Chapter 2-Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The objectives of this study, as described in the previous chapter, are to explore the beliefs about language learning held by learners of English as a second language, and examine the perceptions they have of their language learning experience in Malaysia. The study takes its cue from existing research into learner beliefs and perceptions. The notion that the cognitive and affective aspects of individual learners play a significant role in both the process and product of language learning (Horwitz, 1987; Ellis, 2008) has prompted investigations into learner beliefs about the language learning process as well as into learner attitudes or perceptions towards contextual aspects of their learning situation. This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this study and reviews the literature related to the beliefs and perceptions held by language learners regarding different aspects of the language learning process. To begin with, the review of literature summarizes existing research on beliefs about language learning, starting with a discussion of beliefs and learning. Within the same topic of language learning beliefs, the summary of research moves on to cover different definitions of beliefs about language learning, which leads to an overview of the approaches used to measure this construct. The sections on beliefs about language learning close with a detailed discussion of the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1987) and the findings of several relevant BALLI and BALLI-inspired studies in different learning contexts. After the discussion of literature related to beliefs about language learning, the literature review proceeds to discuss the second variable in this study, learner perceptions. Since studies on learner perceptions have focused on a wide range of aspects, both inside and outside the classroom, only perception studies related to international students, classroom factors and learning environment in higher education were considered relevant to the focus of this study. Finally, the literature review ends by reviewing several studies which are pertinent to

the context of international students learning English in Malaysia: studies on international students in Malaysia and studies on learning English in Outer Circle countries.

2.2. Beliefs, Knowledge and Learning

In Chapter One, a distinction was made between the terms 'beliefs' and 'perceptions' as used in this study, with the former being used to describe learners' notions about language learning in general, and the latter referring to the way learners view the specifics of their learning context. However, what is termed as 'beliefs' in this study has been studied under many different terms by various researchers. Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005) cite a number of different terms used by researchers who have studied language learning beliefs, including 'conceptions of learning' (Benson & Lor, 1999), 'assumptions' (Riley, 1980), and 'mini-theories' (Hosenfeld, 1978). Wenden (1998) has also referred to the same construct as 'metacognitive knowledge'. While these terms have been used specifically in terms of language learning, learning psychology has also looked at learner beliefs about knowledge and knowing in general, also known as 'epistemic beliefs' (Beuhl, 2008). In terms of language learning and teaching, however, the terms 'metacognitive knowledge' and 'language learning beliefs' are the most commonly used terms to refer to the preconceived ideas about learning a language that learners bring into a language course.

Beliefs can be defined as an individual's representations of the world, whether correct or incorrect. According to Nola and Gurol (2005), most of our beliefs are not constantly present in our minds. Instead, they are accessed only when a certain stimulus, such as a question, evokes them (Nola & Gurol, 2005). Essentially, there is no clear way of distinguishing beliefs and knowledge, as beliefs are independent of truth. In addition, Nola and Gurol (2005) state that beliefs can be affected (by experience) and can affect (our actions). It is this feature of beliefs that has the greatest bearing on learning and teaching because what learners believe about the language learning process will influence the way

they approach it (Horwitz, 1988; Ellis, 2008), particularly in the strategies they choose. Consequently, strategy choice determines how well learners progress in their attempts to learn a language.

Thus, conceptions of how languages are learned are invisible, but highly influential, factors in the language learning classroom, on the part of both teachers and students. In the case of teachers, language learning beliefs influence the methods and activities they use to teach a particular language. Similarly, how learners view the language learning process and their learning context determines the way they respond to and participate in teaching and learning activities in the classroom and during self-study. It is understandable then, that learner beliefs have captured the attention of many researchers in the field of second language acquisition. The importance of learner beliefs about language learning to this field of study will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

2.3. The Importance of Language Learning Beliefs in Second Language Acquisition Research

The move away from teacher-centred classrooms towards a learner-centred approach has shifted the focus of research in language learning and teaching towards the learner as an individual. Individual learner differences thought to influence language acquisition have included various physical, cognitive and affective factors, such as age and gender, aptitude and beliefs, as well as anxiety and attitudinal factors. Horwitz (1989:62) defines beliefs about language learning as "preconceived ideas about the language-learning process rather than attitudes toward the target language and the target language group". The examination of these beliefs as a key factor in language learning seems to be of particular relevance to the context of foreign language learners learning English because of the special status of English as a language of commerce and education around the world. The international status of English and its multitude of speakers mean that socio-cultural theory, such as Schumann's Acculturation model for second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978), would

be somewhat unsuited to application in many English language learning contexts around the world. This is because the concept of 'social distance' from the community which speaks the target language has limited relevance to the context of learners who are trying to improve their English language skills to communicate with other non-native speakers of English, for example, in English-medium education in a country where English is not the native language. In situations like these, there is no clear 'target language group'; therefore, 'acculturation' may not come into play in the process of language learning. On the other hand, belief theory, which connects *a priori* beliefs to ultimate success in the language learning classroom, could be of particular importance in explaining the problem of variable success in language learning by English language learners around the world. Also, as beliefs are among the few individual learner differences that can be modified by teachers (Horwitz, 1987), research in this area could translate into improvements in the teaching and learning of languages.

Flavell (1979) describes 'metacognitive knowledge' as being a determining factor in a variety of cognitive activities related to language learning, language acquisition and self-instruction. He further states that beliefs can be deliberately activated, for example, when tasks are new or when learning has been incorrect or incomplete; beliefs can also be automatically activated when evoked by cues within a task (Flavell, 1979).

Research on language learning beliefs across various contexts has pointed to a clear link between the beliefs held by learners and the strategies they choose. From her study of EFL learners in Taiwan, Yang (1999) suggested that there was a close relationship between learner beliefs and strategy. Other studies, such as those conducted by Hong (2006) on ESL learners, also found a relationship between language learning beliefs and strategies. Park (1995), on the other hand, found a medium link between the two variables and stated that the relationship varied based on individual beliefs and strategies. Other areas in which language learning beliefs are thought to play a significant role include learner training and

autonomy. Wenden (1986) and Coterall (1995) advocate the investigation of learner beliefs as a first step towards improving learner autonomy, while Mantle-Bromley (1995) linked positive attitudes and realistic beliefs to learner proficiency.

