



## 摘 要

在我们的语言学习过程中,学习观念被认为是非常重要的,因为它能潜在地影响学习行为。有很多学者在这方面做了调查研究,发现学习观念与自主学习,学习成绩,学习焦虑等变量有关。学习者的观念也能影响学习动机和学习策略。

目前这项研究是在国内外语言学习观念相关研究的基础上进行的,研究高职院校新生外语学习观念,并找出男女生和高分组与低分组学生在学习观念上的差异。140名蓝天职业技术学院的学生参加了此项研究,其中72名女生和68名男生,根据入学的英语成绩他们被划分为不同的组。在Horwitz1986版BALLI的基础上稍加修改而成的问卷应用于此研究,用来收集数据,面对面开放式的访谈用来补充说明问卷的信息。所有的数据都输入SPSS,做统计分析。

这项研究有很多发现:首先,大部分学生觉得英语是中等难度的语言,认为学英语要很花多时间。超过半数的人认为,读写比听说更容易。并且大部分学员意识到了文化的重要性,他们对学习英语持有很强的动机和很高的期望。

其次,就男女生语言学习观念的差别而言,女性在英语学习的难度上更乐观。与男性相比,女性在交际策略和歧义容忍度上也持更积极的态度。

再者,高分组学生在英语学习中表现得更有自信。他们大部分比较喜欢说英语,对他们来说,口语比读懂英语更容易。他们有很强的学习动机,在语言学习过程中会使用多种学习策略。然而,低分组学生更注重口语的准确性,这会妨碍他们口语能力的发展。

根据这些发现,论文也提出了几点英语教学的启示。第一,教师要丰富自己的教学理论和实践。在教学过程中他们应该遵循先进的理论和实践,不断更新自己的教学观念。第二,教师应引导学生掌握科学的积极的学习观念。第三,为了使能够树立新的积极的语言学习观念,教师应该给他们提供一些有益的学习策略。

关键词:语言学习观念;高职院校学生



## Abstract

Beliefs about language learning are considered to be very important in our learning process, because they have potential to affect the learning behavior. A number of researchers have conducted investigations on learner beliefs, and found that learners' beliefs were related to learner autonomy, learning proficiency, learning anxiety. Learner's beliefs would also affect learners' motivation and strategies for language learning.

The current study was based on the relevant studies on language learning beliefs both at home and aboard. Its aim was to explore the freshmen's beliefs about foreign language learning in vocational college, and find out the difference between females and males. It also explored the difference between high-proficiency students and low-proficiency students. 140 students in Blue Sky Vocational Institute took part in this study, of whom 72 females and 68 males. They were divided into different groups according to the English scores in college entrance exam. A slightly modified version of BALLI (Horwitz, 1986) was used to obtain data for answering the research questions, and a face-to-face open-ended interview was conducted to provide the findings to supplement the quantitative data. All the data were entered into SPSS, and they were statistically analyzed.

A number of findings were revealed in this study. First, most students regarded English as a language of medium difficulty and thought learning English would cost a long time. More than half of them believed that reading and writing were easier than listening and speaking. Most learners realized the importance of culture and held strong motivation and a high expectation in foreign language learning.

Secondly, in terms of the differences in language learning beliefs between male and female students, female students felt more optimistic toward the difficulty of English. And female students held more positive attitude towards communication strategy and ambiguity tolerance than the male students.

Thirdly, high-proficiency students showed more self-confidence in language

learning. They generally enjoyed practicing English so it was easier to speak than to understand English for them. They held strong motivation and made use of a variety of learning strategies to facilitate the process of language learning. However, low-proficiency students attached great importance to the accuracy. This may hinder their progress in speaking competence.

On the basis of these findings, the thesis provided several pedagogical implications for English teaching and learning. First, teachers should enrich themselves in pedagogical theory and practice. They should follow the advanced learning theory and practice in language learning, and constantly modernize their own teaching perceptions and ideas. Secondly, teachers should guide their students to hold scientific and positive beliefs about language learning. Thirdly, teachers should provide students with some useful learning strategies, enabling them to set up some new and positive beliefs for language learning.

**Key words:** Beliefs about English learning; students in vocational institute

## Table of Contents

摘    要 .....	I
Abstract .....	II
Chapter One  Introduction .....	1
1.1 Research background .....	1
1.2 Necessity and purpose of the study .....	2
1.3 Overall structure of the thesis .....	4
Chapter Two  Literature Review .....	5
2.1 Definition of language learning beliefs (LLB) .....	5
2.2 Characteristics of language learning beliefs .....	6
2.3 Classification of LLB .....	7
2.4 Research on language learning beliefs .....	9
2.4.1 Some researches on language learning beliefs .....	9
2.4.2 Variables that influence the forming of LLB .....	13
2.4.2.1 Cultural background .....	13
2.4.2.2 Teachers' belief .....	14
2.4.2.3. Language learning strategies .....	15
2.4.2.4 Language learning anxiety .....	16
2.4.2.5 Language learning autonomy .....	17
2.4.3 Differences in language learning beliefs between female learners and male learners .....	18
2.4.4 Differences in language learning beliefs between high proficiency level learners and low proficiency level students .....	19
2.5 Theoretical foundation for the present study .....	21
Chapter Three  Research Methodology .....	22
3.1 Research objective .....	22
3.2 Subjects .....	22
3.3 Instruments .....	23
3.3.1 Questionnaire .....	23
3.3.2 Interview .....	24
3.4 Data collection .....	24
3.5 Data analysis .....	25
Chapter Four  Results and Discussion .....	26
4.1 Research question 1: What are the general beliefs about English leaning held by vocational institute students? .....	26
4.1.1 Beliefs about difficulty of language learning .....	27
4.1.2 Beliefs about foreign language aptitude .....	29
4.1.3 Beliefs about the nature of language learning .....	30
4.1.4 Beliefs about learning and communication strategy .....	30
4.1.5 Beliefs about motivation and expectation .....	31
4.1.6 Beliefs about classroom instruction for English learning .....	32

4.2 Differences in language learning belief between female and male students .....	32
4.3 Differences in language learning belief between high-proficiency and low-proficiency students .....	35
Chapter Five Conclusion and Implications.....	39
5.1 Major findings .....	39
5.2 Pedagogical implications for English teaching.....	40
5.3 Limitations of the study and Suggestions for further study.....	41
Bibliography .....	43
Appendix A.....	47
Appendix B.....	50
Acknowledgement.....	51

# Chapter One Introduction

## 1.1 Research background

Recently it has become distinct to regard the language learners as active participants in foreign language learning process. Now language teachers and researchers view the learners' learning beliefs, styles, strategies, attitudes and motivations as indispensable factors in carrying out the effective language instruction. In this way, they have come to understand that language learners approach their learning in their own unique way. That is to say, language teachers and researchers all over the world currently attach great attention on the role of learners for individual characteristics are considered integral elements in the language learning process. And among these characteristics, beliefs about language learning are very important. For learners' beliefs have potential to affect the learning behavior. On one hand, some beliefs may decide learners' perseverance to learn; for example, unscientific beliefs regarding the amount of time required to attain proficiency in a second language could obviously result in frustration. On the other hand, some beliefs link with certain learner variables, such as learning strategies (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1987; Yang, 1999) and foreign language anxiety (Young, 1991; Horwitz, E. K. Horwitz, Michael B. Cope, J. 1986). The learner who believes that "The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words and how to translate from Chinese" will spend much time in remembering words by heart and doing much translation practice. The one who hold the idea "It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it" would feel anxious easily when they speak English. In order to understand learners' approaches to language learning, it is important to collect and analyze learner beliefs about language learning.

By making a general survey on learners' LLB, we will find that the scope of research in this area has been involved in many fields. Learner's beliefs are related to



learner autonomy (Cotterall, 1995; Cater, 1999), to learning proficiency (Wen& Johnson, 1997; Peacork, 1998; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Huang& Tsai, 2003). Certain beliefs about language learning might affect learners' motivation to learn the target language (Cohen and Dornyei, 2002; cited in Rula L.Diab, 2006). Zimmerman and Schunk's 2001 important work on self-regulated learning also discusses the focal role of beliefs in influencing students' motivation to learn.( cited in Rula L. Diab,2006). There has been some mention that such beliefs have been linked with language learning strategies (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1986, 1987; Yang, 1999; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989) and foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 1988; Young, 1991; Horwitz, E. K. Horwitz, Michael B. Cope, J. 1986).

Horwitz (1988) states that previous experiences as language learners as well as cultural background are both likely to influence and shape learner's beliefs about language learning. He developed "The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (1988) to assess these beliefs about language learning systematically. Rula (2006) revealed cyclical relationships between learners' beliefs and strategy use (1999), so the students' wrong LLB would direct their behavior blindly, and lead to inefficient learning strategies, (Dai and Wang, 2002). In spite of a large number of studies investigating beliefs about language learning, only a few studies took Chinese students as research sample, and fewer studies has yet probed the effect of gender and language proficiency level on students' beliefs about language learning.

