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División de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades

**Beliefs about Language Learning and their Relationship
with Academic Achievement**

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MAESTRO EN EDUCACIÓN, MENCIÓN EN
DIDÁCTICA DEL INGLÉS

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

Mexico has gone through several changes in the path to development; its educational system is not an exception; it has had to evolve, as well. Despite those changes, something that has not suffered this transition, from my point of view, is the English language teaching methodology used in the classrooms. This has almost always been what is said to be 'traditional', in which the responsible of the learning process is the professor. It still seems as if students participate only a few times or do not participate at all since they are seen as passive actors whose main role is to sit and listen to what the teachers have to say.

Historically teachers seem to have the major role in school; they have been in charge of "passing the knowledge they possess to pupils." Nevertheless, as time goes by and societies progress, new perspectives on many fields arise worldwide, and education is part of this growing trend. This is the reason why the education system in Mexico has had to adapt to these new changes. As stated by Delors (2002: 151), "those changes respond to the needs of the new world system we are living in, a very different and difficult world order," which features constant fights among people in terms of competences and skills.

In order to be updated, Mexico joined an apparent international tendency which places more emphasis on students, instead of teachers. The so called self –

learning process has taken over all the previous conceptions about the teaching and learning process. Then universities, among other levels, are struggling to adapt this student-based approach to their own curricula. They are including this approach to their school regulations, in which they state that it is the student who should take action in the process of learning, a more significant role for the student than for the teacher, with this having a more (supposedly) constructivist perspective (Alvarado, 1995). So far, many institutions have adapted their curricula to this necessity and tendencies, at least that is what is expressed in their rules and regulations; reality sometimes shows a different situation, though. Regardless of what some believe about it, this previously mentioned change is growing and more institutions are trying to set it in their school activities.

Those teaching tendencies are being applied to all the possible settings that have to do with teaching; an example can be the English as a foreign language classroom. In these classes teachers are trying to implement these methodologies that emphasize the role of the students in the learning process. However, what students think as correct behavior in the classroom becomes evident and may interfere. For instance, they show certain behavior that they think of it as correct for succeeding in learning a language like taking passive roles, while indeed for learning a language would require a different attitude. To this respect, researchers have suggested that for the language learning process, this attitude taken by students, along with other factors, have a

genuine relation with the language learning process (Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987; Mori, 1997; Gabillon, 2000; Castellotti and Moore, 2002).

1. 1. Statement of the problem

As an example of this teaching approach, the University of Quintana Roo has adopted this new tendency that goes from teacher-centered to student-centered lessons since its foundation in 1993. This can be observed in its 'Ley Orgánica', which states that students are responsible of their own learning process; professors only help as guides throughout the course of action in their education. Yet, because of my previous experience working in this institution, I could state that it looks as if most of the lessons were still being taught following the teacher-centered approach, in which teachers are the responsible of the students' learning process, and apparently it started since the University's foundation.

In spite of what is stated in the 'Ley Organica', the situation is similar to other times and other institutions, students do not seem to be taking their role as the main agent of their learning process; instead, the responsibility appears to be on the teachers' side. For many teachers that might have meant that learners were not giving enough importance to their studies which resulted in many people failing courses and getting delayed for graduation. On the other hand, for faculty members students were not making their best effort even considering

that for any of the majors at the university there are several conditions they have to deal with. .

Another reason they had to pay careful attention to succeeding in passing a subject is that about seventy percent of the subjects are directly related to each other in the major (correlative). As an example, for the Lengua Inglesa Major, if students fail any English subject (i.e. English Language 1) they cannot take any other subject (English Language 2, and others) because the following courses has as a requirement the previous English course. As a result, in 2004, professors in the Lengua Inglesa Program decided to take this commandment very seriously; they decided to place most of the responsibility on the students. And not only that, the evaluation criteria would have to change as well. This change would consist of, instead of having only a global final grade that included all the different abilities and sub abilities of the English language in only one number, there would be a grade for each of the skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and use of English (grammar).

Then if a student was to pass, he must have obtained at least 7 (on a 1 to 10 scale) per skill and not to have failed any of the others, or he would fail the semester. Before this new proposal, students would get a global final grade integrated by their grades from exams, homework, attendance, participations, and any other activity thing done in the classroom –skills and sub skills of English language were not considered. Perhaps there were the listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary parts contained in the exam,;

however in the end, the final grade would just be a sum of each part. It did not matter if they had a low performance on any of the parts; if the sum was enough then they would pass. To the view of members of the faculty, that grade would not reflect the real competence they had in English or the specific area where students were having problems; therefore, the evaluation criteria changed to one based on the language skills.

These new criteria started working, with deficiencies, though, observable in the number of students failing, and basically the worst issue was that students were getting behind for a year; as many of them were failing their language course, they would not take the following level, and then would have to wait for a year to take again the course they failed. Even though the idea of changing the evaluation criterion for all the English subjects was thought to improve their English competence and to make them more responsible of their own learning, a lot of doubts emerged from this system. Was it affecting students instead of helping them improve? Who was responsible of this failure in the language learning process? What was not exactly working?

The grading system had changed but results obtained were not the expected ones, that students would be successful in their language learning process.. Among the reasons thought were that apparently the students' beliefs about how lessons should be given, or how they believed the lessons should be evaluated. That was observable in an informal meeting the Language Major faculty had with some students, to their opinion, professors were not working

enough, they were only giving little information to students and so they were not able to pass the course; mainly, that professors were not fair.

Among the different reasons that might be causing this problem their language learning beliefs seem to outstand. From my point of view, this issue had a direct relation with the learning process in language learning. In other words, conceivably for students what they were doing was enough and that as non-native speakers of the target language they believed that by knowing part of the language they would pass to the next level. That corresponds to previous research which showed a relation between what someone thinks and the way that person reacts. For instance, Schommer (1990) mentions that beliefs somehow predict the results of the actions taken, and also, as beliefs, they are said to be unconsciously present in the students mind (Schommer, 1990). To this respect, this thesis aims at finding out is if students' beliefs about the language learning are related to their academic achievement.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims at:

- a) Identifying the language learning beliefs of Lengua Inglesa students

- b) Identifying the most and least common language learning beliefs students of Lengua Inglesa Major have.

- c) Identifying and analyzing the relations between the students' language learning beliefs and their academic achievement at college.
- d) Identifying and analyzing if there are representative gender differences regarding English language learning beliefs.

Firstly, the application of a questionnaire was necessary to collect the main beliefs students have while enrolled in this specific major, Lengua Inglesa. Once those beliefs are identified, it is intended to find out if there are any direct relations between them and their academic achievement. In other words, try to find out if what they think about learning and knowledge have any influence in their grades, to detect if their beliefs are correlated with success or failure.

One more thing that might result evident will be the most recurrent, as well as the least recurrent, beliefs they have. Once these beliefs are identified, probably will somehow explain the kind of problems students are facing while learning the language. Along with these specific issues, some other data can be observed; such as differences between gender and the relation between language learning beliefs and achievement.

Two hypotheses rise with the present study:

- a) Most and least common students' language learning beliefs are dysfunctional. In other words, that these beliefs are causing a low achievement in the EFL classes.

b) Language learning beliefs are related to academic achievement in EFL.

c) Gender differences are reflected in language learning beliefs.

1.3 Rationale

As mentioned earlier, the problem present in the Lengua Inglesa Major affects many students. They are failing their English language subjects; as a result, they are getting delayed for one or two years. Therefore, students are wasting time and money, and perhaps they are not motivated enough to carry on with their studies.

With the aid of this thesis, students could see cases like their own and identify the same language learning processes and beliefs about the language learning beliefs; as a result, they could reflect and analyze if what they have been thinking of the learning process and the actions they are involved in are what the university expects from them to be doing, as expressed in documents of the university such as the RETL¹.

Second, teachers could identify students' beliefs. Once teachers identify them, they could see them as a real actor of the language learning process. Then they could reflect on their practice and realize if what they do is what is expected from students. As Horwitz (1988) stated,

“Knowledge of learners’ beliefs about language learning should also increase teachers’ understanding of how students approach the tasks required in language class and, ultimately, help teachers foster more effective learning strategies in their students.” (p.11)

The difference between what is expected and what is actually obtained in the lessons may take an important part in the students’ academic achievement. Through this research, analysis and reflection can be made so that some actions could be taken to improve the learning processes. For instance, results may well be presented to teachers so that they reflect on this variable when preparing their lessons; also, when planning their lessons teachers have the chance to add, modify or correct instructions, actions, and / or procedures, to target this issue. The same could happen if gender differences are found; some actions may be taken to target both genders.

Consequently, schools might diminish the serious problem of failing. As known, schools’ indicators showing people failing and / or dropping out are not well considered in terms of efficiency. Hence, the fewer students fail their subjects or drop out from school, the better it is for both faculty and institutions.

1.4 Limitations

There could be many works done in the past, all of them are widening the field of beliefs as days go by, surprisingly, there are not many that could be found in Mexico. Most of the information comes from other countries such as the United

States, Spain, England, Argentina, China, Hong Kong, and a few others (Bernat, 2006; Horwitz, 1987; Yang, 1992; Peacock, 1998; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Wang, 1996; Campbell et al., 1993; Mori, 1996; Kuntz, 1997; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Su, 1995; Le, 2004; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Benson & Lor, 1999; Kalaja, 1995; Gimenez, 1994; Pajares, 1992; Wenden, 1986a; 1986b; 1987; 1998; 1999; 2001; Goh & Xue, 2002). Apparently, Mexico is delayed in this field (Reyes & Murrieta, 2007); then, it is difficult to find information about works done on beliefs here in the country, which in the end, sets a limit itself for the research.

In many parts of the world there have been studies that are related to beliefs; they have been epistemological beliefs, and language learning beliefs, mainly. Even if not many studies have been reported, at least in this part of the country, lately, some recent studies have come to light from the north of the country but they are not completely available to all. Consequently, the following study is limited to supportive theoretical information from other countries.

Moreover, the results of this study present only a static, (from a cross-sectional research design) view of students' beliefs since their opinions were asked only once. In other words, learners' beliefs are variable over time, from person to person, and setting to setting thus they cannot be generalized in any context, in the end findings of this research just show a snapshot of reality at a given moment.

Besides, as only one part of the university students participates in the research, those from a specific major, and whose sample was not chosen randomly, but it was decided to work with most of the students in the major; that may be another reason for not considering it a hundred per cent representative of the whole university, only the Lengua Inglesa major.

Finally, since the main aspects to be considered in order to achieve the objectives of the study are a questionnaire (BALLI), and students' grades, the study is also limited by these facts. That is mainly caused by the characteristics of both elements to be used. For instance, as it is well known information provided by someone being asked to fill in a questionnaire would not always be reliable. It may not possible to know exactly in which conditions the questionnaire is answered, if the person is well at that moment or not; then, replies could vary because of these factors. Nevertheless, for this specific study after piloting the BALLI questionnaire, SPSS statistics showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .729, a reliable tool. (Muijs, 2004).

The same might as well happen with the students' grades. As we know, they may perhaps not show the students' knowledge or performance of the target language. We might not be sure that what we see in the grades is necessarily the knowledge and use a person has over the language because there could be factors that influence their grades at a specific moment. On the other hand, those grades are necessarily a reference of students' academic achievement, if not all, the majority of them. Above all, despite of all those facts, they are part of

a descriptive study; not all things to be considered are precise but representative of the vast majority of students.

There could be many aspects related to this research that could be analyzed; an endless number of concepts in relation with other aspects. However, for the purpose of this thesis, beliefs and grades are to be explored. There are attitudes involved but they are not considered. They could be explored in further research.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Researching on beliefs may involve several factors. Those factors can be intrinsic or extrinsic, internal or external, individual or social. For the purpose of this study, some of these factors are considered, mainly those that were included in Horwitz's research (1985) due to the usage of the same approach, the Normative. Other approaches are briefly explained and commented in the following part to state differences and to fully understand the procedure.

The second part of this framework contains a review of some studies related to language learning beliefs in different contexts, with different genders, with people living in a specific country or with people learning a specific language, all of them related to this research. First of all, it is important to begin this analysis with basic concepts, such as *beliefs* and contributions of some experts of the field.

2.1. Beliefs

Apparently, the term *belief* is a very difficult concept to define; as an example, Pajares (1992) referred beliefs as a messy construct. According to this author that difficulty might be partly due to the paradoxical nature, the characteristics and functions of beliefs.

This same opinion of beliefs is shared by other authors in the past and more recently. For instance, Dewey (1933) thought of beliefs as obstacles and promoters of knowledge at the same time. Pierce (1958) saw the nature of beliefs similarly, this author stated that beliefs are paradoxical because they can stop doubt and also start thought likewise.

On the contrary, Schommer (1990) stated that beliefs are elements unconsciously present in a person's life and that somehow they affect the perception of the reality and the world around. Therefore they lead to a certain behavior and reaction towards situations. Moreover, examples of reciprocal influence can be observed with James (1991) who stated that beliefs influence actions, but at the same time these actions influence or modify beliefs. In the same vein, Mathews (1993) stated that beliefs are important because they correlate with, and even determine behavior in any context the person may be.

More recently, after a survey of previous research, Barcelos (2000) proposed a summary of the series of characteristics for beliefs. She concluded that:

1. They guide action, but they are also influenced by action, there is a reciprocal influence between beliefs and actions.
2. There seems to be a belief for almost any of the actions we take.
3. Beliefs that became part of us when children tend to last longer; they are difficult to eliminate or modify.
4. Beliefs are socially constructed and culturally transmitted.
5. Through our beliefs we interpret and understand the world around us.

6. There are many ways to identify those beliefs, from what we express, and mainly with actions.
7. They are dynamic, may be changing through with time. (p. 39-40)

Barcelos (2000) proposes a summary of the complexity of beliefs and the influential power they have on many aspects of life. These characteristics are complemented with Pajares'(1992) statements that beliefs have specific functions for people, they help people understand themselves and others and adapt to the world; they provide meaning; they help individuals to identify with another group and form groups and social systems; they provide structure, order, direction and shared values, and they reduce dissonance and confusion.

Horwitz (1998), whose model is used /replicated in this study, utilizes George Kelly's psychological concept of belief; he describes beliefs as the cognitive dimensions that people use to understand the world around them (as cited in Horwitz, 1998, p. 1). Those beliefs are formed within the persons' minds and can be related to experience or only cognitive and / or innate factors.

To conclude, the term *belief* is a very difficult concept to define. However, despite its complexity, it has become evident that they affect the way any person reacts. That influence can be directly linked to many aspects of a person, which seems to happen also in the learners' language learning process and performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. The nature of this study does not consider the social aspect of beliefs as stated by some researcher; nevertheless, it is considered that they guide, and are also

influenced by action; they are organized in a structure; and they have to be inferred from statements, intentions and actions.

