collection like classroom observation, discussions, discourse analysis, etc. Another recent approach used to explore language learning beliefs is the metaphorical approach (Ellis, 2002; Farrell, 2006) that identifies beliefs by means of metaphor analysis. According to the metaphorical approach, the researcher analyzes the metaphors learners use in their writings about specific topics like expressing their opinions about language learning and the role of the teacher. An example of metaphors mentioned in research is "language learning is a struggle" implicating the difficulty of language learning.

A large number of studies about language learning beliefs aimed to investigate frequent beliefs in different groups of language learners (e.g. Daif-Allah, 2012; Atas, 2012; Peng & Hui, 2012; Fujiwara, 2011; Mohebi & Khodadady, 2011; Boakye, 2007; Bernat, 2006). Another research interest was devoted to the investigation of the relationships between beliefs about language learning and other factors such as language learning strategies (Wen & Johnson, 1997; Yang, 1992, 1999), anxiety (Horwitz, 1989; Tsai, 2004; Kunt, 1998), motivation (Kim-Yoon, 2000; Banya & Chen, 1997), autonomy (Cotterall, 1995; Victori and Lockhart, 1995; White, 1999), attitude (Banya & Chen, 1997), and proficiency (Bagherzadeh, 2012; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Mori, 1999). What follows is a brief account of some studies exploring the relationship between language learning beliefs and other factors that contribute to language learning.

The relationship between language learning beliefs and strategy use was explored in a number of studies using different samples of language learners. Parviz and Nima (2013) investigated language learning beliefs and strategy use among 80 EFL college freshmen (39 males and 41 females) at Roudbar Islamic Azad University. A moderate correlation was found between beliefs and strategies. Ghavamnia, Kassaian, and Dabaghi (2011) examined the relationship between EFL learners' strategy use on the one hand and three other variables (motivation, proficiency, and learners' beliefs) on the other hand. Findings revealed a positive relationship between strategy use and language learning beliefs. Li (2010) found moderate correlation between foreign language learning beliefs and strategy use among English major sophomores of vocational colleges in Jiangxi. Chang and Shen (2010) experimented with 250 Taiwanese remote junior high school EFL learners. Again a moderate correlation was found between beliefs about language learning and frequency of strategy use.

Talebinejad and Nekouei (2013) investigated the relationship between beliefs about foreign language learning and foreign language anxiety among 42 children in the Iranian context. The findings revealed that participants held the same idea with regard to BALLI and FLCAS. Sioson (2011) conducted a study to determine which among the subscales of language learning strategies (LLS), beliefs about language learning and anxiety was the strongest predictor of performance in an academic speaking context. The relationship between and among the factors was also explored. Results showed that all the subscales of language learning strategies, beliefs and anxiety were positively correlated with their respective subscales. Beliefs about language learning and anxiety subscales had generally no relationship with each other. Again, the results

of Sioson's study confirm that the relationship between language learning beliefs and such affective variables as anxiety and attitudes need to be further researched. This is why the current study explored the relationship between EFL learning beliefs and attitudes in the Saudi context.

Research results concerning the relationship between beliefs about FL learning and achievement are inconsistent. Tanaka and Ellis (2003) reported a study of a 15-week study-abroad program for Japanese university students, examining changes in the students' beliefs about language learning (measured by means of a questionnaire) and in their English proficiency (measured by means of the TOEFL). Pearson Product Moment correlations between the students' responses to the Belief Questionnaire and their TOEFL scores both before and after the study abroad period were weak and generally statistically non-significant. Conversely, low and high proficient SL and FL learners were found to possess different beliefs about language learning. For instance, Mori (1999), in her study of 187 American college students studying Japanese, found significant correlations between some beliefs and achievement. The findings revealed that learners who performed well in the learning of Japanese were those who 1) see Japanese as an easy language and 2) believe that the learning ability is not innately fixed. Bagherzadeh (2012) investigated language learning beliefs of non-English majors with different levels of English language proficiency. The participants were 125 (86 female and 39 male) Iranian non-English majors who were studying biology, geography, accounting and science. The more proficient participants were found to hold strong beliefs in the category of "motivation and expectations". Also results indicated that there was a significant difference among the aptitude of the four groups of participants. Similarly, Huang and Tsai (2003) used the BALLI together with interviews in Taiwan and found that there were significant differences between high and low proficiency English learners in four out of the five dimensions of the BALLI. Firstly, high proficiency learners believed that they were more equipped with special abilities for learning English. Secondly, they perceived English learning as an easy task. Thirdly, high proficiency learners perceived access to listening and reading materials, rather than translation, as more important. Fourthly, they enjoyed practicing English with native speakers. No difference between high and low proficiency learners in their motivation was found.