2.4. Definitions of Language Learning Beliefs in Second Language Acquisition Research

While researchers working in this area tend to agree on the link between language learning beliefs and how learners approach the learning process (Horwitz, 1987, 1999; Wenden, 1998; Coterall, 1995; Ellis, 2008), they differ in their views on the nature of learner beliefs as well as the ways in which they conceptualise and measure them. The main approaches to studying language learning beliefs will be described in this section. The conceptualisation of beliefs in SLA research largely derives from different schools of psychological theory. Cognitive theory views learner beliefs as a part of 'metacognitive knowledge', but this definition was adopted by Wenden (1999) and is used interchangeably with 'beliefs' in second language acquisition research. Constructivist psychology, on the other hand, contributes the notion of learning as a construction of theories (Wenden, 1999). The term 'learner representations' is used when beliefs are seen to be constructed from a learners' representation of an experience, according to the way he perceives it. Other terminology used in second language acquisition to refer to beliefs, such as, 'naive psychology of learning' and 'mini-theories' are also derived from constructivist psychology (Wenden, 1998; Sakui and Gaies, 1999). Social psychology, conversely, highlights the socio-cultural context in belief formation as a result of a person's life and educational experiences (Sakui and Gaies, 1999).

In second language acquisition research, beliefs are widely viewed from the cognitive perspective. For example, Wenden (1999) uses Flavell's cognitivist definition of metacognitive knowledge as "the specialised portion of a learner's acquired knowledge base, which consists of what learners know about learning and to the extent a learner has

made distinction, language learning" (Wenden, 1999:44). Furthermore, Wenden (1999) provides three dimensions of metacognitive knowledge: *task knowledge, person knowledge* and *strategic knowledge*. In other words, language learning beliefs can be classified as those which focus on the learning task, the learner, or the process of learning (Wenden, 1999). Horwitz (1989), on the other hand, restricts her definition of learners' language learning beliefs as referring only to beliefs related to the language learning process in particular and pays little attention to the role of beliefs about learning in general to a learner's beliefs about language learning. Another conceptualization of language learning beliefs comes from Yang (1999), who studied language learning beliefs and strategies of ESL learners in Taiwan. She proposed a theoretical construct of beliefs as comprising *metacognitive* and *motivational* aspects. Beliefs have also been distinguished based on type and level of analysis, in other words, whether the beliefs are generalised or specific.

In addition to differing conceptualisations of language learning beliefs, researchers also hold different views on certain aspects of beliefs. Among the commonly debated aspects are the stability of beliefs and the extent to which they are influenced by culture and context. The following sub-sections present an overview of the discussions on these elements of beliefs.

2.4.1. The Issue of Stability of Language Learning Beliefs

Initially, beliefs about language learning were thought to be stable constructs and were distinguished from knowledge by their 'idiosyncratic' and 'value-related' nature, which Wenden (1998) interpreted as meaning that they would be less likely to change (Wenden, 1998). However, research is beginning to show that there is more variability in these beliefs, depending on the type of beliefs they are and the level of analysis involved in their formation. Studies that attempt to examine shifts in language learning beliefs, for example those conducted by Lee (2007) and Peacock (2001), have shown that beliefs do change as a result of learning experience. Lee's (2007) study on the metacognitive beliefs of Korean

learners of English at different stages of a study abroad programme found changes in beliefs as a result of experience; however, Peacock's study on the language learning beliefs held by pre-service English teachers over a three year period identified three key beliefs that remain the same (Peacock, 2001). As described in this section, there has been some difference in findings about whether beliefs are static or whether they change over time. In addition, researchers have also disagreed on whether culture and context have an influence on language learning beliefs. Several studies in this area will be summarised in the next section.

2.4.2. Culture, Context and Language Learning Beliefs

Since the first implementation of the 34-item BALLI in 1987, it has been applied to many different contexts by researchers around the world. The findings of these BALLI studies have prompted debate on another aspect of language learning beliefs: Do culture and context influence beliefs? More than a decade after the BALLI was introduced, Horwitz (1999) reviewed seven BALLI studies involving different groups of learners to identify patterns of similarities and differences across cultures and groups. She found certain differences from one group to another, for example, the American foreign language learners had different beliefs about the difficulty of language learning when compared to the Asian and Turkish ESL learners (Horwitz, 1999). In addition, the ESL learners were more likely to view learning vocabulary as being crucial to good language learning than the American groups. Despite these and other differences, Horwitz concluded that there was still not enough evidence to suggest that language learning beliefs are culturally influenced. In addition, there was quite a lot of variation within groups, leading Horwitz to propose that contextual differences, such as learning situation, may have a greater influence on learner beliefs.

Siebert (2003) conducted a BALLI study on a group of mixed nationality students learning English for Academic Purposes in the United States. Although her results showed many similarities to other BALLI studies, Siebert noted that Middle Eastern students tended to underestimate the time it takes to learn a language (Siebert, 2003). This was noted by Bernat (2006), who compared the beliefs of EAP learners in Australia to those of EAP learners in America as studied by Siebert. Despite noting that her study included more Asian students, Bernat (2006) concluded that learner beliefs were not context-specific as the beliefs of both groups of learners were similar in all categories. In cautiously rejecting the influence of context, or any single factor, on learner beliefs, Bernat suggests that it is the "individual's complex metacognitive structure, as affected by a number of social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective and personal factors, that is responsible for shaping the nature and strength of these beliefs" (Bernat, 2006: 222). This view is more compatible with the socio-cultural or contextual perspective, used by researchers such as Barcelos (2000), Rantala (2002) and Alanen (2003), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

To summarize, the last few sections have described various ways of conceptualizing beliefs about language learning, by describing how different perspectives differ in the way they define beliefs, different views on the stability of beliefs, and perspectives on the influence of culture and context on beliefs about language learning.

2.5. Approaches to Measuring Beliefs about Language Learning

A researcher's approach to measuring beliefs is shaped by his or her definition of beliefs. In general, there are three methods that have been used in the identification and classification of learners' beliefs about language learning: the normative approach, the metacognitive approach and the contextual approach (Ellis, 2008; Barcelos, 2000). In this section, these three approaches will be discussed along with an additional approach referred to by Ellis (2008) as 'the metaphorical approach'. The discussion on approaches to studying language

learning beliefs will begin with one of the most commonly used approaches, which is the normative approach.

2.5.1. Normative Approach

The normative approach views beliefs primarily as determinants of future actions and tends to describe language learning beliefs as 'misconceptions', 'preconceived notions', and even 'myths' (Horwitz, 1989), where the fallibility of learners' ideas is often highlighted. In addition, this approach tends to disregard the evolutionary nature of beliefs, by measuring them as stable entities on a Likert-type scale of responses. Most studies using the normative approach have measured language learning beliefs quantitatively by using the BALLI, adaptations of the BALLI and other closed-choice questionnaires. Furthermore, the normative approach reports findings in the form of patterns of similarities and differences across groups using statistical description. Horwitz (1999) has stated that the focus of her studies has been to find commonality across groups. Although this approach has been criticised for reducing what is essentially a rich and "messy" construct (Beuhl, 2008; Pajares, 1992) to numerical form and limiting responses to a set of statements, the normative approach is still widely used as it offers the opportunity to study large quantities of data and facilitates the identification of patterns of beliefs within student groups. In addition, it allows statistical correlation to identify links between beliefs and other factors such as proficiency, gender and nationality. In the present study, the normative approach has been used as the basis for identifying the beliefs of a learner group that has not been studied much. To provide more context-specific data and to address the weaknesses of the normative approach of measuring beliefs about language learning, the BALLI questionnaire has been supplemented with qualitative research methods. As the BALLI provides the theoretical framework for this study, BALLI and BALLI-inspired studies will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this chapter. The following section, however, continues

our discussion on the main approaches to studying beliefs with a discussion of the metacognitive approach.

