

**Beliefs about Language Learning of  
Thai Upper Secondary School Students  
in Different Educational Contexts**

---

---

**Sirawit Apairach**

**Jutarat Vibulphol**

*Teaching English as a Foreign Language Program  
Chulalongkorn University*

**Abstract**

Beliefs about language learning are considered key for success in language learning. These beliefs can be shaped by contextual factors (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Dole & Sinatra, 1994; Negueruela-Azarola, 2011). This paper explores the beliefs about language learning of Thai secondary school students in two educational contexts: in the so-called English programs and in the regular Thai public programs. Responses were gathered from 458 twelfth-grade students in six schools that offered both programs, and the data were collected using an adapted Thai version of BALLI 2.0 (Horwitz, 2012). The findings revealed differences in beliefs among students in the English program and those in the regular program. The English program students who have more exposure to English were found to have more facilitative beliefs about language learning than those

in the regular program who have limited exposure to English. A higher number of English program students showed beliefs that are supportive of autonomous learning such as seeing the importance of practicing in various means and learning from various resources. They also believed that they could find online learning resources for self-practice. They tended to focus on the mastery of speaking skills because they believed it could lead to career opportunities. They wanted to be good at speaking English and believed that they would do very well. The best place to learn English was believed to be in an ESL environment.

**Keywords:** learner beliefs, beliefs about language learning, educational contexts, English program

## **Introduction**

Beliefs about language learning are a determinant of one's language learning behaviors (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Mori, 1999; Park, 1995). Positive beliefs tend to encourage positive behaviors (Mantle-Bromley, 1995); on the other hand, some beliefs may obstruct a language learner's progression (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998). Learners may form beliefs intentionally or incidentally based on the learners' experiences in language learning (Vibulphol, 2004; Wenden, 1998). Beliefs about language learning are complex in nature and are potentially sensitive to contextual influences (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Dole & Sinatra, 1994; Negueruela-Azarola, 2011). This paper explores the effects of the educational context on beliefs about language learning. In Thailand, a growing number of public schools across the country have offered two kinds of programs, regular and English programs. The educational contexts in these two programs are quite different. The main difference is quite obviously the medium of instruction, yielding different amounts of exposure to English in all subjects except for Social Studies and Thai Language (Ministry of Education, 2003).

With the exception of English class, the regular program provides instruction in all subjects in Thai language.

Studies have shown that exposure to the target language have effects on factors related to second language learning. For example, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) found that learners in French immersion programs with longer exposure in L2 interaction had some advantages over those who lacked L2 use. They had greater willingness to communicate and became less anxious in L2 communication. Their communicative competence in the target language was also found to be higher than those with less exposure. The learners with more L2 exposure were also found to have higher proficiency, possess international posture, and engage more in communication in and outside the classroom (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). L2 exposure was also found to influence learner's beliefs (Weseley, 2012). ÖZ (2007) found that learners who were exposed to English intensively in the educational program tended to hold beliefs about social interaction and spoken language.

Even though English programs have been offered in Thailand for over a decade, there are only a couple of studies that examined the effects of the two educational contexts on students' learning and other related learner factors (see Daosodsai, 2010; Sumonwiriya, 2008). The beliefs of the students in the two programs have been largely unexplored. This article therefore aims to reveal the beliefs of Thai students in the regular and English programs. The findings presented in this paper are a part of a larger study that examined relationships between beliefs about language learning, language learning strategies, gender, proficiency, and educational contexts (Apairach, 2015).

## **Review of the Literature**

### ***Beliefs about Language Learning***

The concept of beliefs about language learning emerges from the area of second language acquisition. Beliefs are influential factors in individual learner differences. In social

psychological perspective, beliefs are part of the study of cognition and are defined as an affective construct (Dole & Sinatra, 1994). Beliefs about language learning deal with learners' cognition that forms certain kinds of attitudes or ideas towards the language they are learning, and this effect largely impacts learners' acquisition of a language. Horwitz, a pioneering researcher of beliefs, refers to them as *preconceived ideas* (1987) and *preconceived notions* (1987, 1988). Horwitz (1987, 1988) asserted that language learners hold a number of different preconceived notions concerning the perceived nature of language learning. According to Benson, Nyikos and Oxford, learners always bring with them "a complex web of attitudes, experiences, expectations, beliefs, and learning strategies" (as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005, p. 4). Likewise, Vibulphol (2004) echoed this concept, saying that people hold "preconceived ideas" about a variety of matters and these notions potentially affect their understanding of what they encounter.

