

## **Investigating TAFL Learners' Beliefs as an Aspect that Affects the learning process of Arabic as a Second Language**

\* **Dr. Zeinab Mohamed Raafat**

\* **Dr. Rawheya Ahmed Ali**

\* **Dr. Mona Ahmed Aboul Fath Eid**

\* **Ms. Maram Rewaa Farag El Saadany**

### **Introduction and Context of the Problem**

A crucial element that needs to be investigated in identifying the challenges that foreign learners face is their beliefs. It has been claimed that learners' beliefs about language learning, in general, guide their actions and behaviors in the learning process (Cotterall, 1995; Horwitz, 1999). This behavior can be reflected in learners' success or failure in language learning (Cotterall, 1995). If learners hold misconceptions about language learning, the process may be hindered, and consequently may not lead (1988). Barcelos, Kalaja and Paula's article (2011) serves as an introduction to this special issue of *System on Beliefs about Second Language Acquisition (SLA)* holdby learners and teachers of foreign languages in

---

\*Professor English Department, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University

\*Assistant Professor, Phonetics Department, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University

\*Lecturer, English Department, Faculty of Education, Alexandria University

\*Language Instructor, English Department, Higher Institute of Engineering and Technology, Alexandria.

a variety of contexts all over the world . It compares and contrasts the empirical studies included in the issue. Most of the studies can be characterized as qualitative in nature. In addition, the studies tend to view beliefs as variable and fixed. It also focuses on changes in these beliefs and on the interaction between beliefs and learner or teacher actions, acknowledges their relationship to be a complex one.

As Horwitz (1987 p.125) stated, second language learners often hold different beliefs or notions about language learning, some of which are influenced by students' previous experiences as language learners and others that are shaped by their own cultural backgrounds. The pedagogical implications of previous research findings suggested the importance of probing learners' beliefs about language learning, so that teachers may understand how learners view and approach their education in the classroom. Accordingly, language teachers may either address any "limited knowledge" or "erroneous beliefs" learners may have (Horwitz, 1988) or foster existing knowledge that is consistent with a given instructional language learning program (Cotterall, 1995, Horwitz, 1987).

Actually, the researcher examined the literature of the Arabic Language and found out that there is no enough research that has tackled this important element while learning this language. Rifkin (2000 p.394) stated that the beliefs of learners and instructors of other languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian have not been the object of any published investigation.

### **Research Questions**

The current study identifies the challenges facing foreign learners of Spoken Colloquial Arabic. The main research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Will the beliefs of the learners affect the learning process
2. of Arabic as a second Language?

### **Hypothesis of the Research**

This research claims that the beliefs of the learners can affect their learning process. They can have negative implications in learning Arabic as a second language.

### **Aims & Methodology of the Research**

The main aim of this research is to measure whether the beliefs of the learners will affect their learning process. It also focuses on the key variables that can hinder the students' success in learning a foreign language. Needs analysis step will be checked by the use of the questionnaire, formal and informal interviews. The questionnaire results will reflect and identify whether the beliefs of the learners in their learning process. The major role of this study is to explore the challenges that face foreign learners of Spoken Colloquial Arabic as a foreign language in an attempt to reduce the frustration that these learners face while acquiring the Arabic language. The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was developed to assess students' opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning. The researcher took the permission of Horwitz to adapt the version of the BALLI and to apply it to the Arabic language, specifically Egyptian Colloquial Arabic taught in the TAFL Center, Alexandria University.

### **Participants of the Study**

The target population that represents the sample that responded to the questionnaire speaks more than one language as they all come from different origins. Percentage of males and females varied as 40% of the participants are males where as 60% are females. The participants ranged in their age from 18 to 35. Consequently, they differed in the beliefs they hold according to their age, origin and sex. The beliefs of the learners according to Horwitz in the BALLI are divided into five main categories which are the difficulty of

language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, finally the motivation and expectation.

