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## **The Language Learning Beliefs of Self-identified, Successful Learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports on a case study designed to gain insight into the language learning beliefs (LLBs) of eight, self-identified, successful learners of Spanish as a foreign language at a Canadian university. Data collection included an online asynchronous discussion and individual online interviews together with online administration of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Cross-case analyses of LLBs revealed that participants associated success with their ability to create bonds with the target culture. They emphasised developing language strategies as they relate to social purposes, placing emphasis on the social and affective component of learning Spanish, and on learning Spanish in out-of-classroom, authentic contexts. Implications include the value of developing learners' L2 learning social strategies in addition to cognitive ones and the value of promoting opportunities for learners to participate in social events in relation to the target language culture.

### **Résumé**

Cette étude de cas donne un aperçu sur les croyances en apprentissage de langues étrangères (CALE) de huit apprenants d'espagnol dans une université canadienne. Ces apprenants s'identifient eux-mêmes comme étant de bons étudiants. La collecte d'informations s'est réalisée grâce à des discussions asynchrones et à des interviews individuels en ligne basés sur l'Inventaire des Croyances sur l'Apprentissage de Langues (ICAL). Les analyses de cas croisées des CALE ont révélés que les participants associaient leur succès à leur capacité à créer des liens avec la culture cible. Ils mettent l'accent sur le fait qu'ils développent des stratégies d'apprentissage en relation avec des buts sociaux, tout en insistant sur la composante sociale et affective de l'apprentissage de l'espagnol et sur le fait qu'ils apprennent également l'espagnol en dehors de la salle de cours, c'est-à-dire dans des contextes authentiques. Les résultats montrent donc l'importance de développer non seulement les stratégies cognitives mais aussi les stratégies sociales des apprenants. Il est également indispensable d'augmenter les différentes possibilités de participation à des événements sociaux en relation avec la langue et la culture cibles pour nos étudiants.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between second- or foreign- language (L2) beliefs and behaviour, attitude, and motivation (see Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Tumposky, 1991) has led researchers to conduct studies that investigate the link between learners' beliefs (LLBs) and success and proficiency in second-language (L2) learning. Some of these studies have provided insight into the differences between successful and unsuccessful learners in terms of their beliefs, approaches to language learning, use of learning strategies, and motivational aspects (e.g., Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Samimy & Lee, 1997; Victori, 1999).

This paper reports on a study conducted to gain insight into the LLBs of self-identified successful language learners of Spanish at the university level. For the purpose of this inquiry, we relied on an approach to investigating beliefs consistent with Abraham and Vann's (1987) argument that learners have "beliefs about how language operates, and consequently, how it is learned" (p. 95), which, in their view, constitute learners' 'philosophy' of language learning.

The specific research questions that guided our enquiry were:

1. What are the beliefs about learning Spanish as a foreign language of the participating learners according to: a) the difficulty of learning Spanish; b) their aptitude in relation to Spanish; c) the nature of learning Spanish; d) learning and communication strategies; and e) motivations and expectations?

2. What insights do participants' beliefs provide into success in L2 learning?

Studies of LLBs which have focused on L2 success and beliefs have typically considered success or achievement on the basis of grades alone. With the few exceptions that we identified in our review (e.g. Hsieh, 2004; Peacock, 1999), studies have not included alternative means of qualifying success, for example by allowing learners to self-identify themselves as successful. Our study differs from other studies of LLBs in that it allowed participants to identify themselves as successful learners of Spanish. Our study also differs from others in terms of use of data sources. One common approach to study LLBs has been to rely exclusively on closed-item questionnaires and to use data to report results numerically for each item in the questionnaire. Instead of providing percentages of agreement or disagreement with statements reflecting certain beliefs for the whole group, we used questionnaire data together with other data in order to gain further insight into the learners' beliefs.

## **STUDIES OF LEARNERS' LANGUAGE LEARNING BELIEFS AND SUCCESS**

Beliefs have been studied extensively in a variety of settings and with second or foreign languages. The studies focused in some cases on a foreign language such as French, Spanish, German, or Japanese (e.g., Lassiter, 2003; Mori, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; White, 1999), sometimes comparing the beliefs of groups of learners (e.g., Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Kuntz, 1997; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007; Tumposky, 1991). In other studies, students were English as a second language learners, either in their country of origin (e.g., Peacock, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Yang, 1999) or in an English-speaking country (e.g., Bernat, 2006; Cotterall, 1995, 1999; Wenden, 1987). In terms of methods, some studies have relied on questionnaires (e.g., Bernat, 2006; Horwitz, 1999; Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Mori, 1999), while others have included interviews and combined various data collection sources (e.g., Barcelos, 2000; Peacock, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; White, 1999).

