

# **CONTRIBUTION**

## **An Investigation of Beliefs About Learning English by Thai and Vietnamese University Science-Oriented Students: A Cross-Cultural Perspective**

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## 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.

## Table of Contents

### Acknowledgements

### Abstract

Table of Contents.....i

List of Tables and Figures.....iv

### CHAPTER ONE:

#### **BACKGROUND TO STUDY.....pp. 1-14**

1.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter.....	1
1.2. The Working Definitions for the Present Investigation.....	3
1.3. Background of Suranaree University of Technology and its English Language Teaching and Learning.....	4
1.4. Background of Suranaree University of Technology and its English Language Teaching and Learning.....	8
1.5. Research Objectives.....	11
1.6. The Benefits of this Investigation.....	12
1.7. The Expected Outcome.....	12
1.8. Outline of the Research Report.....	13
1.9. Summary.....	14

### CHAPTER TWO:

#### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING**

**pp. 15-31**

2.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter.....	15
2.2. What are 'beliefs'?.....	15
2.3. Research on Beliefs about Language Learning.....	18
2.4. Theoretical Framework for the Present Investigation.....	29
2.5. Summary.....	31

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING .....pp. 32-52**

3.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter.....	32
3.2. Methods in Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Research.....	35
3.2.1. Oral Interviews.....	36
3.2.2. Written Questionnaires.....	37
3.2.3. Diary Studies.....	38

### **CHAPTER THREE: (cont)**

3.3. Framework of Data Collection Methods for the Present Investigation.....	39
3.4. Research Questions.....	40
3.5. Methods for Data Collection and Data Generation.....	40
3.6. Reporting, Analysing, and Interpreting Data.....	42
3.7. Sampling and Rationales for Choice of Subjects.....	43
3.8. The Beliefs about Learning English Questionnaire.....	45
3.9. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory.....	47
3.10. Summary.....	52

### **CHAPTER 4:**

#### **BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH REPORTED BY SUT AND HAU STUDENTS: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....pp. 53-96**

4.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter.....	53
4.2. What do the majority of SUT students agree, disagree and doubt about learning English?.....	55
4.2.1. What do the majority of SUT students agree about learning English?.....	56
4.2.2. What do the majority of SUT students disagree about learning English?.....	59
4.2.3. What are the majority of SUT students doubtful about learning English?.....	60
4.3. What do the majority of HAU students agree, disagree or doubt about learning English?.....	62
4.3.1. What do the majority of HAU students agree about learning English?.....	62
4.3.2. What do the majority of HAU students disagree about learning English?.....	65
4.3.3. What are the majority of HAU students doubtful about learning English?.....	67
4.4. Results and discussion of a comparison of learner beliefs by Thai and Vietnamese science-oriented students .....	69
4.4.1. Learner beliefs about the difficulty of learning English.....	72
4.4.2. Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Aptitude.....	74
4.4.3. Learner Beliefs about the Nature of Learning English.....	76
4.4.4. Learner Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies.....	81
4.4.5. Learner Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations.....	84
4.4.6. Learner Beliefs about the Teacher's Roles.....	87
4.4.7. Learner Beliefs about the Usefulness of Out-of-Class Activities.....	91
4.5. Summary.....	95

**CHAPTER FIVE:**

**SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH,  
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR STUDENTS  
IN THAILAND AND VIETNAM.....pp. 97-109**

5.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter..... 97

5.2. Summary of the Research Findings.....98

    5.2.1. What are the degrees of the discrete learner belief items  
    about language learning reported being held by science-oriented  
    students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam?.....98

    5.2.2. Do the degrees of the learner beliefs about language learning  
    vary significantly according to the cultural context they belong to?  
    If they do, what are the main significant differences.....100

5.3. The Implications of the Research Findings for the Teaching and  
    Learning of English for Students in Thailand and Vietnam .....103

5.4. Contributions of the Present Investigation..... 105

5.5. Limitations of the Present Investigation and Proposals for Future Research....106

5.6. Conclusion..... 108

**Bibliography.....110**

**Appendix.....117**

**About the author .....120**

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 2.1: Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning.....	20
Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework for the Present Investigation.....	30
Figure 3.1: Types of Research.....	33
Table 3.1: Number of SUT and HAU Students by Gender and ‘Perceived’ Language Ability.....	45
Table 4.1: Beliefs about learning English reported by SUT students.....	56
Table 4.2: Disagreement about learning English reported by SUT students.....	59
Table 4.3: Doubt about learning English reported by SUT students.....	61
Table 4.4: Belief about learning English reported by HAU students.....	63
Table 4.5: Disagreement about learning English reported by HAU students.....	65
Table 4.6: Doubt about learning English reported by HAU students.....	67
Table 4.7: Learner Beliefs about the Difficulty of Learning English (%).....	72
Table 4.8: Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Aptitude (%).....	76
Table 4.9: Learner Beliefs about the Nature of Learning English (%).....	78
Table 4.10: Learner Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies (%)...	82
Table 4.11: Learner Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations (%).....	85
Table 4.12: Learner Beliefs about the Teacher’s Roles (%).....	87
Table 4.13: Learner Beliefs about the Usefulness of Out-of-Class Activities (%)..	92



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO STUDY

### 1.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter is an introduction to the project on learner beliefs about learning English of science-oriented students in Thailand and Vietnam and provides background and context for the present investigation. The introduction includes a summary of learner beliefs about foreign language learning. The ensuing sections cover the working definitions for the present investigation, English language teaching and learning in the contexts of Thailand and Vietnam, research objectives, potential benefits of the investigation and finally the expected outcomes. The chapter concludes with an outline of the project report.

It has long been recognised by educators in the fields of language acquisition or applied linguistics that most, if not all, foreign language learners come to their studies with their own personal beliefs, assumptions, expectations about and attitudes towards foreign language learning processes and about themselves as language learners. As suggested by Wen and Johnson (1997), learner beliefs have direct effects on learners' behaviour, reinforcing the view that teachers and materials writers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, students' pre-existing assumptions about the language learning process. Beliefs about language learning that language learners may hold include: beliefs about the difficulty of language learning; the nature of language learning; foreign language aptitude; learning and communication strategies; motivations and expectations (Horwitz, 1988); beliefs about the language task, about likely outcomes; about learners' personal strengths and limitations (Sakui and Gaies, 1999); role of the teacher; role of feedback; learner independence; learner confidence in study ability; experience of language learning; and approach to studying (Cotterall, 1995). Besides,

students may hold beliefs about the usefulness of extra-curricular or out-of-class activities. Therefore, discovering learners' beliefs about language learning can be very helpful for language teachers. As proposed by Wenden (1986) if we are to discover what characterises good or successful language learning, we as foreign language teachers, need to discover what students' beliefs are and what they know about their foreign language learning. Teachers should also be able to provide activities which would allow students to examine or explore these beliefs as well as their possible impact on how they approach learning tasks.

A growing body of evidence suggests that learner beliefs play a central role in learning experience and achievements. Recent research on beliefs about language learning, as to be seen in the subsequent chapter, has examined or investigated the beliefs held by foreign language learners in different contexts, e.g. in the USA, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, Turkey, and China. In the context of the USA, a few researchers investigating beliefs of American students learning a foreign language include Horwitz (1987, 1988), Kern (1995), Mantle-Bromley (1995), Kuntz (1996), Oh, (1996), and Rifkin (2000). Besides, other researchers have conducted their studies dealing with beliefs of students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or as a Second Language (ESL). Examples are Cotterall (1995, 1999) examining learner beliefs of ESL learners in New Zealand; Yang (1992) and Tsai (2003) examining learner beliefs of EFL learners in China; Truitt (1995) examining learner beliefs of EFL learners in Korea; and Sakui and Gaies (1999) exploring learner beliefs of EFL learners in Japan.

Although beliefs about language learning would seem to be naturally related to cultural and situational differences, no attempt or very little has been made in order to consider cultural differences that might exist between the groups of learners from

different cultural backgrounds (Horwitz, 1999). To my knowledge, to date no empirical research in a cross-cultural perspective on learner beliefs about foreign language learning especially English, which is the dominant foreign language in both Thailand and Vietnam, has been carried out with university students learning English in either Thailand or Vietnam. As illustrated earlier, learner beliefs about foreign language learning are very important for language teachers to know, it is therefore appropriate to explore learner beliefs held by Thai and Vietnamese students in order to shed some light on another aspect of learner characteristics other than such characteristics as motivation, anxiety, or gender which have been extensively investigated by a number of researchers already as well as to fill this gap. The investigation of learner beliefs which inform different behaviours in the language classroom is useful in making teachers aware of ‘different learner types’ that need to be accommodated (Cotterall, 1995, p. 493). As concluded by Horwitz (1987), what students think about language learning can affect how they go about doing it. Therefore, knowledge of learner beliefs about language learning is an important step toward understanding the learners’ use of learning strategies.

## **1.2. The Working Definitions for the Present Investigation**

- **Learner Beliefs about Learning English**

In this particular context, ‘learner beliefs about learning English’ refer to the beliefs that are reported being held by Thai and Vietnamese students. The beliefs about learning English have been classified partly based on the modification of the categories proposed by Horwitz (1988) including: Learner beliefs about:

- the difficulty of learning English
- the nature of learning English
- the language learning aptitude
- learning and communication strategies
- motivations and expectations
- teacher’s roles

- the usefulness of out-of-class activities
- **Language learners**

‘Language learners’ for the present investigation refer to the students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology (SUT), Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand in term 1/2003; and at Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), Hanoi, Vietnam in term 1/2003.

- **Statistical significance**

The statistical significance of the results refers to the probability of any outcome. In other words, probability is the proportion of times that any particular result would be obtained if the research was repeated an indefinite number of times. The purpose of the statistical tests is to give confidence that the descriptions of the data are correct, thus telling us whether we can have confidence in our claims. When the probability level is .05, this means there are 5 chances in 100 of obtaining scores. If the probability level is .01, this means that there is only 1 chance in 1000 of getting this score.

### **1.3. Background of Suranaree University of Technology and its English Language Teaching and Learning**

Suranaree University of Technology was established as a public autonomous university outside the civil service system under the supervision of the Royal Thai Government. It is a specialised university in science and technology which aims to promote internal and external efficiency and academic freedom in its operations and to form a community of scholars in the arts, sciences and technology, benefiting both the individual and society. This University pledges itself to excellence in all its missions, to improve the quality of life, to disseminate and create knowledge, moral ethos and mission for the eternal development of mankind (Suranaree University of Technology Annual Report, 2004).

During the period of the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, the government announced its policy to distribute higher education opportunities to the regions and rural areas. Thus, in 1984, then the Ministry of University Affairs, now the Ministry of Education, proposed to the Royal Thai Government the establishment of five new regional universities: one in the North, one in the South, one in the East, and two in the Northeast of the country. In the Northeast, two colleges under the jurisdiction of Khon Kaen University were proposed to be founded in Ubon Ratchathani and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces. The name of the college at Nakhon Ratchasima was to be "Suranaree College." To this end, 1,120 hectares of degraded forest in the vicinity of Huay Yang Reservoir, Muang District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province were allocated for its site.

Later, with the late General Chatichai Choonhavan as then the Prime Minister, realised the need to speed up the establishment of the new regional universities in response to national development demands. The Cabinet thus passed a resolution appointing a committee to establish "Suranaree University" in Nakhon Ratchasima on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1988, with then the Permanent Secretary of University Affairs, Prof. Dr Wichit Srisa-an, presiding the committee. The Committee presented the Suranaree University of Technology Establishment Project before the Cabinet, as well as submitted the draft of the Royal Bill for the establishment of the University to the Parliament in the 1989 session. On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1990, His Majesty the King signed the Bill. The Law was published in the Royal Gazette and became effective on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Suranaree University of Technology thus holds July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1990 as its founding day. In the 1993 academic year, SUT admitted its first undergraduate students into a total of nine engineering and agricultural technology programs. Presently, the University has five different institutes, namely:

- 1) Institute of Social Technology;
- 2) Institute of Agricultural Technology;
- 3) Institute of Medicine;
- 4) Institute of Science; and
- 5) Institute of Engineering.

Regarding English language teaching and learning at Suranaree University of Technology, the status of the language is a mere academic subject with every undergraduate student required to take 5 different modules altogether, starting from English I, II, III, IV, and V respectively. The University does not offer English as a major subject to undergraduate students. Students are required to start English I as designated by the University and the other four modules they have freedom to register whenever they are ready as long as they can satisfy the minimum requirement for their graduation. English I and II are basically English for social communication where students are required to attend at least 80% of the thirteen 2 hour- tutorials and one-hour computer lab. Apart from this, students are required to do self-study at the self-access centre, known as ELRU (English Language Resource Unit) for 10 hours through the trimester. English III and IV gear more towards EST (English for Science and Technology) in which reading is the dominant skill. However, the other skills are also included in the modules and the basic requirements are exactly the same as English I and II. Lastly, English V, formerly the focus of the module was on writing an argumentative essay, and has now been changed to 'English for Future Careers'. The module mainly deals with writing which students are likely to encounter after their graduation, especially when they have to apply for a job. This includes writing a resume, job application and a covering letter, etc. The revision of the curriculum has been made in order to meet the requirement of the National Curriculum which emphasises independent work, autonomous learning, innovations and new technology in English language teaching (ELT), such as self-access learning, performance

standards of general English as well as English for academic and specific purposes (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana and Chinnawongs, 2003). In generally, when classes are in session, lecturers of all the modules are encouraged to use English with students as the medium of instruction and promote learner autonomy among the students in the meantime. However, most teachers still have to code-switch between Thai and English. Regarding extra-curricular activities, the School of English occasionally organises such activities as English club, English Day, or mini-courses for students. Foreigners are also invited as guest-speakers from time to time.

In short, the teaching and learning English at SUT can be summarised as follows:

- English is a compulsory subject for undergraduate students;
- Most members of teaching staff share the same mother-tongue with students;
- Teachers are still seen as the centre of classroom learning or as the main resource person in the class;
- Teachers use both Thai and English as a medium of instruction. Actually, the split between Thai and English depends largely on individual teachers;
- Students must attend classes regularly (at least 80 percent of the class time) in order to be eligible for the end-of-term examination;
- The content of English deals with both general English and English for specific purposes, i.e. science and technology;
- Students meet with their teachers in class for 2-hour tutorials and one-hour in the computer laboratory;
- Classes normally start from 8:00 am and end at 5:00 pm from Monday to Friday;
- Classes are normally heterogeneous in terms of students' field of study as students can choose their own groups of study regarding their timetables and which teacher they want to study with. In the latter case, many students are not generally successful in choosing their favourite teacher due to their tight timetable;
- Most students study English in order to pass the required exams, so they often focus on studying grammar, and vocabulary which are the major components of the tests even though listening is also included in the tests but it is a very small part when compared with grammar and vocabulary (reading);
- Class sizes are normally medium (with between 45-50 students on average) with good facilities;
- Two native speakers of English teaching English at SUT last year (2003);
- The computer service for students is non-limited on campus. The University also provides computers at students' dormitories as well; and
- Teachers are normally encouraged to work in the office so that students can come and seek advice when they have some questions. In reality, students hardly ever show up unless their teachers ask them to do so.



#### **1.4. Background of Hanoi Agricultural University and its English Language Teaching and Learning**

Being a leading university of agriculture in the country, Hanoi Agricultural University makes its highest efforts in Education, Scientific Research, Technology Development and Social Service (Hanoi Agricultural University, 2003). The University devotes itself to the development of a diversified, highly productive, effective and sustainable agriculture in Vietnam. Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU) was established on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1956, as one of the first national universities of Vietnam. Since that time the University has become a leading institution of higher education and research in agriculture in the country. At its establishment the University was named Agro-Forestry University, which consisted of four Faculties: Agronomy, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine, Farm Machinery Engineering and Forestry. In 1958 the University united with the institutes of Farming Research, Animal Production and Forestry to form the Agro-Forestry Institute. During the years 1960 – 1962, the Institute offered two more specialisations: Fisheries and Agricultural Economics. In 1963, the Institute was split into Hanoi Agricultural University and the Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute. At the same time, the Faculty of Forestry was separated from the University to become the College of Forestry. Later, in 1966, the Faculty of Fisheries dissociated itself from the University to become the College of Fisheries. At present, HAU is one of the first-ranked universities in Vietnam in terms of members of staff and student population, plentiful specialisations, and programmes offered and quality of education, research and social service (Hanoi Agricultural University, 2001). At present, the University has seven different faculties for undergraduate students, namely:

- 1) Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Resources Environment Management;
- 2) Faculty of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine;

- 3) Faculty of Post-Harvest Technology and Food Processing;
- 4) Faculty of Farm Engineering and Rural Electricity;
- 5) Economics and Rural Development;
- 6) Land Resources and Environment; and
- 7) Technical Teachers Training

Regarding English language teaching and learning, in the context of political renovation and an open-door policy by the Vietnamese government in the past decade, English has become the first foreign language and in recent years, Vietnam has seen an explosion in the demand for English (Do Huy, 1999). Colleges and universities in Vietnam have been offering Russian, Chinese, English, or French to their students since the 1970's. At that time English was not given proper attention owing to a number of factors, such as the lack of qualified teachers in ELT, the shortage of textbooks and facilities. Today, however, English programmes are offered not only in colleges and universities but also in teacher training colleges, research institutes and medical colleges (Nguyen Xuan, 2003). In addition, in response to an appeal from Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training to all universities and colleges to improve the quality of tertiary education toward regional and international standards, language institutions are making great efforts to promote the foreign language learning process. As a result, the ultimate goals of learning English for Vietnamese learners is not only to pass examinations but also to use language for daily communications and interactions (Vu Thi, 2003).

At Hanoi Agricultural University, like SUT, the status of the language is a mere academic subject in which most undergraduate students are required to take a total of 3 different modules in order to satisfy the minimum requirement of the curriculum for their graduation. The University does not offer English as a major subject. A very small number of students who do not take English can study French or Russian (Le Thi, personal communication, November 2003). The first two modules deal with

general English which focuses on reading and translation and the third module is English for Specific Purposes, depending on the students' specialisation. Each English class meets once a week for three hours. Teachers are still seen as the centre of their classroom learning. When classes are in sessions, teachers use both Vietnamese and English as the medium of instruction. The English club of the University has played an important role in organising extra-curricular activities for students occasionally such as English Night, or English Day. The activities are mostly run by students and one or two teachers are facilitators. Learner autonomy has also been promoted among the learners and the University has a plan to set up a self-access centre for English language and other foreign languages on offer at the University. Phan (2004) has described the Vietnamese classroom as a family in which the sense of supportiveness, politeness, and warmth both inside and outside the classroom is obvious. Students and teachers tend to construct knowledge together, or students work together as a class while the teacher is the mentor. This is practised with regard to both knowledge and moral values. Further, because students come from different parts of the country, ranging from remote areas to villages to big cities, their English proficiencies vary hugely. Hence, teachers of English, no matter what methods they use, have to take all these factors into account in order to provide a service to their students.

