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LANGUAGE LEARNING BELIEFS OF EFL LEARNERS: DIFFERENT VARIABLES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs of Turkish learners of English (EFL) as a foreign language. 12th grade students' (in the field of Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L)) learning beliefs are investigated considering sex and field of study as variables. The population of this study is 637 EFL students in various high schools; Yusuf Kalkavan, Mersin Ticaret Sanayi Odası and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High Schools in 2008-2009 academic year. The instrument administered in this study is Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), which was designed by Horwitz in 1985. The collected data were analyzed via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). According to the interpreted results, there is a significant difference among the 12th grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs. The other significant finding is that students' learning beliefs varied in considering sex as a variable.

Keywords: Beliefs, Language Learning, BALLI, Turkish Learners, Variables

İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN DİL ÖĞRENME İNANÇLARI: FARKLI DEĞİŞKENLER

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Anadolu liselerinde İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançlarına dair yürütülen çalışmanın bulgularını sunmaktır. Çalışmada, 12. sınıf Sayısal, Eşit Ağırlık ve Yabancı Dil bölümü öğrencileri arasında bölüm ve cinsiyet değişkenlerine göre bu öğrencilerin inanç sistemlerinde farklılık olup olmadığı araştırılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini 2008-2009 eğitim-öğretim yılında Yusuf Kalkavan, Mersin Ticaret Sanayi Odası ve Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anadolu Liselerinde öğrenim gören toplam 637 12. sınıf Sayısal, Eşit Ağırlık ve Yabancı Dil bölümü öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak Horwitz'in "Dil Öğrenme Hakkında İnançlar Envanteri" (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory, 1985) kullanılmıştır. Veriler SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda farklı bölümlerdeki öğrencilerin dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançlarında anlamlı bir fark olduğu görülmüştür. Araştırmanın diğer bulgusu ise kız ve erkek öğrencilerin dil öğrenimi hakkındaki inançları arasında anlamlı bir fark olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnançlar, Dil Öğrenimi, BALLI, Türk Öğrenciler, Değişkenler

1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Beliefs, as to Richardson (1996), are "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (cited in Huang, 2006:62). Learners may have various beliefs about learning; may change over time, different from learner to learner, dynamic, changeable, constructed by individuals differently; but consistent with the development and limitations of individuals.

Second language learners' beliefs are of for learners' success or failure in language learning as well as the destiny. The beliefs may vary; including the difficulty of the target language, its scope, its grammar, learning strategies, the nature of language learning, the role of the teacher, learners' self-efficacy, and their expectations for their future with second language. If learners' negative beliefs are proved to be true in lessons, then that may be a frustration or burden preventing effective learning process.

The question of what students believe about second language learning is discussed by Richards and Lockhart (1994). They have concluded that learners' belief system covers a wide range of issue and, can influence their motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, as well as the kind of learning strategies they favor.

The beliefs about language learning stem from many sources including learners' thoughts about their learning capacities and tendencies; preconceptions of the people around them about how easy or difficult to learn a second language is, their parents' views about the importance of a second language and so on. Also, Tumposky (1991) points out that "Learners' beliefs are influenced by the social context of learning" (cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 52). Moreover, in learning process, the language teacher affects students' attitudes toward the second language. Some learners expect teachers to tell what they will do exactly, and to show how to learn; but some of them want to see on their own how best they are learning. If those expectations are not met by the teacher at the very beginning, the learners may begin to develop negative beliefs which cause negative consequences about language learning. The differences about language learning between two genders are discussed by Bernat and Lyod (2007) and Tercanlioglu (n.d.). Both studies have revealed that males and females seem to differ significantly in their beliefs about language learning.

Learning beliefs play a significant role, and reflect us how we perceive, interpret, and conceptualize the world. Consistent with the reality of the learner, beliefs may represent reality, and serve as a basis for learning. To find out the beliefs about language learning, researchers and teachers need some measurements to know what learners believe about themselves or the language they are learning. Of course, generalization is not true; there may be individual differences among learners. However, in order to draw the most effective way for teaching, teachers should know general beliefs and general needs of their students. The aim of this paper is to reveal whether the beliefs of the high school students about language learning differ according to their field of study and genders.

In this paper, the following research questions will guide the study.

- Is there any difference among the 12th grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students in terms of their English learning beliefs?

- Is there any difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the 12th grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students?

