

# Analyzing Language Learning Beliefs of English Student Teachers: A Cross-Cultural Study Across Turkic Republics\*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers' beliefs about English language learning, and whether there are any differences between their beliefs in terms of cultural background. The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was conducted with 239 student teachers enrolled in ELT programs at the universities in Kazakhstan and Turkey. This inventory included items on aptitude, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation. The overall difference between the beliefs of Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers was investigated by running a Man Whitney-U test, which showed a significant and meaningful difference between Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers' beliefs. It was found that student teachers had shared similar beliefs about language learning, and motivations and expectations. However, they had different beliefs in terms of beliefs toward language aptitude, nature of language learning and learning and communication strategies. In light of these findings, it might be said that national origin/ethnicity does affect student teachers' beliefs about language learning.

## Keywords

Student teachers' beliefs, English language learning, Turkic Republics, cross-cultural study.

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## Introduction

Borg (2001: 186) defined belief as a “proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, that is evaluative because it is accepted as true by the individual, it has an emotive commitment, it guides thought and behavior”. Moreover, Pajares (1992: 316) pointed out that “the construct of educational beliefs is itself broad and encompassing”. With the rise of the research in the area of teacher education, concepts such as the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the student teachers have gained a great interest among researchers. One of these concepts which have received a lot of attention is student teachers’ beliefs that have an impact on their foreign language learning ability, strategies, and motivation. Investigating student teachers’ beliefs is important in the field of language teacher education because these beliefs are likely to determine the way teachers teach in the future (Pajares 1992: 307). Horwitz (1987: 119) pointed out that insights about learners’ beliefs about language learning can help teachers prepare their learners to be receptive to new ideas and information. Besides, it may help teachers design and prepare a course or program for some purposes. Besides, Horwitz (1987: 120) stated that language learners’ cultural background is likely to influence and shape the language learners’ beliefs about foreign language learning.

Over the last two decades, researchers have set out to identify beliefs about language learning to better understand the language learner. Among these research studies on beliefs raises the question of the influence of the background variables of national origin/ethnicity and gender on beliefs about language learning. The beliefs of learners about foreign language learning are frequently influenced by the context in which they learn and these beliefs, in turn, influence their learning behaviors (Hong 2006: 184). Several studies using the BALLI with culturally homogenous groups of learners have demonstrated that learners from different cultures tend to hold definite, albeit different sets of beliefs about how languages are learned (Bernat 2006: 202, Horwitz 1999: 557, Fujiwara 2011: 91, Nikitina & Furuoka 2006: 209, Oh 1996: 65, Truitt 1995: 2). For example, Horwitz, in his study (1999: 561), reviewed representative studies (including American learners of French, Spanish, German, and Japanese, the US university instructors of French, and Korean, Taiwanese, and Turkish heritage English as a Foreign Language English students) to identify similarities and differences across cultural groups. The results indicated that beliefs may vary based on age,

stage of learning, and professional status. However, he argued that there was no strong evidence for a conclusion of cultural differences in learner beliefs. There has been relatively little work on comparative studies in terms of different cultural backgrounds (Horwitz 1999: 576).

### **Student teachers' beliefs and relevant studies**

In recent years, there have been a great number of research studies in Turkey (Çobanoğlu 2015: 48) which explored the nature of beliefs (Başer & Mutlu 2011: 95, Boz 2008: 66, Şahin et al. 2010: 296, Şeker 2010: 138), sources of beliefs (Başer & Mutlu 2011: 96, Boz, Kırbulut & Bektaş 2010, Uçar et al. 2010: 321, Uzuntiryaki et al. 2010: 403), changes in beliefs (Cephe 2009: 184, Haser & Star 2009: 294, Özmen 2012: 1, Yüksel 2011: 38) and the relationship between beliefs about teaching and classroom practices (İnceçay 2011: 129, Şeker 2010). These research studies have produced important insights. For instance, in the Turkish EFL context, Altan's (2012: 486) study of EFL pre-service teachers suggested that teacher education programs encourage prospective teachers to explore their beliefs, pay attention to any unrealistic beliefs or misconceptions they may hold, and challenge such beliefs with new information and knowledge. Similarly, Özmen (2012: 11), in his longitudinal study, examined 49 EFL student teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching in the ELT program in Turkey. The findings of the study indicated that "a teacher education program based on a constructivist view of education might have a significant impact on the belief development of pre-service student teachers".

