



Universidad de Nariño

REVISTA HECHOS Y PROYECCIONES DEL LENGUAJE
Volumen 21 ISSN Impreso 0121-3350

Correlation between students' beliefs about English language learning and their academic achievement in the Francisco de la Villota High School

Relación entre las creencias sobre el aprendizaje del Inglés de los estudiantes de la Institucion Educativa Municipal Francisco de la Villota y su rendimiento académico

Laura Estupiñan Molina* y Jesús Alirio Bastidas A. **

* Licenciada en Inglés-Francés de la Universidad de Nariño. E-mail: lur_es997@hotmail.com

** Profesor Titular de la Universidad de Nariño y posee un Post-Doctorado de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra, Cataluña, España. (2013). E-mail: jabas3@yahoo.es

Citar: Estupiñan, L. y Bastidas, J. A. (2015). Correlation between students' beliefs about English language learning and their academic achievement in the Francisco de la Villota High School *Hechos y Proyecciones del Lenguaje*. 21(1), 9- 22.

Abstract

Language learners hold a set of beliefs concerning language learning and these beliefs may influence the ways they learn, even though the beliefs are not always explicitly stated (Erlenawati, 2002:1). The present study describes the correlation between students' beliefs about English learning and their academic achievement in Francisco de la Villota High School. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, the students' grades and an interview. Upon the examination of Pearson correlation results, it became clear that the beliefs that seemed to be correlated to the students' academic achievement were (a) some people were born with a special ability to learn English; (b) everybody can learn English and, (c) women are better than men at learning English. The correlations were given in three different grades, showing that beliefs vary depending on other factors. Besides, the beliefs were negatively associated to the academic achievement which suggests the importance of teachers' awareness and guidance on these inhibitive beliefs.

Keywords: students' beliefs, English learning, academic achievement.

Resumen

Los aprendices de lenguas tienen un conjunto de creencias en cuanto al aprendizaje de una lengua; dichas creencias pueden influenciar la manera como ellos aprenden esta lengua aunque estas no sean siempre manifestadas explícitamente, (Erlenawati, 2002:1). El presente estudio describe la relación entre las creencias de los estudiantes acerca del aprendizaje del Inglés y su desempeño académico en dicha materia en la Institución Educativa Municipal Francisco de la Villota. La información fue recolectada mediante un cuestionario, una entrevista y las calificaciones de los estudiantes. Tras el análisis de las correlaciones de Pearson fue evidente que las creencias que parecían estar en correlación con el desempeño académico de los estudiantes fueron (a) algunas personas

nacen con una habilidad especial para aprender Inglés; (b) todos podemos aprender Inglés y; (c) las mujeres son mejores que los hombres aprendiendo Inglés. Las correlaciones se dieron en tres grados diferentes, mostrando que las creencias varían dependiendo de otros factores. Además, las creencias se asociaron negativamente con el desempeño académico lo que sugiere el conocimiento y la orientación de los profesores en cuanto a estas creencias inhibitorias.

Palabras clave: creencias de los estudiantes, aprendizaje del inglés, desempeño académico.

Background of the study

In recent years, an increasing number of investigations have focused on language learning beliefs in the field of applied linguistics (Barcelos, 2000; Erlenawati, 2002; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Some of these studies on beliefs about language learning have sprung up since the eighties, inspired considerably by, and based on Horwitz' research (Horwitz 1985, 1987) and her inventory "Beliefs About Language Learning Instrument". The previous research has focused on whether and how students' beliefs under consideration are adaptable to change and have drawn relationships between the beliefs and factors such as (a) use of language learning strategies; (b) learners anxiety, and (c) autonomous learning (Agathopoulou, 2010; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). In that sense, studies have revealed the existence of beliefs that could produce, either encouraging or detrimental effects on the acquisition and proficiency level of a foreign language (Vibulphol, 2004) Under this assumption, the importance of this research is supported on its attempt to find possible relations between some students' beliefs about English language learning and their academic achievement among 6th and 7th grade in the Francisco de la Villota High School.

Literature Review

With Stevick's (Vibulphol, 2004) assumption that "success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (p.17), beliefs of the main actors (teachers – students) about a second or foreign language which makes part of "what goes on inside..." mentioned by Stevick, have been characterized by the eminent impact on the process of teaching and learning a second language.

