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**THE BELIEFS AND LEARNER STRATEGY USE OF LOW-PROFICIENCY  
CHINESE LEARNERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LEARNING ENGLISH  
IN A NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT**

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## ABSTRACT

Research on learner beliefs is made on the assumption that learners' perspectives and thoughts guide their learning behaviours (e.g. Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden 1987; Barcelos 2003) and determine the ultimate success of their learning (e.g. Ellis, 2004, 2008). Yet to date few studies have attempted to investigate the development of learner beliefs and the interactions among the three constructs: learner beliefs, learner strategy use and learning outcomes. This multicase study employed naturalistic methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to investigate the development of five low-proficiency Chinese ESL learners' beliefs, language learning strategies and English language proficiency over a 16-week period. The principal aim of the study was to examine the relationships between the learners' beliefs and learning strategy and the impact of both on learning outcomes. A number of data collection methods (e.g. interviews, diaries, class observations, stimulated recall, and a battery of tests) were employed to gather triangulated data.

Qualitative data analysis identified four major changes in their beliefs. First, the learners changed their beliefs about approaches to language learning from an initial analytical approach (e.g. learning grammatical rules) to a later more experiential one (e.g. watching TV). Second, they shifted the focus of their language learning from accuracy to fluency. Third, a new belief about group/pair work emerged after the learners were exposed to new approaches of language teaching in New Zealand. Finally, all the learners' self-efficacy beliefs strengthened as their language progressed. Like beliefs, some of the learners' strategies also developed over the observed period. At time 2, the learners increased their contact with English outside the institution. In addition, they started employing social strategies and higher order cognitive strategies.

Gains in the learners' proficiency were linked to their language learning strategy use, which was underpinned by their beliefs. Those learners who held beliefs about an experiential approach to language learning tended to advance more in speaking and vocabulary tests, whereas those who held

beliefs relating to an analytic approach showed moderate gains in a standardized general English test. However, this relationship did not hold when the learners failed to implement their beliefs. This suggests that beliefs do not have a direct impact on learning outcomes and that their influence depends on whether they have an effect on learning strategies.

This study sheds further light on the characteristics of the good language learner. One of the learners demonstrated language improvement across all the tests. She distinguished herself from the other learners in her concern for accuracy and fluency, her stronger self-efficacy beliefs, her empathy towards the target culture, her autonomous learning behaviours and her effective use of learning strategies.

The thesis concludes with a number of recommendations for policy makers and instructional practice.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BALL	Beliefs about Language Learning
BALLI	Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory
CE	Certificate in English
CLESOL	Community Language and English for Speakers of Other Languages
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
LLS	Language Learner Strategies
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LLBs	Language Learner Beliefs
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour