

BELIEFS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT HANOI LAW UNIVERSITY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	01/4/2022	Every field examining human behaviour and language learning highly appreciates personal beliefs as a means of success in thorough understanding. This study investigated first-year English major students' beliefs about second language acquisition, particularly English language learning. The descriptive quantitative method was employed by using the researcher-made questionnaire focusing on evaluating five factors such as foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivations and expectations, which was floated with 192 participants at Hanoi Law University during the first term of the academic year 2021-2022. The results revealed that first-year English major students had learnt English for a long time, so they expressed positive attitudes towards English language learning. Besides, the disparity of gender does not reflect the different beliefs in English language learning. The findings of this study would help the school administrators formulate some innovative English teaching policies, adjust teachers' pedagogical practices, and serve as a resourceful reference for the future research.
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QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT VỀ VIỆC HỌC TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LUẬT HÀ NỘI

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	01/4/2022	Trong các lĩnh vực nghiên cứu thái độ của con người với việc học ngôn ngữ đều đánh giá cao quan điểm cá nhân như là phương tiện để hiểu biết một cách toàn diện. Bài viết này nghiên cứu thái độ của sinh viên ngôn ngữ Anh đối với việc học ngôn ngữ thứ hai, cụ thể là tiếng Anh. Phương pháp định lượng miêu tả sử dụng phiếu điều tra do người nghiên cứu thiết kế tập trung xem xét 5 nhân tố cụ thể đó là năng khiếu học ngôn ngữ, khó khăn của việc học ngôn ngữ, bản chất của việc học ngôn ngữ, chiến lược học và giao tiếp ngôn ngữ, kỳ vọng và động lực học ngôn ngữ. 192 sinh viên ngôn ngữ Anh năm thứ nhất học kỳ 1 năm học 2021-2022 tại trường Đại học Luật Hà Nội tham gia trả lời phiếu điều tra. Kết quả chỉ ra rằng sinh viên ngôn ngữ Anh năm thứ nhất đã trải nghiệm thời gian dài học tiếng Anh trước đó, bởi vậy những sinh viên này có thái độ tích cực trong việc học tiếng Anh. Ngoài ra, sự khác biệt về giới tính không có ảnh hưởng đến các quan điểm về học ngôn ngữ Anh. Phát hiện của nghiên cứu giúp cho quản trị trường học đổi mới chính sách giảng dạy tiếng Anh, điều chỉnh thực tiễn sư phạm của giảng viên và cung cấp nguồn tài liệu tham khảo hữu ích cho những nghiên cứu trong tương lai.
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1. Introduction

Learning a language is a lifelong process that begins at birth and continues throughout one's life [1]. Students learn languages through using them to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, form relationships with family and friends, and try to make sense of their surroundings. As a matter of fact, students can study at a multi-lingual environment where they have a chance to exchange many foreign languages or they go to school to acquire a new foreign language. It is critical to value and develop each student's first language (L1). Furthermore, the acquisition of knowledge in one language will assist that in other languages [2].

Regarding freshmen's language learning, they might cultivate for themselves multiple experiences in learning a new language. In turn, they somewhat hold a certain volume of viewpoints about learning a language. Conducting a study on what and why they believe in language learning is particularly an interesting topic. Researchers have found that second language learners come to a language class armed with some preconceived beliefs about languages. Language learning styles and beliefs can indicate what expectations that learners have and what actions in their language learning they will take [2]-[4]. It is said that learners' beliefs cause them to approach a specific language learning task differently and account for the individual differences observed even among learners with similar language proficiency [2], [5]. Recognizing the learners' beliefs is important because it helps teachers understand learners' approaches to language learning and learners' use of learning strategies better, so that they can plan language instruction appropriately [1], [4], [6]. Additionally, it is worth considering students' beliefs on the significance or any novel facts, knowledge of the youngest generation of the university, their thoughts toward language learning measures and approaches or even the science behind these conceptions [7], [8]. With these aims, the study tried to explore the factors affecting learners' perspective towards second language acquisition, which has not been paid much attention in the field of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. In particular, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are first-year students' beliefs on English language learning at Hanoi Law University?
2. Are the beliefs moderated by the gender of the learners?

