

## GENDER AND LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Motivation is an important factor in learning a foreign language. Gender is also an important element in learning as the females tend to demonstrate a more positive attitude and motivation towards learning a language. The present study highlights the importance of gender and motivation in language learning. The data have been collected from intermediate level students and analysed with statistical measures. The results have revealed interesting findings.*

**Keywords:** Gender, motivation, attitudes, english language learning

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of motivation in human activity has been recognized in the field of social psychology and education for decades (Noels, Pelletier & Vallerand, 2000 cited in Akram 2007). Although the role of attitudinal and motivational factors has been investigated by a lot of researchers in different social situations but the gender aspect was not included in the previous researches (Clement, 1980; Fillmore, 1991; Gardner, 1985; Schumann; 1986; Spolsky, 1989). Gardner and Lambert (1972) conducted empirical research studies on the effect of instrumental and integrative motivation on second/foreign language learning. It was observed in the studies that instrumental motivation was different from integrative motivation as the focus was on a more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement.

The most effective way to get insight into the learning process is to study the learners' attitude and motivation towards learning English language (Akram 2007). Burstall (1975 cited in Ellis 1994), in her longitudinal study of some 6000 children learning French as a second language in English primary school, reported that girls scored significantly more than boys in all tests measuring achievement in French during the study. There was also a marked difference noticed between the two sexes, as far as their attitudes are concerned; girls' attitudes to learning French were consistently more favourable than boys', which may be attributed to social pressures via parents and the media. Furthermore, Gardner and Lambert (1972) found out also that female learners of L2 French in Canada were more motivated than male learners and had more positive attitudes towards the speakers of the target language. Gardner and Smythe (1975), conclude that girls' tend to demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes than boys do, recognizing also that they are more successful in learning languages than boys.

Gender is supposed to have an important effect on attitude and motivation and learning process. Now a day, the researchers are very much keen to attribute gender related differences to socio-cultural factors (Ekstrand 1980 cited in Sunderland 2000) that impose on females' role models that foster a positive attitude to second language learning. In different motivation studies conducted on gender differences in foreign language learning context, it has been observed that females are more motivated in learning foreign languages than boys (e.g. Dornyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006).

Suleiman (1993) conducted a research on the students of Arabic ethnicities studying EFL at Arizona State University. The study showed motivational differences related to gender. Sung & Padilla (1998) examined 144 elementary and 451 secondary school students' motivation towards learning Chinese, or Korean as L2. Findings of the study confirmed significantly higher motivation for females than their male counterparts. Eccles et al. (1983) model relates that both parents and teachers contribute to gender differences in motivation by- (a) modelling sex-typed behaviour, (b) communicating different expectations and goals for boys and girls, and (c) encouraging different activities and skills.

Abu-Rabia (1997) conducted a research study in the Canadian context to identify the gender differences of Arab students in the motivational constructs and attitudes towards ESL learning. The results of the study revealed that both male and female participants showed stronger extrinsic motivation to learn English as a second language in the Canadian context. In the study no gender differences were found.

In the present study, the researcher has investigated the gender differences with respect to their attitude and motivation towards English language learning and achievement in English test.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants were 240 twelfth-grade Pakistani students, 150 (63 male and 87 female) students belong to the urban areas and 90 students (57 male and 33 female) belong to the rural area, who had studied English for 11 years.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire used by Akram (2007 adapted from Gardner's AMTB 1985) was adapted to examine these students' attitudes and motivations toward learning English. An achievement test (resembling FCE) was also used to know their language proficiency.

### **Procedure**

All the participants were given the questionnaire to fill in to investigate their attitudes and motivation toward English language learning. The participants were also given the achievement test. The students were assured of their anonymity and they were also briefed about the research. The data were then gone through different statistical analyses.

## **RESULTS**

As the present study aimed at investigating the gender differences of the participants regarding attitudes and motivation toward learning English, the researcher has analysed the data through SPSS (version 14). Attitudinal and Motivational factors have been used as dependant variables and gender has been used as independent variable. All statistical tests conducted to investigate the gender differences and motivational determinants used .05 as the minimum alpha level of significance. The analysis presents descriptive statistics, an independent sample t-test and MANOVA. The final results of the present study are presented in table 1.