## 1.2 Necessity and purpose of the study

There are several necessities to conduct research on language learning beliefs. Firstly, this research can provide the theoretical basis for explaining teaching and learning problems, explain the specific characteristics of a student's learning, help people further understand learning principles, and offer a new way in thinking how to improve teaching quality and learning competence. Teachers who have knowledge of how their students are thinking and doing in their English learning process can find out suitable ways to clear the obstacles their students encounter in English learning,

foster students' learning effectiveness and enhance their proficiency and self-confidence. It also offers teachers implications for better instructional methods and materials.

Secondly, numerous studies have found out that there are great distinguishes between more effective learners and less effective ones. The first distinguish is learning strategies, which the learner takes to make language learning easier, faster, more enjoyable and more effective. But the use of learning strategy is decided by learner's metacognitive knowledge which is regarded as a very important part of learning beliefs. Metacognitive knowledge is constituted by three categories: person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge (Wenden, 1991. cited in Flavell, 1979) and the basic metacognitive strategies include planning, monitoring, and evaluating that can help learners shape their self-regulation so that they can attain their goal easily.

Finally, motivation is a part of learning beliefs that affect learning maintenance. Strong motivation can drive learners to work hard toward goal so they will try their best to overcome difficulties in learning. So teachers can make use of this point to trigger the motivation of learning. For the reasons above it become imperative to do this research, hoping that can help teachers and students.

There are several purposes to conduct the research. The first is to help teachers and researches get overall picture of students' LLB. The second is to find out the differences in students' learning beliefs between high- and low-proficiency students, and see how gender may affect students' belief in language learning. 140 freshmen who enrolled in 2009 from three different majors in Blue Sky vocational Institute were chosen as subjects. The adjusted BALLI inventory and interviews were used to collect the data. SPSS was employed to analyze the data. It is hoped that research like this can help foreign language teachers in vocational school know their students' LLB, and train them to grasp correct LLB. It is also hoped that this study could improve the foreign language teaching efficiency, support the research of vocational education and guide its development in Jiangxi province.

## 1.3 Overall structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. This chapter provides background information concerning the importance of leaning beliefs, significance and purpose of the study.

The second chapter deals with the relevant literature in this area. It covers definition and classification of language learning beliefs, and reviews research on learner's LLB at home and aboard. Chapter three introduces research methodology adopted in this study, including the research objective, subject, instruments, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four proceeds to present the results and discussion in this study. Chapter five summarizes the major finding of the study, offers pedagogical implications and points out the limitations of the study. Finally, it makes some suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Two Literature Review

In this chapter, the definition, characteristics and classification of LLB will be presented to illustrate what are language learning beliefs, and then the relevant research both abroad and at home will be reviewed. Based on this, the research questions will be put forward at the end of this chapter.

### 2.1 Definition of language learning beliefs (LLB)

Although the significance of an individual's beliefs has been widely approved by researchers in various fields such as psychology, cognitive psychology and educational psychology, there are various definitions of beliefs due to different theoretical orientations. Different linguists named the LLB in different ways. For example, Flavell (1979) believed that LLB was the particular part of knowledge the learner got, which included learner's knowledge of studying. Horwitz (1987a) referred beliefs about language learning to the opinions that learners hold about various aspects of language learning (cited in Rula L. Diab, 2006). Kuntz (1996) defined Beliefs in his study as notions about language learning that adult students studying in the U.S. acquired before receiving instruction. These preconceived beliefs may limit language acquisition and proficiency and thus may precondition student success or lack of success. (Kuntz, 1996). Harvey (1986) claimed "beliefs are an individual's representation of reality that has enough validity, truth or credibility to guide thought and behavior". According to Sigel (1985) beliefs are "mental constructions of experience, often condensed and integrated into schemata or concepts that are held to be true and that guide behavior". Brown and Cooney (1982) also said, "Beliefs are reasonably explicitly 'propositions' about the characteristics of objects and object classes." (cited in Chen Yuxi 2008). On the basis of Dole and Sinatra (1994)

beliefs are viewed as the understandings which arise from an individual's life story and educational experiences, and which are the bases for value judgments. In Victori & Lockhart's (1995) view, learners' beliefs may be defined as "the general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature about language learning and teaching. And in the constructivist view, beliefs are both outcomes of format and informal learning experiences and determinants of subsequent learning (Sakui and Gaies, 1999). (cited in Jiao Yunyun, 2006).

Whatever the definitions of language learning belief are, they reflect beliefs' traits from different aspects, and these beliefs, consciously or unconsciously, guide students' thinking and action concerning language learning with their evaluation and judgment.

## 2.2 Characteristics of language learning beliefs

In addition to the definition, researchers also explored the characteristic of learner's beliefs. Wenden (1991) summarized four characteristics of learners' beliefs about language learning:

1. Stable. Learners' beliefs about language learning constitute a permanent part of their stored knowledge base and are not primarily different from other kinds of knowledge remained in long-term memory.
2. Statable. Learners can describe their beliefs about language learning explicitly or implicitly. In other words, they are available to awareness either as result of a deliberate self-retrospection or as retrieval cues that help to elicit their learner beliefs.
3. Fallible. Learners' beliefs are not always accurate. Some of them may be acquired from their instructors, peers and family. Others may be developed out of their previous learning experience.
4. Interactive. Beliefs can influence the outcome of a learning activity. For example, they can affect one's choice of strategies. (Cited in Zhou Yanyan, 2005)

Besides characteristics presented by Wen, Gaies(1998 ) and Hu (2007) also identified several characteristics of language learning beliefs.

1. Subjective. Beliefs are subjective understandings so they do not reflect external reality completely. Beliefs reflect truth held by individuals.
2. Idiosyncratic. That means beliefs vary from person to person. In this respect, they are unique to individuals. (Cited in Chen Yuxi,2008)
3. Potential. Some learning beliefs are unconscious; they can be realized by conversation or discussion.
4. Relatively stable. Beliefs should be stable overtime, which indicates that beliefs are formed and maintained by a complex social and cultural system.
5. Dynamic. For the interior and outer conditions are constantly changing, the system of beliefs show dynamic characteristics inevitably.

## 2.3 Classification of LLB

Horwitz (1987) divided language learning belief into 5 categories: beliefs about language aptitude; general difficulty of language learning; beliefs about foreign language aptitude; beliefs about learning and communication strategy; and beliefs about the motivation and learner expectations. Wenden (1986) found that the language learning beliefs included the following aspects: the first category refers to statements made about the language. It referred to grammar (e.g. specific structures, word order), phonology (e.g. dialectal differences, accent), and most often to vocabulary (e.g. cognates, level, and range). They also made observations about the rules of discourse and the function of language. The second category was classified as diagnosing when they referred to their proficiency in the language, referred to areas of difficulty, referred to the quality of their performance and progress in the language, and comparisons with others; The third part focused on the outcome of using a strategy. They indicated whether they had learned or if the strategy had been useful, good, etc.

the forth part is self-analyzing. These referred to learners' reactions to a particular learning activity, i.e. the feelings it evoked. These also referred to their language aptitude ('I don't have the ability to learn'), learning style ('I have to see it written to remember'), personality ('I want to conquer English—I'm ambitious'), and age ('At my age it's hard to remember'). and categorized as self-analyzing referred to social role and its relationship to language learning. The fifth part was described as theorizing when they referred to their beliefs about how best to learn a language.

Another classification was made by Yang, who proposed a theoretical construct of language learning beliefs in 1999. It consists of two primary dimensions: metacognitive and motivational. The first dimension refers to learner's 'metacognitive knowledge' about second language learning (Flavell, 1979; Wenden, 1986). It includes the substances as follows: learners' beliefs about themselves as second language learners (e.g. their own language proficiency, aptitude, learning style, personality, and social role in the second language learning environment); the beliefs about the task of second learning(e.g. the general attitude of foreign language aptitude, the nature and focus of language learning, the difficulty of language learning ); and the beliefs about the knowledge of language learning strategies(i.e. knowledge about language learning strategies).The second dimension refers to learners' motivational beliefs about second language learning and includes Pintrich's three motivational components: learners' beliefs about their ability to learn a second/ foreign language and their expectation about the results or difficulty of the language task; and their goals for second language learning as well as beliefs about the importance, utility, and interest in the learning task; and learners' emotional reactions to second language learning.

In China, Wen (1995) worked out her taxonomy of the language learning beliefs. In Wen's view, learning belief refers to view system which is formed through its own experience or influenced by others in the process of learning English. The beliefs can be divided into two categories: management beliefs and learning beliefs. Management beliefs, which are indirectly related to language learning behavior, concern about learners' beliefs about managing behaviors such as setting goals,

making plans and selecting strategies. Learning beliefs, directly influencing language learning behavior, refer to those beliefs about how to master language knowledge, skills and develop communicative competence. (cited in Jiao Yunyun, 2006). Language learning beliefs include: the form drilling concept (mastering linguistic knowledge is very important for language learning); the functional practice concept (exerting linguistic knowledge is very important for language learning in communication); the relying on mother tongue concept (translation is good access to learn a second language).

## **2.4 Research on language learning beliefs**

Since learners' beliefs play a central role in language learning, there are many researchers who have done studies in this field. The study can be divided into four phase: the initial stage is to explore and describe language learning beliefs held by some foreign language learners from different language groups. The second stage is to find out the variable which may influence the forming of LLB. The third stage is of explosive reproductions, which are mainly related in probing relationships between learners' LLB and other learning variables. The last stage is to compare discrepancies in foreign language learning beliefs among different types of learners.

