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ENGLISH LEARNING BELIEFS OF EFL VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

To enhance international competitiveness in the globalized world, Taiwan has decreed since 2001 that, English be taught as a compulsory subject for elementary students, yet with many years of required English education, students in Taiwan, especially vocational high school students, have made little progress and only achieved lower proficiency in English. The paper is to explore the English learning beliefs of 390 vocational high school students from southern Taiwan in terms of gender, length of time spent on learning English, experiences of acquiring professional certificates, parental educational levels and job occupations as well as regional differences. To achieve a quantitative-qualitative study, the survey instrument used herein to include two questionnaires (BALLI and SBIQ) and one interview guide. The results of this study showed that, these students held divergent English learning beliefs, yet despite English being not an easy subject to learn, most students still exhibited a positive motivation toward it. Moreover, students' English learning beliefs were found to be significantly related to gender, length of time spent on learning English, parental educational levels and job occupations, and regional differences. To conclude, the results help contribute toward understanding Taiwanese vocational high school students' English learning beliefs, and shed light on an effective pedagogy, for teaching English to EFL vocational high school learners.

KEYWORDS: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English, Learning Beliefs, EFL Learners, Vocational High School

INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, English has been regarded as a global language, for its wide usage in diplomacy, international trade, mass entertainment, the medical industry, and academia, all of which is closely associated with our daily lives. As the third largest language commonly spoken by approximately 914 million people in the world, in 2012, the importance of English learning has been brought to public attention, in recent years. According to Wu and Him (2011), three billion people would be speaking or learning English by 2015. Up to the present, approximately 70 countries in the world have stipulated English as their official language, while more than 100 countries have taken English as their second language. Therefore, as a citizen of the earth living in the twenty-first century, it is essential to acquire the basic four skills of the English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Since, the key to connecting with the world lies in good English proficiency, Asian countries such as Singapore and the Philippines have required English, as a subject taught in the elementary stage (Koike, 2001; Miu, 1990). Moreover, elementary students in Japan have to receive an English education, until their senior secondary education (Koike, 2001), while fifth-graders in Mainland China must attend English courses in elementary schools (Lu, 1995). Under these circumstances, Taiwan was no exception to follow this mainstream, decreeing English as a compulsory subject for

elementary students in 2001, for the purpose that, Taiwanese people can become more competitive in the world. Despite many years of English education implementation, the outcome has revealed Taiwanese students becoming frustrated far beyond what was expected. According to the Educational Testing Service [ETS] in 2014, the average grade of TOEIC Taiwanese students obtained was 536, ranking them 32nd, among the forty-four countries. Compared with other countries in Asia, Taiwan lagged far behind the first and second countries, Mainland China and Malaysia, which had average grades of 671 and 656, respectively. In 2015 ETS survey, which showed that, Taiwanese technology university students got 413 on average for TOEIC, which is below the basic score of 450 required by all other enterprises in Taiwan. Hence, the current policies in Taiwan for English education curricula and textbook content, need to be discussed and re-examined.

Vocational education in Taiwan, in comparison to regular senior high schools, focusing on better university admissions, is more skill-oriented rather than for academic purposes. Such heavy emphasis on the practical operation leads to insufficient English teaching and learning, resulting in most Taiwanese vocational high school students, to lack self-confidence or have no motivation for English learning, even influencing their English proficiency as well. As a result, a stereotype generally appears among most Taiwanese elder people that, vocational education is mainly for those learners who have poor academic performances. In spite of poor academic performances, having a specialty in a particular field at hand, can help these so-called low language achievers at least lead an adequate life, in the future. As a matter of fact, such concepts, whether subjective or objective, are essential to children's English learning because parental authority, compared to people in western cultures, does have a certain effect on their daily lives, no matter for future careers, marriage, and particularly academic performances.

