

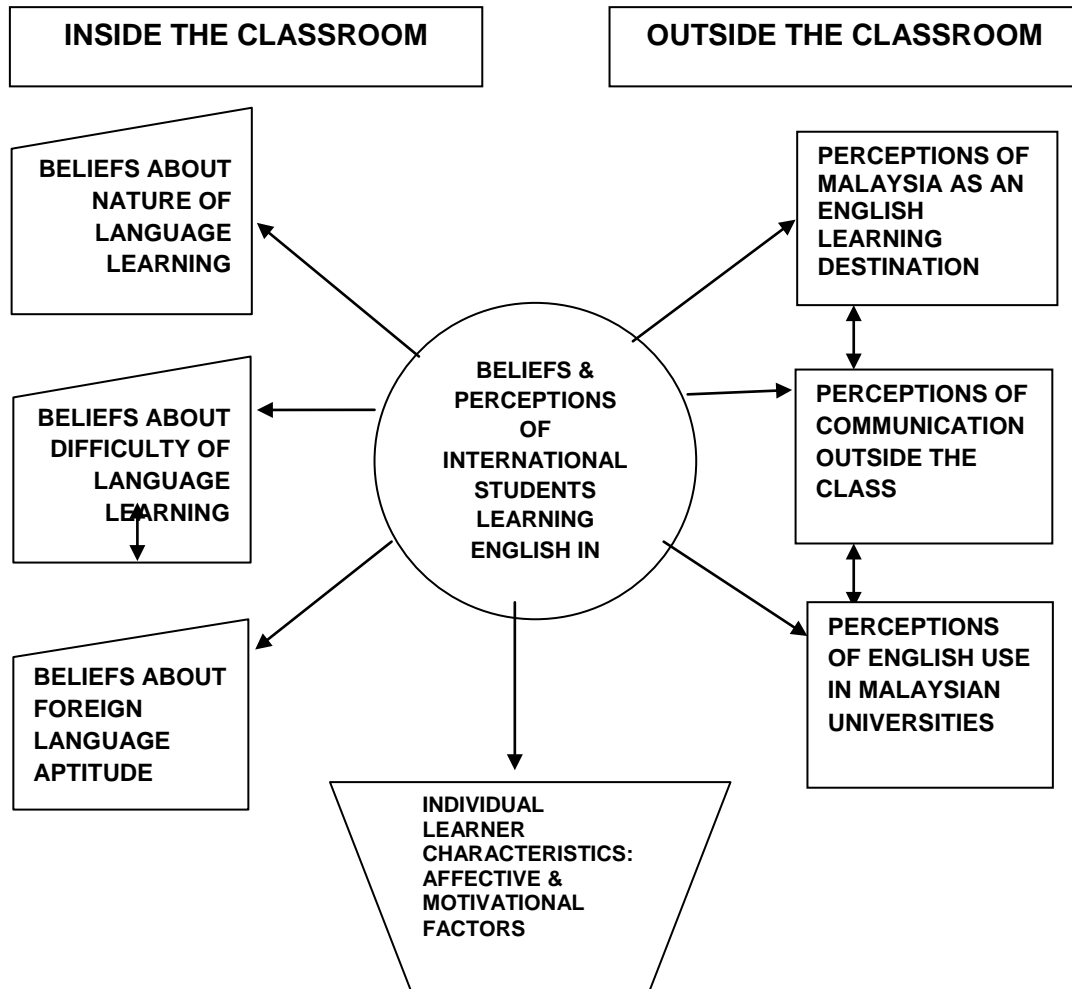
## Chapter 6-Conclusion

### 6.1. Introduction

This study focused on a group of 102 international students from Libya, Somalia, Sudan and several other countries, who were enrolled in an English course at a Malaysian college to prepare for admission into Malaysian university programmes. The aim of this study was to explore participants' beliefs about language learning and their perceptions of their language learning experience in Malaysia. The BALLI questionnaire, which was designed by Horwitz (1987) to measure beliefs about language learning, was used as the framework for measuring language learning beliefs and this was supplemented by a specially-designed questionnaire called the PELLEM. The purpose of the using the PELLEM in this study was to enable the examination of participants' beliefs about language learning within the context of their learning experience as international students in Malaysia, since factors outside the classroom are thought to play a role in the language learning process. To investigate participants' beliefs and perceptions in greater detail, semi-structured interviews with 16 participants were also held. In the following section, the key findings of the study are briefly outlined.

### 6.2. Summary of Findings

The key findings of the study are presented in Figure 6.1., 6.2., 6.3 and 6.4. on the following pages. In general, the findings of the study can be divided into two major areas: beliefs about matters pertaining to classroom language learning (*Inside the Classroom*) and perceptions about factors outside the classroom related to learning English in Malaysia (*Outside the Classroom*). Individual learner characteristics, namely the motivational and affective aspects of the learners, constitute the third major area of findings, and these factors play an influential role in learners' beliefs and perceptions both inside and outside the classroom. Figure 6.1 depicts an overview of the findings of this study.



