

**Supporting Professional Learning**  
**in**  
**Southeast Asian Universities**  
**through**  
**DEPISA**



**Edited**  
**by**  
**Kevin Laws, Lesley Harbon & Christabel Wescombe**

**Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia**

**DEPISA**  
**Monograph no. 5**

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**Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia  
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**University of Sydney  
&  
Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand**

**July, 2018**

**ISBN 978-0-6483295-0-3**

# **Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia**

## **(DEPISA)**

DEPISA acknowledges the generous support of the following institutions for hosting DEPISA conferences and contributing to the publication of proceedings and monographs. Monographs were published in 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2018.

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Laws, K., Harbon, L., & Wescombe, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Supporting professional learning in Southeast Asian universities through DEPISA*. Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand for DEPISA. (DEPISA Monograph no. 5).

*Cover:* Photograph taken at Daegu National University of Education, Korea, August 2017 by Prof. Jang-Ho Son.

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# **Undergraduate Students' Beliefs about Language Learning and English Achievement**

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## **Abstract**

This correlational study, involving undergraduate students in the English Teaching Study Program investigated the relationship between students' beliefs about language and their actual English achievement. The participants were 48 students selected through a proportional random sampling technique from a total of 193. Data were collected from a questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that students' beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution to their English achievement.

## **Introduction**

Current expectations of English language learning at schools is that students master the language both written and orally. This expectation challenges teachers of English since to make language learning successful they need to consider teaching instruction and materials, the language learners themselves, as well as other factors. The learners become one of the important components of language learning because they bring their individual characters to the language learning processes.

Sardiman (as cited in Tjandra, 2009, p. 4) stated that the language learning achievement of an individual is an interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors involve physical factors, psychology, and fatigue (both physical and mental). External factors include family factors, school factors, and community factors (Slameto, 2010, pp. 54-72). Johnson (2001, p. 117) affirmed that characteristics brought by the students into the learning tasks are significant and should be taken into account. The learners' individual characteristics can help to explain their individual outcomes. The roles played by male and female students, their social contexts, beliefs and experiences, age, motivation, aptitude, cognitive styles, learning styles or strategies, their affective states, and personal characteristics may help to understand their learning processes and the final results they obtain (Madrid, 1995, p. 62).

Because the English language curriculum focuses on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, teachers do not always explore the individual characteristics that the learners bring into the classroom, such as what are the underlying beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1987). Breen (as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) stated that in the classroom context, the language learning beliefs, and other characteristics that students bring with them to the learning situation are significant contributory factors in the learning process and ultimate success.

Wenden (1987) proposed that to discover what characterizes lead to successful language learning, it is necessary to discover what students believe or know about their learning. Richards and Lockhart (1996) define beliefs about language learning as very specific assumptions brought by students to the classroom about how to learn a language and about the kinds of activities and approaches they believe to be useful. It covers motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, and their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language. Horwitz (1987) divided language learning beliefs into five different elements: (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) the difficulty of language learning; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations.

Very little research has concerned the contribution of students' beliefs about language learning on their language learning achievement. However, Sioson (2011), conducted a prediction study in relation to language learning strategies, students' beliefs, and students' oral performance. It was found that students' beliefs had a significant contribution to the oral performance of the participant. Lan (2012), studied the roles of anxiety and beliefs about language learning on the English achievement of Taiwanese 7th graders, and found their beliefs had a correlation with their achievement. A correlational study conducted by Angelianawati (2012) found that there was a positive and significant contribution of the beliefs about language learning, learning styles and language learning strategies with students' English achievement.

Therefore, this research was aimed at investigating how undergraduate students' beliefs about English language learning contributed to their English achievement.

### **Research method**

Frankel and Wallen (2009, p. 328) proposed that the possible relationship amongst variables can be studied through correlational research. The results cannot determine the causes but can suggest the need for future studies. Furthermore, Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) state that 'correlational research involves collecting data to determine whether and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables' (p. 196).

The objective of the study was investigating the contribution of beliefs about language learning on the undergraduate students' English achievement using correlation research through predictive analysis. The beliefs about language learning were limited on types of beliefs proposed by Horwitz (1987).

In the present study a sample of 48 respondents was selected from a total of 193. The variable which became the predictor in this study was beliefs about language learning. Meanwhile, the dependent variable (criterion) was English achievement. Data were collected from an inventory and documentation. The inventory used in the present study was Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory adapted from Horwitz's (BALLI, ESL version, Horwitz, 1987).