In short, it would be helpful for the reader to have an overall picture of the teaching and learning of English at HAU. The situation as perceived by the researcher, has been validated by three colleagues who currently work as teaching members of staff at HAU as well as two newly graduated students. It can be summarised as follows:

- English is a compulsory subject for undergraduate students;
- Most members of teaching staff share the same mother-tongue with students;
- Teachers are still seen as the centre of classroom learning or as the main resource person in the class;
- Teachers use both Vietnamese and English as a medium of instruction. In practice, they usually use Vietnamese rather than English;

- Students must attend classes regularly (at least 80 percent of the class time) in order to be eligible for the end-of-term examination;
- The content of English deals with both general English and English for specific purposes, i.e. science and technology;
- The amount of time that students spend meeting with their teachers in class varies. In fact, it depends on the class schedule of a particular class, maybe once or twice or even three times a week for 6 periods (45 minutes each);
- Classes normally start from 6:45 am and end at 5:15 pm from Monday to Friday. However, sometimes there are some classes on Saturday and Sunday;
- Classes are normally homogeneous in terms of students' field of study;
- Students cannot choose the class time to suit their own need. In other words, students normally study as prescribed by the University;
- Class sizes are normally large (with between 50-70 students on average) with poor facilities;
- No native speakers of English teaching English at HAU last year (2003);
- The computer service for students is very limited on campus;
- Teachers are normally encouraged to go home or work at home unless they have classes. And some of them work for some English teaching Centres;
- Most students study English in order to pass the required exams, so they often focus on studying grammar, and vocabulary;
- Teachers do not have enough time to carry out any research; and
- The Youth Union of HAU conducts a so-called Olympic English Examination annually for students at primary and secondary level as part of its academic activities.

### **1.5. Research Objectives**

The present investigation generally aims at exploring the learner beliefs about learning English in Thailand and Vietnam through an investigation of learner beliefs about language learning. It is intended to describe the beliefs about learning English which Thai and Vietnamese students report holding.

The specific aims of the present investigation are:

1. To describe beliefs about learning English reported being held by students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand and Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam; and
2. To investigate the similarities and differences in beliefs about learning English reported being held by students at the two institutions in relation to their cultural backgrounds.

## **1.6. The Benefits of this Investigation**

1. The examination of learner beliefs about learning English will be very useful for both teachers and students:
  - Teachers at both institutions can make use of the findings to improve their teaching and they can also change students' misconceptions about learning English; and
  - Students can take into considerations the beliefs about learning English they have held for the fulfilment of their learning.
2. The members of teaching staff who are responsible for preparing instructional materials or textbooks for students at both institutions will be aware of the beliefs held by their students and as a result, they can present materials in a suitable way.
3. Language teachers are able to understand the students better in terms of individual differences in their beliefs about learning English and they can promote some extra-curricular activities as well as learner autonomy to their students in order to help maximise their potential in learning English. This may result in their progress in language learning to some extent.

## **1.7. The Expected Outcome**

As this is the first empirical research to investigate learner beliefs about learning English reported being held by students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology and Hanoi Agricultural University, one outcome will be to identify and describe the beliefs about learning English reported being held by these students. The expected outcomes will correspond to the research questions. The findings will reveal the learner beliefs about learning English by both Thai and Vietnamese science-oriented students. They will also reveal the relationship between these learner beliefs

and the students' cultural backgrounds, creating a clear picture of the variation patterns of beliefs of the research population for the present investigation.

### **1.8. Outline of the Research Report**

In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher first reviews the past research on learner beliefs about language learning and research methodology which contributes to the present investigation. This can be seen in Chapter 2 which includes a literature review on the work of different researchers. These include Horwitz (1988), McCargar (1993), Cotterall (1995, 1999), Peacock (1999, 2001), and Kayaoglu (1997). The chapter summarises what beliefs are and some characteristics of beliefs are also discussed. Lastly, the conceptual framework based on the related literature and theoretical background in the area is presented and preceded by some research work on learner beliefs about language learning which contributes to the present investigation.

Chapter 3 discusses some general principles of research design which apply to the present investigation. It discusses research methods in learner beliefs about language learning, and the research questions for the present investigation. The data collection procedures are described and how the data obtained are reported, analysed, and interpreted. The last part of this chapter deals with sampling and the rationales behind the choice of subjects for the investigation and the characteristics of the research population. A brief discussion of the modified vs the original versions on the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) is also presented.

Chapter 4 describes and discusses the results of the research findings of the present investigation obtained from the data analysis. No statistically significant differences in the beliefs about learning English by both 344 SUT and 319 HAU students are taken into consideration in the first part, but a comparison of learner beliefs between

students at the two institutions are made in the subsequent section. Discussions of the findings are presented.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the main findings of the present investigation in response to the research questions presented in Chapter 3 including implications for the teaching and learning of English for students in Thailand and Vietnam. The contributions of the present investigation to the related areas are preceded by the presentation of the proposals for future research.

### **1.9. Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher starts off with some description of the background of the investigation in an attempt to put the study in context. This is followed by a brief overview of the background of Suranaree University of Technology and Hanoi Agricultural University as well as English language teaching and learning at each institution in brief. The reason for undertaking the present investigation is also included. Additionally, the research objectives, the potential benefits, and the expected outcomes of the present investigation are briefly discussed. Lastly, the outline of the research report is concluded.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING**



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING**

#### **2.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is primarily focused on the theoretical background and existing research on learner beliefs about language learning which contribute to the present investigation. The Chapter will start off with a brief overview of ‘belief’ and this is followed by the work of different researchers in the field of learner beliefs about language learning in relation to different variables. The research on learner beliefs about language learning is organised according to the main methods or instruments used in each investigation i.e. the research carried out by employing the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI developed by Horwitz, 1987) and the research carried out by employing methods or instruments other than the BALLI. At the end of the chapter the theoretical framework for the present investigation is presented.

#### **2.2. What are ‘beliefs’?**

As this is the first known research on learner beliefs about language learning carried out in a cross-cultural perspective in either Thailand or Vietnam, it would be useful to first provide some background information about beliefs in order to link the concept of beliefs to language learning.

Hamilton (1993 cited in Brown, 2003) has suggested that the ‘beliefs’ can be personal constructs or socially constructed. They are mental processes but are not developed cognitively and they may be only partially explicit. Based on what has been suggested by Britton (1998, p. 12) ‘to believe something is not the same as to know it’, we can be cautious about what language learners may claim to believe in dealing with

language learning. This is because beliefs may develop from their own learning experiences or the contexts they are in. Moreover, many people manage to believe in things without proper evidence, and some people believe simply because they want it to be so (Derksen, (1999). As an attitude or as a psychological state, belief is either true or false. While beliefs may be true or false, they aim at truth in the sense that truth is the goal, or that it belongs to the game of believing that we should try to have true beliefs and avoid false ones (Dummett, 1959 cited in Engel, 1999). Flavell (1987) suggests that beliefs about learning are a component of metacognitive knowledge which is characterised as a part of a learner's store of acquired knowledge; relatively stable and stable; early developing; a system of related ideas; and an abstract representation of a learner's experience. A few researchers have proposed the characteristics of beliefs. Examples are Meijers (1999), Engel (1999), Wenden (1998) and Nespor (1987).

Beliefs, as characterised by Meijers (1999, pp 1-2):

- are involuntary, and not subject to direct control; normally we do not change our beliefs;
- aim at truth, they are about the world as it is, not as we want it to be;
- are shaped by evidence for what is believed, and the degree to which a belief is reasonable is proportional to the degree of evidence that one has for truth;
- an agent's beliefs are subject to an ideal of rational integration: they need to be coherent and make up a larger, overall view of the world;
- are context-independent;
- come in degrees – we can have less or more confidence in our beliefs – and the notion of belief is primarily a quantitative concept.

In addition, Abelson (1979) has contrasted the 'belief system' with the 'knowledge system'. He contends that the use of the term 'belief system' can be highly confusing. Psychologists, political scientists, and anthropologists tend to use the term in rather different senses. It would be fruitless to try to settle once and for all what is really

meant by 'belief system'. The 'belief system' characterised by Abelson can be summarised as follows:

- The elements (concepts, propositions, rules, etc) of a belief system are not consensual. That is, the elements of one system might be quite different from those of a second in the same content domain...Belief systems may vary in complexity. The believer is aware that others may think differently;
- Belief systems are in part concerned with the existence or non-existence of certain conceptual entities;
- Belief systems often include representations of 'alternative worlds' typically the world as it is and the world as it should be;
- Belief systems rely heavily on evaluative and affective components (cognitive/motivational);
- Belief systems are likely to include a substantial amount of episodic material from either personal experience or from folklore (for cultural belief systems), from propaganda (for political doctrines);
- The content set to be included in a belief system is usually highly 'open'. That is, it is unclear where to draw a boundary around the belief system, excluding its irrelevant concepts lying outside; and
- Beliefs can be held with varying degrees of certitude. The believer can be passionately committed to a point of view, or at the other extreme could regard a state of affairs as more probable than not.

According to Puchta (2000), when we believe something, we act as if it is true. And this makes it difficult to disprove. Beliefs are strong perceptual filters of reality. They make us interpret events from the perspective of the belief, and exceptions are interpreted as evidence and further confirmation of the belief. In contrast to the conclusions drawn about the laws of nature, many limiting beliefs are not based on reality. Beliefs are primarily formed through the modelling of significant others, and through conclusions we draw from repetitive experiences. Especially for young learners, their foreign-language teacher is a significant other. According to O'Connor and Seymour (1990, p. 93):

The expectations of the significant people around us instil beliefs. High expectations (provided they are realistic) build competence. Low expectations instil incompetence. We believe what we are told about ourselves when we are young because we have no way of testing, and these beliefs may persist unmodified by our later achievements.

In summary, as illustrated above, beliefs can be viewed as a personal or social construct. They are subjective, not subject to direct control and beliefs can be held with varying degrees even in either extreme. In addition, beliefs can be true or false and more importantly, a believer is aware that others may hold different beliefs from his or hers.

### **2.3. Research on Beliefs about Language Learning**

In recent years, the language learner has been viewed as an active participant in the foreign language learning experience. Motivations and language learning strategies have been considered by foreign language teachers as integral parts or elements in the design and implication of effective language instruction. Horwitz (1999) suggests that language teachers have come to view language learners as individuals approaching language learning in their own unique way. One of the important areas of current interest about language learners is their beliefs about language learning. Learner beliefs have 'the potential to influence both their experiences and actions as language learners,' (Horwitz 1999, p. 558). Influenced by previous experiences as language learners, or shaped by their cultural backgrounds, second language learners often hold different beliefs or notions about language learning (Horwitz, 1987). Further, learner beliefs have also proved difficult to identify and classify in any systematic way (Benson and Lor, 1999).

It is undeniable that learners normally come to their foreign language class with many preconceived ideas about language learning. These preconceived ideas may arise from their previous experiences in language learning, or may arise from what they have been exposed to inside and outside class, and also their own personalities and motivation (Wenden, 1987; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Ellis, 1994; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). Tumpolsky (1991 cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1994) suggests that learner

beliefs are influenced by the social context of learning and can influence both their [learners'] attitude toward the language itself as well as toward language learning in general. Learner belief systems cover a wide range of issues and can influence learners' motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a foreign language as well as types of learning strategies or communication strategies they favour.

Research on learner beliefs about language learning has emerged from a more general interest in learner characteristics, since they are found to have a relationship with language acquisition. Apart from this, such factors as personality, motivation, learning styles, learning strategies, and language aptitude have been examined (Kern, 1995). In general, research on learner beliefs tends to seek to identify learners' preconceived notions about what is involved in learning a foreign language so that researchers can predict expectational conflicts that may contribute to student frustration, lack of motivation, anxiety and in a more serious case, learners even put an end to their foreign language study (e.g. Schumann and Schumann, 1977; Schumann, 1980 cited in Kern, 1995). What follow are the available research works on learner beliefs about language learning since the late eighties up to the present day. The research works are organised according to the main methods or instruments used in each investigation i.e. the research carried out by employing the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory or (BALLI by Horwitz, 1988) the modified version of the BALLI and then the research carried out by employing methods or instruments other than the BALLI. Table 2.1 below presents the research works on learner beliefs about language learning available in the literature.

**Table 2.1: Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>1) Horwitz, E.K. (1988) ‘The Beliefs about Language Learning of Beginning University Foreign Language Students’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To assess students’ opinions on a variety of issues and controversies about foreign language learning
<b>Subject</b>	80 university students learning German, 63 learning French, and 98 learning Spanish at the University of Texas at Austin
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)
<b>2) Yang, Nae Dong (1992) ‘Second Language Learners’ Beliefs about Language Learning and their Use of Learning Strategies: A Study of College Students of English in Taiwan’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate the beliefs about language learning and use of language learning strategies by college EFL students in Taiwan; and  2. To examine the relationship between learners’ beliefs and strategy use.
<b>Subject</b>	505 university students learning EFL in Taiwan
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and The Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL)
<b>3) Kern, R.G. (1995) ‘Students’ and Teachers’ Beliefs about Language Learning’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To compare one group of students’ beliefs about language learning with those of their teachers and with those of their peers at another institution; and  2. To examine change 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.
<b>Subject</b>	288 university students learning French and 12 instructors at the University of California, Berkley.
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>4) Su, Dan (1995) 'A Study of English Learning Strategies and Styles of Chinese University Students in Relation to their Cultural Beliefs and Beliefs about Language Learning'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To determine the relationships between the students' major learning strategy/style preferences and their cultural beliefs and beliefs about language learning
<b>Subject</b>	369 Chinese university EFL students in China
<b>Method of data collection</b>	SILL/the Learning Style Survey (LSS)/BALLI/ and the Beliefs about Learning and Teaching (BALT)
<b>5) Truitt, S.N. (1995) 'Anxiety and Beliefs about Language Learning: A Study of Korean University students Learning English'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate the foreign language anxiety and belief about language learning of university EFL students in Korea; and 2. To examine the relationships among the students' anxiety levels and beliefs about language learning.
<b>Subject</b>	204 undergraduate students
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
<b>6) Park, Gi Pao (1995) 'Language Learning Strategies and Beliefs about Language Learning of University Students Learning English in Korea'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To identify Korean university students' use of language learning strategies and their beliefs about language learning; and 2. To investigate the relationships among the students' use of strategies, their beliefs, and L2 proficiency.
<b>Subject</b>	332 students attending two universities in Korea
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>7. Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995) ‘Attitudes and Realistic Beliefs: Links to Proficiency’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To maintain and/or to improve students’ attitudes towards French and Spanish speakers
<b>Subject</b>	208 middle-school-aged students in 12 classes of a 9-week Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) programme
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)
<b>8) Oh, Myung Joo Theresa. (1996) ‘Beliefs about Language Learning and Foreign Language Anxiety: A Study of American University Students Learning Japanese’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate the beliefs about language learning and foreign language anxiety of American university students learning Japanese; and  2. To examine the relationships between students’ language beliefs and levels of anxiety.
<b>Subject</b>	195 first-,and second-year students
<b>Method of data collection</b>	BALLI and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
<b>9) Wang, Shouyuan (1996) ‘A Study of Chinese College English Majors’ Believe about Language Learning and their Learning Strategies’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate the beliefs that Chinese college English majors hold about language learning and the learning strategies they employ for learning the language; and  2. To investigate the differences between the successful and the unsuccessful language learning and their strategy use.
<b>Subject</b>	20 English majors
<b>Method of data collection</b>	BALLI/SILL/Interview



**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>10) Kuntz, P.S. (1996) ‘University Students’ Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning, with a Focus on Arabic and Swahili at United States HEA Title VI African Studies Centres’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To investigate the beliefs about foreign language learning by 1 <sup>st</sup> month university students
<b>Subject</b>	424 students (81 of Arabic and 53 Swahili)
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Modified BALLI
<b>11) Kayaoglu, Mustafa Naci (1997) ‘An Investigation of the Learning Strategies of Turkish EFL and ESL Adult Learners and the Relationship between their Beliefs about Different Aspects of Language Learning and their Strategy Use’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate learning strategies of Turkish EFL and ESL learners; and 2. To examine the relationship between their beliefs about language learning and their strategy use
<b>Subject</b>	EFL university students in Turkey and ESL Turkish students in USA
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Modified version of BALLI/SILL/Interview
<b>12) Kunt, N. (1997) ‘Anxiety and Beliefs about Language Learning: A Study of Turkish-Speaking University Students Learning English in North Cyprus’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To investigate beliefs about language learning and foreign language anxiety of Turkish-speaking university students learning EFL in North Cyprus; and 2. To examine the relationships among the students’ foreign language anxiety levels and beliefs about language learning.
<b>Subject</b>	882 university students
<b>Method of data collection</b>	BALLI/FLCAS

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>13) Peacock, M. (1999) 'Beliefs about Language Learning and their Relationship to Proficiency'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To determine if the differences between student and teacher beliefs about language learning affect proficiency;</li> <li>2. To develop hypotheses about the origin of Chinese learner beliefs about language learning; and</li> <li>3. To check the correlation between learner self-rated proficiency and tested proficiency.</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	202 students and 45 instructors at the University of Hong Kong
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Questionnaire (BALLI), a comprehensive proficiency test, an interview, a self-rated proficiency sheet
<b>14) Rifkin, B. (2000) 'Revisiting Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<p>To determine whether:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. learners at the first-year level of instruction hold beliefs similar to those held by learners at other levels of instruction;</li> <li>2. learners of more commonly-taught languages hold beliefs similar to those held by learners of less-commonly taught languages; and</li> <li>3. learners at large universities (research institutions) hold beliefs similar to those held by learners at small liberal arts colleges.</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	47 students of Arabic, 73 Chinese, 220 French, 117 German, 57 Italian, 137 Japanese, 158 Russian, and 23 of Swahili and Yoruba
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Modified version of BALLI
<b>15) McCargar, D.F. (1993) 'Teacher and Student Role Expectations: Cross-Cultural Differences and Implications'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To investigate the impact of culture on learner beliefs; and</li> <li>2. To compare teachers' and students' beliefs</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	161 ESL students and 41 ESL teachers in the USA
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Questionnaire