**Figure 6.1. Summary of Key Findings**

Figure 6.1 depicts the interrelation among the beliefs, perceptions and individual learner characteristics of the international students learning English in Malaysia. The key factors in participants' beliefs with regard to matters related to language learning inside the classroom can be divided into three areas: (i) beliefs about the nature of language learning; (ii) beliefs about the difficulty of language learning; and (iii) beliefs about foreign language aptitude. These areas correspond to three of the five BALLI themes identified by Horwitz (1987). Participants' perceptions about learning English in Malaysia with regard to factors outside the classroom can also be divided into three major areas, namely: (i) perceptions of Malaysia as an English learning destination; (ii) perceptions of communication outside the classroom; (iii) and perceptions of English in

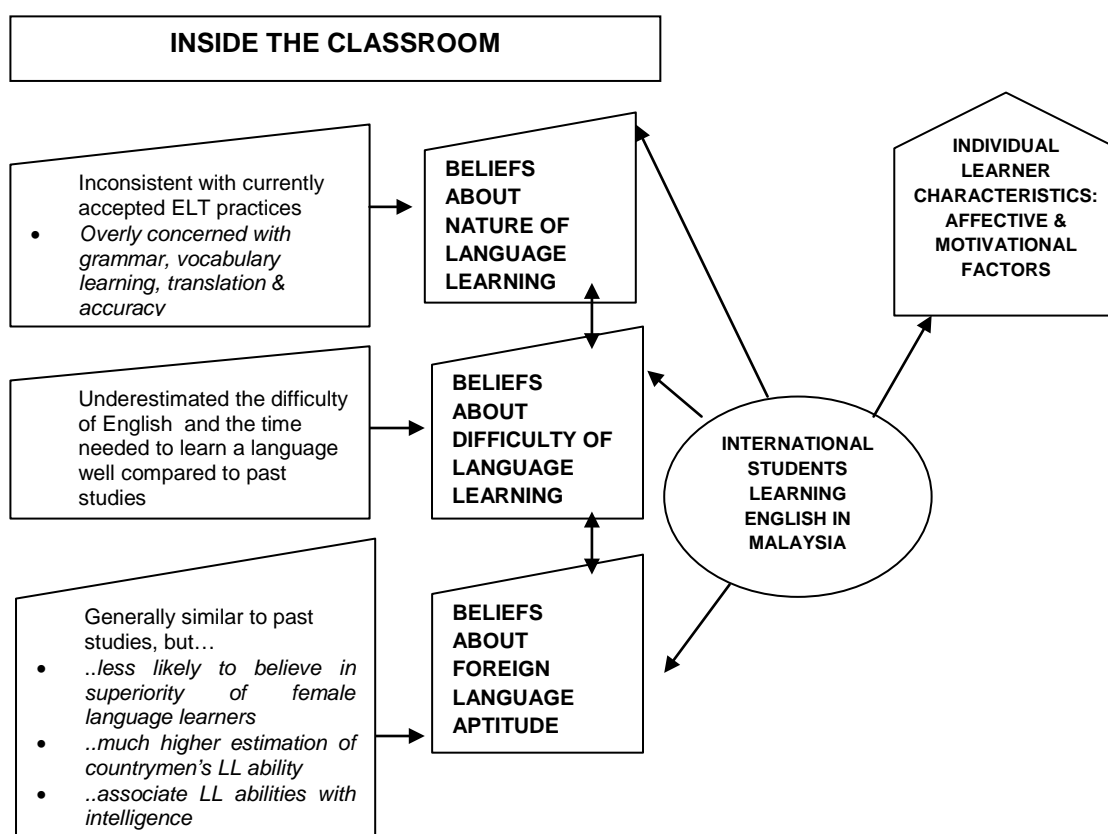
Malaysian universities. In addition, individual learner characteristics, comprising motivation and affective factors, such as optimism and confidence were found to be related to both beliefs about language learning and perceptions of their English language learning experience in Malaysia. Because these factors were a significant part of the findings from the BALLI, PELLEM and semi-structured interviews, they have been treated as a separate area. When combined, the key findings from these three areas give us a clearer picture of the salient factors in the experience of the international students learning English in Malaysia who were involved in this study. While this section has presented a brief outline of the key findings, the following sections will examine each area of the findings in more detail.

#### **6.2.1. Key Findings: Inside the Classroom**

In general, the findings related to factors inside the language classroom were collected from items on the BALLI survey as well as from the semi-structured interviews. One of the major BALLI findings was participants' high regard for grammar, vocabulary and translation, as important aspects of the language learning process. These beliefs are a matter for concern, particularly when contrasted with the communicative language teaching approach that is considered to be the most effective in English language teaching these days. According to Brown (2000), communicative language teaching places more importance on developing learners' communicative competence rather than emphasising linguistic or grammatical competence. Under this approach, techniques used in the classroom aim to give learners the chance to engage in functional and authentic use of language in contexts that are meaningful to them, rather than focus on teaching grammatical structures and vocabulary as the final goal (Brown, 2000). In addition, direct translation from the first language is not considered an effective way to learn a foreign language. Therefore, the participants' high regard for grammar, vocabulary and translation could indicate that they are using ineffective methods to learn English. Another finding was that participants had an unrealistic view of the

