

## Identification of Language Learning Beliefs among Saudi EFL Learners

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### Abstract

It is argued that positive yet realistic beliefs are source of success as language learners whereas negative or unrealistic beliefs can be an impediment to successful language learning. This empirical survey identifies Saudi English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' beliefs through Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz's (1987). The Arabic version of the questionnaire has been administered and 118 Saudi EFL learners from a Saudi university returned the questionnaire. The research questions set for this survey include what beliefs Saudi EFL learners have towards the difficulty of foreign language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies and motivation and expectations for English language learning. The results reveal that the participants bear high English language learning aptitude and believe that it is easier to learn it in childhood. No strong relationship in learning subjects like science and math and English language was reported. The participants also believe that for quick and successful language learning, it is imperative to practice the target language extensively. A positive trend is that Saudi EFL learners have been extremely positive and encouraging towards their chances of achieving communicative competence and do not have any unnecessary inhibition in speaking English.

**Key Words:** beliefs, effective ELT, language learning, EFL learners, perceptions, Saudi EFL learners

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## Introduction and Contextual Background

It has been claimed that beliefs are ‘guiding principles’ of people attitudes (Puchta, 1999). He has further explained that people conceive the target information through their pre-existed beliefs about any target task. Research has suggested that “people possess some preconceived ideas about various issues and that these beliefs can influence their understanding of and reactions towards new information” (Stevick, 1980, p. 4). Similarly, language learners are not empty vessels when they come to language classes; rather, they possess certain beliefs about the process of language learning. It has been reported that they bear certain beliefs about language learning process and the way it is taught and learned (Horwitz, 1987). Research reports that learners’ individual differences in their beliefs bear significant effect on the process of language learning and determine their success (Dornyei, 2005). It is argued that positive yet realistic beliefs are instrumental in their success as language learners because they help them control frustration and ensure long term motivation (Rifkin, 2000). On the other hand, “unrealistic beliefs or misconceptions can result in decreased motivation and increased frustration, which becomes an impediment to successful language learning” (Cui, 2014, p. 2). It is proposed that certain beliefs facilitate language learners whereas certain other sets of beliefs may have negative effect on the process of language learning. Mantle-Bromley (1995) states that if language learners have positive attitudes towards the target language and bear realistic beliefs, they have better chances to succeed as language learners as compared to the ones with negative attitudes and beliefs towards the target language.

## Literature Review

Talking about the significance of beliefs in our lives, Puchta (1999) elaborates that beliefs “are generalizations about cause and effect, and [that] they influence our inner representation of the world around us. They help us to make sense of that world, and they determine how we think and how we act” (pp. 68-69). The term belief seems an encompassing concept in academic world as there have been numerous definitions forwarded by researchers and psychologists. They are identified as “notions about language learning that students have acquired” (Kuntz 1996, p. 4), learners’ opinion about language learning (Banya & Cheng, 1997), as learners’ attitudes, representations, opinions or ideologies (Fraser & Gaskell, 1990), “general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language learning and teaching” (Victori & Lockhart 1995, p. 224) or “central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behavior and learning (Sakui & Gaies 1999, p. 474). Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) have defined beliefs as “a set of conceptual representations which signify to its holder a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action” (p. 388). The role of beliefs in our lives is evident from the fact that this construct is not just seen as a component of metacognitive knowledge but depending on the academicians’ theoretical basis, beliefs have also been identified as ‘mini-theories’ (Hosenfeld, 1978), ‘insights’ (Omaggio, 1978), ‘learner assumptions’ (Riley, 1980), ‘implicit theories’ (Clark, 1988), ‘self-constructed representational systems’ (Rust, 1994), ‘culture of learning’ (Contazzi & Jin, 1996) and ‘conceptions of learning’ (Benson & Lor, 1999). Though beliefs have been defined in a diversifiable manner by different psychologists and linguistics, a review of relevant literature offers valuable insights into the fact that beliefs about foreign language learning are closely associated to the nature of language and the process of language learning. Thus, beliefs about language learning have been defined as

“opinions and ideas that learners (and teachers) have about the task of learning a second/foreign language” (Kalajia & Barcelos, 2003, p. 1).