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>15) Dias, Rula Luffy (2000) ‘Lebanese Students’ Beliefs about Learning English and French: A Study of University Students in a Multilingual Context’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To describe the beliefs about language learning of Lebanese EFL university students;</li> <li>2. To investigate within group variation in these students’ beliefs;</li> <li>3. To compare students’ beliefs about language learning with those revealed in the previous studies of EFL students from other cultures; and</li> <li>4. To compare students’ beliefs about different target languages, i.e. French and English.</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	284 Lebanese undergraduate students
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Modified version of BALLI
<b>16) Peacock, M. (2001) ‘Pre-Service ESL Teachers’ Beliefs about Second Language Learning: A Longitudinal Study’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To investigate changes in the beliefs about second language learning of trainees ELS teachers over their 3-year programme
<b>Subject</b>	146 trainee ELS teachers at the City University of Hong Kong
<b>Method of data collection</b>	The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)
<b>17) Tsai, Chun I. (2003) ‘Anxiety and Beliefs about Language Learning: A Study of Taiwanese College Students Learning English’</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To investigate foreign language anxiety and beliefs about language learning of college students learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan; and</li> <li>2. To examine the relationships among the students’ foreign language anxiety and beliefs about language learning.</li> </ol>
<b>Subject</b>	338 first-, and second-year EFL university students in Taiwan
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Questionnaire (BALLI and FLCAS)

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>18) Cotterall, S. (1995) 'Readiness for Autonomy: Investigating Learner Beliefs'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To identify 'factors' in students' sets of beliefs
<b>Subject</b>	139 adults ESL learners at a university in New Zealand
<b>Method of data collection</b>	A researcher-constructed questionnaire
<b>19) Lucas, R.T. (1995) 'The Role of Beliefs and Anxiety in the Attrition of African-American Students in Foreign Language Study'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To examine students' beliefs and anxiety regarding language learning; and 2. To examine the factors they identified as reasons underlying their decisions to continue or cease their study of a foreign language.
<b>Subject</b>	650 students of French and Spanish at three American universities
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Researcher-constructed Questionnaire
<b>20) Cotterall, S. (1999) 'Key Variables in Language Learning: What do Learners Believe about Them?'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	1. To examine the beliefs which subjects held about factors in the second language acquisition literature, e.g. the role of feedback, opportunities to practise and knowledge of language learning strategies; and 2. To consider the implications of these findings for encouraging learners to adopt autonomous approaches to their language learning.
<b>Subject</b>	131 learners of English as a second language at Victoria University at Wellington
<b>Method of data collection</b>	A researcher-constructed questionnaire

**Table 2.1(cont): Research Works on Learner Beliefs about Language Learning**

<b>21) Sakui, K. and Gaies, S.J. (1999) 'Investigating Japanese Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<p>1. To validate a questionnaire, developed for the Japanese context and written in Japanese, on a variety of beliefs (e.g. person, task, strategy, achievement) about language learning;</p> <p>2. To investigate the value of interview data to complement and explain questionnaire data; and to describe the beliefs about language learning of Japanese learners of English and to determine through factor analysis how those beliefs are organised.</p>
<b>Subject</b>	1296 university students learning English as a foreign language in Japan
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Questionnaire and interview
<b>22) Kim, Yoon-Hyeonokh. (2000) 'Learner Beliefs about Language Learning, Motivation, and their Relationship: A Study of EFL Learners in Korea'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<p>1. To investigate learner beliefs about language learning and the motivational orientation toward language learning of three different age groups learning EFL in Korea;</p> <p>2. To compare beliefs and motivation among the three groups; and</p> <p>3. To examine the relationship between learner beliefs and motivation.</p>
<b>Subject</b>	235 high school students, 227 university students, and 202 adult learners
<b>Method of data collection</b>	BALLIK, Motivation in Language Learning, Individual Background Questionnaire
<b>23) Tittle, M. D. (2001) 'Assessing University Students' Epistemological Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning'</b>	
<b>Purpose of study</b>	<p>1. To develop a self-report survey that measures foreign language students' epistemological beliefs about language learning; and</p> <p>2. To test the unique use and combination of a variety of innovative research methods.</p>
<b>Subject</b>	N/A (University students)
<b>Method of data collection</b>	Questionnaire

Table 2.1 above summarises the available research work on beliefs about language learning starting from 1988 up to 2003. An overall picture of the research work in this field appears to indicate that most researchers have attempted to describe learner beliefs about foreign language learning. The foreign languages included in the research can be classified as more commonly taught and less commonly taught for native speakers of English, all of whom are studying at different American universities. The more commonly-taught foreign languages include French, German, Spanish and Russian while the less commonly-taught foreign languages include Japanese, Chinese, Swahili, Yoruba, etc. For those non-native speakers of English, the foreign language referred to is English, either English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). The research carried out with EFL or ESL students has been in Japan, Korea, China, Turkey, and New Zealand. The main target population of the research in this field tend to be university students. The only research carried out about learner beliefs with secondary school students is by Mantle-Bromley (1995).

With regard to the instruments or methods of data collection, we can see that about 75 percent of the researchers have made use of the questionnaire developed by Horwitz (1988) as the main instrument to elicit the information on learner beliefs about language learning, the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Among these, only a few researchers have modified the BALLI in order to suit their context, e.g. Kayaoglu (1997), and Dias (2000). The other 25 percent of researchers have developed their own instrument which is still a questionnaire. Apart from using the belief questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection, a few researchers have triangulated their methods by using student interviews for to elicit information. Lastly, regarding the variables investigated in relation to learner beliefs about language

learning, the two outstanding variables found in the available research are: learner anxiety and language learning strategies. These two variables have been found to be significantly related to learner beliefs.

Another variable which has been taken into consideration by very few researchers is the impact of culture on learner beliefs. One of the very few cross-cultural investigations available was conducted by McCargar (1993). He found significant differences between the beliefs of groups of students from different cultural groups and between teachers' and students' beliefs with regard to, for example, treatment of error, and use of group work.

To sum up, beliefs about language learning has been in the central focus of research for just over a decade and a growing body of evidence suggests that beliefs about language learning have played a central role in learning experience and achievement among foreign language learners (Cotterall, 1995). The research carried out with native speakers of English has been limited to the American universities and the instrument used for data collection has been mostly dominated by the belief questionnaire developed by Horwitz (1988). Research carried out with non-native speakers of English has been done in East-Asia as well as New Zealand. The largest target population of research in the area is with learners at the tertiary level. What follows in the next section is the theoretical framework which is based on the related literature and the existing research work.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework for the Present Investigation**

As seen in the previous section (2.3), the initial research on beliefs about language learning illustrates that many researchers have attempted to identify or describe learner beliefs about language learning. Examples are Horwitz (1988), Kern (1995), Scottall (1995), and Sakui and Gaies (1999). Later on, the investigation of the

relationship of the beliefs about language learning to strategy use, and foreign language anxiety has been the focus of a growing body of research over the past decade. Little attention has been paid to learners' cultural background or cross-cultural perspective. Hence, based on the review of related literature and theoretical background, the theoretical framework for the present investigation has been formed. However, it is impossible for the researcher to examine the variables which are believed to be related to learner beliefs about language learning. Rather, the focus has been the cross-cultural variable. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the theoretical framework.

**Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework for the Present Investigation**

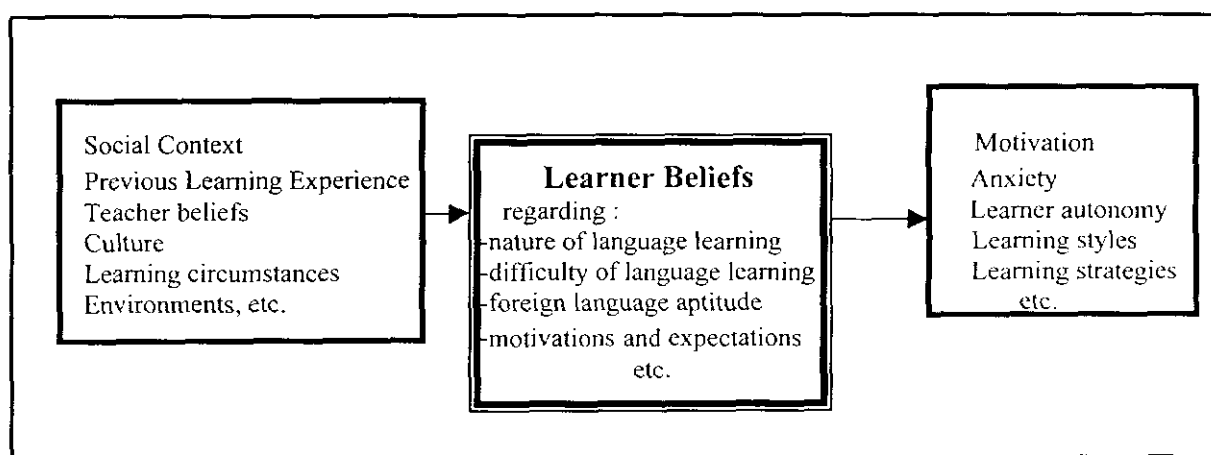


Figure 2.1 illustrates that learner beliefs have been hypothesised to be influenced by different variables such as social context, learners' previous language learning experience, the beliefs held by their teachers, their culture, learning circumstances or environments. As a result, learner beliefs influence learners' motivation, anxiety, learner autonomy, learning styles, and learning strategies. Anyhow, for the present investigation, the only variable taken into consideration is the cultural background of the learners or their learning culture at their own context, i.e. Thai and Vietnamese.



## **2.5. Summary**

The available literature has revealed that the main research works on learner beliefs about language learning were carried out just over a decade ago. To be more precise, the first research work ever carried out on beliefs about language learning was the one by Horwitz (1987). The instrument developed by Horwitz has been the influence on many researchers and a few have modified it in order to suit their context of study. Only few researchers have developed their own questionnaire in order to elicit information about learner beliefs about language learning. A few researchers have made use of student interviews to triangulate the method of data collection and the target population of the investigation has been largely university students. Lastly, the conceptual framework for the present investigation based on the review of related literature as well as the theoretical background has been discussed. The next Chapter will deal with research methodology for the present investigation.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING**

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING

#### 3.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss some general principles of research design which apply to the present investigation. It discusses research methods in beliefs about language learning, and the research questions for the present investigation. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection procedures and finally how the data obtained has been reported, analysed, and interpreted. The preceding section before the last part of this chapter deals with sampling and the rationales behind the choice of subjects and institutions for the investigation and the characteristics of the research population. The last part deals with the instrument for data collection, i.e. the modified version of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) which was developed by Horwitz (1987).

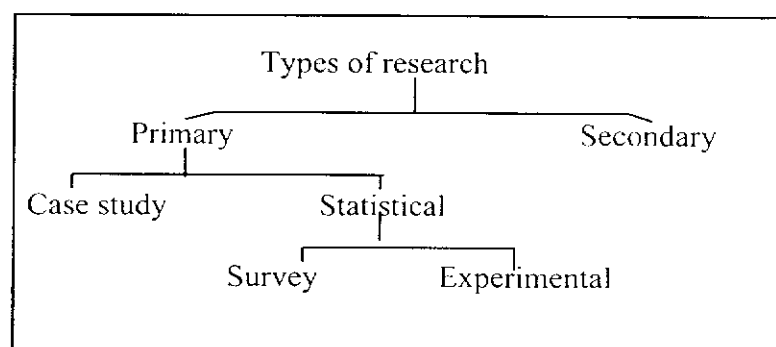
There are two dominant research methods which have been proposed for eliciting information about beliefs about language learning from language learners. Before research methods in beliefs about language learning are discussed, however, the purposes of the research and research design are briefly discussed.

According to Robson (1993), any research work can be classified in terms of its purpose, and the research strategy used. The purpose of any research work can be explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory. It can possibly be a combination of two or all of these purposes, but often one will predominate. The purpose may also change as the investigation proceeds. The purpose of the research work can be classified by looking at what the researcher wants to find out. Robson (1993) explains his classification of the purposes of research work as follows:

1. *Explanatory* : a researcher seeks an explanation of a situation or problem, usually in the form of causal relationships. This type of research may be qualitative and/or quantitative.
2. *Descriptive* : a researcher tries to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations. It requires extensive knowledge of the situation to be researched or described so that a researcher knows appropriate aspects on which to gather information. This type of research may be qualitative and/or quantitative.
3. *Exploratory* : a researcher tries to find out what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions; or to assess phenomena in a new light. This type of research is usually, but not necessarily, qualitative.

In addition to research purposes, it is also worth looking at research design which is concerned with the planning of the study. Johnson (1977) proposes that the research design describes the purposes of the study, how subjects of the study are to be selected, methods or procedures to be followed, measurements to be collected and comparisons or other analyses to be made. Further, Robson (1993) suggests that whatever research strategy a researcher chooses or feels appropriate, the research questions must be the primary consideration as they have a strong influence on the strategy to be chosen. In order to provide an overall picture of research design, Figure 3.1 shows types of research as developed by Brown (1988 cited in Nunan 1992, p. 9).

**Figure 3.1 : Types of Research**



In Figure 3.1, Brown (1988) classifies types of research as primary and secondary. The distinction between primary and secondary research is based on how the information or data is obtained. In the primary research model, data is obtained from primary sources, e.g. a group of students who are learning a foreign language. In the secondary research model, data is obtained through reviewing literature in a given area and synthesising the work carried out by other researchers. Primary research is subdivided into two categories: case studies and statistical studies. Statistical studies are further subdivided into survey studies and experimental studies.

When planning an investigation, the researcher must consider which of the types of primary research are most appropriate given the purpose of the work i.e. explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory. Robson (1993) has suggested the appropriate use of these three types of research as follows:

1. Case studies are appropriate with the 'how' and 'why' research type of questions. The focus of the research is on current events. The case studies are used for developing detailed, intensive knowledge about a single case or a small number of related cases.
2. Survey studies are appropriate with the 'who, what, where, how many and how much' research type of question. They are used for collecting information in standardised form from groups of people, usually employing questionnaires or interviews.
3. Experimental studies are appropriate with the 'how and why' research type of question. Unlike case studies or survey studies, the control of variables and events is necessary. Hypothesis testing is always involved.

The purpose of the present investigation is to look into learner beliefs about language learning reported by science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in

Thailand and Vietnam. Taking into account the purposes of research outlined above, the present investigation can be classified as exploratory and descriptive. The research is basically quantitative.

### **3.2. Methods in Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Research**

According to Johnson (1977, p. 9), "Research methods are procedures a researcher follows in attempting to achieve the goals of a study". Hence, the research methods used to investigate learner beliefs about language learning are procedures a researcher follows in attempting to achieve the goals of a study of learner beliefs about language learning, i.e. to discover beliefs about language learning held by students or language learners when they learn a language, especially the target language. At present, no single research method prevails in the field; certain research methods are well established but imperfect (Cohen and Scott, 1996). There are a few methods which a researcher can use to investigate beliefs about language learning held by students or language learners in different aspects, for example, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, motivations and expectations and foreign language aptitude. Each method has both weak and strong points, but whatever method a researcher employs, he or she must take the main purpose of the study into consideration. (Robson, 1993).

In this section, the main research methods or procedures used to gather data on learner beliefs about language learning will be discussed. This is followed by the instrument used for data collection for the present investigation. The main research methods for learner beliefs in language learning include: 1) Oral Interviews; 2) Written Questionnaires; and 3) Diary studies

### **3.2.1. Oral Interviews**

In investigating a student's beliefs about language learning, a researcher can ask the student to describe what beliefs about language learning he or she holds and the reason why such beliefs are held. One way to do this is to interview students. A student interview calls for retrospective accounts of beliefs he or she has held.

Interviews can be characterised in terms of their degree of formality and can be placed on a continuum ranging from unstructured through semi-structured to structured (Nunan, 1992). Whether they are structured or unstructured, student interviews provide personalised information on many types of beliefs about language learning which would not be available through classroom observations. An unstructured interview is guided by the responses of the interviewee and the interviewer exercises little or no control over the interview. This makes the direction of the interview relatively unpredictable. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a general idea of where he or she wants the interview to go, and what should come out of it. However, the interviewer does not enter the interview with a list of predetermined questions. On the other hand, in a structured interview, the agenda is totally predetermined by the interviewer. Whatever type of interview a researcher wants to use as a method for data collection, he or she should consider the nature of the research and the degree of control he or she wishes to exert. Of the three types of interview mentioned above, the semi-structured interview seems to be popular among researchers. The reason for its popularity is stated by Nunan (1992, p.149) "...because of its flexibility, the semi-structured interview has found favour with many researchers, particularly those working within an interpretive research tradition". Besides the flexibility it gives to the interviewer, the semi-structured interview also gives the interviewee a degree of power and control over the course of the interview.

However, according to Robson (1993), to make profitable use of its flexibility calls for skill and experience in the interviewer. The lack of standardisation raises concerns about reliability. Biases are difficult to rule out, and the interview may be time-consuming.

### **3.2.2. Written Questionnaires**

Like oral interviews, written questionnaires are used to elicit learner responses to a set of questions, and they require the researcher to make choices regarding question format and research procedures (Cohen and Scott, 1996). In addition, written questionnaires typically cover a range of beliefs about language learning and are usually structured and objective in nature. Question items in written questionnaires can range from those asking for 'yes' or 'no' responses or indications of frequency (e.g. Likert Scales) to less structured items asking respondents to describe or discuss in detail the beliefs about language learning they have held. In this scenario, the respondents have more control over the information included in their responses. The responses to structured questionnaires may be simplistic or contain only brief information about any one belief about language learning. The questionnaires that require the respondents to indicate the degree of their beliefs about language learning, like Likert Scales, are easy and quick to give, provide a general assessment of each respondent's typical beliefs, and may be the most cost-effective mode of learner beliefs assessment. They are also almost non-threatening when administered using paper and pencil under conditions of confidentiality (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995). Further, written questionnaires enable the researcher to collect data in field settings and the data obtained is more amenable to quantification than that collected through free-form field notes, participant observing journals or the transcripts of oral language (Nunan, 1992). However, there are a few weak points with this kind of questionnaire.



The data may be superficial. There is little or no check on honesty or seriousness of responses. More importantly, while analysis may be easy, but time-consuming, interpretation can be problematic (Robson, 1993; Walker, 1985).