Method

Participants

Twenty three Business Administration and thirty two English freshmen at Thadiq and El-Mahmal Sciences and Humanities College, Shaqra University participated in the study. The researcher taught Business Administration freshmen a proficiency course, and taught English freshmen reading comprehension and vocabulary building. The mean age of the participants was 19 years. Their average experience in studying English was six years. The study was mainly conducted to investigate language learning beliefs of the Business Administration students to identify whether their poor performance in language learning can be attributed, in part at least, to their holding negative beliefs. The English freshmen sample was used as a comparison group to explore if there were significant differences between the two samples in EFL learning beliefs and attitudes. The inclusion of the English freshmen sample aimed at shedding more light on the beliefs and attitudes held by the non-English freshmen sample.

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher to assess the participants' EFL learning beliefs and attitudes towards learning English. It has two subscales: one for beliefs and the other for attitudes. Relevant literature helped the researcher in developing the items concerning beliefs (Horwitz, 1985, 1987) and attitudes (Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Rermyindee, & Vongchittpinyo, 2004; Gardner, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher used the comments that learners who took the course before voiced about learning English. The researcher used to jot down any comments relevant to beliefs about learning English in a special diary. There are two important observations about the belief subscale. The first is that beliefs tested are of the general type that can affect attitude to the language and willingness to exert the due efforts to learn it. For instance, items relevant to the nature of learning English tapped general principles (e.g. Success in learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student) rather than such specific aspects as the relative importance of learning vocabulary or grammar rules. The second observation is that this subscale, unlike the BALLI, can provide overall scores. Items that indicate positive beliefs if disagreed to are reverse coded so that higher means indicate more positive beliefs. Hence, a participant can get high means if he agrees to some items and if he disagrees to others. It all depends on the beliefs expressed being positive or negative. Reverse coded items will be highlighted when presenting and discussing results.

The belief subscale that initially included 35 items was content validated by three EFL professors to decide on its validity for probing beliefs about learning English. Based on the recommendations of the specialists, some items were either reworded or deleted. The questionnaire was then piloted on 46 students to check its internal consistency. A factor analysis with Varimax rotation and eigenvalues of ≥ 1 was conducted on the responses of the pilot sample to decide on the items to be included in the final version of the questionnaire. Prior to the principal component analysis, the suitability of the data for the factor analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was .773, which is larger than the recommended value of .6. This indicates that the relationships among the items are strong enough. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity result was significant, $\chi2 = 884.331$, $p < .000$. All these test results together affirmed that the items are sufficiently intercorrelated to produce underlying factors. Thus the factorability of the data was supported. Items with factor loadings less than .4 or those that loaded significantly on more than one factor were deleted and the correlation matrix was reanalyzed. A five factor solution was found, which accounted for 63.30% of the total variance in beliefs about learning English. Examining the content of items that loaded onto the five factors, the researcher labeled the five factors as follows: (1) self-efficacy (9 items: variance explained: 18.052%), (2) the importance of learning English (6 items: variance explained 16.879%), (3) the difficulty of learning English (3 items: variance explained 12.076%), (4) the nature of learning English (3 items: variance explained: 8.764%), and (5) threat to mother tongue/culture (2 items: variance explained: 7.53%). The alpha estimate of the questionnaire's internal consistency was .88. Details of factor loadings of items constituting each factor are given in Appendix 2. The final form of the belief subscale consisted of 23 items.