Research related to teachers' beliefs about second or foreign language have shown important aspects to be considered, nevertheless; inquiries on learners' beliefs about second acquisition area are relatively new. Foreign and second language learner beliefs, so far, "have remained relatively unexplored". (Altan, 2006:46).

The term belief is dealt according to each theoretical orientation. Hence, "beliefs are a central construct in every discipline that deals with human behavior and learning" (Fishern & Ajzen, as quoted in Bernat & Gvozdenko; 2005: 1). Alike, language learning entail learners' preconceived ideas about the nature and process of learning. They have some presumptions about what language learning is and how a second language should be learned (Horwitz, as cited in Erlenawati, 2002). As it has

been very difficult for researchers to reach an agreement of the meaning of beliefs, a clear definition of beliefs about language learning is not precisely stated. However, for the purpose of this study it was adopted the definition about language learning beliefs given by Erlenawati (2002) as “statements that are held to be true that affect language learning practices” (p. 1)

Several researchers have suggested that learners’ beliefs about second or foreign language acquisition may result from a number of causes at various ages in one’s life (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). The learners’ past experiences, their family and home background, cultural background, their individual differences such as the personality characteristics and the teaching and learning practices are some factors that could form learners’ beliefs about language learning.

According to Little, Singleton & Silvius (as cited in Erlenawati, 2002) the interpretations of prior repetitive experiences, both in the second or foreign area and in other educational fields, influence learners beliefs and attitudes formation. For example, Horwitz (as cited in Vibulphol, 2004) states that a debilitating belief in the context of foreign language might derivate from an unsuccessful learning experience.

Similarly, learners might form their beliefs through others. According to Spolsky (as cited by Erlenawati, 2002) learners’ beliefs can have roots on the social context where language learning takes place. He affirms that the sociolinguistic environment of home and community, their customs, their behavior, and the level of acceptance of the language in some intellectual or socioeconomic fields are some causes that ease the acquisition of learners’ beliefs about the language and its nature.

In that sense, it becomes clear that learners’ beliefs about language learning could result from their teachers’ beliefs; nevertheless, researchers have not found an ample consistency of that relationship. On one hand, some studies (Elbaum, Beg & Dood ,as cited in Barcelos, 2000) show that the instructional methods, the curricular content, the tasks, the assessment procedures and the feedback used by the teachers and their perceptions could have repercussions on the learners’ beliefs about language and how they learn. On the other hand, language educators have indicated that students attend the language classroom with “a complex web of attitudes, experiences, expectations, beliefs, and learning strategies” (Benson, Nyikos & Oxford, as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Due to the fact that the learners have their own perceptions about the process of learning and classroom roles; a mismatch between teachers and students beliefs could take place in language learning, since teachers tend to disagree with these ideas and apply methods that differ from the students’ beliefs. In that sense, as language teachers, we should therefore be attentive to what we do in the language classroom, because we should facilitate the learning of a foreign language, bearing in mind our students’ perceptions, beliefs, needs and expectations, since the omission of this aspect could affect disadvantageously the process of learning a foreign language.

Some individual characteristics may also influence the way in which learners perceive language learning, to cite an instance, Nunan & Lambert (in Erlenawati, 2002)

illustrate that “beliefs can vary in accordance with the personal characteristics such as personality, learning style, learning strategies, and attitudes”. (p. 1)

The previous arguments reveal that learners’ beliefs and expectations may result from not only their previous learning experiences, and certain personality characteristics, but also from “the unthinking acceptance of popular wisdom”, Tudor (as quoted in Erlenawati, 2002: 3).

Second and foreign language learners hold varied beliefs about language learning (Vibulphol, 2004). Richards & Lockhart (1994) use the concept “belief system” to describe beliefs which are shared by society members, while others are held by each individual; both categories of beliefs cover particular aspects of language.

For instance, the popular instrument for the ESL version developed by Horwitz (1987) called the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) classifies those beliefs in five categories, (a) beliefs about foreign language aptitude; (b) beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, (c) beliefs about the nature of language learning; (d) beliefs about learning and communication strategies and (e) beliefs about motivations and expectations.

Similarly, Vibulphol (2004) indicates that the learners beliefs about language learning embrace aspects such as who can learn a second or foreign language (who), the reasons why people should learn a second or foreign language (why), the best way to learn a second or foreign language (how), the learning tasks that should be included in the learning (what), and the best place or environment and time to learn the language (where and when).