### **Research Instrument**

Horwitz has designed an instrument to assess students' beliefs about learning a new language, which she called the "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) in 1980. The BALLI was developed to assess students' opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning. The BALLI consisted of thirty-four items and assesses student beliefs in five major areas: 1) difficulty of language learning; 2) foreign language aptitude; 3) the nature of language learning; 4) learning and communication strategies; and 5) motivations and expectations. Subsequent studies have employed Horwitz's instrument for inquiries abroad as Yang (1992), Kern (1995) and Mantle-Bromley (1995) who investigated beliefs of Russian language learners.

The researcher has adapted Horwitz questionnaire after taking her approval. The beliefs section of the adapted questionnaire consists of 28 items whereas Horwitz questionnaire constitutes 34 items. Not all the items in Horwitz's questionnaire are included in this section because some of the extracted items do not suit the case of the selected participants. For instance, some items ask about the children as "It is easier for children than adults to learn foreign languages". This item cannot be added in this section as it does not apply in this research. We do not have children to compare their beliefs with the adult's beliefs in the TAFL Center. "Foreign language aptitude" is represented in the questionnaire in numbers:

2- "Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages",

5- "People who speak more than one language are very intelligent",

8-“If I learn Arabic properly, I will understand the Egyptian culture”,

13-“ People from my country are good at learning foreign languages”,

17- “I have a special ability for learning foreign languages”,

23 -“Women are better than men at learning foreign languages”,

27- “Everyone can learn to speak Colloquial Arabic”.

As for the “nature of the language”, it has been explained in items numbers:

10- “Some languages are easier to learn than others”,

12-“it is best to learn Arabic in an Arabic speaking country”,

20-“ The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning vocabulary words”, 21- “The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning the grammar”, 24- “Learning Colloquial Arabic is different from learning other academic subjects”, 25-“ The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning how to translate from my native language”.

As for the “difficulty of language learning” , it is exemplified in items number: 1-“It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one”, 11- “ it is easier to read and write Arabic than to speak it”, 14- “ I believe that I will learn to s

Concerning the “learning and Communication strategies” which are explained in numbers : 3-“I enjoy practicing Arabic with the Egyptians I meet”, 4-“ I feel timid speaking Arabic with Egyptians”,

6-“ My previous language experience indicates my success in learning a new task”, 7-“ It is important to communicate ideas in a clear and understandable way”,

9-“ I need to learn Arabic to understand the Middle East politics”, 15- “ It is important to speak Colloquial Arabic with an excellent pronunciation”,

16- You shouldn't say anything in Colloquial Arabic until you can say it correctly”, 18- “It is important to repeat and practice a lot”,

19- “If beginning students are permitted to make errors in Arabic, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on”,

22- “It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes”.

Last but not least, the “motivation and expectations” are revealed in items number: 26-“If I learn to speak Colloquial Arabic very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job”,

28-“ I would like to learn spoken Colloquial Arabic so that I can get to know Egyptians”.

### **Discussion of the Results**

In analyzing the data obtained from the participants' answers , tables one and two demonstrate that the majority of the participants strongly agree with items numbers 1,7,8,10,12,17,18 and their answers are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  . As for the items 21, 22, 23,26 the majority of the participants agree with these items and their answers are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ . The statistical

analysis in the present study showed that the following items answers are neutral namely: 2, 3 ,4 ,5 , 6, 8, 11, 14, 15, 20, 24, 27 , 28. The majority of the participants are neutral with these items and their answers are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ . This can be directed to the fact that they all come from same origin and college so they all have the same concepts.

If we examined table one and table two we notice that only four items were disagreed upon namely numbers: 9, 16, 19, 25 respectively. Items number 9,16, 19 represent the learning and communication strategies” whereas item

number 25 stands for the nature of the Colloquial Arabic language itself.