Concepts of self-efficacy and attribution (see Bandura, 1986, 1991; Heider, 1958; Rotter, 1966; Weiner et al., 1971) have been used in one strand of studies of LLBs in order to gain insight into beliefs and L2 success. Findings indicate that self-efficacy and attribution beliefs relate to motivation and proficiency and that they differ in more and less proficient learners. Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) highlighted differences in perceptions among groups of French school students at the extreme levels of proficiency with regard to their “sense of agency” (p. 524). Learners with higher proficiency were more able to identify the reasons for their successes and failures, perceived their success as being related to the amount of effort devoted to their studies. They were also more intrinsically motivated, reporting that they enjoyed learning languages and were willing to learn them even if this was not required. Graham’s (2003) study of French learners revealed factors that may affect foreign language learners’ motivation. Graham found that low self-efficacy levels affect motivation, and that attributing success to external factors while attributing failure to external ones or to internal and unchangeable qualities also affects motivation. Hsieh (2004) investigated attributions, self-efficacy, language learning beliefs, and achievement of post-secondary learners who were English as a foreign language learners. Learners who made internal, stable, and personal attributions for language learning success had higher self-efficacy than learners who made external attributions, and higher achievement also related to internal attributions.

The findings of studies that have considered L2 success and beliefs point towards the importance of concepts such as learners’ confidence in their L2 abilities, willingness to speak, self-concept, internal factors (e.g., effort) in L2 learning, as well as intrinsic motivation (e.g., Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997; White, 1999; Williams et al., 2002). Ehrman and Oxford’s study of L2 learner variables and proficiency ratings found a correlation between beliefs and ability to learn languages and proficiency in both speaking and reading. In Samimy and Lee’s (1997) study of first-year Chinese learners of English, the authors also correlated learner beliefs with proficiency. Their findings revealed that learners with higher grades were more confident in their ability to learn foreign languages and more willing to practice with native speakers. In White’s (1999) exploration of the developing beliefs of beginner adult language learners of Japanese and Spanish in a self-instruction context, the factors that participants described as determinants of success were largely internal. Participants ranked highest internal factors such as motivation, persistence, and self-knowledge.

## **METHODS**

### *Participants and Recruitment*

Students were recruited on a volunteer basis from a Canadian university at the beginning of the 2005 Fall Semester in both an elementary and intermediate

Spanish course. Participants were informed that, for the purpose of the study, self-identification as a successful language learner need not be based on grades, but could relate to such factors as peer recognition or recognition by others (e.g., family, teachers), perceived success in language learning, perceived high motivation, effort, enjoyment, or satisfaction in learning Spanish or other languages, or any other factors they considered relevant. A total of 28 people returned consent forms providing their consent to participate in the study. Attrition occurred during the three phases of the study. A total of eight participants completed all the requirements for participation. The reported findings relate to the LLBs of these eight participants.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection was conducted within a web-based learning management system (LMS), WebCT™. Online asynchronous discussions and computer-mediated communication have been linked with opportunities for reflection (e.g., Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000; Harasim, 1993; McComb, 1993). Reflection is afforded by the fact that participants contribute at their own pace and, because the record of posted messages is available, they can refer back to and reflect on their own and other participants' contributions. This opportunity for reflection is important in a context where the focus is on eliciting beliefs. As Pajares (1992), Rokeach (1968), and others have noted, beliefs may be difficult to get at, and individuals may not always be able to represent their beliefs accurately.

### *Phase one: Online administration of the BALLI.*

During the first phase of data collection, participants completed the BALLI (see Horwitz, 1988) within the LMS. The BALLI offers a categorizing framework for learner beliefs according to five dimensions as follows: (1) the difficulty of language learning; (2) foreign language aptitude; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations. It consists of 34 items on a five-item Likert scale organised around those dimensions. For this study, the items were adapted to refer to the Spanish language. Participants were given one week to complete the BALLI.

### *Phase two: Online asynchronous, text-based group discussion.*

Phase two, which involved participation in an online asynchronous, text-based discussion within the LMS, was designed to gain deeper insight into learners' beliefs. The discussion consisted of five prompts reflecting the five dimensions of the BALLI. The first prompt, entitled "Learning Spanish: Is it easy or hard?," presented participants with questions for discussion such as "Do you believe that Spanish is easy or hard to learn and why?" We asked participants to post a message in which they discussed their beliefs in relation to the given prompt. They had three weeks to respond to the five prompts.