2.1.1 Language Learning Beliefs

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to look at the different proposals former researchers have had about the concept of the language learning beliefs. A brief explanation of some of the most common notions is presented in the following part.

On one hand, Barcelos (2000) states that several terms have been used to refer to beliefs about language learning, that is the reason it is difficult to define language learning beliefs. Consider that other researchers see beliefs as representations, (Riley, 1994), the folklinguistic theories of learning (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995); metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1986a, 1987), cultural beliefs (Gardner, 1988), learner representations (Holec, 1987), learners' philosophy of language learning (Abraham and Vann, 1987), the culture of learning languages (Barcelos, 1995), culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), and learning culture (Riley, 1997). All of them refer to the same phenomenon, with different words though and with several aspects involved (as cited in Barcelos, 2000, p. 41 -42). In the end, they all refer to the same issue, language learning beliefs.

Although all of the previous definitions have been used interchangeably in different moments by different authors, and they may be different, but only in some aspects as, in the extent of influence or the reason for those beliefs, they seem to overlap at some point in the literature. All the definitions stress that language learning beliefs refer to the nature of language and language learning. Some definitions emphasize the social nature of beliefs some authors propose. Above all they reflect the researchers' background.

In this study, the definition of language learning beliefs may be a combination of different authors' views. However, it is important to mention that this study considers Horwitz's (1987) definition of language learning beliefs as basic for this research, "by student beliefs about language learning, I mean preconceived ideas about the language-learning process rather than attitudes toward the target language and the target-language group." (p.2). For her, this concept refers to beliefs or opinions about various aspects of language learning, including "foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation". (p.121) Thus, for Horwitz (1987) it all has to do with learners' beliefs about their roles and functions of teachers and teaching materials, and how language operates. Basically only cognitive processes are involved regarding language learning; always based on a normative approach.

On the other hand, there are variables that may be affecting language learning beliefs. Briefly, some of them are mentioned in the study later. Nonetheless, the

ones that are to be considered vital for the purpose of the research have to do with the students' academic achievement because they can, in the end, determine success or not of a learner in the language learning process.

2.1.2 Overview of some variables influencing language learners' beliefs

Another area of research when working with beliefs is the one related to all those elements or variables that may influence the beliefs learners hold about the language learning process. This is an overview of such variables as they are not to be considered for the purpose of this present study; what is important for the present study is cognition.

The complexity and abundance of variables influencing L2 learners' beliefs makes research in this area a difficult task. In this respect, Gabillon (2005) proposes the four most common factors which could influence the way students see the language learning process: society, general educational context, EFL context, and the intra-personal plane.

a) Society at Large

According to this author, cultural beliefs, such as values, prejudices, attitudes, stereotypes constitute the substructure in the learners' belief hierarchy and serve as a kind of reference to learners when shaping their beliefs about language learning (anchoring). In other words, these collectively created beliefs

which reflect views of the society the learner has been brought up in, form a kind of base on which the learner further constructs other beliefs.

Before the learner starts learning a foreign language, he already possesses some of these (culturally/socially constructed or collectively created) ready-made beliefs about foreign languages and, perhaps, beliefs about how foreign languages are/should be learned. The learner's knowledge about the shared historical past and political relations between the target foreign language culture and his/her own might also contribute to shaping his/her beliefs about and his/her attitudes towards learning that particular language and most often even before starting to learn it.

These representations or beliefs may be acquired by the learner unconsciously and accepted as 'truths' before having any personal experience in language learning (Alanen, 2003). Probably they could be modified later when actually the students are involved in the learning process. In a few words, these cultural beliefs are part of the individual's knowledge and attitudes about society (specifically about the target culture), they are not learning beliefs; however, according to the author, they help forming those later language learning beliefs.

b) The General Educational Context

Since childhood, learners are exposed to educational traditions and certain methodologies. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously they develop some

beliefs about what learning and teaching should be and what the roles of learners and teachers are. Moreover, “at this stage learners have day-to-day experience in learning and they construct/reconstruct beliefs based on these experiences and internalize these, embedding them in other relevant beliefs in their belief repertoires” (Gabillon, 2000: 249).

Usually, learning a foreign language is perceived as the same as learning other subjects. In most cases “learning other subjects precede L2 learning and learners keep the same beliefs they had for other subjects (Gabillon, 2000:250).” However, according to this author, these beliefs they have, apparently do not correspond to what specialists consider as functional in L2 learning. Therefore, it becomes important to discern what conceptions learners have about learning in general.

c) The English as a Foreign Language Context (s)

The language learning context, and the learners’ past and present experiences in a second language L2 learning, are other important factors that may influence students’ beliefs about language learning. As with the acquisition of L1, foreign language learning traditions may vary in different educational contexts. In these contexts, learners have could have direct contact with the target language. Therefore, the learners’ cultural beliefs (attitudes towards and beliefs about the target language), their past learning experiences in general, and their mother tongue learning in particular (L1), all contribute to shaping their beliefs and

conceptions about the L2 acquisition. It is then when learners start to have well-established beliefs about how efficient they are in L2 learning, what their roles and their teachers' in L2 classrooms should be, and how L2 should be learned.

(p.251)

Apart from that, teachers in charge of the foreign language teaching also have some conceptions of the learning and teaching activities and they often modify the beliefs students have from previous experiences and may make them adopt approaches which are compatible with teachers' beliefs.

Consequently, not only the specific settings where EFL takes place influence students beliefs, but also the participants in the process as well, professors , and probably, other students.

d) The Intra-personal Level

Alanen (2003) state that beliefs have been primarily constructed in social planes through interactions between others and social tools, later they are appropriated and internalized in the learner's psychological plane to become part of the learner's metacognitive knowledge. This knowledge acquired from experience is then used as a resource by the learner to guide him or her through his/her foreign language learning activities. Recalling this metacognitive knowledge, "the learner makes some judgments regarding self, others and L2 tasks, and

activates self-regulatory mechanisms to choose the strategies s/he believes to be suitable to fulfill the required language tasks.” (Gabillon, 2005: 252)

That is the reason Gabillon (2005) assured that research into foreign language learners’ beliefs needs to allow a wider perspective to include both the learner’s past and present experiences so that possible reasons for some dysfunctional learning beliefs can be traced back. Afterwards, that information can be used to improve language instruction.

Gabillon (2000), based on previous research, identifies other three main concepts that are apparently related to the students’ actions, success and failure in the learning of a second or foreign language; they are: the self-beliefs, control beliefs, and attributions. Only the first two have to do with performance and success, which are two important variables for this study and will be briefly defined in the following sections.

2.1.3 Self-beliefs

Bandura (1986) introduced, along with his social cognitive theory, the concept of self-beliefs. They rapidly became a real research interest and have been widely referred by other researchers (e.g. White, 1995; Yang, 1999). For Bandura, these beliefs comprise a self-system, and the individual’s behavior is the result of the interaction between this system and external influences. In this respect, Pajares & Schunk (2002) argue that learners create, develop, and hold

self-beliefs to be true for themselves, and are considered to play a vital role in their success and failure.

2.1.4 Control-beliefs

Control-beliefs are “beliefs about the presence of factors that may further or hinder performance.” (Ajzen, 2002, p.1). Dörnyei and Otto (1998) refer to the term as “perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (p.56). It has been said that learners who believe that they have sufficient control over a situation (learning, in this case) make a big effort to succeed in that situation. Therefore, these beliefs have an important impact on learning outcomes.

Researchers have worked on many aspects that appear to be influential for the beliefs being studied, some or many of them might reflect reality to certain extent. Nonetheless what are considered to be of great importance for the purpose of this study are the students’ cognition and the effect over the actions in the classroom for the language learning process.

2.1.5 How are Beliefs Formed?

How are beliefs developed? What is their origin? Or what causes their existence? To what extent beliefs are social and cultural but also mental and individual? That has been the major debate in the social and cognitive psychological literature.

On one hand, scholars taking social psychological and sociocultural standpoints claim that beliefs are constructed in a social context. They consider it is necessary to talk about beliefs referring to the context in which they are shaped; otherwise they are incomplete or inexact. (Gabillon, 2005)

On the other hand, scholars defending cognitivism, do not pay attention to the context where beliefs are constructed. For them, these beliefs are considered as *well-organized schema* (networks of connected ideas) and claim that their formation is an individual autonomous act and that each belief holds a mark of the individual. The emphasis is put on the learners' acquired knowledge which is memorized and stored as the learners' knowledge reservoir. (Gabillon, 2005 : p.7)

However, today, both "a cognitive perspective on the individuality of beliefs and a social psychological perspective on the social nature of beliefs are considered to be justifiable and complementary." (Gabillon, 2005: p.8) For the purpose of this study the social aspect is not considered for the formation of beliefs since it is not part of the objectives, only the psychological aspect of them.

2.1.6 Why are language Learners' Beliefs Important?

Beliefs are very often associated with self, and according to Rogers' humanistic movement the *self* is considered to be the central aspect of personality. Therefore, he believed that an individual needs positive regard from both, the

self (positive self-concept, self-worth etc.), and from others in order for self-actualization and growth to take place (Pajares & Schunk, 2002).

Learners' beliefs have proved to influence both the actions and experiences of language learners (Horwitz, 1999). Results of previous studies have shown that beliefs that language learners hold about a target language affect their attitudes towards that language and together with other variables play a role in their L2 motivations (Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Gardner, 1979, 2001a, 2001b;).

Attitudes and beliefs have also been reported to have a notable effect on L2 learners' strategy use, with negative attitudes and beliefs resulting in poor strategy use (Oxford, 1994). White (1999) asserts that language learners' expectations which are developed prior to their experiences are also influenced and shaped by their beliefs. According to White these expectations influence how individuals react to, respond to and experience a new environment. In other words, learners' beliefs, which are formed through their experiences, guide them in their conceptualizations of language learning and influence the approaches they adopt to L2 learning (see Benson & Lor, 1999).

Pajares and Schunk (2002) suggest that the beliefs that learners develop and hold to be true about their capabilities and skills they possess have an immediate impact on their learning behaviors. They state that research should focus on students' beliefs in order to understand why students choose to do

certain activities and avoid others and why they achieve and why they fail to achieve.

Zeldin and Pajares (2000) assert that learners who believe that they do not have the required skills will not engage in tasks in which those skills are required and these beliefs about their competencies will affect “the choices they make the effort they put forth, their inclinations to persist at certain tasks, and their resiliency in the face of failure.” (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000:215).

Similarly, Wenden (1995) sustains that learners choose to engage in activities when they perceive that they have sufficient competence to fulfill the task requirements.

Finally, Benson and Lor (1999) maintain that language teachers need not only know what beliefs learners hold about learning but they also need to know whether these beliefs are ‘functional’ or ‘dysfunctional’ in order to be able to influence learners’ attitudes and behaviors. Ellis (2001) maintains that it is important to identify learners’ beliefs and be used to develop self-awareness in learners.

Therefore, understanding language learners’ beliefs is claimed to be paramount to understanding learners and their approaches to language learning in order to be able to adopt appropriate language education policies and plan and implement consistent language instruction (Benson & Lor, 1999; Castellotti &

Moore, 2002; Horwitz , 1999; Riley, 1997; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Yang, 1999; Wenden, 1999; Zarate., 2004).

Once noticed the importance of learners' beliefs, and the influence of them on many aspects of a student's life, the following aspect that has to do with performance is the learning process. Briefly, the learning process is explained as well as the reasons that might cause students' success or failure.

2.1.7 The Learning Process

Since all this desire of investigating about students is based on beliefs that may be influencing the learning process, it was considered necessary to describe this variable. According to Shanks (1995) learning is considered to be a system, a process of hypotheses testing, mental model matching, and dynamic fits between someone's expectations and experience. Then as it has to do with experience, all the later learning processes will be influenced by the previous experiences. They will then show beliefs about that learning process and about the nature of knowledge.

According to Sternberg (1999), beliefs obtained from learning process reflect thinking styles. They make us perceive the world in which we are living and make us face real life situations in a way. Through this learning process, faculty at Uqroo expects to make students competent in terms of communication. That is one of the aims of the bachelor's program in question.

Therefore, after students pass through this learning process, the result is the actual usage of the language that they are going to show when communicating, which is called communicative competence; one of the ultimate aims of the major since they are to become teachers of English and the main tool for them is the English language. Hence, how is competence understood in the literature?

2.1.8 Communicative Competence

Hymes (1971) introduced the term *communicative competence* to represent language use in a social context; later on, it was complemented by adding that this competence meant an integration of language, communication and culture (Savignon, 2001). At the same time, Savignon, (2001) mentioned that, in Britain, Halliday (1975) developed a theory of language that focused on meaning potential, and context of situation in understanding how language systems work. Regarding this same issue, Canale and Swain (1980) believed that there is an interaction of social context, grammar, and meaning. They considered that communicative strategies are important aspects of *communicative competence*. To the same extent, they proposed their own theory of communicative competence that includes three main competencies:

- a) A grammatical competence which includes knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology,

- b) A sociolinguistic competence, which includes knowledge of sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse, and
- c) A strategic competence which includes verbal and non verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to avoid or compensate communication breakdowns.

Considering the definitions highlighted above, communicative competence would be described as a speaker's ability to demonstrate competence in the domains of speaking, listening, reading, writing and comprehension of cultural issues, along with other factors within a society. Similar definition could be observed in the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) framework.

Another significant concept that comes to scene is language proficiency. It is related to all the previous concepts since proficiency could be considered the ultimate goal of the English Language Major; obviously, along with the teacher training.

2.1.9 Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

There seems not to be a specific definition for language proficiency; the nature and specification of the elements of it have not been determined and there continues to be debate among scholars about the definition.

Cummins (1984), for example, states that “the nature of language proficiency has been understood by some researchers as consisting of 64 separate language components and by others as consisting of only one global factor.

Valdés and Figueroa (1994) indicate that:

“...what it means to know a language goes beyond simplistic views of good pronunciation, "correct" grammar, and even mastery of rules of politeness. Knowing a language and knowing how to use a language involves a mastery and control of a large number of interdependent components and elements that interact with one another and that are affected by the nature of the situation in which communication takes place.” (p. 34)

Even though skills and sub skills are not to be considered in this research, it is important to mention that the Council of Chief State School Officers from the United States (CCSSO) defines a fully English proficient student as being able to use English to ask questions, to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas, and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom. The final grade a student gets in the end of the semester includes a mark for any of these aspects of language; that is the reason this research does not consider them in isolation. According to this Council, four language skills contribute to proficiency:

1. *Reading* - the ability to comprehend and interpret text at appropriate level.
2. *Listening* - the ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information, and follow the instructional discourse.
3. *Writing* - the ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the appropriate level.