The findings of this study would directly redound first-year English major students in providing alternative ways to advance their language learning strategies. The outcomes of this study would propose pedagogical practices of teachers for effective applications of different teaching methods to improve their students' fluency in language learning.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

The research design used the descriptive survey to exploit the primary source via a researcher-made questionnaire. 192 first-year English major students at Hanoi Law University (HLU) were selected by a non-probability sampling method for the respondents of the study. The researcher-made questionnaire was floated to the participants' email addresses via an active Google form link. The researcher's email explained clearly the objectives and relevance of the study, assured the respondents of anonymity and gave them the option of not participating in the study if they wished. A contact number was also provided in case a respondent had any questions. In the case of low response rate 50%, a reminder would be sent to respondents. After the due time stated clearly in the content of the email, the raw data were screened before the accurate data were treated with IBM SPSS v. 25 for data analysis.

2.2. Participants

The research participants were the first-year students at Hanoi Law University (HLU) during the second term of the academic year 2021-2022. The researcher applied Slovin's formula in order to

decide the quantity of participants serving as subject of the study with the expected number of 370 samples ($e = \pm 5\%$) over the population of 5,000. Consequently, the reliable samples turned out to be 192. In particular, 57 males (equal to 29.7%) and 135 females (similar to 70.3%) took part in the survey. 75 participants (or 39.1%) came from rural areas, and mostly 117 respondents (accounting for 60.9%) were from urban locations. Generally, they learned English for a long time, specifically the minority of 18 respondents (representing 9.4%) studied English for under 10 years, while the rest 174 respondents (90.6%) confessed to learn English for under 15 years.

2.3. Research instruments

The research instrument was partly consulted the notion of the BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) developed by Horwitz (1983). The questionnaire underwent a dry run with 30 volunteered students for the liability of the content of the questionnaire objectives. The results of the pilot study were shortlisted to the acceptable internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha ($0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$). The final questionnaire included 30 closed questions for implementation basing on 5 factors, namely foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. These items were rated using Likert scales.

2.4. Data analysis

The frequency statistics was applied to deal with the demographic information, together with 30 closed questions. The interval scales were divided basing on the Likert scales with 5 interpretation degrees such as very low (1.00 – 1.80); low (1.81 – 2.60); moderate (2.61 – 3.40); high (3.41 – 4.20), and very high (4.21 – 5.00). In addition, Independent-Samples T test was applied to investigate whether the gender had different viewpoints on language learning.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Foreign language aptitude

Table 1 presents the outcomes of foreign language aptitude of the respondents. The results entailed the vivid views about it. In fact, learning a new language in general, English in particular, is not very easy. This is the reason why most students showed low views on this matter ($M = 2.43$; $SD = .469\%$). Learning a new language is hard as it requires three primary factors, namely the mind, learners' attitudes, and time. In particular, the mind gets used to the first language, commonly referred to mother tongue, so it has to construct new cognitive frameworks with a new language. Learners' attitudes have a positive or negative impact on individual students' language proficiency [3]. Hence, time refers to the duration of sustained and consistent practice, which challenges learners' efforts and patience. Table 1 indicates that the respondents expressed neutral viewpoints on the comparison of English skills ($M = 3.20$; $SD = .403\%$), the ease of speaking compared with understanding of a foreign language ($M = 3.05$; $SD = .223\%$), and different genders at learning foreign languages ($M = 3.15$; $SD = 3.59\%$). Many studies (e.g., [5]; [9]; [10]) have addressed the comparison of four micro-English skills to date. The conclusion, nevertheless, has been debatable whether one skill is more challenge than the others. Similarly, the ease of speaking a foreign language and understanding it has been controversial. It is difficult to state firmly that a person who speaks a foreign language does not understand it [6]. Although human brain is constructed differently in terms of cognitive skills with the left and right hemispheres in the cortex where language evolves along with the frontal lobes, there is no persuasive evidence to prove that gender disparity has better potential abilities in learning a foreign language. Surprisingly, the respondents revealed high degrees of their perspectives on bilingual people ($M = 3.72$; $SD = .703\%$), and the simplicity of one language compared with the others ($M = 3.95$; $SD = .212\%$). A typical study conducted by [11] argues that an eloquent person seems to be successful at winning other people; however, it does not merely

reflect that the intelligence roots from acquiring a second language. On the contrary, many studies [8]; [10]; [11] have claimed that people who are able to speak more than one language are likely to be smarter at showing better performance on cognitive control tasks, which is consistent with this research finding. As for the ease of learning language, it depends greatly on the type of language; that is, a new language shares similar alphabet, sounds, and syntax with one's native tongue. Guessing unfamiliar words in a foreign language is very essential to comprehend what information is conveyed. The participants evaluated the highest scale for this issue ($M = 4.48$; $SD = .730\%$). Similarly, the contrast between children and adults in regard to learning a foreign language got the same rank ($M = 4.31$; $SD = .653\%$). Naturally, children's brains are very sensitive to language cues, and have increased plasticity for learning all the things. The brains consequently engrave a native tongue in the mind, so older brains are less adaptable to a new language system.

