

**CHANGES IN LEARNER BELIEFS OF JAPANESE EFL STUDENTS: AN IMPACT OF THE COOPERATIVE STRATEGY TRAINING PROGRAM**

**Tra Thu Nguyen, MA**

English Language Studies and English Language Pedagogy, Graduate School of Global Communication Studies  
Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 57 Takenoyama, Iwasaki, Nisshin, Aichi 470-0197 Japan

**Kazuyoshi Sato, PhD**

Department of English Language Teaching  
Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 57 Takenoyama, Iwasaki, Nisshin, Aichi 470-0197 Japan

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Learner beliefs have been identified as one of the individual learner differences that influence second language learning (Ellis, 2008). Although Ellis (2008) claim that learning strategies “are influenced directly by learners’ explicit beliefs about how best to learn” (p. 703), little research has been done as to how learning strategies influence learner beliefs, and vice versa. This study reports the results of a 7-week strategy training course for Japanese university students about how their beliefs are influenced and shaped by their peers while working on cooperative learning activities. In essence, the study reveals the relationship between learning strategies and learner beliefs. Using multiple data source, including surveys, journals, language learning histories, and interviews, this study found that as these students worked more in pair and group work they helped each other by sharing their experiences as well as ideas and gradually changed their beliefs to build their confidence about language learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** learner beliefs; learning strategies; strategy training

---

## INTRODUCTION

It has been acknowledged that successful language learners deploy a complex and flexible set of learning strategies and that learning strategies are teachable and enhance language acquisition. Ellis (2008) states that the way that language learners employ learning strategies may vary based on learner factors as well as social and situational factors such as age, gender, motivation and “directly by learners’ explicit beliefs about how best to learn” (p. 703). Nonetheless, little research has been done to document how learning strategies influence learner beliefs and vice versa (Ellis, 2008). In fact, most of the studies relied on surveys such as the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) without incorporating qualitative data including interviews. This study attempts to reveal the relationship between learning strategies and learner beliefs by using multiple data sources.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Learning strategies and strategy training

The body of research on learning strategy has evolved from the article “What can we learn from the good language learner” written by Rubin (1975). Accordingly, what differentiates successful and less successful language learners is their use of strategy. Defined as “specific actions” (Oxford, 1990) deployed *consciously* (Griffith, 2013) by language learners, language learning strategies enhance second and foreign language acquisition as it “makes learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Ellis (2008) states that the way that language learners employ learning strategies may vary based on learner factors as well as social and situational factors. Empirical studies have shown that age (Lee & Oxford, 2008), gender (Hurd & Lewis, 2008), motivation (Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001), and especially learner beliefs (Huang, 1997; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Wang, 1996; Wenden, 1987; Yang, 1999) play a significant role in strategy choice.

With the notion that successful language learners use a complex and flexible set of learning strategies, much interest has also been paid to strategy instruction in the sense that if less successful language learners are equipped with learning strategies they would become successful ones. Theory and practical studies have proved that language learning strategies are teachable and enhance language acquisition (Carrier, 2003; Huang, 2001; Mizumoto and Takeuchi, 2009).

Huang (2001) evaluated the effect of language learning strategy instructions on learning results in terms of learning progress and attitude development between a control group and experiential group in a Taiwanese university and reported that learning strategies were teachable and that strategy instructions developed learners’ language proficiency, improved and maintained their use of strategies, increased motivation, and reduced anxiety.

Nakatani (2005) researched the way that students in an experiential class learned to use new communication strategies and to examine how students improved their communication ability. Nakatani showed that those students could produce longer utterances to negotiate for meaning in avoidance of communication breakdown and scored higher in the post-test compared to students in the control class. Nakatani concluded that improvement in students’ use of communication strategies would enhance second language learning.

Naughton (2006) examined the effect of the cooperative strategy training program in eight weeks on the posttest interaction patterns of the students in the three experiential groups where they practiced speaking based on the conversation strategies they learned. Naughton found that the effect of the training program was to encourage students to participate in the types of interactional sequences which are important for the language learning process. There was an increase in the mean number of turns taken and remarkably in the strategic participation in the experimental group. She concluded that “the willingness of students to request and provide

help may be a key factor in the success of small group oral interaction and in the ability of students to aid each other's interlanguage development" (p.179). In short, it has been acknowledged that successful language learners deploy a complex and flexible set of learning strategies and that learning strategies are teachable and enhance language acquisition. Among other factors, learner beliefs is one important variable which affects strategy choice.

### **Learner beliefs**

It has been generally acknowledged that it is hard to identify and classify learner beliefs about language learning in any systematic way due to its complex nature (Benson & Lor, 1999). Horwitz (1987) implicitly mentioned in her studies that learner beliefs can be used interchangeably with preconceived ideas, preconceptions that language learners bring with them to the language classrooms. Wenden (1986, 1987) claims that learner beliefs could be used interchangeably with metacognitive knowledge and that this knowledge is stable, stable, and fallible. In short, learner beliefs about language learning have been long viewed as cognitive entities focusing on what learners think to be true about the nature of language and its learning process inside their brain (Wenden, 1987).