4. *Speaking* - the ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities within the classroom and in social interactions within the school. (1992, p. 7)

Canales (1994) states another definition of English language proficiency. For this author, language is more than just the sum of discrete parts (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar). It develops within a culture for the purpose of conveying the beliefs and customs of that culture. Language proficiency is regarded as a coherent orchestration of discrete elements, such as vocabulary, discourse structure and gestures, to communicate meaning in a specific context; for instance, the school.

All the mentioned authors and resources consider language proficiency as something that is derived not only from grades but from various sources. All of them consider a development and evidence of the handling of all the aspects of language, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and so on. Also, it is considered that proficiency cannot be observed only with an examination, it has to be observed in everyday situations, when facing everyday life.

Apparently, there is no best way to measure proficiency, at least not for this study. Some might say that students show proficiency when they pass an evaluation, others might say that it is when the learner actually uses its knowledge about the language to interact with other people. In the end, proficiency might be measured using an international exam, an institutional examination, observation of the students' actions, or the combination of many tools.

Therefore, for this specific study there is not a specific proficiency exam considered, but the academic achievement in the English language learning process; in other words, the grade obtained in the last English course the student registered. The students' final grades are to be used as indicators of their academic achievement during the course. Possibly an international exam would have fit better; however, time and resources limitations did not allow this to happen. Nevertheless, students' final grades can be considered a good mirror of what they did during the course, and how they coped with all the activities in their classes.

In the following section, some of the most representative research that has been done regarding beliefs is presented. First, it is important to mention that studies regarding language learning beliefs have been done following three main approaches: contextual, metacognitive and normative. The three approaches are to be mentioned; nonetheless, since the normative approach is the basis for this study, it will be described more broadly described in its three separate areas that have been identified. Those three areas consider studies using the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), studies using a modified version of the BALLI, and studies not based on BALLI..

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several research studies have been accomplished using interviews, questionnaires, inventories, discussion groups, observation, and probably any other inquiry method. For the purpose of this research, Barcelos' classification of beliefs, based on a definition, research methodology, and the relationship between beliefs and other factors, is adopted for the structure of the following literature review. She identified three main approaches to language learning research, the normative, metacognitive and contextual, which are to be presented. Later, a brief analysis of the approaches is presented in order to compare and contrast them and have a clear view of each one of them.

2.2.1 The Normative Approach

The normative approach sees students' beliefs as explanations for their behavior in class; or what Barcelos (2000) may label as "indicators of students' future behavior as autonomous or good learners, in a cause- effect relationship" (p.45). This approach is characterized by the use of Likert-scale questionnaires in the investigation of learner beliefs. Also, the most widely questionnaire that is used for this approach is the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), originally developed by Horwitz (1985). The BALLI consisted on a 34-item questionnaire that was used to explore students', teachers', and pre-service teachers' beliefs.

This instrument, mainly concerned about 'assessing teacher opinions on issues related to language learning,' was created by asking teachers to list their beliefs, other people's beliefs, and their studies beliefs about language learning. Later, some of idiosyncratic beliefs were eliminated, and the instrument was revised and complemented. BALLI was later on piloted at the University of Texas at Austin. Once the BALLI was finished, she aimed to study and identify the beliefs of beginning university foreign language students.

2.2.1.1 Research done using only BALLI and BALLI along with other tools.

Other studies were conducted in different contexts and analyzing different aspects that are involved in the language learning process. However, at least at the beginning most of the work was done using a specific tool for gathering information through the Beliefs about the Language Learning Inventory (BALLI).

Much of the work done in the normative approach was at the beginning of research in terms of beliefs, having Horwitz as pioneer in this field. Most of the research on language learning and beliefs has been based upon Horwitz (1985, 1987 and 1999). She used the BALLI on her foreign language teacher training course, in which she asked her trainees to question their beliefs about language learning because it appeared for her that learners underestimated the difficulty of language learning; then, they were not doing good with their subjects.

In her study she found out that that there are gaps between teacher and learner beliefs and that probably they result in "negative [language-learning] outcomes" for learners (p. 292). Horwitz also suggests that a gap between teacher and learner beliefs can lead to reduced learner confidence in and satisfaction with the class and to unwillingness to participate in 'communicative' activities. Finally, she asserts that "teachers will likely encounter many unanticipated beliefs, some enabling and some truly detrimental to successful language learning," (p. 290) which is the kind of information being searched in the present work.

Moreover, results of her first study (1985) showed that students hold a range of beliefs and therefore arrive at the task of language with definite preconceived notions of how to go about it. Thus, these ideas cannot be ignored by teachers who want their students to be successful.

Horwitz (1987), obtained interesting results in her second study, such as the belief that some languages are easier to learn than others; that it takes an amount of time to learn a language; that learning a language takes more than just learning vocabulary, and that it is more than just translating; and that the vast majority believes that one learns English better in an English-speaking country.

A year later, Horwitz (1988) concluded from her research that students believed that some languages are more important to learn than others; they also

believed in children's ability to learn languages; in the difference between learning languages and any other subject; some people have special ability to learn a language; and the importance to practice and excellent pronunciation. Those findings coincided with those obtained with Tumposky's research (as cited in Barcelos, 2000, p. 48). Apart from that, both researchers found that students disagreed with the belief that those who are good at math are good at foreign languages.

Later on, Horwitz (1988b) continued working on the same topic but this time, she wanted to identify the differences between student and teacher perceptions or beliefs of the language learning process. She argued that teachers, like any other outsiders, cannot know their students' experience directly; she stated, "We can try to make the classroom environment more comfortable, but we cannot always know when or even whether we are succeeding." (p.2) Results obtained from this study showed that the classroom realities are often perceived differently by students and teachers, and that condition in the end may influence the students' success or failure. Kern (1995) and Mantle-Bromley (1995) conducted similar researches and obtained similar results. They found that teachers and students' beliefs did not match and somehow they were having a negative influence in the students' performance within the language learning class.

In a very different context, Yang (1992) researched on Taiwanese students studying English as a foreign language, which substantially expanded the

results of beliefs research. In order to carry out this work, she translated the BALLI into Chinese to enable students respond easily. Yang divided the 34 statements of the BALLI into four new groups based upon factor loading that were coefficient dependent: a) self-efficacy & expectation, b) value & nature of learning spoken English, c) foreign language aptitude, and d) formal, structured study. Once having done the necessary changes investigation was done, and findings were not as expected.

Her results for statements concerning beliefs about foreign language aptitude showed that students' majoring in languages were more positive than students of any other area. In addition, students' expectations about learning English were significantly associated with their use of a variety of learning strategies. Those results may have suggested that ethnicity and culture were of such importance that they influenced students' beliefs. Somehow those beliefs reflected Taiwanese culture; for instance for those students foreign language learning is important and should be acquired correctly and thoroughly. They valued English skills and proficiency.

Another EFL context research was Truit's (1995). This author investigated the beliefs about language learning of 204 university students learning English as a second language in Korea. The BALLI and a questionnaire eliciting background information were administered to students in Korea. Results indicate some differences in beliefs from the diverse groups. The findings provide evidence

that learners' beliefs about language learning may be based on cultural background and previous experiences.

Kern (1995) conducted another study with the BALLI with 180 students of French as a second language. He firstly wanted to know students' beliefs about this process, but adding a plus, if students' beliefs changed over time. Kern's conclusions are in the main similar to Horwitz's in 1988. However, he mentioned that compared to Horwitz's students, his students' beliefs seemed to be somewhat more in line with "current thinking in foreign language pedagogy" (p. 76). For the second issue addressed in this study, he checked their beliefs twice, at the beginning and the end of one semester, to see if his learners' beliefs changed over time. He found very little change over the whole semester (p. 78), and concluded that learner beliefs do not automatically change when learners are merely exposed to new methodsⁱⁱ, and that learner beliefs were "quite well entrenched" (as cited in Peacock, 1998, p . 128).

Mantle-Bromley (1995) used the BALLI (with five items omitted) to investigate the beliefs of 208 seventh grade Middle School students taking first-year French and Spanish in Kansas. In this case students were much younger than the university students researched in previous studies; however, results were still of interest and importance. Mantle-Bromley's results indicated (as did Horwitz's and Kern's) that some of her students' beliefs about language learning differed from commonly held teacher beliefs. Learners underestimated the difficulty of

language learning to a greater extent than Horwitz's and Kern's. She concluded that teachers need to have a clear understanding of foreign language student beliefs, because learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively in class, work harder outside class, and persist longer with language study (pp. 373-5). Finally, she proposed that when student beliefs and performance do not match, they may become frustrated with the class and with themselves (p. 381), which may result "harmful to their success in the classroom." (p. 383)

Likewise, Wang (1996) carried out research using the BALLI, to explore the beliefs about language learning and the language learning strategies of 20 Chinese EFL college English majors. Results showed that the more successful learners had positive beliefs about learning English while more unsuccessful learners had negative beliefs about the learning process.

Peacock (1998), worked on a project at the City University of Hong Kong. In his thesis three main aims can be seen; a) to determine if the difference between the students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning affect their proficiency; b) develop hypotheses about the origins of learner beliefs about language learning; c) check the correlation between learners self-rated proficiency and tested proficiency. He collected data using a 34 item self-report questionnaire; he used a modified version of the Horwitz's Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), a comprehensive proficiency test, an

interview, and a self-rated proficiency sheet to obtain the necessary data to be examined.

Results showed that some of the beliefs affected the learning of English as a foreign language negatively. Therefore, it was concluded that a number of different learner beliefs were detrimental to language learning, and that these beliefs resulted in 'dissatisfied and frustrated students who could not understand the rationale behind the tasks they carried out in class.'

Kim-Yoon's (2000), also worked using the BALLI but in a different context, researched with EFL learners in Korea, correlated language learning beliefs and motivation. The findings of these studies suggested that learner beliefs about language learning are context-specific; the same as results obtained by Yang in the previous research. For them, context placed an important role for their beliefs about this learning process.

In the same line, Diab (2000) dissertation dealt with beliefs Lebanese students have about learning English as a foreign language. Through the use of the modified version of the BALLI and a background questionnaire, this study revealed that many of the beliefs about language learning of Lebanese students are generally similar to those of EFL students from other parts of the world. However, they also showed several beliefs about language learning in general and learning English in particular that were different from other EFL groups, supporting the proposal that cultural background may be one factor influencing learner beliefs about language learning. Furthermore, significant differences

were found related to variables such as gender, level of proficiency in English, languages spoken at home, and so on.

Le (2004) investigated the affective characteristics of American college students studying Chinese in China, including their reasons for learning Chinese and studying abroad, their beliefs about language learning and their foreign language anxiety. In the conclusions some unique and important characteristics of American college students studying Chinese in China were identified, and provided an overall profile of them. For instance, the different ethnic language and cultural backgrounds likely played an important role in differences about their reasons for learning Chinese and studying abroad, their beliefs about language learning and their foreign language anxiety.

Besides, through this study it was apparent that American students studying Chinese in China were highly motivated but also highly anxious foreign language learners. A substantial majority of them had a long history of foreign language learning, enjoyed learning languages, and believed that they would ultimately learn to speak Chinese very well. However, they also have the highest levels of foreign language anxiety found in studies using three survey instruments, the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and a detailed Individual Background Information Questionnaire (IBIQ).

Bernat (2006), researched on beliefs held by 262 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) language learners at an Australian University. The BALLI was used to collect data, which was later compared with an American study of 156 EAP learners (Siebert, 2003). Contrary to what one may imagine, through data analysis using frequency statistics it was showed that beliefs about language learning reported by both study groups were similar in all categories. It was concluded that despite a small number of inter-group differences, it would not be appropriate to conclude that beliefs about language learning vary by contextual setting. Rather, they are due to the effects of individuals' complex metacognitive structure (as affected by a number of social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors) that is responsible for the nature and strength of these beliefs.

Bernat (2006) also researched on beliefs about language learning among 20 adult Vietnamese ESL learners; the data collection was through the BALLI (Horwitz 1987), which included 34 items on a Likert-type scale. The two aims of the work were: a) identify learners' beliefs about second language learning for the purpose of informing syllabus design and teacher practice; b) discover if links existed between students' motivation for language learning and their beliefs. Results indicated that, despite the respondents' reported lack of language learning aptitude, and the belief in the supremacy of child's second language acquisition, the learners' motivation remained high. It was concluded that external motivators, such as need for employment predominated.

Also recently, Altan (2006) administered the BALLI to a total of 248 foreign language major university students at five universities. The participants were in the departments of English, German, French, Japanese and Arabic and they were all going to be the teachers of the language they were learning. Findings indicated that students have a range of beliefs; for instance, “some people are born with a special ability to learn a foreign language” or “it is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language” with varying degrees of validity. The author states that for these cases the term “myth” might be a more accurate characterization of such beliefs.

The findings confirm that pre-service teachers (as the current participants for this work) arrive at the task of language learning with definite preconceived notions of how to go about it. Therefore, foreign language teacher educators and teacher trainers cannot afford to ignore these beliefs if they expect their students to learn from particular teaching methods and to receive the maximum benefit from them. Knowledge of learner beliefs about language learning should also increase teacher educators’ understanding of how the future teaching of these people would be.

More research was conducted using BALLI as the main tool; nonetheless other researchers omitted some of its questions, or added some more. In addition, other researchers, claiming a more holistic approach, decided to make use of other questionnaires instead of the BALLI and / or complemented their study

with interviews or observation. Next, a review of the most important investigations will be presented.

2.2.1.2 Non BALLI Research

Other researchers, having the BALLI as basis, worked on other questionnaires (with open questions), interviews, diagrams, observation, etc.; to complement and validate their work on language learning beliefs. Questionnaires included different types of questions, as ranking questions, multiple-choice format questions, some considered the inclusion of writings tasks, and other activities.

Campbell, et al. (1993) study related language learning process and beliefs about language learning. They designed a seven-question survey regarding four main aspects of learning: grammar, language aptitude, fluency, and pronunciation. Their intention, similar to the one of this study, was only to describe students' beliefs about language learning of university students.

Results indicated that most students believed that learning how to use grammar correctly is more challenging than learning to use vocabulary correctly, that they should memorize grammar rules, and that most people can learn a foreign language, although some can learn faster than others. By using the open-ended questions there were some other interesting findings. For instance, they showed students' beliefs in the role of age, the value of repetition, and keys to successful language learning, such as exposure to meaningful practice,

determination and motivation, hard work, open-mindedness, and teachers' teaching (new variables of importance too). In short, two beliefs similar to the ones reported in other studies that used the BALLI were the role of age and repetition as the key to success.