In respect of learners' beliefs about language learning, abundant evidence has suggested their potential influence on second language learning (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Chang, 2010; Horwitz, 1987; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Wu, 2014; Yang, 1999). Learners' beliefs mirror learners' attitudes toward language learning, as do their learning performances. Abedini, Rahimi and Zare-ee's (2011) study found that, EFL learners (English as a foreign language) with more positive and reasonable beliefs had a tendency to employ more strategies and achieved better language proficiency. Horwitz (2013) updated the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, by adding 10 new items to the original 34 items. These 10 new items refer to not only learners' autonomy, but also learners' opinions about language tests and their acceptance of either non-native speaking or native speaking teachers. Although, in Taiwan a growing body of studies have researched the beliefs of students of different ages about English learning (Kuo, 2014; Wu, 2007) and have discussed their relation to the usage of learning strategies (Liu, 2004; Shen, 2006; Yang, 1999) and learners' language proficiency (Gao, 2016; Hu, 2010), less research has been conducted by means of the revised version of the BALLI (Horwitz, 2013).

In conclusion, the present study adopts the revised BALLI (Horwitz, 2013), to investigate the English learning beliefs of vocational high school students, enrolled at a private vocational high school in Chiayi County in southern Taiwan, in terms of gender, length of time for learning English, experiences of acquiring professional certificates, parental educational levels, occupations and regional differences.

METHODS

Participants

The participants, who volunteered to take part in the study, made up 390 senior high school students enrolled at a private vocational high school in Chiayi County. Most of them come from Chiayi City, Chiayi County, and Yunlin County.

These participants are now in their sophomore year, aged around 15 to 17, in the Department of Electronics, Department of Fashion Styling, Department of Automobile, Department of Tourism, and the Department of Information Management.

Instruments

To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, the survey instrument used in this study included two questionnaires (BALLI and SBIQ) and one interview guide, all of which were translated from English into Chinese, so that the participants with different English proficiency levels could adequately comprehend the questions. The present study adopted the revised version of the BALLI (BALLI 2.0), as a survey instrument, which consisted of 44 items, dividing into six categories (foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivations, and teaching practices and language tests). Based on the statistical results, the Cronbach's Alpha of this Chinese version of the overall BALLI was .95, for internal-consistency reliability. As for the six categories of the BALLI, foreign language aptitude (9 items) produced a high reliability coefficient of .90, the difficulty of language learning (6 items) was .95, and the nature of language learning (7 items) was. 91, learning and communication strategies (11 items) were .95, motivation (5 items) was .79, and teaching practices and language tests (6 items) was .91, all of which were greater than the basic reliability of .70, recommended by Nunnally (1978). As for Students' Background Questionnaires, the students in the present study were required to elicit their gender, how long they had been learning English, whether they acquired professional certificates or not, their parental socioeconomic status and the places where they come from.

Aside from the questionnaires, focus group interviews were conducted, because the data were intended to serve as additional sources of information to validate the questionnaires. After the pilot study, the items showing the highest and lowest mean scores respectively, from each category were chosen and then modified with some information added as interview questions. As a whole, there were a total of fifteen interview questions, which were asked in Mandarin Chinese, during the process, so as to avoid any misunderstanding and each interview lasted no less than thirty minutes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Gender

As shown in Table 1, there were 241 males and 149 females, who accounted for 61.79% and 38.21% of all the participants, respectively. The results showed that, there was a significant difference in the overall BALLI scores for male students (M = 3.16, SD =. 42) and female students (M = 3.26, SD =. 34); t (388) = -2.58, p =. 010. As for the six categories of the BALLI, significant differences were found in the beliefs of foreign language aptitude, at (388) = -3.30, p =. 00, the beliefs of the difficulty of language learning, t (388) = -2.10, p =. 03, and the beliefs of learning and communication strategies, t (388) = -3.17, p =. 00. In other words, female students had stronger English learning beliefs, than male students did. The former were more willing to believe in the influence, from their innate abilities in English learning and tended to adopt more strategies in the learning process. Last but not least, these female students had a tendency to view English as a language of medium difficulty, while male students found it a difficult subject.

Table 1: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Gender

	Male (n=241)		Female (n=149)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Aptitude	3.09	.45	3.23	.38	-3.30	.00*
Difficulty	2.97	.50	3.07	.41	-2.10	.03*
Nature	3.30	.56	3.39	.48	-1.25	.12
Strategies	3.15	.46	3.30	.41	-3.17	.00*
Motivation	3.45	.67	3.57	.65	-1.80	.07
Practices	2.99	.58	3.03	.53	-0.64	.51
BALLI	3.16	.42	3.26	.34	-2.58	.01*

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <. 05

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Length of time for English Learning

Based on the descriptive statistics, 188 students had nine years of English learning, 28 students had ten years of English learning, 66 students had eleven years of English learning, and 108 students had twelve years of English learning. The results revealed that, statistical significances were only found in the beliefs of motivation, F (3, 386) = 4.22, p =. 00. Post-hoc Scheffe tests presented that, considerable statistical differences existed between students with eleven years of English learning (M = 3.68, SD =. 70) and those with nine years of English learning (M = 3.38, SD =. 65). Students who had learned English for eleven years, in comparison to those who had learned in nine years, agreed more with the items from the category of motivation. Table 2, presents the results of descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA in length of time, for learning English.

Table 2: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Length on time for English Learning

	9 years (n = 188) (48.21%)		10 years (n = 28) (7.18%)		11 years (n = 66) (16.92%)	> 12 years (n = 108) (27.69%)				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD	F	p
Aptitude	3.12	.45	3.07	.47	3.26	.36	3.13	.42	2.22	.08	
Difficulty	3.01	.47	3.05	.50	3.00	.43	3.00	.49	.11	.95	
Nature	3.28	.51	3.29	.48	3.48	.58	3.35	.55	2.29	.07	
Strategies	3.19	.49	3.22	.32	3.28	.42	3.19	.43	.65	.57	
Motivation	3.38	.65	3.44	.62	3.68	.70	3.58	.64	4.24	.00*	
Practices	2.99	.58	3.01	.35	3.06	.53	2.99	.59	.30	.82	
BALLI	3.16	.42	3.18	.32	3.29	.36	3.21	.38	1.82	.14	

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <. 05

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on the Experiences of Acquiring Professional Certificates

In the present study, 303 students successfully acquired professional certificates, whereas 59 eventually failed. The other 28 students never attended such professional certificate examinations. The results found no significant

differences in the overall beliefs and each category of the BALLI. In other words, whether or not students acquired professional certificates, did not affect what they thought of English learning (see Table 3).

Table 3: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on the Experiences of Acquiring Professional Certificates

	Never attended		Ever attended But failed		Did attend and Passed			
	(n = 28)		(n = 59)		(n = 303)			
	(7.18%)		(15.13%)		(77.69%)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	*F*	*p*
Aptitude	3.21	.52	3.11	.48	3.14	.41	.53	.58
Difficulty	3.06	.58	3.01	.51	3.00	.45	.19	.82
Nature	3.34	.61	3.26	.47	3.35	.54	.74	.47
Strategies	3.22	.53	3.18	.50	3.21	.44	.11	.89
Motivation	3.51	.71	3.33	.65	3.52	.66	2.17	.11
Practices	3.11	.72	3.09	.50	2.98	.55	1.40	.24
BALLI	3.24	.51	3.16	.42	3.20	.38	.42	.65

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <. 05

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Parental Educational Levels

Based on the results shown in Table 4, six students reported their parental educational levels belonged to graduate school or above (1.54% of all the participants), 69 to university or college (17.69% of all the participants), 223 to senior high level (57.18% of all the participants), 84 to junior high level (21.54% of all the participants), and 8 to others (2.05% of all the participants). One-way ANOVA indicated that, parental educational levels had a significant impact on their children's English learning beliefs, in the overall beliefs, F (4, 385) = 2.71, p =. 03. Moreover, a salient impact was also found in the beliefs of the difficulty of language learning, F (4, 385) = 3.14, p =. 01, and in the beliefs about the nature of language learning, F (4, 385) = 2.63, p =. 03. However, Post-hoc Scheffe tests revealed no significant differences, within each group.