Data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis. Data description was used to describe the characteristics of each variable to understand the data for the next steps of the analysis. The inferential analyses tested the hypothesis of whether there was a significant contribution of the student's beliefs about language learning towards their English achievement. Pearson product moment correlation was utilized to determine the relationship between, and contribution to, language learning beliefs and students' English achievement.

With regard to the descriptive data, the categorization and distributions of students' scores of beliefs about language learning, and the students' English achievement were based on norm-referenced measurement.

### **Research findings and discussion**

The result of the descriptive analysis showed that the tendency of the beliefs about language learning was high seen from the mean score of 120.77 from 165. 10.42% of students' beliefs about language learning were categorized very high, and 89.58% were in the category of high. Moreover, there were no respondents whose beliefs about language learning were in category of very low. The results of the mean score calculation showed that the tendency in undergraduate students in the English Teaching Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, for beliefs about language learning was high.

Based on the students' answers to the questionnaires as well as a short discussion with the classes, it was found that some students asserted that learning English would be more interesting when they could speak to native English speakers and when media such as video, music, games, pictures, tape were used. They also believed that learning English would make them be better able to study other subjects which were taught in English, as well as being able to find a good job in the future.

In terms of difficulties, some students believed that listening and speaking were more difficult than reading and writing. They needed to concentrate fully, memorize many words, and understand the words and grammar. They realized that vocabulary was very important in learning English. Some other students believed that although English was quite difficult, if they were willing to study, it would become easier. Some of them also said that English appeared to be easier than mathematics and science. They expected that in the future teachers would be able to give them optimal assistance while learning English. They also stated that it was important to find the best ways to study English. They needed guidance from the teachers about what, when, where, and how to learn English to gain the best results, so that, they could use English accurately and fluently.

Based on the data, the mean score of students' English achievement was quite high at 71.74% with 35.42% of students scoring very high; 52.08% high; and 12.50% average.

To test the hypothesis of whether there was a significant contribution of beliefs about language learning on undergraduate students' English achievement, product moment correlation and linear regression analysis were used. All data fulfilled the requirements to be analyzed further. The data were normally distributed and linear. The product moment correlation and linear regression showed that there was a positive correlation between beliefs about language learning and English achievement; the correlation value ( $r$ ) was 0.004; the correlation value ( $r$ ) was 0.004 ( $0 < r < +1$ —positive correlation).

Subsequently, in order to know whether the  $r$  value was significant or not, the counted  $r$  was compared to  $r$  critical value ( $r_{cv}$ ) or  $r$  table. If the counted  $r$  is higher than  $r_{cv}$  with the degree of significance ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), the correlation was significant. However, if the countable  $r$  was lower or the same as  $r_{cv}$ , the correlation was not significant.

In this study, since the number of respondents ( $n$ ) was equal to 48;  $df = 46$ , so that the  $r_{cv} = 0.284$  ( $\alpha=0.05$ ). Based on the comparison done, the scores indicated that the counted  $r$  was lower than  $r_{cv}$  ( $0.004 < 0.284$ ). This means that the correlation between beliefs about language learning and English achievement was not significant. Additionally, it was also found that R Square = 0.000



(0.0%). This indicates that beliefs about language learning had no contribution to English achievement. The t-test provided a value of 0.025 ( $p = 0.980 > 0.05$ ) which indicated that the contribution of beliefs about language learning toward English achievement was not significant either.

Additionally, based on the linear regression analysis, it was found that the contribution of students' beliefs about language learning was a very small - only 0.005(X).

From the results obtained the hypothesis was rejected. There was no significant contribution of beliefs about language learning (the predictor) to the dependent variable (or criterion) English achievement. Even though the predictor had a positive correlation towards the criterion, its contribution was not significant. In other words, students' English achievements are mainly influenced by factors other than their beliefs about language learning.

The results that the students' beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution toward their English achievement, signifies that other considerations, modifications, or explorations in terms of theories, methodologies, instruments used are needed. It is acceptable because students' beliefs about language learning influence and contribute to their language achievement (Horwitz, 2010; Madrid, 1995).

It appears that having better methodologies, instruments, as well as investigating different populations may result in a better outcome. In terms of methodology, it will be better if the researcher modified the methodologies used by utilizing a mixed method, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Moreover, the data will be more elaborate if gathered using several techniques such as survey, interview, observation, questionnaire, and documentation. In terms of instruments used it is important to consider their appropriateness especially in relation to theories been examined.

## **Conclusion**

It was found that beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution towards the English achievement of English Teaching Study Program students in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Christian University of Indonesia, Jakarta. It signifies that there were other factors which were more influential and dominant for students' English achievement. These other factors should be studied further. In this study it was found that the students had strong beliefs about language learning. However, their strong beliefs did not guarantee that they would be successful in learning English.

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