*Phase three: Individual online, asynchronous, text-based interview.*

The purpose of phase three was to probe more deeply into participants' beliefs about their language learning, to cross-check their beliefs, to identify inconsistencies, and to seek clarification. Questions in this phase were individualised based on individual responses to the BALLI and to responses in the discussion. Phase three was conducted at the same time as the discussion in phase two was taking place. The e-mail feature available in the LMS was used for private, one-on-one interviewing and individualised probing with each participant. Participants could not view each other's responses. One example of a question is: "What motivated you to continue learning Spanish while you gave up on French?"

*Data Analysis*

Data analysis was ongoing, beginning with phase one. Individual case evidence (see Yin, 2003) consisted of the results of the 34 questionnaire items for the eight participants. All individual case evidence was collected and aggregated by participant. Analysis of each case was conducted using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), by which data was broken down in order to identify relevant concepts (e.g., enjoyment, cultural artefacts). Open coding was followed by axial coding, which facilitated developing categories of concepts (e.g., cultural bonding, prior language learning experiences).

The unit of analysis was the sentence. However, as some sentences were long and included several clauses, the clause was in some cases used as the unit of analysis. Labelling codes reflected concepts identified in the transcripts (e.g., enjoyment of Spanish music). Sometimes the codes were expressed in the form of full statements in order to accurately reflect participants' beliefs (e.g., Confidence is important when speaking Spanish). We assigned more than one code to the same unit when necessary. We conducted this analysis for all eight individuals for each of the five dimensions and then conducted cross-case analysis, which we report on in this paper. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

**FINDINGS**

*The Difficulty of Language Learning*

Margaret, Jennifer, and Richard referred to their current experiences of Spanish immersion with local native Spanish speakers. They portrayed authentic contexts as settings in which practicing Spanish results in learning it faster. However, they also explained that using Spanish in those contexts was difficult in terms of the demands for speaking and listening in a natural setting with native speakers. Another challenge perceived by participants was the speed of spoken Spanish combined with the unrehearsed nature of the interaction. Writing and reading skills presented less of a challenge because these had been emphasised in the classroom; however, for Margaret, Jennifer, and Richard, who

reported using Spanish frequently outside the classroom, speaking or listening did not present special difficulties.

Frank and Jennifer considered grammar, pronunciation, and speaking to be easier in Spanish than in other languages. Although the study included no specific probing in relation to French, the participants referred to their beliefs about that language. Margaret, Frank, Sarah, and Stephanie referred to having discontinued the study of French, using terms such as “quitting” or “giving up,” even though three of them planned to study other languages. The only exception was Kelly, who had continued studying French and intended to major in it. Margaret, Frank, and Sarah had even decided to learn Spanish as an “alternative” to French, but not because they considered Spanish easier than French. They related their disinterest in French to negative beliefs about the language and culture as well as negative previous learning experiences. Negative beliefs included aesthetic displeasure, lack of enjoyment or of interest in French. Previous experiences learning French related to lack of a sense of achievement and progress in school (e.g., poor grades), lack of motivation because French was compulsory, and ineffective teaching practices.

#### *Foreign Language Aptitude*

When commenting on their success in learning Spanish, Margaret, Jennifer, and Richard tended to focus on their personal contacts with native speakers and/or exposure to the language through cultural artefacts such as movies and songs. They equated success in Spanish with the ability to communicate fluently with native speakers and to understand language in authentic contexts. In this regard, they defined success in Spanish in terms of having the ability to “successfully communicate” with native speakers, to “express” oneself in Spanish, and to “understand” spoken Spanish in conversations with native speakers and in movies and music. Akram, Sarah, Kelly, and Stephanie did not refer to having frequent personal contacts with native speakers. However, they believed in the importance of using the language to communicate with native speakers or referred to their use of and attraction to cultural artefacts related to Spanish.

Frank emphasised error avoidance while Sarah emphasised accuracy in speaking as being related to success. In contrast, Akram, Jennifer, and Richard defined success explicitly in terms of communicative abilities, which they opposed to being “perfect,” being completely “fluent,” and even to succeeding in formal examinations. Participants related success to “experiencing” and to “using” Spanish. This experience involved “immersing oneself” in both the language and its culture.