All of these research studies were done in the Turkish context and investigated the beliefs of Turkish students; unfortunately, few research studies have found in the Kazakh context which explored the beliefs of student teachers of English (Vitchenko 2017: 102). In her mixed-method study, Vitchenko (2017: 105) investigated Kazakhstani teachers' and students' beliefs about language learning and teaching. Participants were 207 students and 15 teachers of the Foreign Languages Department. The research findings revealed that participants' attitudes to learning EFL are equally influenced by internal (e.g. personal and professional development) and external factors (e.g. social value, state policy, and globalization). The author pointed out that her research study has no analogy, as it was the first mixed-methods research investigating beliefs about EFL teaching and learning situated in the context of higher education in Kazakhstan. Therefore, she suggested

further research with more participants in both national and international contexts, which would help explore the role of and the interplay between the beliefs about multilingualism.

The research studies investigating student teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching often show that student teachers learners' beliefs about language learning may be influenced by their cultural backgrounds and previous experiences (Horwitz 1987: 125). For instance, the research made by Kunt (2008: 66) investigated the beliefs of students about learning Turkish as a second language. International students studying at Eastern Mediterranean University participated in her study. The participants were from eight different countries: Nigeria, Iran, Cambodia, Jordan, Cameroon, Pakistan, Iraq, and Mongolia. She compared the responses of international students who are learning Turkish as a Second Language with the previous studies using the BALLI: Horwitz (1987: 119), with international ESL students in the United States; Truitt (1995: 2), with Korean EFL students; Diab (2006: 83), with Lebanese students of English and French; and Kunt (2008: 63), with Turkish EFL students in Northern Cyprus. The data obtained from 60 international university students indicated that Turkish as a second language (TSL) learners' beliefs about language learning differed from those of ESL students in the United States (Horwitz 1987: 119), EFL students in Korea (Truitt 1995: 1), EFL and French students in Lebanon, and Turkish EFL students in Northern Cyprus. In addition, international ESL students had high levels of integrative motivation regarding Turkish culture.

In a similar vein, to discover the underlying beliefs of Korean university students, Truitt (1995: 3) used the BALLI to investigate the beliefs of 204 students learning English as a Second Language. The researcher compared the results with other studies of U.S. foreign language students, ESL students in the United States, ESL students in Taiwan. The findings revealed that learner's beliefs about language learning may vary based on cultural background and previous experiences. Banya and Cheng (1997: 6), with an attempt to identify cultural differences in language learning beliefs between Chinese students of English and the U.S. students of German, French, and Spanish, compared with the previous studies that used the BALLI. The findings pointed out some differences existing in beliefs between Chinese students and American students of foreign languages.

Similarly, Diab (2006: 80) investigated the language learning beliefs of

284 students of English and French in Lebanon. The findings of the study indicated that different cultural backgrounds, background variables within-group, and variation in a particular group's belief about learning different target languages are influential factors on learner belief. Hong (2006: 68) examined the beliefs of 428 monolingual Korean and 420 bilingual Korean-Chinese university students. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the learners' beliefs and their learning strategy use and the influence of background variables. The results showed that the difference in learning experiences of the participants from different geographical and socio-educational learning settings between the two countries could likely have been one of the factors that affected the beliefs of the students in the study. However, Nikitina and Furuoka (2006: 218) stated that "the students of different languages in different cultures held quite similar collective sets of beliefs about language learning". Even though beliefs about language learning are context-specific and learners from different cultures may have different attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about language learning, the mismatches among researchers persisted.

Above reviewed studies show that exploring the beliefs of student teachers from different cultural backgrounds may enable teacher educators and instructors to obtain learning strategies that will make student teachers become more effective teachers. Many studies are focusing on language learning beliefs that compare across cultures (Banya & Cheng 1997: 7, Truitt 1995: 11, Peacock 1999: 247); however, Horwitz (1999: 576) reported that there is still a need for further investigation to identify the beliefs of specific target populations. In addition, there exists no study comparing the beliefs of Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers in different cultural settings. Along this line of thinking, this research presents a quantitative study on student teachers' beliefs about English language learning in Kazakhstan and Turkey.