The attitude subscale aimed to probe participants' attitudes towards learning English. The items were partly adapted from the attitude questionnaire employed in a study by Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Rermyindee & Vongchittpinyo (2004). Other items were taken from Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (1985). Furthermore, some items were developed by the researcher. Items were selected and developed in the light of three aspects

of attitude presented in relevant literature: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. The behavioral aspect deals with the way one behaves and reacts in particular situations. The cognitive aspect refers to beliefs language learners hold about the knowledge they receive and their understanding in the process of language learning. Inner feelings and emotions of FL learners are included under the emotional aspect. Selecting and developing items within these three aspects was meant to make sure that all aspects of attitude are represented. However, overall scores were only used in statistical treatment of data since, in the present study, attitude comes second in importance to language learning beliefs. The preliminary subscale consisted of 30 items, some of which were negatively worded. It was then submitted to a cohort of TEFL specialists to decide on its validity for assessing EFL learners' attitude towards learning English. Recommended changes were performed by deletion, addition, or modification. This left the attitude subscale with 21 items that were then administered to a pilot sample of 46 students to establish its reliability. Its alpha estimate of internal consistency was found to be .93, which is quite reliable.

The summated rating method was used in scoring the two subscales in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to respond to items by indicating how far they agree to the statements on a five-point rating scale. Each response was associated with a point value, where "Strongly agree" was assigned a point value of 5 and the response "Strongly disagree" a point value of 1. Items with negative statement in the attitude subscale were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate more positive attitude.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data obtained from the 55 completed questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS 15.0 package program. Percentages were used to identify frequency of target beliefs. The correlations between beliefs and attitudes were computed using means. Means were also utilized to examine the differences between the two groups in beliefs and attitudes.

Results and Discussion

The results section begins with the frequency of beliefs held by Business Administration students. Then the correlation between learning beliefs and attitudes of the same group is presented. No reference was made to English majors here to place more emphasis on beliefs and attitudes held by Business Administration students. The final section presents the results of the comparison between the two samples in learning beliefs and attitudes.

The beliefs that non-English majors held about EFL Learning

The percentages presented in Tables 1-5 below provides the answer to the first research question "What are the beliefs that non-English majors hold about EFL learning?" The two points (agree and strongly agree) and (disagree and strongly disagree) were grouped together so as to find out whether the participants had positive or negative beliefs on one item. Data concerning each belief factor are presented separately.

Table 1: *Self-efficacy*

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
2. Saudi people are good at learning English	43%	30%	26%
3. I have a special ability for learning English	51%	22%	27%
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well	48%	17%	35%

7. A poor learner of English will remain so throughout years of study	30%	65%	4%
10. I know how to improve my English	39%	30%	30%
12. I think I learn English well compared with my classmates	48%	30%	22%
19. When I encounter difficulties in learning English, I do not give up	48%	26%	26%
20. I can identify and overcome my weaknesses in English	48%	30%	22%

Note: The percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, so the total of all the percentages of one item isn't always one hundred.

The items in the above table relate to self-efficacy beliefs, i.e., learners' perceived aptitude and competencies. It is obvious that learners' evaluation of their aptitude to learn English and their competence in progressing in language learning is below average. From 39% to 51% of the participants agreed that they had aptitude to learn English (item 3), believed they would ultimately learn to speak English very well (item 5), and had the ability to identify and overcome weaknesses (item 20) and improve their English (item 10). These beliefs about self-efficacy are consistent with a belief 43% of the participants held about Saudi people being good at learning English (item 2). Less than half of the participants (48%) agreed that they learn English well compared to their classmates (item 12). They also revealed moderate persistence in the face of difficulties (item 19). The only somehow strong belief they held was that a poor learner of English does not necessarily remain so throughout years of study. That is, they believed that an unsuccessful learner can promote himself and that no one is doomed to be weak in learning English. Overall, participants' beliefs in their aptitude and competencies proved to be below average.

