
DO FEMALE STUDENTS LEARN LANGUAGE BETTER THAN MALE STUDENTS?

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Abstract

This study explores the comparative comparison of language learning capabilities between male and female students by using a qualitative-descriptive methodology. The main tool used in the study is questionnaire to investigate possible differences in how genders approach and do well in language acquisition. The goal of this research is to provide an answer regarding “do female students learn language better than male students?”. In addition to providing a more complete knowledge of potential differences of learning style, learning strategies and motivation variations across genders in their language learning experiences, the findings aim to offer critical insights into educational practices. This investigation not only improves teaching strategies but also establishes the foundation for creating inclusive and productive language learning settings.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Language Learning, Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

Learning a language is a difficult process that is influenced by numerous factors such as personal learning preferences, learning strategies and motivations. Comparative studies of language acquisition abilities between genders have attracted a lot of attention in the field of education research. Academic study has long focused on gender-based differences in learning styles and accomplishments (García et al., 2024). This study investigates language acquisition using questionnaires as the main research instrument to identify potential gender differences in language learning engagement and proficiency.

The research community has long focused on gender-based differences in learning styles and accomplishments (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This study explores language acquisition using questionnaires as the main research instrument to identify potential gender differences in language learning engagement and proficiency. The main inquiry that motivates this study is: "are female students more adept at learning languages than their male counterparts?"

This study goes further measuring competency alone; rather, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different approaches, methods, and motivational dynamics that different genders employ when learning a language. These findings have applications outside of academia, with the goal of improving instructional strategies and practices (Brown & Lee, 2019). Through identifying these subtle differences, the research aims to improve instructional approaches and establish the foundation for creating inclusive and supportive environments for language learning.

This study aims to provide significant findings that can influence more effective instructional methods and encourage fair learning opportunities for all students through a thorough analysis of gender variations in language acquisition.

Research Methods

The study employed a qualitative-descriptive method, in which there were questionnaires used as the instruments. Qualitative research is a method that describes problematic moments, occurrences, and activities through a collection of case studies, individual experiences, interviews, observation, and interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The subjects of this study were 17 high school teachers who teach English in Cirebon and Bandung. In this study using saturated sampling techniques because the population number is no more than 30 (Sugiyono, 2019). This means that the entire population is also used as a sample in this study, which is as many as 17 samples. The researcher utilized close-ended types for the questionnaires as data collection. The respondents were given a questionnaire with 12 questions to fill out to collect data. The questions were designed about the motivation, learning style, and learning strategy used by female and male students. The questionnaire itself employed a five-option Likert scale that entails: (5) strongly agree (SA); (4) agree (A); (3) neutral (N); (2) disagree (D); (1) strongly disagree (SD).

The process of data analysis in this research used qualitative (questionnaire). The data that obtain from the questionnaire were calculated using the following formula

Based on Sudjana (2002) the formula that used is:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Explanation:

P = Percentage

100% = Constant of Value

F = The Frequency

N= Number of Sample

Percentage analysis is used by the researcher to find out the category of teachers' perception toward female and male students in learning language.

Results and Discussion

Results

The 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consists of 12 items. The 32 items are classified into three main categories relating motivation, learning style, and learning strategy differences on female and male students in language learning. The following is the findings based on the teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