Throughout this paper, firstly, the related studies conducted so far will be dealt with in the literature review part. Secondly, the instrument used, the participants involved in, data collection process and data analysis will be explained in the methodology part. Then, the findings of the study will be discussed. Finally, the implications of the study will be mentioned.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

In the learning process, there are many factors distracting the learners from language learning. One of the most important factors is the beliefs students bring with. Reviewed literature reflects that although many attempts to describe and classify the learner beliefs, due to many factors, beliefs are different in nature and context. This study will reveal whether there is a relation between students' success in language learning and their beliefs about that language. Besides, whether learners' beliefs change considering their sex will be another focus of this study.

3. METHOD (YÖNTEM)

3.1. The Participants of the Study (Çalışmanın Katılımcıları)

From three schools, Yusuf Kalkavan, Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High Schools, 637 students have participated in this study in 2008-2009 academic year. Of these participants, 394 are Science students (168 females, 226 males), 201 are Social Sciences students (113 females, 88 males) and 42 are Language students (34 females, 8 males). 315 of them are females and 322 of them are males. The mean age of the participants is 18.

Table 1. The participants
(Tablo 1. Katılımcılar)

	FEMALE	MALE	N
SCIENCE	168	226	394
SOCIAL SCIENCES	113	88	201
LANGUAGE	34	8	42
TOTAL	315	322	637

3.2. The Tool of Data Collection (Veri Toplama Aracı)

The survey instrument that has been administered in this study is Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) which is designed by Elaine K. Horwitz in 1985 (see Attachment. It has 34 items. The BALLI had a Cronbach's alpha of .79. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998), the acceptable value of Cronbach alpha is at least .70 (cited in Tercanlioglu, n.d.).

BALLI measures beliefs about five language learning areas: (1) Foreign language aptitude, (2) the difficulty of language learning, (3) the nature of language learning, (4) learning and communication strategies and (5) motivations and expectations. All items were rated on a 5- point rating scale, with 32 items ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The response options asking for the difficulty of the English language ranged from *very difficult* (a) to *very easy* (e), and the one for the item asking about how long it takes to speak English ranged from *less than a year* (a) to *you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day* (e) (Altan, 2006).

3.3. Data Collection Process (Veri Toplama Süreci)

The population of this study was 12th grade S, SS and L students in İçel Anatolian High School, Yusuf Kalkavan Anatolian High School, Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Anatolian High School and Mehmet Adnan Özçelik Anatolian High School in the district of Mersin city. After the Ministry of Education's official permission, the scale was administered to the students in the mentioned schools during morning sessions.

3.4. Data Analysis (Veri Analizi)

All data have been analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 11.5). In order to find out the difference among the 12th grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs, one - way ANOVA has been used. In order to find out the difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the participants, independent - samples T test has been used.

4. THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS (BULGULAR VE TARTIŞMALAR)

The group statistics that show the number of males and females, mean, standard deviation and standard error mean are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Group statistics
(Tablo 2. Grup istatistikleri)

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BELIEF FEMALE	315	81,8794	10,33444	,58228
MALE	322	88,5870	14,15491	,78882

The findings and discussions of this study are presented below according to the research questions in the given order;

1. Is there any difference among the 12th grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students in terms of their English learning beliefs?

Table 3. The difference in language learning beliefs of groups One - Way ANOVA)

(Tablo 3. Grubun dil öğrenme inançlarındaki farklılıklar tek yönlü ANOVA)

BELIEF	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1183,975	2	591,987	3,615	,027*
Within Groups	103831,6	634	163,772		
Total	105015,6	636			

Note. * $p < .05$

As Table 3 shows, there is a significant difference among 12th grade S, SS and L students in terms of their English learning beliefs. That may be interpreted in many ways.

Firstly, students' pre-existing beliefs may have affected their language learning. Although belief system is unique and individual for a person, it is affected by the previous experiences, environment and culture in which a person lives.

When considered the sample population, they have been focusing more on a nationwide University Entrance Exam (UEE), which is a crucial step, and a tiring process for the students in Turkey. 12th grade students heavily busy with the subjects related to this exam. So, the students may not have given much importance to learning English since they may not need it in UEE. Present goals of the

learners may have influenced their language learning beliefs. While language classes have more positive tendency towards language, the Science and Social Sciences students are busy with other courses. Each learner may give different reactions to particular course/s, and vary according to goals.

In three schools from which the data have been collected, it has been witnessed that there are 595 S and SS students; whereas there are only 42 L students. Language students' have approached with positive beliefs and have shown goal-oriented and highly motivated reactions compared with the others.

