Learner Beliefs vs Learner Strategies: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to present a review of the literature on the learners' beliefs and learners' strategies by analysing a number of researches conducted on a similar topic area. The study analyses the beliefs held by learners, what constructs their beliefs and how the belief systems of learners have an effect on learning a second/foreign language. The study, in addition, presents the strategies that the learners develop in their given cultural and social backgrounds, how the beliefs and strategies differ from one learner to another and also the implications of the strategies in learning; particularly, English language learning. The study also presents how the concepts: of learner beliefs and learner strategies are interrelated like the two sides of the same coin and how they contrast. The study follows the qualitative method in reviewing and presenting an overview of some conceptualized beliefs and strategies discussed in different research articles and books.

Keywords: Learner beliefs, Learner strategies, Construct, Implication, Inter-relation and contrast.

INTRODUCTION:

Learners are social beings. Therefore, learners as social beings, actively participate in the 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) that involves a lot of inter-actions or activities. As a result, the learners develop a set of learning beliefs given the background. More-over, based on their beliefs, they develop some stra-tegies in learning a language. The beliefs that the learners hold, for example; beliefs about the nature of language, its acquisition process, successful use of strategies, and the expectations in their own success in learning the language and also in the teaching methodologies (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005).

Learners' beliefs and strategies are important variables in learning a language. The beliefs and strategies concerning the foreign language learning/second language acquisition have been the subject of various studies by different scholars. The explicit research on

learners' beliefs in foreign language learning dates back to the 1980s with Howritz who developed BALLI (BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING INVEN-TORY) in 1985 (Sedeghi & Abdi, 2015). On the other hand, researcher Oxford, (1990) developed the most comprehensive, detailed and systematic layout of strategies. Apart from them, there have been numerous researchers who have conducted their study on the learners' beliefs and strategies and have come up with different views and insights. This current study re-reads the past research and presents a literature review on the learners' beliefs and strategies.

Definition of the Concepts

The term 'belief' as Raymond defines is a personal judgement that is formed from various experiences (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Learners' beliefs are therefore not primordial but socially constructed or formed as result of the experiences that the learners go

through. Howritz, (1987) defines 'beliefs about language learning' as the language learners' preconceived ideas or notions on a variety of issues related to second or foreign language learning (Abdolahzadeh & Rajaee Nia, 2014). This demonstrates that second language learners enter into learning a language with a set of preconceived ideas or notions. Howritz has been the pioneer in systematically investigating the learners' beliefs in language learning. In fact, most of the research on the learners' beliefs has been conducted by using the BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) instrument (Ariogul *et al.,* 2009). The learners' strategy in second language learning has been defined by many researchers in the field. Researcher Chamot came up with a comprehensive definition of learners' strategy. He defines learner's strategy of learning a foreign language as the process, techniques, approaches and actions that the students take to facilitate their language learning (Hardan, 2013). Therefore, a learner's strategy in language learning is the overall process that the learners take is learners' strategy. Rubin, (1975) in classifying the term describes strategies as the processes that contribute directly or indirectly to language teaching (Griffiths, 2004; Islam, 2023).

The Similarities and Differences between Learners' Beliefs and Strategies

Language learning strategy of learners is, in fact, influenced by the Learners' beliefs about language learning Therefore, learners' beliefs and strategies are related to each other but the relationship between the beliefs and strategy use is non-unidirectional which indicates that just as beliefs about in learning a second language can have effect on strategies, similarly strategies too can have effect on learners' beliefs or belief system (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012). Learners' beliefs are greatly influenced by the sociocultural settings where the learners take part for learning and the beliefs of the learners can influence both their attitudes towards the language itself as well as towards learning the language in general (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Learners' beliefs and strategies both are geared towards language acquisition: beliefs are synonymous with ideologies and these ideologies are the results of learners' experiences from the sociocultural and political background and, on the other hand, strategies

constitute techniques, approaches or methods of learners which too result from the experiences of the similar backgrounds as beliefs. The learners' beliefs are idiosyncratic and subjective (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012), so are the learners' strategies. But the differences between these concepts, for example, the beliefs are ideologies, ideas, conceptions and thoughts but on the other hand, the strategies are implementations of thoughts through action, use of methods, techniques and approaches as Oxford defines learners' strategy saying, "specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed and more effective" (Loganathan *et al.,* 2016). The learners use different strategies being influenced by their beliefs/ideologies. Beliefs are, in fact, hard to define whereas strategies are more concrete and easier to define. There is a common-sensical understanding of what strategies are but no commonsensical understanding of what beliefs are (Maftoon & Shakouri*,* 2012).