When talking about beliefs from another standpoint, some researchers are likely to refer to the concept of metacognitive knowledge, and this term, according to Wenden (1998), can be used interchangeably with beliefs. Wenden explained that *metacognitive knowledge* refers to learners' knowledge based on cognitive theories on which the process of learning, the nature of learning, and learners themselves are the focus. This idea is consistent with Sakui and Gaies (1999) who refer to metacognitive knowledge as a broader term of learners' beliefs. Furthermore, Livingston (1997) gave a concise explanation of this concept as "general knowledge" concerning a particular mechanism of how people learn and deal with information. Learners form certain assumptions that influence their learning, and it can be seen that these perceptions are systematic based on to the following characteristics of their metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1998, p. 517):

- 1) a part of a learner's store of acquired knowledge
- 2) relatively stable and stable

- 3) early developing
- 4) a system of related ideas
- 5) an abstract representation of a learner's experience.

In brief, definitions of beliefs vary depending on specific theories or perspectives on which the researchers focus. However, these definitions do have a common feature in that they are about cognition. Beliefs about language learning can be referred to as what learners generally perceive about their language learning, including their own ability, how to learn a language, and how a language should be taught. The construct of belief in this study is based on Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, which can be classified into five sub-categories: 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.

### ***Educational Context***

The context of language learning and teaching is a factor on which researchers have focused. The definitions and characteristics of context vary according to the underlying approaches or specific frameworks they are based upon. The specific language teaching context is referred to as the *institutional context*. Brown (2000) distinguishes institutional context into two major categories including elementary and secondary schools and higher education institutions. Within these two contexts, different models of English language education are implemented. For instance, the basic education level features submersion, immersion, shelter English, mainstreaming, and bilingual programs. These models primarily aim to support learners in a content-based manner and is appropriately adapted to different backgrounds of learners and their needs. For tertiary education, various models are also implemented such as pre-academic programs, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Vocational and Technical English, Literacy, and Survival/Social Curricula (Brown, 2000). These models largely focus on the

specific purposes of learners, especially their areas of interest and professions. Different models are implemented according to the purposes of the learners in their respective contexts.

In Thailand, the Ministry of Education (2003) officially launched the *English Program* (EP) in public schools where English is used as a medium of instruction. This program mainly aims at enhancing students' English abilities and skills. In contrast to students in the regular program, English Program students are exposed to relatively more intensive English interaction as every subject is taught in English, with the exceptions of Thai and Social Studies. Because of the longer exposure and more intensive experience with English in the English program, it is conceivable that the language development of English program students is substantially greater than it is for students in the regular program. Studies have shown that learners who have longer exposure in L2 interaction will be more likely to have higher willingness to communicate and become less anxious (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000). Importantly, this contextual influence is also found to impact learner's motivation, attitudes, and affect (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). Due to the fact that learners' attitudes are involved, this essentially provides a link to learner's beliefs, which are regarded as a subset of attitudes (Dole & Sinatra, 1994). To elaborate on the effect, Negueruela-Azarola (2011, p. 360) asserts that beliefs are "...historically stable because of their social meaning but susceptible to change because of their contextual nature."

Some studies have investigated the effects of educational context on learner's beliefs and concluded that learners who are more exposed to a L2 learning environment tend to possess positive viewpoints about the foreign language and their learning (Wesely, 2012) and positively emphasize interpersonal interactions and speaking skills with L1 speakers (ÖZ, 2007). This means that English program students are more likely to possess positive beliefs about language learning.

## Research Methods

The population of this study was upper secondary school students in Thai public secondary schools in Bangkok that offer both regular and English programs. A total of 458 twelfth-grade students from six schools in Bangkok Secondary Educational Service Areas 1 and 2 participated in the study. The secondary educational service areas is the system delegated by the Office of the Basic Education Commission in order to manage the educational areas throughout the country. Bangkok Educational Service Areas 1 and 2 are two separated areas in Bangkok which consist of 23 and 27 districts respectively. For the upper secondary school students in Bangkok, the twelfth-grade students were selected to represent the population to ensure that the participants had the minimum of three years experience in different educational contexts, so they had received different amounts of exposure to English in the classroom. Students from only one classroom from each program in the school participated in the study, which resulted in an unequal number of students from the two programs. 253 participants were from the regular program and 205 were from the English program.