The present study focuses on the learners’ beliefs about (a) the difficulty of English learning; and (c) beliefs about the existence of English language aptitude. Several researchers highlight the latent influence of learners’ beliefs in the process of second or foreign language learning (Horwitz, 1987; Erlenawati, 2002; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005), for instance, beliefs can influence (a) learners' motivation to learn; (b) their expectations about language learning; (c) their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, and (d) the strategies they choose in learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 52). This reveals the relation between some learners’ beliefs about language learning and the learners’ achievement in second or foreign language learning. This incidence of beliefs about language learning on the success of second or foreign language learning stimulates other relationships. Some beliefs seem to promote learners’ language learning achievement; for instance, Vibulphol (2004) in her doctoral thesis “Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching Approaches of Pre-Service EFL Teachers in Thailand” claims that when learner’s beliefs about the role of the learner, teacher and materials are in accordance with the idea that they are the “managers” of their own learning; they might assume an autonomous behavior.

Besides, one possible reason why students differ considerably in their use of learning strategies may be found in learners’ beliefs. The study “Relationship between EFL Learners’ Belief and Learning Strategy Use by English Majors in Vocational Colleges” conducted by Li (2010) discloses that learners, who possess more emphatic beliefs about language learning, may employ functional practice strategies and in most cases they are successful learners in the acquisition of a second or foreign language.

Nevertheless, studies have revealed that some other beliefs may raise the probability of learner' failure in language learning such as the debilitating anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope's research entitled "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety" (1986) confirms that learners' beliefs about language learning may lead anxiety reactions in learners which "impedes their ability to perform successfully in a foreign language classes" (p. 125). Beliefs about self-efficacy and beliefs about the difficulty of language learning are considered the most prevalent beliefs that promote both high and low anxiety.

In accordance with the previous classifications of learners beliefs mentioned above, it has been said that certain learners' beliefs about language learning are found to enhance the learners' success in the process of learning a second or foreign language whereas others could have negative effects on learners' language learning. Hence, researchers, teachers, and educators have tried to guide and refine the debilitating beliefs and enhance those that support the language learning in order that students achieve success in the acquisition of a second or foreign language.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Even though English is a subject that makes part of the school curriculum in Colombian institutions, with established schedules, facilitation of some resources and specialized teachers in this discipline, there exist students in eleventh grade, whose level of English is quite low. Possible reasons for this low level of English could be due to many factors (educational, social, cultural factors) that might affect the thinking and behavior of the students and teachers in the process of teaching and learning English; for instance, some beliefs that learners hold about a foreign or second language learning is a factor that could be related to the learning process and a successful acquisition of the English language.

Thus, research about beliefs about (a) the difficulty of English learning; and (b) beliefs about the existence of an English language aptitude could give insights about the students' beliefs that are facilitative to language learning and those ones that are debilitating.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to analyze the possible relationship between the students' beliefs about English language learning and their academic achievement among 6th and 7th grade in the Francisco de la Villota High School.

This objective was supported by reaching these specific objectives:

To identify the most-prevalent students' beliefs about the difficulty of English language learning among 6th and 7th grade of Francisco de la Villota High School.

To identify the most-prevalent students' beliefs about English language aptitude among 6th and 7th grade of Francisco de la Villota High School.

Significance of the Study

This study deserved to be carried out for three reasons. First, the present inquiry permitted to establish the relationship between students' beliefs about English Language Learning and their academic achievement in this subject. Beliefs about a specific language can vary in each student; they could be helpful or detrimental for the learning of a foreign language. Therefore, investigating about students' perceptions, that could influence the academic achievement of a foreign language (English), leads possibly to deal with this phenomenon adequately. Second, taking into account that beliefs make part of a broader framework called motivation (Avella & Camargo, 2010), research done in the University of Nariño in the English and French program has studied motivation and attitudes; however, beliefs had remained unexplored. Hence, the stated inquiry allowed to formulate new research problems and to advance in the educational field, especially to understand the process of language learning. Finally, the findings of this research are relevant for students and teachers of high school education because they will be conscious about the importance of beliefs in the process of learning a foreign language, and, in addition, they could work on them so that the students have more positive beliefs about their aptitudes and the ways to make language learning easier.

