

# THE ROLE OF BELIEFS ABOUT THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS CHINESE INSTITUTES

Wail Muin Ismail <sup>a</sup>, Muhammad Azhar Zailaini <sup>b</sup>, Di Xuan <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a, b, c</sup> Department of Education, University of Malaya, , 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding author: wail77@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** This Study aims to explain the role of the beliefs about the nature of knowledge as an important contributing factor in second language learning and its practice. They reflect the viewpoint of the individual about what and how knowledge can be acquired and the degree of certainty.

The present study sought answers to the following questions:

- What are the overall the beliefs about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Education in China?
- Do beliefs about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Education in China by gender and level?
- Is there a significant correlation between student's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and achievements and to what extent the level beliefs about the nature of knowledge explains from students' achievement?

The researchers have modified the Epistemological Beliefs Questionnaire of Schommer(1990) , which consists of 35 items divided into five domains: quick learning, Certain knowledge, Omniscient authority, innate ability and simple knowledge. The validity of the questionnaire has been substantiated by submitting it to a set of experts. Reliability is ensured by using test retest method. Relevant and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. 229 Questionnaires were distributed randomly to Students of educational institutions in China. The findings revealed that the students reached a acceptable level in beliefs about the nature of knowledge, Where scored "simple knowledge" the highest average, while the "innate ability" is the lowest average. The female students achieved better beliefs about the nature of knowledge than the male students.

Concerning the academic level there statistically significant differences in favor of a third year and fourth and this shows the development of the student's beliefs thorough studies. Further, there is a negative relationship Between beliefs about the nature of knowledge and academic achievement; Where they did not predict high academic achievement among students.

**Keywords:** China Arab relations, Language, foreign trade, nature

## INTRODUCTION

Relationships between China and Arab go to very ancient times and it might be traced to two thousand years ago. Therefore China is one of the countries in which Arabic entered in earlier time [36]. Nowadays, more and more Chinese people have begun to pay attention to Arabic language. Arabic is considered to be one of the oldest languages in the world with a wealth of knowledge. It is spoken by more than two-hundred and sixty million people throughout the world and is the main language of most of the Middle East. In recent years, China has rapidly developed close relations and friendships with these Arabic countries in respects of politics, economy, commerce and cultural communication. And learning Arabic opens up many employment possibilities in a number of different industries such as oil, travel and finance [35]. In addition to the more than 23 million of the Chinese Muslim, Arabic plays an important role for Muslims because Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran [38].

For these reasons, there are many Chinese institutes which provide Arabic language as the second language learning. They provide a three years education for diploma degree. Their aim is to create practical special talents who are competent for jobs in foreign affairs, foreign trade, international cultural communication, management of enterprises, press, publication, foreign language teaching and studies of foreign problems etc.

The students are expected to command a sound basic knowledge of Arabic language and literature and the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating [39].

In this way, the students of Arabic language institutes in China have the greatest need for the beliefs that play a major role in the development of learning and study of the Arabic language and move them to higher stages of thinking, understanding and access to the use of metacognitive strategies [2].

[12, 22] also indicates that students' beliefs about language learning is in cognitive psychology, and also their beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, has been investigated that they are part of metacognitive knowledge, which include that all individuals understand about themselves as learners, including their goals and needs.

The study of individual differences in learning is a major concern among both linguists and educationists; as some learners have more flexible criteria for the monitoring than others. Also differing by their learning, some learners are more successful in the use of effective strategies to learn from others, and as well for language learners, some students are able to achieve higher efficiency in mastering the language of others [20]. For this reason, learning is an active process, where learners acquire knowledge on their own. They have different ideas about learning, and thus determine how they should obtain the necessary information and evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies. So the Beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning greatly influence the learning process and could either facilitate or hinder the successful language acquisition [5]. As they appear to have a potentially tremendous effect on students' motivation towards language learning, willingness to accept challenges, interpretation of mistakes, language learning strategies, and academic performance [14, 29, 27]. According to Cohen, successful learners, who tend to contextualize analysis of linguistic items, have organized thought and ideas detailed about their language learning. As a result, they are able to use effective strategies and reflect on their language learning experiences. On the contrary, for less successful learners, they either lack the verbal abilities or the successful learning experiences. The findings by [18] demonstrated significant positive relationships between traditional teaching/learning conceptions and naive belief such as 'innate/fixed ability' and 'certainty knowledge.