That the education policy of Turkey does not require the graduates to have a definite level of proficiency in English may have affected their future plans, so language learning and their priorities.

Consequently, the significant difference among S, SS and L students has been an expected result.

2. Is there any difference between two genders in terms of their English learning beliefs among the 12th grade Science (S), Social Sciences (SS) and Language (L) students?

Table 4. The difference in language learning beliefs between two genders independent samples t- test)

(Tablo 4. İki cinsiyet arasındaki dil öğrenme inançlarındaki farklılıklar bağımsız gruplar t- testi)

Equality of Means		Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t- test for Equality of Variances		
Mean	Std. error	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2- tailed)
Difference Interval of the Difference						
Lower	Upper					
BELIEF	Equal variances assumed	12,516	,000	-6,818	63	,000**
6,7076	,98375	-8,63938	-4,77580			
6,7076	,98045	-8,63321	-4,78197	-6,841	587,833	,000**
	not assumed					

Note. **p<.01

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of their English learning beliefs. The reason behind this result may be females' position in the society. As stated above, the students of each field of study just deal with the subjects of their own areas. However, when this situation is considered in terms of genders, it can be seen that females differ from males at this point. In other words, females have more tendency to different areas which will be useful for them such as learning English. They may think that it can be better for them if they know English beside the other academic subjects that they know and this can help them with their career.

5. CONCLUSION (SONUÇ)

Since this is a unique study which deals with the difference in English learning beliefs among the three areas at high schools and reveals the difference among these three areas in terms their language

learning beliefs, the finding of the first research question cannot be compared or contrasted with the findings of previous studies. Although a significant difference has been found out between genders in this study, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) have found out no difference among the students enrolled in an Academic English Program in terms of genders. In the same way, Tercanlioglu (n.d.) has not found out any difference between the two genders in her study she has conducted on preservice EFL teachers.

For further steps, a study can be conducted with the same students both at 9th grade and 12th grade in order to find out whether the students' beliefs about learning English change during their high school education if time is available. Moreover, in order to see whether there is any relationship between beliefs about language learning and success in that language, participants' English exam marks and scale scores can be compared if conditions are available.

This study has been carried out with the students from three Anatolian high schools in Mersin. If more Anatolian high schools in Turkey are included in a further study, the results may be varied, and there can be more generalizable points for all Anatolian high school students. Moreover, a similar study can be conducted on students in all high schools in Mersin and the results can be compared with the results of Anatolian high schools. Lastly, this study may reveal different results in other regions of the country.

It is a fact that there is no fixed belief system which covers all learners. For teachers and researchers, it is necessary to find out the implicit beliefs about learning/language. For a teacher to know what his / her students think or believe about language learning is a good way to create a suitable classroom environment, and to choose teaching techniques/ strategies which make the lessons much closer to their objectives. Also, since the teachers are key characters in learning process of their students, by choosing different strategies according to the students' beliefs, they can make the lessons more enjoyable, and the teachers should be able to make their students believe that they can learn English. So, the wall on the way of learning will be disappeared with the help of knowing what students believe about the lesson.

This study is limited with 12th grade students, learning English as a foreign language, and who are also in the process of choosing their field/path of study for a university education. Language learning beliefs of students from three disciplines have been considered so as to see the differences of beliefs at the same age, level and culture. Results have shown that students' language learning beliefs differ in many ways; while their pre-existing beliefs play an important role in language learning, students goals, priorities in their field of study, and place of language in life path will determine how they conceptualize language learning.

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ATTACHMENT (EKİ)

Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory

Below are beliefs that some people have about learning foreign languages. There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your opinions and trying to find out whether there is any difference among the beliefs of 12th grade students about learning English according to their areas. Read each statement and decide if you:

strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

School:

Class / Area:

Gender:

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.					
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.					
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.					
4. English is: (a) a very difficult language. (b) a difficult language. (c) a language of medium difficulty. (d) an easy language. (e) a very easy language.					
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.					
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.					
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.					
8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.					
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.					
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another.					

11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning a foreign language.					
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.					
13. I enjoy practicing English with the Americans I meet.					
14. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.					
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well: (a) Less than a year (b) 1-2 years (c) 3-5 years (d) 5- 10 years (e) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day					
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.					
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.					
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.					
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.					
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.					
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.					
22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.					
23. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.					
24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know Americans better.					
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.					
26. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.					
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.					
28. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.					

29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.					
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.					
31. I want to learn to speak English well.					
32. I would like to have American friends.					
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.					
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.					

Source: Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 72.