Finally, the results indicate that these items do not cause problems to the learners as their beliefs are neither too strong nor too weak. The students are flexible and moderate in these items. They do not hold strong beliefs as a whole that can affect their learning process. This can be attributed to the fact that the participants are from different origins and sex. Also, the age plays an important factor in influencing their beliefs. Moreover, this study indicates that the percent of the females who contributed in this research is bigger than the percent of the males and the females are not rigid in their conceptions.

**( Table 1) Distribution of the studied cases according to this section examines your beliefs about language learning**

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD	$\chi^2$	p
1- It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	No	28	23	8	1	0	1.70	0.77	31.867	<0.001*
	%	46.7	38.3	13.3	1.7	0.0				
2- Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	No	27	30	3	0	0	1.60	0.59	21.900	<0.001*
	%	45.0	50.0	5.0	0.0	0.0				
3- I enjoy practicing Arabic with the Egyptians I meet.	No	18	33	9	0	0	1.85	0.66	14.700	<0.001*
	%	30.0	55.0	15.0	0.0	0.0				
4- I feel timid speaking Arabic with Egyptians	No	9	22	11	15	3	2.68	1.16	16.667	0.002*
	%	15.0	36.7	18.3	25.0	5.0				
5- People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	No	1	17	31	11	0	2.87	0.72	31.467	<0.001*
	%	1.7	28.3	51.7	18.3	0.0				
6- My previous language experience indicates my success in learning a new task.	No	2	27	26	5	0	2.57	0.70	35.600	<0.001*
	%	3.3	45.0	43.0	8.3	0.0				

7- It is important to communicate ideas in a clear and understandable way.	No	38	20	2	0	0	1.40	0.56	32.400	<0.001*
	%	63.3	33.3	3.3	0.0	0.0				
8- If I learn Arabic properly, I will understand the Egyptian culture.	No	5	27	10	16	2	2.72	1.06	32.833	<0.001*
	%	8.3	45.0	16.7	26.7	3.3				
9- I need to learn Arabic to understand the Middle East politics.	No	8	13	14	19	6	3.03	1.22	8.833	0.065
	%	13.3	21.7	23.3	31.7	10.0				
10- Some languages are easier to learn than others.	No	33	21	4	2	0	1.58	0.77	43.333	<0.001*
	%	55.0	35.0	6.7	3.3	0.0				
11- It is easier to read and write Arabic than to speak it.	No	9	20	20	8	3	2.60	1.06	19.500	<0.001*
	%	15.0	33.3	33.3	13.3	5.0				
12- It is best to learn Arabic in an Arabic speaking country.	No	39	19	2	0	0	1.38	0.56	34.300	<0.001*
	%	65.0	31.7	3.3	0.0	0.0				
13- People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	No	0	14	21	19	6	3.28	0.94	8.933	0.030*
	%	0.0	23.3	35.0	31.7	10.0				
14- I believe that I will learn to speak Colloquial Arabic very well	No	5	29	21	3	2	2.47	0.85	50.000	<0.001*
	%	8.3	48.3	35.0	5.0	3.3				
15- It is important to speak Colloquial Arabic with an excellent pronunciation	No	8	33	12	6	1	2.32	0.89	51.167	<0.001*
	%	13.3	55.0	20.0	10.0	1.7				



( Table 2 ) Distribution of the studied cases according to this section examines your beliefs about language learning