Table 4: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Parental Educational Levels

	Graduate		University		Senior		Junior		Others			
	(n = 6)		(n = 69)		(n = 223)		(n = 84)		(n = 8)			
	(1.54%)		(17.69%)		(57.18%)		(21.54%)		(2.05%)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
Aptitude	3.14	.35	3.25	.35	3.13	.44	3.08	.45	3.31	.45	2.01	.09
Difficulty	2.97	.37	3.14	.48	2.99	.48	2.93	.42	3.35	.33	3.14	.01*
Nature	3.81	.60	3.37	.41	3.36	.57	3.21	.50	3.44	.34	2.63	.03*
Strategies	3.40	.37	3.26	.34	3.21	.47	3.12	.47	3.50	.22	2.16	.07
Motivation	3.60	.28	3.58	.54	3.52	.70	3.34	.69	3.57	.37	1.49	.20
Practices	3.41	.72	3.07	.48	2.98	.61	2.96	.48	3.20	.35	1.43	.22
BALLI	3.39	.28	3.28	.28	3.20	.42	3.11	.39	3.40	.23	2.17	.03*

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <.05

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Parental Occupations

For the convenience of computing, the given seventeen jobs were divided into six groups. The distributed proportions of these six occupation groups were 13.84%, 2.56%, 34.87%, 13.33%, 21.28%, and 14.10%, respectively. The results of one-Way ANOVA indicated that, no striking differences existed among the overall beliefs and each category of the BALLI, except one: the beliefs of motivation, which showed a marked relation to students' parental occupations, F (5, 384) = 2.35, p =.04. Post-hoc analyses using Scheffe tests indicated no other significant differences, between the within groups. Table 5 illustrates the results of descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA in parental occupations.

Table 5: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Parental Occupations

	Public Servants		Professional		Business		Agriculture		Labor		Others			
	(n = 54)		(n = 10)		(n = 136)		(n = 52)		(n = 83)		(n = 55)			
	(13.84%)		(2.56%)		(34.87%)		(13.33%)		(21.28%)		(14.10%)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
Aptitude	3.21	.42	3.13	.29	3.19	.39	3.10	.51	3.09	.46	3.08	.40	1.11	.35
Difficulty	3.15	.44	3.08	.36	3.03	.46	2.96	.49	2.94	.46	2.94	.50	1.76	.11
Nature	3.34	.52	3.51	.61	3.41	.45	3.29	.60	3.22	.58	3.33	.57	1.62	.15
Strategies	3.22	.43	3.33	.34	3.28	.40	3.18	.51	3.11	.48	3.16	.48	1.80	.11
Motivation	3.41	.66	3.62	.64	3.62	.64	3.47	.68	3.33	.69	3.50	.62	2.35	.04*
Practices	3.00	.57	3.25	.56	3.07	.52	3.00	.63	2.95	.50	2.90	.64	1.24	.28
BALLI	3.22	.39	3.32	.28	3.27	.34	3.17	.43	3.11	.42	3.15	.42	2.19	.05

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <.05

Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Regional Differences

According to the data from the descriptive statistics (see Table 6), 18.97% of the participants are from Chiayi City, and the remaining participants are from Chiayi County (53.33%), Yunlin County (25.64%), and others (2.05%). One-way ANOVA results indicated that, a striking impact was only found in the beliefs of the nature of language learning, F (3, 386) = 3.58, p =.01. The results of Scheffe Post-Hoc tests found no differences, within each group.

Table 6: Students' English Learning Beliefs Based on Regional Differences

	Chiayi City		Chiayi County		Yulin County		Others			
	(n = 74)		(n = 208)		(n = 100)		(n = 8)			
	(18.97%)		(53.33%)		(25.64%)		(2.05%)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
Aptitude	3.21	.46	3.12	.42	3.15	.43	3.02	.40	1.10	.34
Difficulty	3.03	.43	3.00	.46	3.01	.48	2.95	.89	.12	.94
Nature	3.44	.56	3.29	.50	3.40	.53	2.92	.84	3.58	.01*
Strategies	3.25	.44	3.19	.45	3.24	.46	2.94	.60	1.45	.22
Motivation	3.52	.62	3.44	.66	3.58	.69	3.52	.86	1.01	.38
Practices	2.99	.64	3.00	.53	3.04	.53	2.87	.83	.28	.83
BALLI	3.24	.40	3.17	.38	3.24	.39	3.04	.57	1.31	.26

Note. Aptitude = foreign language aptitude; Difficulty = difficulty of language learning; Nature = nature of language learning; Strategies = learning and communication strategies; Practices = teaching practices and language tests. *p <.05

Results and Findings of Focus Group Interviews

A total of 20 students were randomly selected to attend the interviews. Among these interviewees, four (two males and two females), came from the same department and were arranged together in the same interview.