The data were collected in the second semester of the academic year 2013 using an adapted Thai version of BALLI 2.0 (Horwitz, 2012) with additional questions addressing demographic information and a question about the program of study. In the adapted Thai version of BALLI 2.0, certain words were changed to contextualize the meanings of Items no. 4, 34, 37, and 42 according to the customizable nature of the questionnaire asserted by Horwitz (2012). Therefore, Item no. 4: "People from my country are good at learning foreign languages." was changed to *Thai people are good at learning foreign languages.* Item no. 34: "I have to spend so much time preparing for big English tests, that I don't have time to actually learn English." was changed to *I have to spend so much time preparing for big English tests (e.g. GAT, O-NET, TOEFL), that I don't have time to actually learn English.* Item no. 37: "People in my country feel that it is important to speak English." was changed to *Thai people feel that it is important to*

*speak English*. Finally, Item no. 42: “Tests like the TOEFL, the IELTS, or the TOEIC are good tests of my English ability.” was changed to *General Aptitude Test (GAT) or Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) are good tests of my English ability*.

The adapted Thai version of BALLI was back-translated and validated by two native speakers of English to ensure the meanings of the translated texts and ensure validity of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the BALLI was tried out with a group of thirty students and satisfactorily received Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.82 for its reliability. For beliefs about language learning, the BALLI 2.0 inventory aimed to elicit the participants’ beliefs in five categories (see Appendix A) as conceptualized by Horwitz (1988), which are 1) beliefs about foreign language aptitude, 2) beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, 3) beliefs about the nature of language learning, 4) beliefs about learning and communication strategies, and 5) beliefs about motivations and expectations. The inventory was designed using five Likert-scales. The participants were asked to indicate the degree of agreement and disagreement to each item. The scale ranges from 1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 ‘strongly agree’. In order to see the proportion and tendency of the reported beliefs, the levels of agreement (strongly agree and agree) and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree) were grouped together. Thus, three groups of responses were reported: disagree, agree, and neutral.

## **Results and Discussions**

In this section, the findings about student beliefs about language learning will be reported first. The key differences in beliefs of the students from the regular and English programs will be highlighted and discussed in the later section.

### ***Beliefs about Language Learning of Thai Upper Secondary School Students***

From the findings, certain patterns of beliefs about language learning were found in the responses from the Thai upper secondary school students.



As to the beliefs about foreign language aptitude (see Table 1), both regular and English program students believed that every person has the potential to master spoken language. When it comes to age, the majority of both groups reported that younger learners are better at learning languages, but they were neutral about gender. They did not think that men or women are better at learning a second language. Even though both groups of students reported that Thai people understand the importance of being able to speak English, the majority of both groups (more than fifty percent) remained neutral in the belief that Thais are good foreign language learners. As to the language aptitude of Thai people, such a belief can yield negative results in foreign language learning if they view a certain group of people, in this case Thai people, to have low potential for learning a foreign language (Horwitz, 1988). In turn, they might feel that they, as a member of the group, may also not succeed in language learning. Regarding age, the belief of Thai upper secondary school students in the present study is consistent with the trend that children possess several advantages over adults (Brown, 2000), a result which has also been reported in other studies about Thai students' beliefs (Chirdchoo & Wudthayagorn, 2001; Fujiwara, 2011; Vibulphol, 2004). In terms of gender, it might be reasonable to assume that the two groups of students believed that both males and females can potentially be successful language learners in spite of the common belief that women perform better in language assessments (Ellis, 1994; Brown, 2006).

**Table 1: Percentages of Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude  
(N = 458)**

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.			
Regular program	12.1	39.3	48.6
English program	13.8	31.8	54.5
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.			
Regular program	9.3	21.9	68.9
English program	8	14.7	77.3
4. Thai people are good at learning foreign languages.			
Regular program	27.2	52.2	20.7
English program	22.8	57.3	19.9
9. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.			
Regular program	18.6	34	47.3
English program	13.7	40.8	45.5
14. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.			
Regular program	25.6	44.1	30.4
English program	18	46	36
22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.			
Regular program	36	44.5	19.4
English program	34.1	42.7	23.2
36. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.			
Regular program	18.2	29.6	52.3
English program	12.3	26.5	61.1

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
39. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.			
Regular program	15.4	37.2	47.3
English program	15.5	33.6	49.8
40. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.			
Regular program	8.1	20.2	71.1
English program	7.6	17.5	74.9