### **2.4.1 Some researches on language learning beliefs**

Horwitz is one of the initiator in the field of LLB, and she did numerous studies on it. She developed two instruments (FLAS: the foreign language survey and BALLI) for eliciting student beliefs about language learning and teaching, and reported on students' typical responses to the BALLI in 1985. The discussion of students' responses illustrated the kinds of beliefs students hold could inhibit their learning. It was suggested that a systematic assessment of student beliefs would increase student learning and satisfaction in the foreign language class. (Horwitz, 1985). In 1988, She reported a descriptive study of the beliefs of beginning university foreign language students about language learning and investigated to depict individual belief systems



of students in another paper (1988). The aim was to sensitize teachers and researchers to the variety of beliefs students hold and to the possible consequences of specific beliefs for second language learning and instruction.

Wenden is also one of founders in the field of LLB. Her thesis "How to Be a Successful Language Learner" (1987) is a report of great insightful investigation. She adopted the semi-structured interview to survey 25 students who were studying English as second language half-day in advanced course in Columbia University. In the interview Wenden guided the students to speak out the context in which they hear or use English, and summarized into 12 sentences which could express language learning beliefs. She found out that everyone had a set of learning beliefs, and she got the primary proof that language beliefs would affect the choice of language strategy. Her study in 1986 revealed that learners always had the explicit beliefs about second language learning, which seemingly affected the whole learning process. So language educators should provide learners with valuable insights into their learning beliefs and their preferred learning strategies, and attach great importance on skill training so as to help learners learn a language in a good and effective way. (Wenden, 1986)

Tumposky is the first researcher who investigated the students' learning beliefs from cross-cultural perspective. In her article "Student beliefs about language learning: A cross-culture study" (1991), she assumed that the beliefs were different between the students who came from the multi-language coexist culture and the students who came from one language dominant culture. She used Horwitz's instrument BALLI to investigate 54 students who came from the Soviet Union and 36 students who came from state-owned college in Northeast of United States. She found out the two groups had major discrepancy in the beliefs of motivation. So the culture situation carried weight with the beliefs of motivation while the motivation had impact on the foreign language learning. (Wang Souyuan, 1999)

Based on the previous studies, Kuntz summarized a ten-year history of research concerning beliefs about language learning by Horwitz model. He first described Horwitz' model of research to study beliefs and then presented results from studies of beliefs by nine other scholars; the studies were compared in terms of sample type and

size, method and instrument, and analysis. At last, he got conclusion that development of the BALLI marked the beginning of systematic research on student beliefs about language learning, and that subsequent research has identified common beliefs that should influence language instruction, curriculum development, textbook writing, and program planning (Kuntz, 1996).

Kuntz investigated the beliefs about language learning held by secondary school students of French, German, Latin, and Spanish at five levels of instruction in 1999. The survey questions concerned language learning strategies and patterns, personal motivation for language learning, language aptitude, and the nature of language learning. And the results indicated that students' beliefs about language learning did change over the course of their language learning experience, and some differences did exist between language groups (Kuntz, 1999).

Erlenawati (2002) did an on-going research project to investigate Indonesian learners' perspectives who were undertaking an English course at an Australian university. The findings revealed that the learners indeed held preconceived ideas about how English should best be learnt. Despite some misconceptions, learners' beliefs were on the whole realistic. The paper aims to sensitize teachers in the English as a foreign language and in second language environments to the types of beliefs learners may hold, and to the possible consequences of these beliefs of second or foreign language learning and instruction (Erlenawati, 2002)

Ren Wenge (2000) mentioned in his article that the learning beliefs of freshmen were required to change as follows. Firstly, students should adapt themselves to the teaching method rather than teachers adapt themselves to students. Secondly, foreign language was commanded by learning not by teaching. Thirdly, foreign language learning was a process of accumulating. Fourthly, self-taught studying plays an important part in language learning.

Dai & Wang (2002) did a survey of one group of sophomore English majors from Qufu Normal University in China. He found out that the students' wrong LLB would direct their behavior blindly, and lead to inefficient learning strategies, so knowing about the learning beliefs had actual significant from this point. Language teachers

should use the right theory which is testified by practice to change the wrong beliefs of the students. The aim of this study was to help teacher know the LLB of English major students systematically and attach great importance on the effect of beliefs.

There were also some dynamic researches and longitudinal studies. For the research on the beliefs of American university students about foreign language learning, Rifkin (2000) conducted the study based on a survey of over 1000 learners of 10 different languages at different levels of instruction in three different institutions. Data collected over a three-year period were analyzed, and the comparisons of the beliefs were presented. After that, Rifkin indicated that there was a relationship between beliefs about language learning and level of instruction as well as type of language studied and even with the nature of the institution. (Rifkin, 2000)

Matthew Peacock did a longitudinal study (2001) that investigated changes in the beliefs about second language learning of 146 trainee ESL teachers over their 3-year programme at the City University of Hong Kong. He found that ESL students' beliefs changed very over their 3 years of study. The researcher found that many third-year trainees still believed that learning a second language means learning a lot of vocabulary and grammar rules despite instruction over 3 years on the nature of language learning. The students might over-emphasize the learning of vocabulary and grammar rules to the exclusion of other tasks necessary for learning ESL when preparing classroom tasks, materials, and homework. Peacock arrived at a conclusion that beliefs could be stable for a long time.

Tanaka, K. & Ellis, R. (2003) reported on an empirical study of a 11-week study-abroad program for Japanese university students, examining changes in the students' beliefs about language learning (measured by means of a questionnaire). The results showed statistically significant changes in the students' beliefs relating to analytic language learning, experiential language learning and self-efficacy / confidence during the study-abroad period. The research testified that language learning beliefs would shift if learning circumstance changed.

Riley's study (2009) investigated the beliefs about English language learning of 661 first-year university students and their 34 English teachers at a Japanese university.

The focus of his study was the shifts in reported student beliefs over a nine-month period of English study between two administrations of the Sakui and Gaies (1999) beliefs survey instrument. Significant differences were found in student responses to almost a quarter of the items on the questionnaire and two student discussion groups provided evidence of shifts in language learning beliefs during the nine month period of English study. (Paul A. Riley, 2009)

## **2.4.2 Variables that influence the forming of LLB.**

### **2.4.2.1 Cultural background**

After describing the language learning beliefs of different learners, the researchers were interested in finding out the factors which would influence the forming of LLB. Rula L. Diab did a research in Lebanon where English and French were chosen to learn as a foreign language because of its special background. He found that the beliefs of learning English and French were related to the political and socio-cultural context of foreign language education in Lebanon. This finding supported the general contention that language learners from different cultural back-grounds had various beliefs about language learning. ( Diab , 2005).

Truitt (1995) found some differences in language beliefs from the students of different regions and even different groups in the same region by investigating the beliefs about language learning of ESL students in Korea. Results also indicated that the beliefs of this group were correlated with background factors such as academic major and experience living in an English-speaking country. The findings provide evidence that learner's beliefs about language learning may vary based on cultural background and previous experience.

Horwitz (1999) did another study by using BALLI to identify similarities and differences across cultural groups in order to find out how the beliefs differ across learner groups. The author looked at a sample of the available studies selected to represent a range of cultural groups and language learning contexts, and arrived at an

important conclusion. Perhaps there is a world culture of language learning and teaching which encourages learners of many cultural backgrounds to perceive language learning very similarly. However, there is not strong evidence for a conclusion of cultural differences in learner beliefs. (Horwitz, 1999).

Rao and Zheng (2004) investigated the similarities and differences of language learning beliefs between college students in China and Australia; they found out that students in our country held stronger motivation and more optimistic attitude towards foreign language learning compared with Australian students. Chinese students attached great importance on the learning of language knowledge, but paid less attention on the developing of communicative ability. Rao suggested that foreign language teachers should help students set scientific language learning beliefs according to specific circumstances and guide them to choose suitable learning strategy, and then adjust learners' learning behaviors to improve their language learning.

Amuaie, Grace Lee; Winke, Paula (2009) did a study to find out if there was any change after students had studied abroad. After a comparisons between pre- and during study-abroad beliefs, it revealed that learners experienced changes in their beliefs on learner autonomy and the role of the teacher. Those with more time abroad had significantly more changes in their belief systems, suggesting that learning context and length of context exposure influence belief changes.

#### 2.4.2.2 Teachers' belief

In addition to the cultural and situational factors, teachers' beliefs might also affect students' beliefs. Kern (1995) compared one group of students' beliefs about language learning with those of their teachers and with those of their peers at another institution. It furthermore examined changes in students' beliefs in relation to those of their instructors in an effort to develop hypotheses about the potential influence of teachers' beliefs on students' beliefs. Results showed overall similarities between teachers' and students' beliefs as well as between students' pre- and posttest responses. The findings

of the study suggest that teachers' beliefs are one of many factors that affect students' beliefs about language learning.