Table 2: *The importance of learning English*

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1. English is the most important language all over the world	52%	22%	26%
8. Saudi people respect persons who speak English well	56%	13%	30%
11. Saudi people think it is important to lean English	56%	9%	35%
13. Learning English should be limited to persons who need it	26%	52%	22%
16. Learning English increases one's understanding of the world	83%	9%	9%
18. There's no need for English in my country because Arabic can suffice	17%	56%	26%

Table 2 reveals that participants held moderate beliefs about the importance of learning English. Fifty six percent of the participants agreed that Saudi people think it is important to learn English (item 11) and respect persons who speak English well (item 8). Only 52% of the participants saw English as the most important language all over the world. The reason for this somehow low percentage may be bias towards Arabic. There seems to be a cultural belief in Saudi Arabia that Arabic comes at the top of human languages because it is the language of Islam and Holy Qura'n. However, more than half of the participants saw that English should be taught in Saudi Arabia (56%) and that its learning should not be limited to persons who need it (52%). A strong belief held by most participants (83%) is that learning English increases one's understanding of the world. Overall, participants' beliefs about the importance of English were moderate. One possible reason for this is bias towards Arabic which they conceive of as a holy language.

Table 3: *The difficulty of learning English*

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
6. English is a very difficult language	52%	48%	0%
15. Learning English is easy to me	35%	39%	26%
21. Saudi people think that learning English is difficult	30%	48%	22%

Table 3 provides information concerning participants' beliefs about the difficulty of learning English. Only 30% of the participants agreed that Saudi people conceive of learning English as difficult (item 21). A bigger number (48%) held the belief that learning English is easy in Saudi culture. However, when it comes to personal experience, more than half of the participants (52%) confirmed that English is a very difficult language (item 6). Concurring with this, only 35% confirmed that learning English is easy to them (item 15). It seems that there is a difference when judgment is based on culture and on personal experience. Learners may hear it around that learning English is easy, but in reality they may be facing difficulty in learning English. This seems reasonable taking into account that participants' proficiency is poor.

Table 4: *The nature of learning English*

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
4. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures	39%	48%	13%
9. Success in learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student	52%	26%	22%
14. You should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly	30%	30%	39%

As shown in Table 4, only 39 percent of the participants agreed that it is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures. A bigger percentage (48%) reported knowing about the culture of English-speaking countries as unimportant. More than half of the participants agreed that learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student. Placing more emphasis on the teacher than on the learner may be used, unconsciously at least, to justify poor performance in learning English. This is evident in students' comment that they are not good at learning English because they did not have good teachers in their pre-university education. It is beyond doubt that the role of the teacher is important, but the role of the learner is of more importance. The same number of students (30%) agreed and disagreed to the item that you should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly. Perhaps students did not understand that the item meant that one should use language even if he makes mistakes. For this reason, a bigger percentage of students (39%) were neutral to this item. Overall, participants' beliefs concerning the nature of learning English tended to be negative.

Table 5: *Threat to mother tongue and culture*

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
17. Learning English threatens the Arabic language	35%	43%	22%
23. Learning English can violate the traditions of the Saudi society	26%	39%	35%

Responses to items 17 and 23 in Table 5 show that a large percentage of participants did not see English and its learning as threatening to the Arabic language or the traditions of the Saudi society. Only 35% and 26% of the participants agreed that learning English threatens the Arabic language (item 17) and that learning English can violate the traditions of the Saudi

society (item 23) respectively. What should be noted here is that several students were neutral to the two items, indicating that they did not have established beliefs concerning this factor. Students' beliefs about this factor were inconsistent with the researcher's expectation that was founded on past students comments.

Based on the descriptive statistics presented in the above section, the present study indicated that Business Administration students held various beliefs about EFL learning. Their beliefs about their self-efficacy, and the difficulty and nature of EFL learning were below average. Meanwhile, they held moderate beliefs about the importance of EFL learning and threat to mother tongue and culture. The unexpected finding in this respect is that beliefs about EFL learning being threatening to the mother tongue and traditions are not frequent among students. The researcher expected that such beliefs would be highly frequent based on past student comments. Those comments did not seem to reflect a mainstream of bias against EFL learning in the Saudi context.

The relationship between EFL beliefs and attitudes of non-English freshmen

The data presented in Table 6 below provides the answer to the second research question "What is the relationship between EFL learning beliefs and attitudes of non-English freshmen?"