Cotterall's (1999), first worked with her own designed questionnaire in 1995. Later on, she reported on a study which investigated the language learning beliefs of a group of students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes courses. The study aimed to identify six dimensions underlying learner responses to a questionnaire (role of the teacher, role of feedback, learner independence, learner confidence in study ability, experience of language learning, and approach to studying) and explored the relationship between each factor and autonomous language learning behavior.

In her results she stated that teachers need to allocate class time and attention to raising awareness of monitoring and evaluating strategies, as well as to provide learners with opportunities to practice using metacognitive strategies. For her, teachers also needed to explore learners' beliefs about their ability as language learners and take action where they discover that learners lack confidence. This would allow teachers to acknowledge their learners' beliefs in the design of classroom tasks and in the organization of learning opportunities.

Su (1995), Kuntz (1997), and Sakui and Gaies (1999) worked on the relationship between the beliefs about learning English and specific contexts and cultures. Su (1995) worked with Chinese EFL university students using the

BALLI and the SILL as main research instruments. Findings showed that students were apparently highly motivated to learning English, they did not consider English as a difficult language to learn, and students retained cultural aspects in their beliefs about learning and teaching in general.

Kuntz's (1997) used her own version of the BALLI, and the Kuntz-Rifkin Instrument. She investigated the beliefs about language learning held by university students enrolled in Swahili compared to students of French and Spanish. She found strong evidence that students from a specific context / language (Swahili) do hold unique beliefs concerning language learning. Sakui & Gaies' (1999), used interviews in their investigation of Japanese students learning beliefs, and four factors underlying learners' responses were identified: contemporary (communicative) orientation to learning English, traditional orientation to learning English, beliefs about the quality and sufficiency of classroom instruction for learning English and beliefs about foreign language aptitude and difficulty.

Groult (2006) was found among the few researchers in the American continent, Mexico specifically. Her research was about the beliefs of Mexican university level students of French and English as foreign languages. She intended to find out what the beliefs of the students were as far as the process of foreign language learning was concerned (eg. what they thought about personal factors, materials, activities, the teacher's role, and/or self-assessment). She interviewed students and created her own questionnaire with open, yes no,

questions, and multiple choice. Results showed that Mexican students have fairly average beliefs. In general, Mexican university students have beliefs that are not very different from other population. Those “similarities have to do with personal characteristics, the teachers’ role, as well as the students autonomy for learning, in most of them there is evidence of lacking plans, objectives, and difficulty for self-assessment.” (p.14)

After all, Language Learning Beliefs started to be an important topic for many people around the world. Kuntz (1996) wrote an essay considering ten years of research on language learning beliefs; she basically carried out a review of all research related to language learning beliefs. Through this report, she described the model of research created by Horwitz to study beliefs held by University students and teachers of the commonly taught languages (English, French, German, and Spanish). From this study, it was concluded that development of the BALLI marked the beginning of systematic research on student beliefs about language learning, and that subsequent research identified common beliefs that should influence language instruction, curriculum development, textbook writing, and program planning.

2.2.1.3 Advantages and disadvantages of the Normative Approach

Among the advantages proposed by authors such as Barcelos (2000) and Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) are that

- a) Questionnaires are less threatening than observation. With questionnaires students are found to feel free to express themselves than when being observed. When there is observation students may feel intimidated, resulting in a different reality to be observed.
- b) It is more useful when there is not enough time or limited resources. With questionnaires a researcher can gather information from many people at one time, and with only the questionnaire and a pen or pencil. Different from what could happen with observation and any other data-gathering procedure which takes longer and more resources.
- c) It is easier to analyze data through questionnaires, and can be used with large number of students (Gimenez, 1994). As there is not a wide range of expected answers, it becomes easier to collect and process the answers obtained. Especially when there is not plenty of time and large groups of students who a researcher may be working with.
- d) Other authors coincide with the advantage expressing that questionnaires provide precision and clarity; they allow access to outside contexts and allow data to be collected at any time, without any preparation from the respondents (McDonough & McDonough, 1997).

However, there are some limitations that must be considered when using questionnaires, the basic tool for the normative approach. Several researchers (Benson & Lor, 1999; Wenden, 1986a; Kalaja, 1995; Gimenez, 1994; Pajares, 1992; among others) concluded after carrying out their investigations that:

- a) Students tend to show inconsistent interpretations of questionnaires because of the generality. That happened even with the grading aspect of a question. The numbers 1 to 5 might be understood differently by individuals from different contexts in spite of having the explanation before beginning to answer the statements.
- b) Apparently students are restricted in their answers since the answers are already given by the different options for each of the items. Therefore, it might not be possible to obtain students' beliefs in their own terms, in their own words, which in the end does not allow researchers to identify inconsistencies and problems in terms of beliefs.
- c) According to Richardson (as cited in Barcelos, 2002) beliefs are highly eclectic; however, that cannot be observed from questionnaires that very constraining and predetermined by the teacher. For this case it would be necessary a different tool which could gain the students' real thoughts about language learning beliefs.

In summary there are advantages of using questionnaires as the main tool for gathering data, such as time saving, information easy to analyze, and application of the questionnaire as many times as needed. Nevertheless, there

are limitations that need to be considered since they may affect the results of the research.

However, not all works have been done using the normative framework. Researchers mention that through this approach, there are aspects that are not considered and which result important in terms of finding out reasons for action, specifically, within the classroom. As a result, some other studies focus on a metacognitive approach.

2.2.2 The Metacognitive Approach

For this second approach, Wenden is considered the most representative author working in this framework. For the metacognitive approach, beliefs are described as stable, although sometimes incorrect knowledge learners acquired about language, learning and the language learning process (Wenden, 2001). After Wenden (1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1998, 1999, 2001), a number of research studies on language learner beliefs adopted the metacognitive approach in their inquiries, for instance, Goh & Liu (1997), White (1999, 1999a).

A characteristic of this approach is that studies do not involve the use of questionnaires, but use semi structured interviews and self-reports to collect data. The justification is that students' metacognitive knowledge also constitutes their "theories in action that help them to reflect on what they are doing." (Wenden, 1987: 112).

Since most of the studies carried on following this approach was Wenden's, she has contributed with much information regarding students' beliefs. For instance, for Wenden, (1997, as cited in Barcelos, 2000), learners do think about their language learning process and are able to articulate some of their beliefs. According to Barcelos (2000) this author found that learners are able to talk about the language, their proficiency in the language, the outcome of their learning efforts, their role in the language learning process, and the best approach to language learning. Therefore, according to Wenden, students can express their thoughts pertaining to their learning process, which is usually the way they act when learning a language.

Next, some of the most important research done following this approach is presented here.

Goh & Xue (2002) worked with people from the Republic of China and wanted to find out if different language learning environments influenced the metacognitive knowledge of groups of language learners. They also inquired about the factors that were causing these similarities or differences. As subjects of this investigation, she worked with 117 undergraduates from China. Some of these subjects, 84, were taking English language courses in China; the remaining (93) were part of an intensive course in Singapore.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers developed a metacognitive knowledge questionnaire (MKQ) based on Flavell's (1979) previous work

related to three-dimensional framework of a person, strategy and task knowledge. This tool consisted of three main parts: with the first part general background information about the subjects were obtained. It also contained 50 statements based on Wenden's (1991) eight subcategories of metacognitive knowledge in a second part. And the last part was a free-response section where subjects could state their opinions about language learning. The results obtained suggest that although language environments can influence individuals' metacognitive knowledge, it may take a long time for long held views to be changed. They usually remain for long periods to modify any personal beliefs (seen as metacognitive knowledge) of the language learning process.

Furthermore, Williams & Burden (1997) mention that in a cognitive approach, the language learner was viewed as an active participant in the learning process, using various mental strategies in order to sort out the system of the language to be learned; that is the reason interest in beliefs in second or foreign language learning beliefs arose. This new conception of learning brought changes both into the language classrooms and the research done on language learning. Researchers felt the need to access language learners' beliefs in order to understand how learners make use of cognitions to guide their cognitive activities in language learning.

According to the mainstream cognitivist viewpoint, all information-bearing structures (representations, as they are named) are stored in the mind. These

representations, or information units, are connected to one another to form a kind of network and can be accessed when required. From this standpoint, beliefs are considered to be static and individual. In this cognitive tradition, the roles of the external factors and the context within which the beliefs come into being have almost never been referred to.

Also, in the early works done regarding beliefs, they were focused on the content of the learners' beliefs (Riley, 1989; Wenden, 1986a). For instance, Riley had as aim of her study to investigate the beliefs about English language learning of first year students at a Japanese university. Results suggested that the students in this study hold beliefs consistent with different methodological orientations to learning English, and that many of the students' strongest beliefs are congruent with a contemporary, communicative orientation to English learning.

Additionally, this study aimed to investigate the difference between students' and teachers' reported beliefs, whether students' beliefs about language learning change over a two-semester course of study, and the relationship between students' beliefs and their English proficiency scores.

Another research question broached the issue of belief change; results show that some beliefs are susceptible to change during a course of study. Those changes could be considered in a positive direction, others in a negative direction. However, some of the major differences between student beliefs and teacher beliefs found in the study include differences about the need for error

correction, the effectiveness of practicing English with classmates, and the role of the L1 in learning the L2.

The results of this study indicate several differences between higher proficiency and lower proficiency students, in the responses to individual questionnaire items. The more proficient students tend to have higher aspirations and are gaining greater pleasure from their studies. On the other hand, the less proficient students tend to believe that learning English is mostly a matter of translation. They also prefer to have their teacher provide explanations in Japanese, even if the teacher is an English native speaker. In general, answers provided by professors and students showed gaps, between the beliefs of teachers and beliefs of the less proficient, and often least motivated students.

Time later, researches were more inclusive and tried to find a correlation between language learners' beliefs and the possible influence they might have on their second language (L2) achievement. For example, in terms of strategies used due to beliefs, Wenden (1995, 1998, 1999), affirmed that there are consistent relationships between learners' beliefs and the strategy used when learning a language; likewise, White, Horwitz, and Sakui, among others, found similar consistent relationships, even if their researches were done based on a different approach (White: 1995; Horwitz: 1999; Sakui & Gaies: 1999; Yang: 1999).

Wenden (1987) investigated learners' prescriptive beliefs in order to know whether they had such beliefs, what those beliefs were, and whether they were reflected in what learners' they do to learn a language. 25 students who had lived in the US for no longer than two years and were enrolled in the advance level classes of the language institute were interviewed. Before the interview, she gave them a list of questions related to several aspects of their language learning to think about. Those questions had to do with reasons for participating in social settings, kinds of strategies they used, their observations about language, the way they dealt with errors, and their feelings about handling of the situation.

Results showed that learners had prescriptive beliefs about the importance of using the language in a natural way, the importance of learning about the language, its grammar and vocabulary, and others; and the importance of personal factors, such as feelings, self-concepts, attitudes, and so on.

Dweck and Legget (1988) obtained as results in their research that when people believe that the ability to learn languages is given at birth, they show helpless behaviors when faced with difficult tasks. In other words, if someone believes to have ability for learning (received at birth), this person will succeed in any circumstances. On the other hand, if the same person believes he did not receive this ability when he was born, this same person will have difficulties when trying to solve any situations.

2.2.2.1 Advantages and Limitations of Metacognitive Approach.

Certainly this approach has positive aspects that are to be considered as follows:

- a) First, as in this approach interviews are a constant tool, they are said to give learners the opportunity to elaborate and reflect on their experience. Then answers can be more complete; at least representative of their beliefs because it appears that interviewers and respondents can hold a genuine conversation with thought and genuine answers.

- b) According to Block (1997, as cited in Barcelos, 2000) interviews allow students to evaluate and define the learning process in their own terms. They are not restricted by a designed questionnaire but free to reflect on their thoughts concerning the learning process. It means that they use their own words to talk about this learning process, which might represent the use of different words than in a questionnaire, and thus express differently and with different meaning to what could be expressed in an already arranged questionnaire.

- c) This approach considers beliefs as knowledge. That implies that learner`s beliefs are part of learners reasoning and they are aware of their learning process, their techniques, and the stages that are used while learning a language. They are not thought as something isolated

and of a sudden reaction. Instead of that, students are aware of their own beliefs and the way they react in a given situation.

- d) Beliefs are part of experience and are interrelated with actions and with environment. They are not considered as isolated but part of a person's life and part of a more complex system that forms and influences the students' learning process.

Despite of all the positive aspects of making use of the metacognitive approach, some criticisms have appeared regarding this approach. Among the main rejections, it is possible to note that:

- a) As Dufva (2003) argues, working in a metacognitive approach emphasizes the individuality of mental knowledge and sees contextual influences as secondary. Then context such as the country, the school, the place are secondary to the learning process. However, she mentions that context has to be considered when doing these works as they have an important role. (p.132).
- b) Barcelos (2000) states that the main limitations is to seeing beliefs as abstracts entities inside learners minds; to this same respect, Kalaja (1995) mentions that language learning beliefs have been seen mainly as stable. On the other hand, researchers (Holec, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Kalaja,1995) have found that language use is action-

oriented and social; also that language creates reality; and that scientific knowledge and lay conception are seen as social constructions of the world; therefore, beliefs are not stable, they are socially constructed, interactive, social in nature and variable.

- c) Beliefs are not inferred from actions but from statements only. They cannot be observed since they are only responses to questions, inquiries to what they think; thus, beliefs are only seen as abstract and mental phenomenon.

More recently a different way of studying beliefs has emerged, one which places much importance to the students surrounding, the student's context, the language learning environment.

2.2.3 The Contextual Approach

A growing tendency in the research of language learning beliefs has to do with the contextual approach. Questionnaires are not used in this approach, beliefs are not considered as metacognitive knowledge, and instead, research studies are qualitative in nature and contribute to an interpretive paradigm. Studies use diaries, journals, narratives, metaphor, and ethnography techniques. .

A feature of the studies within this approach is that they are not only diverse in the theoretical frameworks they employ, but as mentioned above, they also vary in methods of data collection that include case studies, ethnographic classroom

observations, informal discussions and stimulated recalls (Barcelos, 2000), naturalistic interviews, ranking exercises, scenarios and yoked subject procedures (White, 1999). The idea behind this approach is combining different methods to interpret students' beliefs in their context, based on the students' own interpretative meanings and perspectives.