Regarding the beliefs about the difficulty of language learning (see Table 2), the participants thought that English is not very difficult. Generally, the finding that English is a language of medium difficulty supports other reported beliefs in previous studies (Chirdchoo & Wudthayakorn, 200; Fujiwara, 2011; Vibulphol, 2004). Viewing a language as moderately difficult can be considered quite facilitative. Horwitz (1988) asserted that believing that a language to be rather easy can confuse students when their learning is at some point delayed. Taking this result into consideration, it is probable that Thai learners in these aforementioned studies held a realistic belief about English difficulty. In terms of the estimated time to study English, most of the participants believed that by practicing one hour per day, English could be learned in less than two years. The findings of the present study are consistent with findings in Fujiwara (2011). According to Horwitz (1988), thinking that it takes only a few years of acquisition periods based on such limited timeframe seems to be an underestimation. However, some other studies found different results. In Vibulphol (2004), Thai pre-service teachers and undergraduates and graduates in Jones and Gardner (2009) reported that it takes at least five years to speak English well. It might be possible that learners who have had less experience in learning, such as twelfth-grade students in the present study and Fujiwara's first-year students, are likely to underestimate the

amount of time required. However, another group of students like the pre-service teachers and graduate students who are considered more mature learners seemed to possess more reasonable expectations about the length time needed. These results should be carefully considered by teachers in order to cope with such improbable expectations in younger students.

**Table 2: Percentages of Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning (Multiple-choice items) (N = 458)**

Statements	Regular program	English program
43. English is:		
1) a very difficult language	5.3	2.8
2) a difficult language	38.1	30.8
3) a language of medium difficulty	44.5	53.6
4) an easy language	11.7	12.3
5) a very easy language	0.4	0.5
44. If someone spend one hour learning English every day, how long would it take him or her to speak English well?		
1) less than a year	20.2	21.3
2) 1-2 years	43.7	36
3) 3-5 years	23.9	22.3
4) 5-10 years	8.5	12.3
5) You can't learn a language in one hour a day	3.6	8.1

In terms of the comparative difficulty of language learning (see Table 3), the participants showed mixed responses about the difficulty of language learning, especially when it comes to the skills of English. It seems that Thai students hold varied ideas about these skills as the majority of Thai students (Chirdchoo & Wudthayakorn, 2001; Jones & Gardner, 2009) agreed that reading and writing skills are easier, while the majority in Vibulphol (2004)

and Padgate (2008) viewed writing as a more comparatively difficult than other skills.

**Table 3: Percentages of Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning (N = 458)**

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.			
Regular program	14.2	30	55.9
English program	8	28	63.9
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.			
Regular program	13.7	38.1	48.2
English program	8.5	26.5	64.9
25. It is easier to speak than understand English.			
Regular program	15	36.8	48.2
English program	9.5	40.3	50.2
33. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.			
Regular program	21.1	40.5	38.5
English program	30.9	36	33.1

Regarding beliefs about the nature of language learning (see Table 4), the participants believed in the importance of learning the cultures of the English speakers and also the different vocabulary, which is consistent with other studies (Jones & Gardner, 2009; Fujiwara, 2011; Tang & Tien, 2014; Vibulphol, 2004). Horwitz suggests that these particular emphases on culture and vocabulary can be a predictor of how students are likely to exert themselves and focus on different aspects of language learning. In this case, Thai upper secondary school students are inclined to spend time learning new cultures and memorizing vocabulary.

With regards to developing grammatical competence, it was found that regular program students were less interested in grammar learning while more English program students considered it a priority. However, it should be noted that despite the differences in terms of the agreement, there was no consensus among the groups. They also admitted that they learn English so that they could get to know the speakers of English. After all, when it comes to grammar learning, more English Program students valued the knowledge of linguistic rules and structures, yet a comparable number of them were neutral. This shows that the importance of grammar is vague when compared to other studies of Thai students where the majority were focused on English grammar (Chirdchoo & Wudthatyakorn, 2001; Vibulphol, 2004; Jones & Gardner, 2009). On the other hand, a later study of Thai EFL university students (Fujiwara, 2011) found uncertainty in this belief, supporting the findings of the present study. One of the reasons why the focus of grammar became unclear might possibly be because Thai upper secondary school students (from both programs) had the motivation to become friends with English speakers and believed that Thai people believe in the importance of speaking English. These beliefs imply that the students did not view English language learning as merely a matter of grammar rules or academic testing. Rather, they seemed to prioritize the benefits of verbal communication.