demands of language learning when compared to previous BALLI studies. This group of English language learners had a much lower estimation of the difficulty level of English and the time needed to learn it. In terms of beliefs about the inherent traits that affect language learning, the participants in this study tended to agree with those of previous BALLI studies, except in a few areas. Firstly, the male-majority sample, who came from what are considered male-dominated cultures like Sudan and Libya, were far less likely to consider women as being better in language learning, as discussed earlier in Chapter Four. In addition, the participants tended to rate their countrymen's natural language learning abilities much more favourably than participants in other studies, for example, those by Bernat (2006), Siebert (2003) and Truitt (1995). This could be related to another key finding in this theme, which was that participants appeared to associate language learning abilities with intelligence. Based on the results of the Pearson  $r$  correlations performed on the BALLI and PELLEM factors, it was found that participants with higher motivation levels were more likely to have strong beliefs about speaking and communication. For example, they were more likely to believe that it was necessary to have excellent pronunciation. Highly motivated participants were also more likely to enjoy speaking English in social situations. Items related to motivational and affective factors were salient aspects of participants' beliefs since these items loaded highly on the first BALLI factor, *Motivational and Affective Aspects of Learning English*. The nature of the items which loaded under the second BALLI factor, *Confidence and Assessment of Difficulty of Learning English*, also indicates that affective, or emotional aspects, also factor strongly in participants' language learning beliefs. Items in this factor included participants' assessment of whether they possessed the special ability to learn languages, participants' expectations of their ultimate success in learning English, and their assessment of the language learning abilities of their countrymen, in addition to their estimates of the difficulty level of English. On the other hand, items directly related to language learning, for example, about the

importance of learning grammar or the role of mistakes in language learning, loaded on the third BALLI factor, which indicates that they are less salient beliefs than those which loaded on the first and second BALLI factors. The factor analysis results of participants' BALLI responses, thus, indicate that among these participants, motivation, confidence and beliefs about spoken communication are more significant beliefs compared to beliefs about formal language learning. Figure 6.2. summarises the key findings related to factors inside the classroom that have been discussed in this section.



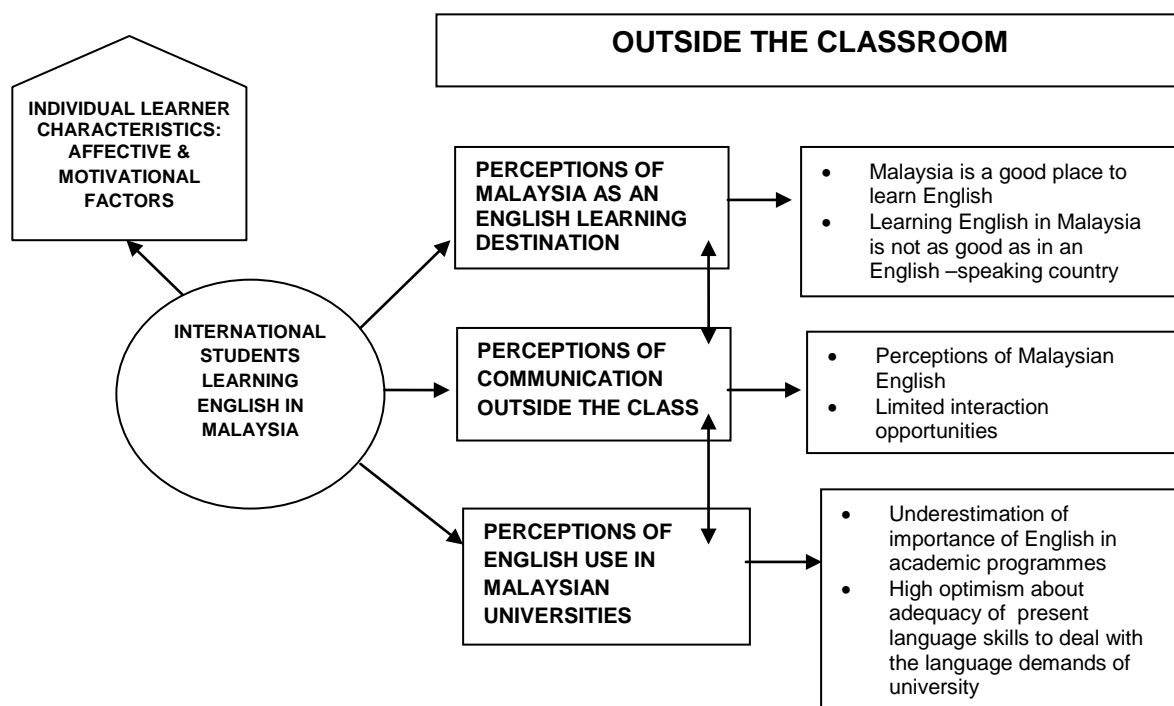
**Figure 6.2. Key Findings: Factors Inside the Classroom**

While formal language learning occurs inside the classroom, it is commonly accepted that other external factors play a role in the language learning process. This is particularly significant in the context of the present study because the learners in question are also international students, who are learning English in a new environment. For many international students, learning English in Malaysia is seen as preferable since there are more English speakers in this country when compared to their home countries. However, because learners are encouraged to practice English outside the class in order to develop

their language skills, they also have to contend with the local variety of English, which is different from that which they are taught in the classroom. Thus, in the language learning experience of these international students, classroom factors interact with factors outside the classroom. While this section has presented the key findings related to participants' language learning experience inside the classroom, the following section will discuss the factors outside the classroom that make up the key findings of this study.

