



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**BELIEFS OF BANSAMORO MADARIS LEARNERS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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October 2008

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This study investigated the beliefs about language learning of 100 Bangsamoro Madaris learners in Southern Philippines. The survey instrument, 'Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory' or BALLI (Horwitz 1987) which included 34 items on a Likert-type scale, was used to collect data on the learners' beliefs about English language learning. The primary aim was to describe their beliefs about English language learning, which to date, has remained unexplored. The second aim was to explore the relationship between their beliefs and academic performance represented by their final grades in English subject in order to provide empirical backing of the relationship, otherwise lacking in beliefs literature (Peacock, 1999). Aside from that, the beliefs of the respondents towards Arabic language learning were gathered using a modified BALLI in order to compare their beliefs about Arabic language learning to their beliefs about English language learning.

Findings of the descriptive analysis on the responses to BALLI statements indicate several firmly held beliefs among the respondents with varying degrees of validity.

Some of the beliefs identified having important teaching implications are the importance given to excellent pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Respondents are also highly motivated and optimistic. The Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis between the beliefs and the final scores indicates relationship in five belief items, two of which different from previous studies (Peacock, 1999) which supports to the context specificity of beliefs. Finally, nine out of 21 statements compared in BALLI English and BALLI Arabic through t-tests are found significantly different, providing more evidence of the influence of social and cultural contexts in shaping beliefs.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi syarat untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**KEPERCAYAAN PELAJAR BANGSAMORO DARI MADARIS TENTANG
PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA DAN HUBUNGANNYA DENGAN
PRESTASI AKADEMIK**

Oleh
KURAI ABDULLAH KARIM
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Kajian ini menyiasat kepercayaan tentang pembelajaran bahasa 100 pelajar Bangsamoro dari Madaris di Selatan Filipina. Alat "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory atau BALLI" (Horwitz, 1987), yang meliputi 34 butiran di skala jenis Likert telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data tentang kepercayaan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris pelajar tersebut. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menerangkan kepercayaan tentang pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris pelajar Bangsamoro yang sehingga kini belum lagi ada kajian terperinci yang telah dibuat terhadap mereka. Tujuan kedua adalah untuk melihat hubungan di antara kepercayaan dan prestasi akademik berdasarkan keputusan matapelajaran bahasa Inggeris peperiksaan akhir tahun untuk memberikan bukti empirikal yang kurang di kesusasteraan kepercayaan (Peacock, 1999). Selain itu, kepercayaan pelajar tentang pembelajaran bahasa Arab juga didapatkan dengan menggunakan BALLI yang diubahsuai untuk melihat perbezaan kepercayaan mereka terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Arabic dengan kepercayaan mereka terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris.

Penemuan pengupasan deskriptif terhadap jawapan kepada BALLI oleh responden menunjukkan beberapa kepercayaan yang dipegang tetap dengan pelbagai tahap kesahihan. Seseengah kepercayaan itu yang ada implikasi penting dalam pengajaran bahasa adalah kepentingan yang diberi pada sebutan, tatabahasa dan perbendaharaan kata. Responden juga didapati mempunyai motivasi dan keyakinan yang tinggi. Analisis hubing kait Pearson di antara kepercayaan dan keputusan peperiksaan menunjukkan ada kaitan di lima butiran kepercayaan. Dua darinya berbeza dari penemuan lepas (Peacock, 1999) yang menyokong bahawa kepercayaan itu mengikut konteks. Akhir sekali, sembilan daripada 21 kenyataan BALLI English dan BALLI Arabic yang dibandingkan melalui t-tests ditemui berbeza. Ini memberikan bukti bahawa konteks sosial dan budaya mempengaruhi kepercayaan.

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May Allah reward you all.

Dedication

To my late father, Hj Mohammad Sadiq Abdullah Karim, the greatest advocate of Madaris I had ever known, this work is humbly dedicated...