Research in language teaching and learning reveals that language learners carry a complex web of learning experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and learning strategies to class (Bernat, 2005; Benson, 2001; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Consequently, it is reported that learners’ attitudes, shaped by their perceptions and beliefs about language learning, carry strong effect on their overall learning behavior (Cotterall, 1995; Como, 1986). Research also reports that these beliefs and attitudes play a significant role determining learners’ academic experiences and achievements (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). It is further suggested that successful learners analyze their language learning beliefs and their learning capabilities and effectively exploit learning strategies to enhance their learning possibilities (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Oxford, 1990); therefore, it seems imperative to investigate learners’ beliefs and attitudes towards language learning process to help them develop and implement effective learning strategies. It has been stated that “learners develop their own opinions or theories about language learning and these opinions likely influence learners’ effectiveness in the classroom” (Cui, 2014, p. 10).

Investigation of beliefs in the context of EFL have been done through several approaches. Kajala (1995) has revealed that human beliefs can be investigated through ‘the mainstream approach’ and ‘the discursive approach’. The mainstream approach focuses on identifying beliefs as cognitive entities in the minds of the learners and beliefs are considered as stable, stateable, and fallible. The discursive approach, on the other hand, concentrates on the function of beliefs and tend to investigate them in oral and written communication. This approach treats beliefs as socially constructed factor that varies from one person to another as well as from one situation to another. Barcelos (2000) has reported that belief studies can be divided into three approaches. According to him, the first one is the normative approach that treats beliefs as a pre-determined set of statements. The second approach is the metacognitive approach which explains beliefs from students’ self-reports and interviews and the third one is the contextual approach that exploits ethnography, narratives, and metaphors to explore language learning beliefs. It is found that the normative approach is mainly related to Horwitz who developed Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in 1985 which provided the basis for beliefs investigations. The researchers have exploited the original version of BALLI (such as Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Su, 1995), or the researchers have modified the original version of BALLI (Mantle-Bromley, 1995) and several other researchers (such as Kuntz, 1996; Victori; 1992) have developed their own instruments to investigate language learning beliefs. The researchers, who followed metacognitive approach, have rather used interviews and self-reports instead of questionnaires to investigate the learners’ beliefs. Beliefs are considered metacognitive knowledge in this approach. It is revealed that this approach has been exploited by Wenden (1986, 1987). Talking about the scope of this approach, Barcelos (2000) states that metacognitive approach enables the learners to use their own words and to critically explain their language learning experiences but this approach does not explain the role of beliefs in students’ academic life. Several studies have exploited the contextual approach to investigate language learning beliefs of learners (Bernat, & Gvozdenko, 2005; Allen, 1996). According to this approach, language learning beliefs are believed to be embedded in academic contexts of the learners. The studies which follow this approach use qualitative and interpretive paradigms. It is reported that ethnography, narratives,

and metaphors have been used in this approach (Kramsch, 2003). A salient characteristic of this approach is that it is quite versatile in the use of theoretical frameworks (see for example phenomeno-graphical approach used by Benson & Lor, 1999 & White, 1999, neo-Vygotskian socio-cultural paradigm exploited by Alanen, 2003, Bakhtinian approach by Dufva, 2003 and Deweyan approach by Barcelos, 2000). Furthermore, this contextual approach makes use of multiple methods of data collection including case studies, ethnographic classroom observations, informal discussions and stimulated recalls (Allen, 1996; Barcelos, 2000), diaries (Hosenfeld, 2003), discourse analysis (Kalaja, 2003), naturalistic interviews and scenarios (White, 1999).

### Research Questions

The study is meant to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards the difficulty of foreign language learning?
2. What are the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards foreign language aptitude?
3. What are the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards the nature of language learning?
4. What are the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards learning and communication strategies?
5. What are the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards motivation and expectations?

### Methodology

This quantitative study is a survey research which has been employed to identify Saudi EFL learners' beliefs about language learning in an EFL context. Descriptive analyses have been run to generate the data based on the perceptions of the participants of this survey. Percentages, minimum values, maximum values, range and standard deviations have been calculated to present the final conclusions and recommendations.