More specifically, this research study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does national origin/ethnicity influence student teachers' beliefs about language learning?
  - a. What are Turkish student teachers' beliefs (English as a second language) about learning English?
  - b. What are Kazakhstani student teachers' beliefs (English as a second

language) about learning English?

c. What are the differences and similarities between Kazakhstani student teachers' and Turkish student teachers' beliefs toward English language learning?

## Method

### *Research design*

This study used a quantitative research design and it is a descriptive study in nature. Dörnyei (2007: 32) described quantitative research as including data collection steps, generally resulting in numerical data and analyzing numerical data via statistical methods. Data obtained were calculated using certain statistical tests to reach generalizations about the targeted group samples. In this regard, the present descriptive study is a quantitative survey, administered to both Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers to analyze their beliefs about language learning.

### *Context*

Discussing the nature of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Kazakhstan to contextualize the study and to give a glimpse of the broader background context of where the pre-service teachers formed their beliefs is important. Kazakhstan is a bilingual country where both Kazakh and Russian are spoken widely in the country. There are over 130 nationalities which makes Kazakhstan a multilingual country. Kazakhstan's Constitution gives Kazakh an official status and used as an official "state" language and Russian is designated as the "language of interethnic communication". The other languages that are also spoken in the country include German, with 958,000 speakers, Uyghur 300,000; Ukrainian, 898,000; Tatar; 328,000; Belarus, 183, 000; Korean, 103,000; Polish, 61,000; Greek, 47,000; and Romanian, 33,000. We called participants Kazakhstani student teachers because the subject group from Kazakhstan consisted of different nationalities.

On the other hand, Turkey is a monolingual country where English is spoken and taught as a foreign language. The official language, Turkish, is the first language spoken by 90% of the 71.1m population. Although the two sample groups in this research study share a similar language structure (Turkic), differences in language learning beliefs between two groups may exist because of the vastly different socio-cultural, political, and educational contexts.

### *Participants*

The researchers selected two ELT programs for this study, one in Turkey

(Gazi University) and one in Kazakhstan (Ahkmet Yassawi University). The participants of the study include 239 student teachers, 172 of them were female, and the remainder 66 student teachers were male. Their ages ranged from 19 to 51, with an average age of 22.3 (SD = .64). They were all full-time undergraduates in different years of English Language Teaching Program. The program is a 4-year full-time pre-service ELT teacher education program for the student teachers who want to teach English as a foreign language. They all learned English in a similar context, "English as a foreign language". In the present study, the participants from Kazakhstan were multinational students. Sixty-six student teachers were Kazakh, 28 students were Uzbek, and 8 Turkmen, 3 Uygur, 4 Russian, 2 Kirgiz, 5 Afghan. Participants from Turkey were all Turkish student teachers.

#### *Instrument*

Horwitz's (1987: 119) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was administrated to investigate Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers' beliefs on English language learning. This instrument was a "suitable tool for conducting research on language learning beliefs in different sociolinguistic settings" (Nikitina & Furuoka 2006: 209). The BALLI contains 34 items and assesses student beliefs in five major areas: 1) Difficulty of language learning; 2) Foreign language aptitude; 3) The nature of language learning; 4) Learning and communication strategies and 5) Motivations and expectations. The Likert Scale questions used a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### *Data Collection Procedures and Analysis*

The questionnaire was administered by the researchers to ELT student teachers with the cooperation of English language teacher educators at the end of the fall semester in 2018.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) software version 22. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation were calculated. The reliability of the survey was analyzed with Cronbach's Alpha ( $r=.6.80$ ) which means that the instrument was quite reliable (Tavşanlı 2014: 25). Before the comparison, the normality and the sample size were considered to see whether there were any concerns. Kolmogorov-Smirnov value is recorded as 0.071 (Turkey) and 0.096 (Kazakhstan). As the number of participants was small and not homogeneous, the non-parametric test applied for the

data analysis. Mann-Whitney U test was used to understand the differences between the two different foreign language groups' responses on BALLI. Participants filled out the questionnaire in their regular classroom settings with their teacher educators.

### Results

Identifying the beliefs of Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers was the primary focus of this study. The data were processed through a quantitative research design. In the survey, BALLI (Horwitz 1987: 119) was utilized to explore student teachers' beliefs about language learning. Five components of BALLI were discussed: The difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, and the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies and motivations, and expectations of foreign language students. BALLI items 3, 23, 32, 33, and 34 concern the general difficulty of learning a foreign language and the specific difficulty of the learner's target language. The descriptive statistic of Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers' English language learning beliefs is listed in Table 1. The majority of the Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers agreed that some languages were easier than others. Both groups of participants disagree with the statement "It is easier to speak than understand English".