Table 6: Correlation between beliefs and attitude

	Self-efficacy	Importance of EFL learning	Difficulty of EFL learning	Nature of EFL learning	Threat to mother tongue & culture	Total Belief
Attitude	.743**	.799**	.562**	.412	.265	.850**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level

As illustrated in Table 6, significant correlations were found between attitude and three belief factors: self-efficacy, importance of learning English and difficulty of learning English. That is, students who have higher self-efficacy, see English and its learning as important, and perceive English as an easy language tend to have more positive beliefs about EFL learning. Nevertheless, no significant correlations were found between attitude and two belief factors: the nature of language learning and threat to mother tongue and culture. The correlation between attitude and the nature of EFL learning was near to significance ($r = .412$). Overall, data revealed a strong relationship between attitude and beliefs about English learning. This means that students who hold strong beliefs about EFL learning tend to have more positive attitudes towards it.

The Effect of major on EFL learning Beliefs and attitude

Another aim for the present study was to find out whether there are any significant differences in learners' beliefs and attitudes towards EFL learning that are attributable to major. Hence, the ANOVA test was used to probe the differences, if any exists, between Business Administration and English freshmen in beliefs and attitudes towards EFL learning. (See appendix 3 for belief frequency of English freshmen).

Table 7: *Differences between the two groups in beliefs about self-efficacy*

Items	Group	M	SD	F	P value
2. Saudi people are good at learning English	Adm.	3.2	1.0	6.2	**.016**
	Eng.	3.9	.90		
3. I have a special ability for learning English	Adm.	3.3	1.2	5.9	**.015**

	Group	M	SD	F	P value
	Eng.	4.1	.96		
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well	Adm.	3.4	1.0	27.5	**.000**
	Eng.	4.5	.57		
*7. A poor learner of English will remain so throughout years of study	Adm.	3.3	1.6	4.1	**.048**
	Eng.	4.1	1.1		
10. I know how to improve my English	Adm.	3.1	1.2	8.6	**.005**
	Eng.	4	1.0		
12. I think I learn English well compared with my classmates	Adm.	3.3	1.0	.3	.589
	Eng.	3.5	1.1		
19. When I encounter difficulties in learning English, I do not give up	Adm.	3.4	1.2	4.5	**.038**
	Eng.	4	1.0		
20. I can identify & overcome my weaknesses in English	Adm.	3.2	1.1	11	**.002**
	Eng.	4.1	.84		
*22. I do not think that I am a good learner of English	Adm.	2.7	1.1	6.8	**.012**
	Eng.	3.6	1.3		

* These items were reverse coded, so higher means indicate stronger disagreement

Table 7 shows that there are significant differences in self-efficacy beliefs between English and Business Administration freshmen in 8 out of 9 items in favor of English freshmen. English freshmen hold stronger beliefs that they have a special ability for learning English, will ultimately learn to speak English very well, know how to improve their English, have the ability to persist in the face of learning difficulties, can identify and overcome their weaknesses in English, and are good language learners. They also hold a more positive view that Saudi people are good at learning English and that a poor learner of English does not necessarily remain so throughout years of study. No significant difference was found between the two groups in item 12 about learning English well compared with classmates. Overall, English freshmen have stronger self-efficacy beliefs than do Business Administration freshmen.

Table 8: *Differences between the two groups in beliefs about the importance of EFL learning*

Items	Group	M	SD	F	P value
1. English is the most important language all over the world	Adm.	3.6	1.3	5.9	**.018**
	Eng.	4.3	.93		
8. Saudi people respect persons who speak English well	Adm.	3.7	1.0	.6	.429
	Eng.	3.9	.93		
11. Saudi people think it is important to lean English	Adm.	3.6	.98	10	**.002**
	Eng.	4.4	.75		
*13. Learning English should be limited to persons who need it	Adm.	3.3	1.2	6	**.016**
	Eng.	4.1	.99		
16. Learning English increases one's understanding of the world	Adm.	4.1	.92	.009	.926
	Eng.	4.1	1.0		
*18. There's no need for E in my country because Arabic can suffice	Adm.	3.6	1.1	10.3	**.002**
	Eng.	4.4	.75		

Data in the above table reveal that English freshmen have significantly stronger beliefs than their business Administration counterparts in 4 out of 6 items that relate to the importance of EFL learning. Their perceptions are more illuminated concerning English being the most important language all over the world, the importance of EFL learning in Saudi culture, the necessity to extend EFL learning to all students, and the need to learn English side by side with the mother tongue. The two groups share the same beliefs that Saudi people respect persons who speak English well and that learning English increases one's understanding of the world.