I certify that an Examination Committee on September 25, 2008, conducted the final examination of Kurais Abdullah Karim on her Master of Science thesis entitled “Beliefs of Bangsamoro Madaris learners about language learning and their relationship with academic performance” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Putra Malaysia (Higher degree) Regulation 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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I hereby declare that this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

KURAI ABDULLAH KARIM

Date: October 2008

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the shift of research interest in language learning from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning. Researchers and educators have recognized the importance of students' contribution in the classroom and have sought to find ways to understand the dynamics of learning from the students' perspectives. Consequently, many research have been conducted from the students' perspective which have come to inform the field of language teaching pedagogy (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Learners hold complex sets of attitudes, expectations, experiences and learning strategies in performing their language learning task (Horwitz, 1987 in Huang & Tsai, 2003) which are formed or influenced by a learner's past experiences, culture, home/family background, context and personal differences (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005).

Attitudes to learning and the perceptions and beliefs which determine them, have a profound influence on learning behaviour (Cotteral, 1995). Existing research suggest that learner beliefs have the potential to influence their motivation, persistence, attitudes and actions as language learners (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Putcha (1999) explains that beliefs act as guiding principles for students' behavior. Richardson (1996:102) defines beliefs as "psychologically held understanding, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" while Stevick (1980) asserts that success in learning does not depend solely on materials and techniques but more on what is going on inside the learner.

1.2 Background of the Study

Beliefs are treated as a central construct in every discipline that deals with human behavior and learning (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Language learning beliefs are categorized under the domain of affective variables such as attitudes, motivations and anxiety (Richardson, 1996). It is important to assess learning beliefs that learners bring to the classroom because they influence the success or failure of learning (Nunan, 1995; McDonough, 1995; and Horwitz, 1998 in Huang, 2006).

The development of the self-report survey instrument Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI by Horwitz of University of Texas launched numerous research on learners' beliefs in different countries and different nationalities and ethnic groups. Presently, it is the leading data collection instrument for researching learners' beliefs on language learning. Horwitz (1987) used this 34 item questionnaire to investigate students', teachers' and pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning. BALLI was consequently used by many researchers in a number of small and large-scale studies.

The findings from studies using BALLI provide useful insights in language teaching and learning. In 1988, Horwitz studied the beliefs of 241 first semester foreign language students at the University of Texas and found that students' answers to some items showed differences and gaps with teachers' commonly held perceptions. She proposed that these gaps between teacher and student beliefs may result in reduced student confidence and satisfaction in the class and unwillingness to participate in communicative activities. For example, students who believe that learning a language is mostly learning new words and grammar rules, will spend

most of their time memorizing vocabulary lists and grammar rules rather than doing the tasks planned by the teacher.

Mantle-Bromley (1995) used BALLI to investigate the beliefs of 208 seventh grade middle school students taking French and Spanish. Her findings are similar to Horwitz's that some of the beliefs held by students differ significantly with commonly held teacher beliefs. She asserts that teachers need to have a clear understanding of their students' learning beliefs because learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively in class, work harder outside the class and persist longer in language study. She proposes that if students' beliefs and performance do not match, "they become frustrated with the class and with themselves" (p. 381).

Peacock (1999) investigated the beliefs about language learning of 202 EFL students and 45 teachers in Hongkong. Using BALLI, proficiency test, self-rated proficiency test and interview, his results showed similarities with the findings of Horwitz and Mantle-Bromley that students held conceptions about language learning different from that of teachers that could affect achievement and persistence in study. Peacock also found significant associations between beliefs and proficiency particularly on four belief items. For example, the students who agreed that "learning a language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules" were less proficient than those who disagreed while the students who disagreed with the statement "If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on" were more proficient than those who agreed. Students who underestimated the difficulty of foreign language learning were less proficient than those with more realistic view and students who disagreed with the statement "You shouldn't say

anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly” were more proficient than those who agreed.