A number of research studies (Gabillon, 1995; Barcelos, 1995; Mori, 1996; Allen, 1996; Benson and Lor, 1999; Kalaja, 2003; White, 1999; Zarate, 2004; Hosenfeld, 2003;) have employed the contextual approach to explore language learning beliefs (Allen, 1996). In this approach, beliefs are viewed as embedded in students' contexts. Research studies within the contextual approach are qualitative in nature and contribute to an interpretive paradigm.

The contextual approach uses several methodologies for their studies, such as ethnography, narratives and metaphors, case studies, ethnographic classroom observations, informal discussions and stimulated recalls, diaries, discourse analysis, naturalistic interviews, ranking exercises, scenarios and yoked subject procedures (Barcelos, 2000).

The amount of research found in this approach seems to be broadening the results and knowledge for language learning beliefs. Apparently more authors tend to consider beliefs as influenced by context, and possibly a large amount of other elements. Next, there is a description of the most representative works done in this approach.

Gabillon (1995) views the research into L2 learners' beliefs through sketching some conceptualizations of beliefs from the psychological and educational literature as they appear in SLL/FLL (Second Language Learning/Foreign Language Learning) belief research. What beliefs are, how they are formed, and how they impact on language learning is reviewed by referring to different theoretical conceptualizations and SLL/FLL research done in this area. In the final part of the study, the author proposed a categorization which views L2 learners' beliefs as a process of progression and concluded by suggesting new directions for future research.

Barcelos (1995), later, worked with 14 senior undergraduate students of English language in Brazil in order to understand their language learning beliefs through the characterization of their culture of learning languages. She carried out this study using observations, semi – structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Among the results obtained, she could identify students' beliefs about the role of grammar, the role of teacher. Most important, the findings showed that students' previous language learning experiences had a strong influence on their foreign language learning beliefs.

Mori's (1996) dissertation considered other aspects involved in the process of learning a language. She related epistemological beliefs and language learning, specifically learning a second or foreign language. After carrying out her study she concluded, similar to Schommer (1989) when developed the 63-item Likert

scale Epistemological Questionnaire, that epistemological beliefs are complex and multidimensional. The language learning beliefs are different from other people in different areas. She also found out that students who were more likely to believe in certain knowledge tended to look for single answers and one-to-one correspondence in language learning. Her findings suggest that context and word morphology play different roles in word inference.

Allen (1996) utilized a different approach to study language learning beliefs in a contextual approach. This researcher studied a Libyan ESL intermediate student in Canada. The main objective for this study was to understand the influence of teachers' beliefs on the students' language learning beliefs. Four main procedures were used to collect the data necessary for the research, classroom observation, document analysis, teacher and student interviews, and learner diaries. Results from this study showed that this student changed his beliefs about language learning during the ESL course. Somehow, in the end, the student's beliefs became more similar to the teacher's beliefs.

Benson and Lor (1999) carried out a research with 16 first-year undergraduates, and aimed to take into consideration three levels of analysis: conception, belief, and approach. These authors wanted to know whether a higher order of conceptions of language and language learning could be identified or not, and whether the notion of approaches to language learning could help understand the functions of beliefs in context. As results, they found that learners' conception of the object and process of learning were influential in the learner's beliefs, and subsequently learning strategies. Then there was a direct relation

between what they thought and the way they reacted in this process. For them conception of learning constitutes a higher level of abstraction than simple beliefs; as a result this conception is significant because it helps to classify learner beliefs, and the approach to learning forms the level at which conception and beliefs function. These authors also discovered that in order to modify beliefs, the learner must also modify the underlying conceptions on which they are based and pay attention to the context in which they function, much more complex processes.

White (1999) conducted a longitudinal study on beliefs, expectations and self-instruction. She researched 23 Japanese and Spanish languages students; for this purpose she used interviews, open questionnaires and discourse analysis aiming to collect the students' expectations and identify their variation through time, if any. In her results she observed some modifications on the students' conceptions of the language learning process

In a more recent study, Zarate (2004), explained that the way we see the "world and our ways of thinking develop from our contact with others and shape our cultural representations." (p. 29). Presumably, these representations, which are sometimes referred to as stereotypes, images, attitudes, and prejudices, are partly shaped by media, literature, tourist information booklets, and various kinds of publicly available sources of information (Castellotti, 2001; Castellotti & Moore, 2002).

In the contextual approach, there has been interesting findings. Basically, authors using several data-gathering methods in this approach argue that beliefs are context-dependent and that they cannot be looked into without considering the context in which they are formed; another important aspect that is considered is the individual's past and present experience in the learning process and in life. Even If this approach has been the most explored one, there are advantages and limitations that need to be considered.

2.2.3.1 Advantages and Limitations of the Contextual Approach.

Among the good qualities of research done based on contextual approaches, it is important to mention that

- a) There is a broader definition of beliefs in the contextual approach. They are seen as dynamic and social. Beliefs are considered to be influenced by many factors, not only cognitive but also elements surrounding the student.

- b) Moreover, researchers who decided to work on the contextual approach utilize different methodologies to investigate beliefs. Studies are conducted using any possible techniques (ethnographic mainly), along with others.

- c) One more aspect considered as positive of this approach is the importance given to the student's own perspective and context in which beliefs may be formed, or modified. For the researchers of this approach, what students express can be very valuable when analyzing the data.

In spite of the advantages of following the contextual approach when researching on language learning beliefs, some disadvantages have been identified.

- a) There is no evidence that with this approach researchers place enough importance to the interaction between beliefs and actions students take. A cognitive aspect is not considered, only context is crucial for their beliefs.
- b) As observed with the examples of research done in the contextual approach, studies are more suitable with small samples. The amount of techniques for data collection, such as observation, and repeated interviews, does not allow any researcher to have a big sample universe to work with.
- c) In a way, studies in the contextual approach fail to see the interactive nature of beliefs and actions. There is no evidence of a relationship stated between beliefs and many different aspects of a student's reaction towards the learning process, which may result in an incomplete perspective of the whole phenomena.

It is important to mention that although there is definitely more information related to contextual approach research, only some of them are mentioned to help locate the present study in the field of beliefs.

2.3 Advantages and Limitations of the Three Approaches

Although more recently some other approaches might be appearing, there are three main theoretical frameworks in language learner beliefs research. However, they present, as stated before, advantages and limitations, which eventually opens a possibility for more research addressing aspects that were not taken into consideration previously.

As a starting point it could be argued that quantitative research methods in the normative approach intend to provide clarity and precision by using well-designed questionnaires and descriptive statistics. In this approach beliefs are considered indicators of future behavior; there is a cause-effect relationship. This approach also allows the inclusion of a large number of respondents at different time periods and at outside contexts, which represents no restrictions regarding these variables.

However, there could be doubts related to normative research; for instance, beliefs are only those identified by the researcher through elaborated questionnaires, possibly not all the beliefs learners might have about language

learning. Apart from that, with those elaborated statements there is always a potential for misunderstanding items in the questionnaires. Finally, Wilkinson & Schwartz and Weinstein (1989; 1994, as cited in Barcelos, 2000) state that anybody's personal belief system cannot be fully captured by people's responses to a set of normative statements. It takes more than just a simple questionnaire to understand a rich and complex beliefs system.

For the metacognitive approach, studies are different from the previous approach, most often of small-scale, in-depth, descriptive and through interpretative analyses. Nevertheless, Gabillon (2000) mentioned that with the use of interviews, learners have the opportunity to elaborate and reflect on their experience, not only considering what was expressed by students but also what can be observed during the interview. Furthermore, this approach considers beliefs as knowledge learners have about language learning, which implies that learners' beliefs are part of learners' reasoning. They are not passive elements of the phenomenon but active and determinant. Finally, language learning beliefs are considered as good indicators of learners' autonomy and effectiveness in language learning.

However, it has been argued that researchers see beliefs as abstract entities inside learners' minds; as something that has no relevance with actions. Besides, for these researchers, beliefs are already constructed and never change, they remain the same during their whole life. Whereas researchers like Holec (1987) mention that beliefs can be changed.

For the contextual approach, there is an apparent broader definition of beliefs; they are considered dynamic and social; thus students' beliefs are investigated according to their actions. Moreover, according to Gabillon (2000) through the contextual approach there is a more positive view of the learner because researchers take students' own perspectives and contexts into account; language learning beliefs are part of the culture of learning and representations of language learning in any society; something that does not occur with the other two approaches.

In contrast, it seems like this approach does not look into beliefs evolution, and interaction between beliefs and action. More important, this approach is used with a small number of participants only. Consequently, there is difficulty for application of results to broader contexts and to larger samples. Despite the approach being used for the research of language learning beliefs, some conclusions can be drawn out of the results obtained in the previous studies mentioned in the literature review.

2.3.1 Conclusion

After having reviewed the investigations about language learning beliefs, it can be observed that a vast majority has to do with the normative approach; nevertheless, as Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005) stated that the choice of research methodology or approach in language learner beliefs studies will depend on the investigator's purpose and research questions, as well as the adopted view of

the nature and function on learner beliefs. There is not a best approach, each one of them shows weaknesses and strengths; what will make the study important and valuable is not the approach but the given support for the approach selected for the study.

Another aspect that can be observed is that the majority of the metacognitive approach investigations were mostly conducted by Wenden (1995, 1998, 1999), having as basis metacognitive theories, which did not happen with the normative approach that has no visible supporting theory. Yet, the contextual approach research goes deeper into the individual and has as basis many theories and methodologies; then there is more theory-foundation, which makes it a more complete approach, very little feasible for most cases, though.

Next, the main characteristics of the findings obtained in each of the approaches are presented. The following is done in order to show similarities and differences that can be related to the present study.

Findings from the normative approach can be summed up as follows:

- a) Students hold a range of beliefs and take them to the English language classroom. Students then arrive at the task of language with definite preconceived notions of how to go about it.
- b) Students' beliefs about learning English were associated with their use of a variety of learning strategies.

- c) There are gaps between teacher and learner beliefs and that can lead to reduced learner confidence in and satisfaction with the class and to unwillingness to take an active role in the process (dysfunctional).
- d) There are differences in beliefs from diverse groups because of cultural background and previous experiences.
- e) A number of different learner beliefs were detrimental to language learning, and that these beliefs resulted in 'dissatisfied and frustrated students.
- f) Learner's beliefs do not automatically change when learners are merely exposed to new methods.

On the other hand, findings from the Metacognitive Approach are summed up as follows:

- a) Students beliefs can be expressed and determine the way one reacts when learning a language.
- b) Beliefs usually remain for long periods; they are usually consistent, static and individual.
- c) Learners' beliefs determine the strategy used when learning a language;
- d) There are differences between higher proficiency and lower proficiency students.
- e) Beliefs are determinant for the student's success

Finally, findings from the Contextual Approach are summed up as follows:

- a) Beliefs are complex and multidimensional

- b) Previous language learning experiences have strong influence on language learning beliefs.
- c) Representations (beliefs) are also shaped by the mass media.
- d) Language learning beliefs are different from other people in different areas. Context plays an important role.
- e) Students can change beliefs about language learning during an ESL/EFL course.
- f) There is a direct relation between what students think and the way they react. As an example, beliefs determine the student's learning strategies.

The conclusion we arrive at are that current literature suggests that beliefs about language learning have the potential to influence the learners' attitudes to language and to learning, their motivation, and shape their experiences and actions in the classroom, which in the end might represent a better performance in the language use. Then, they can be functional in some cases but dysfunctional in some others, as when they affect their academic achievement and make them fail any subject. Moreover, they have the potential to either hinder or promote the learners' ultimate success in the final acquisition of a new language and reduce the length of time committed to language learning.

Taking into consideration the institution's context (EFL), and every limitation we might have, it would be reasonable to consider learners' beliefs and expectations. We need to acknowledge that, as shown by previous research,

beliefs “may contribute to a more conducive learning environment and to more effective learning” (Chawhan & Oliver, 2000:25).

In this specific context as foreign language teachers, we cannot afford to ignore students’ – also teachers- beliefs if we expect our students to be open to particular teaching methods and to reach better performance due to these methods. As language teacher educators and teacher trainers, we cannot afford to ignore these beliefs if we expect our students to learn from particular teaching methods and to receive the maximum benefit from them.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODS

In this chapter, information about the research design, subjects, setting, instruments that were chosen to carry out this study will be explained. Likewise, the data analysis which was conducted with the database will be presented.

3.1 Research Design

For this specific case, since the main tool for data collection is the BALLI, and this research has a quantitative nature, the normative approach will be the guide used. Mostly, this study is based on what Horwitz started when created the BALLI; from that moment she started to look at different aspects of the language learning process that at that point were unexplored. Time afterwards, other researchers continued this trend and worked on other different variables, always related to beliefs.

Needless to say, there is some theoretical support from all of those researchers who continued what Horwitz' started years before. With the contribution of these researches, beliefs area broadened in its knowledge, at the same time, they brought to light new opportunities to do research. Apparently, current trends focus more on a contextual approach considering all of the possible affecting variables in the learners' environment; nevertheless, the case for this study is different.

In this normative approach-based study, there is only the intention to describe what learners' beliefs are and try to find correlations among them, if any. There is no intention of explaining or understanding those beliefs, even though there may be some attempts to do so. Maybe there are many variables influencing students, and possibly affecting their academic achievement; however, that is not the main goal for this present research.

Using the students' final grades, the author of this thesis aimed to find correlations, first, between these and the students' beliefs. As we know, grades will not always show the students' knowledge or performance of the target language. However they can be a reference to their academic achievement towards the English language learning.

3.2 Subjects

This research was conducted at the University of Quintana Roo and a hundred and seventeen students were the informants. They were only students of the Lengua Inglesa Major who were being trained as future teachers of English.

The vast majority of the students were Mexicans from Quintana Roo State; however, there were others from different parts of the country and the world. For instance, eight of them were from Asian countries: seven from Taiwan and one from Korea; others from Central and South America, and lately, a few other students from the United States.

For this stage, the participants in the investigation were selected at convenience. Students taken into account were from all the terms available at the moment of the study, the third, fifth, seventh and ninth semesters; since those students in the first semesters were not enrolled in English lessons, they were not included.

It must be acknowledged that because of different schedules in schools, students missing classes or any other cause, it was always difficult to find them all. As a consequence, there was some data missing, specifically with their final grades.

3.3 Setting

The University of Quintana Roo is a public college located in the South East of Mexico, in the State of Quintana Roo; with an enrollment of about 3, 200 studentsⁱⁱⁱ in the campus Cozumel and Chetumal, students in eleven different majors, four masters' programs and two doctoral programs. Currently, this university offers courses on social sciences, engineering, tourism, computer sciences, natural resources management, business, marketing, anthropology, education and international affairs, among others.