Table 1. Foreign language aptitude of first year students at HLU

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	192	4.31	.653	Very high
2. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	192	3.95	.212	High
6. It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in a foreign language.	192	4.48	.730	Very high
10. It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it.	192	3.20	.403	Medium
11. Female students are naturally better than male ones at learning foreign languages.	192	3.15	.359	Medium
15. It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.	192	3.05	.223	Medium
26. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	192	3.72	.703	High
29. The language I am trying to learn is a very easy language.	192	2.43	.496	Low

3.2. Difficulty of language learning

Table 2 shows some difficulties that language learners may encounter while studying a foreign language. The respondents devalued the importance of knowing well a foreign culture to speak it fluently ($M = 2.52$; $SD = .752\%$), which means a low scale. It is apparent to see that language and culture are intertwined or inextricably related. In other words, language is likened to the roadmap to culture. The respondents had an opposite and different view compared with other studies (e.g., [2]; [12]; [13]). Table 2 also reflects that the participants expressed neutral opinions on the possibility of improving listening skills for a short time ($M = 3.00$; $SD = .432\%$). Among four micro-language skills, listening incorporates many challenges, which demotivates most language learners [3]. The possible pitfalls blame for the lack of control over the speed at which speakers utter, the impossibility of getting things repeated, the poor vocabulary, the failure to recognize the "signal", the problems of interpretation, inability to concentrate, and established learning habits. Thus, the moderate viewpoints of the respondents in this study are consistent with other researchers (e.g., [4]; [10]; [12]). As glimpsed at Table 2, other factors got high degrees. Specifically, grammatical structures ($M = 3.77$; $SD = .531\%$), and word orders ($M = 3.86$; $SD = .349\%$) highly troubled learners. Grammatical rules are usually different from one language to another. Learners find it complicated and difficult to remember when they try to compare with their native language. This disparity also occurs in word orders because of different ways to representation of words in a sentence, a noun phrase, or a phrasal verb. Noticeably, other studies (e.g., [4]; [5]; [14]) also discuss the complexity and challenges of grammatical and lexical entities in learning a foreign language. The last problem in Table 2 dealt with writing skills. The participants thought that they always considered writing as the most challenging ($M = 4.31$; $SD = .639\%$). In fact, writing is labelled as a cultivated skill as humans are tended to speak, not to write since we are born. When learning to write, people have to conform the formality of the logical and sequential ideas. They are also careful about the different styles and cultures [2], if the word choice is not appropriate, the meaning might fail to communicate.

Table 2. *Difficulty of language learning of first-year students at HLU*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
3. Getting used to all complexities and exceptions to the grammatical rules.	192	3.77	.531	High
4. Distinguishing between right and incorrect word orders is very complex.	192	3.86	.349	High
5. Writing rules and styles are very challenging.	192	4.32	.639	Very high
22. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak its language fluently.	192	2.51	.752	Low
30. If someone spent one hour a day practising to listen to a foreign language, it would be possible for him/her to become fluent in a short time.	192	3.00	.432	Medium

3.3. Nature of language learning

As seen at Table 3, different people have their own accents to speak, so the respondents did agree to think that they had to speak English with an excellent accent. Understanding nature of any subject existing in life helps people master them. Actually, learning is a complex process of discovery, collaboration, and inquiry facilitated by language. Thus, language is an undeniable signature of human identity as well as a distinguishing feature of culture. Language is the foundation of all communication and the fundamental means of expression. One encouraging aspect in Table 3 reflects first-year students' willing attitudes to acquire English speaking skills with a very high degree. The goal and purpose of learning a new language are clear communication with other people. In most countries, native speakers are actually forgiving of accent errors and will go the extra mile to help learners better learn their language so long as learners can effectively communicate your needs, accent will be secondary [3], [11]. It is commonly believed that language learners are supposed to have innate ability and gift mattered in language learning. Many people have a high language learning aptitude but lack the opportunities or motivation to study foreign languages. Individuals with outstanding language ability are the result of effort rather than nature [1], [13]. Actually, practicing and motivation still play pivot roles in keep foreign language learners thriving persistently. The respondents express moderate degrees on the correlation between Maths and science with learning foreign languages. Inevitably, there has not been any research investigating the relationship between them. In addition, it was undeniable that Maths and science get distinctive approaches and methods to master them because they belong to natural sciences while language learning is categorized into social sciences. Thus, language learning requires learners to form a habitual usage and need wording daily practices.