More specifically, the beliefs about the nature of knowledge are considered fundamental and important to learners' progress and second language learning and its practice. They reflect the viewpoint of the individual about what and how knowledge can be acquired and the degree of certainty [5]. Moreover, the individuals have multiple beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, ranging from simple ideas to complex ideas; the complex ideas are those which refer to beliefs derived from reason. The ability to learn is acquired. The knowledge is tentative and should be explored. While the simple knowledge refers to the naive belief; that means the knowledge is simple, it is handed down by authority, the ability to learn is innate, the learning is quick and knowledge is certain and some knowledge should be explored [25, 26].

Much more interesting, [28] explains the epistemological belief system illustrating the interplay among culture, ways of knowing, epistemological beliefs, beliefs about learning, self-regulated learning and classroom performance as shown in Figure 1.

As well as, studies [23, 27) have shown that students' academic performance is influenced by their beliefs about intelligence, knowledge and learning, and that students who believe in fixed intelligence and knowledge of simple and quick learning are avoiding obstacles, and use ineffective strategies, and exhibit negative behaviors to adapt when faced with challenges and difficulties. This strongly correlates with a low level of cognitive performance.

And [21] indicates that teachers must recognize the different learning strategies with their students and plan teaching strategies suitable for the growth and integration of the learning procedures of the learner and encourage the learner to adopt a strategy of independent learning. Also [30] suggests that teachers should be vigilant to the beliefs that attracts students with them to the classroom, and that weakens their level of knowledge, and limit their use of effective strategies and the impact on the level of motivation and their academic performance.

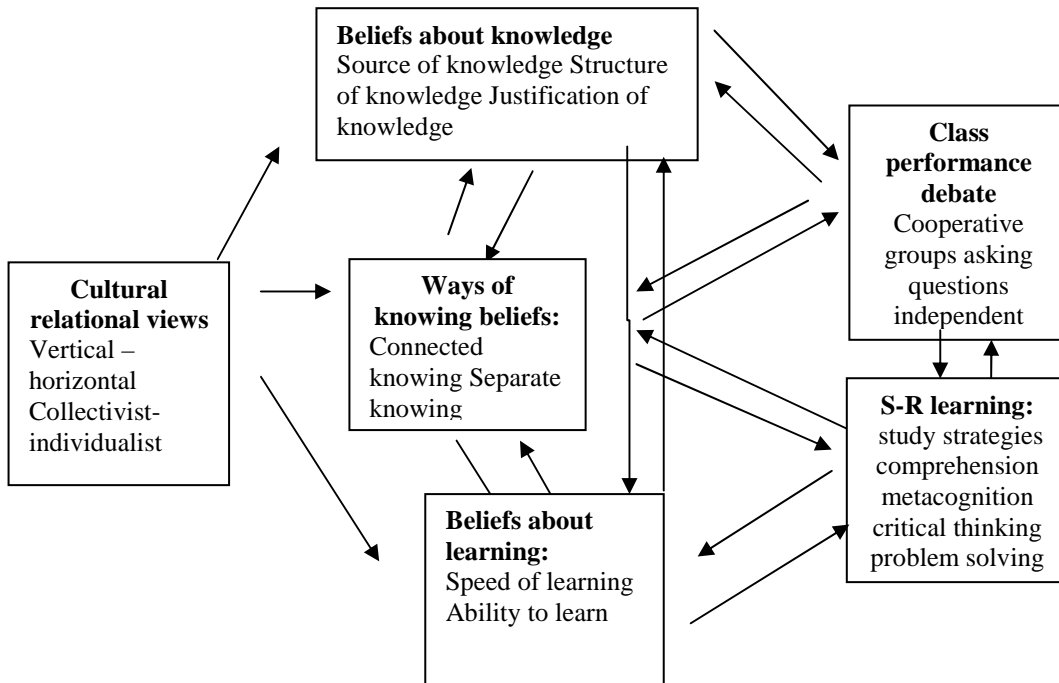
## 1.2 Objective of the study

The beliefs about learning play a major role in the development of learning and study of the Arabic language and move them to higher stages of thinking, understanding and success. Furthermore, this study is aimed at examining the epistemological beliefs among students of Chinese institutes and to clarify its role in learning a second language. We propose the following questions:

- What are the overall beliefs about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Education in China?
- Do beliefs differ about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Arabic language in China by gender and level?

- Is there a significant correlation between student’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge and achievements and to what extent the level beliefs about The nature of knowledge as explained by students ‘achievement’?