### **6.2.2 Key Findings: Outside the Classroom**

The BALLI findings discussed in the previous section provided some insight into participants' beliefs about the language learning process in general. The PELLEM and interview findings, on the other hand, provided another important piece of the puzzle – the participants' perceptions of their experience as English language learners outside the classroom, in the context of Malaysian society. Overall, participants were happy to be learning English in Malaysia as the language is more widely spoken here than it is in their countries; however, there was the perception that Malaysia was somehow inferior as an English learning destination when compared to native English speaking countries. This was apparent in both the PELLEM responses, described in Chapter Four as well as the interview data, presented in Chapter Five. Participants' views of Malaysian English were closely tied to their perceptions of English communication outside the class. Figure 6.3 presents the details of major findings related to participants' perceptions of factors outside the classroom which played a role in their learning environment.



**Figure 6.3. Key Findings Factors: Outside the Classroom**

As can be seen in Figure 6.3, negative perceptions towards Malaysian English combined with participants' limited interaction opportunities and their social isolation from English-speaking Malaysians made for unfavourable perceptions of their out-of- class experience. The third major finding in the participants' perceptions is their underestimation of the need for English proficiency to succeed in local universities. Most participants felt that their language skills were already good enough to start university and many did not necessarily feel that language proficiency had a strong influence on academic achievement. Only seven of the 102 participants were enrolled in the Academic Skills for IELTS level, whereby successful completion of this level would place students at an estimated IELTS band score of 5.5. Since Malaysian university entry requirements usually require a band score of between 4.5 and 6.5, it can be concluded that most participants do not have the necessary English proficiency to cope with the language demands of academic programmes. Nevertheless, 43% of participants felt they were ready for university, in terms of language proficiency and only three of the 16 interview participants expressed any concerns about

facing language problems at university. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, participants' underestimation of the language skills needed to cope at university could be due to several factors, including a lack of understanding of the kinds of tasks they will be required to complete at university, a tendency to be confident, and their low regard for Malaysian English.

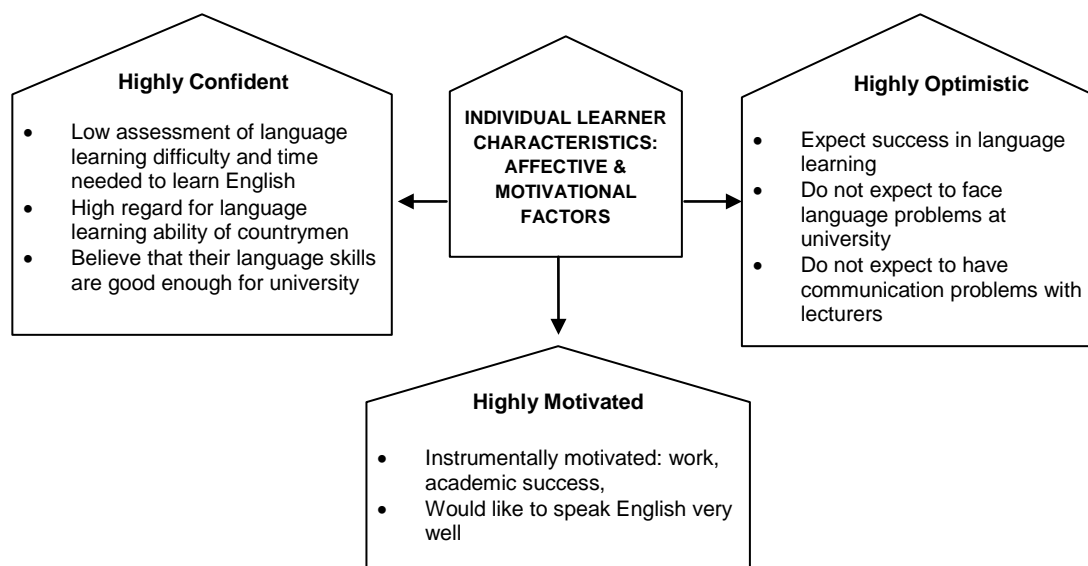
This section has presented a discussion of the key findings in relation to participants' beliefs about perceptions about factors outside the classroom, as summarized in Figure 6.3 on the previous page. As discussed in the earlier sections, in both the factors outside the classroom and the factors inside the classroom, certain affective and motivational characteristics of this learner group were found to have a strong influence on their language learning beliefs and perceptions of their language learning experience. This leads to the third major area of findings, individual learner characteristics, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

### **6.2.3. Key Findings: Individual Learner Factors**

In the previous sections, individual learner characteristics have already been discussed in terms of their relationship to the participants' beliefs about language learning and perceptions of learning English in Malaysia. For example, highly motivated learners were found to have more positive perceptions of Malaysia as a language learning destination and of their language course itself. In addition, the participants' confidence was found to be related to their beliefs about the difficulty of language learning. These findings underline the fact that the learners themselves are an important part of the overall learning experience that cannot be ignored, especially since personality traits and emotional factors invariably influence a person's beliefs and perceptions. An underlying theme was evident from participants' responses to various items on the PELLEM, BALLI and the interview questions. This group of learners was highly motivated, but even more significant was their confidence and optimism about their potential success in learning English and their present



language skills. The exact relationship among these learner factors and those resulting from the BALLI and PELLEM is still unclear. It is likely that participants' high self-confidence causes them to underestimate the difficulty of language learning and the importance of English at university, but it is also likely that their low estimation of Malaysian English could lead participants to underestimate the level of English necessary to succeed at a local university. Although the causal relationship between the factors cannot be determined at this point, there are a number of theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications of this study's significant findings. Figure 6.4 presents the findings related to individual learner characteristics.



