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Manifestations of FLCAS and BALLI among Iranian Kurdish-Speaking Technical College Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the interpretation of questions containing *wh*- islands by non-native speakers of Spanish using a situation interpretation task. Participants were asked to read a series of situations and respond as accurately as possible to a question containing a *wh*- island with two *wh*- phrases; one fronted, [+direct] and one embedded, [+indirect]. The results show that where NSs only allow for a short-distance reading of the fronted *wh*- word, NNS also allow for the fronted *wh*- question to have a long-distance reading, disallowed for native speakers in all stages of acquisition, and to respond to the medial *wh*- question, disallowed for adult NSs but allowed in Spanish child L1.

Keywords FLCAS, BALLI, EFL, anxiety, beliefs, Kurdish-speaking, Iranian

1. Introduction

As a wide-reaching used language and a criterion to the acquisition of a wealth of knowledge, the English language has become an important subject in the educational systems of counties around the world. A thought-provoking question in learning this international language particularly in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) settings is why some people can learn it at once and without difficulty while others come to nothing at this undertaking (Aydin & Zengin, 2008). To tackle this issue, a review of studies on language learning and teaching demonstrates that researchers have probed into a wide range of variables that may originate from neurological to psychological, social, cognitive and affective domains. In this regard, language aptitude, learning styles, language learning strategies, self-esteem, inhibition, motivation, attitudes and beliefs, as well as anxiety have been taken into consideration among other factors (Brown, 2007, p. 161; Aydin & Zengin, 2008).

Amongst the highlighted factors affecting the success or failure in learning a language, recently, language learning anxiety as a well-documented psychological construct (Zheng, 2008) has been under scrutiny by loads of studies (see e.g. Gnaschow & Sparks, 1996; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2006; Cubukcu, 2007; Atef-Vahid & Kashani, 2011; Serraj & Noordin). Language learning anxiety has been defined by Horwitz (2001) as a multifaceted concept comprised of self-perceptions, feelings, behaviors and specifically beliefs related to learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. This complex concept can be of four components (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986) including communication anxiety (learner's fear of

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communicating with other people), test anxiety (learner's fear of exams, quizzes, and other activities employed to evaluate their competence and performance), negative evaluation anxiety (learner's worry about how others view them), and anxiety in the English classroom (learner's fear inside the classroom context) (Zheng, 2008; Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). The merging of these components thus leads to the creation of anxiety in language learners (Brown, 2007; Zheng, 2008; Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). In addition to the aforementioned components, regarding anxiety as a factor affecting language learning, Young (1991) identified six interrelated potential sources from three aspects including the learner, the teacher, and the instructional practice. He claimed that language anxiety is caused by personal and interpersonal anxiety, learner's beliefs about language learning, instructor's beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom producers, and language testing.

During the last two decades, research interest in language learning has been inclined to the examination of student-centered learning and learners' individual characteristics (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) and growing studies in this line have led to a particular focus on learners' beliefs (Altan, 2006; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007). Therefore, in the context of language pedagogy, beliefs as metacognitive knowledge (Oz, 2007) have been defined as common assumptions that learners hold about themselves as learners, about the nature of language learning, the learning process, and the factors influencing their learning (Wenden, 1999).

Evidence from a growing number of published research and scholarship in the last two decades in this stream from the learners' perspective demonstrates that the belief system of language learners plays a decisive role in their success and failure in language learning (Bernat, & Gvozdenko, 2005; Berant, 2008). As well, such studies reveal that learners' beliefs about their own capacity and personal models and processes are much more important than universally accepted theories of learning, and some psychometric measures or individual difference factors such as intelligence or aptitude (Ellis, 2008; Bernat, 2008) and it is argued that belief systems are influential because they raise learners' consciousness and shape their attitudes towards language learning, learning strategies and policies (Buyukyazi, 2010). Therefore, understanding learner beliefs is essential, since they can have a facilitative or detrimental effect on learning and the way learners feel about, approach, and act upon a language (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005).