### Participants

EFL learners from a Saudi university were invited to participate in this survey research. The learners who have volunteered for this study were briefed about the overview of the nature and purpose of this survey. The questionnaire was distributed during a language session and they were requested to fill in the Arabic version of BALLI. A total of 118 EFL learners participated in this survey.

### Data Collection Instrument

A leading researcher of language learning beliefs Dr Elaine Horwitz developed the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to investigate learners' and teachers' beliefs related to various language learning issues (Horwitz, 1987, 1988, 1999). The researchers have used BALLI which is considered the most favorite instrument in this regard and has been frequently exploited in small and large-scale studies in English as second/foreign language contexts.

### Results

Descriptive analysis was done by version 17 of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and range, minimum values, maximum values, mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated to finalize the result. The data of the descriptive analyses are presented in the following tables to indicate the beliefs of Saudi EFL learners towards various components of BALLI.

Table 1: *Foreign Language Aptitude*

No	Questionnaire Items	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2203	1.03061
2	Some people are born with special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.1441	1.09603
10	It is easier for someone who speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.6610	.85954
15	I have foreign language aptitude.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.3136	.82378
22	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.0508	1.17559
29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.5847	1.04862
32	People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.9407	.90858
33	Saudis are good at learning foreign languages.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.4237	1.01617
34	Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.6610	1.18553

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of nine questionnaire items related to foreign language aptitude of the participants of this empirical study. There are only two items which are allocated high mean of more than four, only one item is given less than three mean whereas the remaining 6 items are assigned medium mean range of three to four. The highest mean is assigned to item 15 which indicates that Saudi EFL learners have high aptitude to learn foreign languages. The results also reveal that the participants of this study believe that it is easier for children to learn a foreign language as compared to adults. The third most-favored item in this category remains the belief that the people who speak more than one language are very intelligent. The participants do not agree to the statement that the people who are good at math and science are not good at learning another language. The second least preference is recorded for the item that seeks their perception about women as better at learning a foreign language as compared to men. The participants also do not favor the belief that some people are born with special ability to learn a foreign language.

Table 2: *Difficulty of language learning*

No	Questionnaire Items	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
3	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2034	.92966
4	The language I am trying to learn 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.	118	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.3729	.68932

6	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well.	118	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.5593	.54760
14	If someone spends an hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than one year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) you cannot learn a language in 1 hour a day.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.4661	.95794
24	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.2458	1.05358
28	It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.7797	1.08711

Table 2 contains six items related to beliefs about difficulty of language learning. Two items are assigned higher mean of more than four, two items are allocated very low mean of less than 3 and the remaining two items receive medium mean between three to four. The highest mean of 4.56 is reported for their belief that they will learn to speak the target language very well followed by their belief that some languages are easier to learn as compared to some others. Item 14 elicits the participants' belief about the duration they need to learn English language if they spend one hour each day and the results report that they believe that two to three years are sufficient to learn the target language. The results reveal that Saudi EFL learners represented by the participants of this survey do not consider reading and writing skills easier than speaking and its overall comprehension. The result also suggest that the cohort of this study consider English language as a difficult language to learn for foreign speakers.

Table 3: *The nature of language learning*

No	Questionnaire Items	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
5	The structure of English is different from that of Arabic.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2712	.83370
8	It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.4322	1.05797
11	It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2542	.92622
16	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7034	.99837
20	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammatical rules.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.3644	.93063
25	Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.8983	.99047
26	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.2458	.90522

The perceptive data related to the nature of language learning is detailed in table 3 which reveals that only two items of this category are allocated higher mean of more than 4 whereas all

other items of this section are assigned medium high values ranging from 3.24 to 3.89. Majority of the participants agree that the structure of English is different from that of Arabic and that it is convenient and better to learn a foreign language in the respective foreign countries. Both these items are allocated reasonably high means of 4.27 and 4.25 respectively. The lowest mean to item 26 indicates that the participants do not agree to the belief that learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English language.