The results of MANOVA analysis show that there are no overall statistically significant differences between male and female participants in their motivation to learn English. Moreover, the univariate analysis of variance shows no significant differences between males and females in their parental encouragement, degree of instrumentality, English class anxiety,

ethnocentrism, cultural identity, need for achievement, interest in foreign languages and motivational intensity.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistic for Rating of Motivational Determinants by Gender**

Variables	Male (n=120)		Female (n=120)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Parental Encouragement	37.54	5.087	38.58	5.025
Degree of Instrumentality	33.17	4.591	32.46	3.757
Degree of Integrativeness	31.70	5.005	30.43	4.303
Attitude toward learning English	38.72	6.006	36.76	5.511
Attitude toward English people	17.43	3.227	16.61	2.754
English Class Anxiety	15.63	4.394	16.17	4.086
Ethnocentrism	29.78	4.458	29.90	4.985
Cultural Identity	12.95	4.050	12.86	3.667
Need for Achievement	32.97	3.932	32.15	3.661
Interest in Foreign Languages	37.73	5.594	36.62	5.558
Motivational Intensity	20.18	3.652	20.34	3.856
Desire to Learn English	20.04	2.827	19.23	3.119

However, there are significant differences in their degree of integrativeness; **p** value is **< .05** as the mean degree of integrativeness score for males is 31.70 (SD = 5.005) and for females is 30.43 (SD = 4.303), attitude toward learning English; **p** value is **< .05** as the mean attitude toward learning English score for males is 38.72 (SD = 6.006) and for females is 36.76 (SD = 5.511), attitude toward English people; **p** value is **< .05** as mean attitude toward English people score for males is 17.43 (SD = 3.227) and for females is 16.61 (SD = 2.754), and desire to learn English; **p** value is **< .05** as the mean desire to learn English score for males is 20.04 (SD = 2.827) and for females is 19.23 (SD = 3.119).

**Table 2. Results of T-Test for Differences in Achievement Test Scores by Gender**

Variables	Male (n=120)		Female (n=120)		t-test	Sig. 2-tailed
	M	SD	M	SD	t	P
Achievement Test	41.68	8.438	40.64	8.909	.744	.458

A t-test of independent samples was calculated to find the difference between male and female students in mean score of achievement test. The value of t was calculated as -1.196 and the p value was calculated as **p > 0.05**. This shows that statistically there is no significant

difference between gender and achievement (language proficiency) i.e. gender does not affect the achievement of the students in learning English.

## DISCUSSION

The results regarding the gender differences in their motivation to learn English showed that there are no statistically significant differences between males and females in their attitudes and motivation to learn English language. The study contradicts the research studies conducted by MacIntyre et al. (2002); Baker and MacIntyre (2003) which reported the importance of gender as a variable in second language motivation. The study also contradicts Sung & Padilla (1998) who found significantly higher motivation for females than their male counterparts. The present study supports Abu-Rabia's study (1997) in which no gender differences were found. Males had considerably stronger integrative reasons for learning English related to future jobs, university study and travel abroad. This is explicable given the nature of Pakistani society, with the wide expectation that, despite the prominence of women in a few professions such as teaching, women are not destined to pursue careers in which English would be a relevant feature (Ghani 2003).

Gone are the days when the women's activities were restricted in traditional societies, and even they were not encouraged to pursue their own careers. At present time women no more suffer discrimination at the family or societal levels just because of educational awareness. People have realized the importance of education and particularly the equality of sexes. The tendency is being developed that education is needed for men and women alike. In the past, the number of educated men was greater than women. Men were suffering from superiority complex and they used to overlook women's individuality. So this gap stirred women of their passivity and they have shown equal proficiency in learning English as compared to men. It has also been found that women can be tough competitors and they have taken the male superiority as challenge and have started making their mark in educational fields. In fact this attitude has brought about a healthy competition between both the sexes.

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