#### *The Nature of Language Learning*

Except for Stephanie, all individuals believed that learning Spanish is different from learning other school subjects. Whereas from the questionnaire responses alone it may appear as if participants did not believe in the importance of

grammar and vocabulary, their discussion and interview comments revealed a different type of belief regarding those language components. In fact, all participants mentioned that grammar and vocabulary were important in learning Spanish. However, they associated learning grammar and vocabulary with success, not in terms of academic achievement, but with the goal of acquiring the abilities needed to communicate. They specified that learning grammar and vocabulary made it easier to communicate in the L2.

Some individuals referred to the value of having the opportunity to interact with native speakers and form personal bonds with them and their culture. Those bonds involved affective investment in the language and its culture. Participants often referred to those bonds in terms of “enjoyment” or “fun” in learning about the language and its culture. As well, they referred to having an affinity with Spanish speakers and their culture. They related culture to the following: cultural values; customs; language register, particularly with regard to formal and informal vocabulary and expressions; knowledge of historical facts; and knowledge of the history of the language. They did not believe that practising the language in a Spanish-speaking country was essential, although they did believe in the general usefulness of this type of practice. This belief may relate to participants’ references to informal, out-of-classroom learning contexts as those in which there are opportunities to interact with native speakers in authentic settings. Those contexts did not necessarily involve living or studying in a Spanish-speaking country.

#### *Learning and Communication Strategies*

Guessing from context was highlighted as a strategy for successful communication. Whether participants had the opportunity to frequently interact with Spanish speakers or not, all believed that it is important to speak with native speakers. They also referred to the need to practice speaking regardless of one’s level of proficiency. While confidence was considered important in taking advantage of opportunities to practice Spanish, only Margaret and Richard referred to comfort in speaking and to not feeling self-conscious when conversing with native speakers.

Participants emphasised the importance of practicing oral skills and of developing related strategies. However, they also expressed beliefs about strategies or approaches to language learning which focused less on communication and more on drill and practice, such as repetition. Some individuals also commented on the effectiveness of practice in the language laboratory to reinforce what they learned in class. This difference in beliefs regarding strategies and approaches to language learning also manifested itself with respect to beliefs about errors. Frank focused more on accuracy than did the other participants. For example, most individuals did not believe that sounding like a native speaker was important in terms of being successful in learning the language. They described errors as natural and as a source of learning. At the



same time, they argued in favour of avoiding “bad habits,” and referred to the importance of accurate pronunciation.

### *Motivation and Expectations*

Kelly and Sarah affirmed that being “interested” and “wanting to learn” the language is crucial. Sarah attributed her success in learning Spanish to her “strong desire” to learn the language. For Margaret, Jennifer, Richard, and Stephanie, their initial desire to learn Spanish and interest in it originated in a strong attraction to and enjoyment of the target culture. They initially wished to learn Spanish for reasons such as enjoyment in learning the language, an attraction to Spanish music and culture, personal relationships with native speakers, and Hispanic family connections.

This attraction, personal attachment, and enjoyment played a crucial role in their initial motivation to learn Spanish but also in maintaining their motivation to further learn the language and culture. Stephanie was so intrinsically motivated to learn Spanish and so attracted to the culture that she intended to pass the language on to her children. Margaret referred to her relationships with native speakers in terms of beneficial reciprocal relationships. Frank and Kelly affirmed that they were enrolled in university Spanish regardless of the academic requirements for their programs, while Margaret enjoyed learning Spanish because it “never felt like a chore.” Personal benefits of learning Spanish and other languages that participants identified related to “personal development,” becoming a “richer” person, and increasing knowledge of oneself and others. Three participants specifically referred to the role of learning languages in increasing self-esteem.

Only Stephanie referred exclusively to intrinsic factors as playing a role in her motivation to learn Spanish, while only Sarah and Akram referred exclusively to extrinsic factors for learning Spanish, such as job and travel opportunities. With regard to extrinsic motivation, participants emphasised the importance of learning Spanish for travel and for employment in occupations related to their studies. They related job opportunities with the importance of learning Spanish given the large number of Spanish speakers worldwide, although two individuals noted that learning Spanish does not have the same importance in Canada as in other countries. Sarah mentioned the ease of learning Spanish as a factor that initially motivated her to learn the language.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

Regarding their approaches to learning Spanish, participants emphasised the importance of developing strategies to achieve comfort in communicating orally in out-of-classroom contexts and through interactions with native speakers. Some of them referred to taking advantage of and actively seeking these types of opportunities for communicative practice because they privileged establishing

social, cultural, and affective bonds with L2 speakers. Their focus on language strategy development was therefore closely related with that purpose.