Table 9: Differences between the two groups in beliefs about the difficulty of EFL learning

Items	Group	M	SD	F	P value
*6. English is a very difficult language	Adm.	2.9	1.2	4.7	**.034**
	Eng.	3.6	1.1		
15. Learning English is easy to me	Adm.	3	1.2	6.5	**.014**
	Eng.	3.7	0.9		
*21. Saudi people think that learning English is difficult	Adm.	3.3	1.2	.93	.338
	Eng.	3.6	1.3		

It is clear from Table 9 that the two groups have the same belief that Saudi people think that learning English is easy. However, English freshmen possess stronger beliefs than Business administration freshmen that English is an easy language and that its learning is easy. That EFL learning is easier to English than it is to non-English majors is logical. Students make for specializations that are learnable and enjoyable to them. Perhaps students who made for EFL learning in the university had more successful EFL learning experiences in their pre-university education.

Table 10: *Differences between the two groups in beliefs about the nature of EFL learning*

Items	Group	M	SD	F	P value
4. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English	Adm.	3	1.4	11.1	**.002**
	Eng.	4.1	.9		
*9. Success in learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student	Adm.	2.5	1.1	14.8	**.000**
	Eng.	3.7	1.1		
*14. You should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly	Adm.	3.1	1.1	8.3	**.006**
	Eng.	4.1	1.2		

Data in Table 10 shows the presence of significant differences between Administrative and English freshmen in the three items constituting perceptions about the nature of EFL learning in favor of English freshmen. This means that English freshmen are more understandable of the nature of EFL learning. This seems logical taking into consideration that they are English majors. They therefore have stronger beliefs that knowing about English-speaking cultures is necessary for speaking English well, that success in learning English depends more on the student than on the teacher, and that one should not postpone speaking the language until s/he masters it. Undoubtedly, such beliefs make the learner more energetic in his endeavors to learn the FL.

Table 11. *Differences between the two groups in beliefs about threat to mother tongue/culture*

Items	Group	M	SD	F	P value
*17. Learning English threatens the Arabic language	Adm.	3.2	1.3	2.1	.159
	Eng.	3.6	1.1		
*23. Learning English can violate the traditions of the Saudi society	Adm.	3.1	1.2	7	**.011**
	Eng.	4	1.1		

As listed in Table 11, English freshmen have stronger belief, compared to Administrative freshmen, that learning English does not violate the traditions of the Saudi society. However, the two groups of students share the same belief that learning English does not threaten the Arabic language. This is consistent with the moderate beliefs that Administrative freshmen held about the importance of EFL learning. Another possible explanation is that the Arabic language, being the language of the Holy Qura'n, will persist in the face of any other language. This seems to be a common belief in Saudi Arabia and other Arabic-speaking Moslem countries.

Table 12. *Differences between the two groups in total scores of belief factors*

Belief Factor	Group	M	SD	F	P value
Self-efficacy	Adm.	3.2	.25	28.6	**.000**
	Eng.	4	.31		
Importance of learning English	Adm.	3.6	.26	17.7	**.002**
	Eng.	4.2	.19		
Difficulty of learning English	Adm.	3	.18	26.3	**.007**
	Eng.	3.6	.07		
Nature of learning English	Adm.	2.9	.34	21.5	**.010**
	Eng.	3.9	.20		
Threat to mother tongue and culture	Adm.	3.1	.031	13.8	.065
	Eng.	3.8	.24		
Total belief	Adm.	3.3	.34	52.4	**.000**
	Eng.	4	.30		

Data in Table 12 confirm that English freshmen have stronger beliefs about EFL learning than do Business Administration freshmen in 4 out of 5 belief factors: self-efficacy, the importance of learning English, the difficulty of learning English, and the nature of learning English. A difference was found between the two groups concerning threat to mother tongue and culture in favor of English freshmen, but it was not significant (F = 13.8, p= .06). This indicates that both groups did not conceive of English as threatening to the mother tongue and culture. Overall, English freshmen held much stronger beliefs about EFL learning than Business Administration freshmen.