Banya, kingsley; cheng, maria H. (1997) conducted a study, and found out that students inherited some LLB from their teachers and held some beliefs of their own which were different from teachers meanwhile. Chinese teachers and students share in common the beliefs about children superiority, the advantage of previous language experience, the difficulty degree of that target language, language aptitude, individual's ability to learn a foreign language, and the necessity of lots of practice. Their mismatching beliefs existed in their views of language learning (learning vocabulary, grammar, and translation), immediate error correction, whole language, speaking with an excellent accent, and female superiority. From the paper we can know that teachers' beliefs have great impact on students'.

#### 2.4.2.3. Language learning strategies

Rebecca Oxford and Martha Nyikos' article (1989) provided many insights about variables influencing the choice of learning strategies by foreign language students. They demonstrated the powerful effects of learning beliefs, motivation and other variables on choice of language learning strategies. For example, students' expectations imposed by the standard academic approaches to teaching and testing limit their motivation to try new, creative, communicatively oriented strategies. Students should be encouraged to experiment with a great variety of strategies and to apply them to tasks which promote creative, communicative learning.

Wen and Wang (1996) analyzed the relation between beliefs and strategies using. They found out that each belief of language learning was positively correlated with its corresponding strategy. The correlation has statistical significance. For example, the beliefs of mother tongue had the greatest impact on the strategy using. The more the students relied on the belief of mother tongue; the more translation strategies they used.

Su (1997) surveyed the subjects who were students of foreign language college in

Nanjing University with the quantitative research; he revealed that there were of high stability between the relationship of motives, beliefs and strategic. Motivations affected beliefs and strategies, beliefs also affected the strategies. In order to improve students' learning proficiency, he gave some suggestions to adjust learners' strategy. At first, teacher should find out how students' wrong LLB after analyzing them. Second, they should guide their students to establish right and suitable strategies.

Yang (1999) carried out the research on learning beliefs and strategies during his studying in Texas University. The study found that language learners' self-efficacy beliefs about learning English were strongly related to their use of all types of learning strategies, especially functional practice strategies. And learners' beliefs about the value and nature of learning spoken English were closely linked to their use of formal oral practice strategies. The results of this study suggested cyclical relationships between learners' beliefs and strategy use.

#### 2.4.2.4 Language learning anxiety

Horwitz & Cope (1986) wrote in the article "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety" that certain beliefs about language learning conduced the student's tension and frustration in the classroom. For example, a number of students hold the beliefs that nothing should be said in the foreign language until it can be said correctly, and that it is not okay to guess an unknown foreign language word. Students who held the beliefs like these are likely to get anxiety if they are expected to communicate in foreign language.

Young (1991) also pointed out: Learner's beliefs about language learning are a major contributor to language anxiety. As several of these beliefs are unrealistic for the language learner, they could lead to anxiety. For example, if beginning students believe that pronunciation is the most important aspect of a language, they will end up frustrated and stressed. The same frustration and anxiety sets in if they believe they should be fluent in two years. In other word, when beliefs and reality clash, anxiety results.

Instructor beliefs about language teaching are a further source of language anxiety. The majority of the instructors considered "some intimidation is a necessary motivator for promoting students' performance", which will lead students' tension and anxiety easily; Instructors who believe their role is to correct students constantly they may be contributing to learner language anxiety when students make any error. The social context that the instructor sets up in the classroom can have tremendous ramification for the learners.

#### 2.4.2.5 Language learning autonomy

The main characteristic of autonomy is that students take significant responsibility for their own learning. Cotterall (1995) reported on a questionnaire study of the language learning beliefs of a mixed nationality group of English. She identified six factors underlying subjects' responses to the questionnaire items (role of the teacher, role of feedback, learner independence, learner confidence in study ability, experience of language learning, approach to studying) and explored the relationship between each factor and autonomous language learning behaviour. She argued that learners' beliefs reflected their readiness for assuming greater responsibility for their learning.

In 1999, Cotterall conducted another study to identify how learning beliefs about language learning is associated with the nature of autonomous language learning behavior. She investigated the language learning beliefs of a group of students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes course. The study drew on the results of an earlier study of language learning beliefs (Cotterall, 1995) and extended the earlier work in three ways. It reports that beliefs learners hold about language learning are key to language learning autonomy.

Beverly-Anne carter's study (1999) of learner beliefs was engaged in promoting learner autonomy. It was part of a larger learner autonomy project that sought to promote and integrate autonomous language learning into the foreign language syllabus. It looked at the beliefs held by students, as revealed by the BALLI questionnaire, and discussed the validity of these beliefs and how they are likely to



facilitate or hinder the shift to a more autonomous mode of language learning. The learners' readiness to assume active roles, as required by autonomous learning, was to some extent determined by the beliefs that they hold about foreign language learning.

### **2.4.3 Differences in language learning beliefs between female learners and male learners**

Bacon & Finnemann carried out a study (1992) to find out the belief discrepancies between female and male groups in language learning. This study examined sex differences of beginning learners in general language-learning beliefs and beliefs dealing specifically with authentic input. A comparison revealed that, females reported higher levels of motivation, strategy use, comprehension, positive affect, willingness to confront and exposure to authentic input but less use of analytic strategies. And this position implies that men and women should not be expected to share a common point of view or to adopt a generic set of learning strategies. Instruction in L2 must account for and capitalize on potential differences rather than ignore them.

Siebert (2003) conducted a study of 156 language learners of mixed ethnic backgrounds at a higher education institution in the U.S., and also found a number of significant differences in beliefs among males and females. Findings revealed that male students were more likely to agree that people from their country were good at learning foreign languages and that they had a special ability for learning languages. And males believed to need a shorter time to master a foreign language than females. Besides, more male supported that the most important part of learning a foreign language was learning grammar, and they believed in the importance of practicing with audio-visual equipment.

In order to ascertain gender differences in language beliefs and to compare outcomes with Siebert's study, Bernat & Lloyd (2007) used BALLI to collect the general beliefs of students in an Academic English Program in Macquarie University and employed the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test to investigate the relationship

between LLB and gender. The outcomes of two studies were totally different. The study indicated that overall males and females held similar beliefs about language learning, and there were only two items on which male and female had significant differences responses. One concerned the beliefs "women are more likely than men to believe that people who speak more than one language are very intelligent." It showed that females were more likely to view that intelligence played a greater role in language learning than males. Another difference was found in an item "I enjoy practicing English with the Australians I meet." Males were more likely to enjoy the experience of practicing English with native speakers than females.

#### **2.4.4 Differences in language learning beliefs between high proficiency level learners and low proficiency level students**

Wen & Johnson (1997) conducted a study in a Chinese context to find out L2 learner variables and their relationship to English achievement. To establish the variable, a questionnaire and open-ended interview are employed in this study. It revealed that the beliefs had direct effects on the learning strategy, and the effects found to be strong and consistent. It further approved the impact of beliefs on learning achievement.

Peacock (1999) conducted a study to find out if the differences between student and teacher beliefs about language learning affect proficiency and develop hypotheses about the origins of Chinese learner beliefs about language learning. Results indicated that four of the mismatched learner beliefs negatively affected EFL proficiency. It was concluded that a number of different learner beliefs were detrimental to language learning, and also that they resulted in many dissatisfied and frustrated students who could not understand the rationale behind the tasks they carried out in class.

Huang & Tsai (2003) did a comparison study which aimed to investigate the differences of the beliefs between high English-proficiency and low English-proficiency level learners in English learning. It revealed five significant belief discrepancies between high English proficiency and low English proficiency

learners, that is, foreign language Aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies and motivation. High proficiency learners tended to hold relatively positive language learning beliefs than low proficiency learners. And they suggested some instructional activities and principals to help learners gain positive learning beliefs. First of all, to sooth the impact of classmates' reactions on learners' perceptions of their English learning, teachers are recommended to form English learning discussion activities to create the cooperation atmosphere of learning. Second, teachers are suggested to incorporate various teaching methods and language communication strategies in instructions. Finally, teachers are suggested to communicate with students' parents for their beliefs of English learning.

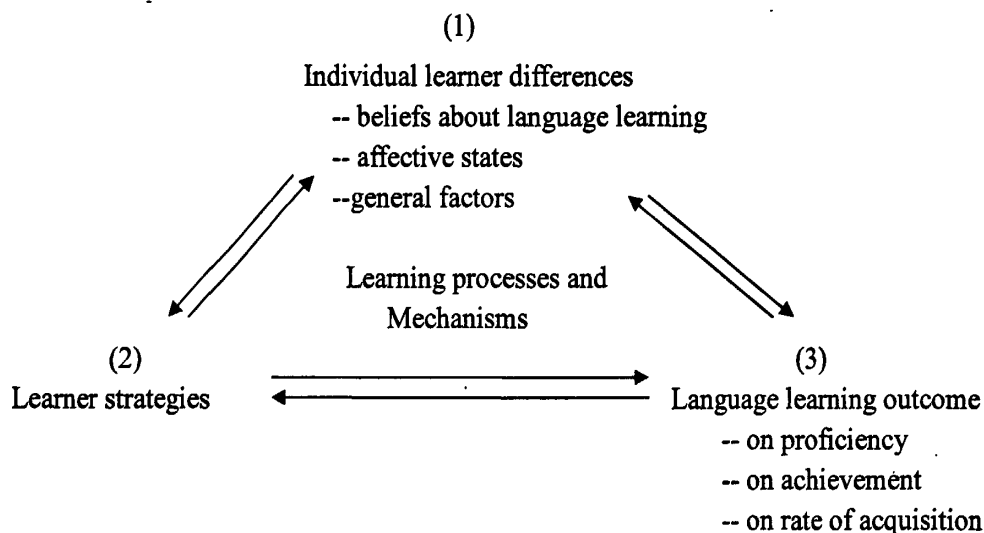
Zhou (2005) compared the language learning beliefs between high-proficiency and low-proficiency students in her Master Thesis .The result showed that high-achievers on the whole had confidence about their language study; low achievers generally lacked self-confidence in their learning. High proficiency level students held both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards English learning while low-proficiency students only held extrinsic one, which wouldn't make language learning last for a long time. The high-achievers relied less on mother-tongue in learning English than low-achievers, so they didn't trust so much on the beliefs of applying translation strategy.

Jiao (2006) was another postgraduate student who made comparison of language learning beliefs between high- and low- proficiency group in her master thesis. She found some significant differences too. The students with high-proficiency were usually more optimistic about English learning while the subjects with low-proficiency seemed to attach importance to the role of translation. The high-proficiency group also held more learning and communication strategies, such as guessing a word in English learning. In addition, they were more optimistic about the opportunities to use English, which, at least to some degree, motivate them to learn English and make much progress in their learning process.

## 2.5 Theoretical foundation for the present study

Ellis (1994) outlined a framework for investigating individual learner differences in his book "The Study of Second Language Acquisition". The framework illustrated in Figure 1.1 (Ellis,1994:473) cast light on how individual differences, learning beliefs, learning strategies and language learning outcome interact with each other. The three sets of factors are related in complex ways.

Figure 1.1 A framework for investigating individual learner differences (Ellis, 1994)



The Individual learner differences have effect on the learning process and the learning beliefs and strategies, which result in different learning outcomes. Learners' pre-conceived ideas about the importance of language aptitude and the nature of language learning not only influence the learning process, but also the strategies choice; the affective state such as anxiety and motivation influence the learning process too.

On the other hand, the students' language proficiency can affect learner preference strategies and learner's beliefs. The learning experiences, whether they are successful or not, are likely to change learners' attitudes and their learning beliefs. For example, the negative learning outcomes can destroy their learning motivation or give up the strategies they applied.

## Chapter Three Research Methodology

This chapter introduces the research methodology used in this study. It first provides research objectives of this study, and then offers detailed information about the subjects, questionnaire, and interviews. Next, it describes the process of data collection and the procedures of data analysis.

### 3.1 Research objective

In spite of the growing number of studies investigating beliefs about language learning from various cultural backgrounds, few studies have yet explored the freshmen's beliefs about foreign language learning in vocational institutes; therefore this study will explore the general idea of students' LLB, and then analyze how gender, proficiency affect students' language learning beliefs. The research questions in this study are as following:

1. What are the general beliefs about English leaning held by vocational institute students?
2. Are there any significant differences in vocational institute students' beliefs for English learning between male students and female students?
3. Are there any significant differences in vocational institute students' beliefs for English learning between high proficiency students and low proficiency students?

### 3.2 Subjects

A total of 140 students registered in Blue Sky Vocational Institute in September, 2009 took part in this study. They studied English for more than 6 years (3 years

junior and 3 years senior middle school) before entering the college. There were 72 female and 68 male students, and they came from different majors, (English, science and engineering, liberal arts). There are 40 female out of 53 students in Accounting major, 30 female out of 37 students in English, but there are only 2 female out of 50 students in Motor Electronic major. The students are divided into three different proficiency groups according to the English scores in colleague entrance exam. The students whose scores were higher than 90 had been classified as high proficiency, and students whose scores were lower than 60 had been classified as low proficiency. The rest was regarded as middle proficiency. Their age ranged from 15 to 20 years old. Of all subjects, 10 students were selected for interview to ensure that both qualitative and quantitative data were used to answer the research questions.

### **3.3 Instruments**

In order to get clear and more reliable information towards LLB of vocational institute students, two instruments were used in this study, questionnaire and interview.

#### **3.3.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire administered to collect information on language learners' beliefs here was designed by Jiao Yunyun (2006) in Southwest Petroleum University. It was adapted from BALLI (Horwitz, 1986) with some items omitted and some items added according to Chinese reality. It included 6 parts: Beliefs about language aptitude, General difficulty of language learning, Beliefs about foreign language aptitude, Beliefs about learning and communication strategy, Motivation and learner expectations, and beliefs about English teaching. The questionnaire was translated into Chinese version so that students with different English levels could adequately understand the items. Students were asked to read a statement and rank their answers on a five-point likert-scale in English class under the supervision of English teachers. Ahead of questions there were three items for students to fill in to gather students' background information including major, gender, English score in colleague entrance

exam. The development of this instrument had satisfactory reliability and validity. It took about a quarter of an hour to finish it.

### 3.3.2 Interview

After the initial analysis of the questionnaire data, a face-to-face open-ended interview was conducted, because the questionnaires investigating and descriptive statistics were not enough. So the author introduced interview as a complement for obtaining more data on students' learning belief. Each student was interviewed (in Chinese) for 15 minutes respectively to probe the questionnaire results (usually in the students' classroom). Before the interview, they were told there were no right or wrong answers to the questions so they should try to express themselves freely and honestly. The interview questions were designed by the author herself in the light of previous researchers' study, the student's current state and the questionnaire with the aim to know more about their idea of English learning, such as the beliefs of English learning, the motivation, the strategy they prefer to use, the teachers' pedagogy etc. The interview was tape-recorded and notes were taken by the author at the same time.

## 3.4 Data collection

The research data of the present study was collected in the first week of new semester in 2009. This survey was conducted by myself during the evening class or break time. Before the questionnaire, subjects were provided with instructions about how to answer the questionnaire, and informed of the purpose and significance of the study. Students were supposed to complete them in 15 minutes. Each questionnaire was examined individually and coded. 140 questionnaires were collected for there is no invalid questionnaire. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS, version 11.0) was used for the statistical analysis of the study.

### 3.5 Data analysis

The quantitative analysis of the data was carried out by using the SPSS.11 through the following statistical methods:

1. Descriptive statistics such as percentage, means, and standard deviations concerning items of the five aspects of beliefs were computed to summarize the participants' responses to the questionnaire. These descriptive analyses could help identify the general beliefs about English leaning held by vocational institute students.
2. The Independent Sample T Test was used to explore significant variation for English proficiency and gender by examining BALLI items. To identify the significant variation through the study, the researcher used the standard of  $p < .05$ .
3. The information of follow-up interviews was intended to serve as an additional data to supplement the questionnaire survey. The exact and concrete interview data were first transcribed and then classified according to the contents. Finally, the interview data were used to interpret the differences in students' belief about language learning.



## Chapter Four Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the study. It first analyzes and discusses the students' general beliefs about English learning, and then presents the belief differences between high and low proficiency group. Next, it explores how gender affects students' language learning beliefs.

### 4.1 Research question 1: What are the general beliefs about English leaning held by vocational institute students?

In order to find answer to this question, I listed the results in Table 4.1 to demonstrate the general findings in 6 categories in such sequence: Beliefs about difficulty of language learning (1-6 items); beliefs about foreign language aptitude (7-13 items); beliefs about the nature of language learning (14-19 items); beliefs about learning and communication strategies (20-27 items); beliefs about motivation and expectations (28-31 items); and beliefs about classroom instruction for English language (31-33 items).

Table 4.1 Frequencies of Response for the BALLI Items

Items	response for each of 5-point Likert scale						Mean	Std. Deviation
	N	1.strong disagree	2.disagree	3.neither agree or disagree	4.agree	5.strong agree		
Q1	140	5.7%	15.7%	11.4%	47.1%	20.1%	3.6	1.14301
Q2	140	2.9%	18.6%	60.0%	11.4%	7.1%	3.0143	0.83954
Q3	140	28.6%	29.3%	25.0%	11.4%	5.7%	2.3643	1.17657
Q4	140	1.4%	6.4%	34.3%	37.1%	20.8%	3.6929	0.92056

Q5	140	15.7%	39.3%	17.9%	18.6%	8.5%	2.65	1.19907
Q6	140	7.9%	15.7%	21.4%	42.1%	12.9%	3.3643	1.13296
Q7	140	2.1%	8.6%	12.1%	37.1%	40.1%	4.0429	1.03097
Q8	140	3.6%	6.4%	24.3%	47.1%	18.6%	3.7071	0.96333
Q9	140	30.0%	36.4%	21.4%	7.9%	4.3%	2.2571	1.12762
Q10	140	8.6%	25.7%	23.6%	34.3%	7.8%	3.0714	1.12296
Q11	140	7.1%	13.6%	44.3%	15.7%	19.3%	3.2643	1.1355
Q12	140	2.9%	29.3%	41.4%	14.3%	12.1%	3.0357	1.02073
Q13	140	11.4%	13.6%	32.9%	25.7%	16.4%	3.2214	1.21186
Q14	140	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	24.3%	73.6%	4.7143	0.49871
Q15	140	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	30.0%	65.0%	4.6	0.58519
Q16	140	2.9%	13.6%	35.7%	37.9%	9.9%	3.3857	0.94134
Q17	140	6.4%	30.0%	43.6%	17.9%	2.1%	2.7929	0.88551
Q18	140	1.4%	5.0%	26.4%	39.3%	27.9%	3.8714	0.92793
Q19	140	17.1%	47.1%	28.6%	4.3%	2.9%	2.2857	0.89993
Q20	140	0.0%	1.4%	8.6%	46.4%	43.6%	4.3214	0.69186
Q21	140	0.0%	2.9%	13.6%	42.1%	41.4%	4.2214	0.7872
Q22	140	0.0%	4.3%	7.9%	34.3%	53.5%	4.3714	0.80772
Q23	140	38.6%	37.9%	8.6%	7.1%	7.8%	2.0786	1.21186
Q24	140	8.6%	12.9%	39.3%	27.9%	11.3%	3.2071	1.08287
Q25	140	2.9%	12.9%	40.7%	34.3%	9.2%	3.3429	0.91958
Q26	140	7.9%	22.1%	30.0%	28.6%	11.4%	3.1357	1.1266
Q27	140	27.9%	40.7%	15.0%	8.6%	7.8%	2.2786	1.18788
Q28	140	0.7%	2.9%	5.7%	49.3%	41.4%	4.2786	0.75929
Q29	140	0.0%	2.1%	7.1%	37.1%	53.7%	4.4214	0.72039
Q30	140	0.0%	2.1%	4.3%	47.9%	45.7%	4.3714	0.67155
Q31	140	15.7%	22.1%	32.9%	19.3%	10.0%	2.8571	1.19695
Q32	140	15.0%	37.9%	27.9%	15.0%	4.2%	2.5571	1.05443
Q33	140	9.3%	19.3%	30.7%	37.1%	3.6%	3.0643	1.04027
Valid N (listwise)	140							

#### 4.1.1 Beliefs about difficulty of language learning

These items refer to general difficulty about language and the difficulty of specific language skills. More than half of subjects agreed or strongly agreed, "Some language is easier than other" although they have only learned English as foreign language. Maybe they compared the difficulty of learning English to our mother tongue.

Concerning the general difficulty of learning English, 60% of subjects regarded English as a language of medium difficulty. About 18.5% of students regard English as a/an (very) easy language. 21.5% considered it (very) difficulty. Students' judgments about the difficulty of language learning play a crucial role in the development of their expectations for and commitment to the learning task (Chen Yuxi, 2008). If students judge English an easy language and can be commanded easily, they are likely to get frustrated if they do not make progress rapidly. However, students who overestimate its difficulty are likely to make a minimum effort on learning, thus success is so far away. From their interview message, we could know some of them gave up their English learning for they had no interest in it.

As for item3, 57.9% of students didn't believe they could speak English well, which reflected their lack of confidence in speaking English. Refer to "If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him or her to speak English very well", 34.3% of subjects thought 3-5 years were enough, 37.1% estimated it would take 5-10 years and 20.8% of them thought it impossible to learn it well by spending only one hour a day on English. We could infer from the data that the majority of students regarded English as a time-consuming subject and most students still considered oral English difficulty. Only about 7.8% of them chose less than 2 years. It means only a small number of students underestimated the difficulty of mastering a language; they are likely to get frustrated when they faced learning problems, for they didn't get themselves ready for them.

Items5, 6 are about the difficulty of four basic skills of English learning. We can learn from the data that the two items showed similarly results. 55% of subjects opposed that speaking is easier than understanding, while 55% of subjects identified that reading and writing were easier than speaking. The results rooted in our traditional teaching system; we focused too much attention on the examination-oriented education and ignored to develop their pragmatic English skills.

### 4.1.2 Beliefs about foreign language aptitude

These items address the issue of foreign language aptitude. Two items are about the different aptitude of learning English among different groups; two items are related to the special ability for learning and so on. The majority of students (65.7%) held the view of some people's having special abilities for language learning, but it was disappointing that more than 60% of them didn't believe they had this kind of special abilities. The students of this group had negative attitude towards learning. When they face problem, they'd like to attribute their failure to the lacking of special ability instead of lacking of endeavor. And from the interview we can learn that some of them lack interest in English and didn't get good access of learning. It revealed that they lack confidence on themselves.

42.1% of students consent to the beliefs that everyone could learn to speak English. In Horwitz' research, there were more than 77% of students who believed that everyone had potentiality to speak a foreign language. 65.7% of students agreed that some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages in Yang's research. In the present study, 77.2% of students approve "children are easier than adults to learn a foreign language", 42.1% agree to "women are better than men at learning foreign languages". The result is similar with Yang's research but different from Horwitz's.

35% of students considered "People who speak more than one language are very intelligent", indicating that a small number of students regarded the foreign language learning ability was associated with intellect. Only 26.4% of subjects approved the item "Chinese people are good at learning foreign languages", and approximate half of students held neutral position towards this statement. It perhaps proves that learners in this study lacked a suitable language environment to practice English outside classroom and they only studied English for examination-oriented education. This has made students lose interest in English. This explains why only a few of the students in this study are good at learning foreign language.

### 4.1.3 Beliefs about the nature of language learning

This part is about the nature of language learning. 47.8% learners strongly agreed that "The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words". Only 20% students endorsed the concept "The most important part is learning grammar, and 43.6% of them remained neutral towards it. Meanwhile more than 60% subjects opposed "The most important part is learning how to translate it to Chinese". They depreciated the grammar learning and translation practice in a way, for more and more students realized the importance of oral communication and the ability of using it. It was in accord with Yang's study (1993, in which only one fourth agreed to this item. It is however a litter different from Horwitz's (1988) study, in which over half of the subjects agreed to this item. It is evident that a growing number of students disagree with the traditional grammar-translation teaching method.

Nearly all the students overwhelmingly endorsed the statement "it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country" and "It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English." Most people realized that learning cultures can make for language learning easier. In addition, most learners expressed their desire to know more about English-speaking culture in the interview conversation. They expressed their regret of having no chance to learn English in those countries. Some of them hoped language teachers could create relaxing and realistic language environment.

### 4.1.4 Beliefs about learning and communication strategy

This section addresses the issues of importance of accuracy and use of some particular learning strategies. Approximate 90% students have realized the importance of repeating and practicing to learn a language and 83.5% agree that "It is important to practice with CDs or tapes." These people realized the importance of repeating and practicing. Practice make perfect and that is the good way to get fluency. Although 87.8% of subjects assent to the item "It is important to speak English with

an excellent pronunciation”; a large number of subjects (76.5% and 68.6%) rejected the items “You shouldn’t say anything in English until you can say it correctly”, and “If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on” respectively. Even though they attached great importance on the accuracy, they are not afraid of making errors.

With regard to their communicative strategies, the current study revealed the discouraging results. 39.2% learners agreed that “I enjoy communicating with foreigners so that I could practice speaking English”, and 43.5% learners were willing to guess if they didn’t know a word in English. 40% of the students expressed that “I feel timid speaking English in front of others”. The account for the negative beliefs could be supplemented by some interview data. Some students would feel nervous or timid when they talked to native English speaker because of their lack of confidence. And some students only demanded that they could read to get some information.

#### **4.1.5 Beliefs about motivation and expectation**

Motivations and expectations are considered to be closely related with students’ strategy. Psychological motives can greatly influence their learning enthusiasm and learning process. From the data analysis, we can know that learners generally held strong motivation and a high expectation about EFL learning. An overwhelming number of students (more than 90%) kept a positive attitude towards the following items: “Chinese think that it is important to speak English”, “If I learn English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it”, “If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job”. On the contrary, less than 30% of students (strong) agreed to “I would like to learn English so that I can get to know foreigners better”. From the results we can know that most of students held instrumental motivation to learn English, which is mainly resulted from the current traditional Chinese English teaching situation. English is a compulsory course not only in middle school but also in college, which pays important role in education. And if someone learns English well (get high mark in exam), he can enjoy his advantage in entrance

exams. English certification is also basic for applying a position. Owing to the reasons above, they held strong motivation towards English learning.

## 4.1.6 Beliefs about classroom instruction for English learning

This part is concerning beliefs about classroom instruction. More than 50% of subjects were against “English teaching at school is good for our listening and speaking”; only 40% of students think “English teaching at school is good for our reading and writing.” It seems that English teaching at school is not good for listening and speaking, and not favorable for reading and writing either according to students’ opinion. In other words, students are not satisfactory with English teaching at school. In this case students are likely to attribute their failure to the unsatisfactory teaching at school easily instead of themselves. That would be bad for their learning.

## 4.2 Differences in language learning belief between female and male students

Independent-sample T test was employed to find out the significant differences in learning beliefs between male and female students, and the results are displayed in table 4.3.