Research Methodology

Paradigm and type of research. In accordance with the nature of the research problem, this research was carried out, using mixed methods research. Mixed methods research involves “different combinations of qualitative and quantitative research, either at the data collection or at the analysis levels within a single research project” (Dörnyei, 2007:24)

On one hand, this research embraced the quantitative research. “The quantitative research involves data collection procedures that results primarily in numerical data which is analyzed primarily by statistical methods. “ (Dörnyei: 2007, 24). Thus, its main objective is the verification and the explanation of phenomenon, using objective data collection, and analysis. From the types of quantitative inquiry, it was pertinent to use the descriptive research.

On the other hand, this study adopted the qualitative paradigm. According to Creswell (1998), this is an inquiry process of understanding, based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. This sort of research builds complex and holistic pictures, it reports detailed views of informants, and allows to conduct the study in natural settings.

The techniques for this research were an attitudinal questionnaire, an interview and the students' sixth and seventh grades.

Population, sample and location. It was asked the collaboration of 114 students of the 6th and 7th grade. Without taking into account the academic performance or gender, the participants were men and women whose ages are between 11 and 15 years old, and

their strata are from 0 to 2. The public institution Francisco de la Villota High School is located on the outskirts of San Juan de Pasto city, in the small town of Genoy, which is composed of low strata neighborhoods. Forty seven (47) students of two classrooms of 6th grade and 67 students of 7th grade collaborated in answering the questionnaire. To do the interview, the sample was six students chosen at random.

Procedure. Before developing the techniques described early, it was asked the respective permissions for applying the questionnaire and the interview inside the classroom. Having the respective permissions, the questionnaire was applied to the students. After collecting the data, they were coded and analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0). Pearson correlations were found to determine relationships between language learning beliefs and the English students' achievement. Then, interviews were made to some of the students. Then, the research focused on the analysis of the information. It was given to the institutions a copy of this research study, with the purpose of analyzing and debating the results by the people involved in this research. Finally, thanks for the collaboration and the permissions granted were given to the authorities of the school.

Validation Criteria. To accomplish aspects of validity, this research used triangulation. According to Jakob (2009) triangulation is the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. In this case, a multiple triangulation was used, adopting the questionnaire from quantitative research and the interview from qualitative research. With this type of triangulation, it was intended to overcome the weakness that comes from using single methods, since the quantitative inquiry allowed us to find the relation between the learners' beliefs and the learning of English, and the qualitative inquiry permitted to go deeper and to discover how students perceive English learning.

Ethical Issues. The following ethical issues were taken into account:

- All of the authors and references were reported to acknowledge copyright.
- To apply the questionnaire and the interview, permissions of the authorities of the institution, such as the principal, the teachers, the parents, and the learners were asked for.
- The participation of the institution, the teachers and the students was voluntarily.
- No names or specific data were disclosed in this research in order to guarantee people's confidentiality.
- The researchers did not exert any physical or psychological damages on the learners or the institution.

Results and discussion

The description of the questionnaire and interview results are showed taking into account the specific objectives of this study. Then we focus on the Pearson correlations.

Students' beliefs about the difficulty of English language learning. The first specific objective of the study was “To identify the most-prevalent students' beliefs about the difficulty of English language learning among 6th and 7th grade of Francisco de la Villota High School”.

The data of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the 6th and 7th grade students of Francisco de la Villota High School believe that English is a language of medium difficulty. The responses to the relative difficulty of English are encouraging. Only a mere 2% of the participants view English as a “very difficult” language. This result is consistent with other studies, such as the one by Vibulphol (2004).

Since the students of Francisco de la Villota High School view English as a subject under their control “of medium difficulty”, they may be encouraged to do well in learning this language. Mori (1999) and Horwitz (1987) found that beliefs about the difficulty of the target language can undermine learners' success in language learning; however, it is not likely that the students in this study will be affected negatively by this belief. Their perception of the difficulty of English shows consistency with beliefs of other EFL learners (Yang, as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) suggesting that their beliefs are relatively realistic. Also, their ideas about the difficulty of English may help the students develop realistic expectations for their own progress in language learning and prevent them from the anxiety caused by difficult tasks.

