



# Revealing learner beliefs in EFL learning across cultures and technologies

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Learners' beliefs are a crucial factor in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as they influence motivation, learning strategies, and learning outcomes. Recent studies have shown that positive beliefs, such as confidence in one's own language abilities, promotes active participation and achievement, while negative beliefs can hinder progress. Sociocultural factors, prior learning experiences, and environmental context also play a significant role in shaping these beliefs. This study reviews empirical literature published in Scopus-indexed journals between 2020 and 2025 to examine the development of learners' beliefs within cross-cultural contexts and the integration of technology. The review reveals that learners' beliefs are related to their learning strategies, motivation, and learning orientation, and are influenced by social norms, cultural background, and pedagogies practices. Furthermore, technology integration, particularly through AI-based applications, gamified environments, and adaptive learning platforms, has been found to enhance positive beliefs by providing personalized materials, instant feedback, and interactive learning experiences. However, challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, unequal internet access, and insufficient teacher preparedness remain significant barriers, particularly in the Indonesian context. These findings underscore the need for adaptive and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that can positively shape learners' beliefs, foster comprehensive language competencies, and effectively utilize technology to support inclusive and holistic EFL learning. Theoretically, this study contributes to deeper understanding of learners' beliefs in EFL contexts, while practically, it offers valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers in designing culturally responsive and technological integrated learning environments.

**Keywords:** Learner Beliefs, EFL, Language Learning Strategies, Learning Motivation, AI And Gamification, Cross-Cultural Contexts, Educational Technology

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## INTRODUCTION

Learners' beliefs play a significant role in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as they incorporate perceptions, assumptions, and expectations that impact motivation, learning strategies, and learning outcomes. [Cai and Xing \(2023\)](#) show that affirmative beliefs, such as self-confidence in language ability, encourage active participation and enhanced performance, while negative beliefs may serve as barriers that reduce students' efforts and confidence. Moreover, these beliefs are shaped by cultural influences, prior learning experiences, and social contexts. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of learner beliefs is essential for educators to design interventions that support positive attitudes and address limiting factors, thereby optimizing EFL acquisition. Improving EFL students' English

proficiency requires a flexible approach that considers individual differences, emotions, and technology, employing innovative and contextually appropriate methods (Waluyo, 2024). Technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) integrated with gamification, are increasingly supporting language learning through interactive game-based tools (Kayyali, 2025). The use of gamification in learning environments enhances students' motivation and positive attitudes, reduces anxiety, and builds their confidence in using English (Casanova-Mata, 2023). Therefore, the integration of AI and adaptive gamification is worth exploring further to enhance second language acquisition through personalized, engaging, and interactive learning experiences.

This article aims to explore and analyze EFL learners' beliefs within cross-cultural and technological contexts. It focuses on how these beliefs develop under the influence of socio-cultural factors and are mediated by technological advancements in language learning. Accordingly, this article pursues to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between learner beliefs, pedagogical practices, and technological innovation in EFL acquisition.

The review highlights patterns, trends, and findings from prior research to better understand how learners' beliefs shape the learning process and language attainment outcomes. It also identifies existing research gaps, especially concerning context, methodology, and regional focus, that have not adequately addressed in previous studies. Therefore, this article serves as an academic reference and calls for further research on learners' beliefs and their role in EFL acquisition.

Beliefs are considered one of the key contributions that learners bring to the classroom alongside cognitive styles, attitudes, learning strategies, and motivation. They are also viewed as one of the psychological characteristics of second language learners (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). In this context, beliefs encompass learners' views and expectations about the learning process, affecting how they understand, process, and apply new knowledge. Moreover, these beliefs not only shape learners' mindsets but also contribute to the social and emotional dynamics of the classroom, thus influencing the success of second language learning. Another perspective defines beliefs in language learning as reflections of individuals' thoughts, feelings, and judgments about the language learning process. This component plays an important role in determining how students interpret, process, and apply learning strategies that align with their needs and goals (Gabillon, 2014; Kalaja et al., 2017).

This article offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it broadens the understanding of EFL learners' beliefs by emphasizing the role of cross-cultural frameworks and technology as key determinants in the language acquisition process. Practically, it offers teachers and curriculum developers with insights into designing more adaptive learning strategies that are responsive to cultural diversity and effectively utilize technology to enhance the language learning experience. Furthermore, this review opens opportunities for further interdisciplinary research that integrates applied linguistics, cultural studies, and educational technology.