Nevertheless, in the last ten years researchers have argued that such definitions paint an incomplete picture of the issue (Barcelos, 2003). Since it is noteworthy that learner beliefs are embedded in social and cultural contexts, it follows that social interactions among learners should be included in further investigation on learner beliefs. Accordingly, Kalaja (1995) states that learner beliefs now should be viewed as "socially constructed, emerging from interaction with others" (p. 196). Alike, Barcelos (2003) uses the term "contextual approach" and defines learner beliefs as "part of the culture of learning and representations of language learning in a given society" (p. 26). Another thing to note is that while earlier studies on learner beliefs considered beliefs as stable and reluctant to change (Wenden, 1986, 1987), emerging studies over the past twenty years have seen beliefs as dynamic and context-specific (Barcelos, 2003; Benson & Lor, 1999; Kalaja, 1995).

Wenden (1987) investigated the relationship between learner beliefs and strategy use and found a close relationship between learner beliefs and strategy use, namely the relationship between the importance of using the language and communication strategies, and the relationship between the need to learn about the language and cognitive strategies. Using the BALLI, the SILL, the background information questionnaire, and interviews, Huang (1997) found a relationship between the students' beliefs about the need to use certain strategies and their uses of these strategies. Most importantly, a close relationship between student's self-efficacy and learning strategies like self-encouragement (affective strategy), attention paid to spoken English (cognitive strategy) was reported. A significant relationship between self-efficacy and language learning strategy was also reported in studies conducted by Magogwe & Oliver (2007) in Botswana, and by Yang (1999) in Taiwan. Yang (1999) also concluded that students' beliefs about language learning might affect their use of learning strategies, vice versa, learning strategies might shape students' beliefs about language learning as well. In

other words, the relationship between learner beliefs and strategy use is a bidirectional one, not a causative one.

In summary, it has been widely recognized that there is a relationship between learner beliefs and language learning strategy use. This relationship, however, is a bidirectional instead of a causative one (Barcelos 2003; Yang 1999). Yet, little is known about how learning strategies actually shape and change learner beliefs in the classroom.

## RESEARCH ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Although learning strategies and learner beliefs have been the interests of researchers for a long time, little research has been done on the impact of learning strategies on learner beliefs and vice versa. In particular, little systematic strategy training research has been done. Most of the research used surveys such as the BALLI and the SILL as a research instrument, which means there is a lack of multiple instrumentations including ones based on qualitative data. Therefore, to explore the insights into the research issue, multiple data sources including questionnaires, journals, language learning histories, and interviews were used in this study. It is a unique of this study as (Smith, 2014) stress the significance of using multiple data sources to reveal beliefs about language learning and teaching. The following research questions are:

- (1) What kind of beliefs do these university students bring into the class?
- (2) How do the students participate in cooperative strategy training activities?
- (3) How do the students change their beliefs through the strategy training course?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Eighteen 1st-year Japanese university students enrolling in a strategy training class participated in this study. Language learning strategies were taught in this class in the last 7 weeks of the second semester in 2014. The class aimed at developing students' understanding of language learning strategies (listening strategies, communication strategies, reading and discussion strategies) so that they could try out new ways to learn English. The students met once a week (90 minutes) in the last 7 weeks of the second semester. Table 1 shows weekly class activities. The class began with a song/rhythm practice, followed by pair work. The students worked in pairs (changing partners 3 times) sharing their experiences trying to use new strategies which they learned in the previous class outside the classroom. Then new communication strategies were introduced and the students continued working in pairs and practicing those strategies. The class ended with Literature Circles, where students worked in groups of five, and each had a different rotated role (discussion leader, summarizer, passage person, connector and word master) sharing their understandings after reading one chapter in the textbook "Language Hungry!" (Murphey, 1996). After each class, students were required to write a reflection log including what they learned in the class, the activities they liked and a mission report about trying out the new strategies outside the classroom.

**Table 1. Weekly class activities**

Week	Song/rhythm practice	Communication strategies	Literature circles	Missions
1				Try to use as many conversation strategies as possible and report.
2	I just called to say I love you	Rejoinders	Chapter 1 The roller coaster of your language.	Use rejoinders and follow-ups in other classes and report.
3		Clarifications	Chapter 2 Need an ideal conversation partner? Try a non-native!	Call your friends twice a week and have a talk in English.
4	Rhythm test	Mentions	Chapter 3 Apprehiatingmistakes	Telling your mistake stories to your friends. Choose two from
5	Hero	Shadowing/Summarizing	Chapter 4 Shadowing, summarizing, and self-talk: Letting your mind do the talking	Shadowing, Echoing, Summarizing, Self-talk, Planning, and Affirmations and try them out.
6	Jazz chant		Chapter 5 A teddy bear in your ear	Try Smart Fun or create Jazz chant or memorize "Five ways to happiness" by Tim Murphey on YouTube.
7	LLH presentation Rhythm test			

