

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Answers to the Research Questions

Latitudinal Study

Question 1: Which beliefs about language learning have a statistically significant association with the length of time a student has spent in the Paradise English program? Only one individual item (Item fourteen: “If students are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be difficult for them to get rid of them later on.”) showed a statistically significant association between the time spent in the program and coincidence with the instructors’ belief (actual and portrayed,) but since categories three and four showed such strong associations we can assume that those associations must also exist on the item level for at least a few of the beliefs. The fact that only one item registered that association probably speaks more about the difficulty of using the BALLI to reach statistically significant conclusions about samples of this size than it does about the rigidity of student beliefs.

Question 2: Is there a positive association between the length of time a student has been in the program and the level of coincidence between his belief and the beliefs (portrayed or actual) of his instructors? The combined results showed no statistically significant correlation regarding instructors’ actual beliefs, but for

portrayed beliefs they showed a very strong association with a statistical significance below the level of 1 percent probability of happening by chance. The lack of an association with instructors' actual beliefs did not occur because students' beliefs weren't changing, but because beliefs in some categories showed positive associations and beliefs in other categories showed negative ones.

Question 3: Is the correlation greater for beliefs that instructors believe to be important to language learning? Yes. For the instructor's actual belief, there was a non-significant negative correlation between time spent in program and coincidence with teachers' belief for the items not designated as important to language learning. There was a positive association for the items designated as important to language learning which also did not reach statistical significance. When the two categories are compared, there is a statistically significant difference between the two associations, at the level of 1 percent probability. For the instructors' portrayed beliefs, there is no statistically significant association for items not designated by instructors as important to success in language learning. There is an association below the level of 1 percent probability for items designated as important. When the two categories are compared, there is a statistically significant difference between the two associations, at the level of 1 percent probability.

Longitudinal Study

Question 1: Which beliefs about language learning change as a result of the Paradise English program? Items 1, 7, 19, 20 showed a statistically significant positive change towards the instructors' actual and portrayed beliefs. Item 14 showed a statistically significant negative change towards the instructors' actual beliefs and a positive change towards their portrayed beliefs.

Question 2: Do students' beliefs change to be closer to the beliefs (actual or portrayed) of their instructors? Yes. For Instructors' actual beliefs, there was a combined increase in student agreement with instructor of +40, which was statistically significant at the level of 2.5 percent. For five of the items (42%) there was a negative change and for the remaining seven items (58%) the change was positive. For instructors' portrayed beliefs, there was a combined increase in student agreement with instructor of +74, which was statistically significant at a level below 1 percent. Nine out of the eleven items (82%) had an increase in coincidence. The exceptions were items 13 ("It's important to repeat and practice a lot") and item 23 ("People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages") for which coincidence decreased.

Question 3: Do more students alter their belief for BALLI items which instructors believe to be important to language learning? Between the first and third surveys, there was a +10 increase in student agreement with instructors for

items not designated important to language learning, and a +30 increase for items that were designated as importance. However, when the two categories are compared with each other, this difference is not significant. For instructor's portrayed beliefs, the change was +18 for items not designated as important and + 56 for items designated important. When the categories are compared, the difference is significant at the level of 2.5 percent probability. If item one (the item for which there was probable data bias) is excluded from the calculations, then the difference between the categories reaches statistical significance with 5 percent probability for actual beliefs and below the level of 1 percent probability for portrayed beliefs.

Cross analysis

Do the findings from the latitudinal analysis and the longitudinal analysis support each other? For most items and categories, the findings of the latitudinal and longitudinal study support each other. The only major exception is item 1 ("Children are better than adults at learning languages") for which there was a very sharp increase between the coincidence of student and instructor belief (both actual and portrayed,) but for which the latitudinal study found no correlation. This issue is discussed in greater detail below in the section Critique of Research Methodology, subsection evidence of possible data bias.

What can be inferred from These Results?

Can a possible causative relationship be inferred between teachers' beliefs (actual or portrayed) and students' beliefs? No. There may be some form of causative relationship between teacher and student beliefs, but it can not be inferred from the data collected in this study. Although the longitudinal and latitudinal study both found a positive correlation between many of the questions (especially those designated as important to success in language learning) there is not sufficient evidence to infer that the teachers' beliefs were causing this effect. Although the research was not designed to test causations, portrayed beliefs showed a more clear association than did actual beliefs and there are more reasons to suspect a causative relationship. The fact that portrayed beliefs are intertwined with many other aspects of language teaching – program philosophy, text-book choice, curriculum, etc – makes them difficult to isolate as independent factors for an experimental study, but also lends intuitive credibility to the claim that they would be causally connected with the changes in student beliefs.