Table 3. *Nature of language learning of first year students at HLU*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
8. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well.	192	4.23	.917	Very high
12. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.	192	2.48	.501	Low
16. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	192	3.91	.292	High
20. People who are good at maths and science are not good at perceiving the surrounding as those who study foreign languages.	192	3.15	.354	Medium
24. I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.	192	3.21	.407	Medium

3.4. Learning and communication strategies

Table 4 mentions learning and communication strategies. It is remarkable to see that the respondents totally disagreed the ideas of correct pronunciation in using a foreign language ($M =$

1.52; $SD = .721\%$). In practice, communication includes verbal and non-verbal approaches, so speakers may employ body gestures to assist the understanding of the targeted information. This accounts for the reason why communicators should be confident to use English as a means of communication without paying much attention to correct pronunciation [2], [9]. Currently, English is used as an international language; therefore, it is primarily employed for communicative purposes, which leads to the low opinions on grammatical and translating methods ($M = 1.98$; $M = 1.99$, respectively) in language learning. It is necessary for grammar and translation to a certain extent in some language aspects; however, the ultimate objectives of language learning are put into practice, which focusses mainly on oral communication [11], [15]. As seen from Table 4, most respondents believed that it was advisable to have a rich vocabulary ($M = 4.01$; $SD = .440\%$). The importance of vocabulary is clearly undeniable because a robust vocabulary improves areas of communication; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Indeed, people need to use words, not correct grammar, to express their stands in communication. In addition, most respondents agreed that the practice of using a second language with native speakers empowers language learners to be fast-track progress ($M = 3.85$; $SD = .354\%$). When communicating with native speakers, learners enjoy the opportunity of developing their contemporary English, intensity of listening, natural assimilation of colloquial vocabulary and the basics of grammar, and varied accents [12], [15]. Besides, most respondents believed that they should collaborate and practise speaking their foreign language with anyone who was using the target language ($M = 3.62$; $SD = .487\%$). Actually, peer learning can be powerful tool in improving the fluency of language use. Learners have a chance to collaborate and interact with other speakers in one target language. When being in English speaking environments, people can be better at self-adjusting their English competency. The result herein is also found in the findings of other studies [7], [8], [14]. Memorization and rote learning are commonly used to form a new habitual action. Most participants agreed that learning a foreign language was different from other school subjects because the presence of memorization and learning by heart ($M = 3.91$; $SD = .292\%$). Rote learning has a deeper impact on cranial capacity. It is found to bring added plasticity to the brain's working. By repeating the words, numbers, or any pattern in the mind, the memory formation capacity of the brain is increased. Remarkably, some advantages of rote learning are that it enables longer retention, quicker concept recall, better display of knowledge, and proper retention of any procedure's steps.

Table 4. Learning and communication strategies of first year students at HLU

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
7. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating.	192	1.99	.446	Low
9. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	192	4.01	.440	High
13. If I learn to speak this language very well, it requires me to communicate more with native English speakers.	192	3.85	.354	High
14. You should not say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.	192	1.52	.721	Very low
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammatical rules.	192	1.98	.546	Low
19. If I heard someone speaking in the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practise speaking the language.	192	3.62	.487	High
23. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects in that it requires memorization and learning grammatical rules, and lexical pronunciation and meaning by heart.	192	3.91	.292	High

3.5. Motivations and expectations

Table 5 illustrates some factors relating to motivations and expectations which encourage language learners to raise their interests in developing language competency. Most participants asserted that their career prospects would be heavily influenced by a good command of English