**Table 4: Percentages of Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning (*N* = 458)**

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
7. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.			
Regular program	10.1	26.3	63.6
English program	8.6	25.6	65.9

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Levels of Agreement</b>		
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>
10. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.			
Regular program	12.1	39.7	48.2
English program	10.9	24.6	64.4
12. In order to speak English, you have to think in English.			
Regular program	20.2	41.7	38.1
English program	19.4	34.1	46.4
15. The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words.			
Regular program	9.7	31.2	59.1
English program	13.7	28.4	57.8
17. It is better to have teachers who are native-speakers of English.			
Regular program	12.1	25.5	62.4
English program	3.3	20.9	75.8
20. The most important part of learning English is learning the grammar.			
Regular program	31.6	37.2	31.2
English program	20.3	39.3	40.3
27. I can learn a lot from non-native English teachers.			
Regular program	19.5	43.3	37.2
English program	17.5	43.1	39.3
28. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects.			
Regular program	14.9	31.2	53.9
English program	8	35.1	56.8
30. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from Thai.			
Regular program	19.8	38.5	41.7
English program	27.9	36.5	35.6

Interestingly, certain conflicting beliefs were found in the category of learning and communication strategies (see Table 5). Even though Thai upper secondary school students agreed that beginners can make errors without having speaking difficulties in the long run, they believed people in general should not speak until he/she was fully competent in English. As to these conflicting beliefs, it seems that a number of Thai upper secondary school students still hold a mistaken conception about language learning. In second language acquisition, errors are common and are in fact part of L2 acquisition. Researchers have been studying errors and proved that errors are predictable (Ellis, 1985) and beneficial to language learning (Ellis, 1997; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006).

**Table 5: Percentages of Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies (*N* = 458)**

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
6. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.			
Regular program	17	25.5	57.4
English program	7.6	22.3	70.1
8. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.			
Regular program	8.9	18.6	72.5
English program	6.6	13.7	79.6
11. I enjoy practicing English with the people I meet.			
Regular program	19.4	41.3	39.3
English program	14.7	43.1	42.2
13. It's ok to guess if you don't know a word in English.			
Regular program	16.2	36.4	47.4
English program	11.4	28.9	59.7



<b>Statements</b>	<b>Levels of Agreement</b>		
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>
16. It is a good idea to practice speaking with other people who are learning English.			
Regular program	6.5	28.7	64.8
English program	5.2	18	76.7
19. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.			
Regular program	55.1	35.6	9.3
English program	65.4	26.5	8
21. It is important to practice with multi-media.			
Regular program	11.7	27.1	61.1
English program	5.2	24.6	70.1
24. I can learn a lot from group activities with other students in my English class.			
Regular program	12.5	40.1	47.3
English program	8	35.1	56.9
29. It is possible to learn English on your own without a teacher or a class.			
Regular program	15	36.4	48.6
English program	18.5	21.3	60.2
31. Students and teachers should only speak English during English classes.			
Regular program	16.2	31.2	52.6
English program	11.4	30.3	58.3
32. I can find a lot of useful materials to practice English on the Internet.			
Regular program	9.7	25.5	64.7
English program	4.3	23.2	72.6

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
34. I have to spend so much time preparing for big English tests (e.g. GAT, O-NET, TOEFL) that I don't have time to actually learn English.			
Regular program	49	33.6	17.5
English program	35.5	35.5	28.9
35. It is important to speak English like a native speaker.			
Regular program	13.7	33.2	53
English program	13.7	31.3	55
41. I feel timid speaking English with other people.			
Regular program	34.8	32.8	32.4
English program	25.1	29.4	45.5
42. General Aptitude Test (GAT) or Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) are good tests of my English ability.			
Regular program	38.4	43.3	18.2
English program	47.9	32.2	19.9

**Table 6: Percentages of Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations (N = 458)**

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
18. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.			
Regular program	8.9	21.9	69.3
English program	3.8	10.9	85.3
23. I want to speak English well.			
Regular program	8.1	19.8	72.1
English program	4.3	12.8	82.9

Statements	Levels of Agreement		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
26. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know English speakers.			
Regular program	10.9	27.5	61.5
English program	4.7	33.2	62.1
37. Thai people feel that it is important to speak English.			
Regular program	12.9	21.1	66
English program	11.4	24.6	64
38. I would like to have English speaking friends.			
Regular program	6.9	27.1	66
English program	8.5	22.3	69.2

Lastly, student responses about motivations and expectations yielded quite a remarkable consensus (see Table 6). The vast majority of Thai upper secondary school students believed that they want to speak English well, and as a result, they believed this could increase their job opportunities as well. Findings from other studies similarly revealed that Thai learners from different levels (Jones & Gardner, 2009; Fujiwara, 2011; Vibulphol, 2004) are well aware of the role of the English language and its impact on their future careers.