$\chi^2$ : Chi square test

\*: Statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD	$\chi^2$	p
16- You shouldn't say anything in Colloquial Arabic until you can say it correctly	No	7	0	5	24	24	3.79	1.25	21.733	<0.001*
	%	11.7	0.0	8.3	40.0	40.0				
17- I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	No	5	8	33	8	6	3.03	1.01	46.500	<0.001*
	%	8.3	13.3	55.0	13.3	10.0				
18- It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	No	41	16	3	0	0	1.37	0.58	37.300	<0.001*
	%	68.3	26.7	5.0	0.0	0.0				
19- If beginning students are permitted to make errors in Arabic, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	No	5	17	3	29	6	3.23	1.21	40.00	<0.001*
	%	8.3	28.3	5.0	48.3	10.0				
20- The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning vocabulary words.	No	7	35	7	7	4	2.43	1.06	55.667	<0.001*
	%	11.7	58.3	11.7	11.7	6.7				
21- The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning the grammar.	No	2	13	23	18	4	3.15	0.95	26.833	<0.001*
	%	3.3	21.7	38.3	30.0	6.7				
22- It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.	No	7	14	22	15	2	2.85	1.04	19.833	<0.001*
	%	11.7	23.3	36.7	25.0	3.3				
23- Women are better than men at learning foreign languages	No	2	2	26	22	8	3.53	0.89	42.667	<0.001*
	%	3.3	3.3	43.3	36.7	13.3				
24- Learning Colloquial Arabic is different from learning other academic subjects.	No	11	34	12	3	0	2.12	0.76	35.333	<0.001*
	%	18.3	56.7	20.0	5.0	0.0				
25- The most important part of learning Colloquial Arabic is learning how to translate from my native language	No	1	6	14	31	8	3.65	0.90	44.833	<0.001*
	%	1.7	10.0	23.3	51.7	13.3				
26- If I learn to speak Colloquial Arabic very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job	No	6	25	26	3	0	2.43	0.74	29.733	<0.001*
	%	10.0	41.7	43.3	5.0	0.0				

27- Every one can learn to speak Colloquial Arabic	No	4	39	15	1	1	2.27	0.69	87.000	<0.001*
	%	6.7	65.0	25.0	1.7	1.7				
28- I would like to learn spoken Colloquial Arabic so that I can get to know Egyptians.	No	15	32	10	2	1	2.03	0.84	52.833	<0.001*
	%	25.0	53.3	16.7	3.3	1.7				

## Validity

Weir (2005) identifies different kinds of validity. He has emphasized that “the problem of validity is that whether a test really measures what it purports to measure”. All the mentioned types of validity are examined in this paper.

### Theory Based Validity

Weir (2005p. 17 ) states that a questionnaire should be built on an explicit specification , which deals with cognitive and linguistic abilities involved in the activities of the specified language. There are two aspects related to theory based validity, one concerns with priori evidence collected before the test and the other deals with posteriori evidence proofed after the test administration (Weir 1988: a). As for the posteriori stage, it deals with the ability of describing the construct we are intending to measure. The researcher has applied priori and posteriori stage on the questionnaire to validate it.

### Sample validity

This kind of validity ensures the validity of the sample participating in the priori and posteriori stages of the questionnaire.

The sample consists of 100 L2 Arabic speakers who are currently enrolled in the TAFL Center at Faculty of Arts in Alexandria. Their age ranges from 18 to 35years. Only 60 Participants answered the questionnaire. They are 36 females and 24 males. They are college students who have come to Egypt to complete their studying as a part of their learning program. To ensure the homogeneity of the

Arabic language in terms of students' language competency, the TAFL center asks each student to sit for a language proficiency placement test upon registration for the course. When this process was applied during the first week of the academic year 2010/ 2011; it produced three classes. They are divided as follows: the first is advanced followed by intermediate and the third is beginner. Students from these classes comprised the sample that took part in the second phase of the study, that is to say responding to the questionnaire.

### **Scoring Validity**

After the implementation of the test and the application of statistical analysis on the data gathered, we need to understand to which degree we can depend on these results. It concerns the extent to which test results are stable over time, consistent on the terms of content sampling and free from bias.

### **Conclusion**

These questions are used to investigate the beliefs that these participants hold concerning the difficulty in the Arabic language, the motivation and expectations of the participants, their aptitude and the nature of the Arabic language. The results indicate that the items in the "Beliefs" section do not cause problems to the learners as their beliefs are neither too strong nor too weak. The students are flexible and moderate in these items. They do not hold strong beliefs as a whole that can affect their learning process. They also reflected the fact that the males of the beginners' level hold stronger beliefs than the females. As for the Intermediate and advanced levels, the results do not represent any statistical differences. A deep look in the relations between the level of the students in the center demonstrates the fact that the challenges really differ according to the level of the students in the center.