Most of the Turkish student teachers ( $M=3.45$ ) believed that English is an easy or a medium-difficulty language; however, the majority of the Kazakhstani student teachers ( $M=2.89$ ) thought that English is a difficult language to learn. The student teachers also underestimated the duration necessary to learn English. Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers believed English could be learned in 1-2 years by spending only 1 hour a day. Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers also differed in terms of difficulty of speaking and understanding a foreign language. While Turkish student teachers (Mean= 2.88) disagreed with item 23, most of the Kazakhstani student teachers (Mean=3.50) showed neither disagreement nor agreement. Both believed that some languages are easier than others (Kazakhstani student teachers agreed;  $M=3.89$ ; Turkish student teachers agreed;  $M=4.07$ ). Another item that revealed a significant difference between the Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers was that the ease of reading and writing than speaking and understanding the English language. Turkish students disagreed with item 32, while Kazakhstani student teachers neither disagreed nor agreed.



**Table 1.** *The difficulty of language learning*

Items	Country	N	M	SD
3. Some languages are easier than others.	Turkey	120	4.07	.945
	Kazakhstan	119	3.89	.896
23. It is easier to speak than to understand English.	Turkey	120	2.30	.966
	Kazakhstan	119	2.76	1.03
32. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	Turkey	120	2.88	1.19
	Kazakhstan	119	3.50	1.07
33. The English language is*	Turkey	120	3.45	.765
	Kazakhstan	119	2.89	.857
i. a very difficult language				
ii. a difficult language				
iii. a language of medium difficulty				
iv. an easy language				
v. a very easy language				
34. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?	Turkey	120	2.81	1.39
	Kazakhstan	119	2.40	1.12
i. less than 1 year				
ii. 1 to 2 years				
iii. 3 to 5 years				
iv. 5 to 10 years				
v. You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day				

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree;  $p < .05$

The second category examined was “Foreign Language Aptitude” and the results obtained in that category are given in Table 2. BALLI items 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 17, 28, and 31 concern the general existence of specialized abilities for language learning and beliefs about the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful language learners. The majority of the participants agreed that language learning is easier for children than for adults (Turkish:  $M=4.33$ ; Kazakhstani student teachers:  $M=3.93$  agreement). Another item on which both Kazakhstani and Turkish student teachers had similar beliefs was that some people have a special ability for language learning. For item 5,

the majority of the Turkish student teachers disagreed, while Kazakhstani participants neither agreed nor disagreed. Although Turkish ( $M=4.15$ ) and Kazakhstani student teachers ( $M=3.78$ ) indicated that they had different beliefs on learning another language is easier if you already know a language, there is no statistically significant difference between the participants in this item. Turkish ( $M=1.85$ ) and Kazakhstani ( $M=2.54$ ) student teachers were determined to have found similar beliefs in those people who are good at mathematics and science are not good at languages. Another item on which both Turkish ( $M=3.67$ ) and Kazakhstani ( $M=3.63$ ) student teachers had similar beliefs was that they have a special ability for learning foreign languages. Both groups indicated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with this item. No significant difference was determined in item 17, which indicated that women are better language learners than men. Similarly, despite no statistical significance, the majority of the Turkish student teachers ( $M=3.77$ ) neither disagreed nor agreed with the item stating that people speaking a foreign language are intelligent; however, most of the Kazakhstani student teachers ( $M=4.06$ ) agreed with that item. Turkish student teachers and Kazakhstani student teachers differed in item 31. While Turkish students ( $M=3.88$ ) neither disagreed nor agreed, Kazakhstani students ( $M=4.21$ ) agreed with this item.