**Figure 6.4. Key Findings: Individual Learner Characteristics**

Based on the findings of this study, a significantly cohesive profile of the learners in this group emerged. These learners were highly motivated, confident and optimistic about their English proficiency in terms of ultimate success as well as their readiness to cope with the language demands of university study in Malaysia.

Section 6.2 of this chapter has provided a summary of the key findings of this study in relation to factors inside the classroom, factors outside the classroom and individual learner characteristics. These findings are useful not only in the information collected about the participants' language learning beliefs and perceptions of their learning experience, but also

in terms of the implications they hold for the teaching and learning of English as well as research in this area. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following sections.

### **6.3. Theoretical Implications**

The final chapter of this study began with a discussion of the key findings of this investigation into the language learning beliefs held by international students learning English in Malaysia and their perceptions of their language learning experience in Malaysia. In this section, the theoretical implications of these findings will be discussed.

The findings of the BALLI survey, which were summarized in the previous section, provide further evidence for Horwitz's (1999) assertion that there are some beliefs that are common across all learner groups. However, the variance between certain beliefs of the present group of participants and those of other BALLI studies raises several questions. Firstly, although the idea of cultural influences on language learning beliefs has been refuted by Horwitz (1999) and Bernat (2006), it is premature to conclude that culture has no bearing on language learning beliefs. The factor analysis of the BALLI findings showed a strong thematic relationship between items related to confidence and those related to perceived difficulty of language learning. Moreover, the findings of this study corroborated Siebert's earlier supposition that Middle Eastern students were more likely to have lower estimates of the time it takes to learn a language when compared to Asian students (Siebert, 2003). It is a logical step of reasoning that an overconfident individual is more likely to assess a task as being less difficult; thus, confidence and beliefs on difficulty could be culturally influenced.

The socio-cultural aspect of language learning beliefs has long been a contention of researchers working towards a more multilayered representation of language learning beliefs, for example, Barcelos (2000) and Kalaja (2003). The statistical relationship found in this study between some aspect of learners' perceptions of learning English in Malaysia

and their language learning beliefs further reinforces the preliminary conclusion that factors outside the classroom can influence how learners view the language learning process. Furthermore, the circumstances of the learning context, for example, as in the participants' negative views towards Malaysian English and its possible relationship to their beliefs about the difficulty of language learning, indicate that contextual factors have the potential of affecting their beliefs about language learning. Therefore, a broader examination of language learning beliefs within a particular context and in relation to an individual learner's experience of the language learning process appears to have the potential of producing more useful findings. The normative approach to measuring learner beliefs, such as in the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987), remains a very useful way to begin an investigation into the language learning beliefs of a particular group of students, as has been done in this study. However, for a deeper understanding of this variable, the various aspects of the learning experience must be taken into account.

Several theoretical implications that can be concluded from the findings of this study have been discussed in this section. In addition to these, there are implications on methodological aspects of research in second language acquisition, which will be outlined in the following part of this chapter.

#### **6.4. Methodological Implications**

Based on the application of this study's research methods, several implications can be identified. Firstly, in the collection of questionnaire data from English language learners, the provision of a bilingual instrument greatly enhanced the data collection procedure, which leads to several conclusions about the preparation of instruments when surveying learners of English. In this study, the variables being studied were relatively abstract; thus, many of the items required participants to make evaluative decisions, for example, deciding whether women are better language learners or whether Malaysia is a good place to learn English. Having the survey instruments in Arabic and English enabled the collection of data

from learners at all levels of proficiency. Since the original BALLI was used with a mixed-nationality group of English learners, providing a first language translation of the BALLI would not have been a practical method for Horwitz (1987). However, other researchers focusing on learner groups which shared a first language, for example, Sakui and Gaies (1999) and Hong (2006) also used questionnaires in the first language of the English language learners being studied. Even if the researcher shares a first language with the subjects, for example, as Hong (2006) did with her Korean subjects, the problem of subjects misunderstanding of items can still be significant, particularly with large samples. Therefore, translation and back-translation are valuable steps in instrument preparation, not only for ease of administration but also to increase the accuracy of the data.

Secondly, the statistical analysis of the quantitative data from the BALLI and PELLEM led to some implications with regard to these instruments. To prepare the data for analysis, several statistical procedures were performed, including the generation of descriptive statistics, factor analysis and Pearson *r* correlations. Based on the statistical analysis of the BALLI and PELLEM results, a number of conclusions can be made. Firstly, the low reliability scores on the BALLI themes, ranging from 0.237 to 0.668, can be attributed to the nature of the instrument. Items within a certain theme and within the BALLI itself cover a broad range of issues related to language learning.