## METHODS

This study employed a Structured Narrative Review (SNR) methodology to synthesize and interpret literature on EFL learners' beliefs within cross-cultural and technological contexts. The SNR approach was chosen because it combines the rigor of systematic search and filtering procedures with the flexibility of narrative synthesis, making it particularly suitable for mapping complex and interdisciplinary research domains (Snyder, 2019). The review process consisted of several stages. First, the research question was formulated in accordance with the study's purpose, which was to understand how learners' beliefs are shaped by sociocultural factors and mediated by language learning technology. Second, a systematic literature search was conducted in the Scopus database using the following Boolean search string:

("learner beliefs" OR "language learner beliefs" OR "learner perceptions" OR "learner attitudes") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "second language acquisition" OR "SLA") AND (culture OR "cross-cultural" OR intercultural OR technology OR CALL OR "computer-assisted language learning" OR digital)

Third, inclusion criteria (Table 1) were applied to select peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, written in English, and directly addressing learner beliefs, pedagogical practices, and technology. Exclusion criteria were used to eliminate duplicates, grey literature, and articles not available in full text. Fourth, the selected studies were organized into a literature matrix, extracting key information such as research context, methodological design, technology employed, and pedagogical implications. Fifth, the literature was analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns, key debates, and research gaps. By integrating systematic procedures and narrative synthesis, this SNR provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the dynamic relationships among learner beliefs, pedagogical practices, and technological innovation in EFL acquisition.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the data, inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully applied. The inclusion criteria comprised empirical articles published in Scopus-indexed journals, written in English, and published between 2020 and 2025, focusing on learner beliefs in EFL contexts encompassing cognitive, affective, sociocultural, or technological dimensions.

The synthesis presented in Table 2 below summarizes the findings from the thirteen studies identified and reviewed in this research. The analysis of these studies reveals the key emerging themes as well as the range of methodological approaches used by the researchers.

TABLE 1 | Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Selected Studies

| Eligibility criteria |                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Criteria             | Inclusion criteria                                                                                                                                                         | Exclusion criteria                                                         |
| Publication types    | Empirical papers                                                                                                                                                           | Non-empirical papers<br>Review articles                                    |
| Timeframes           | Published between 2020-2025                                                                                                                                                | Published before 2020 and after 2025                                       |
| Languages            | English                                                                                                                                                                    | Languages other than English                                               |
| Topics               | <div><div>– learner beliefs in the context of EFL</div><div>– the role of technologies in mediating learner beliefs.</div><div>– EFL learners of any age group</div></div> | <div>– teachers’ beliefs without considering learners’ perspectives.</div> |

TABLE 2 | Finding Drawn from the Analyzed Studies

| Authors (Years)              | Country      | Key Themes                                                                           | Research Methodology                                | Findings                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Al-Bogami & Elyas (2020)     | Saudi Arabia | iPad-supported active learning and engagement in EFL acquisition                     | Mix-Methods Approach                                | iPad applications increased engagement and improved EFL reading and vocabulary learning                                          |
| Wallace & Leong (2020)       | Macau        | Motivation of young EFL learners in language acquisition.                            | Qualitative Study (Open -Ended Questionnaire)       | Learners were highly motivated by teacher support and engaging classroom activities.                                             |
| Dawala Wilang (2021)         | Thailand     | Student mindset in EFL learning                                                      | Quantitative (Survey)                               | High school students showed a growth mindset regarding their language learning ability.                                          |
| Zayed & Razeq (2021)         | Palestine    | High school students' attitudes towards learning English and its culture             | Qualitative (Interview)                             | Social and personality factors greatly influenced motivation and attitudes.                                                      |
| Janfeshan & Janfeshan (2021) | Iran         | Impact of digital instructional technology on EFL achievement and learner attitudes. | Experiment Study                                    | Otus-based instruction improved English achievement and attitudes, demonstrating online networks’ effectiveness in EFL learning. |
| Shirzad et al. (2022)        | Iran         | Epistemic beliefs dan self-efficacy                                                  | Quantitative (Hypothesis model)                     | Self-efficacy mediated the relationship between beliefs and language learning strategies.                                        |
| Abdullah & Razi (2022)       | Kurdistan    | Gender comparison related to motivation to learn English.                            | Quantitative and qualitative mixed methods          | Both male and female Kurdish EFL students demonstrate positive attitudes toward English language learning                        |
| Ustun et al. (2022)          | Turkey       | AR in EFL: learners’ attitudes, self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement            | Mixed-method, pre-test/post-test experimental study | Augmented reality-supported EFL education improved attitudes, understanding, and engagement                                      |
| Huiyuan (2024)               | China        | Learners’ belief about English in the Global Englishes context                       | Quantitative (Questionnaire)                        | Subjective norms and attitudes towards native English varieties influenced L2 motivation.                                        |

|                                   |                                 |                                                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Koné (2024)                       | Afrika Sub-Sahara (Francophone) | Learners’ beliefs about learning English                                    | Qualitative (Journal and FGD)                                            | Francophone environment limited active engagement in English learning.                           |
| Naghavian (2024)                  | Iran                            | Beliefs about L2 speaking fluency.                                          | Qualitative (Metaphor)                                                   | Learners’ metaphors revealed complex perceptions of speaking fluency.                            |
| (Abdollahzadeh & Rajacenia, 2024) | Iran                            | Learners’ belief, motivation and expectation in language learning.          | Mix methods Approach (BALLI Questionnaire and Semi-structured Interview) | EFL Learners showed strong beliefs in motivation, expectations and language aptitude.            |
| Rabab’ah et al. (2025)            | Uni Emirate Arab                | EFL vocabulary acquisition through AI-based digital games (ChatGPT AIGames) | Quasi Experiment                                                         | AI-based games fostered positive student attitudes significant gains in vocabulary and spelling. |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studies on learners’ beliefs in Second Language Acquisition (L2) have shown significant developments over the past five years. This is reflected in the increasing number of studies published in Scopus-indexed journals between 2020 and 2025 that examine various dimensions of learners’ beliefs in both the process and outcomes of second language learning. These studies provide important insight into the role of learners’ beliefs in shaping language acquisition.

Beliefs and Attitudes in English Learning

A study by (Dawala Wilang, 2021) conducted among Thai high school students examined learners’ beliefs about whether language learning ability is fixed or can be developed. It also explored differences in mindset between male and female students and identified challenges they face in learning English. Data from 467 students in a Bangkok public school were analyzed using a modified mindset survey. The findings indicated that students generally possessed a growth mindset regarding their abilities, others’ successes, criticism, obstacles, and challenges; however, they maintained a fixed mindset toward learning English itself. The study identified both cognitive and affective challenges, including difficulties in understanding grammar and vocabulary, as well as lack of self-confidence, which carry important implications for teaching strategies aimed at fostering students’ growth mindset.

Another study from (Zayed and Razeq (2021) conducted among Palestinian high school students, investigated their attitudes towards learning English and its associated cultures, as well as the underlying reasons for these attitudes within the Palestinian educational context. The study involved 24 ninth-grade students (12 males and 12 females) learning English as a foreign language and employed a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews analyzed thematically. The results showed that the social environment in which students develop significantly influences their attitudes and motivations. Moreover, individual differences and personality traits determined whether students remained motivated or disengaged from the learning process.

A study conducted in Iran by (Shirzad et al. (2022) examined the relationship between epistemic beliefs (EBs) and language learning strategies (LLSs) subscales through the mediating role of learner self-efficacy (LSE). The sample consisted of 300 Iranian high school students who completed three survey questionnaires. The results showed that the LSE framework effectively explained learners’ use of LLSs, with subfactors such as effort, persistence, and imitation positively affecting strategy use. This study suggested that teachers and material developers should pay greater attention to enhancing learner self-efficacy, as it exerts a stronger influence on LLSs than Ebs. Another Iranian study by (Abdollahzadeh and Rajacenia, (2024) investigated students’ beliefs about English language learning among Iranian EFL learners using a mixed methods approach. Data were collected from 226 male and female junior and senior students through the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed strong beliefs regarding motivation, expectations, and foreign language aptitude, underscoring the importance of positive learner beliefs in sustaining engagement and achievement in EFL contexts.