This finding relates to those of other studies such as Samimy and Lee's (1997), which investigated learners' LLBs and performance. Their findings revealed that successful learners (i.e., those with higher grades) were willing to practice with native speakers. In our study, participants' emphasis on developing language strategies as they relate to social purposes addressed the role of affect in the L2 learning process. As Oxford (1994) has argued, L2 learning strategies "need to include the social and affective sides of learning along with the more intellectual sides" because "the L2 learner is not just a cognitive and metacognitive machine but, rather, a whole person" (Implications section, ¶ 1). Our findings reinforce Oxford's argument in favour of an emphasis on the social and the emotional.

Participants' references to learning French confirmed the importance of previous language learning experiences. Cotterall (1995) identified the experience of language learning as one factor underlying responses to a questionnaire about language learning beliefs. Barcelos (2000) conducted a study on the LLBs of three Brazilian students of English which revealed the role of previous experience in shaping beliefs. Learners' beliefs were "rooted in their language learning experiences" (p. 286), deriving from their connections between present and past experiences. Gardner, Masgoret, and Tremblay's (1999) research highlighted the influence of experiences and attitudes (e.g., motivational intensity; learner attitudes towards French courses) on attitudes to learning the L2 and to its speakers as well as learners' self-perception of proficiency.

In our study, participants' previous language learning experiences in Spanish appear to have provided them with an attraction to the language and culture that their experiences learning French did not, to the point that some of them even chose to study Spanish *instead of* French. Whereas previous experiences identified in the literature include those related to familial influence (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gardner et al., 1999), participants in our study did not refer to that type of influence. We cannot, however, draw further conclusions about the extent to which learners' present beliefs had their origins in their prior experiences or were related to other factors. Peacock's (1999) study, in which learners did not seem to know the origin of their beliefs or were unsure about them, points to the difficulty of eliciting learners' insights on why they have certain beliefs.

The experiences that our participants highlighted in relation to the target culture focused on out-of-classroom language learning contexts, as opposed to classroom language learning. They described out-of-classroom language learning experiences as allowing access to the target culture and its speakers as well as opportunities to create bonds with them. In this regard, our findings relate to those of other studies of LLBs that have highlighted learners' beliefs

about the importance of out-of-classroom learning. Wenden (1987) identified categories associated with approaches to second-language learning, one of which was beliefs about using the language. Within this category, participants believed in the possibility of learning languages in an out-of-classroom context. Sakui and Gaies (1999) investigated the beliefs of learners of English and found a dimension of beliefs reflecting a communicative orientation in learning English. This dimension included, for example, the value of interacting with fluent speakers of English, the importance of oral practice, and the value of using authentic materials as a source of language and cultural input.

Participants' out-of-classroom language learning in our study did not necessarily or exclusively involve living or studying in a Spanish-speaking country. As was the case for several participants, the opportunity to gain access to the target culture and to develop oral skills through interaction with native speakers presented itself through out-of-classroom language learning experiences which took place locally. In this study there was less emphasis on learning the language in the target language country than in Barcelos' (1995) study of learners of English, in which one of the core beliefs identified was that English-speaking countries are the ideal site for learning English.

In the present study, similar concepts to those in Wenden's (1987) and in Sakui and Gaies' (1999) studies manifested themselves in relation to integrativeness. Integrativeness reflects openness to other cultures as well as an appreciation of and interest in the target language culture and group (Gardner, 2005). It also represents "a socially relevant... affective construct" (p. 11) and "group-focussed affective reactions" (p. 10). As Gardner explains, individuals with an interest in other language communities or an appreciation and interest in other language groups are more open to learning a second language.

For Noels (2001), integrative reasons for learning a language relate to positive contacts with the target language group and may even lead to eventual identification with that group. Integrativeness manifested itself in our study in the importance that participants attached to personal bonds with the target culture and its speakers. Although not all participants referred to frequent personal interactions with native speakers, they all highlighted their attraction to and interest in the target culture as playing an important role in their learning. Participants' beliefs in the importance of personal bonds with the target culture and its speakers may be related to their success in learning Spanish. As the socio-educational model of second language acquisition indicates, learners with an appreciation and interest in other language groups are more open to learning a second language. The model posits that integrative motivation (which subsumes integrativeness, attitudes towards the learning situation, and motivation) impacts achievement in language learning (see Gardner, 2005).