Can a possible causative relationship be inferred between the importance an instructor places on a belief and the tendency for student beliefs to change to fit with their instructors'? No. The results neither give information to help us reject or accept this claim. This is because the items that instructors designated to be important to language learning were exactly those items which fell under categories three (“Nature of Language Learning“) and four (“learning and communication

strategies“) of the BALLI. This means it could be the kind of belief the item portrays (rather than the importance placed on it by the instructor) which makes them more likely to change. Categories three and four are arguably the ones most directly relevant to learning on the classroom, so it is not surprising that the students would alter them because of enrollment in a program or that the teachers would designate them as important.

Could the associations found for individual BALLI items be the result of random variations? This is very unlikely, but when considering only the data regarding the instructors' actual beliefs it seems like a possibility. In the latitudinal study, only one out of the twelve BALLI items showed a statistically significant association, and that association was negative, which was the opposite of what was hypothesized. The longitudinal study produced more positive results (5 out of 12 BALLI items produced a statistically significant change in belief) but there was evidence of data bias (skewing the results towards a tighter coincidence) which prevents us from dismissing the possibility that the program has no effect. This result would lend credibility to the claim that beliefs about language learning are too deeply rooted to be influenced by a particular learning context (See the section The open question as to whether beliefs about language learning are context specific in the introduction to this paper.)

However, the data regarding portrayed beliefs provides ample evidence to conclude that student beliefs were changing, especially on those items designated by instructors as important to language learning. For items designated as important,

there was a very strong association with significance below one percent probability. The longitudinal study produced those same results.

Can we infer that the English program is what is altering the students' beliefs?

This depends on how we define the scope of the program. As was discussed previously, we can not infer a causal link between instructors' actual beliefs or portrayed beliefs and the change in student belief. Similarly, we can not for sure identify a causal link between the curriculum and these changes. The only thing we know for sure is that the students beliefs changes significantly in the twelve weeks covered by the study. However, because the students were brought to Boracay specifically to enter the program, and are staying in a homestay provided by the school, all of the external factors they experience are because of the program. Since it was unlikely that their beliefs would have changed so dramatically during a three month time in their normal life in Korea, we can say fairly confidently that the program is responsible.

Other Findings

Similarities and differences between teacher and student beliefs: For most of the BALLI items, the majority of students shared similar views with their instructors. Only on items 14 and 25 did the majority of students disagree with the beliefs of their instructors. The nature of the disagreement between the students and the teachers on these items was surprising. On item 14 (“If students are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be difficult to get rid of them later on”) the instructors agreed and the students disagreed. In a program that tried (and often fails) to get the students to let go of their language anxiety and speak up during class, this is the opposite result of what someone might expect. On item 25 (“Everyone can learn English”), the students agreed and the instructors disagreed. This is also a surprising result because language teachers are usually expected not to give up on their students. The answers to these two items also seem to suggest that the students had bought into the idea of communicative language learning more than their teachers had.

Items for which there was a negative correlation between time spent in program and coincidence with instructor’s beliefs: There was only one individual item (item 14) for which there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the time spent in the program and the coincidence between teacher and student belief. This is also the only individual item for which there was a statistically significant negative change in the coincidence between teacher and student belief in the latitudinal study. As is explained in the above section of this paper, Similarities

and differences between teacher and student beliefs, item 14 (“If students are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be difficult to get rid of them later on”) was one of two items for which the instructors disagreed with the majority of students. Perhaps more relevantly, it was also one of the items for which the instructors stated a personal belief that was different from the belief they hoped to convey to their students.

The effect of explicit discussions about beliefs: For item one there was a +10 change in agreement with instructors even though other items in the category failed to show significant changes in belief. This is presumably due to the fact that one or more explicit discussions took place regarding the belief represented by this item (see the Critique of Methodology section under possible evidence of data bias for a more detailed description.) The results of this unintended circumstance seem to indicate that explicit discussions about beliefs about language learning have a strong impact on what the students think. However, before taking this result too seriously there are a few things to consider. In many different areas of language learning (such as grammar rules, error correction, etc) there is an ongoing discussion about if and when explicit discussions can be useful. Oftentimes, giving students explicit information allows them to regurgitate an answer but has little impact on the complex web of his abilities. Similarly it could be that explicit discussions about beliefs will alter how students answer a particular BALLI item without significantly altering their inner thoughts. Explicit discussions about beliefs about language learning is certainly a topic worthy of further study, but it is premature to reach any conclusions in this area from the data this research has produced.