**Data collection and analysis**

Multiple data sources included three questionnaires (April-reflection, November, and January), reflection logs (RL) (six times after each class), a self-evaluation report (January), language learning history (LLH) (January) and interviews (January). The questionnaire consisted of 40 five-point Likert scale questions, 27 of which were developed by Tanaka & Ellis(2003)whilethe remaining13 questionswere added by the researchers. According to Tanaka & Ellis (2003), the questionnaire items cover three dimensions of beliefs: beliefs about analytic learning, beliefs about experiential learning, beliefs about self (self-efficacy, confidence). Six students (two advanced, two intermediate, and two weak) were chosen for an interview. The second researcher interviewed them in Japanese and transcribed the Japanese into English. Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were integrated for this study. The quantitative data were analyzed by calculating the mean scores and the percentage change during two periods of time. The qualitative data were analyzed through inductive approaches and integrated for this study.

**RESULTS****Quantitative data analysis****Table 2. Results of Kendall's Tau Coefficient**

	Time 1 (April)	Time 2 (November)	Time 3 (January)
Time 1 (April)		.455**.	.166
Time 2 (November)			.471**.
Time 3 (December)			

\*\* .  $p < .01$

As shown in Table 2, there were significant correlations between April and November, and between November and January, while there was no correlation between April and January. The results reveal that the rank ordering between April and November was similar to some extent, indicating a minor change of students' beliefs. Similarly, there was a minor change of learners' beliefs between November and January. However, the rank ordering between April and January was not similar, indicating a major change over two periods of time.

**Table 3. Mean scores for the three beliefs factors before and after the cooperative strategy training course**

Factors	Time 1 (April)		Time 2 (November)		Time 3 (January)		Mean score difference(%)	
	Rank	Mean scores	Rank	Mean scores	Rank	Mean scores	Apr-Nov	Nov-Jan
1. Analytic Learning	1	3.55	2	3.94	3	4.00	11.1	1.61
2. Experiential Learning	2	3.42	1	4.17	1	4.31	21.84	3.22
3. Self-efficacy and Confidence	3	2.43	3	3.56	2	4.17	46.49	17.19

Table 2 shows that in April, at the beginning of the first school year, among the three factors, student beliefs about analytic learning ranked first, followed by experiential learning and self-efficacy and confidence came last on the list.

Table 2 also shows that there are changes in the rank order of the three factors and the mean scores of all of the three factors increased over two periods of time, reflecting the changes in student beliefs about English learning.

During the first period from April to November, students were exposed to a new way of learning English based on a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) curriculum (without cooperative strategy training (Smith, 2014)). They had opportunities to learn four integrated skills which really helped them gain more knowledge, having more opportunities to practice listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. Student beliefs changed remarkably during this time. They believed that experiential learning is the best way in their regular English classes to study English; the mean score increased 21.84% as compared with April. Beliefs in analytic learning also increased 11.1%, ranked second in the list. Self-efficacy and confidence factor rocketed in this period (up 46.49%).

During the second period from November to January, students were exposed to cooperative learning strategies in the strategy training class. Data from Table 2 show that the mean scores of the first two factors increased by a small amount during the seven weeks. The biggest advantage of this class was that student self-efficacy and confidence continued to rise quickly (up 17%) after seven weeks, ranking number two on the list after experiential learning factor.

**Table 4. Meanscores for the beliefs statements about cooperative learning**

Factors	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Mean score difference	
	(April)	(November)	(January)	Apr-Nov	Nov-Jan
Cooperative learning	3.71	4.12	4.45	11.11	8.1

Table 3 shows the analysis on changes in the beliefs about cooperative learning over two periods of time. During the first period, students worked in pairs in English classes, they had more chances to practice speaking and listening with their partners. Student beliefs in cooperative learning increased nearly 11% which means that students could see the benefits of the TBLT curriculum to study English. In the second period, with the exposure to cooperative learning activities, beliefs in the benefits of cooperative learning continued to rise rapidly at the rate of 8%.

**Table 5. Beliefs statements which increased the most from November to January**

Questionnaire items	Mean score (November)	Meanscore (January)	Percentage change
26. I am satisfied with my progress in English so far.	2.18	3.41	56.76
10. I can write an essay in English with 700 words.	3.12	4.41	41.51
9. I can keep talking with my partner for 8 minutes.	3.76	4.59	21.88
5. Listening to English songs helps to improve my listening skills.	4.00	4.76	19.12
3. I know many ways to learn English.	3.71	4.41	19.05

Four out of five questionnaire items which increased the most belong to the self-efficacy and confidence factor. Item 26 had the highest improvement, showing that students were satisfied with their progress after the seven-week strategy training. They knew more new ways to study English with enjoyment. The ability to speak and to write also improved significantly after a short period of time. The only one item left belongs to experiential learning. As song/rhythm practice was an activity which the students learned in every class, they gradually realized that rhythm practice was a very efficient way to improve their pronunciation as well as listening skills.