There is a great difference between the advanced level and the beginner and intermediate levels in their beliefs. Because they are advanced level in their learning, their beliefs are stronger than the beginners and intermediate. So, there is a direct relation between the beliefs and the level of the students in the center and consequently the advanced level has greater challenges than the other two levels. Teachers need to put in consideration while teaching foreign students the beliefs of their learners to have a class where the communicative method is applied. By this way, we can avoid all the problems that foreigners face while learning the Arabic language. We need to suggest a systematic qualitative research method to increase our knowledge of second language learning during studying abroad. Third, an experimental study may be conducted on two groups, a control versus an experimental group, to further investigate whether the changes in learners' beliefs of the present exploratory study were due to the impact of the new learning settings or due to other factors that were not controlled in the present study. Faculties should begin by being self reflective about their pedagogical goals and strengths in teaching.

## References

1. - Barcelos, Ana and Kalaja, Paula (2011) Introduction to Beliefs SLA Revisited. *System*, 39 (3), 281-416.
2. Cano-Garcia, F., & Hughes, E. W. (2000). Learning and thinking styles: An analysis of their interrelationship and influence on academic achievement. *Educational Psychology*, 20(4), 413-430.
3. Cotterall, S. (1995) Readiness for autonomy: investigating learner beliefs. *System* 23(2) 195- 205.
4. -DeKeyser, Robert. (1991). Foreign language development during a semester abroad.
5. Freed (Ed.), *Foreign language acquisition research and the classroom* (pp. 104-119).
6. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath
7. Gardner R. C., & Lambert, W. E.(1972). *Attitudes and motivation in Second language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
8. Horwitz, E.K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language teaming. In A .L.
- 10.Wenden & J.
- 11.-Horwitz, E. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign
- 12.language students. *The Modern Language Journal*, 72 (3), 283-294.
- 13.Horwitz, E. (1999). Cultural and Situational Influences on Foreign language learners' Beliefs about language learning: A review of BALLI studies. *System*, 27, 557, 576.
- 14.Horwitz,(2008). *Becoming a Language Teacher: A Practical Guide to Second*
- 15.*Language Learning and Teaching*, Allyn & Bacon.

16. Jenn, N.C, 2006. Designing a Questionnaire. *Malaysian Family Physician*, 1(1), p. 32-35. Retrieved 11 March, 2008 from: <http://ejournal.afpm.org.my/v1n1/index.htm>
- 17.- Kern, R.G. (1995) Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign Language Annals* 28,(1) 71-92.
18. Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995) Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: links to proficiency. *Modern Language Journal* 79, (3) 372-86.
19. Robin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-132). London: Prentice Hall.
- 20.- Rifkin, B (2000). *Revisiting Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning*. University of Wisconsin : Madison.
21. Rifkin, B. (2003). Oral Proficiency learning Outcomes and Curricular Design. *Foreign Language Annuals* 36(4), 582-588.
23. Rifkin, B. (2005). A Ceiling Effect in Traditional Classroom Foreign Language Instruction: Data from Russian. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 3-18.
- 24.- Yang, N.D. (1992) Second language learners' beliefs about language learning and their use of learning strategies: A study of college students of English in Taiwan. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

## **Abstract**

The present study aims at identifying the challenges that foreign learners face in learning spoken Colloquial Arabic by investigating learners' beliefs. The subjects of the study are 100 foreign learners who are studying Arabic in the TAFL Center, Alexandria University. They are undergraduate students coming from different countries and universities to study Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic in Egypt. Participants represent the three language levels in the Center and both gender, males and females. All subjects who are studying in the Center participated in this study upon their consent. The researcher uses the analytical descriptive method while applying the questionnaire as a method of data collection. The results indicate that the beliefs of the learners are not considered as a crucial element that can affect the learning process