**Table 2.** *Foreign language aptitude*

Items	Country	N	M	SD
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	Turkey	120	4.33	.93
	Kazakhstan	119	3.93	1.00
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	4.34	.8451
	Kazakhstan	119	4.17	.830
5. People in my country are good at learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	2.30	.884
	Kazakhstan	119	3.36	.880
9. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	Turkey	120	4.15	.816
	Kazakhstan	119	3.78	.910
10. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	1.85	.981
	Kazakhstan	119	2.54	1.14
14. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	3.67	.945
	Kazakhstan	119	3.63	.881

17. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	2.42	1.22
	Kazakhstan	119	2.73	1.18
28. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	Turkey	120	3.77	.939
	Kazakhstan	119	4.06	.918
31. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	Turkey	120	3.88	1.11
	Kazakhstan	119	4.21	9.22

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree;  $p < .05$

BALLI items 7, 11, 15, 21, 25, and 26 include a broad range of issues related to the nature of the language learning process. Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers neither disagreed nor agreed with the item 7. The graphs for the statements about the nature of language learning (Table 3) show that a vast majority of student teachers of both countries agreed with the statements that it is best to learn English in an English speaking country (Item 11). Most of the Kazakhstani ( $M=4.34$ ) and Turkish ( $M= 3.59$ ) students believed that the most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words. We can infer from the item 21 that Turkish ( $M= 2.12$ ) student teachers do not believe in the importance of learning grammar, while Kazakhstani ( $M=3.73$ ) students neither disagreed nor agreed. It can be stated that the majority of Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers showed agreement on learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects (Item 25). Although Turkish ( $M=2.35$ ) students disagreed that translation is important, responders from Kazakhstan ( $M=3.81$ ) neither disagreed nor agreed with this item.

**Table 3.** *The nature of language learning*

Items	Country	N	M	SD
7. People in my country are good at learning foreign languages.	Turkey	120	3.86	.925
	Kazakhstan	119	3.57	1.16
11. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	Turkey	120	4.30	1.01
	Kazakhstan	119	4.53	.734
15. The most important part of learning English is learning vocabulary words.	Turkey	120	3.59	.957
	Kazakhstan	119	4.34	.807
21. The most important part of learning English is learning grammar.	Turkey	120	2.12	.903
	Kazakhstan	119	3.73	1.03

25. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	Turkey	120	3.88	1.02
	Kazakhstan	119	3.53	1.01
26. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.	Turkey	120	2.35	1.04
	Kazakhstan	119	3.81	.991

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree;  $p < .05$

A significant difference was found in student teachers' beliefs about learning and communication strategies. For instance, Turkish ( $M=3.35$ ) student teachers neither disagreed nor agreed with item 6, while Kazakhstani ( $M=4.35$ ) students agreed on the importance of excellent pronunciation. If we consider Table 4; we can state that the majority of Turkish ( $M=1.62$ ) and Kazakhstani ( $M=2.25$ ) students showed disagreement on saying nothing in English until you can say it correctly. The student-teachers of both countries stated that they enjoyed practicing English with native speakers of English (Item 12). Similarly, both groups of participants expressed the importance of guessing the meaning of an unknown word (Item 13). It was determined that Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers shared the same belief since the majority of them believed that repetition and practice are very important in language learning (Item 16). The students from Turkey ( $M=2.63$ ) disagreed with the statement "I feel timid speaking English with other people", while students from Kazakhstan ( $M=3.12$ ) neither disagreed nor agreed with this item. Similarly, Turkish students disagreed and Kazakhstani students neither disagreed nor agreed with item 20. The participants from both countries shared the same belief since the majority of them believed that practicing with audio equipment such as cassettes or tapes (CDs) is important in language learning (Item 24).

**Table 4.** *Learning and communication strategies*

Items	Country	N	M	SD
6. It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.	Turkey	120	3.35	1.00
	Kazakhstan	119	4.35	.925
8. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	Turkey	120	1.62	.840
	Kazakhstan	119	2.25	1.27

12. I enjoy practicing English with native speakers of English.	Turkey	120	4.41	.728
	Kazakhstan	119	4.46	.789
13. It is okay to guess if you don't know a word in English.	Turkey	120	4.30	.705
	Kazakhstan	119	3.32	1.15
16. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	Turkey	120	4.60	.678
	Kazakhstan	119	4.69	.683
19. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	Turkey	120	2.63	1.11
	Kazakhstan	119	3.12	1.12
20. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	Turkey	120	2.52	1.15
	Kazakhstan	119	3.47	1.04
24. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.	Turkey	120	3.61	.971
	Kazakhstan	119	3.75	.929

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree;  $p < .05$

Table 5 is concerned with motivations and expectations and there were six items (4, 18, 22, 27, 29 and 30). The majority of the Turkish ( $M=4.12$ ) and Kazakhstani ( $M=4.26$ ) student teachers believe that they would learn to speak English. The student-teachers of both groups stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed on knowing a foreign language is important in their country (Item18). They had also similar thoughts on item 22. The majority of Turkish and Kazakhstan student teachers agreed with the item which stated that they could find a good job if they learned English very well (Item27). It was also clear from the expressions of student teachers of both countries that they wanted to learn to speak English well (Item29). The student teachers also stated that they would like to have friends who are native speakers of English (Item 30).