The finding that Saudi English majors hold strong beliefs about EFL learning is consistent with the study of Daif-Allah (2012) who used BALLI with a comparable sample, i.e., Saudi first-year English language majors. The finding that English majors hold stronger beliefs than non-English majors is not consistent with the findings of Tanaka and Ellis (2003) who found weak and nonsignifiant relationship between proficiency and beliefs. This finding is nevertheless in line with other studies (e.g., Mori, 1999; Bagherzadeh, 2012; Huang & Tsai (2003). For instance, Huang and Tsai (2003) found significant differences between high and low proficiency English learners in four out of the five dimensions of the BALLI. That English majors hold stronger beliefs than non-English majors does not necessarily mean that stronger beliefs alone make the difference between the two groups of language learners. What can be safely contended is that beliefs constitute one of the factors that differentiate low and high proficiency language learners.

Table 13.*Differences between the two groups in attitudes towards EFL learning*

	Group	M	SD	F	P value
Attitude	Adm.	3.4	.51	16.2	**.000**
	Eng.	4	.41		

As listed in Table 13, a significant difference was found between English and Business Administration freshmen in attitudes towards EFL learning in favor of English freshmen. This means that stronger beliefs about EFL learning are accompanied by more positive beliefs towards it. This is consistent with Banya-Chen's (1997) finding that students with positive beliefs about FL learning tend to have strong motivation and hold favorable attitude.

Conclusion and implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL Learning beliefs and attitudes in a group of non-English Saudi college freshmen (Business Administration). It also explored differences between English and non-English freshmen in beliefs and attitudes towards EFL learning. Results revealed that non-English freshmen's beliefs about their self-efficacy, and the difficulty and nature of EFL learning were below average. Meanwhile, their beliefs about the importance of EFL learning and threat to mother tongue and culture were moderate. Contrary to the researcher's expectation, non-English freshmen did not conceive of learning English as threatening to their mother tongue and culture. A strong relationship was found between the non-English freshmen's EFL learning beliefs and attitudes, indicating that stronger beliefs are accompanied by more favorable attitudes. The findings also revealed that English freshmen hold stronger beliefs and more favorable attitudes towards EFL learning than do non-English freshmen.

The study stresses the importance of identifying beliefs in different groups of FL learners. The identification of beliefs, if done prior to teaching a given group of FL learners, can be very valuable to practitioners. Language teachers with an understanding of learners' beliefs about language learning can help enhance learners' success in language learning in two ways: by reinforcing their students' beliefs that are facilitative to language learning and by challenging those that are debilitative. Teachers who have access to their learners' beliefs are better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogue about learning with their learners. For instance, it can make a big difference if a teacher succeeds through dialogue and practice to dispel a belief that learning a FL is an intricate task in a sense that demotivates learners. Urging learners to be confident in their ability to learn the FL and giving them the feel that they are progressing well can also have a good reflection on their performance. Such decisions and others depend on the identification of learners' beliefs. The positive relationship between beliefs and proficiency indicates that holding negative beliefs can be partially responsible for poor performance of low achievers. This directs teachers' attention to an area that needs careful consideration if they wish to help low achieving learners.

The small sample in the present study makes it difficult to generalize the findings of this research to the entire population of non-English majors in Saudi Arabia. Future research therefore needs to be conducted on a wider scale in order to generalize the findings to the entire population. Teachers' beliefs about language learning also need to be researched to identify their match or mismatch with learners' beliefs. The match or mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices is also an area that needs to be researched in EFL settings including Saudi Arabia. It is also recommended that teacher education programs be surveyed to explore the beliefs embedded in them concerning FL learning and teaching. Finally, future research is needed to explore other factors that shape learners' beliefs such as demography and family background.