Table 4: *Learning and communication strategies*

No	Questionnaire Items	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
7	It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent pronunciation and accent.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.9153	1.04248
9	You should not say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.3305	1.14021
12	If I heard some people speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0169	.93354
13	It is o.k. to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language.	118	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.0678	.73646
17	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	118	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.6441	.71043
18	I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.8475	1.24466
19	If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.6864	1.50042
21	It is important to practice in the language laboratory.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7458	1.12612

Table 4 contains the results of descriptive analyses of eight items related to the participants' beliefs towards learning and communication strategies. There are only three items which are given higher mean of more than four and these are the items which have SD of less than one indicating inter-rater unanimity of responses. Three items are assigned low mean of less than three and two are allocated medium mean and all these five items show SD of higher than one which suggest that there exist higher inter-rater differences in the perception of the participants. An extremely high mean of 4.64 suggests that the participants believe that it is important to repeat and practice intensively to learn the target language effectively. The second highest mean is allocated to language leaning belief that it is ok to guess if one does not know the target vocabulary of the foreign language. The results also reveal that Saudi EFL learners do not hesitate to go up to some people who are engaged in speaking the target language so that they also avail the chance to practice the foreign language. The participants do not support the belief that you should not say anything in a foreign language until they have the capacity to say it correctly. Likewise, the next least preferred item remains the one that elicits their perception related to the supposition that if foreign language learners are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, these mistakes becomes permanent and it

will become hard to get rid of these mistakes later on. The participants do not favor item 18 as indicated by low mean value indicating that they do not feel self-conscious or embarrassed if they need to speak the target language in front of other people. Speaking the foreign language with an excellent pronunciation and practicing it in the laboratory have been assigned medium high values.

Table 5: *Motivations and expectations*

No	Questionnaire Items	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
23	If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.4237	.74429
27	If I learn to speak this language very well, it will help me get a good job.	118	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.2542	.78649
30	Saudis think that it is important to speak a foreign language.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.6441	1.05834
31	I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.2288	.93745

Table 5 exhibits the results generated by the descriptive analyses of four items related to foreign language learners' motivations and expectations and nearly all items are favored by the participants as indicated by high mean values. Furthermore, low SD of less than 1 for the majority of these items also reveal that they see eye to eye to each other for these items. The results show that the learners have sufficient opportunities to practice the target language if they are motivated and want to learn it effectively. The participants also allot extremely high mean to the item which states that they will have better chances to get a good job if they have high English language proficiency. The third highest mean is reported for the belief that Saudi EFL learners prefer to learn English language to get to know its speakers better. Medium high preference is shown for the belief that Saudi students think that it is important to speak a foreign language.

## Discussion

The data generated through the descriptive analyses of the various questionnaire items related to five categories of beliefs as classified in BALLI as perceived by EFL learners has significant implications. The first category is related to 'Foreign Language Aptitude' and the participants of this study state that they have high aptitude for learning a foreign language confirming the findings of Roomy (2015) who also report that Saudi medical undergraduates have also ranked this item the highest in this category. This seems quite a positive indicator that Saudi EFL learners bear high foreign language aptitude which should be exploited by English language teachers to inculcate and sustain high motivation to learn English language. The second important finding is that the participants of this survey believe that it is easier for children to learn a foreign language as indicated by high mean value supporting the results of Roomy (2015) and Fujiwara (2011). The findings of these studies show that this seems an international belief that it is better to expose learners to the target language in the childhood to maximize their learning possibilities. A unanimity of responses has been witnessed with quite low mean among Saudi EFL learners as well as EFL learners from other regions towards the beliefs about women and people who are good at math and science as better foreign language learners. Differences are found in their perceptions towards the belief that some people are born with special ability for foreign language learning:

Saudi and Thai EFL learners do not support this belief but Iranian EFL learners assigned higher mean to it (Javid & Al-Malki, 2018; Roomy, 2015; Fujiwara, 2011).