**Table 5.** *Motivations and expectations*

Items	Country	N	M	SD
4. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak the English language very well.	Turkey	120	4.12	.7839
	Kazakhstan	119	4.26	.868
18. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.	Turkey	120	3.54	1.20
	Kazakhstan	119	3.66	1.01

22. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know native speakers of English better.	Turkey	120	3.93	.837
	Kazakhstan	119	3.73	.915
27. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	Turkey	120	4.54	.659
	Kazakhstan	119	4.57	.604
29. I want to learn to speak English well.	Turkey	120	4.74	.510
	Kazakhstan	119	4.79	.461
30. I would like to have friends who are native speakers of English.	Turkey	120	4.51	.798
	Kazakhstan	119	4.59	.642

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree; p< .05

**Table 6.** *Descriptive Statistics of Turkish and Kazakhstani Student Teachers' English Language Learning Beliefs in terms of factors*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
The difficulty of language learning	Turkey	120	1.80	5.00	3.1067	.49599
	Kazakhstan	119	1.80	4.60	3.0941	.48908
Foreign Language Aptitude	Turkey	120	2.11	4.33	3.4157	.41586
	Kazakhstan	119	2.44	4.56	3.6069	.35750
The nature of language learning	Turkey	120	1.50	4.33	3.3542	.49956
	Kazakhstan	119	1.50	5.00	3.9244	.49327
Learning and communication strategies	Turkey	120	2.38	4.50	3.3833	.35788
	Kazakhstan	119	2.38	4.68	3.6807	.37206
Motivations and expectations	Turkey	120	2.83	5.00	4.2333	.40618
	Kazakhstan	119	3.17	5.00	4.2717	.38502
Total	Turkey	120	2.38	4.09	3.4961	.28681
	Kazakhstan	119	2.76	4.32	3.7222	.25562

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree; p< .05

To explore the similarities and differences between Turkish student teachers' and Kazakhstani student teachers' language learning beliefs, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed in this study. We can see from the table that they had shared similar beliefs in the difficulty of language learning and motivations and expectations. However, in other factors, they had different beliefs.

**Table 7.** *Comparison between Turkish Student Teachers’ Language Learning Beliefs and Kazakhstani Student Teachers’ English Language Learning Beliefs*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>MR</b>	<b>SR</b>
The difficulty of language learning	Turkey	120	120.48	14458
	Kazakhstan	119	119.51	14222
Foreign Language Aptitude	Turkey	120	104.53	12543
	Kazakhstan	119	135.61	16137
The nature of language learning	Turkey	120	81.18	9741
	Kazakhstan	119	159.15	18938.50
Learning and communication strategies	Turkey	120	93.21	1185.50
	Kazakhstan	119	147.01	17494.50
Motivations and expectations	Turkey	120	116.40	13968
	Kazakhstan	119	123.63	14712
Total	Turkey	120	91.69	11003
	Kazakhstan	119	148.58	17677

\*Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree;  $p < .05$

Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests showed no significant differences in responses between males and females, although the factor “Motivation and Expectations” was marginally significant showing a higher mean ranking of women (123.99) compared to men (107.79).

**Table 8.** *Descriptive Statistics of Student Teachers’ English Language Learning Beliefs in terms of gender*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>MR</b>	<b>SR</b>
The difficulty of language learning	Male	66	122.60	8091.50
	Female	172	118.31	20349.50
Foreign Language Aptitude	Male	66	111.80	7379
	Female	172	122.45	21062
The nature of language learning	Male	66	115.81	7643.50
	Female	172	120.92	20797.50
Learning and communication strategies	Male	66	112.83	7447
	Female	172	122.06	20994
Motivations and expectations	Male	66	107.79	7114
	Female	172	123.99	21327
Total	Male	66	111.75	7375.50
	Female	172	122.47	21065.50

Table 9 shows that students have the strongest belief in Difficulty of Language Learning (M=3.10), followed by Foreign Language Aptitude (M=3.51), the nature of language learning (M=3.63), Learning and Communication Strategies (M=3.53) and Motivation and Expectations (M=3.95). Means are higher than 3, and the significant level is <0.05.