**TABLE6. Beliefs statements which decreased the most from November to January**

Questionnaire items	Mean score (November)	Mean score (January)	Percentage change
2. I can learn well by speaking with native English speakers.	4.29	3.88	-9.59
15. In order to speak English well, it is important for me to learn grammar.	4.59	4.24	-7.69
31. It is okay to guess if I do not know a word in English.	4.41	4.12	-6.67
24. I should not be forced to speak in the English class.	3.06	2.88	-5.77
37. I would like my English teacher to correct all my mistakes.	4.18	3.94	-5.63

The questionnaire item which showed the biggest decrease was item2. Students read an article called “Try a non-native speaker” in week three and then discussed in class in groups. They were all totally surprised at the content of the reading assignment and tried to practice speaking English with their friends both inside and outside the class. The result was positive. The students felt more relaxed when talking with their friends, thus felt more confident. The rest of the four items belong to the analytic learning factor. Students understood that grammar is not the most important thing and that making mistake is not a bad thing if they want to speak English more fluently.

### Qualitative data analysis

#### Initial beliefs

In the first part of the LLH, students were required to reflect the way they had studied English in high schools. All of the students wrote that the purpose of studying English in high school was to pass university entrance exam. Therefore, the focus of the English classes was memorization, grammar, reading and translation from English into Japanese. This traditional way of learning English is still the norm in Japanese high schools (Smith, 2014). Students came to the university, bringing with them those similar kinds of beliefs they used to have in high schools.

My English teachers at my high school often said that you should learn vocabulary and grammar, so I did exactly what they said. We took vocabulary test every week. It was very hard for us. However, I believed that vocabulary is the most important because we were not able to understand English sentences without knowing words. Moreover, we often translated a lot of long passages from English into Japanese. Thus, I thought that reading and grammar were also important. (Yuko, LLH)

**The impact of strategy training on learner beliefs which includes Song/rhythm practice and Communication strategies, reading assignments, and missions.**

For all of the students, it was their first time being introduced to song/rhythm practice. They reflected this fact in their LLH.

I like singing and it was only in this class that we could sing English songs. I was surprised to know that rhythm practice is a good way to learn English. (Miki, LLH)

In the first class, I knew that we could learn English intonation from song and rhythm practice. I was very surprised. I had never had such an experience. (Yuki, LLH)

“I just called to say I love you” was the chosen song for the first three weeks of the class. Students really enjoyed this activity although they found it a little bit strange and difficult.

I liked song and rhythm practice very much. It was fun. I thought that by reading aloud the lyrics with rhythm we could pronounce the words easily and remember them quickly. (Tetsuya, RL 1)

I enjoyed song/rhythm practice. I know the song “I just call to say I love you”, so I could sing the song well. I could also check my pronunciation when we did the rhythm practice. It was very helpful. (Riko, RL 1)

Some other students, however, expressed doubt on this activity.

I did not like song/rhythm activity because I did not think it can improve my English skill. (Toshi, RL 1)

In the second week, students continued the song/rhythm practice. They now got used to it and found it easier to follow compared to the first week. Toshi, a student who expressed doubt on this activity before changed his view and he wrote in his second action log:

Last week I did not understand the reason we did song/rhythm practice, but this week I noticed I could sing the song we sang last week. I remembered the rhythm of the song. It is easy to remember the song and English. I am really surprised that it is a good way to learn English. (Toshi, RL 2)

In the third and fourth week, students got used to song/rhythm activity and they enjoyed practicing it outside the classroom to get ready for the rhythm test in week four. All of the students passed the test with excitement.

We took the rhythm test today. I was a little bit nervous. However, my group passed the test at our first try. It was a good experience. (Mako, RL 4)

We practiced several times before taking the rhythm test today and we could pass the test easily. I was glad because we could help each other practicing to have a good result. (Haruko, RL 4)

In the next two weeks, students practiced a new song, “Hero”. They got used to this activity; they therefore could do the task without difficulty.

I like the new song. I have never listened to this song before, but I could remember some parts already. Rhythm practice made it easier to remember the lyrics, I think. (Toshi, RL 5)

When the course ended, students reflected how they changed their view on the song/rhythm practice activity in their language learning history.

What I learned from this class is that rhythm is very important while speaking. I could not speak English fluently, but I could do it with rhythm. I was happy and I really enjoyed this activity. (Daisuke, LLH)

I liked singing songs and doing rhythm practice in this class. I could not follow rhythm well at first, but I practiced again and again with my friends. Then I got used to it and found this activity very enjoyable. I felt that to make students enjoy the lesson is very important for teachers, so I want to introduce this activity to my students when I become an English teacher in the future. (Mako, LLH)

As for Communication strategies, reading assignments, and missions, the students had one homework reading assignment about the language learning/communication strategies they were going to learn in the next class. In class, under the instructions of the teacher, the students practiced new communication strategies every week in pairs (changing partners several times) and in the last twenty minutes of the class they worked in groups of five in Literature Circles (rotating their roles every week) to discuss the content of the reading assignment. Outside the classroom, the students were required to try out the new communication strategies which they learned in class in other classes or in their daily lives, to write their mission reports, and to share their reports with partners in the following week.