He concludes that a number of learner beliefs were actually detrimental to language learning and that they resulted in many dissatisfied and frustrated students who could not understand the rationale of the tasks they carried out in the class (Peacock, 1999). He suggested that teachers examine their learners’ beliefs and thereafter take action to reduce learner misunderstanding and dissatisfaction. These studies show how knowledge of learners’ beliefs can improve learning achievement.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Research supports that beliefs about language learning are context specific, shaped by students’ socio-cultural backgrounds (Barcelos, 2003; Yang, 1992). Learners from different cultures may have different beliefs, motivations and attitudes about language learning which in turn influences success or failure of learning. In the past two decades, extensive research has been conducted on the beliefs of language learners in different sociolinguistic setting but no study has been conducted yet to investigate the beliefs about language learning of Bangsamoro learners. This study aims to address that gap. The Bangsamoro learners especially those in the Madaris present an interesting subject because of their unique history and educational orientation. Due to the dominant Islamic Arabic curriculum of the Madaris, the students’ exposure to English as a subject in school is limited and less emphasized. This situation might have shaped some beliefs that are unique to them. Exploring their beliefs will provide insights to those who are responsible for implementing the English enhancement program for the Madaris students in Mindanao. Realizing the importance of Madaris in the education of the Bangsamoro in Mindanao, the

Department of Education of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao with the help of various funding agencies like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Philippine-Australia Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) and United States Agency for International Development under Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) for Mindanao, is currently in its initial stage of upgrading the curriculum of the madaris to include core subjects taught in the normal schools. One of these subjects is the English language which provided an impetus to the development of many English language enhancement program for madaris teachers and students alike. The long term goal of this program is to integrate the madaris to the mainstream educational system of the Philippines. The English enhancement programs aim to improve on the English proficiency of students in order to bridge the gap with the students from schools that follow the Philippine education system curriculum, which has years of learning and exposure to the English language. This can be best achieved if teachers understand the beliefs that their students bring to the classroom.

The Bangsamoro learners in the Madaris learn Arabic language as an essential part of the curriculum. Spelling, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary are taught alternately everyday. Arabic is given much importance because it is the key to understanding the topics about Islam such as Qur'an and Sunnah, Fiqh and Seerah. The learning of the Arabic language and passing the subject is compulsory for every student. It is taught in a systematic fashion with a proper syllabus developed by the teachers and approved by the school (as in the case of Nahda Central Academy). On the other hand, the English language as a subject in the Madrasah is still in its incipient stage without proper syllabus and taught by teachers who did not major in

teaching English. The status of the Arabic language and the English language in Madrasah is clearly different and might have created different views and beliefs among the learners. This study attempts to compare the respondents' beliefs about Arabic language learning to their English language learning beliefs. This will give insight to how they perceive these two languages which have very different backgrounds and roles in their society.

Examining learners' beliefs about language learning is important because of its links to proficiency and achievement. Mantle-Bromley (1995), in her study of the beliefs about language learning of middle school students, concludes that positive and realistic beliefs have links to proficiency. Although many studies have been done on beliefs about language learning in various contexts and in relation to other learning variables, there is a lack of studies done on exploring its links to proficiency and/or academic achievement (Peacock, 1999; Huang & Tsai, 2003) and more studies are needed in order to establish causal link between the two. The lack of empirical evidence of the relationship that might exist between the two variables is also being addressed in this study.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is three-fold. The first and foremost was to investigate Bangsamoro learners' beliefs about English language learning. The second is to check for relationship between their beliefs about English language learning and their academic performance. The third is to compare their beliefs about English language learning with their beliefs about Arabic language learning. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. identify Bangsamoro learners' beliefs about English language learning within the five areas of Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI English) survey instrument: Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude; Beliefs about Difficulty of Language Learning; Beliefs about Nature of Language Learning, Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies and Motivations and Expectations;
2. identify Bangsamoro learners' beliefs about Arabic language learning within the four areas of the modified BALLI (BALLI Arabic): Beliefs about Difficulty of Language Learning; Beliefs about Nature of Language Learning, Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies and Motivations and Expectations;
3. test for relationship between the beliefs about English language learning held by Bangsamoro learners and their academic performance; and;
4. check for differences between the beliefs held by Bangsamoro learners about English language learning and their beliefs about Arabic language learning.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study identified above, the following research questions have been formulated.

1. What are the beliefs about English language learning held by the Bangsamoro learners?
2. What are the beliefs about Arabic language learning held by the Bangsamoro learners?