3.4 Instruments

This study required two basic instruments, two data-collecting instruments: a questionnaire, and students' immediate past grade in the English subject. The questionnaire, which has been widely used in the past, and which was found to be suitable for this research, was the Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) proposed in 1988. Because of context, there were minor adaptations done to the instrument so that it could be used with the subjects. This questionnaire has been very popular in previous research to assess students' beliefs about learning a foreign or second language. (See Appendix 1)

3.4.1 BALLI

The BALLI questionnaire was designed to be a provider of data regarding beliefs not only about learning, but also about learning a new language, in this case, English language. This inventory consisted of 34 items covering five major areas, a) nature of learning, b) foreign language aptitude, c) language difficulty, d) learning and communication strategies, and e) motivation.

Each dimension or area has an uneven number of items. For instance, the area that has to do with nature of learning contains 8 items, in which beliefs on the learning process are measured. The questions are:

Table 1 Nature of Learning Dimension

Nature of Learning	
Items	
7.	It's necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English.
11.	It is the best to learn English in an English-speaking country
12.	I enjoy practicing English with English-speaking people.
15.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words
21.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar
25.	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.
26.	The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language.
33.	The English language is

The foreign language aptitude dimension contains 9 items. They measure the students' beliefs on how they think a foreign language is learned. The questions are:

Table 2. Foreign Language Aptitude Dimension

Foreign Language Aptitude Dimension	
Items	
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language.
2.	Some people have a special ability for learning second language.

5.	People in my country are very good at learning second languages.
9.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
10.	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages
14.	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
17.	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
28.	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.
31.	Everyone can learn to speak a second language

The difficulty of language learning dimension contains 5 items. They measure the students' beliefs on how difficult they think learning a language is. The questions are:

Table 3. Difficulty of Language Learning Dimension

Difficulty of Language Learning Dimension	
Items	
3.	Some languages are easier than others
23.	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language
32.	It is easier to read than to write a foreign language
33.	The English language is
34.	<p>If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than 1 year - 1 to 2 years - 3 to 5 years - 5 to 10 years - You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.

The learning and communication strategies dimension contains 8 items. They measure the students' beliefs on the learning and communication strategies they have when trying to learn a language. The questions are:

Table 4. Learning and Communication Strategies Dimension

Learning and Communication Strategies	
Items	
6.	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.
8.	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.
12.	I enjoy practicing English native speakers of English.
13.	It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English
16.	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
19.	I feel shy speaking English with other people.
20.	If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
24.	It is important to practice with cassettes, tapes, or CD ROMs

The motivation and expectations dimension contains 6 items. They measure the students' beliefs on how motivated they are; as well as their expectations from the learning process. The questions are:

Table 5. Motivations and Expectations Dimension

Motivations and Expectations	
Items	
4.	I believe I will learn to speak English very well.
18.	People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.
22.	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know English-speaking people.

27	If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.
29.	I want to learn to speak English very well.
30.	I would like to have English-speaking friends.

Two items of the instrument are repeated as they overlap their areas. (12 and 33)

Eventually, only minor changes were necessary in order to use this instrument. In the original version found there were words or expressions such as 'Americans', they were replaced with 'English-speaking people.'

As with almost all studies done in terms of opinions, or beliefs, this instrument employs a five-point Likert Scale ranging from answers indicating 'strongly disagree,' to 'strongly agree;' the same being used for this present study.

For this tool to be used it was needed to pilot it with some students before actually using it with the sample thought. Before that, some minor changes were necessary. For instance, the BALLI was translated into Spanish since that is the students' mother tongue. Another reason for having the inventory in Spanish is because that way there would not be misunderstandings or problems with words difficult to understand. Nevertheless, after piloting the instruments it was necessary to do some changes, minor ones such as the modification of a word for a more colloquial word or expression.

After asking 34 students to answer the BALLI, the results were analyzed with the Statistics Program for Social Studies (SPSS) software. The reliability statistics showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .729, which results enough to consider this tool as reliable (Muijs, 2004).

3.4.2 Students' grades

The other essential information considered for this research was the students' final grades. In previous research proficiency exams were used as the aspect to be related with their beliefs, not in this case. The setting of this study does not allow a proficiency exam to be used; at least in this case, the use of a proficiency exam is not feasible because of important reasons such as money, time, and students' availability.

Then, the decision taken for this case was to ask the students' final grades to teachers responsible of each one of the levels of English (from English I to English VII subjects). They were only global grades that represented for the researcher and the current study a measure of academic achievement.

3.5 Procedure

The BALLI instrument was given to as many people as possible from all the different semesters in the English language major; all available students were asked to answer it. The only way to obtain this data from students was by meeting students in their classrooms, at the beginning or at the end of their

classes. Otherwise, it was hard to find them because of the different schedule and different levels. After talking to the professors and explaining them what the instrument was about, students were asked to cooperate.

When answering the instruments they were asked not to write their names on the paper so that they could feel more comfortable, or more honest when giving their responses. Yet, they were asked to write their student ID number so that it was possible to know who believed what and what his or her grade was.

Also, in order to have more accurate information, they were asked not to share answers with classmates, they were said that the objective of the tool was to know about their opinions and that it had to be personal. Their answers were expected to reflect their opinions and feelings about the issue being asked.

For this labor more expected time was necessary than what was thought. That was because some individuals were studying in the morning, other in the afternoon and some of them were not taking any class when the tool was intended to be applied. However, after some time a vast majority (about 90%) of students answered the BALLI.

Once the data from the inventory was obtained and the grades were provided by teachers, the next stage consisted on the processing of that information. For this phase, it was essential to make use of the SPSS Statistics Software

Manager. This way, the program would help analyze the answers to each item in the instrument used.

Moreover, as the students' previous grade in English was necessary, professors in charge of those classes were requested to provide that information. Yet, there was not a full response to the request; then it was necessary to wait for a short period of time until that piece of information was given. It is understandable that, for this current research, it was necessary to obtain permission from the students to use their English final grade; nonetheless, it was not possible for two main reasons, the first was that since the term had already finished, students were not present and it was not possible to get it from all of them. The second reason was because the research dealt with the data only, not with the subjects, then I believed a permission was not necessary, at least not in that moment.

3.6 Data Analysis

As mentioned above, the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) software was used for all the purposes of this study. Among the needed analysis for which this software program was used, descriptive analysis was the most used; that was due to the nature of the research.

For instance, to find all the demographic data such as number of subjects, their gender, their grades, their semesters, their mother tongue, and other more

important issues as the number of times a response was either or five, it was necessary to do frequency analysis from this software.

Since this present study is descriptive, some of the main research questions had to be answered through descriptive analysis. For instance, the first question that deals with the most and least common language learning beliefs students of Lengua Inglesa Major have had to be found through mean, median, and mode. In spite of this analysis, it was also considered compulsory to do analysis dimensions. The five dimensions of which the BALLI is formed were decomposed into their minimal elements, the isolated items. By doing that, it was possible to identify not only the most common beliefs as group (dimensions) but the most and least common belief.

In order to answer the main question of this research, which deals with the relationship between beliefs and academic achievement, bivariate correlations were necessary. By doing this it was possible to answer if there was a direct effect between what they thought the language learning should be and the grades obtained at the end of an English course.

Furthermore, for obtaining extra information from this database such as gender differences, it was necessary to analyse responses through cross tabulations. Only through these processes was possible to find those unnoticeable at first sight between what a man and a woman can think of the EFL or ESL language learning process.

Next, some of the most important findings from the analysis of the database are to be presented in the following chapter. They intend to answer the research questions and provide helpful extra information.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS

Next, there is a presentation of the results obtained; they were organized to answer first the research questions and then other extra information that was obtained. The emphasis is made in whether the beliefs identified are functional or dysfunctional; understanding as functional all those beliefs that lead to positive language attitudes and allow the development of the target language. Dysfunctional (or negative) beliefs are those that origins negative behavior towards the language learning process (Bernat, 2006).

From the communicative approach and the constructivism theory, a language is learnt when practicing, when talking to native speakers, when students are motivated, and so on. Consequently, if beliefs and behavior meet the requirements of these principles then they are functional; if not, then they are dysfunctional because they affect the language learning process. That is the reason that when doing the analysis a belief can be expressed as functional or dysfunctional.

Some demographic data was also included in this part to help us better understand the context and the surrounding conditions where this study took place.

4.1 Demographic Data

Among the information obtained, it was identified that students vary in age; the range is between 19 to 23 years old; few cases of older subjects were found (dispersed cases). Not surprisingly was the fact that about 68 % of the students were female and the rest, twenty-eight percent, male.

Also, it was observable that around a 95 % of the subjects' mother tongue is Spanish, about 2 % has Maya as mother tongue, and about a 3% of the universe has other languages (5 students). About a 2 % of the students had had experience living in an English speaking country, among other data. Moreover, the majority of the students were Mexicans from Quintana Roo State; however, there were others from different parts of the country and from abroad. For instance, eight of them were from Asian countries: seven from Taiwan and one from Korea; others from Central and South America, and lately, a few other students from the United States (which may explain why for some the mother tongue was not Spanish).

In the following part the research questions of the study are going to be presented in the order they were stated to corroborate or disprove the hypothesis posted at the beginning of this thesis. The first question was: what were the most and least common language learning beliefs students of Lengua Inglesa have? Then, are students' language learning beliefs related to their EFL

academic achievement? Afterwards, there is a description of the five dimensions of the BALLI for a deeper look into the subjects' beliefs. Finally, some other findings are presented. This information was not planned; nevertheless it is believed to be of relevance for the purpose of this study.

4.2 What are the most and least common language learning beliefs students of Lengua Inglesa Major have?

One of the main objectives of the study was to identify the most and least common beliefs of these students towards the learning process of the English language. The idea behind this objective was to identify the type of students in this EFL teacher training programme. In this respect, the following table shows the top ten beliefs. The highest belief is 'I want to learn English very well' (followed by 'Everybody can learn a second language.')

Table 6. Top eleven beliefs

Items		Mean
29.	I want to learn to speak English very well	4.7717
31.	Everyone can learn to speak a second language.	4.5118
16.	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	4.4385
30.	I would like to have English language speakers friends.	4.4252
27.	If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	4.3387

4.	I believe I will learn to speak English very well	4.3256
24.	It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs.	4.2756
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language.	4.2077
18.	People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	4.1440
6.	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	4.1231
12.	I enjoy practicing English with the native speakers I meet.	4.1094

As can be observed in table six, the top beliefs show a common mean of no more than 4 points (which means that they tend to strongly agree on these issues). For most of these items, it could be said that those answers represent a “good reasoning” in terms of language learning beliefs. A clear example can be observed in item six, “it is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.” Most of the respondents (mean: 4.1) expressed their agreement with this statement. From my view, this answer represents a functional belief, since these students express that learning English necessarily requires an excellent pronunciation; therefore, they would have to invest much time on their pronunciation skill so that it could actually ‘speak English’.

However, taking a closer look it may be noted that for item number one (It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language) the results obtained can have an interpretation of a dysfunctional belief. In other words, most of the respondents believe that children have it easier when trying to learn a second or foreign language. In the case of the universe for this study, they are not

children, and then if they are not having a good academic achievement, they might be thinking that their age could be an important factor causing it. For the other beliefs, there may not be more comments as what they believe seems to be near to what can be considered as expected, given the nature of the major these subjects are registered.

On the contrary, there were beliefs that most students strongly disagree with. The following table shows those ten beliefs For instance, the two beliefs that were found to have similar results with a very low mean were ‘Nothing should be said in English until it is said correctly,’ a mean of 1.8125. The same happened with the item that mentions that “people who are good at math are not good at languages”, with a mean of 2.2016. (See Table 7)

Table 7. Last ten beliefs

Items	Mean
8. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	1.8125
10. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.2016
17. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	2.4646
23. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	2.6614
26. The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language.	2.7795
34. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?	2.8651
13. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	2.9154

33. The English language is a) very difficult b) difficult c) not easy not difficult d) easy e) very easy	2.9444
19. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	3.0394
20. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	3.1260

Those results may have been expected and may not cause any dysfunctional behavior for students in the learning process. However, if looking carefully at questions 26 (The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language) and question 19 (I feel shy speaking English with other people) it may result interesting to reflect on them.

Those findings may be indicating some dysfunctional behavior. For instance, if they believe that the most important part of learning English is learning to translate from their own language then they would be facing some difficulties when learning English. It is well known that knowing a language does not only include the meaning of words and their meaning, it also means to know many cultural aspects of the language. Therefore, if they believe it is enough to do literal translations to know a language, they are going to be surprised when strange phrases result from those changes of linguistic codes.

In addition, if they feel shy speaking English with other people, that attitude might result in poor practice of the target language, contrary to the continuous practice and repetition found in the Communicative approach principles. Therefore, the learning process may occur very slowly or not happen at all if

they do not fulfill the requirements learning a language has. It is known that for a student to learn a language requires of a lot of practice of all the skills and sub skills of English, thus an attitude like that would not be good for the sake of the learning process.

In general, if these students' beliefs are close to 3 points (neutral), that indicates that they are not sure if what is being stated is good or bad for the learning process. Being neutral does not show self-confidence on what is needed for the process to be successful. Instead, those answers might be indicating hesitation and not knowing how to react towards certain situations.

Since Horwitz (1987) and many of the Normative-Approach followers divided the BALLI in five dimensions, Language Difficulty, EFL Aptitude, Nature of Learning, Learning Strategies, and Motivation, it was thought that a revision of these dimensions could provide important information for the purpose of this study.

4.3 Dimensions Analysis

Once having the groups well organized, it was observable that the motivation dimension was the one with more beliefs showing a tendency towards the 5 points (strongly agree). The mean of this dimension was 4.28, followed by the Nature of Language dimension (3.56), Learning and the Strategies dimension (3.4), the EFL Aptitude dimension (3.35), and the dimension that showed the

least number was Language Difficulty dimension (3.1). In the subsequent part, each of these dimensions is reviewed with a closer look, in the order before mentioned. Then results were analyzed.

a. Motivation Dimension

This dimension was integrated by 6 items. For these items separately, the mean, median and mode were calculated at the beginning. The results apparently showed (see table 14) some motivation because of the main item of this dimension, “I want to learn to speak English very well,” which had as mode 5 points, and as mean 4.7 points; along with the statement “I believe I will learn to speak English very well.” Those results may have been an indicator of motivation towards the language.

Perhaps that could be related to the following items of the dimension. They may have stated that they want to learn English very well because they would like to have English language speakers as friends, they want to have better job opportunities, people in Mexico feel that it is important to speak English and that through English they can get to know native speakers better.