The BALLI was designed so that items could be interpreted individually (Hong, 2006; Horwitz, 2007). The factor analysis of the BALLI results showed items loading on three different themes compared to Horwitz's five themes. Researchers who have conducted factor analysis of the BALLI have come up with varying results, for example, many of these studies found four BALLI themes with different items loading under each theme (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Tumposky, 1991; Yang, 1999; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Park, 1995, Hong, 2006). Others, such as Truitt (1995), Kuntz (1996), Bernat et al. (2009) and Rieger (2009) have found five BALLI factors. In addition, different constructs loaded on different factors

in many of the studies, for example, items related to motivation were the first factor in this study and those conducted by Hong (2006), Nikitina & Furuoka (2006) and Park (1995), yet for Truitt (1995), motivation was the fifth factor. This has led some researchers to propose that the structure of beliefs may vary from one group of learners to another. On the other hand, there are several things that previous studies seem to have in common. In many of these studies, as in this one, motivational factors seem to be a core structure in learner beliefs; moreover, factors related to difficulty, formal learning beliefs and spoken communication were also found. Although Horwitz (1999, 2007) seems to have responded to criticisms raised by other researchers with regard to the statistical validity of the BALLI, the low reliability within each theme as well as the factor analysis results found in this study indicate that the items and themes within the instrument could be refined to enhance its usefulness.

While the BALLI has been used widely in a variety of contexts, the PELLEM was designed for use in this study and, therefore, there are no previous studies to which the present findings can be compared. As described in the third chapter of this dissertation, reliability tests of the themes in the initial version of the PELLEM were performed, after which a number of changes were made. Next, when the finalized PELLEM had been administered and the results tabulated, the Cronbach's Alpha for each theme was computed with the results depicted in Table 6.1 on the next page.

**Table 6.1. Statistical Analysis of PELLEM Structure**

| <b>Theme</b>   | <b>Cronbach's Alpha:</b> | <b>Factor, items</b>                                     | <b>Items dropped from factor analysis</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--|---|
| Theme 1- <i>General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia:</i><br>9 items      | 0.752                    | Factor 1: 5 items<br>Factor 2: 1 item<br>Factor 3:1 item | 1 item                                    |
| Theme 2- <i>Out of Class Experience:</i><br>6 items                              | 0.607                    | Factor 1: 1 item<br>Factor 2:4 items<br>Factor 3:1 item  | 0 items                                   |
| Theme 3- <i>Perceptions of English Use in Malaysian Universities:</i><br>8 items | 0.340                    | Factor 3: 2 items  | 4 items                                   |
| Theme 4- <i>Teaching &amp; Learning in a Local Language Course:</i><br>7 items   | 0.844                    | Factor 1: 6 items  | 1 item                                    |

As can be seen from the table above, five of the nine items in Theme 1 loaded on the first factor of the PELLEM, *Perceptions of Learning English in Malaysia-the Classroom and beyond*. Incidentally, four of these items loaded on the lower end of the theme, in terms of factor loadings. Of the items from the second theme, four out of six loaded on the second factor of the PELLEM-*Perceptions of Malaysian English & its Speakers and Expectations of English Use at University*. Of the third theme, very few items actually loaded above 0.40 in the factor analysis. The two items that loaded above 0.40, loaded under Factor Three-*Motivation for and Benefits of English Proficiency at Malaysian Universities*. These two items were related to motivational factors in terms of the benefits that English proficiency would offer participants at university, namely social and academic rewards. Finally, six of the seven items in Theme 4 loaded on the first factor of the PELLEM, with all six items loading at the higher end of the factor.

From Table 6.1, several conclusions can be made about the structure of the PELLEM, based on the Cronbach's Alpha and final factor loadings of the PELLEM. Firstly, perceptions of matters related to the teaching and learning activities on the present course are significant constructs in the structure of participants' perceptions of learning English in Malaysia. Also, certain factors outside the classroom including practice opportunities and learners'

perceived improvement of their language skills also play a role in their perceptions. In addition, items previously thought to be related to out-of-class experience appear to be connected to participants' perceptions of the local variety of English. These perceptions also form participants' view of Malaysia as an English language learning destination. Moreover, motivational factors, in terms of the social and academic benefits that come with English proficiency, also play a role. Finally, the third theme, which includes various items on perceptions of English use at Malaysian universities, is not as strong a factor in participants' overall perceptions of English language study in Malaysia when compared to Factors One and Two. In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha for this theme was the lowest of all the PELLEM themes.

These statistical findings could be used to make revisions to the PELLEM in order to increase its reliability and validity as a potential instrument for measuring the learning experience perceptions of foreign English language learners in Malaysia. In addition, the revised versions of this instrument could be further applied to other contexts in which international students from Expanding Circle countries are learning English in Outer Circle countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and India.

Thus far, the theoretical and methodological implications of this study's findings have been discussed. While the theoretical and methodological implications of this study contribute to research in the field of language teaching and learning, neither of these directly affect the learning experience of language learners in the classroom. However, the pedagogical implications resulting from this study can be used to improve the courses provided to international students learning English as well as language learners in general. In the following section, the pedagogical implications of this study will be presented.

## **6.5. Pedagogical Implications**

The results of the study show that learners have very clear ideas about what language learning constitutes, which will likely affect the strategies they choose and even the amount of effort they expect to put into the process. As learners of English in Malaysia, participants also face specific challenges particularly in getting sufficient practice opportunities outside class. These findings can be used to improve the teaching and learning of English for the participants, future students at the college, as well as other international students in Malaysia.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the participants of the study as well as the teachers and administrators of the Intensive English programme they were enrolled in. The participants of this study could benefit from being informed about their language learning beliefs and perceptions, especially those that are unrealistic or that affect their language learning negatively. For example, the participants' lack of awareness with regard to the importance of English in their academic programmes is of particular importance. In addition, the learners' misconceptions about the language learning process, evident in their high regard for grammar, vocabulary and translation as important parts of the language learning process, are issues of significance to their teachers.