Table 1. Research Results

No.	Items	Percentage (%)					Total
		SD	D	N	A	SA	
Motivation							
1	Do female students tend to have stronger motivation and show greater passion for learning language and its culture?			11.8%	52.9%	35.3%	100%
2	Do you notice any differences in the level of participation between male and female students in your English class?	5.9%		23.5%	35.3%	35.3%	100%
3	Do females get better learning achievements than males?			52.9%	17.6%	29.5%	100%
4	How much do you agree with the statement that male students are more engaged in English class compared to female students?	5.9%	5.9%	58.8%	17.6%	11.8%	100%
5	How would you rate the level of participation for male and female students in group work and class discussions?			35.3%	41.2%	23.5%	100%
Learning style							
6	For the group style, both females and males can learn best when they are working with their friends but females tend to learn with this style better than males.		5.9%	17.6%	47%	29.5%	100%
7	For the individual style, females can learn well and males have some difficulties learning or working alone.			47%	23.5%	29.5%	100%
8	How much do you agree with the statement that males learn better with the help of visualization and hearing, while females process languages more efficiently (they can learn in any approach)?			35.3%	35.3%	29.5%	100%
Learning strategy							
9	Females used memory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies more frequently than male learners. Females are better at memorizing than male.			35.3%	29.5%	35.3%	100%
10	Females engage more skills (speaking, reading, listening, etc.) and language elements (vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.), than males, who tend to stick with merely a handful of practical study methods. How much do you agree with the statement?	5.9%		29.5%	29.5%	35.3%	100%
11	Females also are high strategy users of social strategies in learning L2. Whenever they do not understand something in English, they ask the person to slow down or say the word or statement again. How much do you agree with the statement?			35.3%	41.2%	23.5%	100%
12	Females like discussing when learning English, good in social thinking and interaction while the males are active in expressing their ideas, and logic. Male in communication style tend to show that they focused on information while females focused on relationships. How much do you agree with the statement?			29.5%	41.2%	29.5%	100%

Items 1-5 are the statements that represent the students' motivation toward learning language in English class. In regard to the motivation component, most of the responses from respondents for each statement fell within the agreement with the highest percentage, which showed there was a tendency that female students were more motivated in learning English. The highest percentage displayed in

question number one with the statement that female students tend to have stronger motivation and show greater passion for learning language and its culture, the percentage got 52.9% agree and 35.3% with strongly agree. 35.3% of respondents believed that there is differences in the level of participation between male and female students in the English class. While female students participation in classroom discussion is more than male students 41.2% agree and 23.5% strongly agree with this statement. Respondents showed 52.9% and 58.8% neutral to express the situation about learning achievement and engagement. Thus, from the questionnaire result, it was found most of the respondents gave positive responses toward female students' motivation in learning English.

In regard to learning style categories in items 6-8. The results showed respondents give positive results that female students are more adaptive in any learning style stated in the questionnaire. 47% agree and 29.5% strongly agree that group style learning makes female students learn best. For individual style, females can learn well and males have some difficulties learning or working alone. 23.5% strongly agree and 29.5% agree with responses. Moreover, in the statement that males learn better in visualization and hearing 35.3% strongly agree and 29.5% agree. Here, female students process languages more efficiently and they can learn in any approach than male students.

Female and male students' learning strategy is reflected in items 9-12. The respondent gave positive results that females are better at memorizing than male 29.5% strongly agree and 35.3% agree. In the context of skills and language elements 29.5% strongly agree and 35.3% agree with female students. Females also are high strategy users of social strategies 41.2% strongly agree and 23.5% agree with this statement. Females like discussing when learning English, good in social thinking and interaction while the males were active in expressing their idea, and logical 41.2% strongly agree and 29.5% agree the respondents show positive points. Then, the results showed that female students outperform male students in the context of learning strategy.

Discussion

Motivation

Motivation is an additional affective component which is essential to second language acquisition theory. Motivation is actually a cluster of factors that "energise behaviour and give it direction" (Atkinson, 1979). The significance of encouraging learners' motivation is emphasized by Chomsky (1988), who states, "The truth of the matter is that about 99 percent of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material." The student's motivation for wanting to pick up a second language is a factor, but the key is understanding what really motivates the learner. The two broad orientations of integrative and instrumental motivation were identified in the early research of (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

1) Instrumental motivation

Desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, etc.

- 2) **Integrative motivation**
- 3) **Desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it; the desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group.**

4) **Instrumental motivation vs Integrative motivation**

The literature has differentiated between two types of motivation: "integrative" motivation, which is the desire to become part of the target language culture and identify with it, and "instrumental" motivation, which is the desire to learn the language for academic or professional advancement. According to research by Gardner and Lambert (1972), learning a foreign or second language successfully is probably going to be harder if the underlying motivational orientation is instrumental as opposed to integrative. However, further research has raised questions about whether this statement can be applied to all foreign language learners.

