CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an introduction of this study which gives a description of background of the study in learners' beliefs about language learning, learning strategies and language proficiency. Subsequently, the background of the study is followed by research questions, research purpose, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

English is an obligatory subject in Indonesia and is learned by many students since elementary school through junior and senior high school. Despite having studied English for a long period, many students still have low proficiency and are less successful than other students regardless of methods or techniques of teaching. This phenomenon may be related to their beliefs about language learning and their use of learning strategy. Therefore, this study was conducted in order to investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs about language learning, learning strategy use and language proficiency of EFL high school students in Indonesia.

Foreign language learners possess beliefs about nature and process of language learning, and they come to class with these beliefs (Hong, 2006; Altan, 2006; Azar and Saeidi, 2013; Landelle, 2004; Elfeel, 2014; Pratolo, 2014). These beliefs influence both the process and product of learning (Ellis, 2008, as cited in Azar and Saeidi, 2013). Tanaka and Ellis (2003) explained that these beliefs contribute to individual learner differences in second language (L2) learning by influencing learners' behaviors, in particular, choice of learning strategies, and their affective states such as confidence and anxiety, and thereby affect both linguistic outcomes (i.e., changes in competence, knowledge, and skills in some aspect of the target language) and nonlinguistic outcomes (i.e., changes in

reactions to the target language, the situation, and/or factors associated with the target language).

The information about beliefs held by language learners is important for the students because beliefs have the potential to influence the learners' attitudes to language and to learning, and shape their experiences and actions in the classroom, (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, as cited in Bernat, 2006) so beliefs have the potential to either hinder or promote the learners' ultimate success in the acquisition of a new language and reduce the length of time committed to language learning (Bernat, 2006) since many researchers asserted that learners' preconceptions about language learning are likely to affect the way they use learning strategies and learn a second language (Suwanarak, 2012), in other words, learner beliefs bear significant influence on language learning and outcomes, thus understanding of learner beliefs can enhance the language learning process and produce favorable learning outcome, as shown in a research by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990, as cited in Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006) that the students who believe that their study is interesting and important are more actively engaged in the learning process and more persevering in their academic work.

In addition, this information is also beneficial for language educators, as stated by Lo (2010) that language teachers need to know more about how and what influences learners' learning. More elaborately, Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) explained that beliefs the learners hold are defining factors of their learning behavior, and that, in order to ensure an effective teaching/learning process and to arrange the classroom procedure in the most effective way, it is important for language teachers to know their students, specifically to consider what the learners are expecting from their language classes and what learning behavior they are likely to adhere to. Using the information about students' beliefs, teachers can make more informed choices about teaching and are able to adopt a more responsive approach to the organisation of learning opportunities in their lessons (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, as cited in Suwanarak, 2012). Ellis (2008) also said that learners; beliefs about language learning cannot be ignored by teachers, and that teachers are advised to find out about their students' beliefs. In other

words, knowing the language beliefs of the students can help teacher in understanding their students. Consequently, this understanding can cause teachers to adopt a more sensitive approach to the organization of learning opportunities (Cotteral, 1999, as cited in Rieger, 2009).

Furthermore, Chang and Shen (2001) suggested the teachers to help learners to promote their awareness of their existing language learning beliefs and to develop positive beliefs that lead to effective learning strategy use and minimize negative beliefs that might hinder learning. Wang and Rajprasit (2015) also asserted that affirmative thinking or positive beliefs could be considered one of the keys to the successful acquisition of a foreign language. Furthermore, Kormos et al., (2008, as cited in Daif-Allah, 2012) said that learners' beliefs about foreign languages are considered fundamental to learners' progress, and Rifkin (2000, as cited in Lo, 2010) wrote that students' beliefs about foreign language learning are of critical importance to the success or failure of any student's efforts in mastering a foreign language.

For English teachers, the investigation of learners' beliefs about language learning can lead to more effective instructional planning and implementation. Teachers must not ignore learners' beliefs if they want their students to be open to particular teaching methods and to receive the maximum benefit from them (Altan, 2006). Vibulphol (2004) listed some benefits of studies on beliefs about language learning, these are 1) understanding about learners' beliefs may help adjust learners' attitudes and behavior so that they become confident in teachers' teaching approaches and activities; 2) insights about learners' beliefs may help promote the use of effective language learning strategies; and 3) investigation of learners' beliefs about language learning may help teachers design and prepare a course or program for particular purpose(s).