capability ($M = 3.70$; $SD = .434\%$). In today's globalised world, English is used as the primary language of communication across the globe, so proficiency in English is a highly sought-after skill in the international workplace. This intrinsic motivation promotes the learners' desire to become fluent in English ability to work in globalized conglomerates or multinational companies. In addition, most participants acknowledged that they had a positive foreign language aptitude ($M = 3.76$; $SD = .618\%$). Language aptitude refers to a set of cognitive abilities that are predictive of how well an individual can learn a foreign language in a given amount of time and under given conditions compared with other individuals. Therefore, motivation to acquire a foreign language is positively liable to language aptitude, this is somehow same as the findings of previous studies (e.g., [1]; [4]; [10]). English is considered as Englishes or an international language, which can be used in different circumstances as long as people use different native languages. The respondents highly believed that people from different countries mainly communicate in English ($M = 3.56$; $SD = .431\%$). This finding shares similarities with other studies (e.g., [1]; [7]; [11]). Another motivation and expectation viewpoints the participants totally agreed to state were that English could be regarded as the key to future academic success ($M = 4.58$; $SD = .741\%$), and the opening of the world insights ($M = 4.38$; $SD = .721\%$). English can be the medium of instruction in almost universities in the world [9], teaching materials are also in English or translated into English. Besides, handbooks or guidelines are presented in English or even in bilingual materials. Overall, the respondents show their high motivations and expectations to acquire their English.

Table 5. Motivations and expectations of first year students at HLU

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
18. Learning English improves career prospects	192	3.70	.434	High
21. I have a good foreign language aptitude	192	3.76	.618	High
25. Learning English facilitates communication with people from different countries.	192	3.56	.431	High
27. English is the key to academic success in the future.	192	4.58	.741	Very high
28. English is the key to open the world insights	192	4.38	.721	Very high

3.6. Gender comparison in beliefs about language learning

Table 6 examines the possibility of gender difference in language learning. The *Sig.* values of Equal variances assumed in Levene's Test for Equality of Variances show that foreign language aptitude, nature of language learning, and learning and communication strategies have the values under 95%, which requires referring the values of *Sig.* (2-tailed) of Equal variances not assumed in t-test for Equality of Means to come up with final conclusion.

Table 6. Gender disparity in terms of beliefs about language learning

			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
			F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Foreign aptitude	language	Equal variances assumed	18.471	.000	-.932	190	.353
		Equal variances not assumed			-.792	77.331	.431
Difficulty of learning	language	Equal variances assumed	.539	.464	-1.427	190	.155
		Equal variances not assumed			-1.505	119.289	.135
Nature of learning	language	Equal variances assumed	18.604	.000	.536	190	.593
		Equal variances not assumed			.459	78.417	.647
Learning and communication strategies	and	Equal variances assumed	28.967	.000	-2.235	190	.027
		Equal variances not assumed			-1.798	71.255	.076
Motivations and expectations	and	Equal variances assumed	.688	.408	-1.776	190	.077
		Equal variances not assumed			-1.654	90.870	.102

As clearly displayed in Table 6, all values are above 0.05, which denotes the fact that there is no difference regarding males and females regarding the beliefs of language learning. Similarly, difficulty of language learning, as well as motivation and expectations have the values of Equal

variances assumed in the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances higher than .05%, which means to confer their interpretations of their similarities in t-test for Equality of Means. The results illustrate higher the confidence intervals ($CI = .05$). As the result, there is no difference in genders towards beliefs in language learning, too. In general, beliefs in language learning signify no difference in regards with gender.

4. Conclusion

In education, aptitude and attitudes play decisive roles in determining the success and achievement of learners in general and language learners, specifically English acquisition in particular. This study examined 5 main factors which have great impacts on English learning. On the whole, freshmen at HLU seem to formulate positive attitudes towards English language learning. They do not reckon that English is easy to learn. It is also unnecessary to know well the foreign culture in order for exchange conversations in English. Besides, they believe that excellent accent does not guarantee for a smoothy information exchanged. In addition, translation and grammatical rules could be underestimated in terms of communicative purposes. For other matters, first-year students tend to highly value these perspectives. With the hypothesis of gender disparity in English language learning, the results yield that there is no difference among male and female first-year students. This might help the school administrator easily formulate the enhanced English policies to boost the effectiveness of English teaching and learning to meet the learning outcomes with the tertiary level according to the Circular No. 24/2021/TT-BGDDT amending Regulations on testing of foreign language competencies according to the six-level Framework of Reference for Foreign Language in effect in Vietnam that are annexed to the Circular No. 23/2017/TT-BGDDT issued earlier, signed by Ministry of Education and Training¹ on September 8, 2021. For teachers, they could consult the findings to adjust their pedagogical practices to reap the great success of English language teaching and learning.

Due to the outbreak of the fatal Covid-19 pandemic, this study is bound within one higher education institution, so the findings were restricted to a small scale. Thus, it is better to conduct more future studies with both teachers and students, and broader settings, i.e., other universities to get the liability of the findings.

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