**Table 9.** *Descriptive Statistics of Student Teachers from both countries*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
The difficulty of language learning	239	1.80	5.00	3.10	.491
Foreign Language Aptitude	239	2.11	4.50	3.51	.398
The nature of language learning	239	1.50	5.00	3.63	.571
Learning and communication strategies	239	2.38	4.63	3.53	3.93
Motivations and expectations	239	2.83	5.00	4.25	3.95
Total	239	2.38	4.32	3.60	2.93

## Discussion

The study intended to explore the ELT student teachers' beliefs about English language learning. For this purpose, based on the analysis, it was found that Kazakhstani student teachers and Turkish student teachers held a variety of beliefs about language learning. The findings suggest that national origin/ethnicity does affect students' beliefs about language learning. For example, some of the most striking differences were found in the areas of language aptitude, nature of the language and language learning strategies. However, regarding the comparison of Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers in their difficulty of the language and motivation and expectations, the findings of this study indicated a similar pattern between the two groups. Furthermore, ELT student teachers were optimistic about the difficulty of English learning and their ability.

Concerning the difficulty of language learning (Table 1), both Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers study held very similar beliefs. Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers, for example, while rating the English language as a language of medium difficulty, also reported that someone who spent 1 hour a day learning a language would be able to speak the language well in 1-2 years. Similar results were found in previous research studies, which support this issue (Truitt 1995: 5).

Overall, Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers' responses regarding



foreign language aptitude (Table 2) were not similar. Turkish student teachers believed that people in Turkey are not good at learning foreign languages. On the other hand, Kazakhstani students neither disagreed nor agreed. In addition, they shared similar beliefs on the issue of whether women are better than men at learning foreign languages. Both groups did not agree with this statement.

Furthermore, the nature of language learning (Table 3) showed a number of different beliefs. For example, Turkish student teachers did not agree on the importance of grammar learning, while Kazakhstani student teachers were neutral with this statement; however, both groups agreed on the importance of vocabulary learning. Students from both countries believed that it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.

Beliefs concerning learning and communication strategies (Table 4) in both groups were not similar. Turkish study participants held different beliefs on the areas of pronunciation, while Kazakhstani participants agreed on the importance of speaking English with excellent pronunciation. However, both Turkish and Kazakhstani students held similar beliefs with the importance of practice in English language and enjoyment in practicing English with native speakers. In addition, both groups disagreed on the issue of whether not speaking in a foreign language unless correctly. Not all participants from both countries were sure about practicing with audio equipment. This interpretation is consistent with the previous research on the students' learning strategies, which revealed that individual students differ considerably in their use of learning strategies (Oxford 1993: 27, Rubin 1987: 15).

Finally, the student teachers' responses regarding their motivations and expectation for success (Table 5) showed marked similarities to items relating to motivation for learning English and their expectation for ultimate success. It was clear from the results that both groups of student teachers were highly motivated. It showed that motivation plays an important role in learning a second language (Gardner & Lambert 1972: 277). Other results related to motivations and expectations indicated that both groups of student teachers have a strong level of instrumental motivation because they believed that if they learn English very well, they would have better opportunities for a good job. These results support Dörnyei's (1990: 45) argument that in EFL contexts, students are more instrumentally motivated than integratively.

To investigate gender difference (Table 8), the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was employed. The findings revealed that overall males and females held similar beliefs about language learning. It is important to note that although many gender differences were found in the cross-cultural studies Siebert (2003: 27), some studies show that there was no significant effect of gender on students' beliefs in learning English (Bernat & Liyod 2007: 79, Tercanlioglu 2005: 146). Therefore, the findings of the present study are in line with Tercanlioglu's (2005: 157) study in which no significant relationship between language learners' beliefs and gender was observed. Regarding the five components of beliefs about language learning (Table 9), the results of the present study show that student teachers from both countries have the strongest belief in Difficulty of Language Learning ( $M=3.10$ ), followed by Foreign Language Aptitude ( $M=3.51$ ), nature of language learning ( $M=3.63$ ), Learning and Communication Strategies ( $M=3.53$ ) and Motivation and Expectations ( $M=3.95$ ). Means are higher than 3, and the significant level is  $<0.05$ , meaning all Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers have significant strong beliefs about language learning in all five components (Altan 2012: 481). Based on these findings, this study presents empirical evidence to the existing literature, which suggests that ELT student teachers' beliefs about language learning may also be context and culture-dependent. With these perspectives, the current findings are in line with similar research about student teachers' beliefs on English language learning (Horwitz 1999: 575).