In the first class, the students were given a list of communication strategies and were asked to try to use those which they were not familiar with when working in pairs with their peers. The students were a little bit worried as there were a lot of communication strategies which they did not know.

I learned a lot of new conversation strategies in today's class. I realize that I often use the same conversation strategies again and again, so I am worried. For the last few days I have been trying to use the conversation strategies which I do not know in other classes. I want to speak English fluently. (Nina, RL 1)

The first reading assignment "The roller coaster of your language" helped the students to realize that there were ups and downs in their learning and to relieve the stress of learning English to some extent.

In today's reading assignment, I learned that it is natural to have ups and downs in our learning process, so we do not need to mind about it too much. (Minae, RL 2)

The contents of the second reading assignment "Need an ideal conversation partner? Try a non-native!" and the third one "Apprehiating mistakes" were a big surprise to all of the students. They started to change their views on an ideal conversation partner and making mistakes.

I used to think that talking with native speakers is the best [way] to learn [a] target language. I was surprised to know that [talking with] non-native speakers is [a] better [way]. Now I understand that it is important to talk with my classmates. I will try to talk with my friends in English outside of the classroom. (Fukiko, RL 3)

Once there was a change in student beliefs, there was a change in their actions. I called Fujiko and talked to her about Christmas for about 20 minutes. I was quite nervous at first because I have never called anyone in English [before]. However, we enjoyed talking with each other. I think using English out of the class is a good chance for us to improve our skills. I felt really fresh! (Minae, RL 3)

I talked with Miki and we told each other our mistake stories. We both laughed and did not feel embarrassed at all. I enjoyed sharing my mistake story with others. I thought making mistakes is not a bad thing, we learn from our mistakes. (Fujiko, RL 4).

I used to think that making mistakes is not good and I often feel ashamed about my mistakes. However, I realized something while talking with my friends about making mistakes. We could learn from mistakes and try not to make such [kind of] mistakes in the future. I think sharing mistake stories is good to improve our lives and our English skills. (Saki, RL 4)

In the last two reflection logs, students reported a remarkable increase in the number of communication strategies that they could use to complete their missions. Today when I recorded the discussion with my partner in the Discussion and Debate class, I tried [to use] summarizing and shadowing as much as possible. By doing that, I could keep the conversation going and I could understand my partner's opinions clearly. The number of conversation strategies which I could use is more than before. Using conversation strategies is a good way to learn English, I think.(Minae, RL 5)

The students reflected how they changed their views about language learning after the strategy training course in their LLH, self-evaluation, and interviews.realized that practicing English outside of the classroom is very important. At first, I could not speak English well, but I came to be able to use English more than before as I tried to use it positively with my classmates. I also noticed that I did not use difficult English grammar in daily conversation. I still think that grammar is important, but it is not necessary to use perfect grammar to speak English. (Yuko, Self-evaluation)

I learned the fun of studying in this class. Enjoying study is very important. After this class finished, I felt more confident about my English ability. I felt happy about my progress. I will try to use what I learned in this class in other classes in the future. I will not give up and remember to enjoy learning to improve my English ability. (Mako, LLH)

When I was a high school student, I just studied English by using reference books and listening materials. However, I learned different ways to learn English in this class such as

listening to music, talking with non-native speakers, and even self-talking. I have noticed that there are easy and accessible ways to learn English. (Miki, Interview)

I learned from my classmates that they watch movies to improve their listening skills. Then, I tried it by myself. I learned that learning English with fun is very effective. (Tetsuya, Interview)

### **The impact of peers on learner beliefs**

Pair work was the activity which students enjoyed the most. Student beliefs were influenced by their peers as they talked to one another during pair work. They wanted to try out new things that their classmates recommended to have a better way to study English.

I hardly talked with my friends about ways of studying English. However, today we did a lot of pair-work and talked about our habit of studying English. I knew new ways to study English like watching movies or listening to music. I will try to do what my partners recommended. I enjoyed doing pair-work. (Minae, RL 1)

Through pair-work, I could learn new ways of studying English. For example, one of my partners recommended watching movies to improve our listening skill. She also said that we should watch each movie twice, the first time with subtitle and the second time without subtitle. I tried this way and I felt that I could improve my listening skill as well as know a lot of useful structures which I can use in daily conversations. I want to continue doing this activity. (Tetsuya, LLH)

Pair work also provided the students with opportunities to practice new communication strategies and to share mission reports. For most of the students, pair work was fun and it helped them build up their confidence when speaking by using communication strategies which they learned in this class.