The second section of BALLI is related to ‘difficulty of language learning’ and it has six items to elicit the respondents’ perceptions. The highest preference of the cohort of this survey partially confirm the results of Roomy (2015) who reports that Saudi university medical students have ranked it medium high mean value. The lower preference by medical students might be due to the fact that medical students concentrate mainly on their major subjects and English is not their first priority. The results of the studies conducted in the non-Arab EFL context also partially support the findings of this survey as medium preference has been exhibited by Thai and Iranian EFL learners (Fujiwara, 2011). This high motivation and expectation shown by Saudi EFL learners is quite an encouraging factor. The findings also present a factor of great pedagogical significance that the participants of this study have assigned extremely low mean to the item that seeks their response to the supposition that it is easier to read and write English language than to speak and understand it. The same has been reported by Roomy (2015). This trend seems to be the result of presence of strong oral tradition among Arab societies in general and Saudi society in particular. The findings go with the result of Shannon (2003) who reports that Gulf societies give more importance to oral tradition. Watson (2004) is rather more direct and specific in his claim that reading culture is weak and neglected in the Arab education system. He further contends that this weak reading culture has negative overbearing in teaching and learning English language in the Arab world.

‘The nature of language learning’ is the next factor that encompasses seven questionnaire items to elicit the participants’ responses. The cohort of this survey have highest support for the argument that the structure of English is different from that of Arabic and which logically pose serious challenge for Arab speakers to gain proficiency in this language. Similar results are reported by the responses of Saudi medical students (Roomy, 2015). Much research has revealed that languages and their cultures are inter-related and this is a pedagogical concern that attempts to learn a foreign language without incorporating its culture may result in achieving mere ‘linguistic competence’ but the learner will not be able to have ‘communicative competence’. Genc & Bada (2005) posit that teaching a foreign language devoid of its culture will remain incomplete because learner will not be able to effectively communicate with English native speakers. Another important finding of this empirical study is the allocation of medium high mean values by Saudi EFL learners to the items which elicit their responses towards the presumption that learning English language is mostly a matter of learning its lexemes, grammatical rules and translating from the target language. The results align the findings of the beliefs studies in the non-Arab contexts of Thailand (Fujiwara, 2011). This seems that Saudi EFL learners do not consider English language learning as mere gaining isolated linguistic competence in different areas but believe that learning a language is actually a comprehensive skill of achieving overall competence.

The next component is related to ‘learning and communication strategies’ which should be exploited to achieve the desired competence in the target language. The highest-ranking item in this category remains the belief that it is important to repeat and practice a lot both by Arab EFL learners (Javid & Al-Malki, 2018; Roomy, 2015) as well EFL learners from other contexts as reported by other studies (Fujiwara, 2011; Bernat & Lioyd, 2007). This belief has significant pedagogical

implications and provides English language teachers with an advantage to motivate and encourage EFL learners to practice the target language extensively to achieve the desired proficiency level. The second highest ranking item in this category remains the use of context-clue method to guess the meaning of unknown target vocabulary. High mean of more than 4 has been reported by the participants of this study as well as the cohort of Roomy (2015) whereas EFL learners from non-Arab context have assigned medium mean to this item (Fujiwara, 2011; Bernat & Lioyd, 2007). The unanimously least favored item by Arab and non-Arab EFL learners has been the belief that learners should not say anything in a foreign language until they can say it correctly. This seems quite a positive attitude of EFL learners that they do not suffer from unnecessary inhibition to communicate in the target language which sometimes hinders language learning process because without proper practice in various language skills, learners cannot achieve proficiency in the target language. If learners are conscious about making mistakes, it will activate 'affective filter' which will negatively affect their learning ability as posited by Krashen. The same is reinforced by the responses of the participants of this survey towards item 18 and 19 which indicate that they do not feel hesitant to speak in front of other people and that the mistakes do not get permanent. The results are in line with the findings of Roomy (2015) and partially in contrast with the results of Bagherzadeh (2012) and Fujiwara (2011). Another significant finding is medium liking by Saudi EFL learners towards practicing the target language in the language laboratory whereas the results of Fujiwara (2011) have shown that Thai EFL learners have shown extremely high preference for using language laboratories to practice the target language supporting Liton (2012) who has suggested that use of new technologies is instrumental in inculcating supportive and motivating learning atmosphere. Saudi EFL learners do not consider it very important to speak a foreign language with an excellent pronunciation and accent as indicated by medium mean assigned to it partially contradicting the findings of Bagherzadeh (2012) and Fujiwara (2011).