Table4.3 significant differences in learning beliefs by gender

item	Questions	GENDER	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Q2	English is:(1) a very difficult language (2) a difficult language (3) a language of medium difficulty (4) an easy language(5) a very easy language	female	3.2361	0.86388	0.001
		male	2.7794	0.75004	0.001
Q3	I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	female	2.6944	1.12135	0.001
		male	2.0147	1.13942	0.001
Q4	If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it	female	3.4167	0.78274	0.000

	take him or her to speak English very well:(1) less than a year (2) 1~2 years (3) 3~5 years (4) 5~10 years(5) He can't learn English in 1 hour a day	male	3.9853	0.96958	0.000
Q9	I have a special ability for leaning foreign languages.	female	2.5556	1.12449	0.001
		male	1.9412	1.04927	0.001
Q13	Everyone can learn to speak English	female	3.4722	1.26683	0.011
		male	2.9559	1.09863	0.011
Q24	I enjoy practicing English with the English-speaking foreigners I meet.	female	3.4444	1.14927	0.007
		male	2.9559	0.95314	0.007
Q25	It is OK to guess if you do not know a word in English.	female	3.5556	0.91757	0.004
		male	3.1176	0.87297	0.004
Q26	I feel timid speaking English with other people	female	2.8611	1.20218	0.003
		male	3.4265	0.96686	0.003
Q31	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know foreigners better	female	3.1944	1.1462	0.000
		male	2.5	1.15254	0.000

From the table, we know that the two groups of student showed significant differences in 9 items. The significant differences caused by gender mainly fell in beliefs about language difficulty and foreign language aptitude. It can be interpreted in the following aspects.

First, we know from the above findings that most females were high-proficiency students, and that a majority of males were low-proficiency students. This indicates that females performed better than male in English learning, and that they experienced more success and accumulated more confidence. Perhaps that's the main reason why females felt more optimistic than males toward the difficulty of English (Q2) and need shorter time on its learning (Q4). It also explains that female students held more positive attitudes toward their ability of language learning (Q3, Q9, Q13). Interview data also testified it.

F(Female): I think English is less difficulty than science subjects. English is not too difficulty to master. So I have confidence in learning it well.

M(male): I don't like English, it takes much of my time to learn, but the result is not good, may be I haven't got the special ability to learn it.



Second, females and males had different inclinations because of their different interest. Male students were likely to choose science and engineering major for they preferred a logic thinking and scientific discovery. English was a pain-taking and time-consuming subject for them. But female students generally selected liberal arts such as languages and sociology major. Maybe they were good at learning something by root. All these may explain why female students would like to learn English so that they can get to know foreigners better. The interview information provides further data to support such a finding.

F1 (Female): I like English very much, I am also interested in its culture, its people and everything. So I hope that one day I have opportunity to go aboard to know more about English-speaking countries.

F2 (Female): I am not good at learning science and engineering subjects, so I chose to learn a language. I spend more time on its culture, try my best to read more and learn more. I believe that I can improve my English proficiency. Mastering a foreign language can help us establish ourselves in the international environment. And I'd like to find a job of exporting goods outside which can help me to get high income.

F3(Female): Generally speaking, I like scientific and engineering major, but you know mastering a kind of foreign language can help me get promoted in my career, it's another working skill, competitive advantage.

The disparities also existed in beliefs about learning and communication strategy. Most female students held more positive attitude towards learning communication strategy and ambiguity tolerance. And most male students felt timid when speaking English with other people. This is clearly reflected in the interviews:

F (female): I have confidence in English learning when speaking to foreigners; I can try my best to communicate with them. It needn't feel nervous, you know, English is not our mother tongue.

M (male): when I speak with foreigner in English, I feel timid. I am afraid to be

laughed by them.

### 4.3 Differences in language learning belief between high-proficiency and low-proficiency students

Table 4.7 shows differences in language learning beliefs between high and low proficiency students.

Table 4.7 beliefs differences between high-proficiency and low- proficiency groups

Questions		GROUP	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Q2	English is:(1) a very difficult language (2) a difficult language (3) a language of medium difficulty (4) an easy language(5) a very easy language	high-pro	3.9722	0.77408	0.001
		low-pro	2.3333	0.69222	0.000
Q3	I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	high-pro	3.8333	0.7746	0.002
		low-pro	1.2121	0.41515	0.000
Q4	If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him or her to speak English very well:(1) less than a year (2) 1~2 years (3) 3~5 years (4) 5~10 years(5) He can't learn English in 1 hour a day	high-pro	2.9167	0.5542	0.000
		low-pro	4.697	0.76994	0.000
Q5	It is easier to speak than to understand English	high-pro	3.7778	1.17379	0.010
		low-pro	1.7576	0.70844	0.000
Q9	I have a special ability for leaning foreign languages.	high-pro	3.5556	0.8765	0.001
		low-pro	1.2727	0.45227	0.008
Q13	Everyone can learn to speak English	high-pro	4.5556	0.55777	0.000
		low-pro	1.9091	0.87905	0.000
Q23	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	high-pro	1.5556	0.50395	0.004
		low-pro	2.8485	1.46033	0.000
Q24	I enjoy practicing English with the English-speaking foreigners I meet.	high-pro	4.4444	0.50395	0.003
		low-pro	2.2121	0.81997	0.005
Q25	It is OK to guess if you do not know a word in English.	high-pro	4.2222	0.48469	0.002
		low-pro	2.5758	0.8303	0.000
Q26	I feel timid speaking English with other people	high-pro	1.75	0.5542	0.000
		low-pro	4.0606	0.74747	0.000
Q27	If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	high-pro	1.5556	0.50395	0.000
		low-pro	3.3939	1.05887	0.000

Q31	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know foreigners better	high-pro	4.3889	0.49441	0.003
		low-pro	1.3636	0.4885	0.003
Q32	English teaching at school is good for our listening and speaking	high-pro	3.5833	1.0247	0.005
		low-pro	1.7273	0.76128	0.000

The statistic data above show the significant discrepancies in 13 items between high-proficiency group and low-proficiency group. First, the students of high-proficiency in the present study show their self-confidence in language learning. Most of the high-proficiency students believed that they have a special ability for learning foreign language (Q9), and most high-proficiency students agreed with Q2 "More female students regard English easier than male" and Q4 "English would take less time". Their confidence in language learning was also embodied in "I believe that I will learn to speak English very well" (Q3) and "Everyone can learn to speak English" Q13. This finding indicates that most high-proficiency students tended to consider language learning to be not so difficult. Their positive belief in language learning may contribute to their success in English learning.

Secondly, the significant difference in language learning belief also exists in the domain of different language skills: reading (understanding), writing, listening and speaking. Since low proficiency students attached great importance on how to get high score in exam, they pay much more attention to training in reading and writing than listening and speaking. Also, most of the low proficiency students regarded reading and writing easier than listening and speaking, which may mislead their language learning tendency. However, high-proficiency students were rather different, and they can use a variety of language learning method in the process of learning English. They consider the four language skills as equal importance, and even considered listening and speaking was simpler than reading and writing. So more high-proficiency students approved "it is easier to speak than to understand English", "I enjoy practicing English with the English-speaking foreigners I meet", and "English teaching at school is good for our listening and speaking". On the contrary, most low proficiency students felt timid in speaking English with other people.

Thirdly, there are also significant discrepancies in learning beliefs about accuracy.

The mean score of low-proficiency learners were higher than high-proficiency learners in Q23, Q27, which indicated that low-proficiency students attached great importance on the accuracy. This language learning belief perhaps hindered their progress in speaking ability. The results correspond to the above finding and it could be used to explain why most low-proficiency learners regarded listening and speaking difficult.

Fourthly, there are some huge differences in learning beliefs about the use of learning strategy and learning motivation. High-proficiency students held a belief that language learners should make use of a variety of learning strategies to facilitate the process of language learning, while low-proficiency students seldom have such a belief that the use of learning strategies can help them learning English better. They more agreed on the importance of learning strategies, and especially advocated the extensive exposure to English, such as reading English newspapers, magazines and novels, listening to English program, seeing authentic English movies. Also, high-proficiency students benefited from their high motivation to learn English, therefore they regard strong motivation as one of the most important factors in language learning. Low-proficiency students, however, never had such a strong motivation and did not consider motivation as important factor.

In addition, high proficiency students believe that language students should tolerant more ambiguity than low-proficiency group (Q25), and they generally possessed intrinsic motivation compared with low-proficiency students (Q31). There are two factors which can explain the differences between high and low proficiency learners. First, one's learning experience, no matter successful or failure, can affect one's beliefs of learning. For example, if one learns English well by tolerating ambiguity in English learning, he can get enjoyment from success and sense of accomplishment. This can, in turn, give him a positive psychological hint. The reverse is also true. Interviewing with low-proficiency students indicated that they ascribed their failure to the discouraging learning experience.

LP (low-proficiency): I always get frustrated in English learning so I think that

English is very difficulty and I haven't got the genius to learn it.

LP (low-proficiency): I believed that there existed some kind of ability to learn English, somebody are born to learn English well, however hard I tried to learn it, I always got low score, and I can't pronounce it correctly either.

Second, the appraisalment from other people can have great impact on their learning beliefs, in other words teachers' (parents') praise and peer learners' admiration can strengthen their motivation to learn and influence their learning beliefs simultaneously. For example, if someone has obtained a high score in English exam and is praised by his parents and teachers, he is likely to accept that he has a special ability to learn a foreign language and vice versa. Interviewing with some high-proficiency students suggested that appraise from other people can pay important role in setting up students' learning beliefs:

HP (high-proficiency): My parents often praise and encourage me in English learning that make me believed I am born to learn English well.

HP (high-proficiency): When I got positive evaluation from my teacher or get admiration from my classmates, I always get exited; gradually I regard learning English is of great enjoyment.