The Importance of the Concepts in Linguistics

The concepts of learner's beliefs and learners' strategies are very significant in the study of language because of the growing interest in language learning. Every learner, no matter what the field of study is, develops certain mind sets and beliefs regarding learning: how and where he/she can learn and also about the teachers who teach. These preconceived beliefs and mindset are held by learners which can either facilitate or complicate their learning (Kaymakamoğlu & Atmaca, 2016). Since language learning has been one of the growing needs of the modern world, the study of learners' beliefs has been of greater importance in facilitating language learners to learn the language to the maximum level. Similarly, the study of learners' strategies has been of the same importance in language learning just as learners' beliefs. Loganathan *et al.* (2016) cite Bialystok and co-authors as follows: Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have emerged not only as an essential component of various theoretical models of language proficiency but also as the means of achieving learner autonomy in the process of language learning" (Loganathan *et al.,* 2016). In any language learning context, a learner follows a set of strategies in learning a language. Therefore, the study of learner' strategies which repre-

sent action, the use of techniques and devices, the use of method and learners' approaches have been very relevant in facilitating the learners to acquire the target language successfully. There is a lot of research on learners' strategies and it is very demanding in understanding the strategies that the learners develop and follow in language acquisition.

DISCUSSION:

Learner beliefs are in general perceptions or ideas of the learners towards learning language. Abdolahzadeh and his co-author cite Lockhart who describes the learners' beliefs as general assumptions that learners hold about themselves as learners" (Abdolahzadeh *et al.,* 2014). The learners' backgrounds, individual personality and also learners' previous experience; both positive and negative, shape learners' beliefs. Therefore, given their cultural background, family/ home background and individual differences such as personality learners hold various beliefs in learning a language. Some learners believe learning a language in its natural environment which indicates the native countries where the language is spoken. Also, some learners believe that a language can be learnt the best in one's own country together with the learners who are new learners of the language too. Similarly, some may believe in natural tendency in learning a language that comes at birth but on the contrary, others may believe in one's ambition, determination and effort in learning a language. For some, theoretical learning of language works best but for others this belief may not be the same and may believe in communicative language learning. Some may also believe that language learning happen the best in one's childhood but for others it may be that the adults who are more developed cognitively can learn the language the best. All these beliefs indicate various belief-systems of learners depending on their perceptions and ideas. However, learners' Language Learning Strategies are the methods which the learners use for achieving the success in learning a language over a period. Kupper defines learning strategies as - techniques that students use to comprehend, store and remember new information and skills (Loganathan *et al.,* 2016). Researcher Oxford has explained six different strategies of learning a language, for example: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strate-

gies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. He describes that memory strategies help learners to store and remember information about the language, cognitive strategies enable learners to understand and produce new skills in learning a language, compensation strategies help learners to communicate even if the learners have deficiencies in their language knowledge, for example, the learners can guess meanings and can also overcome the limitation in speaking and writing, metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their own learning through organizing, planning, and evaluating, affective strategies help the learners gain control over their emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values, and finally the social strategies allow learners to have interaction with the other people in the society or in any other context (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). Learners' beliefs and learners' strategies are developed from experiences of the learners by interacting with other people around. Learners' beliefs and learners' strategies are inter-related to each other. Learners' beliefs have an impact on the choice of learning strategies. But at the same time, just as the learners' beliefs can influence the ways of learning a language, the strategies can also influence the learners' beliefs. This non-unidirectional relationship between the beliefs and strategies indicates that a learner may have certain beliefs in learning a language but that may be changed when the learner comes across a strategy of learning which is more effective. Therefore, both the learners' beliefs and strategies are inter-related. It holds to be true that because of the need of learning English as a second/ foreign language, the significance of the learners' beliefs and strategies is immense. Both of these concepts make learners understand the functional dimensions of language learning, and also help the learners learn the language easily with the accuracy and proficiency.

CONCLUSION:

Understanding learners' beliefs and strategies plays a vital role for learners in acquiring the target language. This understanding is essential to learners because a learner in context follows a set of beliefs and strategies in learning a language. Hall, (2011) states that learner beliefs are important since they guide learners' thinking and behavior and the learners' thinking and

behavior lead to learners' adopting strategies of the learning a language (Sedeghi & Abdi, 2015). Learners' beliefs cover a number of issues and, can leave an impact on the learners' motivation in learning, learners' expectations towards learning a language, on the perception about what is easier or difficult about a language and also on the strategies they prefer in learning a language (Richards & Lockhart*,* 1994). Therefore, the study of learners' beliefs and strategies, the construction of the learners' beliefs and strategies, the relationship between the two concepts and their importance have been very relevant in facilitating the learners to acquire the target language successfully. At this point, it can be said that the learners' belief and learners' strategies are just the two sides of the same coin and, both of this influence each other: learners' beliefs influence the learners on what strategies the learners will choose to apply and also the learners' strategies influence the learners' beliefs. This indicates learners' beliefs and strategies are subject to change given the experiences of learners in different contexts.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

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