Then, another study conducted in Kurdistan aimed to analyze and compare the levels and types of motivation among female and male Kurdish EFL students based on the components of the self-motivational system in a second language (L2) learning, as well as to identify their dominant motivational types. The participants consisted of 118 students (46 female and 72 male) randomly selected from various cities in Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq. Data were collected through student questionnaires followed by semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed using SPSS software and content analysis. The findings showed that both male and female Kurdish EFL students generally demonstrated high levels of motivation and positive attitudes towards English and its learning. The study also suggested several motivational strategies for educators to enhance students’ motivation in secondary schools (Abdullah & Razi, 2022).

Meanwhile, (Huiyuan (2024) utilized a modified Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model to examine Chinese EFL



learners' beliefs related to Global Englishes (GE) and their relationship with motivation to learn a second language (L2). Data were collected from 460 university students in China using a questionnaire and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression. The results showed five key dimensions of learner beliefs: attitudes toward native English, attitudes toward Chinese English, attitudes toward non-native English, subjective norms, and self-efficacy. Regression analysis revealed that students' L2 motivation was significantly influenced by several belief dimensions, particularly attitudes toward native English and subjective norms, suggesting that perceived social pressures play a crucial role in shaping Chinese students' motivation to learn English.

The study by [Koné \(2024\)](#) investigated the factors shaping students' beliefs about learning English in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically the factors that either encourage or discourage engagement in EFL learning. The study aimed to raise EFL teachers' awareness of students' beliefs to help them adapt their teaching practices to the unique sociolinguistics context of their students. Data were collected from 0 university EFL students (four females and sixteen males aged 24–42) through reflective journals and focus group discussions. The results indicated that (a) teachers' instructional practices, (b) opportunities for interaction to develop or test new knowledge, (c) students' individual efforts, and (d) the surrounding French-speaking environment all influenced learners' beliefs about English learning. However, the limited availability of interactive speaking opportunities and the dominance of the French-speaking environment hindered students' active engagement in English learning.

### Learners' Belief on Language Element and Skills

The study by [Mansouri and Jami \(2022\)](#) examined the preferences and beliefs of Iranian high school students regarding two types of form-focused instruction (FFI) for grammar teaching and learning: isolated FFI and integrated FFI. Data were collected from a large sample of high school students ( $n=1,058$ ) in the Iranian public school system using an adapted version of a questionnaire developed by [Valeo and Spada \(2016\)](#). The analysis showed that most participants preferred integrated grammar FFI in their curriculum. Furthermore, students' preferences for these two types of grammar instruction varied depending on their high school major and the length of exposure to English.

Another study by [Naghavian \(2024\)](#) investigated Iranian EFL learners' beliefs about second language (L2) speaking fluency through metaphors and follow-up interviews. A total of 24 EFL learners from an English Language Education Department were asked to conceptualize L2 speaking fluency using metaphors. The metaphor analysis revealed eight metaphorical themes reflecting learners' deep understanding of L2 speaking fluency and its complex, and multifaceted nature. The findings suggest that metaphors serve as an effective tool for gaining insight into learners' beliefs about L2 speaking fluency and identifying contextual factors that influence these beliefs, thereby contributing to research and practice in second language learning.

### Digital Technology in EFL Learning

Recent studies have shown that technology integration in language learning significantly contributes to language acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts. For example, [Rabab'ah et al. \(2025\)](#) found that the AI-games technique, which combines digital games with AI applications, significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery, particularly in denotation and spelling, although its impact on pronunciation remained limited. This finding aligns with [Al-Bogami and Elyas \(2020\)](#), who emphasized that the use of iPad applications with game-based elements, such as Quizlet and Pixton Comic Maker, can enhance student engagement, increase motivation, and foster independent learning. Similarly, [Janfeshan and Janfeshan \(2021\)](#) showed that the use of the educational social network Otus not only improved EFL students' academic achievement but also strengthened teacher-student interactions through faster feedback and flexible access to materials. Supporting these findings, [Ustun et al. \(2022\)](#) highlighted the potential of Augmented Reality (AR) in creating interactive learning experiences that enhance students' positive attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation. Taken together, these studies show that various forms of technology hold great potential for promoting student-centered pedagogy, enhancing both emotional and cognitive engagement, and opening up opportunities for innovation in language learning. However, technical challenges, such as internet access, device limitations, and application compatibility, remain key issues that need to be addressed for effective classroom implementation.