Therefore, it can be concluded that an awareness of learners' beliefs is central to language pedagogy because according to Ellis (2008), beliefs shape the way learners set about language and language learning process and product. In addition, knowledge of learners' multidimensional beliefs about language and language learning that are under the influence of many variables including past positive or negative learning experiences, cultural background and context, and numerous individual differences as well as personal factors (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Oz, 2007) may provide language teachers and educators as well as curriculum designers with a better understanding and awareness of differing types of learners, their strategies, orientations, and expectations that will have an impact on their

learning practices (Horwitz, 1988, p.283). Consequently, it is argued that teachers can make more informed choices about teaching and learning processes (Bernat, & Gvozdenko, 2005), plan appropriate language instruction (Horwitz, 1999), and adopt the best approaches and techniques for teaching English based on the belief system of learners.

Over the past two decades, many researchers have explored language learning beliefs in various studies (e.g. Altan, 2006; Bernat, 2006; Buyukyazi, 2010; Oz, 2007; Man-fat, 2008; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Yazici & Tan, 2010;), covering varying groups of learners in different learning settings (e.g. in Turkey, China, Hungary, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia). Iran, among other EFL contexts, provides an interesting sociolinguistic setting for a study on language learning beliefs. Like other EFL settings, English stands as a foreign language taught as a compulsory subject at Iranian high schools up to colleges and higher education institutions. Learning English has always been a great challenge for Iranian students due to the limited contact with target-language speakers and the dearth of opportunities to practice English in their daily and professional lives. College students, exposed to English in their classrooms, need to get General English (GE) and ESP courses during their studies to fulfill the requirements of their studies. Most of the learners express their fears and a feeling of uneasiness against learning EFL and ESP. The feeling of anxiety can provoke many problems in the acquisition, retention and production of the language which ultimately affects their grades, achievement and future studies (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Cubukcu, 2007).

There has still been scarcity of empirical research both internationally and locally that investigate language learners' beliefs in unique contexts. Yet only a few of studies have explored Iranian technical college students' beliefs (except a few recently published studies limited in scope to monolingual Persian-speaking EFL and ESP learners (e.g. Abedinia, Rahimi, Zare-ee, 2011; Ghabanchi and Meidani, 2012; Ghavamnia, Kassaian and Dabaghi, 2011; Mohebi and Khodadady, Khonamri, 2009). Therefore, due to the paucity of studies on learners' belief system and their levels and extremes of language learning anxiety in Iran it would be interesting to explore the language learning beliefs of a growing minority of Iranian Kurdish-speaking college students learning EFL and provide a preliminary description of the likely relationship between learners' beliefs and EFL learning anxiety in a region outside the circle of English world in order to complement the lines of research and studies in this regard.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The present descriptive study aims to investigate the levels and extremes of EFL learning anxiety in light of learners' beliefs toward language learning among a convenience sample of Iranian Kurdish-speaking technical college students. Due to the rise in orientations towards student-centered language learning, learners' beliefs about language learning will be of utmost importance among other factors in the present exploratory study. Because learner's beliefs toward language learning shape their thinking, they could be an effective factor in learner's anxiety levels and extremes. Reviewing the

related literature reveals that although great deals of researches have been conducted on language learning anxiety and beliefs toward EFL, no research, to my best knowledge, has examined anxiety in and beliefs about EFL learning among Kurdish-speaking technical college undergraduates in an Iranian context. Therefore, to contribute to the previous research in this regard and provide a better understanding of EFL learning anxiety and learners' beliefs in Iran, the current study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the manifestations of EFL learning anxiety among Iranian Kurdish-speaking technical college undergraduates?
2. What beliefs do Iranian Kurdish-speaking technical college undergraduates hold about EFL?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Adopting a descriptive-analytic design, the study was conducted at five randomly selected state-run and private technical colleges in Ilam in western Iran. The participants of this study consisted of 191 undergraduate students majoring in different disciplines including Computer Sciences, Architecture, Construction, and Electronics. Using an ethnicity and bilingualism background questionnaire, they were screened-out for their history of bilingualism out of 342 students at these technical colleges to meet the requirements and validity of the study. The age range of the participants varied from 17 to 23 with the mean of 19.4 years. The bilingual Kurdish-speaking EFL learners all had at least 1 year of experience of English learning at private language schools and high schools. During the administration of the questionnaires, the enrolled participants were taking General English for technical college student courses.