Table 14. Motivation Dimension

	Mean	Median	Mode
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well	4.3256	4.0000	5.00
18. People in my country feel that it is important to	4.1440	4.0000	4.00

speaking English.			
22. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know native speakers better.	3.7165	4.0000	4.00
27. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	4.3387	4.0000	5.00
29. I want to learn to speak English very well.	4.7717	5.0000	5.00
30. I would like to have English language speakers as friends	4.4252	5.0000	5.00

b. Nature of Learning Dimension

The second dimension with more answers towards “strongly agree” was the learning dimension, and it was integrated by 8 items. For these items, the mean, median, and mode were calculated at the beginning, for each of the items separately.. The results show in the mode row that they agree mostly with six out of eight of the items of the dimension. (See Table 12).

The item with a higher mean was that students enjoy practicing English with the native Speakers they meet, with a mean of 4.1094. Maybe this item had more people with ‘agree’ answers because the nature of the item is also related to motivation (the dimension with more ‘strongly agree’ choice); again, they were motivated to learn the language (functional).

The following items with close mean were that they believed necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English, with a mean of 3.7752; they believed it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country, mean of 3.7734; they believed the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words, mean of 3.7209; they believed that learning a foreign

language is different than learning other academic subjects, with mean 3.9370; and they believed that the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar, with a mean 3.4803.

All of the items mentioned a mode of 4, which may indicate that they do believe seriously on the statements of those dimensions. What could be noted was that they thought grammar is the most important part of the language. For teachers who may have been concerned with the communicative aspect of the language, that belief may have caused a dysfunctional behavior due to the fact that perhaps they were more interested in knowing about grammar rules and not the other aspects of English language. The opposite, may have occurred with teachers or researchers who place very much weight to grammar, as an important element for language learning.

The other item that could be commented had to do with translation. The item that stated that “the most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language,” obtained a mean of 2.7795, and a mode of 3. That may indicate (as mentioned in the last section, they think translation plays an important role for learning a language) a dysfunctional behavior towards the learning process, from the constructivism, and a communicative approach. when placing more emphasis to writing or translation, the main objective is lost, communication. Obviously, there can be communication through writing but translation requires more than just writing, it is necessary to know the target and origin languages well, there is a necessity of learning grammar rules, social

contexts, and so on, so that a student can do translation. This belief and behavior directly affect the language learning process.

Table 12. Nature of Learning Dimension

	Mean	Median	Mode
7. It is necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English.	3.7752	4.0000	4.00
11. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	3.7734	4.0000	4.00
12. I enjoy practicing English with the native Speakers I meet	4.1094	4.0000	4.00
15. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words.	3.7209	4.0000	4.00
21. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	3.4803	4.0000	4.00
25. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	3.9370	4.0000	4.00
26. The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language.	2.7795	3.0000	3.00
33. The English Language is:	2.9444	3.0000	3.00

c. Learning Strategies Dimension

This dimension was integrated by 8 items. For these items in separated, the mean, median, and mode were calculated. (See Table 13).

The higher means for this dimension were found in three items, it is important to repeat and practice a lot, mean of 4.4385; It is important to practice (very related to the previous item) with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs, mean of 4.2756; For these previous items there is no important comments, only that they believe that practice is important.

The other two items with high means were “It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation,” mean of 4.1231; and I enjoy practicing English with the native Speakers I meet, 4.1094. As with the previous dimensions, it was thought that the explanation of their means is that somehow they are related to motivation because of the words ‘excellent pronunciation’ and ‘I enjoy’.

The items that showed neutral beliefs were: If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on, mean of 3.1260; I feel shy speaking English with other people, mean of 3.0394; and It’s OK to guess if you don’t know a word in English, 2.9154; results obtained in this items showed that they might know if it is recommended to allow a person speak without correcting or not; and that they are not sure if guessing is correct. However, the item that expresses hesitation when speaking can be a dysfunctional behavior, since they might be shy and unmotivated when having to speak.

The item with the lowest mean was that one should not say anything in English until one can say it correctly, mean of 1.8125; apparently this belief might help them cope with the learning process since they express that they do not have to know the word correctly to use it.

Table 13. Learning Strategies Dimension

	Mean	Median	Mode
6. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	4.1231	4.0000	5.00

8. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	1.8125	2.0000	1.00
12. I enjoy practicing English with the native Speakers I meet.	4.1094	4.0000	4.00
13. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English	2.9154	3.0000	3.00
16. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	4.4385	5.0000	5.00
19. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	3.0394	3.0000	4.00
20. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	3.1260	3.0000	3.00
24. It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs.	4.2756	4.0000	4.00

d. EFL Aptitude Dimension

The second lowest dimension (3.35) was integrated by 9 items. For these items, the mean, median, and mode were calculated for each of them. (See Table 11). Having a low mean, compared with the other four dimensions could possibly indicate that there was no enough aptitude towards the language learning, as can be observed in the following items.

The first two items with high mean in the dimension were, "everyone can learn to speak a second language," mean of 4.5118; and it is easier for children than adults to learn a second language, 4.2077. In spite of having a low number as a group, these items analyzed in isolation can indicate that adults believe that it is easier for children to learn a language, and that they are going to have a hard time learning it. Needless to say, that can be a dysfunctional belief which may result in "negative" behavior in the English lessons.

Also, most of the subjects tend to agree that some people have a special ability for learning second language, mean of 3.6846; that it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one, mean of 3.4186; some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages, mean of 3.1692; and that people who speak more than one language are very intelligent, 3.1575; those results may be indicating that they believe that of the universe some do not think they have this ability, and perhaps that they are not intelligent enough for the language, which may result in dysfunctional beliefs.

Finally, even though most of the subjects did not believe that women are better than men at learning foreign languages, mode of 2, there was still a number of subjects who believed the opposite; as a consequence that belief may have been interfering in the learning process. The same occurred with the subjects who believed that people who were good at mathematics or science were not good at learning foreign languages (2.2016); then if a student considered himself as good in mathematics; then it was to be difficult for that person to learn the language, another dysfunctional-like belief.

Table 11. EFL Aptitude Dimension

	Mean	Median	Mode
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language.	4.2077	4.0000	5.00
2. Some people have a special ability for learning second language.	3.6846	4.0000	4.00
5. People in my country are very good at learning second languages.	3.3798	3.0000	3.00
9. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	3.4186	3.0000	4.00
10. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.2016	2.0000	2.00
14. I have a special ability for learning foreign	3.1692	3.0000	3.00

languages.			
17. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	2.4646	2.0000	2.00(a)
28. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent	3.1575	3.0000	3.00
31. Everyone can learn to speak a second language	4.5118	5.0000	5.00

a Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

e. Language Difficulty Dimension

This dimension obtained the lowest mean of all the five dimensions. In general, subjects mostly disagree with these statements. Nevertheless, when analyzing the items of the dimensions interesting facts could be noted. For these items in separated, the mean, median, and mode were calculated. (See Table 10)

Even if the mean of the complete dimension was low, some items were found to have high means. For instance, the item that states that some languages are easier than others, mean of 3.7188; and that it is easier to read than to write English, mean of 3.3071. Those numbers may show that English is not a difficult or an easy language, (mode, 4) therefore, for some of those subjects the language is difficult to learn and for others it is easy.

Students also believed mostly that it is easier to speak than understand English, mean of 2.6614; although if checking the mode (3) it may be possible to state that most of them did not know what to say. Similar results were obtained with the statement, the English language is, the results expressed that they believe that English is not difficult but it is not easy, mean of 2.9444.

Finally, they expressed that if someone spent one hour a day learning a language, it would take them to speak it very well between one to five years, mean of 2.8651. That finding would suggest that they believe it takes time and continuity to learn a language. Maybe that also indicates that some people take less time than others to learn a language.

Table. 10 Language Difficulty Dimension

Items	Mean	Median	Mode
3. Some languages are easier than others.	3.7188	4.0000	4.00
23. It is easier to speak than understand English	2.6614	3.0000	3.00
32. It is easier to read than to write English.	3.3071	3.0000	3.00
33. The English language is: a) very difficult b) difficult c) not easy not difficult d) easy e) very easy	2.9444	3.0000	3.00
34. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?	2.8651	3.0000	4.00

As a conclusion of this part of the analysis, it can be said that within the most and least common beliefs, those items that express motivation to learn the language can be functional. Nevertheless, there were other findings that where students strongly agree or just agree with could be treated as dysfunctional, 'It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language' (similar to Horwitz, 1998), for example. In addition, those beliefs around the 3, (neutrals) may also be dysfunctional since they would not know how to react in a given situation of the language learning process.

Through analysis of the different dimensions of the BALLI questionnaire, I can conclude that there are beliefs in a specific dimension that could be treated as functional, those of the motivation dimension. However, when examining results of the Nature of learning dimension, different beliefs were found, more erroneous thoughts of the language learning process predominated which in the end may be affecting the students' academic achievement.

Learning strategies dimension beliefs showed, more than anything, hesitation, which may represent influence on the academic achievement. The EFL Aptitude Dimension beliefs showed more than anything dysfunctional beliefs indicating that there might not be enough aptitude for the language learning (perhaps a good reason if they were not having good grades). Finally, the Language Difficulty Dimension beliefs showed much hesitation, surely, having as a result poor academic achievement.

With the last part most and least common beliefs were identified through item by item, and dimensions analyses. Next, the answer to the other main issue of the research is to be analyzed.

4.4 Are students' language learning beliefs related to their EFL academic achievement?

Another important objective of this study was to find if there was any correlations between the five different dimensions of the BALLI instrument and the final grade obtained in the last English course taken as a prove of academic achievement. In that way, it would possible to find a relation between what students believe and their grades.

Table eight shows results obtained from calculating the correlation between dimensions of the BALLI and the English final grade. As can be seen, none of the dimensions shows a significant Pearsons' correlation. The numbers obtained did not show any important value to be analyzed; therefore apparently there is no connection between what they think (when items are grouped) and their final grade in English.

Table 8. Correlations with dimensions

Groups	Correlations	Final English Grade
Language Difficulty	Pearson's r Correlation	.084
EFL Aptitude		.138
Nature of Learning		-.133
Learning Strategies		.066
Motivation		.174

According to these values, language learning beliefs were not having any correlation with their grades obtained in their previous English language subject. However, in order to do a deeper analysis, a broader correlation was intended, in this case, a correlation with all the items of the BALLI and their final grade. .

Once having calculated the Pearson's results showed interesting numbers which contrasted what had been found in the previous section. All of the items

of the BALLI, only four items showed direct correlations with grade; those items were that some people have especial abilities to learn languages. Also, that some languages are easy to be learnt, that Mexicans are good at learning English; and that if they learn English, they will have more opportunities to find a good job. (See Table 9).

Table 9. Correlation between grade of English and items of the BALLI

Questions		Final English Grade
2. Some people have a special ability for learning second language.	Pearson's Correlation	.190(*)
3. Some languages are easier than others.		.197(*)
5. People in my country are very good at learning second languages.		.178(*)
27. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.		.187(*)

Question number 2, which deals with the statement that some people have special abilities, was apparently having an influence on their final English grade. Therefore, they may be they thought that one needs to have special abilities to learn English; as they are not in that group, then they cannot learn the language; at least not easily.

Maybe when they thought that some languages are easier to learn than others (item 3), they thought that English is located in the group of the difficult languages. As a result, that belief was affecting their academic achievement since they thought they did not have the ability and that English language is a difficult language to learn. That may have result in a dysfunctional belief.

Contrary to the previous results in the items was that people in my country are very good at learning second languages (Item 5). That result may be indicating that there is a good attitude towards the language and that this specific belief may be functional for the academic achievement and therefore for the final grade of English.

The last item which showed a little correlation was “if they learn to speak English very well, they will have better job opportunities.” This result might be showing some motivation towards the learning of the language. However, they may be having an expectation of the school when enrolling in English language major (Montalvo, 2003) that may not be satisfied.

As a result of this second analysis, it can be stated that some of the beliefs expressed in the responses can be functional, those related to motivation for learning the language, but there may be other beliefs that may have a dysfunctional effect of the students' learning process.

4.5 Gender Differences

Another type of analysis was intended with the data; a correlation between language learning beliefs and gender. In this case, there were six items from the BALLI that showed marked differences in beliefs. Those were items (18) ‘People in my country feel that it is important to speak English’; (19) ‘I feel shy speaking English with others’; (20) ‘If beginning students are allowed to make

mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on'; (24) It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs', (25) 'Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects'; and (34) 'If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?'.

Maybe those results obtained from what respondents think do not show a high level of difference between what men and women believe; nevertheless, they tell us that there are differences in what they think and the way they approach the learning process. However, those differences of beliefs may result dysfunctional or functional either for men or women; but there cannot be, at least in this moment, a statement that can be explained as functional or not, only different.

Of that group, the highest gender differences were found in two specific items, 'I feel shy speaking English with other people' and 'If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on'. Those items may be indicating a relationship with the academic achievement, especially in the first question. If more men are shy then they might be helping them to take more risks, more learning, and therefore a better academic achievement. (See Table 15).

Table 15. Gender differences

Items	Gender	Mean
34. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?	Men	3.1818
	Women	2.7727
18. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English	Men	3.9118
	Women	4.2326
19. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	Men	2.5000
	Women	3.2727
20. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	Men	2.7059
	Women	3.2955
24. It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD Roms	Men	4.0294
	Women	4.3750
25. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	Men	3.7059
	Women	4.0341

An additional analysis was done better explaining the result of the previous table, and identifying the differences between men and women. For that purpose, *crosstab calculation* between the highest means on the previous results (See Table 15) and gender was necessary; the intention was to find if there was enough significance of that correlation to be considered as important. They basically showed that men and women differ importantly in the way they think towards these two issues.

Results (see Table 16) show that there is difference between expected and counted numbers. Those numbers indicate that, as an example, that there are more women with a shy attitude when trying to practice the language than

expected. Therefore, if they have that belief, the behavior would become dysfunctional at the moment of learning a language; see the averages of men and women, for instance. (8.22 for men, and 8.16 for women).

Table 16. Gender Differences B

Crosstab		Gender		Total		
		Men	Women			
19. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	1.00	Count	10	8	18	
		Expected Count	5.0	13.0	18.0	
	2.00	Count	7	13	20	
		Expected Count	5.6	14.4	20.0	
	3.00	Count	7	23	30	
		Expected Count	8.4	21.6	30.0	
	4.00	Count	10	35	45	
		Expected Count	12.5	32.5	45.0	
	5.00	Count	0	9	9	
		Expected Count	2.5	6.5	9.0	
	Total		Count	34	88	122
			Expected Count	34.0	88.0	122.0

Pearson Chi-Square Tests result: .018 ($\alpha = 95$)

The same occurred with the other statement that expresses that it is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs. The results showed that there are difference between expected and count numbers. In this case, women tended to have more positive beliefs towards practice. Therefore, in this specific case, it would a dysfunctional belief for men. (see Table 17).