The last section of this questionnaire comprises of four items related to motivations and expectations of EFL learners and the participants have allocated extremely high mean to almost all items indicating high motivation level they bear to learn the target language. This is an extremely positive indicator of Saudi learners' success as foreign language learners because a growing mass of research has offered valuable insights that motivation and language learning are directly proportionate to each other (Al-asmari & Javid, 2012; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Harmer, 2007). Highest ranking item of this category has been the notion that if they want to speak the target language well, they have plenty of opportunities to use it. This is a very positive sign that Saudi EFL learners have this confidence and intention to exploit the wide range of online resources available to them to learn and practice the target language and help them become self-sufficient life-long learners. The results also show a strong instrumental motivation in Saudi as well as non-Saudi EFL learners that they will be able to get lucrative jobs if they achieve the desired proficiency level in English language as indicated by extremely high mean values assigned by several studies conducted in the Arab world as well in non-Arab EFL contexts (Javid & Al-Malki, 2018; Roomy, 2015; Al-Asmari & Javid, 2012; Daif-Ulla, 2012; Fujiwara, 2011; Bernat & Lioyd, 2007).

### **Conclusions and pedagogical implications**

The results of this empirical study report that Saudi EFL learners bear high English language learning aptitude and believe that it is easier to learn it in childhood. It is also revealed

that there is not much difference between male and female in term of successful language learners. Likewise, the participants have not shown any strong relationship between subjects like science and math and English language. Generally speaking Saudi EFL learners consider English a medium difficult language to learn. They have suggested that some languages are comparatively easier to learn as compared to some others but their responses have been extremely positive and encouraging towards their chances of achieving communicative competence in the target language. It is also disclosed that it is easier to achieve speaking proficiency in English language than mastering reading and writing skills. As far the nature of learning the target language is considered, it is proclaimed that it is better to learn a foreign language in its respective country as the vast exposure enhances the chances of achieving the required proficiency quickly and easily. The syntactic differences of the target language with those of the learners' mother tongue make it rather challenging for Saudi EFL learners to learn it. Another important conclusion is that Saudi EFL learners understand that learning a language is not merely memorizing new vocabulary, grammatical rules or simple translation but it requires a deeper understanding of the culture as well. The cohort of this study also believe that for quick and successful language learning, it is imperative to repeat and practice a lot in the target language. Another positive trend is that Saudi EFL learners do not have any unnecessary inhibition and have the confidence to go and talk to the people who are using the target language to provide them with the opportunity to practice it. The participants believe that it is not mandatory to speak the target language without any mistakes and with excellent pronunciation and accent. Furthermore, Saudi EFL learners have expressed this positive learning attitude that if one wants to practice the target language, there are numerous opportunities to use it because of the availability of modern technology nowadays. The participants also bear this thing is their mind that proficiency in the target language will help them acquire attractive jobs as well as to know the native speakers well.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that English language teachers should identify learners' past learning experiences and their beliefs towards language learning process to ensure relevant and appropriate academic decisions to enhance learning possibilities. The understanding of learners' beliefs will provide EFL teachers with the opportunity to exploit their positive beliefs for sustained motivations and if the learners are reported to bear some negative beliefs, the teachers can address them affectively with the passage of time. The identification of EFL learners' interests, concerns and learning objectives will be a useful resource for making appropriate pedagogical decisions. Dörnyei (2001) states that in order to rectify learners' negative beliefs, adult EFL learners should be made informed of the nature of foreign language learning process. Therefore, it is significant to convey to the learners that the proficiency in the target language is not a unidirectional process but it can be achieved in a variety of ways by using varied and appropriate teaching strategies. This kind of positive and comprehensive approach towards English language learning process will be helpful in successfully tackling EFL learners' negative beliefs.

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