2.5.2. Metacognitive Approach

The metacognitive approach views beliefs in generally the same way as in the normative approach. Wenden, who pioneered the metacognitive approach at around the same time as Horwitz's formulation of the BALLI, based much of her conception of beliefs on theories of knowledge about learning proposed by cognitive psychologist, Flavell (Wenden, 1999). As in the normative approach, learners' knowledge about language learning is viewed as an indicator of success and autonomy (Barcelos, 2000). Wenden (1998) also refers to Vygotskian socio-cultural theory, which highlights the social setting. This comprises socially-acquired assumptions of roles, means and goals, as being the main contributors to the development of higher-order mental functions. However, Wenden points out that the socio-cultural perspective often overlooks the role of these assumptions in shaping the setting, while highlighting the influence of the 'social setting' in shaping the assumptions. Studies of learner beliefs from the metacognitive perspective usually employ open-ended interviews as a means of data collection (Ellis, 2008). However, Rantala (2002) used a questionnaire comprising statements representing the two of the three components of metacognitive knowledge as defined by Wenden and Flavell: *strategic knowledge*, *person knowledge* and *task knowledge*. In her study, person knowledge and task knowledge were broken down further into components such as universal attributes of learners; family factors; personality and motivation, and purpose of learning English; nature of learning English; learning in different settings and learning in classroom settings (Rantala, 2002). The advantage of the metacognitive approach to measuring language learning beliefs is that the semi-structured interviews and self-report data collection techniques often used in this approach allow learners' beliefs to be stated in their own words. In addition, they are not restricted to expressing opinions on beliefs selected by a researcher, as in the Likert-type

questionnaires used in the BALLI. However, this approach has been criticised for using learner statements as the only source of data, thereby isolating learner beliefs from their context and treating them as abstract mental states (Barcelos, 2000). Critics of both the normative and metacognitive approach have advocated measuring learner beliefs using the contextual approach which will be discussed in the next section.

2.5.3. Contextual Approach

The contextual approach, or the socio-cultural approach (Bernat, 2008), advocates a holistic approach to measuring learner beliefs, by viewing them as "embedded in students' contexts" (Barcelos, 2000:60), instead of as metacognitive states that can be measured by questionnaires and presented as quantitative data. Beliefs are viewed as 'socially-constructed representation systems' and therefore cannot be studied in isolation from context. This approach usually utilises qualitative research methods, which most often comprise multiple data collection methods including diaries, observation, journals and ethnography. The purpose of combining different methods, allows researchers to examine learner beliefs in their context. The contextual approach provides rich data, going beyond the measurement of beliefs to examining the experiences that lead to conception of beliefs. Studies using this approach are usually conducted on a small-scale because the focus is more on a deep understanding of several learners' beliefs and their underlying factors, rather than measuring the beliefs of large groups of learners. In addition to the three approaches already discussed, there have been a number of studies which use metaphor to get an understanding of learners' conceptions of matters related to language learning. This approach will be discussed in the next section.

2.5.4. Metaphorical Approach

According to Ellis (2008), a fourth approach to measuring learner beliefs involves using metaphors to draw out learner beliefs about language learning. This approaches views

beliefs as being covert and best studied indirectly (Ellis, 2008). Ellis (2008) describes metaphors as the windows through which learner beliefs can be viewed. Studies using this approach generally apply qualitative research methods in metaphor analysis to examine language learning beliefs, for example, studies by Ellis (2002), Nikitina & Furuoka (2008) and Farrell (2006). The metaphorical approach most often utilises questionnaires and journals to collect data, from which metaphors are identified during analysis. Metaphors are then grouped under main themes. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008), for example, gave a list of incomplete sentences (e.g. A language teacher is like....) to 23 learners of Russian at a Malaysian university to identify learner perceptions of language teachers. The 27 metaphors that resulted, which included items such as 'vitamins', 'discovery channel' and 'big lorry', were then grouped according to four emergent aspects: social order, cultural transmission, learner-centred growth and social reformer. Ellis (2008) reports on his 2002 metaphor study in which six adult learners of German kept language learning diaries. These diaries were later analysed for metaphorical language to examine learner perceptions of the language learning process (Ellis, 2008). The most common metaphors found in the data were of 'Learning as a Journey' and 'Learning as a Puzzle'. Metaphors are also used in the contextual approach to measuring language learning beliefs. The metaphorical approach is less commonly used when studying language learning beliefs; however, its use is becoming more common.

This section has discussed the four main approaches to studying language learning beliefs, which are the normative approach, the metacognitive approach, the contextual approach and the metacognitive approach. SLA researchers who look at the language learning process from a constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives have criticised the cognitive approach for what they consider a simplistic view of and approach to studying beliefs. Barcelos (2000), who advocates a socio-constructivist approach, states that the metacognitive, or mainstream, approach isolates learner beliefs from the environment and experiences which

played a role in their formation (Barcelos, 2000). Dufva (2003, as cited in Gabillon, 2005) also rejects the cognitive approach stating that too much emphasis is given to individual mental states without any consideration for the influence of external contextual factors on the formation of these mental states, or beliefs. The socio-cultural context referred to here not only includes classroom interaction among learners and teachers, but also encompasses the socio-cultural forces at play in terms of the language being learned and its speakers, as well as all the experiences that have shaped the learner prior to beginning the learning process.

While many researchers have opted to investigate learner beliefs exclusively from one side of the cognitive-sociocultural divide, other researchers are now advocating a more inclusive perspective using both normative or metacognitive approach and the socio-cultural approach. This is done through mixed methods research, for example, by combining a questionnaire with interviews or observation and allows group patterns in learner beliefs to be identified while facilitating the examination of learner beliefs on an individual level. Bernat & Gvozdenko (2005) trace the development of various perspectives on studying learner beliefs and parallels these perspectives to the major approaches in SLA research; cognitive, socio-cultural and ecological approaches. While acknowledging the major contribution that the psycho-cognitive perspective has made in initiating a systematic method of studying beliefs, Bernat & Gvozdenko propose a more holistic approach towards studying language learning beliefs and other aspects of SLA in general (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Similarly, Gabillon (2005) asserts that no single approach is sufficient to account for the complexity of learner beliefs.