Generally speaking, the students in the interviews exhibited higher motivation toward English learning, despite the fact that, they lacked self-confidence to succeed in English learning, due to their poor academic performances as shown on written exams. In their opinions, good English proficiency not only led to better job opportunities in the future, but also helped them feel a sense of fulfillment and superiority toward themselves, among their counterparts.

Different from other academic subjects, English was considered as an either difficult or very difficult subject, which required at least three to five years for these students to learn it well. As far as most students are concerned, a lack of enough vocabulary and explicit grammar rules determined their frustration on English learning, which affected not only their reading and writing abilities, but also their willingness to practice speaking English either at school or in public. Furthermore, all the students in the interviews considered it impossible to learn English well without a teacher or a class. Regardless of many free online self-learning websites or materials available for them, the safe way which made these students feel comfortable the most while learning English was to rely on their teachers, who offered detailed descriptions of grammar rules, sentence structures, and reading comprehension step by step.

As vocation high school students, most interviewees considered that professional certificates should come first before language tests such as TOEIC and GEPT (General English Proficiency Test). Although language tests and professional certificates were both important and helpful for them in their future careers, the success rate in passing professional certificate examinations was much higher. Therefore, most students replied that they would rather spend time preparing for their professional certificates so as to reach a graduation requirement, rather than attending language tests.

All in all, the students in the interviews believed that everyone had a talent for English. Based on this point of view, a person's success in English learning had nothing to do with gender, or his/her performances on mathematics and science. Nevertheless, they didn't believe in their abilities to master English, resulting from their poor English proficiency, a factor which was closely related to their lack of self-confidence in English learning.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussions of Findings

As for foreign language aptitude, the present study found that only a small group of respondents (less than 38%) agreed that women were better learners than men, and that people who were good at mathematics or science were not good language learners, the above findings which are in accordance with some earlier findings (Gao, 2016; Horwitz, 1987; Wu, 2007; Wu, 2014). At the mention of the difficulty of language learning, the present study together with other BALLI studies revealed that Taiwanese students viewed English as a subject that was not easy to learn (Kuo, 2014; Liu, 2004; Shen, 2006; Wu, 2014; Yang, 1999). In respect of the nature of language learning, over 50% of the vocational high students endorsed the importance of vocabulary and grammar rules in English learning, which are in agreement with other empirical studies (Horwitz, 1987; Hu, 2010; Kuo, 2014; Liu, 2004; Wu, 2014). One possible reason for these similar results relate to current textbook content and examinations, all of which focus on vocabulary, grammar rules, and sentence structures given in terms of word-filling, multiple choice, sentence rewriting, and translation.

With regard to learning and communication strategies, the vocational high school students in the current study as well as other Taiwanese students at other learning stages (Hu, 2010; Kuo, 2014; Liu, 2004; Wu, 2014) confirmed the importance of excellent pronunciation. The results, to some extent, might be associated with accuracy, which is deeply rooted in students' minds, because they have been taught how essential correct answers are ever since they were young. Therefore, the more learners care about correctness, the less willingness they show to practice what they have learned in class. It is no wonder that the study found students felt timid while speaking English with other people, just like in Hu's (2010) and Liu's (2004) studies. In respect to motivation, students in Taiwan are highly motivated to learn English, because many studies have revealed that students' responses to beliefs of motivation items achieved the highest mean scores (Gao, 2016; Hu, 2010; Shen, 2006; Wu, 2007; Wu, 2014). In the present study, the vocational high school students highly agreed that they learned English not only for themselves, but also in order to get well-paid job opportunities in the future, which are congruent with some previous research examining college students (Hu, 2010), military students (Gao, 2016; Wu, 2014), and senior high students (Liu, 2004). However, the above findings are dissimilar to Kuo's (2014) study in which Taiwanese elementary school students learned English in order to have more foreign friends and to understand them more. Compared to younger learners, it seems that elder learners realize that good English proficiency as a competitive advantage allows them better prospects in society. For teaching practices and language tests, the vocational high school students in the present study as well as the cadets in Wu's (2014) research relied much on their English teachers who taught them vocabulary, grammar rules and sentence structures. The more likely explanation rests on the deep influence from teacher-centered instruction that has been long executed in Taiwan, which leads to Taiwanese students lacking abilities in critical thinking and self-learning. Unlike the results found in Wu's (2014) study, the vocational high school students of the present study revealed less interest in language tests like TOEFL, IELTS, or TOEIC. The major reason for this issue probably refers to students' practical skills which are highly required by Taiwanese vocational education, resulting in most vocational high schools stipulate a graduation threshold, demanding that students acquire professional certificates while in school.