The beliefs that participants described about themselves as language learners and about the requirements of language learning can be discussed within the framework of motivational constructs used in the literature on

learners' LLBs. The literature has highlighted the importance of perceived self-efficacy in relation to internal attribution beliefs such as personal effort (see Hsieh, 2004; White, 1999; Williams et al., 2002). Although this study did not aim to establish correlations between self-efficacy levels and attribution beliefs, the fact that participants attributed success largely to internal factors relates to findings of studies focusing on self-efficacy in L2 learning.

In this regard, it would appear that our participants had high levels of self-efficacy. They attributed their success in learning Spanish to internal rather than external factors and exhibited intrinsic or self-determined motivational orientations in relation to Spanish. The emphasis on internal rather than external factors in learning Spanish was reflected in their comments on their persistence in learning the language and in the sense of devoting time and effort to it. Participants' intrinsic motivational orientations and emphasis on internal factors may relate to their success in Spanish. In this sense, the study's findings would confirm those of previous studies (see Noels, 2001; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001).

Participants emphasised their belief in the importance of self-confidence in L2 learning, which has been associated in the literature with success (see Clément, 1980; Clément, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977; MacIntyre et al., 1998). There was a contrast, however, between participants' beliefs in the importance of self-confidence and their perceptions of themselves and their abilities, which did not always reflect self-confidence. This was the case in relation to the ability of speaking in authentic contexts with Spanish speakers. Only two of the eight participants referred to not feeling self-conscious in those situations. Those participants were precisely individuals who had frequent contacts with native speakers, which may provide support for Clément and Kruidenier's (1983) argument that learners' contact with target language speakers influences self-confidence.

## **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS**

The first research question in our study related to identifying the beliefs about learning Spanish as a foreign language of the participating self-identified successful learners of Spanish. The learners viewed success as the ability to communicate meaningfully and to create bonds with members of the target culture. Compared with strands of L2 literature which have emphasised the cognitive component of L2 learning, our findings emphasised more the social and affective components. Participants emphasised developing language strategies as they relate to social purposes and highlighted learning Spanish in out-of-classroom, authentic contexts. These authentic contexts did not necessarily involve living or studying in Spanish-speaking countries. Participants expressed their belief in the importance of self-confidence in L2 learning. An unanticipated finding was their integrativeness in relation to Spanish in contrast with their lack of integrativeness in relation to French.

Findings also emphasised the notion of internal rather than external factors in relation to learning Spanish.

The second question of the study referred to what insights the learners' beliefs might provide into success in L2 learning. The portrayal of language learning success that emerged from the LLBs of participants highlighted the following: social, affective strategies for oral practice in out-of-classroom contexts; integrativeness, in the sense of an appreciation of and personal bonds with the target culture and speakers; intrinsic motivation and internal rather than external factors for language learning.

In terms of implications for practice, participants' attention to using Spanish for social purposes suggests the value of developing learners' L2 learning social strategies in addition to cognitive ones. Their emphasis on using the L2 for social purposes and to establish bonds with the target culture points to the value of promoting opportunities for learners to participate in social events in relation to the target language community and culture and to practice oral skills. Additionally, those opportunities might take place in the learners' immediate surroundings, as highlighted by the fact that participants in our study did not conceive of authentic L2 learning as involving only "going abroad" experience.

In terms of implications for research, participants' LLBs highlighted the role of social strategies aimed at communicating orally with native speakers in real-life contexts and establishing affective bonds with the target culture and speakers. As Oxford (1994) has argued, L2 strategies need to include the social and affective aspects of learning. Oxford (1990) noted that the reason for the lack of attention to those strategies is that learners are not familiar with paying attention to their feelings and social relationships as part of the process of learning a second language. Findings of this study confirm the need to further investigate learners' development and implementation of language learning strategies related to the social and affective component of language learning.

We focused on gaining insight into the beliefs of eight individuals in a particular context; therefore, findings may not be relevant to other learning contexts. Findings might also be different if another language was chosen. We did not seek to correlate beliefs with other variables using quantitative analysis or to study beliefs over time. It was not in the scope of this study to use observation in order to compare beliefs with actions or behaviours. The study did not examine the beliefs of other individuals involved in the educational setting, such as instructors, nor did it seek to compare participants' self-reports of success in learning Spanish with external measures of success such as grades. Finally, there was attrition in different phases of the study. It is possible that those who remained in the study were more able to reflect on and articulate their LLBs. They may also have been more comfortable with the online environment used for data collection. In spite of these limitations related to data collection, the use of prompts in the online discussion and the individual online interviews

along with the BALLI questionnaire allowed us to gain more insight into the beliefs than if we had used the questionnaire alone.

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