2.2 Instrument

A self-designed bilingualism background questionnaire including age, gender, birthplace, native language and second language, as well as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), as the most well-known instruments according to a review of previous studies, designed and validated by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and (Horwitz, 1988) respectively, were employed to obtain data for the current study.

The FLCAS as a systematic 33-item survey questionnaire is categorized by the causes of anxiety that would be prevalent among EFL learners in different learning contexts. The factors are identified as communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and anxiety in the English classroom. Another survey instrument, BALLI is a popular self-administered 34-item Likert-type questionnaire classifying beliefs under themes including language learning aptitude, language learning difficulty, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. Both questionnaires were translated and validated for the ease of responding into Persian (the second but the formal educational

language of bilingual Kurdish-speaking EFL learners in the present context) in order not to cause lack of understanding or misinterpretation.

2.3 Procedure

At first, the purpose of the current study was explained to the EFL university teachers at technical colleges. Then, they were asked to get the convenient schedule of their class sessions as to the administration of the bilingualism background as well as the FLCAS and BALLI questionnaires to the target Kurdish-speaking undergraduate students. To ensure that the participants had no problem in understanding the questionnaire, the questionnaires were translated from English version into Persian version as the formal educational and academic language of the bilingual Kurdish-speaking students in Ilam in Iran. Then, in order to assure the validity of the questionnaires and to consider more cautiously the influence of cross-culturally conceptual transfer of the items, the questionnaires were given to two experts on translation studies to evaluate their validity.

Before conducting the main study, a pilot test of the questionnaires were also administered among 18 Kurdish-speaking EFL learners chosen from the same population in which the internal reliability of the Persian version of the questionnaires were found to have alpha coefficients of 0.83 and 0.79 respectively. To collect the necessary data, the questionnaires were then distributed among the participants to complete them.

Once all the data were completed, the questionnaires were classified, tallied and tabulated. SPSS 20.00 software was employed to analyze the data in the forms of percentages, means and standard deviations for each item and component in FLCAS and BALLI to see the general situation of Iranian bilingual Kurdish-speaking learners' streams of beliefs as well as the levels and extremes of EFL anxiety.

1. Findings and discussion

To answer the first question of the study, the findings of the FLCAS were delineated. The results of the FLCAS portrayed a general picture of Iranian Kurdish-speaking technical college students' language learning anxiety levels and severity in an academic context. Following previous studies (e.g. Horwitz et al., 1986; Chan, 2004; Lucas et., 2011), responses to all the FLCAS items were reported in Table 1 in the form of percentages, means and standard deviations. All the percentages (rounded to the nearest whole number) referred to the number of EFL learners who were in (complete) agreement or disagreement with the FLCAS statements indicative of language learning anxiety. Additionally, means and standard deviations of the FLCAS were presented by items for further analysis.

FLCAS Items	SA* %	A %	N %	DA %	SD %	Ms	SDs
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.	43.2	20.0	14.7	10.9	11.2	5.87	16.87
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	10.5	18.8	9.4	38.2	19.9	5.91	16.86

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.	23.0	30.4	12.6	16.8	15.2	4.71	13.89
4. I am afraid when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class.	23.6	29.4	12.6	18.8	13.6	5.30	13.80
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.	31.4	24.6	13.1	20.4	6.8	5.98	18.23
6. In English classes, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson.	10.5	22.5	17.8	27.2	18.3	6.72	18.09
7. I think that my classmates' English is better than mine.	43.8	20.1	12.0	13.6	10.5	4.36	12.05
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my class.	14.7	10.6	17.3	30.4	23.5	6.50	18.13
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	32.5	37.2	12.0	10.5	5.8	4.20	13.94
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.	36.6	25.1	12.0	12.0	12.6	3.89	12.12
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class.	13.6	13.6	24.6	24.1	19.9	7.05	19.30
12. In English class, I am so nervous that I forget what I know.	16.8	35.6	13.6	20.4	7.9	8.19	22.53
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	28.3	23.6	15.2	13.1	18.8	4.30	9.86
14. I will not be nervous when speaking with native English speakers.	10.5	18.8	24.1	27.2	18.3	4.24	9.85
15. I get depressed when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	37.2	27.2	7.3	18.3	8.4	4.43	12.02
16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.	15.2	37.2	8.4	23.0	16.2	2.87	1.36
17. I often feel like not going to my English class.	6.3	8.4	11.5	37.2	35.1	5.37	11.91
18. I feel confident when I speak in English class.	20.9	5.8	19.9	15.7	33.0	7.20	20.49
19. I am afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake I make.	11.5	22.5	15.2	31.9	17.3	4.71	12.01
20. I feel my heart pounding when I am going to be asked to speak in English class.	25.1	24.1	16.8	18.8	13.1	4.71	13.89