Diab (2000) said that researchers have only recently attempted to identify and examine such beliefs in a systematic manner, and Altan (2006) wrote that there is still a great shortage of research that investigates the beliefs of learners. Therefore, analysis of learners' beliefs are important, as stated by Bernat (2006) that these analyses are worthy of note for the light they shed on learners' thinking,

expectations, and actions in the language-learning context. In addition, researchers have called for more studies on learner beliefs to broaden the scope of second language acquisition since the studies of learner beliefs in the field of second language acquisition have been fairly new and relatively few and limited, and the scholars showed concerns that learner beliefs have been an under-explored area (Landelle, 2004; Chen, 2011), as Zhong (2012) said, "Research into language leaners' beliefs is still in its infancy." This concern is shared by Rodriguez-Feliciano (2000) who expressed that, "despite there has been a great effort in researching teachers' beliefs during the last two decade, the aspect of second language learners' beliefs has not been investigated in a similar fashion, in depth nor in breadth, so this topic needs to be explored further." Considering the importance of the analyses about language beliefs, the author conducted research on this topic.

Besides investigating the beliefs hold by language learners, the relationship of learners' beliefs about language learning and their learning strategies is examined too, in order to give more information about how beliefs influence the proficiency and about the extent to which learners act on their beliefs since it is stated by Ellis (2008) that, "to understand how beliefs are related to developing proficiency it is helpful to examine the learner's choice of learning strategies and how these do or do not reflect beliefs." In addition, understanding learners' beliefs about language learning is fundamental to understanding learner strategies and planning appropriate language instructions (Azar and Saeidi, 2013).

Furthermore, this study also attempted to look at the relationship between these beliefs and learners'' language proficiency because beliefs play a vital role in learning strategies and achievements (Valencia, 2004). There have to date been very few studies of the relationship between learner beliefs and learning outcomes (Ellis, 2008), and that few researchers have looked at the relationship between beliefs and language proficiency (Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). Zhong (2012) also claimed that there are only a few studies that have investigated the relationships between learner beliefs and learning strategies, and between learner beliefs and learning outcomes so the findings are somewhat mixed and inconclusive, thus

Zhong asserted that more research is needed to examine the three constructs: beliefs, learning action and learning outcomes. Moreover, inattention to language learnings strategies and beliefs about language learning can be a drawback in the facilitation of language learning (Ghabanchi and Meidani, 2012). Therefore, the study on the link between learners' beliefs and learning achievement is considered important.

Most of the studies about learners' beliefs emphasized tertiary level students, while secondary level students have received little attention (Choy and Troudi, 2006, as cited in Yu, 2013), so this research intended to provide more information concerning this issue at secondary level of education, specifically at the level of senior high school. Moreover, there are relatively few studies that addressed students' beliefs about English learning in EFL contexts (Chen, 2011), and that this topic has remained relatively unexplored (Altan, 2006). The author also did not find many studies conducted to investigate the relationships between learners' beliefs, learning strategies and language proficiency in Indonesian setting, where English is considered a foreign language and is learned and used primarily in classroom context. Accordingly, this research is expected to present some understanding concerning learners' beliefs in Indonesian setting.

Based on this background and the problem of students' learning outcomes which show low achievement and low proficiency, this research studied Indonesian EFL high school students in terms of their relationships between language learning beliefs, learning strategy use and language proficiency. Specifically, this research investigated the relationship between their beliefs about language learning and learning strategies, their beliefs about language learning and language proficiency, and their learning strategies and language proficiency.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background above, the research questions of this research are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between learners' beliefs and learning strategy use of Indonesian EFL high school students?

2.   What is the relationship between learners' beliefs and language proficiency of Indonesian EFL high school students?

3.   What is the relationship between learning strategy use and language proficiency of Indonesian EFL high school students?