2.5.5. Conceptual Framework

In SLA research, beliefs and perceptions fall within a broad category usually referred to as 'individual learner differences'. As stated earlier in this dissertation, individual learner

differences include biological factors such as age and gender, cognitive factors such as beliefs and aptitude, and affective factors such as anxiety, perceptions and attitudinal factors. Many researchers have attempted to categorise the individual learner differences, for example, Altman (1980, as cited in Ellis, 2008b), Skehan (1989) and Larsen, Freeman and Long (1991). According to Ellis (2008b), although the researchers examining individual learner differences agree on the importance of these factors in second language learning, they often differ in their classification of these differences, as well as the terms used to define different constructs. Ellis (2008b) further contends that in comparing the categorization of individual learner differences as proposed by Altman (1980, as cited in Ellis, 2008b), Skehan (1989) and Larsen, Freeman and Long (1991), "...the constructs...are often vague and overlap in indeterminate ways," (Ellis, 2008b: 171). In order to solve this problem, Ellis (2008b) put forward a 'Framework for Investigating Individual Learner Differences', which is depicted in Figure 2.1.
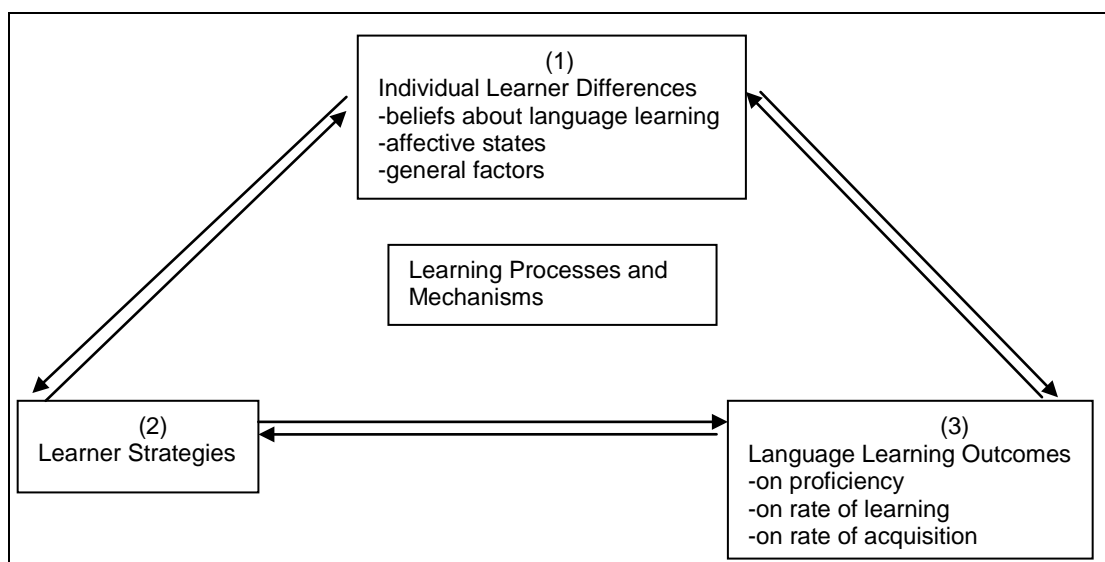

Figure 2.1. Ellis (2008b)'s Framework for Investigating Individual Learner Differences.

Ellis's framework creates a model for the assertions of researchers who have been investigating various individual learner differences. For example, Elaine Horwitz, who was among the pioneers of language learning beliefs research, states that language learning beliefs have an effect on language learning outcome (Horwitz, 1987). In Ellis's (2008b)

model, there are three main components which interact with each other in second language learning: *individual learner differences*, *learning strategies* and *learning outcomes*. The relationship among the three components occurs within the context of '*learning processes and mechanisms*' (Ellis, 2008b). Ellis further states that individual learner differences, learning strategies and learning outcome are interrelated in many different ways. For example, while language learning beliefs can affect learning outcomes through the learner's choice of strategy, learning outcomes could also cause learners to change their strategies and beliefs, or have an impact on their affective states.

In the context of this study, it is Ellis's categorization of individual learner differences that is deemed to be relevant. In his model, Ellis divides individual learner differences into three types: *beliefs about language learning*, *affective states* and *general factors*. The first type of individual learner difference in Ellis's model (Ellis, 2008b) is beliefs about language learning, which have been studied by Horwitz (1987, 1988, 1999) in the BALLI and Wenden (1988, 1989). The next type of individual learner difference is affective states, which covers a broad range of emotive and psychological aspects including learner anxiety, confidence and perceptions of progress. Finally, the third type of individual learner beliefs is what Ellis described as general factors, which is also very broad-ranging and includes age, gender, personality, learning style and foreign language aptitude. According to Ellis, the first two categories of individual learner differences: beliefs about language learning and affective states are affected by experience, while general factors differ depending on the specific variable. For example, age is a stable factor but learning styles could be modified either by the learners themselves or their environments. Ellis further states that in addition to the interrelation between learner strategies, individual learner differences and learning outcome, the three categories of individual learner differences are also interrelated (Ellis, 2008b). He puts forward the example of how personality factors might affect a learner's language learning beliefs and affective response to their learning context. According to Ellis

(2008b) while language learning beliefs tend to be stable, affective states can vary from one day to another, or even from one moment to another in response to aspects of their learning context, for example, the activities conducted in class.

In discussing individual learner differences, Ellis contends that it is these factors that provide insight into why language learners achieve variable success, both in terms of speed of learning as well as the level of proficiency they are able to achieve. He states that "A full account of how learners differ with regard to how, how much, and how fast they learn a L2 will need to take account of both social and psychological factors, and how these interact"(Ellis, 2008b:169).

In this study, Ellis's (2008b) framework provides a foundation for the exploration of two individual learner differences of international students in Malaysia, namely their language learning beliefs and perceptions of their learning experience. Although Ellis (2008b) discusses affective states as being responses to specific classroom factors, he also highlights the relationship between learning context and affective states. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the case of the international students involved in this study, their perceptions of learning English in Malaysia, both inside and outside the classroom, are linked to their affective states. These perceptions, along with participants' language learning beliefs, are likely to play a role in their learning strategies and learning outcomes. In addition, there is a need to investigate the possibility of a relationship between these two variables in order to better understand how they are linked to the participants' success or failure in learning English.