The interview phase showed that when the students of sixth and seventh grade of Francisco de la Villota affirmed that English is a language of “medium difficulty” to be learned, they referred to (a) extrinsic and intrinsic motivation; (b) the nature of English and; (c) external factors such as the class hours established in the school or the approach to native speakers. The reasons led them to affirm that they have a realistic view of English learning, corroborating why they see English as a language of medium difficulty.

Prevalent students' beliefs about English language aptitude. The second specific objective was: “To identify the most-prevalent students' beliefs about English language aptitude among 6th and 7th grade of Francisco de la Villota High School”.

The students' answers of the questionnaire indicated that the students of sixth and seventh grades of Francisco de la Villota agreed to item 7 “women are better than men at learning English”, to item 8 “people who speak a foreign language tend to learn English easily than other people ” and item 10 “People who are good at other subjects like maths or chemistry do not have similar performance in English”. Also, the students tend to believe that: (1) the individual characteristics that can affect language learning is gender not age, and (2) they believe that the more prone people to learn English are people who speak two or more languages and do not have interest in other subjects. Nevertheless, it is also palpable that these students may perceive that they themselves conform to their model of successful language learning since they believe everyone can learn English despite the existence of such a thing as a foreign language aptitude. In other words, the participants seem to believe that the special ability for English is a gift,

but not a universal requirement for English learning (Vibulphol, 2004). As a consequence, these students are likely to have a positive expectation about their English learning by disregarding the effect of gender, age, subject interest, and language aptitude.

The explanations given by the students in the interviews showed that their beliefs about the existence of English language aptitude refer to the following origins (a) last experiences and (b) comparisons with other English learners. The last experiences are attributed to past failures and interpretations of peer experiences in English learning.

Correlation Analysis of Students’ Beliefs and Academic Achievement. In order to investigate the relationship among students’ beliefs and their academic achievement, Pearson correlation procedures were performed on a total of eleven variables: ten belief variables that were the underlying factors of the Language Learning Belief Questionnaire and the last variable includes the students’ grades that comprises the first and second term grades.

The correlation coefficient (represented by “r”) ranges from -1 to +1. A correlation coefficient whose value is between 0.2 and 0.4 means a low to moderate significant correlation, between 0.4 and 0.7 means a sound significant correlation, between 0.7 and 0.9 means a high significant correlation, below 0.2 means a lowest correlation, which is usually ignored, and above 0.9 means a highest correlation, which rarely occurs. In this section, three Pearson correlations that were around 0.5 are shown.

Everybody can learn English.

Table 1
Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, measuring the association between the belief about the ability to learn English for everyone and the the 6 -1 students’ grades of Francisco de la Villota High School

		Grades	Everybody can learn English
Grades	Correlación de Pearson Sig. (unilateral)		-,386(*) ,034
Everybody can learn English	Correlación de Pearson Sig. (unilateral)	-,386(*) ,034	1

*Nota:** La correlación es significativa al nivel 0,05 (unilateral).

Table 1 shows that the students' beliefs about the statement that everybody can learn English was significantly and negatively correlated with their academic achievement. ($r=-0.38$, $p<.03$) Although the correlation coefficient was not high, the intensity of the belief that learners hold will greatly influence their academic performance in their English learning. In other words, the stronger belief they hold, the least effective academic performance they will have.

Women are better than men at learning English

Table 2

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, measuring the association between the belief about the ability to learn English between women and men and the 6-2 students' grades

		Grades	Women are better than men at learning English
Grades	Correlación de Pearson	1	-,509(*)
	Sig. (bilateral)		,013
	N	23	23
Women are better than men at learning English	Correlación de Pearson	-,509(*)	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,013	
	N	23	23

*Nota:** La correlación es significante al nivel 0,05 (bilateral).

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the belief it is easier for women to learn English than for men and the 6-2 students' grades, by means of the two first terms. There was a notable negative correlation between the two variables, ($r = -0,5$ $p <.01$) This suggested that the more reliant on that belief, the less proficiency in English the students will get.

Some people were born with a special ability to learn English

Table 3

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, measuring the association between the belief that reflects a special ability to learn English from the birth and the 7-2 students' grades

		Grades	Some people were born with a special ability to learn English
Grades	Correlación de Pearson	1	-,417(*)
	Sig. (bilateral)		,014
	N	23	23
Some people were born with a special ability to learn English	Correlación de Pearson	-,417(*)	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,014	
	N	23	23

Sig. (bilateral)	,014
------------------	------

*Nota:** La correlación es significante al nivel 0,05 (bilateral).