21. The more I prepare for an English test, the more confused I get.	11.0	11.0	16.2	33.0	27.7	4.56	9.82
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	19.9	22.0	19.4	27.2	8.4	5.83	16.86
23. I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I.	22.0	34.1	9.9	14.6	13.6	8.54	22.44
24. I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students.	40.2	22.2	12.0	15.1	10.5	4.98	13.83
25. English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.	17.3	26.2	15.2	28.8	8.9	6.37	18.15
26. I feel tenser and have more pressure in English class than in other classes.	11.0	14.7	16.2	34.6	22.0	4.92	11.98
27. I get nervous when I speak in my English class.	5.8	13.6	19.4	38.2	20.9	5.56	13.74
28. Before English class, I feel confident and relaxed.	18.3	30.4	23.0	16.8	6.8	7.15	20.50
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.	17.8	29.8	18.3	25.7	5.2	5.72	16.88
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.	16.2	23.0	26.2	24.6	6.8	5.84	16.86
31. I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English.	20.9	34.1	6.2	21.5	14.7	5.36	15.45
32. I feel easy when native English speakers are with me.	11.5	28.8	30.4	20.4	5.2	6.30	18.15
33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	23.6	33.0	16.8	16.2	7.3	5.52	16.92

* SA= Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, DA=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, Ms=Means, SDs= Standard Deviations

Table 1. The percentages, means and standard deviations of the FLCAS among Iranian bilingual non-English-major undergraduate students

Overall analysis of the obtained results from the percentages revealed the most anxiety-provoking causes spelt out by Iranian Kurdish-speaking students' responses to the FLCAS items. In answer to the research questions of the present study, the findings were delineated and discussed. As a result, the extremely anxious situations according to the findings were as follows:

Exploration of the responses to the first component of the FLCAS items, communication anxiety, revealed that these Iranian undergraduate participants are in (complete) agreement (64%) towards being unsure of themselves when they are speaking in English classrooms (Item 1). This was also true for Item 24 (I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students) with 62.4% of students endorsing feeling shy while speaking in English in front of peers. The respondents strongly agreed or agreed with such statements "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class" (item 9, 70%); "I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says" (Item 29, 48%) and "I feel easy when native English speakers are with me" (Item 32, 40%). Generally, in consonance with previous studies on language learning anxiety in Iranian and Pakistani EFL learning contexts (see e.g. Nahavandi and Mukundan, 2013; Awan et al., 2010, respectively), the findings indicated that communication via the third language they were learning particularly speaking in front of others, that is peers, as well as mutual communication with their EFL teachers in the English classrooms is one the most serious types of anxiety. Interestingly, such a level of communication anxiety was depicted in their responses to item 14 (46%) and 18 (49%) "I will not be nervous when speaking with native English speakers" and "I feel confident when I speak in English class", respectively. In response to these two statements, the bilingual respondents spelt out that they will feel nervous if they have communications with native speakers (Item 18, 49%).