This section has discussed Ellis's (2008b) framework for investigating individual learner differences in order to provide the basis for investigating the beliefs about language learning and perceptions of the international students learning English in Malaysia. As demonstrated by Ellis (2008b), the individual differences of learners are interrelated with their success or

failure and these individual differences include language learning beliefs as well as learner perceptions. In the following sections, relevant studies that have been conducted on the two variables, learner beliefs and learner perceptions, will be discussed. To begin with, the following section will focus on the BALLI instrument, which was based on the normative approach as discussed in section 2.5.1. The BALLI is of particular significance to this study as it was used to collect data on participants' beliefs about language learning.

2.6. Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

One of the most extensively used instruments for measuring the language learning beliefs of learners, is the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), a questionnaire developed by Elaine K. Horwitz in the 1980s to measure the language learning beliefs of language teachers in the United States. The "Teacher BALLI" initially comprised 27 statements on various aspects of the language learning process, and was later developed into two other versions the Foreign Language BALLI and the ESL BALLI. The version most often used is the ESL BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) which lists 34 statements on five different themes identified by Horwitz, as a result of brainstorming sessions with teachers, and later with language students. The themes in the BALLI questionnaire are: *Foreign Language Aptitude*, *Difficulty of Language Learning*, the *Nature of Language Learning*, *Language Learning Strategies* and *Learning and Communication* (Horwitz, 1987). Applying this instrument to different groups of language learners at the University of Texas, Horwitz identified learner beliefs and found commonality across learner groups (Horwitz, 1987).

Although Kuntz (1996) points out that the BALLI originated from teachers' opinions of what language learners believed, and, therefore is not entirely appropriate for measuring the language learning beliefs held by learners, Horwitz (1987) states that the later versions of the BALLI were tested in focus groups which included both foreign language and ESL learners from a variety of countries. Since the BALLI offered researchers the opportunity to

measure the language learning beliefs of large groups of learners, it has been used on a variety of learner groups throughout the world over the last two decades. Some of these studies will be reviewed in the next section.

2.6.1. BALLI Studies

Since Horwitz's early BALLI studies, the BALLI has been used by many researchers to investigate the language learning beliefs of different learner groups, with varied target languages and learning contexts. These include foreign language learners in the United States (Horwitz, 1988), EAP learners in the U.S. (Siebert, 2003) and Australia (Bernat, 2006), and EFL learners in Turkey (Altan, 2006), Korea (Park, 1995; Hong, 2006) and Finland (Rantala, 2002). Due to the extensive use of the BALLI, it would be time-consuming and unnecessary to list all the studies that have used this questionnaire to measure learner beliefs. Therefore, only those studies conducted on learners of English or considered relevant to the context of this study will be focused on. These studies will be outlined in the following sub-sections in two categories: BALLI studies of ESL and EAP learners in Other Countries and BALLI studies in Malaysia (ESL and Foreign Language). For the purpose of this study, no distinction will be made between ESL and EFL, and the term ESL will be used to refer to the learning of English regardless of the context.

2.6.2. BALLI Studies of English Learners in Other Countries

There have been several BALLI studies in countries such as the United States, Australia, Korea and Turkey. First, BALLI studies in the United States and Australia, both countries in which English is a native language, will be discussed. This will be followed by a review of several BALLI studies in Korea and Turkey. Siebert (2003) conducted a study on the language learning beliefs of EAP learners North American universities and colleges. The purpose of Siebert's study was to identify commonly held beliefs as well as variations among the group, in addition to establishing whether variables such as gender and

nationality had an influence on the beliefs (Siebert, 2003). Findings showed that gender had a significant effect on beliefs as there were marked differences in the language learning beliefs held by male students when compared to those held by female students. For instance, male students were more confident of their language learning abilities and more optimistic about their potential success in the course they were taking (Siebert, 2003). There were also some common beliefs held by students of the same culture or nationality, which differed from those of other nationality groups, for example, the higher confidence levels of the Middle Eastern students in Siebert's study (Siebert, 2003). Bernat (2006) conducted a BALLI study of international students learning EAP in Australia, and compared her results to those of Siebert (2003) in order to identify whether learning context had any influence on language learning beliefs. Overall, Bernat's (2006) findings corresponded with those of Siebert (2003), which led her to conclude that there is not enough evidence to conclude that learner beliefs are context-specific. However, this view is contradicted by the findings of other researchers, for example, Tanaka & Ellis (2003), who studied the shift in beliefs of Japanese learners of English using a questionnaire they had developed specifically for the Japanese context.

In addition to BALLI studies in English-speaking countries, researchers have used the BALLI to measure the language learning beliefs of English learners in countries including Turkey (Altan 2006; Oz 2007), Lebanon (Diab, 2006) and Korea (Park, 1995; Truitt, 1995; Hong, 2006). In these studies, learning English is conducted more as learning a foreign language since it is not widely spoken outside the classroom. In Turkey, Oz (2007) administered an adaptation of the BALLI to 407 learners of English in Turkish secondary schools. In general, findings showed that Turkish learners held some beliefs in common with the learners studied in other contexts. However, there were also some differences. In addition, Oz found intra-group differences based on certain variables such as grade at school, city of residence and gender. Diab (2006) studied the beliefs of university students

learning English and French in Lebanon, using their BALLI responses to see whether there was any difference in their beliefs according to target language. In her study, Diab found that socio-cultural and political factors related to each of the languages being learned influenced the students' beliefs about learning that language. For example, English was viewed as an easy language while French was seen as a difficult one, perhaps due to the history of the country as a former part of the French Mandate. Diab's findings provide proof that beliefs about language learning are not uniform across all contexts; thus, socio-cultural, political and individual factors cannot be completely overlooked when studying language learning beliefs.

Several BALLI studies conducted in Korea by Park (1995), Truitt (1995) and Hong (2006) are of particular relevance to this study since they also involve factor analysis of the BALLI. Truitt (1995) used the BALLI to measure the language learning beliefs of 204 Korean university students who were learning English. When compared to previous studies of foreign language learners, ESL learners in the U.S. and EFL learners in Taiwan, there were a number of differences in the learners' beliefs. Participants' beliefs were also found to be linked to other factors such as academic experience and major. Because of this, Truitt (1995) concluded cultural background and experience could potentially cause variations in learner beliefs. Another BALLI study in Korea was conducted by Park (1995), who studied the relationship between language learning beliefs and strategy use of 322 university students learning English in two Korean universities. Park used the BALLI to measure learner beliefs, and the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Park, 1995) to measure learners' strategy use. The results of both questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics as well as factor analysis, to describe the learner beliefs and strategy choice. Finally, the factors resulting from each questionnaire were correlated using Pearson r correlation, to see whether there were any significant relationships between the different factors for the beliefs and strategies. Park found that

learner beliefs and strategies were generally related, and these finding were echoed by Hong (2006). Hong (2006) also studied the learner beliefs and strategies of Korean EFL students, but looked at two different groups of English language learners, comprising 428 monolinguals and 420 bilinguals. Using the same methods as Park (1995), for the first part of her study, Hong (2006) went a step further by comparing the data for both groups using Multiple Analysis of Variance and found that the bilingual Korean learners appeared to be more adept language learners since they reported a higher rate of strategy use (Hong, 2006). Park's (1995) and Hong's (2006) studies are not only relevant to the present study in terms of the methodology used, but also since they reinforce the influence of beliefs on strategy choice. In addition, Hong's (2006) findings that bilingual Korean learners tend to use more language learning strategies may have implications on this study since many of the participants are monolingual Arabic speakers. Overall, the BALLI studies in different learning contexts also reinforce the assertions of several researchers that factors such as nationality, socio-cultural factors and previous languages learned influence learner beliefs and as a result, can affect language learning. In addition to the BALLI studies in Turkey, Lebanon and Korea which were described in this section, there have also been several BALLI studies in Malaysia. These are presented in the following section.

