

## ABSTRACT

The present investigation has been designed to examine the learner beliefs about learning English of science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology (SUT), Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, and Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), Hanoi, Vietnam. It also investigated the similarities and differences of learner beliefs held by SUT and HAU students.

Three hundred and forty-four SUT students and three hundred and nineteen HAU student (six hundred and sixty-three in total) participated in this study. They were sampled on the basis of convenience and availability. The main instrument used for the data collection was the modified Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988). The modified questionnaire comprises 35 5-point Likert-like Scale discrete belief items. The questionnaire which was actually used with SUT students is in Thai, while the one used with HAU students is in Vietnamese. The reliability estimates based on a 344-student sample for SUT students and 319-student sample for HAU students are .71 and .67 which are considered acceptable when compared with the acceptable reliability coefficients of .70, which is a useful rule of thumb for research purposes (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993).

Both similarities and differences in beliefs about learning English responded to by SUT and HAU students were found. Regarding the similarities in their beliefs, based on the percentages of responses to the 'Agreeing' category, the top priorities were given to the beliefs about the importance of repetition and practice; their ultimate success in learning to speak English; an opportunity to get a job if their English is good; and the utilisation of mass media in improving their English, respectively. In terms of the similarities in their disagreement, based on the 'Disagreeing' category, it was found that both SUT and HAU students shared their disagreement upon some aspects of learning English. Examples are: students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly; teachers should speak their mother tongue rather than English while teaching in class; they study English only to pass the examination; or without a teacher, learning English is impossible for them. When taking what students were unsure about learning English into account, we found that both SUT and HAU were similar in that they were doubtful about their own ability as well as the ability of students at their universities in learning English.

When learner beliefs about learning English under the seven categories, based on the results of the chi-square tests, were taken into consideration, major significant differences among the beliefs held by SUT and HAU students were found in most aspects. These include learner beliefs about: 1) the difficulty of learning English; 2) the language aptitude; 3) motivations and expectations; 4) learning and communication strategies; and 5) the teacher's roles. Minor significant differences were found in terms of their beliefs about the nature of learning English and the usefulness of out-of-class activities.

The findings of the present investigation indicate that the cultural background of learners has a strong relationship with learner beliefs in most of the examined aspects, i.e. about 75 percent of the discrete belief items. The reader, however, must be cautioned against jumping to the unwarranted conclusions that this factor might play an important role in shaping beliefs of learners or a predictor of learner beliefs. It is

definitely possible that factors other than the learner cultural background (e.g. previous language learning experience, teacher beliefs, anxiety in English language classroom, or proficiency), which were not included in the present investigation, may play an important role in shaping learner beliefs or may be an important predictor of learner beliefs, but they remain to be further investigated.