The Kurdish-speaking undergraduate students' responses to the items of the second FLCAS component, test anxiety, were also estimated. Analysis of the five items classified under the component of text anxiety demonstrated Iranian Kurdish-speaking EFL learners' anxiety towards being tested in English as the third language they were learning. The students strongly disagreed and disagreed with four items including "I don't worry about making mistakes in English class" (Item 2, 59%); "I am usually at ease during tests in my class" (Item 8, 54%); "I worry about the consequences of failing my English class" (Item 10, 62%); and "I am afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake I make" (Item 19, 50%). Such findings showed that the students experience a high level of anxiety before administering a test in the third language, during the test and performance in EFL, and after the test administration. These bilingual L3 learners were test-anxious either because of undue expectation of test results or because of unpleasant test experience in the past. Such findings were consistent with Chan's (2004) study as well as a study on Iranian monolingual EFL learners (Shabani, 2012). The only statement that received a high percentage of strong disagreement was Item 21 in which bilingual students showed that if they prepare for an English test, they will not get confused anymore in the process of EFL testing. Generally, the analysis of the statements revealed that bilingual EFL students in this academic context will not experience test anxiety provided that they prepare for EFL testing very well.

Items related to the fear of negative evaluation as the second component of FLCAS were also analyzed in order to portray the anxiety levels and severity of language learning among the undergraduate respondents. The bilingual students' responses to the related items demonstrated that in most items

they strongly agree or agree with the anxiety-provoking situations in their English classrooms expressed in these statements such as "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be asked to speak in English class" (Item 3, 54%); "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class" (Item 13, 52%?); "I get depressed when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting" (Item 15, 65%); "I feel my heart pounding when I am going to be asked to speak in English class" (Item 20, 50%); "I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance" (Item 33, 57%). Similarly, they expressed their anxieties towards other learners in the classroom in statements including "I think that my classmates' English is better than mine" (Item 7, 64%); "I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I" (Item 23, 56%); "I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English" (item 31, 55%). There was only Item 25, "English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind" which received relatively same responses, that is 44% of students were in (complete) agreement and 41% in (total) disagreement. Generally, the findings from the bilingual learners of English in this context revealed that they experience a high level of anxiety particularly in contexts wherein the EFL teachers as well as other bilingual learners' evaluations play the leading roles in the degree of language learning anxiety. The results were consistent with the examination of FLCAS in several EFL contexts (see e.g. Na, 2007; Yamat and Bidabadi, 2012; Mamhot et al., 2013).

The final component of FLCAS is anxiety in the English classroom highlighting the role of the EFL classroom context and its related factors in the levels and severity of language learning anxiety among EFL learners. Among the items related to this component, five statements were endorsed by the EFL respondents, that are, "I am afraid when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class" (Item 4, 53%); "It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes" (Item 5, 56%); "In English class, I am so nervous that I forget what I know" (Item 12, 52%); "Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it" (Item 16, 53%); and "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English" (Item 30, 57%). The findings in this regard revealed that the EFL teachers, the number of classes that students have to take and the activities and rules they have to follow to learn EFL are the main causes of a high level of anxiety in the English classroom. The results were in line with other studies employing FLCAS (see e.g. Na, 2007; Awan et al., 2010; Atef-Vahid and Kashani, 2011). On the other hand, several statements which were rejected by the bilingual participants as anxiety-provoking situations included "In English classes, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson" (Item 6, 49%); "I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class" (Item 11, 44%); "I often feel like not going to my English class" (Item 17, 73%); "I feel tenser and have more pressure in English class than in other classes" (Item 26, 58%); and "Before English class, I feel confident and relaxed" (Item 28, 49%). The findings revealed that the bilingual respondents are pleased with EFL classroom attendance; they have concentration in the EFL classrooms though they experience kind of anxiety before taking EFL classrooms. Interestingly, the item 22 in this component received an equal

number of responses in agreement (42%) and disagreement (38%) with, "I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class".

Moreover, through the computation of means and standard deviations of each component of FLCAS, it was found that bilingual students experience a high level of anxiety in all components. Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of students in terms of each kind of anxiety.