### **3.2.3. Diary Studies**

In an effort to collect data on beliefs about language learning held by students over a period of time, some researchers may use diaries as a research tool. Bailey (1990 cited in Nunan 1992, p.120) defines the diary study as “a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events”. Since diaries are learner-generated and usually unstructured, the entries may cover a wide range of themes and issues. They may include learners’ written reports of the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies they believe would be helpful for them in language learning. Further, diaries are usually subjective and free-form although they can be guided by teacher suggestions (Oxford and Crookall, 1989). Bailey and Ochsner (1983 cited in. Nunan 1992, p.120) suggest ways to shape diary studies in order to make them suitable as research documents. For example, the data collection should be as candid as possible despite the potential embarrassment of some of the entries. The initial database can be revised for public consumption. Patterns and significant events are identified and the factors which appeared to be important in language learning are discussed and interpreted. Nunan (1992) suggests that it is probably a good idea to avoid analysing and interpreting the data until a substantial amount of material has been collected. This can help the researcher avoid coming to premature conclusions which may be inaccurate or incorrect. My experience and that of others is that diary studies are highly problematic:

1. learners may be unfamiliar with diaries
2. researcher and learners may not share the same language, so there is a problem over which language should be used
3. learners may want a 'reward' for the effort, e.g. feedback from the researcher.

### **3.3. Framework of Data Collection Methods for the Present Investigation**

As mentioned earlier, different methods for data collection may lead to different conclusions about the beliefs about language learning. Having studied the main methods for data collection of beliefs about language learning thoroughly, the researcher for the present investigation decided to employ the questionnaire as the main instrument. However, the researcher recognises that in order to accomplish the purposes of the study, it is worth considering the multiple data collection methods as suggested by Robson (1993) below:

“There is no rule that says that only one method must be used in an investigation. Using more than one method in an investigation can have substantial advantages, even though it almost inevitably adds to the time investment required. One important benefit of multiple methods is in the reduction of inappropriate uncertainty. Using a single method and finding a pretty clear-cut result may delude investigators into believing that they have found the right answer.” (Robson, 1993, p. 290)

To investigate learner beliefs about learning English held by science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam, a written strategy questionnaire was used as the main method of data collection. This method is suitable for the present investigation because the researcher did not investigate the beliefs about language learning which students held while they were taking any particular English courses, or how students deal with certain language modalities or skills. Rather, the researcher looked into how students managed themselves in learning English both within and outside the classroom in order to achieve their general learning purposes. The written strategy questionnaire served the purposes of the present investigation as it provided the researcher with adequate amounts of

information about learner beliefs about language learning. This is because questionnaires provide the broadest range of coverage for learner beliefs because of the structure given to the questions (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). The narrowest range of strategy coverage seems likely to occur with think-aloud procedures because the data collector is constrained from using prompts for additional strategies by the nature of the approach. In addition, questionnaires which call for retrospective accounts of the beliefs learners hold, is found to be more successful in gaining data about beliefs about language learning from learners.

### **3.4. Research Questions**

Based on the literature review as well as the available research works on learner beliefs about language learning, the research questions can be formed. The present investigation attempts to describe the beliefs about language learning held by science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam. In order to establish some empirical data on the context of language learning of science-oriented students in Thailand and Vietnam, the present investigation is designed to answer the following specific questions:

1. What are the degrees of the discrete learner belief items about language learning reported being held by science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam?
2. Do the degrees of the learner beliefs about language learning vary significantly according to the cultural context they belong to? If they do, what are the main patterns of variation?

### **3.5. Methods for Data Collection and Data Generation**

In collecting data to answer the research questions for the present investigation, a written strategy questionnaire was used as the main method for the data collection. It

was administered to science-oriented students who are the research population for this particular investigation. It was carried out with students in Thailand between mid-June and mid-July 2003. Every attempt was made to ensure the readiness of everything for when the data collection started especially in terms of the instrument. As his instrument the researcher decided to adopt and modify the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1987), which has been proved to be most reliable and valid available. When meeting with students at Suranaree University of Technology in Thailand, the researcher started the classroom process by briefing them on the purpose of the data collection and the use of the outcome of this investigation. The students were asked to look through the questionnaire and they were allowed to ask about any questions that they did not understand. Generally, most students spent about twenty minutes completing the questionnaire. The researcher was always at hand in case students had any questions while completing the questionnaire. Once the students had finished, they were asked to hand in the questionnaire in person because the researcher wanted to make sure that every part of the questionnaire was correctly completed. The researcher ensured this aspect by looking through page by page. If any incomplete part of the task was spotted, that particular student was asked to go back to complete that part again. A few students tended to leave blanks to indicate that they were not sure of the stated belief item; in such cases they were asked to check the appropriate frequency column for that response. Going through the questionnaire page by page was very helpful though it was time-consuming. In this case, the researcher apologised to the students beforehand for any inconvenience caused by the process. As a result, only a few of the strategy questionnaires were not completed as intended. The similar classroom process was carried out at Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam which was carried

out in November 2003 when the researcher was a visiting lecturer to the University. However, due to the constraint of the language, the researcher asked one of the colleagues at the Department of English, Mrs Le Thi Thuan, who was also the visiting lecturer to the researcher's university in Thailand, to help with the explanation in Vietnamese.

The researcher returned to Thailand in November 2003 with 319 sets of strategy questionnaires. Altogether, 663 written strategy questionnaires were then processed and analysed with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS programme in early September 2004 in England. The full results of the analyses as well as a discussion of the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

### **3.6. Reporting, Analysing, and Interpreting Data**

The data obtained in the belief questionnaires was analysed by the researcher with the assistance of the SPSS programme. The analysis procedures are presented as follows. The purpose of the questionnaire analysis is to answer the research questions in relation to beliefs about the language learning of science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam. The data obtained was quantified and the SPSS programme was used to analyse the data. The following appropriate statistical methods were employed to analyse the data obtained to see if there is any relation to the students' cultural backgrounds. The researcher sought to identify whether there are patterns of variation in learner beliefs about language learning in relation to the cultural background variable, and if so to analyse them to see what kinds of patterns exist.

The following statistical methods were used through the assistance of the SPSS programme in order to achieve the research objectives regarding analysing and interpreting the data obtained through the written strategy questionnaire.

## 1. Descriptive statistics

To compare the extent to which learner beliefs were reported being 'strongly agree/agree'; 'not sure'; and 'strongly disagree/disagree' based on the percentage of the responses by 344 Thai students and 319 Vietnamese students.

## 2. Chi-square Tests

The chi-square tests are employed to determine the significant variation patterns in students' reported beliefs about language learning at the individual item level. These tests are employed to check all the beliefs items for significant variations by the cultural background variable. This test compares the actual frequencies with which students give different responses on the 5-point rating scale, a method of analysis closer to the raw data than comparisons based on average responses for each item. For the Chi-square tests, responses of 1 and 2 ('Strongly Disagree', and 'Disagree') were consolidated into a single "Disagreeing" category; responses of 3 'Not Sure' and responses of 4 and 5 ('Agree' and 'Strongly Agree') were combined into a single "Agreeing" category. The purpose of consolidating the five response levels into three categories of learner beliefs is to obtain cell sizes with expected values high enough to ensure a valid analysis (Green and Oxford, 1995, p. 271).

### **3.7. Sampling and Rationales for Choice of Subjects**

Kane (1983, p. 90) defines a sample as 'a portion of the universe and, ideally, it reflects with reasonable accuracy the opinions, attitudes or behaviour of the entire group. Further, the result from a sample cannot be expected to be precisely the same as the result obtained from studying the universe. The sample has to be similar to the universe or the population. If not, the results of the study are useless'. Cohen and Manion (1985, p.101) also note that 'the correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under scrutiny'.

Since it is doubtful that the entire population can be tested, a sample will have to be used. The sample should provide results similar to those that would have been obtained had the entire population been studied. In selecting the subjects for an investigation, several questions arise. Drew (1980), for example, asked whether or not the subjects are appropriate for the research question, whether or not the subjects are representative, and how many subjects should be used. The first two questions pose no problems, but the third one is more difficult to answer. According to Drew (1980), sample size presents a problematic question because no set answer or rule may be given. If the sample does not accurately represent the population, interpretations of the results may not be accurate for individuals other than those actually used as subjects. If the researcher is unaware that the sample is unrepresentative, incorrect inferences may be drawn concerning the population in general.

This investigation is broadly exploratory and it is the intention of the researcher to go for a sample size sufficient to serve the purpose of the investigation. Still the researcher has to keep in mind that the sample size should not be too big to be manageable. The samples must be good representatives of the entire population to some extent. That is to say, they are good representatives for science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University students in Thailand and at Hanoi Agricultural University in Vietnam. In any event, the researcher must attempt to address some issues when selecting the sample by taking some crucial factors dealing with the variables for the present investigations into consideration. Principally, the students were selected on the basis of convenience and availability. Even though the total number of students might not be big enough, these 344 SUT students and 319 HAU students provided the researcher with enough information to serve the purpose of the

present investigation. What follows is the breakdown of the number of participating students by gender and their 'perceived' language ability. This is provided in order to give a context for the results obtained through the data analysis for the present investigation.

**Table 3.1: Number of SUT and HAU Students by Gender and 'Perceived' Language Ability**

<b>Gender of Students</b>	<b>Suranaree University of Technology (SUT)</b>	<b>Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU)</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	161	201	<b>362</b>
<b>Female</b>	183	118	<b>301</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>663</b>
<b>'Perceived' Language Ability</b>	<b>Suranaree University of Technology (SUT)</b>	<b>Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU)</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Good</b>	23	21	<b>224</b>
<b>Fair</b>	171	224	<b>395</b>
<b>Poor</b>	150	74	<b>44</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>663</b>

### **3.8. Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire**

As mentioned earlier in the Chapter, the main instrument for data collection is the belief about language learning questionnaire. The belief questionnaire for the present investigation was modified by the researcher based on the BALLI (Horwitz, 1988). Every effort to make the questionnaire valid and reliable has been made. There are versions in English, Thai and Vietnamese. The English version was used for discussion purposes for the research, and the Thai and Vietnamese versions were used for the purpose of data collection with Thai and Vietnamese students (See Appendix 1



for the full English versions of the belief questionnaire). These two translated versions of the belief questionnaire were actually used as the instrument, as this helped maximise ease of administration and ensured greater accuracy of results, especially with the lower-ability students. The translation of the belief questionnaire from English into Thai was initially done by the researcher. It was then checked for the correct usage by four of the researcher's colleagues who are native speakers of the Thai language teaching English at Suranaree University of Technology in Thailand. Some item refinement was recommended by the colleagues. For the Vietnamese version, the translation was initially done by two instructors at Hanoi Agricultural University and then the translated version was checked for the correct usage and coverage of the content through the discussion with twenty Vietnamese students who attended evening classes with the researcher. As a result, after a long discussion, some item refinement was recommended and the corrections were made accordingly.

The belief questionnaire has been divided into two main sections which are students' background (gender, 'perceived' English language ability, and field of study) and the discrete items of learner beliefs about learning English. The students are requested to look at the belief items which they have held and then to choose the appropriate degree of beliefs from the range '**strongly agree**', '**agree**', '**not sure**', '**disagree**' or '**strongly disagree**'. The researcher recognised that the modified beliefs about language learning inventory for the present investigation which was based on Horwitz's BALLI was by no means perfect, but all the belief items in the questionnaire served the purpose of the present investigation, revealing the degree of actually 'self-reported belief about learning English' by allowing each student to express their own judgement. The researcher did not presume that every student would agree or disagree about every belief about learning English listed in the

questionnaire. So they could indicate their uncertainty or doubt by responding to the 'not sure' category. The advantages of this type of instrument include the fact that it can easily be administered to a large group of students, scoring and data compilation are relatively simple and, more importantly, precise quantitative measures can be derived (Bialystok, 1981). The belief questionnaire was modified, and was not used in the piloting scheme. However, Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) or Cronbach alpha is used to check the internal consistency of the questionnaire. This coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) is appropriate for calculating the reliability of items that are not scored right versus wrong. A reliable measurement procedure will produce the same or nearly the same scores when the same individuals are measured under the same conditions (Gravetter and Wallnau, 1996). 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).

### **3.9. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory**

The BALLI was originally developed as 34 5-point Likert-scale items to assess student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to foreign language learning (Horwitz, 1988, p. 284). However, it has also been an instrument for research and training purposes in workshops for discussions with members of staff and foreign language learners in order to elicit the different opinions about language learning that students hold, to sensitise or raise teachers' awareness about the fact that students may hold different beliefs which they may bring with them into the classroom and also to improve learners' language learning strategies. The thirty-four items in the

questionnaire are intended to examine the learner beliefs about foreign language learning in five major areas:

- Difficulty of language learning;
- Foreign language aptitude;
- The nature of language learning;
- Learning and communication strategies; and
- Motivations and expectations

The 34-item questionnaire asks respondents to indicate, in a multiple-choice format, their agreement, disagreement, or uncertainty/doubt with the given statements. As Horwitz points out, the BALLI does not necessarily have clear-cut right or wrong answers. However, it has proven useful as a means of exploring learner beliefs. It can thus be considered to be a systematic way of documenting the range and the extent of beliefs, and of exploring their consequences for foreign language learning (Kayaoglu, 1997).

As there is no perfect questionnaire, The BALLI, which was used as a basis for the present investigation was still problematic. The original version was evaluated in terms of the applicability of its items to our specified samples, and its appropriateness for the stated purposes of the present study. In addition, it was necessary to establish whether the existing belief items in the original version were sufficient to yield to information that the present investigation required. It was felt that some modifications were needed in order to make the instrument for the present investigation reliable and valid. It is, however, worth mentioning that each language has its own unique features in different aspects such as syntax, style, or sociolinguistics, it is therefore not always possible perform a literal translation from one language to another. As suggested by Oppenheim (1986), translating questionnaires from one language to another is just like entering a series of minefields. A similar difficulty was felt in the translation of the questionnaire into both Thai and Vietnamese and it is worth noting again that the

Thai version was used with Thai students and the Vietnamese version was used with Vietnamese students. The English version was used for the discussion purposes for the present investigation.

What follow are the modifications of the BALLI for the present investigation. The modifications include: omission and replacement of the items; wording modification; and the inclusion of new items.

- **The belief items with no modification**

17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.

- **The belief items with some wording modification**

As the focus of the present investigation is on ‘beliefs about learning English’ not any other foreign language. As a result, certain word(s) in the original version were replaced or changed in order to suit the context of the present investigation. The belief items which were replaced or changed include:

1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.

—► *Item 1: It is easier for children than adults to learn English.*

2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.

—► *Item 2: Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English.*

4. The language I am trying to learn 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

—► *Item 3: English is a difficult language.*

6. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well.

—► *Item 5: I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.*

7. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.

—► *Item 7: It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.*

8. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.

—► *Item 8: It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English.*

9. You shouldn't say anything in a foreign language until you can say it correctly.  
 —▶ *Item 9: Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.*
11. It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.  
 —▶ *Item 11: It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country.*
13. It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.  
 —▶ *Item 13: It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English.*
15. I have foreign language aptitude.  
 —▶ *Item 14: I have a special ability for learning English.*
16. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.  
 —▶ *Item 15: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary.*
20. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.  
 —▶ *Item 18: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.*
21. It is important to practice in the language laboratory.  
 —▶ *Item 21: It is important to practise with cassettes or videos or other mass media.*
22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.  
 —▶ *Item 17: Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.*
24. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.  
 —▶ *Item 20: It is easier to speak English than to understand it.*
25. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.  
 —▶ *Item 22: Learning English is different from learning other academic subjects.*
26. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English.  
 —▶ *Item 23: Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Thai/Vietnamese or from Thai/Vietnamese into English.*
27. If I learn to speak this language very well, it will help me get a good job.  
 —▶ *Item 24: If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.*
28. It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it.  
 —▶ *Item 29: It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.*

29. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.  
 —→ *Item 10: Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.*
31. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.  
 —→ *Item 19: I would like to learn English in order to make friends with foreigners.*
33. Americans are good at learning foreign languages.  
 —→ *Item 6: Thai/Vietnamese students are good at learning English.*

- **The belief items which were omitted**

3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.  
 5. The language I am trying to learn is structured in the same way as English.  
 10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.  
 12. If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.  
 14. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day  
 18. I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.  
 19. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.  
 23. If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.  
 30. Americans think that it is important to speak a foreign language.  
 32. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.  
 34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

- **The new belief items which were included in the original version**

- Item 4: The teacher should correct all the mistakes I make.*  
*Item 12: I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.*  
*Item 25: Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English.*  
*Item 26: Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me.*  
*Item 27: Extra-curricular activities enable me to learn English well.*  
*Item 28: I want to learn to speak English well.*  
*Item 30: The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English.*  
*Item 31: I study English only to pass the examination.*  
*Item 32: The teacher should speak Thai/Vietnamese rather than English when teaching in class.*  
*Item 33: The teacher is the best resource person in class.*  
*Item 34: Doing a self-study in English outside class is very helpful.*  
*Item 35: Extra-English classes are very helpful.*

In conclusion, the original version of the BALLI has been modified. As a result, one belief item was adopted without any modification; eleven belief items were omitted due to the appropriateness of the contexts of the present investigation; twenty-four items were modified by changing some wordings; and twelve new belief items were included in the original version. Eventually, thirty-five belief items about learning English were included in the questionnaire. It is worth noting here that it is not the concern of the researcher to judge or classify the learner beliefs as correct or incorrect. Rather, the researcher attempts to address the extent of such a belief among students and its consequences for language learning and teaching.

### **3.10. Summary**

As seen in Chapter 2, different researchers have different ways of eliciting information from language learners about language learning. Information from the background questionnaire completed while administering the belief questionnaire provided the researcher with an overall picture of the sample characteristic. The learner beliefs about learning English questionnaire, which was the main research instrument, was modified based on the BALLI developed by Horwitz (1987). The large-scale investigation involved 663 informants, 344 science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand and 319 science-oriented students learning English at Hanoi Agricultural University and they were requested to respond to the written belief questionnaire. In addition, the characteristics of these 663 students who were the research population were identified. Lastly, Chapter 4 deals with the data analysis and discussion of the data analysis obtained through the belief questionnaire.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH REPORTED BY SUT AND HAU STUDENTS: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH REPORTED BY SUT AND HAU STUDENTS: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and discuss the results of the research findings of the present investigation. In the first part of analysis (Section 4.2), no significant statistical differences in beliefs about learning English are taken into consideration. Instead, comparisons of the beliefs about learning English by 344 science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology (SUT), Thailand and 319 science-oriented students learning English at Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), Vietnam, are based on the percentages of their beliefs. These will be presented separately. However, the comparison of beliefs about learning English of students in the two institutions based on the Chi-square tests will be presented in Section 4.3.