My favorite activity in this class was pair-work. We tried to use some conversation strategies in class with partners right after we learned them. I felt that it is very important to actually use what we learn. I could remember the strategies better, and I felt more confidence about my speaking ability. (Yuko, LLH)

When I could not understand what [native English-speaking] tutors said, I just said “Un-huh” in the first semester. But I started to use clarifications in the second semester which I learned from this class. I thought I improved my English ability. (Toshi, Interview)

I began to ask questions to my friends in a group discussion in PUT in the second semester. I used “What do you mean?” or “What does that mean?” Also, I could use summarizing by saying “You said...” or “You mean...” to confirm what tutors said. Then, I thought I could improve my English ability. (Tetsuya, Interview)

For all of the students, it was their first time to be introduced to Literature Circles where they work in groups of five and each member had his/her own role in the discussion. Several students expressed their worries about performing their roles in the first Literature Circle. However, all of the students could perform their role quite well as they received help from other group members.

In the first Literature Circle, the students soon realized that although all group members read the same reading assignment at home, in class they could still learn a lot of new things from other members as each person had a different role to perform.

When we were high school students, we often had reading assignments. However, we always did the assignments alone and then checked the answers in the next class. We did not know our friends' opinions [about the content of the reading assignments]. However, in this group-work, we had chances to know what our group members' thoughts. ( Saki, RL 2)

In the following Literature Circles, with the support from group members, the students gradually overcame the difficulties they had in the first week and they began to enjoy group work.

Today I learned that group-work is very efficient. We helped one another so it was easier to understand the reading assignment. We could listen to different opinions about the reading, too. I liked this activity. (Nina, RL 3)

The students learned how to discuss in groups and they also noticed that group work helped them open their minds to accept different points of views.

It was interesting to listen to different opinions about the reading assignment. Some opinions were different from mine but I thought it was fine. There were no right or wrong answers, we just discussed our opinions. ( Yuki, LLH).

Group work also helped the students learn how to cooperate with one another and to build up students' confidence to express their ideas gradually.

I had to do different roles every week in Literature Circles which I had never done before, so I was a little [bit] nervous. However, we could help one another and I became more confident to do my task. I enjoyed Literature Circles. (Saki, LLH)

The most memorable [activity] was Literature Circles ... After several classes, I realized that I could speak what I want to say and the amount of information I [could] tell my group members increased because I could speak fluently. (Nina, LLH)

## DISCUSSION

The three research questions are discussed based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### **Question 1: What kind of beliefs do these university students bring into the class?**

The LLH provided the students with a chance to look back at the way they studied English in their senior high schools. All of the students recalled the time they spent in their English classes with the focus on grammar, memorization and translation to prepare for the entrance exams to universities. They did not know about experiential learning and to them, studying English was very boring. They could not listen to English and could not express their ideas in English. What they wrote in the LLH clearly explained that analytic learning ranked first among the three factors in April when they entered the university. However, from April to January, their views of learning English changed remarkably as they were exposed to the TBLT curriculum and the strategy training course.

**Question 2: How do the students participate in cooperative strategy training activities?**

In November the students received strategy training. In seven weeks, they were introduced to communication strategies, listening strategies, reading and discussion strategies. In class, all of the students participated in all activities enthusiastically. They showed their eagerness to learn and practice new communication strategies and to share their mission reports in pairs. In every single reflection log as well as in the LLH and interviews, pair work was the most favorite activity which most of the students chose to write about and talk about. To them, pair work was a great environment to practice communication strategies as they felt free to try to use those strategies in their conversations without worries about making mistakes as their partners were their classmates, not their teacher or tutors. Students also had chances to review what they learned in the previous class and to share their missions trying out the communication strategies which they learned in this class in other classes and in their daily lives. The students enjoyed this activity as everyone had their own way in applying the strategies they learned in this class into practice; therefore, they could learn a lot from one another's experiences.

The students also liked to discuss reading assignments in groups of five. For all of them, Literature Circles was their first experience working in groups to discuss the same reading assignments. Several students expressed their worries about performing their roles in the first two weeks of this class. However, with the help of other group members, they could do their tasks well and gradually learned how to have group discussions. Group discussion provided the students with opportunities to express their opinions on the reading assignments and to open their minds to welcome different points of views at the same time.

**Question 3: How do the students change their beliefs through the strategy training course?**

Students' beliefs about cooperative learning increased rapidly at the rate of 8.1% after seven weeks, showing that the students felt that they could learn better when they worked together. Pair work and group work had provided the students with a significant amount of time inside the classroom to practice the new strategies they learned in every class and to share their experiences of using those strategies outside the classroom. Learner beliefs were influenced by their peers as they talked to one another during pair work and group work. They reflected in their action logs, LLH, self-evaluation and interviews that they wanted to try out new things that their classmates recommended to have a better way to study English. They understood that there were various ways to learn English and the most important thing they realized was that learning English could be fun. They also knew that an ideal partner to practice speaking English is their friends, and that making mistakes while speaking English is not a bad thing. In addition, group work helped the students open their minds to accept different points of views as they learned how to cooperate with one another and to build up their confidence to express their ideas gradually.