Table 17. Gender differences C

Crosstab			Tu género es		Total	
			Male	Female		
24 It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD ROMs	2.00	Count	0	3	3	
		Expected Count	.8	2.2	3.0	
	3.00	Count	8	5	13	
		Expected Count	3.6	9.4	13.0	
	4.00	Count	17	36	53	
		Expected Count	14.8	38.2	53.0	
	5.00	Count	9	44	53	
		Expected Count	14.8	38.2	53.0	
	Total		Count	34	88	122
			Expected Count	34.0	88.0	122.0

Pearson Chi-Square Tests: .007($\alpha = .95$)

When trying a different analysis, a t-test analysis was done. For finding correlations between gender and beliefs, results were significantly different. As can be seen in table 18, the items that showed difference when considering gender were: two (Some people have a special ability for learning second language), seven (It is necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English), 23 (It is easier to speak than understand English), and 26 (The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language)

On the other hand, item two, 'Some people have a special ability for learning second language' coincided with one of the items obtained in the cross tabulation process when trying to find correlation between beliefs and final English grades. If trying an interpretation of that result, when students believe

there needs to be a special ability, functionality, or not (of the belief) will be noted in their academic achievement. When using the t-test for independent samples, the 34 items of the questionnaire and gender, a significant difference between boys and girls was visible ($t=1.572$, $df=123$, $p > 0.05$). That fact might be saying that between and men there is an important difference that may have an impact on their final grades.

Table 18. T-test of all 34 items and gender

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
2. Some people have a special ability for learning second language	Equal variances assumed	4.993	.027	1.450	123	.149
7. It is necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English	Equal variances assumed	9.716	.002	-1.502	122	.136
23 It is easier to speak than understand English	Equal variances assumed	6.835	.010	.456	120	.649
26. The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language	Equal variances assumed	9.022	.003	-.431	120	.668

4.6 Summary

Some beliefs are apparently having a good influence on the students' academic achievement, mainly those beliefs that have to do with motivation. In spite of those positive findings, there are other beliefs (the majority) showed either no or some dysfunctional beliefs that may be affecting the language learning process. However, those conclusions can only be inferred from a descriptive analysis, which means a lot of interpretation from the author.

Regarding the relationship between beliefs and final grade of the last English course not much can be noted. Dimensions of the BALLI and the English final grade were analyzed together, and none of the dimensions showed a significant Pearson's' correlation. The numbers obtained did not show any important value to be analyzed; therefore apparently there was no connection between what they believed (when items are grouped) and their final grade in English. Nonetheless, some correlation was found when items when analyzed in isolation, only with some items though; perhaps not enough as to be considered of great influence for the academic achievement.

In terms of gender differences, through cross tabs it was visible that there are marked differences between what men and women think. Those beliefs can be related to the analysis of the gender's grades, resulting in having a higher average for men. Nevertheless, women said to be less shy at the moment of

practicing English; that may have been reflected on their grades, women had better grades if not taking as a consideration the average.

Through the t-test some difference between men and women were found. Again, that difference in beliefs may represent the different approach each gender has towards learning English, resulting in different levels of achievement. At least in this study, men had a better average of the grades but women had less subjects failing and the better grades if taking them as individuals.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 Recomendations

After conducting a study of this descriptive nature, results indicated similarities between what has been found in the past and current observations. As an example, common beliefs were identified with research carried by Horwitz (1998), students believed that some languages are more important to learn than others; also they believed that children have more abilities to learn languages, in this case, English. Those results showed resemblance to what Altan (2006) found in previous research, that age played an important role for the language learning process, and that some people are born with a special ability to learn a foreign language.

Other important beliefs that were identified had to do with the value of repetition, exposure to practice, and motivation as keys to succeeding when learning English. Apparently those beliefs are logically correct for the success of the learning process. Surprisingly, in spite of those functional beliefs, many students were having problems while trying to learn the language, which was the main reason of this investigation.

Most likely those discordances were due to what Bernat (2006) found in her research, a lack of aptitude, which explained why even if students were highly

motivated they were having problems; and what Mantle-Bromley (1995) mentioned as 'learners underestimating the difficulty of language learning.' Where students, even if motivated and thought of good procedures for succeeding when learning a language, they were not actually doing those activities, or were not doing enough for the learning to happen. Surely, some of those beliefs conducted to behavior and actions that are detrimental for the learning process.

Another resemblance with previous research was observed when analyzing the BALLI through dimensions. Motivation and Expectations dimension, (I want to learn English well, everybody can learn a second language, I would like to have English speaking friends, etc.) was the group with the highest mean of respondents who agreed with these statements. However, in the same group was the statement 'if I learn English, I will have more opportunities to find a good job,' proves that possible benefits of learning a language could bring them; then there were external motivators, such as need for employment (Bernat, 2006).

It is important to note that in three of the five dimensions the mode and means were either three or near three in the Likert scale. For the researcher that meant were not sure or had no knowledge about aptitude for EFL learning and English learning strategies. In other words, maybe some of those students who participated in the study had a lack of language learning aptitude, which was similar with research in the past (Bernat, 2006). Again, maybe those students

enrolled in the English language major did not have the ability for languages, resulting in dysfunctional belief and then behavior and actions.

It was not possible to generalize all the beliefs found, but there were some beliefs that may have been detrimental to language learning and may have resulted as in the case of the students at UQROO, who expressed dissatisfaction and frustration when not succeeding in their academic duties in more than one occasion.

Also important was the fact that it was no possible to find much correlation among the students' grades and the dimensions of the BALLI. That fact may have been explained by different reasons, such as inconsistency of answers and beliefs, or as Benson and Lor (1999) stated, through the questionnaire, we only get a snapshot of learners' beliefs and it is no sufficient to understand the complexity of learners' beliefs.

Similarly, Schwartz and Weinstein (1989; 1994; as cited in Barcelos, 2000) stated regarding this issue, that anybody's personal belief system, cannot be fully captured by people's responses to a set of normative statements. They argued that it takes more than just a simple questionnaire to understand a rich and complex beliefs system. Still, by revising on the items in isolation some minor correlations were found.

Gender analysis through cross tabs and t-test procedures showed that some beliefs and attitudes are characteristic of a gender in particular. That finding was related to differences when approaching the learning process and thus related to their academic achievement. It is not possible to state which of those beliefs proper of a gender were functional or dysfunctional; nonetheless those differences were present and were having an impact of the students learning process.

5.2 Recommendations

Some things can be expressed after having worked on a project like this; nevertheless only five issues are to be mentioned as important to consider by the institution where this research took place.

First, in order to avoid having too many students failing or getting delayed, it would be very useful to look at all the research on language learning beliefs. For example, the Council of Europe has published various studies proposing different approaches for mediating language learners' beliefs and helping learners develop positive attitudes toward the target culture(s) and language(s).

The second recommendation has to do with doing research on beliefs. They are important since there are studies with important results. Kern (1995) and Mantle-Bromley (1995) conducted similar researches and obtained similar results. Apart from that fact, they found that teachers and students' beliefs

sometimes did not match and somehow they were having a negative influence in the students' performance within the language learning class.

Therefore, there is another important factor that is part of the learning process, teachers' beliefs; and they have to be addressed in further research. They are important because they have an important role not only for the students but because all the things presented and guided in the classroom are encouraged by this element of the education system. If student's beliefs are not similar to those of the teachers', negative results may be happening.

Third, it would be good to have a look at what other institutions and countries are doing in terms of beliefs and academic achievement. For instance, Gabillon (2005) mentioned that in some institutions where foreign languages are taught, learner training programmes^{iv} are integrated in language learning curricula, so that it can help negotiate (mediate) learners' dysfunctional beliefs and help them to appropriate them in a better way. In this way the students' needs are being addressed for the sake of the students learning.

Fourth, the author also considers that students should go through a language learning aptitude test which will permit faculty to identify those who may face problems during the long process of learning the language in a foreign environment. With this test some activities can be planned to help teachers and students have a better experience when working together.

Fifth, due to some interesting findings related to gender, the author also considers pertinent some more research on beliefs but related to their social background. Possibly, past facts formed and shaped those beliefs that are making students have a hard time while in the learning process.

In every institution, learners' beliefs should be taken into consideration. As mentioned before, they might lead to certain behavior that can cause either success or failure in the learning process of the target language. These beliefs should not be put aside since they are part of the individual's cognition and way seeing and interpreting the world around, and of course, react to any situation faced on it, especially one that to do with learning a language in a foreign context.

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7. APPENDIX

Sección I BALLI Inventario Sobre Creencias en el Aprendizaje de Idiomas

Este cuestionario pretende hacer un inventario de las creencias que las personas tienen sobre el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero. Éste no es un examen, no existen respuestas falsas o verdaderas, correctas o incorrectas, sólo trata de compilar las opiniones de las personas que lo responden. Por favor, no deje preguntas sin contestar. No es necesario que escriba su nombre pero **sí** su matrícula. Gracias.

En completo desacuerdo.	En desacuerdo.	Neutral	De acuerdo.	Totalmente de acuerdo.
1	2	3	4	5

Sección I. Cuestionario

Instrucciones: Marque con una X la respuesta que más o mejor represente su opinión.

- | |
|--|
| 1.- A los niños les resulta más fácil aprender un idioma extranjero que a los adultos.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 2.- Algunas personas tienen una capacidad especial para aprender idiomas.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 3.- Algunos idiomas son más fáciles de aprender que otros.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 4.- Creo que aprenderé inglés muy bien
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 5.- Las personas de mi país son buenas aprendiendo inglés.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 6.- Es importante aprender inglés con una pronunciación excelente.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 7. Para aprender inglés hay que saber sobre la cultura de los países angloparlantes.
1() 2() 3() 4() 5() |
| 8.- No se debería decir nada en inglés hasta que se pueda decir bien. |

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

9.- Para alguien que ya sabe un idioma extranjero es más fácil aprender otro.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

10.- Las personas que son buenas en matemáticas o en ciencias no son buenas en idiomas.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

11.- Lo mejor es aprender inglés en un país angloparlante.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

12.- A mí me gusta practicar mi inglés con angloparlantes.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

13.- Si no se sabe una palabra en inglés, está bien adivinarla.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

14.- Tengo un talento especial para aprender idiomas extranjeros.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

15.- Lo más importante para aprender un idioma es aprender el vocabulario.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

16.- Es muy importante repetir y practicar mucho para aprender un idioma.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

17.- Las mujeres son mejores que los hombres en aprender idiomas extranjeros.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

18.- En mi país la gente piensa que es muy importante aprender inglés.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

19.- Soy un poco tímido/tímida para hablar inglés con otras personas.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

20.- Si se permite que los principiantes cometan errores en el inglés, será muy difícil que se puedan expresar correctamente más tarde.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

21.- Lo más importante para aprender un idioma es aprender la gramática.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

22.- Me gustaría aprender inglés para poder conocer mejor a personas

angloparlantes.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

23.- Es más fácil hablar inglés que entenderlo.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

24.- Es importante practicar con audio en inglés.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

25.- No es lo mismo aprender un idioma que aprender cualquier otra materia.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

26.- Lo más importante al aprender inglés es aprender a traducir de mi lengua materna al inglés.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

27.- Si soy capaz de aprender bien inglés, tendré más oportunidades de encontrar un buen puesto de trabajo.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

28.- Las personas que saben hablar más de un idioma son muy inteligentes.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

29.- Yo quiero aprender inglés muy bien.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

30.- Me gustaría tener amigos angloparlantes.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

31.- Todo el mundo puede aprender un segundo idioma.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

32.- Es más fácil leer que escribir inglés.

1() 2() 3() 4() 5()

33.- El idioma inglés es:

() muy difícil () difícil () ni muy fácil ni muy difícil () fácil
() muy fácil

34.- Si alguien estudia una hora al día para aprender un idioma ¿cuánto tiempo crees que tardará en aprenderla bien?:

() menos de un año () 1-2 años () 3-5 años () 5-10 años
() imposible hacerlo con una hora diaria

Sección II. Datos Demográficos

2.1 Tu edad es:

- Menos de 18 19-24 25-29 30-34 35-39
 40 años o más

2.2 Tu género es:

- Hombre Mujer

2.3 Tu datos estudiantiles son:

Carrera: _____ . Matrícula : _____
Semestre: _____

2.4 Tu lengua materna es:

- Español Maya Francés Italiano Otro: _____

2.5 Estudias inglés desde hace:

- Menos de un año. 1-2 años. 3-4 4-5 Más de 5 años

2.6 Si estudias otro idioma además del inglés, indica cuál:

- Francés Italiano Maya Español para extranjeros
 Otro o ninguno: _____.

2.7. Si has realizado una estancia en algún país donde se habla el idioma inglés, indica el tiempo:

- Menos de un año. 1-2 años. 3-4 4-5 Más de 5 años

Sección II. Datos Demográficos

2.1 Tu edad es

Menos de 18	19-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40 años o más
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.2 Tu género es:

1. Hombre	2. Mujer	Carrera :		Matrícula :	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Semestre:			

2.4 Tu lengua materna es:									
Español	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maya	<input type="checkbox"/>	Francés	<input type="checkbox"/>	Italiano	<input type="checkbox"/>	Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.5 Estudias inglés desde hace									
Menos de un año	<input type="checkbox"/>	1-2 años	<input type="checkbox"/>	3 – 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4-5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Más de 5 años	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Si estudias otro idioma además del inglés, indica cuál									
Francés	<input type="checkbox"/>	Italiano	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maya	<input type="checkbox"/>	Español para extranjeros	<input type="checkbox"/>	Otro o ninguno	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.7. Si has realizado una estancia en algún país donde se habla el idioma inglés, indica el tiempo:									
Menos de un año	<input type="checkbox"/>	1-2 años	<input type="checkbox"/>	3 – 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4-5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Más de 5 años	<input type="checkbox"/>

¡Gracias por su colaboración!

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ⁱⁱ Some studies use eclectic approaches which combine different research orientations.

ⁱⁱⁱ

<http://sigc.uqroo.mx/Planeacion/Paginas%20Selectivas/Desgloces/Concentrado%20institucional/concentrado%20institucional.htm>

^{iv} CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et D'Applications Pédagogiques En Langues) Université Nancy 2 has been

using counselling services as part of their self-directed learning programme (see Gremmo, 1993b; Bailly, 1993).