As evidenced in the review of literature in Chapter 2, there are many variables affecting the beliefs about language learning that language learners hold. These variables include language proficiency, motivation, previous language learning experience, and anxiety in language learning. In addition to these variables, the researcher believes that 'a culture of learning' may also affect learner beliefs about language learning. The relationship of beliefs about language learning to variables such as language learning strategies, language proficiency, motivation, previous language learning experience, and anxiety, has been one of the focuses of research on beliefs about language learning. Examples are Horwitz (1988), Cotterall (1995), Yang (1992) and Sakui and Gaies (1999).

However, for the present investigation, beliefs about learning English of Thai and Vietnamese science-oriented students is the primary focal point and the different culture of language learning contexts is examined. Different levels of beliefs are taken into account in order to examine beliefs about learning English by the research population in a more detailed manner. In this particular investigation, the levels of beliefs are classified into: 1) agreeing; 2) not sure; and 3) disagreeing.

As mentioned earlier, no statistical methods are employed in analysing the data in this section, nor are significant variation patterns described or discussed. Rather, the comparisons of percentages of beliefs about learning English are the focal point of description and discussion. The levels of beliefs have been categorised as ‘Agreeing’, ‘not sure’, and ‘Disagreeing’. This is determined by the 5-point rating-scale in the belief about learning English questionnaire, levels or degrees of beliefs being valued by the number 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. The degree or level of belief ranges from ‘strongly disagree’ which is valued as 1, ‘disagree’ valued as 2, ‘not sure’ valued as 3, ‘agree’ valued as 4 and ‘strongly agree’ which is valued as 5. The actual degree or level of beliefs with which students give different responses on the 5-point rating scale were consolidated. That is to say, responses of 1 and 2 (‘strongly disagree/disagree’) were consolidated into a single category, response of 3 one category and responses of 4 and 5 (‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’) were combined into a single category. Then the percentage of each belief item is determined. To determine the degree of beliefs, disagreements, and doubts, the different criteria are applied.

1. Any belief item with 50% or more of the responses by the subjects in either ‘4’ or ‘5’ will fall in the ‘agreeing’ category.
2. Any belief item with 30% or more of the responses by the subjects in ‘3’ will fall in the ‘not sure’ category.

3. Any belief item with 30% or more of the responses by the subjects in either '1' or '2' will fall in the 'disagreeing' category.
4. Any belief item which does not fall into any of the above category will not be mentioned in this part.

In order to give a clearer picture of the beliefs, disagreements, and doubts about learning English of SUT and HAU students, the items in each category will be presented in the order of the percentage size of that particular item. In other words, the item which receives a larger percentage will appear before the one receiving a smaller percentage but must be in the criteria presented earlier. Another point which should be noted here is the data provided by SUT and HAU students will be presented separately. This is because at this stage no comparisons of beliefs about learning English of students in the two institutions will be made.

#### **4.2. What do the majority of SUT students agree, disagree and doubt about learning English?**

This section presents the beliefs, disagreements, and doubts about learning English reported by 344 science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. The first section (4.2.1) presents what the majority of these students believe about learning English and then their disagreements and doubts about learning English are presented in the subsequent sections (4.2.2 and 4.2.3) respectively.

#### 4.2.1. What do the majority of SUT students agree about learning English?

Based on the data reported by 344 students obtained through the belief questionnaire which was a modified version of the Belief About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) proposed by Horwitz (1987), it was found that twenty-two out of thirty-five belief items met the criteria given earlier. That is to say, fifty percent or more of the students reported that they believe or agree to what is stated in the questionnaire. This was evidenced by the rating scale they chose, i.e. 4 or 5 which is 'agree or strongly agree'. What follow are the ranks of the beliefs about learning English reported by SUT students.

**Table 4.1: Beliefs about learning English reported by SUT students**

Rank	Belief Item	Agreeing% (n=344)
1	It is important to repeat and practise a lot.	97.4
2	I want to learn to speak English well.	92.7
3	If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.	90.1
4	It is important to practise with cassettes or video or other mass media.	89.8
5	Extra-curricular activities enable me to learn English well.	86.0
6	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary.	84.5
7	The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English.	83.8
8	Doing a self-study in English outside class is very helpful.	81.4
9	The teacher should correct all the mistakes I make.	79.8
10	It is easier for children than adults to learn English.	75.6
11	It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English.	74.9
12	It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	71.4

**Table 4.1. (cont): Beliefs about learning English reported by SUT students**

Rank	Belief Item	Agreeing% (n=344)
13	Learning English is different than learning other academic subjects.	67.3
14	The teacher is the best resource person in class.	66.1
15	It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English.	63.4
16	I would like to learn English in order to make friends with foreigners.	63.0
17	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	60.6
18	Extra-English classes are very helpful.	60.2
19	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Thai or from Thai into English.	59.9
20	Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English.	55.8
21	It is easier to speak English than to understand it.	55.1
22	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	52.8

Table 4.1 above illustrates the percentages of the beliefs reported by 344 SUT students. The majority of these students (97.4%) reported that they strongly agree or agree that ‘it is important to practise and repeat a lot’ when they learn English. This item came in the top rank of all items. This is followed by ‘I want to learn to speak English well.’; ‘If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.’; and ‘It is important to practise with cassettes or video or other mass media.’ The percentages of the students responding to the ‘Agreeing’ category for these items are 92.7%, 90.1%, 89.8%, and 86.0% respectively. If we look closely at the first four items which students reported strongly agreeing or agreeing may reflect the real situation in their life as students learning English at their institution, i.e. their culture

of learning context, and what they expect to encounter once they graduate especially in terms of the importance of the English language in helping them get a job if their English is good or very good. They also show their motivation or determination to wish to speak English. Another important factor which has become a crucial part of their life is mass media. Again, the heart of learning English for these students may be involved in practising. As the status of English in Thailand is of course a foreign language and the opportunity for students to expose themselves in the language is very limited. The way to help them improve or master the language is through practice, be it with their teachers in class or by themselves outside class. As reported elsewhere in Intaraprasert (2000; 2002), mass media like films, videos, or even the Internet, have played an important role in language learning on which Thai students reported relying.

Apart from what has been mentioned above, SUT students also reported believing that doing self-study outside class or autonomous learning as well as extra-curricular activities is very helpful for them in learning English. Further, the teacher is also an important factor to make them like or dislike learning English. This is very common in the Thai classrooms where teachers are still seen as the most reliable resource of learning. When looking at the skills in learning English, a large percentage of SUT students reported believing that vocabulary is very important in learning English. In addition, learning grammar rules is still important though they see that verbal communication should be emphasised. With regard to this respect, slightly more than half of the students (52.8%) reported believing so. Some other things which students reported agreeing when learning English include, for example, translation from Thai into English and from English into Thai; attending extra-English classes; speaking English with an excellent accent; and guessing an unknown vocabulary item.

#### 4.2.2. What do the majority of SUT students disagree about learning English?

In the previous section, the researcher described what the majority of SUT students reported believing about learning English at their institution. In this section, it is worth describing what the majority of SUT students do not believe or agree about learning English. However, the criteria used to determine the belief items in this section are different from those used in the previous section as already mentioned in the introductory part. Table 4.2 below shows what are the disagreements about learning English reported by 344 SUT students.

**Table 4.2: Disagreement about learning English reported by SUT students**

Rank	Belief Item	Disagreeing% (n=344)
1	Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.	87.2
2	The teacher should speak Thai rather than English when teaching in class.	67.4
3	I study English only to pass the examination.	64.3
4	Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English.	62.5
5	Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.	59.1
6	Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me.	56.7
7	Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.	55.1
8	English is a difficult language.	37.0
9	I have a special ability for learning English.	30.8
10	I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.	30.8

Table 4.2 shows that ten out of thirty-five belief items obtained through the belief questionnaire were reported by SUT students that they did not agree upon about learning English. What the largest number of students did not agree upon about

learning English is ‘Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.’ This is evidenced by 87.2 percent of the students reported that. This is followed by ‘The teacher should speak Thai rather than English when teaching in class.’(67.4%); ‘I study English only to pass the examination.’(64.3%). Apart from this, when asked about the nationality of the teacher teaching the speaking skill, 62.5 percent of SUT students reported that they did not believe that only native speakers of English can teach them to speak the language. Another interesting point which is worth mentioning here is that more than half of the students reportedly did not agree that students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English. In addition, they reported that they became more self-reliant in learning English, with 56.7 percent of these students reporting that learning English is still possible for them without a teacher. This statement is consistent with the item reported in the previous section where students reported about the usefulness of self-study as well as the extra-curricular activities. Further, English is not believed to be a female thing according to these students. Finally about a third of these students reported that they did not agree that English is a difficult language; they have a special ability for learning English; and they enjoy speaking English with foreigners they meet. The percentages of students responding to the ‘Agreeing’ category for the last three statements are 37.0, 30.8, and 30.8 respectively.

#### **4.2.3. What are the majority of SUT students doubtful about learning English?**

As can be seen in the first two sections (4.2.1 and 4.2.2), the beliefs and disagreements about learning English reported by SUT students were described. A few items upon which these students reportedly disagreed will appear in this category as the students reported being doubtful about them. Table 4.3 below illustrates the



items which half or at least a third of the students reported their doubts about learning English.

**Table 4.3: Doubts about learning English reported by SUT students**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Belief Item</b>	<b>Not Sure % (n=344)</b>
1	Thai students are good at learning English.	50.7
2	I have a special ability for learning English.	47.4
3	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.	45.5
4	I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.	44.2
5	It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.	39.2
6	Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.	33.5
7	Extra-English classes are very helpful.	31.1

Seven out of thirty-five items were reported under this category. In other words, there are certain items which SUT students were not sure about when learning English. About fifty percent of these students reported that they were not sure whether or not Thai students are good language learners. To be more precise, they did not know whether or not Thai students were generally good at learning English. Slightly over a third of these students were reportedly doubtful about their ability in learning English with regard to their ability to learn to speak English very well. Further, they were not sure if they really enjoyed practising or speaking English with foreigners they have met or they will meet. In addition, they reported not being sure if reading and writing English is easier than speaking even though, as shown in Section 4.2.1, about half of these students reported believing that speaking is easier than reading and writing. Another doubt which these students reported having is whether female students are

actually better than male students or not in English and finally they reported not being sure if extra-English classes are useful for them even though sixty percent of them reported believing they are.

In summary, in learning English students reported holding certain beliefs, disbeliefs or some doubts. This has been reported by different researchers as shown earlier in the literature review section in Chapter 2 that what the majority of students in one learning culture reported believing may or may not be reported the same in another learning culture. The beliefs which students hold reflect to some extent the way they deal with their learning in their own context, as shown in this section where Thai students, in this case SUT, reported what they believed, disagreed, or doubted. The next section (4.3), the beliefs, disagreements, and doubts reported by 319 students in another learning culture, i.e. Vietnam will be described.

#### **4.3. What do the majority of HAU students agree, disagree or doubt about learning English?**

This section presents the beliefs, disagreements, and doubts about learning English reported by 319 science-oriented students learning English at Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), Hanoi, Vietnam. The first section (4.3.1) presents what the majority of these students reported believing about learning English and then their disagreements and doubts about learning English are presented in the subsequent sections (4.3.2 and 4.3.3) respectively.

##### **4.3.1. What do the majority of HAU students agree about learning English?**

Based on the responses to the questionnaire provided by 319 science-oriented learning English at Hanoi Agricultural University, Hanoi, Vietnam, it was found that the majority of students reported either agreeing or strongly agreeing to twenty-four out of thirty-five items. Table 4.4 below gives the detail of those items ranking from the

largest to smallest percentages of students responded to these items but within the criteria which were previously mentioned.

**Table 4.4: Beliefs about learning English reported by HAU students**

Rank	Belief Item	Agreeing % (n=319)
1	It is important to repeat and practise a lot.	99.0
2	I want to learn to speak English well.	97.5
3	If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.	96.6
4	It is important to practise with cassettes or video or other mass media.	92.8
5	It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English.	89.9
6	I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.	89.7
7	Extra-curricular activities enable me to learn English well.	88.7
8	It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	87.7
9	Extra-English classes are very helpful.	87.7
10	Doing a self-study in English outside class is very helpful.	85.3
11	It is easier for children than adults to learn English.	83.3
12	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.	79.9
13	Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English.	76.7
14	The teacher should correct all the mistakes I make.	74.4
15	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary.	72.4
16	Learning English is different than learning other academic subjects.	70.7
17	The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English.	68.6

**Table 4.4. (cont): Beliefs about learning English reported by HAU students**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Belief Item</b>	<b>Agreeing % (n=319)</b>
18	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	68.3
19	It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English.	66.4
20	I would like to learn English in order to make friends with foreigners.	64.9
21	It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.	55.2
22	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Vietnamese or from Vietnamese into English.	52.4
23	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	52.7
24	The teacher is the best resource person in class.	51.7

As can be seen in Table 4.4 above, the largest number of HAU students (99.0%) reported believing that when learning English, it is important for students to repeat and practise a lot. This is followed by ‘I want to learn to speak English well.’; ‘If my English is good, I will have better opportunities to get a job.’; and ‘It is important to practise with cassettes or video or other mass media.’ The percentages of the students reported their agreements on these beliefs are 97.5, 96.6, and 92.8 respectively. Apart from this, HAU students also reported that knowing the cultures of native speakers of English is very important in learning English too. They reportedly believed that they enjoy practising or speaking English with foreigners they meet. When speaking English, HAU students felt that an accent is very important and they believed that they will be eventually able to speak English very well. When it comes to a matter of autonomous learning, HAU students believed that extra-curricular activities, extra-English classes as well as self-study are very helpful for their learning. About two-

thirds of HAU students reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that some of them have special ability in learning English. Again, vocabulary is still seen very important in learning English. If they do not know the meaning of a word, guessing is still acceptable. Aside from vocabulary, translation from English into Vietnamese and from Vietnamese into English and grammar rules are believed to have an important role in learning English. In their opinion, a teacher of English is still an important factor who may make them like or dislike learning English and they still see that their mistakes should be corrected by their teacher. Slightly more than half of the students agreed that the teacher is the best resource person in class.

#### **4.3.2. What do the majority of HAU students disagree about learning English?**

In the previous section, the researcher described what the majority of HAU students reported believing about learning English at their institution. In this section, it is worth describing what the majority of HAU students do not believe or agree about learning English. However, the criteria used to determine the belief items in this section are different from those used in the previous section (4.3.1) as already mentioned in the introductory part. Table 4.5 below shows what the disagreements are about learning English reported by 319 HAU students.

**Table 4.5: Disagreements about learning English reported by HAU students**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Belief Item</b>	<b>Disagreeing% (n=319)</b>
1	Students should not say anything in English unless they can say it correctly.	88.1
2	Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.	80.2
3	I study English only to pass the examination.	78.9
4	Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English.	78.8

**Table 4.5 (cont): Disagreement about learning English reported by HAU students**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Belief Item</b>	<b>Disagreeing% (n=319)</b>
5	The teacher should speak Vietnamese rather than English when teaching in class.	67.0
6	Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me.	47.5
7	I have a special ability for learning English.	47.3
8	English is a difficult language.	44.7

Table 4.5 shows that eight out of thirty-five belief items obtained through the belief questionnaire were reported by HAU students that they did not agree upon about learning English. What the largest number of students did not agree upon about learning English is ‘Students should not say anything in English unless they can say it correctly.’ This is evidenced by 88.1 percent of the students reported this. This is followed by ‘Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.’ (80.2%); and ‘I study English only to pass the examination.’(78.9%). Apart from this, when asked about the nationality of the teacher teaching them to speak, 78.8 percent of HAU students reported that they did not believe that only native speakers of English can teach them to speak the language. Another interesting point which is worth mentioning here is that more than half of the students reportedly did not agree that when teaching in class, the teacher should speak Vietnamese rather than English. In addition, they reported that they became more self-reliant in learning English, with 47.5 percent of these students reporting that learning English is still possible for them without a teacher. This statement is consistent with the item reported in the previous section where students reported about the usefulness of self-study as well as the extra-curricular activities. Finally slightly more than a third of HAU students reported they did not agree that English is a difficult language or they have a special ability for

learning English. The percentages of students responding to the 'agreeing' category for the last two statements are 47.3 and 44.7 respectively.

#### 4.3.3. What are the majority of HAU students doubtful about learning English?

As illustrated in the first two sections (4.3.1 and 4.3.2), the beliefs and disagreements about learning English reported by HAU students were described. A few items upon which these students reportedly disagreed will also appear in this category as the students reported being doubtful about them. Table 4.6 below illustrates the items which nearly half or at least a third of the students reported their doubts about learning English.

**Table 4.6: Doubts about learning English reported by HAU students**

Rank	Belief Item	Not Sure % (n=319)
1	Vietnamese students are good at learning English.	47.9
2	Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.	46.9
3	I have a special ability for learning English.	44.8
4	The teacher is the best resource person in class.	32.6
5	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	32.2

Table 4.6 above shows us that five out of thirty-five belief items were reported under the 'not sure' category. In other words, there are certain items which HAU students were not sure about when learning English. Nearly half these students (47.9%) reported that they were not sure whether or not Vietnamese students are good language learners. To be more precise, they did not know whether or not Vietnamese students were generally good at learning English. Slightly over a third of these students were reportedly doubtful if females are better than their males counterparts in learning English. They were also doubtful about their ability in learning English even though

they reported believing that they will eventually learn to speak English very well. Further, as seen in Section 4.3.1, more than half of HAU students reported believing that the teacher is the best resource person in class; however, an ample percentage of HAU students reported not being so sure if the teacher is the best resource person in class. Lastly, some of HAU students were not sure if learning grammar rules is still important for them in learning English.