## Discussion

The present study identified several key differences in the beliefs about language learning held by a higher number of English program students and regular program students. According to Horwitz (1988), some of these reported beliefs are facilitative to language learning. The study found that, in terms of foreign language aptitude, more English program students believed in the idea that some people have a gifted ability to learn language. This belief was shared among the vast majority of

regular program students. There were no obvious differences in beliefs with regards to the factors of age or gender advantage. More English Program students reported a belief that people who excelled at maths and science may find language learning more challenging. Having more exposure to English language interaction and communication, the English Program students might be more aware of their current ability than regular program students, which is a special privilege for certain people. This belief, however, does not seem to affect their language learning as both regular and English programs students agreed that without such ability, people are still able to acquire a foreign language. As the majority of the English program students consider themselves to be more language-oriented in terms of their innate ability, this is likely the reason why a higher number of them thought people with other orientations or abilities, in this case mathematics and science, might find language learning comparatively more challenging.

Regarding the difficulty of English difficulty, slight differences in beliefs were found. Somewhat more English program students viewed English as a language of medium difficulty, while a slightly higher number of regular program students believed it to be a difficult language. Furthermore, a very similar proportion of responses between the two programs was seen in the estimation of learning period. Despite no clear consensus, a somewhat higher number of regular program students believed it takes at least two years to master speaking proficiency given that one can practice one hour per day. Based on the findings, it is premature to assume any remarkable differences between both programs.

Both groups of participants recognized the importance of learning the cultures of English-speaking people as well as vocabulary. However, a slightly higher number of regular program students agreed that learning how to translate from Thai to English is important. Another major difference was the focus on the practice of spoken language. If they could achieve a high competency in spoken English, a higher number of the English program students believed they were likely to have better job

opportunities. For this reason, more English Program students were determined to master speaking skills in English, and they were motivated to speak English well. Unlike the context of the regular program where the use of English is limited, the students of the English program were more aware of the role of the English language in the world and how it could positively affect their future careers.

As suggested by Lightbrown and Spada (2006), if learners feel that it is important to use the language in social and occupational aspects, they would appreciate the communicative facet of language and then be inspired to master the language they are learning. This could result in great determination to speak English excellently. Besides, to best learn the English language, more English program students focused on learning English in an ESL environment. This suggests that they believe in the authentic use of English in practical situations where the language is being used by its speakers. They correspondingly reported that it is better to have English native speakers as teachers. These reported beliefs might possibly emerge from the intensive English environment of the program. These students might be acquainted with the communicative use of English and engage in more classroom English practice. Obviously, since the English program students had more experiences in classroom English interactions and were taught by the native speakers of English or English speakers, their language learning preferences are likely to be an ESL environment and be engaged in communicative use of English with the native users of the language.

The findings further revealed that more English program students tended to use various learning and communication strategies and were generally more autonomous in their learning. It is evident that the students put an emphasis on accent and thought that guessing an unknown word is permissible. Moreover, they reported beliefs about practicing in groups with other English learners, and also the importance of multi-media and the accessibility of online materials. Since English program students experience real English communication more than regular

program students, this might explain why a higher number of English program students prioritized good accent.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that to nurture students' communicative competence, the focus should instead be on how pronunciation works, along with accuracy and fluency (Brown, 2000). Therefore, it is not crucially necessary for students to have an excellent accent considering the communicative use of language and the growing significance of English as an international language. Furthermore, more English program students were also likely to be active in improving their language learning by means of online learning and other various modes. This supports Sumonwiriya (2007) as she found that English program students tended to use various learning strategies, practice English outside class and be positive about learning by themselves.

Finally, one conflicting belief found was that more English program students reported that they were not confident to speak English with other people even though they believed in the importance of the mastery of spoken language and put their emphasis on the communicative aspect of language. In contrast, a smaller number of regular program students reported feeling timid to speak English. However, it is worth noting that, for both groups, no clear-cut agreement was found. Some researchers have suggested that it is possible for students to experience foreign language anxiety which, in this case, might possibly be caused by misconceptions about language learning, including the underestimated time for mastering a foreign language, the overrated focus on accent, and the idea of privileged abilities to learn a language (Oxford, 1999). Apart from these unrealistic beliefs, research has shown that language anxiety is related to language evaluation. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) elaborated that "because foreign language anxiety concerns performance evaluation within an academic and social context, it is useful to draw parallels between it and three related performance anxieties: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation" (p. 127). Moreover, a study of Chinese

students also showed that the majority of the students enjoyed communicating in English with their friends in non-academic situations. However, they were unwilling to speak English in class mostly because of the performance evaluation (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This paper aims to explore the beliefs about language learning of Thai upper secondary school students in regular and English programs. Similarities of beliefs of the two groups were identified. Furthermore, certain key differences in beliefs suggest that the more exposure to English in classroom can yield certain beliefs that are facilitative to language learning. Considering the common beliefs of Thai upper secondary school students and the key differences between regular and English program students, it might be useful for teachers to reconsider the goals of language learning and apply certain pedagogical approaches that enrich classroom communication.

