Exploring the Effect of Demographic Variables on Non-Iranian Persian Learners' Learning Beliefs

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1. Introduction

The beliefs held by language learners regarding language learning can significantly influence their aptitude and expectations in the language learning process. These beliefs are commonly shaped by prior learning experiences and influenced by both cultural backgrounds and educational settings. It is noteworthy that an individual's beliefs not only impact their language learning but also affect their perception of the world and their communication with the external environment.

As stated by Gauvain (2005:15), the cultural background of language learners and their beliefs play a critical role in shaping the social processes that contribute to their cognitive development and language learning. Consequently, the beliefs of language learners exhibit a complex relationship with their cognitive abilities, as well as their responses to linguistic and social inputs within the target language and society. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that shared attitudes, beliefs, and values are reflected in the language usage patterns of group members, as highlighted by (Genc & Bada, 2005).

The crucial role of language learning beliefs in the process of acquiring a second language is widely acknowledged. These beliefs encompass the cognitive and mental attitudes of language learners towards language acquisition and exert a significant influence on their motivation, engagement, and ultimate success in language learning endeavors. While some beliefs can positively enhance the language learning experience, others can impede the learning process and lead to anxiety. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the influence of these beliefs on second or foreign language acquisition by identifying various learning beliefs and their impact on the learning process. The objective of this research was to examine the beliefs of non-Persian language learners regarding the acquisition of the Persian language. This research provides insight into the general beliefs held by Persian learners participating in Persian language courses, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between beliefs and language learning outcomes.

This study focuses on examining the overarching beliefs held by Persian learners

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enrolled in Persian language courses at universities within the country. Specifically, this research explores the influence of variables such as mother tongue, gender, and age on these beliefs. To achieve this, the present study sought to address several research questions related to non-Iranian language learners' beliefs about acquiring Persian as a second language and the relationship between these beliefs and demographic variables. Specifically, the first research question aimed to investigate the beliefs held by non-Iranian language learners regarding learning Persian as a second language. Subsequently, the study aimed to explore whether there was a significant difference in the Persian learning beliefs of non-Iranian learners with and without university education. Another research question investigated the effect of mother tongue on non-Iranian learners' beliefs about Persian language learning. Additionally, the study aimed to examine the impact of gender on non-Iranian Persian learners' beliefs about Persian language learning. Finally, the research question aimed to explore the effect of age on non-Iranian Persian learners' beliefs about learning Persian.

Persian language classes comprise a heterogeneous group of learners with diverse characteristics. The understanding of learners' beliefs regarding language learning is crucial in determining their approaches and satisfaction with language instruction. The identification and categorization of these beliefs serve as valuable instruments for Persian language teachers, enabling them to significantly enhance their productivity and efficiency. By acknowledging and addressing these beliefs, teachers can optimize the learning environment, resulting in heightened educational outcomes and improved learner satisfaction.

The empirical findings of this research contribute to the understanding of Persian language teachers regarding the beliefs held by Persian learners, potentially reducing misunderstandings and facilitating the adoption of suitable educational strategies. Furthermore, these research outcomes can inform the design of course objectives, lesson planning, and the development of teaching materials and methodologies to align with the specific beliefs of distinct learner groups within the target language domain. The integration of these findings into pedagogical practices enables language educators to effectively cater to the diverse needs and expectations of their learners, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted to examine the impact of language learners' beliefs on their proficiency in acquiring Persian as a second language. The Horowitz Language Learning Beliefs Inventory (BALLI), developed by Horwitz (2008), was utilized as the instrument for measuring learners' beliefs. The BALLI questionnaire comprises 34 items that are categorized into five distinct domains, including foreign language learning aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. The Bali questionnaire has been designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of language learners' beliefs in the context of second language acquisition.

In the current investigation, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was calculated to be 0.842, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Over the past two decades, the Balinese Inventory has been utilized to explore various aspects of language learning beliefs, and a multitude of studies have employed this instrument. This widespread adoption of the Bali questionnaire attests to its reliability and robust psychometric properties

(Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006: 212). It is noteworthy that the Bali questionnaire remains the most commonly used tool for measuring learning beliefs in second language acquisition research (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2019: 676). The present study included 167 non-Persian language learners, ranging in age from 20 to 30 years, who had a learning history of Persian ranging from 6 months to 1 year.

3. Results and discussion

The study's findings indicate that non-Iranian language learners perceive learning Persian as moderately challenging. Moreover, the results reveal no significant differences in the beliefs of Persian language learners based on age or gender. However, the investigation highlights that Persian language learners with university education possess a significantly higher level of talent than those without university education. The research also demonstrates that there is no significant difference in the mean levels of learning aptitude, motivation, and expectations between Arab and non-Arab Persian learners, suggesting that the mother tongue does not impact their ability to learn the language or their motivation and expectations. Nevertheless, the study underscores the significance of challenging topics in the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, communication strategies, and test-based learning methods. By gaining insight into language learners' beliefs, teachers can better tailor their instructional approaches to align with the beliefs of foreign Persian learners.

4. Conclusion

As indicated by the study's findings, non-Iranian language learners generally perceive learning Persian as somewhat challenging. This outcome is consistent with Cui's (2014) research, which revealed that Chinese language learners also found Persian to be difficult. It is intriguing to note that despite being a comparatively easier language than Chinese, Persian is still considered challenging by language learners. Given that the research was conducted during a training course, learners' beliefs about the difficulty of Persian were likely formed either during the course or prior to their arrival in Iran and remained unchanged throughout their studies. The results of the study underscore the pressing need for scientific resources and teachers with specialized diplomas and expertise in Persian language instruction, including courses on psychology of language learning, teaching multilingual classes, and managing multicultural classrooms.