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between learners' beliefs, learning strategy use and language proficiency among Indonesian EFL students at secondary educational level in terms of receptive skills. Specifically, the research is focused on three objectives. First, the research is intended to discover the relationship between learners' beliefs and learning strategy use among Indonesian EFL high school student. Second, the research is aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs and language proficiency among Indonesian EFL high school students. Third, the research is intended to investigate the relationship between learning strategy use and language proficiency among Indonesian EFL high school students.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on three parts of discussion concerning learners' beliefs about language learning, learners' language learning strategy, and learners' language proficiency. This research investigates the relationship between learners' beliefs about language learning and learning strategy use, the relationship between learners' learning strategy use and language proficiency, and the relationship between learners' beliefs about language learning and language proficiency.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research is expected to give contribution to the area of English language teaching at secondary level in Indonesian context by providing deeper understanding about beliefs held by Indonesian EFL students and the relationship of these beliefs with learning strategies and language proficiency in terms of receptive skills. It is expected that the result of this research would be able to give some information about the beliefs held by Indonesian EFL high school students. In addition, the research is expected to present some insights about the relationships existing between learners' beliefs, learning strategies and language

proficiency of Indonesian EFL students at secondary level. The Information regarding the learners' beliefs about language learning and their relationships with learning strategies and language proficiency is considered beneficial in helping the teachers to gain better understanding about their students. Better understanding can help the teachers to facilitate the students in achieving expected learning outcomes. Furthermore, the research is expected to provide information that could be helpful for other researchers in understanding learners' beliefs in relation to learning strategies and language proficiency at secondary educational level in Indonesian context.

1.6 Classification of Terms

1. Beliefs:

Psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true (Richardson, 1996, as cited in Bagherzadeh and Azizi, 2012).

2. Beliefs about language learning:

Individuals' stable preconceived notions, myths or misconceptions (Horwitz, 1988, as cited in Yu, 2013); a subset of metacognitive knowledge which shares some characteristics of the learner's metacognitive knowledge, beliefs consists of person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge (Wenden, 1996, as cited in Chen, 2011). In this study, beliefs about language learning refers to beliefs which were held by the participants about English language based on the classification by Horwitz (1987, as cited by Ellis, 2008).

3. Learning strategies:

Specific actions taken by language learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990); specific actions consciously employed by the learners for the purpose of learning, or what learners do to learn language and relate to learners' characteristics, learning styles and learning achievement (Suwanarak, 2012). In this study, learning strategies refer to strategies in

learning English which were used by the participants based on the classification by Oxford (1990, as cited by Zamani, 2013).

4. <u>Language Proficiency</u>:

In this study, language proficiency refers to participants' receptive skills, which are abilities in reading and listening English.

5. <u>BALLI</u>:

The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, developed by Horwitz (1987, as cited in Ellis, 2008) based on the five categories generalized from her interviews with foreign/second language instructors from different cultures, with foreign/second language learners from different cultures, and modified based on the feedback of language educators. In this study, BALLI refers to the instrument in the form of questionnaire that was based on Horwitz' research and was used to collect information about beliefs held by the participants.

6. <u>SILL</u>:

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learners, developed by Oxford (1989, as cited in Huang, 1997) based on the six categories of learning strategies derived by Oxford from the studies of language learning strategies used by good language learners. In this study, SILL refers to the instrument in the form of questionnaire that was based on Oxford's research and was used to collect information about learning strategies used by the participants.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

The research paper was organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 Introduction

These section contains introduction which discusses background of the study, research questions, research purpose, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper

Chapter 2 Theoretical Foundation

This chapter consists of related theories as the basis of investigating the research problems. These include the definition of beliefs, learners' beliefs about language learning, factors influencing learners' beliefs, learning strategies, learners beliefs and learning strategies, learners' beliefs and language proficiency, and learning strategies and language proficiency. This chapter also discusses previous studies related to learners' beliefs about language learning and their relationship with learning strategies and language proficiency.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology in conducting the research. It consisted of the research methodology that covers population and sample, research method, instrumentations, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

This chapter consists of the researcher's interpretation of the results of the research and discussion. It shows findings as well as discussion related to the theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter consists of the research conclusion and suggestions to other researcher who want to continue the research.

1.8 Concluding Remark

This chapter has presented some aspects underlining the study including background of the study, research questions, research purpose, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper. The next section will present some theories relevant with the study.