Second, the present study found that the female vocational high school students had stronger English learning beliefs, and adopted more learning and communication strategies. Moreover, they confirmed the influence of innate abilities on English learning. The results are similar to Jafari and Shokrpour's (2012) in Iranian context as well as to those in Taiwan (Chang, 2010). Compared to male learners, female learners are more attuned to words and sounds, because they are considered to better at using their declarative memory, which functions mainly on memory storage such as historical facts, vocabulary words, faces, and names (Niu, 2014). The above advantages echo the current Taiwan educational system in which most examinations designed for Taiwanese students are mainly on knowledge memorization shown in terms of vocabulary-filling, cloze tests, and Chinese-English translation.

Third, the results showed that students with eleven years of English learning had a higher motivation toward English learning than those with nine years of English learning. The statement that learners spending more time on English learning tend to hold stronger English learning beliefs, have a higher motivation toward English learning, and even achieve better English performances generally agrees with some previous studies (Chen, 2009; Shen, 2006; Wu, 2007).

Fourth, the present study found whether or not students passed and obtained professional certificates did not affect their thinking about English learning. There is a likelihood that the current professional certificate examinations for specific skills, whether written tests or practical operation, are all conducted in Chinese, which has far less connection

with English learning. On the other hand, the pressure for graduation threshold drives these vocational high school students to acquire certificates as a top priority instead of investing their time on English learning, because English is comparatively a difficult subject for them.

Fifth, Schommer (1993) noted that parental education levels helped children develop a cognitive system of complexity. The present study found that parents' educational levels did play a role affecting students in their overall beliefs, in their beliefs of the difficulty of language learning, and in their beliefs of the nature of language learning, though no significant differences were found within each group. Similar findings were also found in previous literature (Wu, 2007; Yin, 2006). As for the results above, one possible reason is that higher education involves deeper and more specific knowledge in which most information and knowledge such as those from textbooks, manuals and reports are generally presented and instructed in English during the learning process. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that well-educated parents equipping with Basic English abilities are able to offer assistance in solving any problems that their children face when learning English.

Sixth, parental occupations only presented extraordinary differences in their children's beliefs of motivation although no notable significances were found between each group. The results found in the present study are in agreement with those of previous studies (Chang, 2010; Yin, 2006), all of which revealed socio-economic status as one of the main factors influencing the academic performances of students. A Chinese proverb states that "better than better." For parents who engage in well-paid occupations, they surely hope their children can live good lives in the future, even much better than they have had now. On the other hand, engaging in lower-income occupations, those parents, who have to sacrifice time getting involved in their children's learning but instead work longer hours to earn more money, eagerly hope a better job will bring their children to a brighter future. Under these parental influences, therefore, having a job with well-paid salary and benefits in the future seemingly becomes a main reason driving most students to learn English.