The belief about “some people were born with a special ability to learn English” appeared to be negatively correlated with the 7-2 students’ academic achievement in English ($r=-0.4$ $p <.01$) it can be concluded that the more they believed some people had a special ability to learn English, the least likely they would have a good attainment in English.

From ten computed Pearson correlations, three of them were partially high significant. The students’ beliefs that seem to be negatively correlated with their academic achievement comprises (a) Everybody can learn English for 6-1 (b) women are better than men at learning English for 6-2 and (c) some people were born with a special ability to learn English for 7-2.

With this in mind, it is supposed that three categories of beliefs and the English performance were significantly correlated with correlation coefficients ranging from -0,38 to -0.5 indicating moderate correlations, whereas most of beliefs studied in this research were not significant correlated with their academic achievement. Besides, any of the beliefs of 7-1 grade students were apparently not significant correlated with their academic achievement (most of the Pearson correlations were at 0.1 or below 0, 1 in this grade). With this, it is demonstrated that beliefs can vary depending on individual variations such as individual learner characteristics, personality type, identity, self-concept, and self-esteem. Hence, the need of studies on how beliefs differ across learners in terms of individual differences is latent.

Limitations of the Study

The present study contains some limitations. First of all, the number of the participants in the survey phase was relatively small for the findings to be generalized to the whole population of the students in the rural areas of Pasto. Only the students of sixth and seventh grade of Francisco de la Villota High School participated in this study. Secondly, the Pearson correlations were conducted only with the first and second term grades. The correlations could not be carried out with all the grades of the year because of time constraints. Therefore, the correlations could not have yielded more evidence in order to have a general overview of the relation between the beliefs about English learning. Also, some items of the questionnaire seem to be problematic for the purposes of this study because these statements could involve other implications for the validity and/or applicability of the results. These statements involves other issues such as cultural knowledge, past experiences, meetings with English native speakers. Thus, it was difficult to deal with the results of these items. Finally, the use of teachers’ grades as a variable could also be a limitation because of validity issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The results from the questionnaire and the interview reveal important findings as follows, first, the students of sixth and seventh grade of Francisco de la Villota High School reported to possess some beliefs about English learning that are common among EFL learners in previous studies and some that are different. For instance, Horwitz's study (1987) shows similar results to those ones of this research because their subjects share the same belief that the students of Francisco de la Villota High School hold "everyone can learn English". Besides, Avella & Camargo (2010) studying beliefs about the difficulty of English in two public institutions conclude that their subjects "comprehend the importance of foreign language in their academic and professional lives" as it was demonstrated in the interview section in this study. Also, compared with Vibulphol (2004) and Yang (as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) studies, the students in the present study tended to share the belief "English is a language of medium difficulty". On the contrary, the most noticeable difference with other studies consists in that the research reviewed in the theoretical framework (Vibulphol, 2004; Horwitz, 1987) determine that the subjects believe that children are better at learning English than adults whereas this study showed the opposite results; the students of Francisco de la Villota High School believe that the mature people are more likely to learn English.

Second, the findings reveal that beliefs about a required ability for English learning might have been influenced not only by their learning experience as EFL learners, but also by the absence of some situations related to a foreign language learning. On one hand, the students' previous experiences support one possible cause how learners create, shape and guide beliefs. The beliefs that seemed to relate to their prior learning experiences are (a) the existence of specialized abilities for learning English and; (b) everybody can learn English. On the other hand, the findings also reveal that the lack of some situations like the absence of contacts with English native speakers or with children who speak English fluently give place to the development of the belief "adults are better at learning English than children"

Third, some beliefs about language learning that have been analyzed in previous studies as being potentially detrimental to learners' language learning were found to be less influential in this study. With the exception of the three Pearson correlations that were negatively significant, it can be concluded that beliefs about the existence of foreign language aptitude and beliefs about the difficulty of English are not inhibitive beliefs. The reported beliefs about the existence of foreign language aptitude did not seem to have negative effects on their English learning since the students do not see the aptitude as a cause of success in English learning, but they know that their efforts in learning English can compensate the lack of foreign language aptitude as it was demonstrated in the questionnaire.