## Conclusion

The quantitative data gathered utilizing the BALLI questionnaire indicated the beliefs of Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers about English language learning. In light of these findings, it might be said that some similarities and differences existed between the Kazakhstani and Turkish ELT student teachers, perhaps because of their education system, different cultures, and the role of English in both countries. For instance, the Turkish students appeared to have greater confidence in their ability to learn English than the Kazakhstani students. This could be related to differences in the learning contexts in these countries, cultural differences, or differences between the Turkish and Kazakh languages. Participants from Kazakhstan were bilingual students, which means that it could be one of the most

important factors, which would affect the students' beliefs about foreign language learning. Also, responses from student teachers within the two groups show that they shared similar beliefs about the difficulty of the language. For instance, both groups stated that English can be learned in 1-2 years by spending only 1 hour a day.

Despite the small sample, this research study points out that significant differences do exist in beliefs about English language learning between Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers based on cultural and educational background. The results of the study entail that more research into this topic needs to be conducted with a larger sample of Turkish and Kazakhstani student teachers.

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# İngilizce Öğretmeni Adaylarının Dil Öğrenme İnançlarının İncelenmesi: Türki Cumhuriyetlerde Kültürlerarası Bir Çalışma \*

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## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kazakistanlı ve Türk öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce öğrenme konusundaki inançlarını ve inançları arasında eğitim ve yetişme durumu açısından kültürel bir fark olup olmadığını araştırmaktır. *Dil Öğrenmeye İlişkin İnançlar Envanteri*, Kazakistan ve Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde İngiliz Dili Eğitimi programlarına kayıtlı 239 öğretmen adayları ile yürütülmüştür. Bu envanter, yetenek, dil öğreniminin doğası, öğrenme ve iletişim stratejileri ve motivasyon konularını içermektedir. Kazakistanlı ve Türkiyelili öğretmen adayları arasındaki inançlarındaki genel fark Man Whitney-U testi kullanılarak incelenmiş olup, öğretmen adaylarının inançları arasında anlamlı bir farklılık göstermiştir. Örneğin, öğretmen adayları dil öğrenme zorluğu, motivasyon ve beklentiler konusunda benzer inançlara sahip olmuştur. Ancak dil yetenekleri, dil öğreniminin doğası, öğrenim ve iletişim stratejileri ile ilgili inançları bakımından farklı sonuçlar göstermiştir. Bu bulgular ışığında, ulusal köken/etnik yapının öğretmen adaylarının dil öğrenme konusundaki inançlarını etkilediği söylenebilir.

## Anahtar kelimeler

Öğretmen adaylarının inançları, İngilizce öğrenimi, Türk Cumhuriyetleri, kültürlerarası çalışma.

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# Исследование веры в изучение языка у будущих учителей английского: межкультурное исследование в тюркских республиках\*

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## Аннотация

Цель данного исследования состояла в том, чтобы изучить убеждения казахстанских и турецких студентов в изучении английского языка, а также выяснить, есть ли различия между их убеждениями с точки зрения воспитания и образования. Опрос по изучению языка (BALLI) был проведен с участием 239 студентов, обучающихся по программам ELT (преподавание английского языка) в университетах Казахстана и Турции. Анкета включала в себя вопросы, касающиеся способностей, характера изучения языка, стратегий обучения и общения, а также мотивации. Общая разница между убеждениями казахстанских и турецких студентов была исследована с помощью теста Ман Уитни-U, который показал существенную и значимую разницу между убеждениями казахстанских и турецких студентов – будущих преподавателей. Выяснилось, что учащиеся разделяют схожие взгляды на изучение языка, а также на мотивацию и ожидания. Однако у них были разные убеждения с точки зрения взглядов в отношении языковых способностей, характера изучения языка и стратегий обучения и общения. В свете этих данных можно сказать, что национальное происхождение/этническая принадлежность влияет на убеждения будущих преподавателей языка в изучении языка.

## Ключевые слова

убежденность студентов-будущих преподавателей, изучение английского языка, тюркские республики, межкультурное исследование.

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