**Figure 1: The epistemological belief system**



**2. METHODOLOGY**

**2.1 Population and sample of the study**

The population of the study is composed of Malaysian students who are studying in the Institute of Arabic language in China.

The researchers distributed the questionnaire of Epistemological beliefs to a random sample from the society of the study which amounted to 229 students distributed as follows: Institute of Arabic language in Zhengzhou, (16 males and 5 females), Anthawkanço (62 males and 78 females), and Kunming (22 males and 46 females)

**2.2 Study’s Instrument:**

[25] Questionnaire of Epistemological beliefs includes 63 paragraphs distributed in five dimensions namely: Quick learning, Certain knowledge, Omniscient authority, Innate ability and Simple knowledge, adopted to be congruent for the Chinese environment. Accordingly, the current study developed a 35-item questionnaire after determining validity and reliability, also the arbitrators made some suggestions for modification in some paragraphs, for example:

Items befor modification	Items after modification
明确的事物，一点就通。	只要明确的事物，一点就通。
听老师讲一道他自己都犹豫不决的问题令人很担心。	听老师讲他自己都徘徊不定的问题令人十分不安。
一些宣称能无师自通的书籍并不是非常有用。。	标榜能无师自通的书籍其实并不是十分有用。

The researchers also calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients for dimensions of Epistemological beliefs questionnaire, where values ranged between (0.71- 0.72). See Table 1.

Responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale and the response categories are assigned weights from 1 to 5, and the positive items were scored by the following key: 5= strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 undecided, 2 = agree, and 1 = strongly agree. The negative items were reversed coded in order so that meaningful analyses at the subscale level could be conducted.

**Table 1: The coefficient reliability of Epistemological Beliefs Questionnaire**

Scale	consistency ranged	number
Quick learning	0.71	7
Certain knowledge	0.72	6
Omniscient authority	0.72	6
Innate ability	0.71	9
Simple knowledge	0.71	7
Epistemological beliefs	0.721	35

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study is to explore the overall beliefs among student's Chinese institutes. To answer the first study questions, "What are the overall the beliefs about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Education in China?" The researchers calculated the means and standard for the study dimensions as it is shown in Table 2

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Each Subscale (n=229)**

Subscale	Mean	SD
Quick learning	2.509	0.424
Certain knowledge	2.919	0.530
Omniscient	2.350	0.535
Innate ability	2.116	0.430
Simple knowledge	2.923	0.439
Entire scale	2.563	0.471

Table 1 shows the participants' mean scores with the SD of the five subscales. The participants scored the lowest on innate ability (mean = 2.116); as such, the participants have Naive beliefs about innate ability. The means scores of participants beliefs about quick learning, omniscient authority, and certain knowledge subscales are (mean =2.509, 2.350 and 2.919) respectively. The means scores also indicated that the participants have a low level belief on quick learning, omniscient authority and have a medium (undecided) belief on certain knowledge. The participants scored highest on the simple knowledge subscale (mean = 2.923); as such, the participants have a medium beliefs about simple knowledge. Consequently, the beliefs of students in Chinese colleges ranging from low to medium, this refers to the simple belief. The reason seems to be obvious:

1. Students and teachers are affected by Chinese exam-oriented education.
2. (Teachers' educational contexts) The teachers are not educated by teaching skill or any teaching training, maybe they used wrong teaching methods, such as pay attention to learning but not understanding.
3. (Students' educational contexts) Most of the participants graduate from secondary school, and they continued study in Chinese institute only for the certificate for future work.
4. (Learning environment) the students were educated in a constructivist learning environment, and show a constructivist conception of teaching and learning. [6]
5. The curriculum of these Chinese institute lacks the program for cognitive growth of the students.
6. Cultural factor: In the study of epistemological beliefs, the cultural and pedagogical contexts are often used as an explanation for the inconclusive results on the dimensional structure of epistemological beliefs [8, 9].
7. Also, this mediate in the belief, attributed to their reluctance when talking, and using the second language; because they do not trust themselves when spoken, as noted [31] "they believe that you should not say anything unless it is grammatically correct".