Similarly, even though these students perceived that English was not an easy language, they continued investing time and effort in learning English. A possible explanation could be that the beliefs about the difficulty of English learning could have

been predominated by beliefs about the value of English for them or high motivation for English.

Last but not least, the data from the Pearson correlations phase reveal that there were relationships between three reported beliefs about English learning and the academic achievement with correlation coefficients ranging from $-.386$ to $-.509$, indicating low to moderate correlations. The three beliefs that appeared to relate negatively to the academic achievement are: (a) everybody can learn English; (b) women are better than men at learning English and; (c) some people were born with a special ability to learn English, which means that the strongest the belief is, the least academic performance the students seem to accomplish. This suggests the teachers' awareness of these debilitating beliefs in order to guide and even modify the inhibitive perceptions.

Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further study

The findings of the present study suggest the following: first, teachers and educators should try to enhance their students' understanding of their own beliefs about English, specifically refining the possible detrimental beliefs and enhancing the ones that are related to high performance in English learning. Furthermore, as teachers we can promote awareness of the fact that a foreign language can be learned using diverse strategies and in different ways; thus, letting the students to discover and adopt for themselves strategies by which they might feel more comfortable.

Second, taking into consideration the complexity of beliefs about language learning, it was employed two sources of data in the present study, some beliefs were not easy to elicit using questionnaires alone. The interview provided complementary information for the discussion, and allowed to know some important evidence that could not be obtained through the questionnaires, for instance, the relation of the students' beliefs about the difficulty of English and their past experiences or their motivation to learn English; thus, triangulation is a very useful tool studying beliefs.

This study also suggests that research about beliefs could be carried out comparing groups by age of student, by genre or by level of language learning experience, it would be convenient to do this in order to establish significant and clear differences about common beliefs in a specific group that could possibly suggest new perspectives about foreign language beliefs inventories.

Finally, future research about learners' beliefs should incorporate the results into program design, materials and instructional strategies to enhance foreign language learning as Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005) state "identification of these beliefs and reflection on their potential impact on language learning and teaching in general, as well as in more specific areas such as the learners' expectations and strategies used, can inform future syllabus design and teacher practice in the course". (p. 1)

REFERENCES

- Agathopoulou, E. (2010). EFL Student teachers' beliefs and the effect of a second language acquisition course. In A. Psaltou-Joycey & M. Matthaoudakis. (Eds.), *Advances in Research on Language Acquisition and Teaching*. (pp. 165-177). Thessaloniki, Greece: Greek Applied Linguistics Association.
- Altan, M. (2006). Beliefs about Language Learning of Foreign Language- Major University Students. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 31 (2), 45-52. Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol31/iss2/5>
- Avella, C., & Camargo, D. (2010). Exploring Student's Beliefs about Learning English in two Public Institutions. *Cuadernos de Linguística Hispanica*, 15(1), 77-92.
- Barcelos, A. (2000). *Understanding Teachers' and Students' Language Learning Beliefs in Experience: A Deweyan Approach*. (Unpublished doctoral's thesis). The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.
- Bernat, E., & Gvozdenko, I. (2005). Beliefs about Language Learning: Current knowledge Pedagogical Implications. *TESL-E*, 9(1), 1-21 Retrieved from <http://tesl-ej.org/ej33/a1.pdf>
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press
- Erlenawati, S. (2002). Beliefs about Language Learning Indonesian learners' perspectives and some implications for classroom practices. *Australian Journal of Education*, 46 (3), 1-10. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6475/is_3_46/ai_n28968689/pg_2/?tag=content:col
- Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/327317>
- Jackob, A. (2009). *On the Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Typological Social Research: Reflection on Typology of Conceptualizing Uncertainty in the Context of Employment Biographies*. Retrieved from <http://cranepsych2.edublogs.org/files/2009/08/triangulation.pdf>
- Li, F. (2010). Relationship between EFL Learners' Belief and Learning Strategy Use by English Majors in Vocational Colleges. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(6), 858-866. doi:10.4304/jltr.1.6.858-866
- Mori, Y. (1997). *Epistemological beliefs and language learners beliefs: what do language learners believe about their learning*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED406657.pdf>
- Richards, J., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Vibulphol, J. (2004). *Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching Approaches of Pre-Service EFL Teachers in Thailand* (Unpublished doctoral's thesis). Oklahoma State University, Bangkok.