2.6.3. BALLI Studies in Malaysia

In Malaysia, Nikitina and Furuoka (2006, 2006a, 2007) have conducted BALLI studies with Malaysian university students learning Russian as a foreign language. While they had many findings in common with other BALLI studies, Nikitina and Furuoka also found that there were some contextual constraints (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006) which indicated that perhaps socio-cultural factors may influence language learning beliefs. For example, beliefs about foreign language aptitude were less salient in Malaysian subjects, than among the American learners in Horwitz's study (Horwitz, 1987). The researchers suggest that the multilingual nature of Malaysian society could have resulted in the differing beliefs, as many of the

Malaysian students were bilingual, or at least know bilingual or multilingual individuals. Another local study that utilised the BALLI was conducted by Mary, Chong, Hanisah and Tan (2006), who examined the beliefs of pre-service teachers of English at the Institut Perguruan Bahasa Asing (Institute of Foreign Language Teaching), Malaysia. The findings of this study in relation to beliefs about foreign language aptitude strengthen the findings of Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) that Malaysian students do not have strong beliefs in foreign language aptitude, which may be related to the multilingual society in this country. The students in Mary, et al.'s (2006) study had strong beliefs in the other BALLI themes, and the female students tended to see learning English as easier than did the male students. However, while there have been several BALLI studies in Malaysia, no BALLI studies of international students learning English were found in the literature search. As depicted in the review of BALLI studies in Malaysia, the BALLI has been applied in several contexts, including that of foreign language learners of Russian and pre-service English teachers. The versatility of this instrument has also made it possible for researchers to include other factors in their studies of language learning beliefs. A number of these studies will be reviewed in the next section.

2.6.4. BALLI studies with Other Factors

In addition to using the BALLI to identify learners' beliefs about language learning, researchers have studied other variables alongside measuring language learning beliefs, often with the purpose of identifying possible links between these variables. Among the variables that have been studied are gender (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), learning stage (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003) and strategy use (Park, 1995; Truitt, 1995; Yang, 1999; Hong, 2006; Shen, 2006; Mokhtari, 2007). Many researchers have also modified the BALLI or used it with other instruments to gain more insight into learner beliefs and any other variables being studied. Truitt (1995), for example, added open-ended questions to the BALLI in her study. Hong (2006) and Park (1995) used the BALLI along with Oxford's Strategy Inventory of

Language Learning (SILL) to investigate the relationship between the beliefs and learning strategies of ESL learners in Korea. Shen (2006) conducted a similar study on school children in remote areas of China. Her findings also showed that there was a moderate relationship between learner beliefs, as measured by the BALLI and learner strategies, as measured by the SILL (Shen, 2006). In addition, Shen (2006) also found that gender and time spent learning English had some influence on the participants' language learning beliefs. All the studies summarised in this section found some relationship between learner beliefs and learner strategies. In addition, other variables such as gender have also been found to influence learner beliefs about language learning. The BALLI studies cited in this section, and the ones before it, have contributed some important knowledge in the area of learner beliefs about language learning. However, over the years, certain weaknesses of this instrument have been highlighted by several researchers. The following section will described the criticisms that have been made of the BALLI.

2.6.5. Weaknesses & Criticisms of the BALLI

The BALLI has been credited with providing researchers with a useful tool to systematically investigate learners' beliefs, in addition to bringing attention to what was then an often overlooked phenomenon. However, some issues have been raised about its development and other potential weaknesses in the instrument. For example, Kuntz (1996) pointed out that the initial version of BALLI was generated from brainstorming sessions with language teachers not learners, and, therefore, the statements on the BALLI comprise language teachers' perceptions of what learner beliefs are. However, Horwitz (1988) states that "The BALLI was developed in several stages from free-recall protocols of foreign language and ESL teachers of different cultural backgrounds, students (both foreign language and ESL) focus groups, and additional beliefs supplied by teacher educators from a variety of culture groups" (Horwitz, 1988:284). The second criticism that has been brought up by a number of researchers (Kuntz, 1996; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006) was that

Horwitz's five themes were not statistically generated from learner responses. Furthermore, Kuntz (1996) points out that the labelling of the BALLI themes was not explained. In response to these criticisms, researchers such as Yang (1999) and Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) have conducted factor analysis of BALLI results to determine the statistical structure of the BALLI. Other researchers such as Truitt (1995), Yang (1999) and Hong (2006) have conducted a factor analysis on the BALLI and found different results and themes than those proposed by Horwitz. Factor analysis of Truitt's (1995) adapted BALLI study on ESL learners in Korea also resulted in certain statements loading under different themes than they did in Horwitz's study. These differing results could be indications that culture and ethnicity influence the shaping of beliefs. In addition, they suggest the structure and sets of beliefs may differ from one sample to another (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006, 2007). In Nikitina and Furuoka's BALLI study of the beliefs of Malaysian students learning Russian at university, four factors were extracted: motivation; aptitude; strategy and ease of learning, which correspond with four of the five BALLI themes. Only one of Horwitz's themes, 'nature of language learning', did not form a separate factor in Nikitina and Furuoka's study, which led them to conclude that the BALLI could be considered suitable for conducting research on language learning beliefs in different cultural contexts (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007).

The previous sections have looked at past research on the language learning beliefs of learners as well as examined various relevant theoretical issues in the investigation of this construct. The remainder of this chapter will focus on available literature on the second variable in this study, learner perceptions.