On the whole, students with high proficiency tended to have stronger sense of self-efficacy, more positive and broader attitudes toward language learning strategies, had a stronger motivation in learning English, and had more insightful beliefs about the nature of language learning. All these positive beliefs have greatly contributed to their rapid progress in English language learning.

## Chapter Five Conclusion and Implications

This chapter summarizes the findings of this study. On the basis of the findings, it offers some pedagogical implications for English teaching. Finally, this chapter pinpoints some limitations of the present study, and makes some suggestions for further research.

### 5.1 Major findings

After investigating the language learning beliefs of the students in vocational institute and analyzing the statistical data, I am now able to summarize some major findings in this research.

First, most students regarded English as a language of medium difficulty and thought learning English would cost a long time. A majority of students approved "children are easier than adults to learn a foreign language", and more than half of them identified that reading and writing were easier than listening and speaking, indicating that listening and speaking were still a problem in English teaching. As regards to the nature of language learning, only a part of them agreed that the most important part of learning a language was learning vocabulary words or grammar-translation, for more and more students realized the importance of oral communication and the ability of using it. Most learners realized the importance of culture and held strong motivation and a high expectation about EFL learning.

With regard to the relationship of LLB and gender, there are significant differences in nine items of the questionnaire between female and male subjects in this aspect. It mainly consists of the beliefs about difficulty and about learning and communication strategy. Compared with male students, female felt more confident to learn English and adopt more active strategies.

There are also significant differences between high and low proficiency group in language learning belief. High-proficiency students felt more confidence in English learning and they generally held the beliefs of having special ability to learn/speak English well. High-proficiency students also regarded the speaking and listening as easier than reading and writing, so they enjoyed practicing with English-speaking foreigners. But low-proficiency attached more importance on accuracy which hindered their progress in speaking ability.

## 5.2 Pedagogical implications for English teaching

On the basis of the findings above, some practical implications for English teaching and learning can be offered in the following aspects.

First, the present study has found that teachers' belief about language learning may affect students' learning beliefs, therefore teacher should enrich themselves in pedagogical theory through learning. They should follow the advanced learning theory and practice in language learning, and constantly modernize their own teaching perceptions and ideas. Only in this way can they help their students improve language learning efficiency.

Second, it reveals that the preconceived beliefs will affect the behavior of English learning and the strategy's choosing, so teachers should guide their students to hold scientific and positive beliefs. There are several methods to supply. First, teachers can use some questionnaire scale such as BALLI devised by Horwitz in 1987 to investigate students' learning beliefs, and let students know their strengths and weaknesses of their beliefs. After that, teachers can make their students accept new positive beliefs though some practice. Second, use brain storming methods. Teachers should organize students to speak out their learning beliefs, discuss with them and write some key point on the blackboard if necessary. They should make their students ponder over learning beliefs and draw a conclusion. All these should help students set positive learning beliefs (such as learning confidence, beliefs about the nature of language learning) and stir their learning interest and so on. In addition, teachers

should also present some useful learning strategies, and give them chance to practice these strategies. In this way, these students may change their beliefs about language learning. Teachers should also recommend some English books or magazines as accessory reading material and guide students to establish positive learning beliefs in language learning.

Next, the discussion of in learning beliefs held by high-proficiency and low-proficiency groups in this study indicates that the teachers' or parents' praise and peer learners' admiration can not only strengthen their motivation to learn but also influence their positive beliefs about language learning process. Teachers should, therefore, praise and encourage their students in their learning process. They should never give negative feedback or punishment in class, because this type of feedback will definitely break down students' confidence and learning interest.

Finally, language teachers should take into consideration students' learning beliefs in their teaching process. For example, a large number of students who are poor at speaking and listening held some negative beliefs about communicative competence in language learning. So teachers should realize such a problem, and then adopt some measure to change the deadlock, like applying the communication strategy in class. Also, the beliefs towards autonomous learning are positive; teachers should make their students accept the beliefs and guide them to take responsibility for their own studying. That's to say students should set goals, make plans, arrange studying, review, self-test and self-enhance by themselves instead of depending on their teachers. In a word, teachers should guide students get rid of the irrational learning beliefs, eliminate their psychology burden and give the constantly positive feedback even they made mistake, thus help them set scientific learning beliefs.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study and Suggestions for further study**

Though this study has revealed some features in students' learning beliefs of



language learning, it has some limitation in the research itself.

Firstly, the samples are only from three classes in Blue Sky vocational institute, and the number of subjects is rather small in size, therefore the samples can't represent general learners of the vocational institutes in Jiangxi Province. Further studies should be conducted in other institutes in Jiangxi province. It should be carried out in a large scale, so that more comprehensive data can be obtained for discussion and analysis and we can get an overall picture of students' beliefs.

Secondly, the present study was a static research, and it only examined the general beliefs of students held by different groups of students at one time, and it has not investigated the change of the students' learning beliefs. In the future, longitudinal studies are suggested to find out whether the beliefs of students would vary over a period of time and to survey how their beliefs change and affect their English learning.

Thirdly, the author used English score in college entrance exam to divide groups into high-proficiency, medium-proficiency and low- proficiency. It isn't scientific to judge English level by only exam score. There are five skills in a language, and the score in this exam can't reflect the integrated ability. So the following researchers should collect other information such as observation record for reference in further study.

Finally, the present study employed only questionnaire and interview to examine students' learning belief. It is possible that the information obtained by the questionnaire and interview will affect subjects' responses in data gathering procedures. Therefore, future research should use some other research instruments to collect data, such as classroom observation, think-aloud etc. Research has proved that use of multiple research methods can obtain a variety of data to probe the research questions in a study.

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# Appendix A

## 英语学习观念问卷调查

专业:

性别:

高考英语分数:

各位同学好!感谢您在百忙之中抽出时间作答问卷。本问卷仅作为教学研究材料,不做他用,而且匿名填写,对您没有任何影响,请不必有所顾虑。非常感谢您的合作!

下面是人们对外语学习的一些看法,这些看法没有对错之分,请您根据每个数字所代表的含义圈出其中一个选项(1=完全不同意;2=基本不同意;3=既不同意也不反对;4=基本同意;5=完全同意。)

### 对外语学习难度的看法(6项)

1. 有些语言比其它语言相对来说要容易学。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

2. 英语是一门: 1) 非常难的语言 2) 难的语言 3) 中等难度的语言 4) 简单的语言  
5) 非常简单的语言

3. 我相信有一天我能说一口流利的语言。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

4. 如果一个人每天花一小时学习英语,他需要花多长时间才能把这门语言学得很好:

1) 不到一年 2) 一年到两年 3) 三年到五年 4) 五到十年

5) 一个人每天只花一小时学习英语是不够的

5. 说英语要比听懂英语容易。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

6. 读、写英语比听、说英语容易

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

### 对外语学习能力的看法(7项)

7. 儿童比成人学习英语要容易。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

8. 有些人天生就有学习外语的特殊才能。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

9. 我有学习外语的特殊才能。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

10. 女姓比男性更擅长学外语。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

11. 能说不止一种语言的人很聪明。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

12. 中国人擅长学外语。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

13. 每个人都有学会说一门外语的潜力。

1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

### 对语言学习本质的看法 (6 项)

14. 为了学习英语, 了解英语国家的文化是必要的。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
15. 在说英语的国家, 学习英语是最好的。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
16. 学习英语最重要的部分就是学习词汇。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
17. 学习英语最重要的部分就是学习语法。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
18. 学习外语不同于学习其他的课程。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
19. 学习英语最重要的部分就是学习如何把英语翻译成汉语。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

### 对学习策略和交际策略的看法。(8 项)

20. 大量的练习和重复对学习英语很重要。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
21. 使用磁带, 录像(音)带等练习口语很重要。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
22. 说英语时, 语音标准是很重要的。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
23. 在能正确使用英语之前, 不要用英语表达任何意见。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
24. 我喜欢和我遇到的来自于英语国家的人练习口语。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
25. 当你不认识一个英文单词时, 可以使用猜的办法。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
26. 当我和其他人说英语时, 我感到很害羞。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
27. 若允许初学者说英语时犯错的话, 那他们以后就很难说出正确的英语。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

### 对学习动机和学习期望的看法 (4 项)

28. 如果我的英语说得很好的话, 我将有很多机会使用它。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
29. 如果我的英语说得很好, 我就会有更好的获得好工作的机会。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
30. 在中国, 人们认为会说英语很重要。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---
31. 我学习英语是为了更好地了解外国人。  
1--- 2--- 3--- 4--- 5---

### 对英语课堂教学的看法 (2 项)

32. 学校的英语教育足够使我们很好地“听”和“说”英语。

1-- 2-- 3-- 4-- 5--

33. 学校的英语教育足够使我们很好地“读”和“写”英语。

1-- 2-- 3-- 4-- 5--



# Appendix B

## Interview     Schedule

Do you like English? Why do you learn English?

Do you have confidence in English learning? Do you like to talk with foreigner?

Do you think English is difficult? Do you believe there exists a special ability to learn English?

As we know there are five parts in English learning, reading, writing, speaking, listening and translating, which part do you think is most important and most difficulty? Why?

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