Seventh, the present study pointed out that students' English learning beliefs were related to the places where they came from, which is roughly in accordance with some previous studies (Shen, 2006; Wu, 2007) that confirmed the connection between students' English learning beliefs and regional differences. One-way ANOVA results noted that a striking impact was only found in the beliefs of the nature of language learning, regardless of no salient differences existing within groups. Different from other cities which have complexity combination including primary industrial sectors (such as agriculture, fishing, and traditional industry), secondary industrial sectors (such as manufacturing, construction, and electricity supply) and tertiary industrial sectors (such as wholesale and retail trade, finance and insurance, and information and communication) altogether, the three southern regions of Taiwan (Chiayi City, Chiayi County, and Yunlin County) share similar demographic and geographic characteristics because their development focus is mainly on primary industrial sectors only. As a result, that no notable differences existed within groups seems reasonable.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results, several pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. First of all, the present study found that these vocational high school students had positive motivation toward English learning, which associated with their future career and parental expectations, in spite of the fact that most of them considered English as not an easy subject. To shorten the distance between theory and practice, and to decrease learning difficulties as well, language teachers may therefore combine effective learning strategies with the current characteristics of vocational high schools'

curricula and students' career development. Due to the fact that vocational education requires heavy practical operation, situated learning with actual life experience sharing may not only vivify the content knowledge in a given subject, but also reinforce students' memory intensity for what they have already learned.

Second, the results of the present study showed that gender posed a significant impact on the English learning beliefs of these vocational high school students. As a matter of fact, that the inherent gender characteristics cause male and female students to exhibit different learning styles in language learning is an unchangeable and irresistible fact, which may trouble language teachers and restrain them from teaching their students in class because coeducation is a common trend in today's schooling in Taiwan. However, in a class which reveals a disproportional rate of male and female students, a common phenomenon which is often seen in vocational education, language teachers may take advantage of gender differences to design their courses, including arranging in-class activities such as report presentation, peer editing, and group competition. As Niu (2014) and Odak (2015) stated, female learners need much encouragement and acceptance, which help create a sense of security in learning, while male learners require stimulation that is full of tasks and problems to be solved, which enable learning to be more challenging. Aiming at these characteristics, language teachers are suggested to adjust the tones they speak to their students as well as the ways they interact with their students.

Third, the results analyzed from both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that most students in the present study relied much on their non-native English teachers when learning English. Thus, the importance of language teachers cannot be overemphasized. Instead of being traditional authorities who cram knowledge into their students, language teachers are more like facilitators who not only care about students' needs, but also assist students in how to execute self-learning and construct their learning modes through available materials around them. To achieve an efficient and interesting teaching environment, a place which could catch students' attention and prolong their learning as well, language teachers may employ either content-based or task-based approaches into teaching, according to different textbook content, or unique department characteristics. Moreover, with the rapid spread of Internet and the wide usage of cellphones, language teachers may guide their students in how to make good use of these materials such as free online self-learning websites or English radio programs for the sake of cultivating students' learning autonomy.

Fourth, the majority of students in this study were found to lack self-confidence in speaking English, because they were afraid of making mistakes or pronouncing vocabulary incorrectly—factors that cause them to feel timid while speaking in public. Hence, it is highly suggested that read-aloud activities be employed in English classes so as to enhance more opportunities for oral practice. Last but not least, language teachers have to take into consideration the ways they ask questions. In other words, aiming at students with different English proficiency, language teachers may ask either convergent-thinking or divergent-thinking questions. To enhance students' willingness to speak, language teachers may first try to elicit the answers to the questions from their students, and then solicit extra information about their opinions, and finally redirect their responses in a more fruitful direction.

Suggestions for Future Studies

In view of the results obtained, future research should attempt to address the following issues. First, vocational education in Taiwan, whether public or private schools, exhibits great complexity involving regular programs, business-education-partnership programs, and practical-skill programs, all of which have different course objectives designed for vocational high school students. Thus, future studies are suggested to examine either a certain program or a certain

department to acquire a more in-depth understanding of those students or take on a larger sample size, including all three educational programs in every area in Taiwan as part of an overall study.

Second, parental influence in oriental countries, to some extent, is an important factor dominating children's lives. Though the present study found students' English learning beliefs were significantly associated with parental educational levels and occupations, it did no further discuss family structures, such as a grand-parenting family, a single-parent family, or particularly a foreign-spouse family in which could get involved in different cultural backgrounds of Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Mainland China. Therefore, the issues addressing the unique cultural and social features and how they affect learners' English learning should be carefully taken into consideration and be worth investigating in future studies.

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