These misconceptions imply that learner training should be included in the language course at the college. Learner training involves the explicit teaching of language learning strategies as well as a discussion of learner beliefs about language learning with the main objective of improving learners' effectiveness at language learning and preparing them for self-directed language learning. Researchers such as Ellis (2008) have already proposed that learner training be a part of all language teaching syllabi. Yet, most general English course books either ignore this aspect of the learning process, or focus on prescribing specific strategies such as dictionary skills and the recording of vocabulary.



What is needed is a means of finding out what students think about language learning at the onset, so that appropriate measures can be taken. For example, the first day of the language course could include an activity for teachers to identify students' language learning beliefs, followed by a discussion to correct any disabling misconception. Throughout the course, instructors can refer back to these beliefs and the students' preferred learning strategies and, perhaps, demonstrate more beneficial ways of improving one's language skills. Teachers could also show learners real examples of the types of assignments that they will be required to produce at university.

Learner training is also a potential solution to another important finding of this study, which was the participants' underestimation of the importance of English proficiency at university level. An important part of language learning is for learners to know what their goals are. As found by Pandian (2008), Hamzah (2009), and Kaur & Sidhu (2009), language difficulties are a significant issue in the learning experience of international students in Malaysia. However, the previous studies mentioned involved participants who had already started university. On the other hand, the participants in this study were preparing for university admission and were found to underestimate the language demands that they would face at university in relation to their present language proficiency. With the participants of this study, at least, it appears that the learners' understanding of their final goal, which is to improve their English for university, is not consistent with the reality of the situation. The ESL instructors at the college could consider initiating a discussion on learners' expectations about the language skills they will need for university. This would enable them to assess whether their learners have realistic expectations, and allow them to demonstrate to the learners the type of tasks they will be required to perform as university students.

One of the most significant implications of this study is the important role played by factors outside the classroom on the overall learning experience of foreign English language learners. Administrators and instructors at the college could attempt to address this problem

by incorporating activities which increase the opportunity for authentic communication outside the classroom. For example, the international students in the English programme could be paired up with Malaysian students from other programmes so that they would have the opportunity to practice speaking English. This would also reduce the social isolation perceived by participants of the study. More trips and talks can be scheduled so that learners will have a chance to practice speaking outside the confines of the classroom. The school could also prepare a guidebook to provide learners with more information about English language facilities and practice opportunities in the city where they live. For instance, information on English language radio channels may seem an insignificant detail, but an international student who is new to the country may not even know of their existence. If possible, activities which give English learners the opportunity to build relationships with English-speaking locals should be arranged.

The pedagogical implications of this study, namely the need to identify learners' beliefs and perceptions, the need for learner training, as well as the need to increase opportunities for social interaction could also provide useful information to other stakeholders involved in the teaching of English to international students. For example, language schools, colleges and universities providing similar courses would be able to tailor their courses to these students needs, both inside and outside the classroom by incorporating some of the suggestions above. These findings could also be used by the universities which these students are headed to, for example, by providing language support programmes and social programmes for international students. English language programmes for international students in other regions where another variety of English may be dominant outside the classroom, may also use the findings of this study to better understand the difficulties faced by their students and to find ways to overcome these limitations.

Sections 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 have given a detailed account of the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications arising from the findings of this study. While the findings of

this study have answered some questions about the language learning beliefs and perceptions held by international students learning English in Malaysia, they have also pointed towards certain areas in which there is a paucity of data. These areas can be studied further in order to answer many of the questions, which have come to light in view of knowledge collected during this study. In the following section, several suggestions for future studies are made.

## **6.6. Suggestions for Future Studies**

The findings of this study have answered some preliminary questions about the language learning beliefs and perceptions of English learning experience held by a group of international students learning English in Malaysia. This group of learners is very much under-studied although it is becoming an increasingly significant client base of the local education industry. Thus, there is the need for further studies, particularly with regard to the learning of English in countries outside the Inner Circle, as well as specifically on international students learning English in Malaysia. The following sections, 6.6.1 and 6.6.2, summarize the potential for various research projects in these two areas.

### **6.6.1. Studies on English Language Learning Destinations Outside the Inner Circle**

The demand for English language instruction continues to grow around the world with non-native speakers of English long ago outnumbering native-speakers. English proficiency is not only a necessity for immigrants into English-speaking nations; it is also the language of education and commerce in Outer Circle Countries like Malaysia and India. Expanding Circle countries, such as China, Iran and Korea, have also seen a huge growth in their English Language Teaching industries due to the increased globalisation of education and commercial interests. For this reason, learners of English from the Expanding Circle countries are increasingly looking for more effective ways to improve their English proficiency, rather than attending courses in their home countries. English language learning

in countries other than the Inner Circle countries are becoming an increasingly attractive option due to financial reasons as well as greater restrictions on immigration into native English-speaking countries such as the U.S.A. and the U.K. In the past, students learning English for university were either headed for English-medium academic courses in countries where English is the native language, for example, Australia and the U.K., or for English-medium academic courses in their own countries. However, as Coetzee-Van Rooy (2008) suggests, the increasing number of Korean ESL learners coming to South Africa indicates a potential trend in English language learning. This is also reflected in the efforts of many nations, such as Malaysia, the U.A.E., and Singapore, to establish education hubs that will attract international students. This means there will be an increase in the number of international students learning English in destinations other than their home country or English speaking countries. If the host country already has an indigenized version of English, then factors outside the classroom must be taken into consideration when planning English language instruction for these learners.