In summary, as mentioned earlier, no statistical comparisons of beliefs about learning English reported by Thai and Vietnamese students are made. However, it is worth pointing out that both Thai and Vietnamese students do share some common beliefs, disagreements and doubts. For example, the majority of both Thai and Vietnamese students do believe that when learning English, it is important for students to repeat and practise a lot. This practice tends to involve utilising mass media such as videos, or cassettes. Their motivation in learning English is quite high especially their expectation of speaking English. Both groups reported agreeing that English will become a major part of their lives especially when they graduate. If their English is good, it will certainly give them an advantage over other graduates in terms of getting a job. With regard to the disagreements, what they reported disagreeing upon include the statements that students should not say anything unless they can say it correctly, or that they study English only to pass the examination. In addition, they did not agree that only a native speaker of English can teach them to speak the language which is good, because otherwise I would not have a job. Last but not least, both Thai and Vietnamese students do have some doubts about learning English. They reported being doubtful about their own ability in learning English, whether or not English is a female thing, or that students from their own countries are good at learning English. However, there are some differences in learner beliefs with respect to learners'



cultural backgrounds as evidenced in the literature in the field. We could see that a cultural factor may play an important role in determining what students in that particular culture believe and bring to class with them the beliefs they hold. Regarding this respect, Horwitz (1988) states that foreign language learners enter the class with many preconceived ideas about language learning arising from their experiences and what they have been exposed to inside and outside class, and also their own personalities and motivation. Against this background, the researcher has some evidence to support that students from different learning cultures do hold some different beliefs though they do have some in common. What follows in the next section is the comparison of beliefs about learning English reported by Thai and Vietnamese students.

#### **4.4. Results and discussion of a comparison of learner beliefs by Thai and Vietnamese science-oriented students**

As presented in the previous sections (4.2.1-4.2.3 and 4.3.1-4.3.3), no significant differences in beliefs about learning English of SUT and HAU students have been taken into consideration. The following section, we will describe the data analysis based on the results of the Chi-square tests which are employed to determine the significant difference in learners' beliefs about learning English at the individual item level under each grouping. To demonstrate the significant difference, the percentage of SUT and HAU students reporting their agreements, disagreements, and doubts about learning English as well as the observed chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) value which shows the strength of variation in belief about learning English of each discrete belief item are presented.

One of the primary purposes for carrying out this investigation was to explore similarities and differences in beliefs about learning English that science-oriented students learning English in two different cultural contexts, i.e. Thai and Vietnamese

reported holding. For this reason, the description of the study was devoted to the identification of learners' beliefs and the results will be discussed with reference to the obtained data in order to provide a more coherent picture of the issue being investigated. It is worth noting that, due to the lack of written documentation, part of the tentative explanation for certain significant differences found among the learner discrete beliefs is based on the personal observations of the researcher and informal discussions with both students and members of staff at the two institutions, SUT and HAU, where the researcher has been working as a permanent lecturer at the former since 1996, and as a visiting lecturer at the latter between mid-September and mid-November 2003. With limited exposure to the Vietnamese learning context or learning culture, the researcher always recognises that the interpretations and explanation for certain significant differences can be only at the surface level. Regarding the cultural issue, Hinkel (1999, p. 1) argues that the term 'culture' has diverse and disparate definitions that deal with the forms of speech acts, rhetorical structure of text, social organisations, and knowledge construct. Anyhow, Rosaldo (1984) pointed out that cultural models derive from the world in which people live and the reality that they construct. Those who live outside a culture, for example researchers, cannot provide a complete interpretation because an individual's sense of self and assumptions about the world and society will ultimately depend on one's embeddedness within particular socio-cultural milieu. Additionally, culture shapes and binds one's social and cognitive concepts and those concepts are not likely to be understood and appreciated by outsiders.

Importantly, SUT and HAU students differ in some characteristics which would seem to be potentially associated with their beliefs about learning English. For example, most SUT students started to learn English at a primary school while most of those at

HAU started to learn English at their junior secondary school as prescribed by the National Curriculum (Do Huy, 1999). Regarding the gender of the subjects of the study, it appears that there are slightly more female than male SUT students (183:161) while there are a lot more male than female HAU students (201:118). In addition, when taking the students' 'perceived' English language ability into consideration, we found that almost half of SUT students reported perceiving their English language ability as 'low' (150) while about three-fourths of HAU students reported perceiving their language ability as 'fair'. This indicates that SUT students were less positive than HAU students about their language ability. Another point which should be worth discussing is their language teachers. At the time of collecting the data, there were two native speakers of English teaching at SUT but none teaching at HAU. Thus, the reader should also take into account that any significant differences highlighted here may be related to students' previous language learning experience, the perception of their language ability, the nationality of the teachers, and learning environments (Kramsch, 1991b), which may include persons (teachers, peer tutors), materials (textbooks, speech, knowledge in various forms) or circumstances (fortuitous or deliberate). The discrete belief items have been grouped according to the common characteristics they share. The groupings include learner beliefs about:

1. the difficulty of learning English;
2. the language learning aptitude;
3. the nature of learning English;
4. learning and communication strategies;
5. motivations and expectations;
6. teacher's roles; and
7. the usefulness of out-of-class activities.

It should be noted that the discrete belief items are presented as they appear in the same order as in the inventory. This makes it easy to see an overall picture of the beliefs reported by both SUT and HAU students for each grouping. The significant

difference of the particular items are included in a brief discussion of each grouping. Tables 4.7-4.13 below show the cross-cultural investigation in a detailed manner.

#### 4.4.1. Learner beliefs about the difficulty of learning English

In the contexts of both Thailand and Vietnam, English is considered as a foreign language and it is a mere school subject in both countries even though there are a few institutions which use it as the medium of instruction. However, students learning at both Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand and Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam, take English as required by the university curricula though they differ in terms of the number of credits or modules students are supposed to fulfil. As a mere subject like other academic modules, a lot of students may find some difficulty in dealing with learning English. Table 4.7 below illustrate what students at both universities reported believing regarding the difficulty of learning English.

**Table 4.7: Learner Beliefs about the Difficulty of Learning English (%)**

<i>Item 3: English is a difficult language.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	34.0	29.0	37.0	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	28.9	26.4	44.7	
<i>Item 5: I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	45.8	45.5	8.7	$\chi^2 = 82.202$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	79.9	17.2	2.8	
<i>Item 20: It is easier to speak English than to understand it.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	55.1	29.7	15.2	$\chi^2 = 20.669$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	42.1	28.6	29.2	
<i>Item 29: It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	36.3	39.2	24.4	$\chi^2 = 23.767$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	55.2	27.0	17.9	

The results of the chi-square tests in Table 4.7 show significant variations in beliefs about learning English reported by SUT and HAU students, with a significantly higher percentage of HAU than SUT students reporting the agreements or strong agreements on item 5, which is 'I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.', and item 29, 'It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.', while a significantly higher percentage of SUT (55.1%) than HAU (42.1%) students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing on item 20, 'It is easier to speak English than to understand it.' However, a more or less similar percentage of students at both universities (29.7% of SUT and 28.6% of HAU) felt that they were not sure about this. When looking at the beliefs under this grouping that both SUT and HAU students have shared, we found that they did not differ in terms of the difficulty of English. Based on the data analysis, there is an interesting point which should be examined further. That is that a lot of HAU students reported that they found the speaking skill difficult but they were confident that they would eventually learn to speak English very well, whereas a lot SUT students reported the speaking skill was not difficult but they were not confident that they would eventually learn to speak English very well.

Generally, the belief items under this category deal with the difficulty of learning English. When taking the difficulty of English into consideration, we found that SUT and HAU students did not differ in this regard. What should be pointed out here is how students viewed their success in learning English with HAU students being more positive about their ultimate success in learning English especially in terms of the oral skills. Even though HAU students felt that speaking English is more difficult than reading or writing it, they were very positive that they would eventually be able to speak the language well. On the other hand, SUT students found speaking less

difficult than reading or writing, but they felt they would not be able to speak the language. The similar case was also reported in Intaraprasert (2000; 2003) that SUT students rated speaking more important than the other skills; however, they reported doing the least, especially outside the classroom, in order to improve their speaking skill. To date, no empirical has been carried out to investigate why this is the case. According to Horwitz (1987), students' judgments about the difficulty of language learning are critical to the development of students' expectations for and commitment to language learning. In this case, the students who believe that they will eventually learn to speak English very well may put maximal efforts in learning English while those who do not feel positively about their success in learning may put only minimal efforts since they are unlikely to see the good results. However, students who reported underestimating the difficulty of English may feel frustrated when they feel that they cannot make progress as quickly as they expect.

Another interesting point which should be highlighted here deals with the difficulty of speaking English. With respect to this skill, one possible explanation for the students' belief that it is a difficult skill has to do with their limited exposure to the English language. In the contexts of both SUT and HAU, students are likely to be exposed to the target language only when they are in the classroom with their teacher and their English teacher can be seen as the only person they can speak English with, but even that an opportunity to speak English is still very limited. Apart from this, many students find English pronunciation very difficult especially the sounds which do not appear in their mother tongue. Through my experience, Vietnamese students find it difficult to pronounce the cluster [tr-] or final sound with [-sh]. They seem to be influenced by their mother tongue which they pronounce as if they pronounced [j-/] and [-k]. Similarly, Thai students cannot pronounce words with [th], [z], [sh] very

easily. Stress, intonation and final sounds are still problematic for both SUT and HAU students. In addition, their over-concern about grammatical rules could possibly be another factor which makes them believe that speaking English is more difficult than reading or writing it. However, systematic investigation into this matter is still needed.

#### **4.4.2. Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Aptitude**

Aptitude is defined as '*the ease of learning or understanding*', or more simply '*intelligence*.' The capacity of learning is inherent in all humans and the speed or facility to learn depends upon the individual's intelligence. The process of language acquisition uses this intelligence in order to be able to communicate with others in the community. An accurate and effective summary of "language aptitude" includes the four skills of "phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity, rote memory, and inductive language ability," (Hunter, 2004). In addition, aptitude in learning language also includes the amount of time it takes an individual to learn the task in question (Stansfield, 1989). In language learning, some people believe that there are certain motor skills which relate to effective language learning. Examples are: imitation of sounds, hearing different sounds, short-term and long-term memorization and remembrance of sounds and words, etc. There is little we can do to change our innate abilities. The difference between a person with a low and a high aptitude for language learning is the speed with which either will learn a certain amount of language, or perhaps the fluency with which they speak. It does not mean that the person with low aptitude will not succeed ('Language Learning', 2004). Table 4.8 below show the results of the chi-square tests regarding different aspects of language aptitude.

**Table 4.8: Learner Beliefs about Language Learning Aptitude (%)**

<i>Item 1: It is easier for children than adults to learn English.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	75.6	18.6	5.8	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	83.3	12.6	4.1	
<i>Item 2: Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	55.8	28.5	15.7	$\chi^2 = 33.591$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	76.7	17.0	6.3	
<i>Item 6: Thai/Vietnamese students are good at learning English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	30.6	50.7	18.7	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	37.5	47.9	14.6	
<i>Item 10: Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	12.3	28.7	59.1	$\chi^2 = 35.654$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	4.4	15.4	80.2	
<i>Item 14: I have a special ability for learning English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	21.8	47.4	30.8	$\chi^2 = 32.961$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	7.9	44.8	47.3	
<i>Item 17: Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	11.4	33.5	55.1	$\chi^2 = 48.087$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	23.9	46.9	29.2	

Table 4.8 illustrates that SUT and HAU students reported holding beliefs about learning English differently in four out of six items.

Based on the 'Agreeing' category, we found that a significantly higher percentage of HAU than SUT students reported believing that some students have a special ability which helps them learn English while a significantly higher percentage of SUT students reported that they have a special ability for learning English. However, a



more or less percentage of both SUT (47.4%) and HAU (44.8%) students expressed their uncertainty regarding this respect. When examining further, we found that slightly under half of the HAU students (47.3%) and slightly under a third of the SUT students (30.8%) believed that they did not have a special ability for learning English. With respect to the language learning aptitude of students who are good at mathematics, it was found that a large number of HAU students (80.2%) disagreed or strongly agreed upon this claim while slightly more than a half of SUT students (59.1%) shared the same belief with HAU students.

When gender of students and learning English were taken into account, it was discovered that both SUT and HAU students reported holding different beliefs in this regard, with higher percentage of SUT (55.1%) than HAU (29.2%) students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that female students are better at learning English than their male counterparts. However, 46.9% of HAU students and 33.5% of SUT students reported that they were not sure in this respect.

Where SUT and HAU students did not report any differences in terms of language learning aptitude, it was found that the majority of both SUT and HAU students agreed or strongly agreed that children are better at learning English than adults. This belief is quite commonly held by language learners as reported elsewhere in Horwitz (1988), Yang (1992), Oh (1996), and Kunt (1996). Further, they were not sure about the ability of students from their home countries in learning English.

Regarding the ability in learning English, if these students feel they lack some ability necessary to learning English, as a result, they probably expect to do poorly in language study.

#### 4.4.3. Learner Beliefs about the Nature of Learning English

As presented earlier, it was found that both SUT and HAU students reported holding beliefs regarding the difficulty of learning English as well as language learning aptitude which were significantly different to some extent. What we are going to examine further in this section are learner beliefs about the nature of learning English. Table 4.9 illustrates the detail of different aspects regarding this issue.

**Table 4.9: Learner Beliefs about the Nature of Learning English (%)**

<i>Item 8: It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	74.9	16.6	8.5	$\chi^2 = 25.557$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	89.9	6.0	4.1	
<i>Item 11: It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	60.6	20.1	19.2	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	68.3	17.6	14.1	
<i>Item 15: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	84.5	11.1	4.4	$\chi^2 = 14.840$ p = .001
Vietnamese (HAU)	72.4	21.0	6.6	
<i>Item 18: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	52.8	27.3	19.9	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	52.7	32.2	15.1	
<i>Item 22: Learning English is different from learning other academic subjects.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
<i>Item 23: Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Thai/Vietnamese or from Thai/Vietnamese into English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	59.9	22.1	18.0	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	52.4	25.7	21.9	

The results of the chi-square tests shown in Table 4.9 revealed that SUT and HAU students reported different beliefs in terms of cultural awareness of English native speakers, with a significantly higher percentage of HAU (89.9%) than SUT (74.9%) students reported the necessity of this aspect. When taking the importance of learning new vocabulary words into account, we found that a higher percentage of SUT (84.5%) than HAU (72.4%) students reported their agreement or strong agreement on this matter. What may also contribute to the significant variation in this respect is the number of students who reported being doubtful that learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary items, with 21.0% of HAU students yet 11.1% of SUT students reporting their doubts. The similar result was also reported in Intaraprasert (2002) that students believed that if they know a lot of vocabulary items, they will certainly do well in the examination and they can learn English better. Similarly in the Vietnamese context, students often come to class expecting teachers to explain the vocabulary, language points or sentence structures or to translate English texts into Vietnamese for comprehension. They usually believe that they can barely say anything before acquiring "enough" grammar rules and vocabulary (Nguyen Thi, 1998; Pham Hoa, 1998).

However, there are four other beliefs regarding the nature of learning English that SUT and HAU students reported sharing the similar ideas. In other words, the majority of both SUT and HAU students agreed or strongly agreed that it is a better idea to learn English in an English-speaking country, and learning English is different from learning other academic subjects. In this regard, Williams and Burden (1997, p.115) state that 'there is no question that learning a foreign language is different to learning other subjects, mainly because of the social nature of such a venture.' Likewise, Gardner (1985, p. 146) agrees that 'languages are unlike any other subject

taught in a classroom in that they involve the acquisition of skills and behaviour patterns which are characteristics of another community.’ Additionally, about half of SUT and HAU students agreed or strongly agreed that grammar and translation are still important in learning English even though some students expressed their doubts or their disagreement regarding these two respects.

It is worth discussing here that *Item 8: It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English*. A similar result was also reported in Martin and Laurie’s (1993) finding that knowing some aspects of the target language was important. Culture and language learning are inseparable and constitute a single universe or domain of experience (Kramsch, 1991a, p. 217). Within the Thai context, learners are often exposed to a limited range of encounters with English culture through Western media and brief encounters with tourists, which can easily lead to unrepresentative stereotypical impressions (Baker, 2003). This may be also true in the Vietnamese context. In terms of language teaching and learning, Byram (2003) suggests that culture is usually defined as the culture associated with the language being learnt, in this case, English. The knowledge of a language’s culture is thought essential to a full understanding of a language’s nuances. Knowledge of a culture presupposes a competence which is essential to the grasp of language’s true meaning. As pointed out by Williams and Burden (1997, p.115), the learning of a foreign language [English] involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner. In addition, Wandel (2003) maintains that EFL teaching must enhance its cultural and geographical scope and include other English-speaking countries apart from the UK and the USA. Barrow

(1990) points out that learning English does not necessarily destroy the learner commitment to beliefs and values that they otherwise acquire. Rather, teachers may add something to their inheritance as familiarity with other languages might add something to English. With regard to the curriculum, although the inclusion of culture in the foreign language curriculum has become more prevalent in recent years, gaining in both popularity and respectability, there are still those who either ignore the concept or deny its validity (Valdes, 1990). There is no way to avoid teaching culture when teaching English. Consistent with this comment, Hinkel (1999) contends that applied linguists and language teachers have become increasingly aware that a second or foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of the community in which it is used. In addition to this view, Thomas (1983, 1984) observes that non-native speakers are often perceived to display inappropriate language behaviours and often are not aware that they do.

#### **4.4.4. Learner Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies**

In learning English, students have to make use of different types of learning strategies in order that they become successful language learners. Likewise, students may have an opportunity to make use of the language they learn to communicate with speakers of other languages. Tarone (1980, p.419) has defined communication strategies from the interactive point of view and focuses on the cooperative criterion. The term relates to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. Table 4.10 below demonstrates what SUT and HAU students believe about the utilisation of both learning and communication strategies.

**Table 4.10: Learner Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies (%)**

<i>Item 7: It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	71.4	13.7	14.9	$\chi^2 = 31.727$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	87.7	8.8	3.5	
<i>Item 9: Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	4.9	7.8	82.2	$\chi^2 = 7.342$ p = .025
Vietnamese (HAU)	8.2	3.8	88.1	
<i>Item 12: I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	25.0	44.2	30.8	$\chi^2 = 286.101$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	89.7	9.4	0.9	
<i>Item 13: It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	63.4	24.1	12.5	$\chi^2 = 9.255$ p = .01
Vietnamese (HAU)	66.4	15.7	17.9	
<i>Item 16: It is important to repeat and practise a lot.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	97.4	1.2	1.5	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	99.0	1.0	0	
<i>Item 21: It is important to practise with cassettes or videos or other mass media.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	89.8	7.9	2.3	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	92.8	5.3	1.9	

The results of the chi-square tests illustrated in Table 4.10 indicated that significant differences in beliefs about learning English regarding learning and communication strategies reported by SUT and HAU students were found to some extent. Strikingly, a remarkably higher percentage of HAU (89.7%) than SUT (25.0%) students reported that they enjoy practising English with foreigners they meet. However, nearly half of SUT students (44.3%) felt unsure about this. It should be interesting to investigate

further why they felt this way. Another aspect of communication strategies which a higher percentage of HAU than SUT students reported believing deals with their accent when they speak English. In other words, when speaking English, a larger number of HAU students reported trying to imitate native speakers of English than did SUT students. 'Accent' is defined as 'distinctive manner of oral expression or the way in which people in a particular area, country or social group pronounce words' (Cambridge Dictionary Online), in this case, people from English-speaking countries or native speakers of English. Additionally, they did not agree that 'students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.' Regarding the guess of an unknown vocabulary item in English, even though more or less the same percentage of students at both universities reported agreeing, a higher percentage of SUT students were not sure whether they should guess the meaning of such an unknown word or not, and a higher percentage of HAU (17.9%) than SUT (12.5%) students disagreed or strongly disagreed to this strategy.

No significant differences were found between SUT and HAU students' beliefs about learning English regarding practice and repetition and practice through the utilisation of mass media such as cassettes, videos, or other forms of media available to them. This indicates that students in both cultural contexts realise the important role of media in language learning.

What might be an explanation for the significant differences under this category especially for *Item 12: 'I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet'* with HAU students being more positive about this is Vietnamese students are generally sociable and confident. While the researcher was at HAU as a visiting lecturer, very often a group of between five to as many as fourteen students came to his guesthouse to practise speaking English or the researcher was invited to take part in informal events

organised by students and the researcher wondered why a lot of students enjoyed meeting him. They [HAU students] found it was a good opportunity for them to speak English while SUT students hardly ever did this. Instead, they [SUT students] tend to avoid meeting foreigners as they believe that they may not be able to understand English or make themselves understood if they have to communicate in English. However, when looking at the concern about the accent when speaking English, we found that both SUT and HAU students are very optimistic about speaking English, but their over-concern with accent and accuracy will probably inhibit their communication attempts (Horwitz, 1987), thus limiting their opportunity or confidence in using the language. As reported in Intaraprasert (2000, 2003), SUT students were very positive about the speaking skill but they reported doing the least in order to improve their speaking outside the classroom. However, no systematic investigation has been carried out in order to deal with the issue. In the respect of speaking and Thai students in general, Shaw (1983, p.25) has observed that Thai students very rarely speak English. Their highest frequency of use was with English teachers but even this was very low. It therefore seems that [speaking] English plays a very small part in their daily life and is not essential for their functioning. Significant difference was found in belief held by SUT and HAU regarding the accent when speaking English. In this regard, Richards and Lockhart (1994) point out that for some learners, a native-like accent may not be considered an important goal, since they will use English mainly to speak with other non-native speakers of English. For other students, however, acquiring a native-like accent in English may be a high priority.

#### **4.4.5. Learner Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations**

In learning English or any other foreign language, motivation seems to play an important role among language learners (Harmer, 1991; Williams and Burden, 1997;



Richards and Lockhart, 1994). The motivation in language learning can be either integrative or instrumental. According to Williams and Burden (1997), learners differ markedly in their need to achieve or to be successful. Table 4.11 below shows the detail of what SUT and HAU students reported believing regarding motivations and expectations in learning English.

**Table 4.11: Learner Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations (%)**

<i>Item 19: I would like to learn English in order to make friends with foreigners.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	63.0	17.8	19.2	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	64.9	21.3	13.8	
<i>Item 24: If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	90.1	7.3	2.6	$\chi^2 = 10.837$ p = .004
Vietnamese (HAU)	96.6	2.5	0.9	
<i>Item 28: I want to learn to speak English well.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	92.7	5.8	1.5	$\chi^2 = 8.096$ p = .017
Vietnamese (HAU)	97.5	2.2	0.3	
<i>Item 31: I study English only to pass the examination.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	14.9	20.8	64.3	$\chi^2 = 17.318$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	9.8	11.4	78.9	

The chi-square test results revealed that the great majority of both SUT and HAU students believe that they will have a better job opportunity if their English is good. This means that students see English as an instrument to bring success to their life once they graduate from their universities, though a significantly higher percentage of HAU students (96.6%) than SUT (90.1%) students reported so. Other responses which may contribute to the significant difference with respect to this belief are the

percentages of SUT students responding to the 'not sure' and 'Disagreeing' categories which are 7.3 and 2.6 respectively, while only 2.5 and 0.9 percent of HAU students responded to those categories. This is also true about their desire to speak English well. Another significant difference found under this grouping deals with the expectation of learning English in class, where a higher percentage of students studying at HAU (78.9%) than SUT (64.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they study English only to pass the examination. When examining this respect further, we found that nearly a third of SUT students were unsure of or agreed upon this. As reported in Intaraprasert (2000), a great number of Thai engineering students reported that they tended to study English only to pass the examination. However, their belief about this matter might change, so it should be another interesting point to investigate if learner beliefs can change over time or not in order to understand it better. No significant differences in learner beliefs held by SUT and HAU students were found in terms of learning English in order to make friends with foreigners or tourists.

As evidenced above, SUT and HAU students reported holding different beliefs regarding motivations and expectations. No matter how different, they were both found instrumentally motivated to learn English. According to McKay (1992), the spread of English is affected both by an individual's belief in the value of knowing the language for economic and educational betterment and by actual social and economic rewards. Both of the factors are important in providing economic incentives for learning English. This is true for both SUT and HAU students as they reported believing that knowing English will help them have a better opportunity in getting a good job. In the Thai context, a similar result was also reported in Shaw's study (1983). In addition, Adamson (2003) comments that many Thai students are motivated instrumentally to study to reap the rewards of better career prospects in

their life. They may not wish to undertake purely academic studies which would not lead to high-earning career, as noted by Redmont (1998) that, it is rare for students to take studies ‘cultivated for their own sake’ and intrinsic motivation for academic study would apparently be less common than instrumentally motivated study (Skehan, 1989). Likewise, in the Vietnamese context, a similar result was reported in Do Huy’s study (1999). Furthermore, in recent years, Vietnam has seen an explosion in the demand for English. With the move to a market economy by the Vietnamese government and the growth of international business as well as an increasing number of foreign tourists, knowledge of English has become a passport to a better-paid job not only in the tourism and hospitality industries, but also in many other enterprises (Do Huy, 1999). This indicates that knowing English is also an instrument for Vietnamese students for their career prospects after their graduation.

#### 4.4.6. Learner Beliefs about the Teacher’s Roles

In the context of the formal learning setting both at Suranaree University of Technology and Hanoi Agricultural University, the teacher is still seen as the centre of classroom learning. This is because students are still required to attend classes and have to pass the examination as required by the university curricula. However, students in both cultural contexts may see the roles of their teacher differently. What follows are the five belief items dealing with the teacher’s roles in the inventory.

**Table 4.12: Learner Beliefs about the Teacher’s Roles (%)**

<i>Item 4: The teacher should correct all the mistakes I make.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	79.8	13.5	6.7	$\chi^2 = 8.584$ p = .01
Vietnamese (HAU)	74.4	12.0	13.6	

**Table 4.12 (cont): Learner Beliefs about the Teacher's Roles (%)**

<i>Item 25: Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	16.9	20.6	62.2	$\chi^2 = 29.621$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	4.7	16.5	78.8	
<i>Item 26: Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	16.6	26.7	56.7	$\chi^2 = 7.953$ p = .022
Vietnamese (HAU)	24.2	28.3	47.5	
<i>Item 30: The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	83.8	9.4	6.8	$\chi^2 = 21.508$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	68.6	17.0	14.5	
<i>Item 32: The teacher should speak Thai/Vietnamese rather than English when teaching in class.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	12.5	20.1	67.4	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	17.9	15.1	67.0	
<i>Item 33: The teacher is the best resource person in class.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	66.1	20.8	13.2	$\chi^2 = 15.221$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	51.7	32.6	15.7	

The results of the chi-square tests above provided us with an overall picture of the significant differences in terms of beliefs about the teacher's roles reported by SUT and HAU students. Regarding the correction of their mistakes, a higher percentage of SUT students (79.8%) than HAU students (74.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher should correct all the mistakes they make while very small percentages of students at both universities (13.6% of HAU and 6.7% of SUT) reported their disagreements upon this respect. Another aspect of the teacher's roles reported here deals with students' attitude towards in learning English. The majority of SUT students (83.8%) have been influenced by their teacher whether they like or dislike

learning English. Regarding this matter, only 68.6% of HAU students agreed or strongly agreed. This attitude towards their teacher may also link to seeing their teacher as the best resource person in class, which 66.1% of SUT students but only 51.7% of HAU students believed. When taking the disagreements and doubts of students about this aspect into account, we found that nearly a third of HAU students while 20.8% of SUT students responded to the statement under these two categories.

With regard to learning English without a teacher, though SUT students seemed to have been influenced by their teacher more than HAU students, they are more optimistic about learning by themselves. This is evidenced by 24.2% of HAU students while 16.6% of SUT students agreed or strongly agreed that learning English is impossible for them. Lastly, more HAU than SUT students are confident about the ability of their teacher to teach them to speak English while more SUT students tend to think that only a native speaker of English can teach them to speak the language. Where both SUT and HAU students did not report a significant difference was where the target language was used as a medium of instruction. That is, more than half of the students reported their disagreement if their teacher speaks their native language while teaching in class. They prefer their teacher to use English rather than Thai or Vietnamese though a very small number of students expressed their agreement or doubt upon this issue.

Having examined the beliefs about the teacher's roles carefully, we have found that both SUT and HAU students reported holding generally different beliefs about the teacher's roles. In other words, the majority of SUT students agreed that they have been influenced by their teacher whether they like or dislike learning English and that their teacher should correct all the mistakes they make. They also believed that their teacher is the best resource person in class but they believed that a native speaker of

English rather than their teacher can teach them to speak the language and they can learn English without their teacher. On the other hand, only slightly more than half of HAU students agreed that they have been influenced by their teacher in terms of their motivation in learning English. Interestingly, nearly a third of them were not sure if their teacher is the best resource person in class. However, they believed that their teacher rather than a native speaker of English can teach them to speak the language and learning is impossible without the teacher.

In generally, SUT and HAU students perceived the roles of their teachers differently. One striking result which is worth noting here is the confidence in their teachers as the best resource person in class. Most SUT students do not question in this regard but HAU students do. A possible explanation may concern the students' satisfaction in class especially with the teacher's methods of teaching. Through the informal discussion with some students at HAU, the researcher found that many students felt that the focus of their classroom learning is still on grammar and translation while students want to learn more speaking and they also want their teacher to speak English rather than Vietnamese while teaching in class. This is consistent with the comment made by Pham Hoa (1999) that, for many teachers in Vietnam, the concept of adapting whatever aspect of the new methodology is appropriate to the Vietnamese context, and using whatever new technique seems to work with Vietnamese students has not been considered. In other words, the concept of a flexible, empirical approach to teaching has not been grasped. In addition, Giang (2000) points out that since the Vietnamese education system is deeply rooted in a traditional philosophy of learning and teaching, Vietnamese teachers and students are strongly affected by Confucianism as well as by French and Soviet education that focuses on academic study of grammar, literature, and in-depth knowledge of literary texts. In Vietnam even at the

tertiary level, learning and teaching are not much different from those at secondary school, where the teacher is the passer of knowledge and the students are the receivers of knowledge. Because learning is generally viewed as a process of accumulating knowledge, analyzing and memorizing ideas in books rather than of acquiring practical skills, Vietnamese students' language learning styles (Rao, 1996 cited in Pham Hoa, 1999), are characterized by two main features: meticulous attention to linguistic and stylistic details rather than communicative skills, and the use of translation as the indispensable learning strategy. This view may also be supported by Horwitz's (1987) suggestion that whenever instructional activities are not consistent with students' preconceived beliefs about learning English or fail to meet students' expectations, students can lose confidence in the teacher's instructional approach and their ultimate achievement can be limited.

Another point which is worth discussing deals with the influence of teachers on students' like or dislike of learning English. In this regard, SUT students are more influenced by their teachers than are HAU students. This phenomenon may be explained by the social value of Thai people where teachers are still seen as respectable people in the society and can be the students' role model. Through my observation at the university, it is the researcher's general practice to learn about students' expectation and attitude toward English before starting each of new classes. Students are asked to express their ideas about English. As all students are science-oriented, English seems to be something beyond their ability to cope with. However, this is not always true for every student. Very often, students find English very important but they do not like English. One of the reasons given apart from the difficulty of the language deals with their English teachers especially those at their primary or secondary schools. The comments about their English teachers are, for

example, too strict, not sympathetic, cruel or unkind. However, students who like English tend to make rather positive comments about their teachers such as they are kind, understanding, and helpful or have pleasant personalities. However, a systematic investigation needs carrying out to examine this issue.

#### 4.4.7. Learner Beliefs about the Usefulness of Out-of-Class Activities

It is becoming very common in both institutions that out-of-class activities have been one of the foci in language teaching for promoting learner autonomy among students. This can be evidenced that SUT has a very good self-access centre and HAU has a plan to set up a similar self-access centre. Moreover, a few extra-curricular activities which come in various forms such as English club, English Day/Night, or English camp, are regularly organised and students are encouraged to participate in those activities. These extra-curricular activities can be teacher-initiated, student-initiated, or teacher-student-initiated. Table 4.13 below gives us detail about the beliefs about the usefulness of out-of-class activities reported by SUT and HAU students.

**Table 4.13: Learner Beliefs about the Usefulness of Out-of-Class Activities (%)**

<i>Item 27: Extra-curricular activities enable me to learn English well.</i>				
Nationality	Strongly agree/agree	Not sure	Strongly disagree/disagree	Observed $\chi^2$ P < .05
Thai (SUT)	86.0	12.8	1.2	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	88.7	9.4	1.9	
<i>Item 34: Doing a self-study in English outside class is very helpful.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	81.4	16.0	2.6	Not Significant
Vietnamese (HAU)	85.3	11.9	2.8	
<i>Item 35: Extra-English classes are very helpful.</i>				
Thai (SUT)	60.2	31.1	8.7	$\chi^2 = 15.221$ p = .000
Vietnamese (HAU)	87.7	11.3	0.9	



The chi-square test results shown above revealed that the majority of both SUT and HAU students reported believing that extra-curricular activities and self-study outside their English class are very helpful for them. However, a significant difference was found between SUT and HAU students in their belief about the usefulness of extra classes, where 87.7 percent of the latter but only 60.2 percent of the former expressed their agreement upon this aspect. Examining further, we found that nearly a third of SUT students were doubtful if attending extra-English classes would be helpful for them. The issue about why these students are sceptical about this matter will be worth investigating further.

Generally, both SUT and HAU students are very positive about extra-curricular activities as well as doing self-study outside class. This is very important for language learning, since they meet their teacher about three hours a week, which is reportedly inadequate to master the language. Regarding this issue, Horwitz (1987) suggests that a large amount of language learning goes on outside the classroom and is therefore not subject to the teacher's direct intervention. Yet, how students control this learning is crucial to their success as language learners. Additionally, Victori and Lockhart (1995, p.225) conclude that if students develop or maintain misconceptions about their own learning, if they attribute undue importance to factors that are external to their action...they are not likely to adopt a responsible and active attitude in their approach to learning and may never become autonomous.

One interesting point of belief which has been found significantly different held by SUT and HAU students deals with attending extra-English classes. As mentioned earlier, SUT students reported being sceptical about or disagreeing upon the usefulness of going to extra classes. As discussed elsewhere (Intaraprasert, 2000, 2002), a lot of students reported that they did not have enough time for such an

activity; it was not helpful when they did exams; and in an extreme case, they reported being too lazy to do anything about learning English. In the Vietnamese context, a lot of students reported different reasons why extra-English classes have done a great deal to help them. As reported in Pham Hoa (1999), it may be useful to provide a picture of English classes at a university in Vietnam which does not seem to satisfy the students' need due to many constraints. Given students' passive learning habits and the teachers' belief that it is impossible to change these habits, language classrooms in Vietnam remain lecturer-oriented or teacher-centred, with the focus on grammatical items and translation. What the students attempt to do is to attend class, listen to the teacher's explanation, finish the assignments and pass the final examinations. The concept of learner autonomy or learner independence seems to be very new. Consequently, many students obtain good exam grades as a result of their knowledge of language structures, linguistic details as well as of linguistics and literature, but fail to communicate effectively in real life. As a result of the teacher-centred method of teaching, English classes at universities do not seem to provide an adequate environment for developing language skills. There are too many students in one class and teachers fail to create tasks that are engaging enough for students to participate in. As mentioned above, for fear of being unable to control the chaotic, noisy students as well as of the challenge to the structure of the teacher-student relationship, the teacher just reads a question in a textbook and invites an individual student to answer it, instead of assigning pair or group learning activities. The interaction is usually one way, from the teacher to the student and back to the teacher. This teaching methodology fails to create a favourable learning atmosphere that allows the students to communicate freely. A student in the ELT extended program in Dong Ha reported that many of his classmates and himself did not have even one

chance to speak English in class for a whole semester, simply because their teacher never called them. To make matters worse, learners of English in many parts of Vietnam, except for the big cities, cannot get much input outside the classroom, because the chance to encounter English-speaking people is rare. The lack of free communication in the classroom and the poor input outside the class may account for the fact that many students, despite their good linguistic analytical skills, are at a loss when they have to communicate with speakers of English from other countries. Many of her students say that they do not feel that English teaching in college can prepare them for future jobs. Asked whether they were concerned about their future, one student replied:

“Many of my friends who have graduated say that the reality of working directly with foreign speakers of English will provide us with the required English skills that college cannot, and that a year working in a good English speaking environment can benefit us much more than the three years at college in terms of skills development.”

It is not surprising to see a number of HAU students preparing themselves for their extra-English class after they finish their regular classes. Students who regularly attend extra-English classes offered both on and off campus find it advantageous to their language learning.