Classified Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication Anxiety	5.50	15.46
Fear of Negative Evaluation	5.36	14.96
Test Anxiety	5.11	13.78
Anxiety in the English Classroom	5.92	15.58

Table 2. The overall means and standard deviations of the components of FLCAS among Iranian bilingual non-English-major undergraduate students

These results according to Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that Iranian Kurdish-speaking undergraduate students feel uniquely unable to deal with the task of learning English as their third language. The findings of this exploratory study suggest that significant language learning anxiety is experienced by many Iranian bilingual undergraduate students in this unique context in response to most of the aspects of EFL learning. A majority of the statements as well as all the components reflective of EFL learning anxiety were supported by the participant students surveyed. Therefore, the results imply that anxious students are common in EFL and ESP classrooms all over the world and in Iran, too.

Along with the analysis and discussion of FLCAS, the data obtained by BALLI were also discussed under Horwitz's (1988) themes (i.e. language learning aptitude, language learning difficulty, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations) below.

(a) Language learning aptitude

Items	BALLI Statements	SA/A* %	N %	SDA/DA %
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	92	6	2
2	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	73	18	9
6	People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	50	36	14
10	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	38	30	32
11	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign language.	9	22	69
16	I have a special ability for learning a foreign language.	52	29	19
19	Women are better than men at learning languages.	21	32	57

30	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent	72	17	11
33	Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	87	8	5

*SA/A=Strongly Agree/Agree, N=Neutral, SDA/DA=Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Table 3. Participants’ beliefs about language learning aptitude

The Iranian Kurdish-speaking undergraduate respondents endorsed the concepts of the positive effects of early language learning, the existence of special abilities for language learning, the belief that everyone can learn to speak a foreign language, the influence of intelligence on language learning; in contrast, they were in disagreement with the effect of gender on language learning, and they did not make a distinction between an aptitude for the sciences versus an aptitude for the humanities-type subjects such as language. Half the respondents also believed that people from their country at good at learning languages. All in all, the findings suggested the perceived existence of language aptitude by the bilingual respondents and the belief that while learning a language is not impossible for anyone, the ability to master more than one foreign language indicates intelligence.

(b) Language learning difficulty

Items	BALLI Statements	SA/A* %	N %	SDA/DA %
3	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	74	18	8
4	English is a language that is . . .	26	50	24
15	If someone spent 1 hour a day learning a language, how long would it take then to speak the language very well?	75	15	10
25	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	49	29	22
34	It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	77	15	8

*SA/A=Strongly Agree/Agree, N=Neutral, SDA/DA=Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Table 4. Participants’ beliefs about language learning difficulty

The Iranian Kurdish-speaking EFL learners believed that some languages are easier than others; however, they regarded English as a language of medium difficulty which would optimistically take one to three years to learn. The respondents also believed that it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language, and they agreed that it is easier to read than write in a foreign language. In all, the findings suggested that the population of respondents as a whole feel that their target language is of medium difficulty, and do not perceive a difference between the difficulties of various language skills.

(c) *The nature of language learning*

Items	BALLI Statements	SA/A* %	N %	SDA/DA %
8	It is necessary to know about English speaking cultures to speak English.	85	10	5
12	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country	16	15	69
17	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words.	83	13	4
23	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	55	27	18
27	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	68	22	10
28	The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my own language.	74	19	7

*SA/A=Strongly Agree/Agree, N=Neutral, SDA/DA=Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Table 5. Participants’ beliefs about the nature of language learning

The respondents believed that it is necessary to know the culture of the foreign language in order to speak the language but not in an English-speaking country. The respondents believed that learning new words, grammar and translation are the most important parts of language learning. They also agreed that people who are good at academic subjects are good at foreign languages. The elicited beliefs in this stream imply that respondents lean towards believing that there are certain approaches, such as focus on learning vocabulary or grammar and translation strategies that make language learning successful.

(d) *Learning and communication strategies*

Items	BALLI Statements	SA/A* %	N %	SDA/DA %
7	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	89	8	3
9	You should not say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	2	34	64
13	I enjoy practicing English with the foreigners I meet.	78	15	7
14	It is OK to guess if you don’t know a word in English.	57	26	17
18	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	96	2	2

21	I feel shy speaking English with other people.	19	12	69
22	If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on	83	15	2
26	It's important to practice with cassettes/tapes or CD ROMs.	87	12	1

*SA/A=Strongly Agree/Agree, N=Neutral, SDA/DA=Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Table 6. Participants' beliefs about learning and communication strategies

The learners endorsed repetition and practice with cassettes/tapes or CD ROMs. They admitted that they will enjoy practicing English with an English-speaking individual they meet without any shyness. They favored having excellent pronunciation, guessing unknown words and saying anything grammatically incorrect just for the sake of communication, but not for beginning students. This reflects the fact that in foreign language learning contexts, the role of authentic materials is viewed as a crucial aspect of successful language learning, and learners adopt different strategies in various contexts.