8. Family education factor.
9. Public policy factor.
10. Society factor.

For these reasons, we suggest that Chinese institutes are required to develop entry requirements, such as high school education level. Moreover, training for teachers about teaching and native knowledge for theory leading students to pay attention to native knowledge is required. Otherwise, teachers' awareness of the influence of epistemological beliefs on student learning and their commitment to classroom discussions of epistemological issues, may contribute to the development of students' thinking about knowledge and knowing. It is frequently taken for granted that students possess the necessary communication skill, research skill and problem-solving skills that are aim at developing epistemological beliefs to advance assimilation to the demands of higher education [16; 17]. In this case, the institute should be providing some activities that can develop students' intelligent. At the same time, the institute could offer the Intellectual development courses for students. These results were consistent with report in [15] where results indicated that the mean scores of the five subscales ranged between (2.50 – 3.49), this indicates that the beliefs of Malaysian students grades ranging between low and medium. It enhances that these findings that are revealed by the study [18], has indicated that pre-service EFL Teachers in Iran tended to hold beliefs about the innate and fixed nature of knowledge, certainty knowledge. Also, most teachers tended to endorse traditional conceptions about language teaching and cannot produce knowledge of English.

In order to answer question 2, "Do beliefs about the nature of knowledge of students at Institute of Education in China by gender and level?" The researcher used independent Sample T-test analysis for difference between the means of Male and Female Students in the components Beliefs about Nature of knowledge, ANOVA analysis for difference between the mean of students in the four education levels in the components Beliefs about Nature of knowledge, as it is shown in Table 3 and 4

**Table 3: Results of Independent Sample T-test analysis for difference between the means of Male and Female Students in the components Beliefs about Nature of knowledge.**

Subscale						Level of sig.
	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T -value	
Quick learning	male	100	2.5086	.41678	.871	At 0.05 Or 0.01
	female	129	2.5094	.43222		
Certain knowledge	male	100	2.8000	.42640	.174	
	female	129	3.0129	.58393		
Omniscient	male	100	2.3267	.42897	.739	
	female	129	2.3695	.60666		
Innate ability	male	100	2.1422	.36972	.463	
	female	129	2.0965	.42749		
Simple knowledge	male	100	2.8143	.46811	.194	
	female	129	3.0089	.39800		
Entire scale	male	100	2.51	0.421	0.668	
	female	129	2.59	0.48		

Table 3 shows the mean and SD of males is 2.51 and 0.421 whereas the mean and SD of females is 2.59 and 0.48, respectively. It indicates that males and females have no significant difference on beliefs about the nature of knowledge, This result conform with the study [10, 6, 11, 7, 34, 4, 29 ] where the results revealed no differences between the genders, and found that boys and girls had similar beliefs about nature of knowledge and knowing. While it differs with the result of [15], [19] which shows that female students scored lower than males in innate ability, whereas they are similar in Quick Learning, Certain Knowledge, Omniscient authority, and simple knowledge)

**Table 4: Results of One way ANOVA analysis for difference between the mean of students in the four education levels in the components Beliefs about Nature of knowledge.**

Subscale	Sum of	Df	Mean	F-value	p-value
	Squares		Square		
Quick learning	1.387	3	.462	2.620	.052
Certain knowledge	.184	3	.061	.215	.886
Omniscient authority	.875	3	.292	1.017	.386
innate ability	1.291	3	.430	2.709	.046
Simple knowledge	2.904	3	.968	5.287	.002

Table 4 shows that there is no significance difference between year level domain (first, second, third and fourth) and dependent variables: certain knowledge  $F(3, 225) = 2.620, P >.05$ . Omniscient authority  $F(3, 225) = .215, P >.05$ . and Quick learning  $F(3, 225) = 1.017, P >.05$ . Also, but is significance difference between year level and dependence variables: innate ability  $F(3, 225) = 2.709, P <.05$ . Simple knowledge  $F(3, 225) = 5.287, P <.05$ .

This result differ with the study [26, 34, 4, 19, 32] where the results revealed differences between the four level domain, and found that year 1, year 2, year 3 and year 4 students had difference beliefs about nature of knowledge and knowing, it means the belief of nature increase as the students age increase and they have a prediction relationship between year level and nature belief. It is seen from table 4 that there is no significant difference in certain knowledge, omniscient authority and quick learning, while there is significant difference in innate ability and simple knowledge. In order to identify the innate ability and simple knowledge that was behind this difference, the researcher used Tukey test for comparisons, as it is shown in Table 5

Post hoc comparisons (Table 5) using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for level 4 ( $M = 2.20, SD = 0.360$ ) was significantly difference than level 1 ( $M = 2.02, SD = 0.403$ ), level 2 ( $M = 2.12, SD = 0.391$ ) and level 3 ( $M = 2.18, SD = 0.409$ ) students' believe in Innate ability. It means level 4 students more confident that learning ability is innate. Followed by the mean score for level 3 ( $M = 2.18, SD = 0.409$ ) was significantly difference than level 1 ( $M = 2.02, SD = 0.403$ ) and level 2 ( $M = 2.12, SD = 0.39$ ), it means level 3 students more confident that learning ability is innate than level 1 and level 2. Then level 2 ( $M = 2.12, SD = 0.39$ ) was significantly difference than level 1 ( $M = 2.02, SD = 0.403$ ). It means level 2 students more confident that learning ability is innate than level 1.