This study has identified several challenges faced by English language learners as a result of learning English in a country where English is not a native language, whereby authentic practice opportunities are limited and negative perceptions of the local variety of English may be affecting language learning. With the potential for a large number of English language learners in various countries around the world, more research is needed to identify the contextual factors that might play a role in their language learning success. Studies could examine factors such as the effects of efforts to increase out-of-class communication opportunities, and the perceptions held by learners towards different varieties of English. In addition, the influence of the local variety of English on English learners from Expanding Circle countries could also be investigated. As an increasing number of international students commence English language study in countries like Malaysia, India, Singapore and South Africa, research focusing on this new context of English language learning and

teaching will improve the ability of instructors and course providers to cater to these students' needs.

### **6.6.2. Studies on International students Learning English in Malaysia**

The enrolment of international students in Malaysian universities and colleges has reached an all-time high, with the government's target of 80,000 international students in 2010 achieved within the first half of the year. Currently, the Malaysian government is aiming for international student enrolment of 120,000 by 2015 (New 120,000-foreign student target, 2010). The financial and political instability of many developing nations around the world, combined with the tightening visa regulations of traditional student destinations, have resulted in a new student population entering Malaysia's tertiary education industry. In addition, the increasing significance of university ranking bodies, which award marks for an internationally-diverse student body, among other criteria, has prompted bureaucratic measures to increase the enrolment of international students. For example, the Times Higher Education (THE) -World University ranking awards 5% of the total points given to any university based on a category called 'International Mix', which comprises the international diversity of both faculty and students. Since the Ministry of Education places a heavy importance on the THE ranking achieved by Malaysian universities, many universities have increased their targets for international student enrolment in both undergraduate and graduate programmes.

With universities already struggling to increase the English proficiency of local students and staff, the entry of a new student group with varying levels of exposure to English will surely have an impact on teaching and learning practices, affecting all parties involved: international students, local students and their lecturers. Because of this, it is essential for administrators and policy makers to rethink the English language support and instruction provided to international students as well as the current practices used to evaluate the

language proficiency of international students who are applying for university admission. As described in Chapter Five of this study, the different, and sometimes contradictory, English language requirement policies practiced by Malaysian universities at present, may contribute to the tendency of the participants of the present study to underestimate the language-related challenges that they will face at university. For example, many universities still accept students who do not meet the English requirement and require them to take English courses, often while taking their academic courses at the same time. This sends the message that English proficiency is not a necessity for academic success.

## **6.7. Conclusion**

Overall, this study has provided further evidence on learners' beliefs about language learning, by applying the widely-used BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) questionnaire to a new context, that of international students learning English in Malaysia. While the findings show some commonality in language learning beliefs across learner groups, the variances found in the beliefs of this group of learners indicate that it is necessary for teachers to explore the language learning beliefs of each new group of students. While the link between language learning beliefs and strategy choice found by other researchers such as Hong (2006), Park (1995) and Truitt (1995) has strengthened the notion that individual learner factors should not be overlooked in the teaching and learning of any language, the possible influence of ethnicity and learning context also indicate that teachers cannot afford to ignore factors outside the classroom when planning and conducting language courses. This is particularly true when the language learners in question are international students in a host country, like the participants in this study. The PELLEM results and interview data of this study show that although participants may be satisfied with the specifics of their language course, their out-of-class experience, for example, the lack of communication opportunities and exposure to another variety of English, can lead to negative perceptions and can also influence the way they view the language learning process. As seen in this study, participants' lack of

access to English-speaking Malaysians and a social-context or community of practice in which to use English may have caused them to turn to grammar and vocabulary learning, rather than communicative practice, as a means of improving their language skills. In addition, participants' negative views about Malaysian English may have led them to underestimate the need for English proficiency to do well at university.

For institutions involved in the teaching of English and academic subjects to international students, this study has provided further evidence that specific measures must be taken to address the needs of this student group. Learner training appears to be the logical solution to addressing the problem of ineffective learning strategies, which can result from the potentially harmful language learning beliefs held by learners. In addition, international students who are learning English in an environment like that in Malaysia need additional help to ensure they have access to opportunities for meaningful, authentic communication outside the classroom. Unlike students in English-speaking countries, it takes a little more effort for international students in countries like Malaysia to locate proficient English speakers with which to practice. Enabling international students to have venues for interaction with Malaysians who are proficient in English will also go a long way in improving their negative perceptions of the local variety of English.

The lessons learned from this study are applicable across a wide range of contexts, for example, that of language learners around the world, as well as that of English language learners in Outer Circle countries such as Malaysia, India, Singapore and South Africa. In addition, the key findings of this study echo the current climate in language learning and teaching, in that it further emphasizes the powerful role of individual learner characteristics as well as socio-cultural factors of the learning context in the process of language learning. Ultimately, a good language course will have to find the right balance of classroom teaching and learning activities which are useful for most learners, while at the same time accounting for individual learner factors and the specifics of the language learning context.