#### **4.5. Summary**

A comparison of beliefs about learning English reported by SUT and HAU students has been made and I have highlighted and discussed some significant differences in the particular beliefs about learning English which were reported being held by students from two different cultural contexts. We have found some differences and similarities in beliefs held by both SUT and HAU students. The beliefs have been grouped under seven different groupings which include learner beliefs about: 1) the difficulty of learning English; 2) language learning aptitude; 3) the nature of language

learning; 4) learning and communication strategies; 5) motivations and expectations; 6) teacher-reliance; and 7) the usefulness of out-of-class activities. Based on the significant differences found among the beliefs about learning English held by Thai and Vietnamese students, it would seem that cultural backgrounds of the learners has a strong relationship with learner beliefs in nearly every aspect. As suggested by Rifkin (2000), the reader must, however, be cautioned against jumping to unwarranted conclusions regarding the role this factor (cultural background) might play in shaping beliefs of learners or as a predictor of learner beliefs. It is entirely possible that factors other than learners' cultural background which are 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. The next chapter (Chapter 5) will summarise the main findings of the present investigation in response to the research questions presented in Chapter 3 including implications for the teaching and learning of English for students in Thailand and Vietnam. The contributions of the present investigation to the related areas are preceded by the presentation of proposals for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

**SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, PROPOSALS FOR  
FUTURE RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR  
TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR STUDENTS  
IN THAILAND AND VIETNAM**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR STUDENTS IN THAILAND AND VIETNAM**

#### **5.1. Introduction and Purpose of the Chapter**

The main purpose of this last chapter is to present the principal findings of the present investigation in response to the research questions posed earlier in Chapter 3. This is followed by a discussion of the implications arising from the research for the teaching of English to students in Thailand and Vietnam. Then, the contributions of the present investigation to related areas are considered. Finally, the limitations of the present investigation and proposals for future research are presented.

In Chapter 4, the researcher has systematically attempted to identify the discrete learner beliefs about learning English reported holding by 344 science-oriented students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand, and 319 of those at Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam. Significant differences in learner beliefs about learning English by students at both institutions have also been taken into consideration. Arising out of the questionnaire for the present investigation are significant findings in the degrees of learner beliefs about learning English. In order to help the reader understand certain similarities as well as apparently significant differences in association with cultural contexts, the researcher has suggested reasons for them. What follows in the subsequent section is a summary of the findings in response to the research questions which are organised in the order as presented in Chapter 3.

## 5.2. Summary of the Research Findings

The present investigation has reported on the research findings of learner beliefs about learning English held by SUT and HAU students. These findings also form responses to the research questions and are discussed further below.

### 5.2.1. What are the degrees of the discrete learner belief items about language learning reported being held by science-oriented students learning English at the tertiary level in Thailand and Vietnam?

In response to the first research question, the research findings demonstrate that the major findings can be classified into three different groups according to the three collapsed categories regarding the degrees of agreements, disagreements and doubts. As indicated in Chapter 4, the discrete belief items from the questionnaire are presented in three different categories: 1) 'Agreeing'; 2) 'Not Sure'; and 3) 'Disagreeing'. To determine the degree of agreements, disagreements, and doubts, the different criteria are applied.

1. Any belief item which has 50% or more of the responses by the subjects in either '4' or '5' will fall in the 'Agreeing' category.
2. Any belief item which has 30% or more of the responses by the subjects in '3' will fall in the 'Not Sure' category.
3. Any belief item which has 30% or more of the responses by the subjects in either '1' or '2' will fall in the 'Disagreeing' category.

With respect to the first criterion, it was found that SUT students reported their agreements upon twenty-two out of thirty-five belief items while HAU students reportedly expressed their agreements upon twenty-four out of thirty-five belief items. It is interesting to point out that the first four beliefs reported by both SUT and HAU students are exactly in the same ranking though the percentages are different. These beliefs are: 1) *It is important to repeat and practise a lot (97.4% of SUT students and*

99.0% of HAU students agree upon this belief.); 2) *I want to learn to speak English well (92.7% of SUT and 97.5% of HAU students believe in this item.); 3) If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job (90.1% of SUT and 96.6% of HAU students are positive about this item.); and 4) It is important to practise with cassettes or video or other mass media (89.8% of SUT and 92.8% of HAU students agree or strongly agree to such a belief).*

With regard to the second criteria, we found that SUT students were doubtful mostly about their ability in learning English while HAU students were doubtful about their ability or their teachers. Generally, SUT and HAU students were doubtful about similar issues. Examples are 1) *'Vietnamese students are good at learning English./Thai students are good at learning English'*; 2) *'I have a special ability for learning English'*; 3) *'Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English'*. However, SUT but not HAU students were doubtful about: 1) *'I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well'*; 2) *'I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet'*; 3) *'It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it'*; and 4) *'Extra-English classes are very helpful'*. Unlike SUT students, HAU students were doubtful about: 1) *'The teacher is the best resource person in class'*; and 2) *'Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules'*.

Lastly, when taking the third criterion into consideration, the results of the analysis revealed that both SUT and HAU students shared similar ideas in terms of what they disagree or strongly disagree upon. That is to say, there are only two belief items which SUT students did not agree upon but HAU students did or were doubtful about. These beliefs are: 1) *'Females are better than their male counterparts at learning*



English'; and 2) 'I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet'. SUT and HAU students commonly disagree upon the following:

1. *Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly;*
2. *The teacher should speak Thai/Vietnamese rather than English when teaching in class;*
3. *I study English only to pass the examination;*
4. *Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English;*
5. *Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me;*
6. *English is a difficult language;*
7. *I have a special ability for learning English; and*
8. *Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.*

**5.2.2. Do the degrees of the learner beliefs about language learning vary significantly according to the cultural context they belong to? If they do, what are the main patterns of variation?**

In response to the second research question, an attempt to examine variation in learner beliefs about learning English as presented in Chapter 4. As found in the belief questionnaire responded to by 344 SUT students and 319 HAU students, the findings based on results of the chi-square tests in the seven different categories in relation to cultural contexts can be summarised as follows:

**1. Learner Beliefs about the Difficulty of Learning English**

Significant differences found in learner beliefs regarding this aspect held by SUT and HAU students include: *Item 5: 'I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well'; Item 20: 'It is easier to speak English than to understand it'; and Item 29: 'It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it'*. No significant differences were found in terms of the difficulty of the English language.

**2. Learner Beliefs about the Language Learning Aptitude**

Significant differences found in learner beliefs regarding this aspect held by SUT and HAU students include: *Item 2: 'Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English'; Item 10: 'Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English'; Item 14: 'I have a special ability for learning English'; and Item*

17: *'Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English'*. No significant differences were found regarding the language learning of children and adults or the ability of people from their countries in learning English.

### **3. Learner Beliefs about the Nature of Learning English**

Significant differences found in learner beliefs regarding the nature of learning English held by SUT and HAU students include: *Item 8: 'It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English'*; and *Item 15: 'Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary'*. No significant differences were found regarding the following discrete belief items: *Item 11: 'It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country'*; *Item 18: 'Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules'*; *Item 22: 'Learning English is different from learning other academic subjects'*; or *Item 23: 'Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Thai/Vietnamese or from Thai/Vietnamese into English'*.

### **4. Learner Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies**

Significant differences found in learner beliefs regarding learning and communication strategies held by SUT and HAU students include: *Item 7: 'It is important to speak English with an excellent accent'*; *Item 9: 'Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly'*; *Item 12: 'I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet'*; and *Item 13: 'It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English'*. No significant differences were found regarding the following discrete belief items: *Item 16: 'It is important to repeat and practise a lot'*; or *Item 21: 'It is important to practise with cassettes or videos or other mass media'*.

## **5. Learner Beliefs about Motivations and Expectations**

Regarding learner beliefs about motivations and expectations held by SUT and HAU students, the results of the chi-square tests revealed that significant differences found in this respect include: *Item 24: 'If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job'*; *Item 28: 'I want to learn to speak English well'*; and *Item 31: 'I study English only to pass the examination'*. However, no significant difference in belief regarding learning English in order to make friends with foreigners was found.

## **6. Learner Beliefs about Teacher's Roles**

Taking learner beliefs about the teacher's roles held by SUT and HAU students into account, the results of the chi-square tests revealed that significant differences found in this respect include: *Item 4: 'Teacher should correct all the mistakes I make'*; *Item 25: 'Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English'*; *Item 26: 'Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me'*; *Item 30: 'The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English'*; and *Item 33: 'The teacher is the best resource person in class'*. However, no significant difference in belief regarding whether the teacher should speak their mother tongue while teaching English in class was found.

## **7. Learner Beliefs about the Usefulness of Out-of-Class Activities**

Significant difference found in learner beliefs regarding the usefulness of out-of-class activities held by SUT and HAU students deals with the usefulness of extra-English classes. However, no significant differences were found regarding the extra-curricular activities or learning autonomy.

### **5.3. The Implications of the Research Findings for the Teaching and Learning of English for Students in Thailand and Vietnam**

The research findings summarised earlier in Chapter 4 demonstrate that learner beliefs about learning English play a vital role in enhancing students' language learning. As a result, language teachers should be aware that beliefs about learning English held by students are important for their students in language learning, in this case English.

Arising out of the research findings, both SUT and HAU students differed in holding certain beliefs as well as sharing the same beliefs, disbeliefs or doubts about learning English. One of the results revealed that both SUT and HAU students believe that learning English is mostly a matter of learning new vocabulary items. With this regard, Horwitz (1987) suggests that if students hold such a belief, they tend to spend more time or expend much effort in memorising vocabulary lists at the expense of learning the other language skills. So, teachers should correct students' understanding or discourage some learning strategies in order to maximise the learner's efficiency in learning English. Another belief held by SUT students is they were not convinced that they would eventually learn to speak the language very well. This indicates that students feel hopeless in mastering the language. As a result, they may become discouraged and put only minimal efforts into their language study. In this case, teachers should find ways to help, encourage and make students see that it is not impossible for them to learn.

Another belief which should be pointed out here deals with 'an excellent accent' when speaking English. The result shows that a lot of HAU students hold such a belief. In reality, acquiring a native-like accent is not impossible, but in a context like Thailand or Vietnam, students have very little exposure in the language use, so the chance to be native-like when speaking English is probably slim. Hence, students should be encouraged to pay more attention to the pronunciation rather than accent. Horwitz

(1987) suggests that their over-concern with the accent will probably inhibit their communication attempts.

When taking the culture of people whose native language is English, teachers should raise their students' awareness about the culture as it is inseparable. As suggested by Wandel (2003), teachers should also develop students' intercultural sensitivity. In other words, students should be allowed to get to know a number of different cultural outlooks and perspectives. They ought to be provided with tools to analyse fundamental aspects of cultures. This is because culture awareness and the learning of a second culture can only aid the attaining of second language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993). In addition, foreign language learners are often perceived to display inappropriate language behaviours and often are not even aware that they do (Thomas, 1983, 1984). Hence, teachers should also be aware of not only accuracy and fluency, but also appropriateness in language use when teaching. Following Wenden (1987, p.188), 'the better we [language learners] can understand the cultural context which gives rise to the language we are trying to learn, the more likely we are to come to understand the essential differences between the way in which that language is used and our own.' Apart from this, Baker (2003) supports the importance of culture and language teaching and learning that culture and language are inexorably linked and thus cannot be separated. This indicates that teaching English without teaching culture is impossible. Whether culture is consciously or unconsciously part of the teachers' pedagogic aims the transmission of culture is unavoidable.

Another aspect which has been suggested in the literature deals with teachers' and learners' expectations. As in any classroom, there are certain expectations of language lessons. Both teachers and learners have expectations about the content and the method of foreign language teaching. Often their expectations are not explicitly

articulated (Cortazzi, 1990). Further, learners from different cultures may have different beliefs about what constitutes good teaching and if their beliefs are mismatched with their teachers', they may feel frustrated. With regard to this issue, Richards and Lockhart (1994, p.35) suggest that '...differences between teachers' and learners' beliefs reinforce the importance of clarifying to learners the assumptions about what is useful to focus on in a language lesson or accommodating classroom practices to match them more closely to students' expectations. The consequences of not doing so are likely to be misunderstanding and mistrust on the part of both teachers and learners.' Therefore, teachers and students should spend sometime discussing their beliefs in order to prevent misunderstanding and mistrust between them. In addition, Williams and Burden (1997) supports that learner beliefs about language learning are an important factor and they are changeable. Language teachers and learners should discuss misconceptions with one another by providing knowledge and examples concerning the process of language learning. This may be because students' beliefs about language learning are often based on limited knowledge and/or experience (Horwitz, 1987).

Last but not least, both SUT and HAU students believe that extra-curricular activities and self-study are very helpful in learning English. Regarding these two respects, their institutions should provide more out-of-class activities so that students can gain benefits from taking part in such activities as well as providing some materials or places for students to do their self-study outside class.

#### **5.4. Contributions of the Present Investigation**

As previously seen in Chapter 2, there has been no research work on beliefs about learning English carried out with Thai or Vietnamese students in no matter what aspect. The major contribution of the present investigation is a new cross-cultural

investigation, especially in Southeast Asia where research on this aspect is still badly needed. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the benefits of this investigation is that teachers can make use of the findings to improve their classroom teaching. In addition, they can introduce the appropriate language learning strategies in association with learner beliefs about learning English to their students so that their students may be able to improve their language learning in general or manage their own learning processes so as to be more successful or productive.

### **5.5. Limitations of the Present Investigation and Proposals for Future Research**

The present investigation has been valid and valuable in addressing the primary research questions, which are to identify the degree of learner beliefs about learning English held by SUT and HAU students and to examine the relationships between learners' beliefs and cultural backgrounds of the students. However, in carrying out the research, certain limitations have been apparent, and areas for possible future research have been discerned. Looking first at the limitation issue, the researcher would wish to note critically that:

- Formal student interviews as well as classroom observations, rather than informal discussions with students and members of staff, should have been included as part of the research especially in the Vietnamese context. These two methods could have revealed or provided the researcher with a clearer picture as an explanation for certain apparently significant differences;
- The questionnaire should have been organised in accordance with the categories discussed. This would have been useful for the researcher in terms of providing an open-ended question as the present questionnaire is by no means comprehensive. In doing so, the researcher might have discovered more of the learner beliefs regarding each aspect;

- The last limitation has to do with the generalisability of the findings. The results reported here pertain to the groups investigated, i.e. students learning English at Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand, and those at Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam; extrapolations to other populations must remain hypothetical.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the research is nonetheless valid, but the researcher acknowledges that some areas might justify further research. These areas could include the following:

1. As shown in the review of related literature, it can be seen that a number of research works examined learner beliefs in association with use of language learning strategies, and anxiety in the language classroom. The researcher still sees there is a need to replicate research on learner beliefs by examining such variables with learners in contexts other than the USA, Japan, China and Korea.
2. It has been mentioned several times that teachers' beliefs in language learning have played an important role in classroom practices. It is important to relate teachers' beliefs to their students' in order that they will be in tune with each other in terms of classroom practices.
3. Learner beliefs by larger groups of students learning in other fields should be also investigated.
4. Lastly, since students are likely to view their language teachers as experts in language matters and teachers presumably convey through their classroom practices many of their own assumptions about language learning, it is therefore interesting to examine to what degree teachers' beliefs might influence those of their students.



## **5.6. Conclusion**

The present investigation has been conducted in a data-based, systematic, and non-judgmental descriptive manner. It has contributed to the field of research on learner beliefs about learning English in terms of cross-cultural perspective. Again, based on the significant differences found among the beliefs about learning English held by Thai and Vietnamese students presented earlier, it would seem that cultural backgrounds of the learners has a strong relationship with learner beliefs in nearly every investigated aspect for the present study. As suggested by Rifkin (2000), the reader must, however, be cautioned against jumping to unwarranted conclusions regarding the role this factor (cultural background) might play in shaping the beliefs of learners or as a predictor of learner beliefs. It is entirely possible that factors other than learners' cultural background, which are 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 remain to be further investigated. These factors may include learner's previous language learning experience, language proficiency, anxiety in foreign language classroom, learning circumstances, or teachers' beliefs. One of the major contributions of the present investigation has been a new cross-cultural investigation, especially in Southeast Asia where research in this respect is still badly needed. Lastly, the researcher for the present investigation has suggested some implications arising out of the research findings for the teaching and learning English to Thai and Vietnamese students. Limitations of the present investigation and some proposals for future research have also been put forward. The researcher believes that with appropriate instruments for eliciting learner beliefs about learning English, as well as a research design as presented in Chapter 3, a researcher can gain further insights into learner beliefs and how students go about learning

English both inside and outside of the class. It is worth noting that the replication of the research by taking the formerly investigated variables in association with learner beliefs or other variables, for example, teachers' beliefs and non-science oriented students learning English in different contexts, could shed some light on new aspects of research in the field.

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# **APPENDIX**

## Questionnaire

### Beliefs About Learning English

**Instructions:** The Beliefs About Learning English Questionnaire (BALEQ) is designed to gather information about what you believe about learning English. On the following pages, you will find statements related to learning English. Read each of the given statements about 'beliefs about learning English' in the questionnaire carefully. Then choose one of the given responses for each statement which is true about your beliefs about learning English by putting a cross (X) for each statement. The five responses are: *strongly agree*; *agree*; *not sure*; *disagree*; and *strongly disagree*. Please also note that there are no right or wrong answers. Before you start the questionnaire, please provide the background information below.

- 1) You are: \_\_\_\_\_ Male  
                  \_\_\_\_\_ Female
- 2) You have been learning English for about \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- 3) Your major field of study is \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) You perceive your ability in English as \_\_\_\_\_ good/very good  
  \_\_\_\_\_ fair  
  \_\_\_\_\_ poor/ need improvement

**Example:**

Belief Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0: It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.		X			

Belief Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1: It is easier for children than adults to learn English.					
2: Some students have a special ability which helps them learn English.					
3: English is a difficult language.					
4: The teacher should correct all the mistakes I make.					
5: I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.					
6: Thai/Vietnamese students are good at learning English.					
7: It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.					
8: It is necessary to know the cultures of people who speak English as their native language when learning English.					
9: Students should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly.					
10: Students who are good at mathematics are not good at learning English.					
11: It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country.					
12: I enjoy practising English with foreigners I meet.					
13: It is O.K. to guess if you do not know the meaning of a word in English.					
14: I have a special ability for learning English.					
15: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary.					
16: It is important to repeat and practise a lot.					
17: Females are better than their male counterparts at learning English.					
18: Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.					

Belief Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19: I would like to learn English in order to make friends with foreigners.					
20: It is easier to speak English than to understand it.					
21: It is important to practise with cassettes or videos or other mass media.					
22: Learning English is different from learning other academic subjects.					
23: Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from English into Thai/Vietnamese or from Thai/Vietnamese into English.					
24: If my English is good, I will have a better opportunity to get a job.					
25: Only a native speaker of English can teach me to speak English.					
26: Without a teacher, learning English is impossible for me.					
27: Extra-curricular activities enable me to learn English well.					
28: I want to learn to speak English well.					
29: It is easier to read and write English than speak and understand it.					
30: The teacher is an important factor to make me like or dislike learning English.					
31: I study English only to pass the examination.					
32: The teacher should speak Thai/Vietnamese rather than English when teaching in class.					
33: The teacher is the best resource person in class.					
34: Doing a self-study in English outside class is very helpful.					
35: Extra-English classes are very helpful.					

☺ Thank you for your cooperation ☺

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**





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