First of all, since the majority of both regular and English program students were skeptical about Thai people as good language learners, teachers should encourage students that if they believe everyone is able to learn a foreign language, they all can also achieve it as well. This is to foster positive attitudes towards language learning. As Horwitz (1988) suggests, if a certain group of learners are viewed as inferior, particularly if the students are in said group, this can preclude their language learning in the long run. Teachers should explain the natural process of learning as both groups seemed to underestimate the period of time to practice and master spoken English. Also, due to the emphasis on learning the cultures by both regular and English program students, teachers might consider introducing and integrating cultural content in their English classes.

The findings of beliefs also imply the significance of language use in terms of authenticity and underline student's communicative competence. For this reason, considering communicative competence as a goal of language learning and

teaching, teachers might consider applying communicative language teaching or CLT as a pedagogical approach to both regular and English program classrooms. Specifically, for the regular program, since the students have less exposure to the English language than those of the English program, it may be crucial for English teachers to devote most of their class time to practice the language and provide engaging activities aiming to develop communicative competence as much as possible.

In light of the conflicting and potentially misleading beliefs, the overrated belief about having a good accent should be reconsidered and discussed. Teachers should also clarify the concept of language errors so that students could understand that errors are a common part of language learning and development. To deal with the timidity of speaking English, students should be encouraged to speak as much as possible without worrying about mistakes or errors. Appropriate feedbacks from teachers should be encouraged, for students can realize that their performance evaluation is simply a process for their language development. Given these points, students of the two programs can be acquainted with the spoken language and gain confidence in verbal communication with others.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Since the present study relied on quantitative data analysis, certain in-depth aspects of beliefs were not fully explored. Future studies should include qualitative methodologies such as interviews to elicit comprehensive findings as well as to clarify contradictory beliefs that may be present. Furthermore, due to the fact that beliefs about language learning are complex in nature, receptive to change, and context-sensitive, a longitudinal study would be instructive to see how students' beliefs change and evolve over time. For instance, future studies could keep track of students' beliefs when they first enter a program until they complete it. Then, the researchers can explore the development of beliefs based on contextual influences and other factors that might come into play.



### The Authors

Sirawit Apairach received his B.A. in English (First-class Hons) from Naresuan University and is currently an M.Ed. student in Teaching English as a Foreign Language program at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University.

Jutarat Vibulphol is a university lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. Her research interests lie in the areas of learner factors and English language teaching methodology.

### References

- Abraham, R., & Vann, R. (1987). Strategies of two language learners: A case study. In A. Wenden and J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp.85-102). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Apairach, S. (2015). *A model of relationships between beliefs about language learning and language learning strategies, proficiency, gender, and educational contexts of Thai upper secondary school students* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.
- Amuzie, G. L., & Winke, P. (2009). Changes in language learning beliefs as a result of study abroad. *System*, 37, 366-379.
- Baker, S.C., & MacIntyre, P.D. (2000). The role of gender and immersion in communication and second language orientations. *Language Learning*, 50(2), 311-341.
- Bernat, E., & Gvozdenko, I. (2005). Beliefs about language learning: Current knowledge, pedagogical implications, and new research directions. *TESL-EJ*, 9(1), 1-21.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. D. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson Education.

- Chirdchoo, O., & Wudthayagorn, J. (2001). Beliefs about learning EFL: A study of Thai female high school students. *PASAA*, 32, 82-94.
- Daosodsai, H. (2010). *A study of language learning strategies of students in an English program in Thai secondary school* (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Dole, J. A., & Sinatra, G. M. (1994). Social psychology research on beliefs and attitudes: Implications for research on learning from text. In R. Garner, & P. A. Alexander (Eds.), *Beliefs about text and instruction with text* (pp. 245-264). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Otto, I. (1998). Motivation in action: A process model of L2 motivation. *Working papers in Applied Linguistics, Thames Valley University, London*, 4, 43-69.
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). Learner beliefs and language learning. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4), 7-25.
- Fujiwara, T. (2011). Language learning beliefs of Thai EFL university students: Dimensional structure and cultural variations. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 8(1), 87-107.
- Horwitz, E. K., Howitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129). London: Prentice Hall.