(e) Motivation and expectations

Items	BALLI Statements	SA/A* %	N %	SDA/DA %
5	I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	74	20	6
20	People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	76	14	10
24	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know the native speakers better.	78	15	7
29	If I learn English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	79	12	9
31	I want to learn to speak English well.	91	7	2
32	I would like to have foreigners as friends.	74	15	11

*SA/A=Strongly Agree/Agree, N=Neutral, SDA/DA=Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Table 7. Participants' beliefs about motivation and expectations

The respondents agreed that they want to learn to speak English very well, and they believed they will eventually speak English very well to get better job opportunities and have better communications. They believed that their countrymen valued the ability to speak English highly. Respondents felt instrumentally motivated. In this category, the vast majority of responses

seem to reflect the learners' desire for and optimism in achieving their language learning goals.

As a whole, the research findings elicited by FLCAS and BALLI in such a newly-explored bilingual context in Iran revealed that these instruments can be considered as suitable tools for conducting research on language learning anxiety and language learning beliefs in different sociolinguistic settings. The findings also revealed that Iranian technical college students in this ethnic region hold a range of beliefs and levels of anxiety, some of which would be an impediment to successful language learning and some can facilitate it.

2. Conclusion

Knowing about anxiety as one of the self-documented affective factors in the process of EFL learning and its severity as well as its repercussions in the EFL context is of utmost importance (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). While other studies on EFL learning anxiety focused on monolingual language learners, this study focused on Iranian bilingual Kurdish-Persian undergraduate students learning EFL and found obvious tendency of EFL learning anxiety in four leading components of FLCAS including communication anxiety, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety in the EFL classroom. Shedding light on the levels and extremes of EFL learning anxiety among these unique participants in an Iranian context deepened our understanding of EFL learning anxiety particularly among the community of academic-level bilinguals and facilitated our efforts to reduce it.

Additionally, the present study aimed to examine Iranian Kurdish-speaking undergraduate students' overall belief system in an unexplored academic context in light of current literature in order to fill a gap in learner belief research. Analysis of the established principal belief themes shows that there are significant results that can be linked to the specificity of the participants' context. In addition, beliefs may vary based on individual learners' differences, learners' age, learning stage, language proficiency, professional status, cultural and educational background, context diversity, and several personal factors among others (Horwitz, 1999; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). It is argued, that it is rather the individuals' complex metacognitive structure, as affected by a number of social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors that is responsible for the shaping nature and strength of these beliefs (Bernat, 2006). Investigating the relationship of beliefs to other factors sheds light on their stability and malleability and thus bears consequences for possible instructional intervention methods in the classroom attempting to change those beliefs, which may hinder the learning process (Bernat, 2006) and upgrade those beliefs which may facilitate the learning process.

Based on the findings of this exploratory study, some implications and suggestions are given as follows. First, we have to increase Iranian EFL teachers' awareness of EFL learning anxiety because such a psychological affective construct is an important factor which affects students' EFL learning process (Lucas et al., 2011). That is, language anxiety can probably be alleviated, at least to an extent, by a supportive teacher who will

acknowledge students' EFL learning anxiety and offer suggestions for attaining foreign language confidence (Horwitz et al., 1986).

To balance the levels and severity of EFL learning anxiety, teachers must pay more attention to this affective factor and prepare properly for teaching. Of the techniques to alleviate the severity of language anxiety are making students feel safe to learn and practice EFL by creation of a relaxed and learner-friendly environment (Lucas et al., 2011; Liu, 2012), designing EFL teaching materials and activities which can reduce EFL students' anxiety indirectly (Chan, 2004; Lucas et al., 2011; Mesri, 2012), giving more encouragement by avoiding negative evaluation of EFL learners in classrooms and giving positive reinforcement and feedbacks (Lucas et al., 2011; Mahmoodzadeh, 2013), leveling the curriculum design of EFL and ESP courses in collaboration with EFL learners and based on their language proficiency as well as their teaching goals and objectives (Chan, 2004), adopting other measures or in Lucas et al.'s (2011) terms "alternative assessment and evaluation schemes" instead of conventional end-of-semester testing methods to evaluate and test EFL learners' competence and performance in EFL and eliminating the failure-success ranking of students by their test scores, and giving advice on effective EFL language learning strategies. Although teachers can make use of the above-mentioned means to help students to deal with their anxiety in English classrooms, teachers should not try to help students get away from anxiety completely. Much research indicates that adequate anxiety plays a positive role and can motivate students to maintain their efforts on learning. Therefore, the teachers' real job is to help students keep adequate anxiety, neither too high nor too low (Na, 2007; Mesri, 2012) because completely avoiding all these anxiety-provoking situations is neither practical nor helpful (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In addition to the curriculum designs of EFL and ESP courses and teachers' styles and procedures of teaching (Mesri, 2012; Mahmoodzadeh, 2013), there are a series of important variables such as age gender, language proficiency, learning styles and strategies (Williams and Burden, 2000, p. 154) as well as EFL learning background, learners' beliefs and perceptions about EFL learning and teaching, cultural and social norms and expectations (Williams and Burden, 2000, p. 94), plus several cognitive and affective variables including empathy, self-esteem, autonomy, inhibition, motivation, and attitudes (Brown, 2007, p. 161; Lucas et al., 2011; Liu, 2012) that may contribute to the levels and extremes of EFL learning anxiety in different settings, particularly here in Iran. These issues, however, are not addressed in the present study; therefore, the effects and the interdependence of such variables should be examined systematically in future investigations to reveal how such variables reduce or enhance the levels and severity of language learning anxiety experienced by EFL learners.

The analysis of the BALLI items revealed that different students had different beliefs towards learning English as a foreign language. Iranian bilingual students in this study showed their great eagerness to learn this internationally accepted language very well and this is surely a very helpful belief that can facilitate language learning. But, maybe these good and

correct beliefs cannot guarantee their learning because of the other harmful beliefs that they hold such as placing a great deal of emphasis on grammar and excellent pronunciation and believing that less than two years for learning English is enough. In this case, the students are faced with mismatching beliefs clashing with the reality of language learning and consequently frustrations and disappointments might emerge. In such cases it is required to confront erroneous beliefs with new information (Horwitz, 1988). There are some strategies that might help reduce these misbeliefs. Sometimes the source of such wrong beliefs goes back to what is known as culture or background. Therefore, culture and background of the students should also be taken into account by teachers. It seems that there is a need for teachers to devote sessions to talk with students about the real and helpful beliefs about language learning. This will help both students to become familiar with correct and realistic beliefs and teachers to get most from their classes.

Several limitations of the study need to be pointed out. First, the results cannot be generalized to all Iranian bilingual EFL educational settings due to the fact that the limited participants were selected from five technical colleges located in a specific bilingual Kurdish-speaking region in Iran. Thus, as Mesri (2012) and Mahmoodzadeh (2013) state, there is an essential need for future research to cross-validate findings achieved from such studies to some different and larger samples of EFL classrooms in Iran. Another drawback of this study relates to the data collection instruments employed, FLCAS and BALLI. This type of self-report survey questionnaires would be supplemented with further data collection techniques such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and diaries (Liu, 2012) in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of EFL learning anxiety as an influential factor in the process of language learning and the streams of beliefs about EFL learning and teaching. As a whole, this study was a preliminary attempt to uncover the EFL learning anxiety and the belief system of a community of Iranian Kurdish-speaking undergraduate students learning EFL in an academic context. Further investigations are required to support the findings of the present study, explore the belief system and anxiety-provoking factors, and discover anxiety-reducing techniques in more specified EFL learning contexts in order to open more windows to the psychological aspects of language learning and teaching.

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