Post hoc comparisons (Table 5) using the Tukey HSD test also indicated that the mean score for level 4 ( $M = 3.06, SD = 3.08$ ) was significantly difference than level 1 ( $M = 3.01, SD = 0.338$ ), level 2 ( $M = 2.77, SD = 0.57$ ) and level 3 ( $M = 2.87, SD = 0.35$ ) in students' believe in simple knowledge. Followed by, the mean score for level 1 ( $M = 3.01, SD = 0.338$ ) was significantly difference than level 2 ( $M = 2.77, SD = 0.57$ ) and level 3 ( $M = 2.87, SD = 0.35$ ) in students' believe in simple knowledge. Then, the level 3 ( $M = 2.87, SD = 0.35$ ) was significantly differ from the level 2 ( $M = 2.77, SD = 0.57$ ) in students' believe in simple knowledge.

In order to answer the third question, "Is there a significant correlation between student's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and achievements and to what extent the level beliefs about the nature of knowledge explains from students' achievement?" the researcher used Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between student's belief about the nature of knowledge and academic achievement, as it is shown in Table 5 and 6

**Table 5:** Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test for students' belief in Innate ability and Simple knowledge

Dependent Variable	(I) grade	(J) grade	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Innate ability	1.00	2.00	-.10211	.06620	.414	-.2735	.0692
		3.00	-.16643	.07343	.109	-.3565	.0236
		4.00	-.18857	.07970	.087	-.3949	.0177
	2.00	1.00	.10211	.06620	.414	-.0692	.2735
		3.00	-.06433	.07680	.837	-.2631	.1345
		4.00	-.08647	.08282	.724	-.3008	.1279
	3.00	1.00	.16643	.07343	.109	-.0236	.3565
		2.00	.06433	.07680	.837	-.1345	.2631
		4.00	-.02214	.08870	.995	-.2517	.2074
	4.00	1.00	.18857	.07970	.087	-.0177	.3949
		2.00	.08647	.08282	.724	-.1279	.3008
		3.00	.02214	.08870	.995	-.2074	.2517
Simple knowledge	1.00	2.00	.23683*	.07106	.006	.0529	.4208
		3.00	.13778	.07883	.301	-.0662	.3418
		4.00	-.05304	.08555	.926	-.2745	.1684
	2.00	1.00	-.23683*	.07106	.006	-.4208	-.0529
		3.00	-.09904	.08245	.627	-.3124	.1144
		4.00	-.28987*	.08890	.007	-.5200	-.0598
	3.00	1.00	-.13778	.07883	.301	-.3418	.0662
		2.00	.09904	.08245	.627	-.1144	.3124
		4.00	-.19082	.09522	.190	-.4373	.0556
	4.00	1.00	.05304	.08555	.926	-.1684	.2745
		2.00	.28987*	.08890	.007	.0598	.5200
		3.00	.19082	.09522	.190	-.0556	.4373

**Table 6: Correlation of academic achievement and subscale**

		academic achievement	Quick learning	Certain knowledge	Omniscient authority	Simple innate ability	Simple knowledge
academic achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.142*	-.204**	-.055	-.125	-.166*
	P		.032	.002	.409	.058	.012
	N	229	229	229	229	229	229

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 7. Correlation of academic achievement and Epistemological beliefs**

		Academic Epistemologi cal beliefs	achieveme nt
Academic	Pearson Correlation	-.205**	1
achievement	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	229	229

Table 5 and table 6 shown that Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between student's belief about the nature of knowledge and academic achievement. There was a weak negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.205$ ,  $n = 229$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . It means that students overall nature beliefs are not predicted estimates of their academic achievement. This result is different with [33].

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#### About the authors

DR. Wail Ismail

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

e-mail: wail77@yahoo.com

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

DR. Muhammad Azhar Zailaini

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

e-mail: azhar@um.edu.my

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

Di Xuan

Research Assistant, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

e-mail: 469076894@qq.com

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.