2.7. Learner Perceptions and Language Learning

Perceptions and beliefs are both essentially representations in an individual's mind about an abstract or physical thing. As has been stated in Chapter One of this study, the term *beliefs* is used to refer to the assumptions made about language learning in general, while

perceptions is used to refer to how the participants view various aspects of their learning experience as international students learning English in Malaysia. In this study, the aspects of the learning context being investigated are those that are relevant to this particular group of participants, namely their perceptions of Malaysia as an English language learning destination, their out-of class experience, their perceptions of English in Malaysian universities as well as of learning and teaching in a local English language course. To find studies on learner perceptions that have involved the same factors would be very unlikely, considering the relatively unique context of these participants. However, although the studies reviewed in the following section examine learner perceptions on different aspects of their learning situation, all their findings indicate that learner perceptions provide useful information about a learner group, which can be used to inform educational and administrative practices, and that these perceptions also play an important role in learners' ultimate success in language learning.

2.7.1. Perception Studies involving International Students in a Host Country

The learning context and learning environment have been suggested as factors in the formation of language learning beliefs. Horwitz (1999:575) stated that learner beliefs could be influenced by "...contextual differences in the language learning situation as well as specific classroom practices". A number of studies have investigated the beliefs of international students learning English in a new country; however, there are few studies which have examined the perceptions held by this group about their learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. One such study was conducted by Christison and Krahnke (1986), who measured the perceptions held by non-native learners of English at US universities in terms of their language learning experience and use of English in academic settings. Through open-ended interviews on aspects such as their language learning course as well as the effects of out-of-class experience on language learning, Christison and Krahnke (1986) found that the learners were generally satisfied with their intensive English

course; however, they emphasised the need for more skills practice. An interesting observation was that students tended to rate their teachers based on personality attributes rather than technical ones (Christison & Krahnke, 1986). The study also found that 68% of the participants spoke at least an hour of English outside the class every day and 12% did not speak English out of class.

2.7.2. Perception Studies in ESL and FL Classrooms

Many of the studies found in the literature search focused on learners' perceptions of aspects directly related to their learning and teaching experience such as classroom activities and teacher's experience. According to Tse (2000), learners' perceptions may include a broad range of factors related to their language learning experience. She explains how learners' perceptions of the foreign language classroom can fit into Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition as a non-linguistic outcome and also as individual learners' indicators of motivation and anxiety. Tse's study of learner autobiographies found that learners desired more oral communication in their courses and tended to give low estimations of their language proficiency (Tse, 2000). Barkhuizen (1998) conducted a study with the aim of learning how South African schoolchildren viewed the different activities they participated in as part of their ESL lessons. Both Barkhuizen and the teachers at the school where the study was conducted were surprised by some of the results, for example, that the students rated mechanical aspects of language study such as spelling very highly in terms of enjoyment, learning English and usefulness after school (Barkhuizen, 1998). He also found that students were not so keen on communicative activities such as class discussions and debates and preferred more traditional classroom activities. Despite the different learning contexts in Tse's and Barkhuizen's studies, it is relevant to the present study to note that finding out about learner perceptions can often provide the instructors with information that may help increase learners' satisfaction and motivation.

2.7.3. Perception Studies on Learning Environment in Higher Education

Other studies outside the area of language learning and teaching have also examined learners' perceptions of their learning environment. For example, perception studies in the area of higher education such as those by Lizzio, Wilson & Simmons (2002) and Wierstra (1999) also focused on learner perceptions of their academic environment. In their study which links learner perceptions to academic outcomes, Lizzio et al. (2002) review Biggs's *3 P model* which describes the learning process as being made of up 3 interacting components: the learning environment and student characteristics (*presage*), students' approach to learning (*process*) and learning outcomes (*product*). According to this model, learner perceptions are part of the 'presage' factors, which can affect both the 'process' and the 'product' aspects of the learning process (Lizzio et al., 2002). This view is similar to how belief theory views the influence of beliefs about language learning on the language learning process. The result of the study involving 624 university students of various subjects found a strong relationship between learners' perceptions of various aspects of their learning experience, such as academic workload, appropriateness of assessment and quality of teaching, and their approach to learning. In addition, it was found that how learners perceived their learning environment was a stronger predictor of academic success when compared to prior academic achievement (Lizzio et al., 2002). Based on the strong relationship found between learners' perceptions and academic outcome, it can be concluded that learners' perceptions are a significant part of their learning experience and may even determine their ultimate success. Other researchers have looked at how international students perceive the learning environment within their academic institutions. For example, Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas (2000) studied the perceptions held by 408 undergraduates from various countries who were enrolled in academic programmes in an Australian university. Three main categories were identified as part of the participants' learning environment: activities inside the university, activities outside the university and

language-related issues. Robertson et al. (2000) found that international students had feelings of isolation and perceived many instances which they interpreted as racist or non-inclusive, both outside the university and in the classroom. In addition, language related issues were as significant as academic ones, with many of the participants citing the need for additional support given to international students. A study by Wang, Singh, Bird and Ives (2008) involving Taiwanese nursing students in Australia also found the need for further support to help international students navigate the academic, cultural and language-related problems that they face. Overall, these studies in higher education have found that perceptions held by university students and international university students about their learning environment play an important role in their overall learning experience and their academic achievement. For international students in particular, issues that appear to be outside the realm of academia also factor into their overall learning experience. As this study focuses on international students learning English in Malaysia, studies on this particular group are particularly significant. Several studies on international students in Malaysia will be covered in the next section.

2.8. Studies on International Students in Malaysia

While international students learning English in Malaysia are a relatively new learner group, several studies have been conducted on various aspects of their language learning. Hamzah, Moloudi, and Abdullah (2009) conducted a study on international postgraduate students in University Putra Malaysia to identify their perceptions of the English language course they were required to take. The study conducted by Hamzah et al. (2009) differed from the present study since the researchers focussed only on learner perceptions about issues related to their language course, including teachers, materials and course content. Overall, most of the students had less than positive views about their language teachers and one student was quoted as saying that Malaysia was not an English speaking country (Hamzah et al., 2009). Another study on international students conducted by Ali (2007) also found similar views

among international students at another Malaysian university. This study looked at the speaking and learning motivations of international students enrolled in an intensive English programme in UNITEN, Selangor. However, the students in the study by Ali (2007) had overall positive perceptions of their language course, despite implying that their opportunity to practice speaking English outside the university was limited. Kaur (1999) reports on the problems of assessing the English proficiency of international postgraduate students at University Sains Malaysia (USM). According to Kaur (1999), at the time of the study, the English proficiency of international students applying for admission into the postgraduate programmes at USM was evaluated on an individual basis by the Dean of the Institute of Postgraduate Studies. Following this assessment, some students would be required to sit for an English placement test to determine whether they would have to enrol in a remedial English course. Kaur (1999) spoke to around 50 students who had taken the placement test and discovered that although most students were satisfied with the speaking and listening sections of the test, most were dissatisfied with the reading and writing sections. Most of their concerns were to do with the reading selections featured on the test, saying that the subject matter of the selections were biased towards some areas of study. Kaur (1999) concludes that assessing the English language proficiency of the international postgraduate students must be based on a comprehensive needs analysis to determine the type of communicative tasks that the students will need to carry out. She also suggests that, in assessing the English of international students, the construct of proficiency should be defined by taking into consideration the perspectives of all the stakeholders involved, for example, supervisors, lecturers, test developers and the students themselves. While Kaur's study was conducted more than a decade ago, it underlines the need for valid and reliable English placement tests in order to accurately assess the proficiency of international students before they enter university and in order to deal with any limitations in students' English proficiency levels by providing English language courses.