The context specificity of beliefs about language learning: The preliminary research, Appendix D, concluded that students from different language learning contexts tend to hold different beliefs. As was mentioned earlier, it is this fact that justifies our research into what factors are associated with that change. However, it is interesting to note that the findings from the preliminary research indicated statistically significant differences even in beliefs that students' did not seem to change in the main body of this research. For 9 of the 12 BALLI items analyzed, there was a statistical significant difference between student beliefs in different programs, representing items in all four categories. In fact, the preliminary research finds a larger variance in categories one and two than in categories three and four. This is interesting, because the main research showed that items in categories 3 and 4 were the only ones prone to change for students in the program. This discrepancy may occur because studies one and two were only set up to measure the change over just a few week period, focusing specifically on students who had just enrolled in a new academic program. These results could point to other important factors that influence student beliefs (especially beliefs in categories 1 and 2) which are either innate, are no longer malleable into adulthood, are not influenced by a particular setting or program methodology, or can not be altered significantly in twelve weeks time.

Critique of the Research Methodology

Limitations of the latitudinal approach: Although the latitudinal approach provided satisfactory results for the larger categories of beliefs it did not provide very much useful information for individual BALLI items. Only one item (item 14) yielded any statistically significant correlation. For many of the other items, a correlation could be neither ruled out nor confirmed because in such a small program, even mid-range correlations do not reach statistical significance. The population size was sufficient to collect useful data for the combined BALLI results, the four individual belief categories, and the subgroups of items that were designated by teachers to be important to success language learning and those designated not important to success in language learning.

Limitations of the longitudinal approach: The students seemed to be changing their beliefs in individual BALLI items, but the requirements for statistical significance were too rigorous to accurately track these changes item by item in such a small program. The result is that for many of the research questions there is little evidence of either a positive or a negative result. The population size was sufficient to collect useful data for the combined BALLI results, the four individual belief categories, and the subgroups of items that were designated by teachers to be important to success language learning and those designated not important to success in language learning.

Evidence of possible data bias in the longitudinal study: As stated in the section of this paper, Rationale behind the study, (subsection weaknesses of the longitudinal study), a problem inherent in surveying students multiple times is that there is a possibility that the administering of the earlier surveys will skew the results of the later ones. Item 1 is the only item where the latitudinal and the longitudinal study seem to give contradictory results. In the latitudinal study, the results for item one was consistent with the results of other items in the category but the item one results were not consistent with other items in the longitudinal study. All other items yielded a slight change (either positive or negative) in the responses of the students whereas item one registered a change of +12. This result was so different that it was enough to shift the combined category “Items not designated by teachers to be important to success in language learning,” from a negative change to a positive one. Meaning that this one item can explain the unusual result (moderate negative correlation in the latitudinal study and positive change in the longitudinal one) for the category as well. The teachers were asked if they had any insight into this issue, and two of them remembered some discussion instigated by the students after the initial survey about this particular belief. It is unclear as to how explicitly the instructors expressed their personal beliefs to the students on this item or whether these discussions still continued after administering the second survey.

The decision to use three surveys instead of two: Although the middle survey did not factor into any of the calculations for the data analysis section of the longitudinal study, there were two reasons for conducting it. The first was that it added a few more subjects to the latitudinal study, which was important because there were so

few students in the program which made it difficult to do statistically significant correlational research. The second reason is so it could be used to uncover any statistical abnormalities. However, no major statistical anomalies were uncovered and the second survey could have exacerbated the inherent problems with re-surveying students. If the research had been set up so that the students were surveyed when they first entered the program then the middle survey would have provided useful information about the speed and resilience of changes in students' belief, but since the students were surveyed when they were in different stages of their progress through the program the middle survey did not have these benefits. With both positive and negative effects on the research, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this middle survey was worth conducting.