Findings from recent studies demonstrate that learner beliefs in EFL acquisition are contextually embedded and shaped by a complex interplay of internal dispositions and external factors. [Dawala Wilang \(2021\)](#) found, for instance, that Thai students generally held a growth mindset, yet maintained fixed attitudes toward learning English. This suggests that unique pedagogical strategies are needed to address language-specific cognitive challenges. Similarly, [Shirzad et al. \(2022\)](#) highlighted the mediating role of learner self-efficacy in strategy use, where subcomponents such as effort, imitation, and persistence were positively correlated with language learning strategies (LLSs).

Social and cultural influences also remain prominent. In the Palestinian context, [Zayed and Razeq \(2021\)](#) revealed that societal norms and cultural perceptions significantly shaped students' attitudes toward English. This finding aligns with [Huiyua \(2024\)](#), who used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework to demonstrate that subjective norms and beliefs about Global Englishes influenced the language learning motivation of Chinese students. According to these studies, learner beliefs are socially constructed responses to linguistic ideologies and cultural expectations rather than purely internal characteristics ([Gabillon, 2014](#); [Kalaja et al., 2017](#)).

Although numerous studies have demonstrated that technologies such as AI-based digital games ([Rabab'ah et al., 2025](#)), self-learning apps ([Al-Bogami & Elyas, 2020](#)), and educational social media ([Janfeshan & Janfeshan, 2021](#)) can improve language learning outcomes, there remains a gap in research regarding how AI and adaptive platforms influence learner beliefs. Learner beliefs about the effectiveness and

controllability of learning is crucial, as they directly relate to motivation, learning strategies, and attitudes (Horwitz, 1987; Ferreira Barcelos, 2015). AI systems capable of adapting materials, difficulty levels, and learning pace to individual learner profiles have the potential to foster positive beliefs, particularly the belief that language learning can be more personalized and responsive to individual needs.

Furthermore, the instant feedback provided by AI systems can reinforce the belief that mistakes are part of the learning process, in line with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development theory. This suggests that, in addition to enhancing cognitive achievement, technology can also shape affective aspects such as motivation and self-efficacy (Ustun et al., 2022). In the Indonesian context, however, EFL learner beliefs remain heavily influenced by exam orientation learning, leading students to prioritize vocabulary and grammar mastery over communicative competence (Suryanto, 2014). The integration of AI and adaptive platforms has the potential to shift these beliefs by providing instant feedback, personalized learning, and more communicative learning experiences, again resonating with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. Nonetheless, challenges such as imitated digital infrastructure, inadequate internet access, and insufficient teacher readiness remain crucial determinants of how these technologies shape students' learning beliefs in Indonesia. Future research should explore more deeply how the integration of AI and adaptive learning platforms influences EFL learners' beliefs in Indonesia, particularly in shifting their orientation from mere exam preparation toward the development of communicative competence. Further studies should also investigate how AI and adaptive learning environments can transform learner beliefs to ensure that technology integration truly supports effective and inclusive language learning.

## CONCLUSION

The learners' beliefs in acquiring EFL are contextual and shaped by the interaction between internal and external factors. Findings from various studies confirm that self-confidence, motivation, and socio-cultural norms play crucial roles in shaping language learning strategies and orientations. Thus, learners' beliefs are not static individual characteristics, but rather socially constructed understanding influenced by linguistic ideologies, cultural expectations, and specific learning experiences. This demonstrates the need for adaptive and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches that enable learners to develop positive beliefs supporting the growth of comprehensive language competence.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI)-based technologies and adaptive learning platforms hold significant potential to foster more positive learner beliefs about the language learning process. Through instant feedback, personalized materials, and communicative learning experiences, these technologies can enhance motivation, self-efficacy, and the understanding that mistakes are an integral part of the learning. However, implementation within the Indonesian context still faces challenges such as limited

digital infrastructure, inadequate internet access, and insufficient teacher preparedness. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how AI integration can shift the learning orientations from test-focused preparation toward communicative competence development, ensuring that technology truly becomes a catalyst for forming learner beliefs that support effective and inclusive language learning.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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