What the students wrote in their reflection logs, self-evaluation, LLH and what they said in interviews about changes in their beliefs perfectly matched with the quantitative analysis. The quantitative data show a 19.12% increase in the number of students who believed that listening to songs helps to improve their listening skills and a decrease in the number of

students who believed that they can learn well by speaking with native English speakers, that it is important to learn grammar in order to speak English well and that they would like their English teacher to correct all their mistakes (9.59%, 7.69%, 5.63% respectively). Changes in the views towards learning English lifted the burden on their shoulders, thus enabling them to feel free while speaking and to enjoy the conversations. Students' self-efficacy and confidence was remarkably improved after seven weeks.

Quantitative analysis also shows that four out of five belief statements which increased the most after seven weeks belonged to self-efficacy and confidence factor. They could write an essay in English with seven hundred words and they could keep talking with their partners for eight minutes. In short, the biggest advantage of this class was that student self-efficacy and confidence rose quickly (up 17%) after seven weeks, ranking number two among the three factors after experiential learning factor.

In summary, we have to be careful about interpretation of the results of the survey data. As the results of the Kendall rank correlation coefficient indicate, there were similarities of rank ordering between time 1 and 2 as well as time 2 and 3. However, there was a significant difference between time 1 and 3, which indicates that it takes time to change learner beliefs. Moreover, qualitative data show that how students changed their beliefs about language learning through interacting with other students and becoming members of the learning community. Through mixed methods by integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study reveals that "[l]earning is a process that takes place in a situated practice, not in an individual mind" (Young & Miller, 2004, p. 533).

## CONCLUSION

The mixed method analysis confirms that the cooperative strategy training course played a significant role in changing student beliefs about English language learning. The quantitative data showed that by having a lot of experiences trying out different strategies learned in this class, the students understood that there are various ways to help them become good language learners. This finding is in line with Cohen (2011) in the sense that "strategy instruction should be embedded into language instruction so that learners are provided an opportunity to enhance their language learning experiences" (p.695). Moreover, from a sociocultural perspective, as these students worked more in pair and group work, they built a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). For instance, some students were worried about the group discussion in Literature Circles at the beginning; however, they helped each other and started to enjoy sharing their experiences and ideas. It is evident that these students performed better as they came to participate in discussion actively. According to Swain, Klinnear, & Steinman (2011), "learning involves a gradual and deepening process of participation in a community of practice" (p.29). Consequently, they changed their beliefs and increased their confidence in language learning.

This research was carried out during seven weeks, thus it was quite short to predict how the students would continue to use the strategies they learned in this class after the class ended.

Moreover, these students had opportunity to try out new strategies in other classes based on the TBLT curriculum. What would have happened, if the students had had little opportunity to experiment with new strategies? In addition, this research clearly shows that learner beliefs were shaped and influenced by their peers as they interacted with one another in cooperative learning activities. Those ideas pose new research questions in the future. How will the students continue to use the cooperative strategies they learned in this class in other English classes? Furthermore, Ellis (2008) claims that “strategies involving functional practice aid the development of communicative competence” (p.716). Then how does cooperative strategy training improve learners’ communicative competence? Lastly, how can we analyze the impact of peers on learner beliefs based on a sociocultural perspective? These future issues remain to be answered.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this paper was presented at CAES International Conference, University of Hong Kong in June 2015. We would like to thank Joseph Wood for his proofreading and insightful comments.

## REFERENCES

- Barcelos, A.M.F. (2003). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In P. Kalaja and A.M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 7-33). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Benson, P., & Lor, W. (1999). Conceptions of language and language learning. *System*, 27(4), 459-472.
- Cohen, A.D. (2011). Second language learner strategies. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 2) (pp.681-698). New York: Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Griffiths, C. (2013). *The strategy factor in successful language learning*. Great Britain: ShortRun Press.
- Horwitz, E.K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129). London, UK: Prentice-Hall International.
- Huang, S.C. (1997). Taiwanese senior high school students' EFL learning: Focus on learning strategies and learning beliefs. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 58(03), 780A. (UMI No. 9727936).
- Huang, S.C. (2001). Effects of language learning strategy training on English learning. ERIC number: ED466628.
- Hurd, S., & Lewis, T. (2008). *Language learning strategies in independent settings*. Great Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- Kalaja, P. (1995). Student beliefs (or metacognitive knowledge) about SLA reconsidered. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 191-204.