The decision to include data collected from new students during the second and third surveys as part of the latitudinal study: Because of the small number of students enrolled in the program at the time of the initial survey, the decision was made to also include data from new students in surveys two and three in the latitudinal data. Because of this, the number of subjects who have been in the program for between zero and four weeks is significantly higher than the number of subjects who have been in the program between five and eight weeks or between nine and twelve. This is not a problem because the study deals with percents but the decision also means that some of the latitudinal data came from students who have been exposed to the post-survey atmosphere of the school, and may have been involved with students in discussions related to these beliefs. However, if this were the case it would most likely skew the data to make the beliefs of these students more

similar to the beliefs of the veteran students, resulting in data that was a more conservative estimate of the actual correlations. This could partially explain the weak (non-statistically-significant) negative correlations found for several of the BALLI items for which there was a positive change in belief for the longitudinal study.

Pedagogical Implications of this Research

These results indicate that students in this program alter their beliefs to coincide more with the beliefs portrayed by their instructors than with their instructors' actual beliefs. Furthermore, their beliefs tend to change in a way that is consistent with the communicative approach to English teaching. Since this is the method employed by the school, this is a positive result. It implies that the students are not rebelling against the teaching methods and tend to understand the rationale behind them. Student beliefs seem to change naturally, without the instructors' conscious intervention. This is an important result for these types of short-term English-immersion programs in particular because students pay large amounts of money to uproot themselves from their home countries and experience another point of view. Many students already find flaws with their previous attempts at learning English and hope not only to learn English while enrolled in the program but to carry back with them valuable insights which will help them in their future attempts at language learning. The fact that their beliefs are changing (especially those beliefs thought by their teachers to be important to success in language learning) seems to show that (at least temporarily) the students are getting what they paid for.

Research has already been conducted regarding the association between positive beliefs about language learning and language learning success, and the changes in the students belief seem to fit the profile of becoming more 'positive' from that research. However, to determine the long-term pedagogical implications of this study more research would be required. Some suggestions for the form that research should take will be discussed in the below section, Ideas for Further Research.

Ideas for Further Research

Because the subjects of this study are transported from their familiar home environment to an unfamiliar one (both for living and for study) this current study maximized the potential for belief changes to occur. This means the results are very useful for answering general questions about changes in learner belief -- such as the question regarding context-specificity of beliefs and tendencies for beliefs to converge— but not so useful in answering questions about the specific factors altering beliefs. The positive result justifies further research in the later area. Here are a couple of important questions into specific factors influencing belief that could be asked as a result of this study.

1. Do explicit discussions about beliefs alter student beliefs about language learning? To get useful results from this question, it would be necessary to use a different definition of 'beliefs about language learning' than the one utilized in this current study. The researcher would need to demonstrate that students were thinking differently about their beliefs, rather than just responding differently

because of the discussions. The difficulties in answering this question are further shown in the discussion section of this paper, subsection explicit discussions about beliefs.)

2. Do English programs that do not include a homestay component show similar results to the results of this study? Because the subjects of this study were mostly living with their instructors, it is unclear whether their classes or their environment was the major factor in changing their beliefs. Studies isolating such factors could build upon this study and could provide extremely important results. If living environments are found to influence student belief, this could lead to research into such topics as the benefits of international student dormitories. If classroom lessons were the predominant factor, this could pave the way for research into developing specific teaching methods to foster positive beliefs

Another important area of research evolving from this study would be determining the effects of altering learner beliefs. To do this, researchers would need to find answers to the questions posed back in the introduction of this paper._

1. Are student beliefs about language learning malleable?
2. Is the well-established relationship between students' beliefs about language learning and language learning success causative?
3. Are changes in learner beliefs resilient?

The first question was already addressed in this paper. Question two and three are open questions that would require long-term, longitudinal studies that continued tracking students after leaving their initial English programs. Because the current research only covered a few week period (during which the students remained

enrolled in the program) the data collected would not be useful in this exploration. To determine what specific factors influence student beliefs, experimental research methods must be used. Below some useful research questions that could help in answering them.

1. Do changes in certain beliefs lead to better success in language learning? This is different from the question of whether holding certain beliefs is associated with success in language learning, which has already been studied frequently. The important result of this research question would be to find a causal link between altering beliefs and improving student progress.

2. Does a tight coincidence between student and teachers' beliefs (or teachers' portrayed beliefs) correlate with a student's greater satisfaction with a students' English program? This question could be answered using the same methodology as with the current research by adding a single question to the survey regarding the student's satisfaction. Initially, it was the intention to include this in the current research but the director of the school showed reluctance to allow this question to be asked of students for the purpose of research.

3. After leaving an English program, do students revert back to their prior beliefs? This is an important question, especially in terms of short-term programs such as the one studied in the current research, since students often enter into these programs hoping to gain insight into language learning that will help them in their future study.