About the Author
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Appendices
Appendix 1: The Attitude Subscale

24   Studying English is a lot of fun
25   I wish I could speak English fluently
26   I feel stressed when the English teacher chooses me to answer questions
27   The English language will play an important role in the future of my country
28   I think that mastering English is indispensable for a literate person
29   I feel more stressed in English classes than in other classes
30   Learning English makes me feel proud
31   I will pursue improving my English when I finish schooling
32   I do not feel enthusiastic to come to English classes
33   I appreciate good learners of English
34   Learning English helps me to develop good feelings
35   I feel internally motivated to learn English
36   Learning English is one of my life's important goals
37   I would like to have friends from English-speaking countries

38   I enjoy doing activities in English
39   To be honest, I am not highly motivated to learn English
40   Studying English helps me to improve my personality
41   My attention is distracted when I study English
42   I do not care much about how others will look at me if I make mistakes in the English class
43   Learning English makes me more self-confident
44   In English classes I think of things irrelevant to the lesson

Appendix 2: Factor Structure of the Learning Beliefs of the Pilot Sample

Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: Self-efficacy					
10. I know how to improve my English	.77				
3. I have a special ability for learning English	.77				
19. When I encounter difficulties in learning English, I do not give up	.72				
22. I do not think that I am a good learner of English	.68				
2. Saudi people are good at learning English	.67				
7. A poor learner of English will remain so throughout years of study	.63				
12. I think I learn English well compared with my classmates	.60				
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well	.58				
20. I can identify and overcome my weaknesses in English	.57				
Factor 2: Importance of learning English					
18. There's no need for English in my country because Arabic can suffice		.78			
8. Saudi people respect persons who speak English well		.75			
16. Learning English increases one's understanding of the world		.75			
1. English is the most important language all over the world		.66			
13. Learning English should be limited to persons who need it		.62			
11. Saudi people think it is important to lean English		.61			
Factor 3: Difficulty of learning English					
21. Saudi people think that learning English is difficult			.83		
6. English is a very difficult language			.75		
15. Learning English is easy to me			.67		
Factor 4: Nature of learning English					
14. You should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly				.686	
9. Success in learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student				.685	
4. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures				.570	
Factor 5: Threat to mother tongue and culture					
23. Learning English can violate the traditions of the Saudi society					.828
17. Learning English threatens the Arabic language					.749

Appendix 3: Frequency of beliefs held by the English freshmen sample

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Self-efficacy			
2. Saudi people are good at learning English	69%	9%	19%

3. I have a special ability for learning English	78%	9%	12.%
5. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well	97%	0%	3%
7. A poor learner of English will remain so throughout years of study	9%	78%	12%
10. I know how to improve my English	75%	12%	23%
12. I think I learn English well compared with my classmates	53%	19%	28%
19. When I encounter difficulties in learning English, I do not give up	81%	16%	3%
20. I can identify and overcome my weaknesses in English	81%	6%	12%
22. I do not think that I am a good learner of English	28%	66%	6%
Importance of learning English			
1. English is the most important language all over the world	87%	9%	3%
8. Saudi people respect persons who speak English well	69%	3%	28%
11. Saudi people think it is important to lean English	97%	3%	6%
13. Learning English should be limited to persons who need it	9%	84%	6%
16. Learning English increases one's understanding of the world	84%	12%	3%
18. There's no need for English in my country because Arabic can suffice	3%	91%	6%
Difficulty of learning English			
6. English is a very difficult language	25%	72%	3%
15. Learning English is easy to me	81%	19%	0%
21. Saudi people think that learning English is difficult	25%	72%	3%
Nature of learning English			
4. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures	84%	13%	3%
9. Success in learning English depends on the teacher, not on the student	19%	75%	6%
14. You should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly	13%	81%	6%
Threat to mother tongue and culture			
17. Learning English threatens the Arabic language	19%	65%	16%
23. Learning English can violate the traditions of the Saudi society	16%	78%	6%