Another study on international postgraduate students at USM was conducted by Pandian (2008). However, the study conducted by Pandian (2008) focussed on the social relationships of these students, rather than directly on their language skills. Pandian (2008) examined the social ties between international and local students and documented the perceptions held by 200 international postgraduate students from Middle Eastern countries about matters related to their interpersonal relationships with Malaysians. Using a questionnaire, Pandian sought to discover the extent to which multicultural relationships were fostered between the international students and the local students and whether the international students involved had positive or negative perceptions about the way they were treated by the Malaysian students at that university. Around 77% of the participants did not report having any problems in socialising with local students from other programmes (Pandian, 2008). In addition, more than half the participants disagreed that they faced discrimination from the local students and the local community. Nevertheless, some participants did relate incidents in which they had encountered prejudicial treatment from locals and several students perceived that local students were reluctant to include international students in their discussions inside and outside the classroom (Pandian, 2008). Furthermore, it was found that international students with higher levels of English proficiency tended faced fewer difficulties in interacting with the local students. While the international postgraduate students in Pandian's (2008) study had generally positive views on their experience of multicultural interaction, they indicated that they would welcome more opportunities to interact and build relationships with local students. Kaur and Sidhu (2009) conducted a study on postgraduate students at USM and UiTM, another public university, this time focusing on both local and international students and their perceptions of their learning experience. While the scope of this study was different to that of the present study, Kaur and Sidhu (2009) found that English proficiency was a significant issue in the learning experience of international postgraduate students, although language-related

difficulties were also faced by some of the local participants of the study. The international students in Kaur and Sidhu's study reported that language problems inhibited their participation in class and communication with their classmates (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009).

The existing literature on international students in Malaysia has examined several aspects of their learning context, including their perceptions of their language course (Hamzah, 2009), matters in the ESL classroom (Ali, 2007), the assessment of their English proficiency (Kaur, 1999) and their perceptions of multicultural interaction (Pandian, 2008) and learning experience (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009). One common thread that runs through all these studies is the undeniable significance of English proficiency in these students' academic and social experience as international students in Malaysia. For international students in Malaysia, and other Outer Circle countries, having a local variety of English in their environment also poses its own challenges. In the following section, research on English learners in Outer Circle countries will be reviewed.

2.9. Studies on English Language Learning in Outer Circle Countries

In Chapter One of this study, Kachru's (1985) model of the Concentric Circles of English has already been discussed. In this model, English speakers are divided into Inner Circle countries (or native English speaking countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.), Outer Circle (former British colonies such as Malaysia and Singapore) as well as Expanding Circle countries (the rest of the world) (Kachru, 1985). Since the international student group in Malaysia tends to come from Expanding Circle countries, there now exists a situation where learners from Expanding Circle countries with a high regard for the Inner Circle variety of English are learning the language in a country which has its own indigenized variety of English. Coetzee-Van Rooy (2008), who conducted a study on Korean learners of English in South Africa, states that more Expanding Circle learners are turning to Outer Circle countries as a destination for learning English, which brings the need for more research into the special circumstances that arise from this situation. For example, in Coetzee-Van Rooy's

study, one participant pointed out that variations in the local variety of English made the situation less than favourable. However, for other participants, South Africa provided a good alternative to the United Kingdom and America for learners to acquire the English language (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2008).

Closer to the Malaysian context, Young (2003) conducted a study involving international students from China studying English in Singapore, which sought to identify changes in their views towards Singapore English. These participants initially viewed Singapore English as a non-standard variety of English, and unfavourable when compared to American or British English. Yet, they eventually grew more accepting of the local variety of English towards the later stages of their stay in the country (Young, 2003). Another study in Singapore was conducted by Sng, Pathak and Serwe (2009). This study described the English learning process of international students from Indonesia, China and Cambodia. The first year Engineering students in this study were clearly aware that the English used by local Singaporeans was different from the English they were taught in their language course. Further, they had to traverse the differences between standard Singapore English, the 'low' variety called 'Singlish', and communication which included code-switching (Sng et al., 2009). As in the study by Young (2003), several students did not have a high regard for Singapore English, with one student mentioning that the international students did not like the Singapore English accent. Since the context of the present study presents a similar challenge to the participants in the form of Malaysian English, the findings of these studies indicate that the local variety of English is a significant factor in the language learning experience of international students who learn English in an Outer Circle country. The summary of research conducted on English language learners in Outer Circle countries presented in this section has concluded the review of literature that is relevant to the context of the study. The next section will present a conclusion to the second chapter of this study.

2.10. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical framework guiding this study as well as looked at relevant literature on language learning beliefs and learner perceptions. Horwitz's work with the BALLI questionnaire in the eighties and nineties, along with that of other researchers studying learner beliefs from different perspectives (Wenden, 1986; Benson & Lor, 1999), spurred research into learner beliefs in various contexts. Although the BALLI is still being used by researchers around the world (Diab, 2006; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006, 2007; Bernat, 2006; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), research into learner beliefs is increasingly moving towards a contextual approach as advocated by researchers such as Kalaja (2003) and Barcelos (2000). In the present study, the contextual factors of the participants as learners of English in Malaysia were not overlooked. While the present study aimed to identify learners' perceptions of both the academic and situational aspects of their experience of learning English in Malaysia, it was difficult to find existing literature on perception studies in a similar context. Thus, the studies reported in this chapter were selected as they shared certain traits with the context of the present research. Classroom aspects such as teaching and learning undoubtedly have a strong effect on the learning experience. However, the findings of studies on international students described in this chapter indicate that, in the case of international students, how learners perceive the conditions outside the classroom could possibly affect their overall perception of their language learning experience, as found in various studies on international students in Malaysia, other Outer Circle countries and traditional destinations for international students such as Australia and the United States. While language learning is situated in the class-room, the classroom itself is also situated within a larger context of the host-country, Malaysia. In addition, the participants' learning experience is also contextualised within their purpose of learning English in order to join local academic programmes. Therefore, learner perceptions of both the micro (class-room) and macro (country) aspects of their learning experience were examined in order to get a

broader perspective of how participants viewed their language learning experience in Malaysia as well as to explore the various factors that could be of significance in forming their beliefs about and perceptions of language learning in Malaysia. The next chapter will present the research methodology used in this study.