- Lee, K. R., & Oxford, R. (2008). Understanding EFL learners' strategy use and strategy awareness. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(1), 7-32.
- Magogwe, J.M., & Oliver, R. (2007). The relationship between language learning strategies, proficiency, age and self-efficacy beliefs: A study of language learners in Botswana. *System*, 35(3), 338-352.
- Mizumoto, A., & Takeuchi, O. (2009). Examining the effectiveness of explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies with Japanese EFL university students. *Language Teaching Research*, 13, 4, 425-449.
- Murphey, T. (2006). *Language hungry! An introduction to language learning fun and self-esteem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nakatani, Y. (2005). The effects of awareness-raising training on oral communication strategy use. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, 76-91.
- Naughton, D. (2006). Cooperative strategy training and oral interaction: Enhancing small group communication in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Learner*, 90, 169-184.
- Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Swain, M., Kinnear, P., & Steinman, L. (2011). *Sociocultural theory in second language education*. New York: Multilingual Matters.
- Rubin, J. (1975). What can we learn from the good language learner? *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 31, 304-318.
- Schmidt, R., & Watanabe, Y. (2001). Motivation, strategy use, and pedagogical preferences in foreign language learning. In Z. Dornyei & R. Schmidt (Eds), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (pp. 313-359). Honolulu: The University of Hawaii, second language teaching and curriculum center.
- Tanaka, K. & Ellis, R. (2003). Study-abroad, language proficiency, and learner beliefs about language learning. *JALT Journal*, 25, 63-85.
- Wang, S. (1996). A study of Chinese English majors' beliefs about language learning and their language learning strategies. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57(12), 5021A. (UMI No. 9716564).
- Wenden, A.L. (1986). What do second-language learners know about their language learning? A second look at retrospective account. *Applied Linguistics*, 7:2, 186-205.
- Wenden, A.L. (1987). How to be a successful language learner: Insights and prescriptions from L2 learners. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 103-118). London, UK: Prentice-Hall International.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yang, N. (1999). The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and language strategy use. *System*, 27, 515-535.
- Young, R.F. & Miller, E.R. (2004). Learning as changing participation: Discourse roles in ESL writing conferences. *The Modern Language Learning*, 88, 519-535.

**Appendices****APPENDIX A****LEARNER BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING QUESTIONNAIRE**

Directions: Indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement by choosing the appropriate scale between 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.'

1. I can speak better if I know many conversation strategies.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
2. I can learn well by speaking with native English speakers.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
3. I know many ways to learn English.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
4. It is okay to make many mistakes to improve my English ability.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
5. Listening to English songs helps to improve my listening skills.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
6. I can discuss in English with my classmates for 20 minutes.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
7. I can ask my partner clarification questions if I don't understand what he/she said.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
8. I can ask my partner follow-up questions if I want to know more.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
9. I can keep talking with my partner for 8 minutes.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
10. I can write an essay in English with 700 words.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
11. I can learn well by speaking with classmates in English.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
12. If I am permitted to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for me to speak correctly later on.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
13. I can learn well if I try to study English outside class on my own.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
14. I can learn English well by writing down everything in my notebook.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
15. In order to speak English well, it is important for me to learn grammar.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
16. It doesn't matter if I make mistakes when speaking with others in English.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
17. In order to learn well, it is important for me to review what I have been taught in the English class.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
18. I should be able to understand everything I read in English.  
strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree
19. In order to learn well, it is important for me to try to think about my progress in

English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

20. I can learn well by listening to music or watching movies in English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

21. Memorization is a good way for me to learn English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

22. I can learn English well by living in an English-speaking country (e.g., USA).

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

23. I can learn English well by following a textbook.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

24. I should not be forced to speak in the English class.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

25. I can learn English well if I am studying just for pleasure.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

26. I am satisfied with my progress in English so far.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

27. I would like my English teacher to explain important things in my first language so that I can understand everything.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

28. I can learn English well in a class where the teacher maintains good discipline.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

29. I can learn well by using English outside class.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

30. I should be able to understand everything the teacher says in the English class.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

31. It is okay to guess if I do not know a word in English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

32. I can learn well by reading English books or newspapers.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

33. It is possible for me to learn to speaking English every well.

Now strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

34. I can learn well if I try to think in English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

35. In order to speak English well, it is important for me to learn vocabulary.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

36. It is possible for me not to get nervous when speaking English.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

37. I would like my English teacher to correct all my mistakes.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

38. I can learn better if I work in a group.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

39. I can learn better when I teach other group members.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

40. I can learn better when other group members help me.

strongly agree 5-----4-----3-----2-----1 strongly disagree

## **APPENDIX B**

### **LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What activities did you like the most? Why?
2. What language learning strategies did you find the most efficient? How did you learn to use those strategies?
3. What conversation strategies did you find difficult to use? Why?
4. Did you enjoy Literature Circles? Why or why not? Which role was difficult? Why? What did you learn from other group members?
5. How about writing reflection logs, language learning history and then sharing with peers? Was it useful? In what way?
6. What missions did you like? Why?
7. After this course, do you think that your communication skills were improved? How do you know?
8. After this course, did you change your views about English learning? How did you change?
9. After this course, do you have any plans to use those language learning strategies in the future? How?