- Horwitz, E. K. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *The Modern Language Journal*, 72(3), 283-294.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2012). *Becoming a language teacher: A practical guide to second language learning and teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern language journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Jones, B., & Gardner M. (2009). *Language learning beliefs in Asia: A closer look at the BALLI*. Retrieved from <http://jaltcue.org/files/OnCUE/OCJ3-3articles/OCJ3.3.2.Jones.pdf>
- Lightbrown, M., & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(i), 71-86.
- Livingston, J. A. (1997). *Metacognition: An overview*. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/fas/shuell/cep564/Metacog.htm>
- Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: Links to proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79, 372-386.
- Ministry of Education. (2003). *โรงเรียนสองภาษา (English Program)*. Retrieved from [http://www.moe.go.th/5TypeSchool/school\\_eng.htm](http://www.moe.go.th/5TypeSchool/school_eng.htm)
- Mori, Y. (1999). Epistemological beliefs and language learning beliefs: What do language learners believe about their learning? *Language Learning*, 49(3), 377-415.
- Neguera-Azalora, E. (2011). Beliefs as conceptualizing activity: A dialectical approach for the second language classroom. *System*, 39, 359-369.

- ÖZ, H. (2007). Understanding metacognitive knowledge of Turkish EFL students in secondary education. *Novitas-ROYAL*, 1(2), 53-83.
- Oxford, R. (1999) Anxiety and the language learner: New insights. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 58-66). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Padgate, W. (2008). Beliefs and opinions about English writing of students at a Thai university. *PASAA*, 42, 31-53.
- Park, G. (1995). *Language learning strategies and beliefs about language learning of university students learning English in Korea* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Texas at Austin, TX.
- Sakui, G., & Gaies, S.J. (1999). Investigating Japanese learners' beliefs about language learning. *System*, 27, 473-492.
- Sumonwiriya, S. (2007). *A comparison of out-of-class English language learning activities, learning strategies, and attitudes towards autonomous English language learning of English program and regular program students in secondary schools* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.
- Vibulphol, J. (2004). *Beliefs about language learning and teaching approaches of pre-service EFL teachers in Thailand* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oklahoma State University, OK.
- Wenden, A. L. (1999). An introduction to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: Beyond the basics. *System*, 27, 435-441.
- Wesely, P. M. (2012). Learner attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 45(S1), 98-117.
- Yashima, T., & Zenuk-Nishide, L. (2008). The impact of learning contexts on proficiency, attitudes, and L2 communication: Creating an imagined international community. *System*, 36, 566-585.

**Appendix A**  
**Categories and Items for the Adapted English Version of**  
**the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI 2.0)**

**Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude**

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. Thai people are good at learning foreign languages.
4. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
5. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
6. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
7. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.
8. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.
9. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

**Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning**

10. Some languages are easier to learn than others.
11. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.
12. It is easier to speak than understand English.
13. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.
14. English is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language.
15. If someone spent one hour learning English every day, how long would it take him or her to speak English well? 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) You can't learn a language in one hour a day.

**Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning**

16. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.
17. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.
18. In order to speak English, you have to think in English.
19. The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words.
20. It is better to have teachers who are native-speakers of English.
21. The most important part of learning English is learning the grammar.
22. I can learn a lot from non-native English teachers.

23. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects.
24. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from Thai.

#### **Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies**

25. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.
26. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.
27. I enjoy practicing English with the people I meet.
28. It's ok to guess if you don't know a word in English.
29. It is a good idea to practice speaking with other people who are learning English.
30. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
31. It is important to practice with multi-media.
32. I can learn a lot from group activities with other students in my English class.
33. It is possible to learn English on your own without a teacher or a class.
34. Students and teachers should only speak English during English classes.
35. I can find a lot of useful materials to practice English on the Internet.
36. I have to spend so much time preparing for big English tests (e.g. GAT, O-NET, TOEFL), that I don't have time to actually learn English.
37. It is important to speak English like a native speaker.
38. I feel timid speaking English with other people.
39. General Aptitude Test (GAT) or Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) are good tests of my English ability.

#### **Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations**

40. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.
41. I want to speak English well.
42. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know English speakers.
43. Thai people feel that it is important to speak English.
44. I would like to have English speaking friends.