5) **Resultative and intrinsic motivation**

Maslow's motivational pyramid which focuses on human needs, the 'resultative motivation hypothesis' (Skehan, 1989) implies that success breeds success. Skehan proposes that: motivation might be influenced by the success experienced by learners (the resultative hypothesis). (Skehan, 1989)

The "resultative motivation hypothesis" (Skehan, 1989), which is based on Maslow's motivational pyramid and emphasizes human wants, suggests that success leads to success. Skehan suggests that: learners' experiences of success may have an impact on motivation (the resultative hypothesis) (Skehan, 1989).

On the contrary, "the intrinsic hypothesis" (Skehan, 1989) holds that the tasks and the materials themselves are the source of motivational desires. According to Skehan, a learner's motivation comes from a natural interest in the tasks they are required to complete for their education (Ellis, 1994). While a great deal of study has been done on motivation, especially on individual differences among learners, not as much has been done on intrinsic motivation.

In the context of language learning Oga-Baldwin (2020) shows that male students were more likely to demonstrate low quality, externally controlled motives, while girls were more likely to show higher quality internally regulated motives. These findings indicate the need to improve support for boys' internally regulated motivation in Asian foreign language settings. Moreover, Zoghi et al (2018) state females tend to have stronger motivation and show greater passion for the target language and culture. They also tend to have a higher self-concept of language and receive more support from their parents.

Learning style

Dunn (1978) asserted that learning style is the human's own way to begin concentrating, processing, stimulating or analyzing new information or knowledge. Pashler, et al. (2008) define learning styles to the concept that individuals differ in regard to what mode of instruction or study is most effective for them. Furthermore, Schmidt and Harriman (1998) offered a thought in which learning style is a situation where the students could be helped to learn well and more efficiently. In brief, the students should know their own learning style to improve their ability in classroom activities. However, not many students are aware of the styles they use in their

learning. Moreover, Prashnig (2007) also found the same case, that only some students know their learning style and use it well. Yet, this may cause their difficulties in understanding, concentrating and memorizing subject materials.

Educationists and some psychologists classified differently the types of wellknown learning styles which are used today by humans. Dunn (1978) classified three types of students' learning style as follows:

1) Visual Students

Students who learn best by watching with their own eyes are those who are visual learners. The visual learner finds it easier to comprehend written material when they can see the words written in books, notebooks, and on whiteboards.

2) Auditory Students

Auditory students have good listening skills. In order to fully comprehend what they hear, they would rather have the teacher explain things on audio.

3) Kinesthetic Students

Kinesthetic students learn best by actively exploring the material using an experiential method. Learning requires them to sit still for extended periods of time. These learners love to construct, repair, or produce things because they find it simpler to learn with manipulated materials.

Viriya (2014) shows that for the visual style, males and females can learn well with the eyes (seeing). For the tactile, females can learn best and males can learn well with hands-on activities. For the auditory, females can learn best and males can learn well with the ears (listening). For the group style, both females and males can learn best when they are working with their friends but females tend to learn with this style better than males. For the kinesthetic, females can learn best and males can learn well with experiential learning. Lastly, for the individual style, females can learn well and males have some difficulties learning or working alone.

Therefore, it is essential for educators to understand the various learning styles and their corresponding characteristics in order to assign and facilitate assignments that will improve students' learning outcomes.

Learning strategy

Learning strategies have been studied from different perspectives, based on which it was concluded that numerous individual variables affect the selection of learning strategies, such as gender, age, motivation for language learning, cognitive learning style, maturity level, previous experience in language learning, learner's beliefs and other factors. Therefore, Cohen (2002) believe that the most important individual differences among learners relate to their age and gender. In line with the statements above, Nyikos (2008) states that the differences in language learning preferences between males and females, in some cases, are statically significant. Here are some other studies, about the differences between males and females:

Table 2. Learning Strategy Differences Between Males and Females Students

Bacon (1992)	no difference between the sexes
(Gardner & Lambert, 1972)	female learners are more motivated than wale learners
Spolsky (1989)	girls have more positive attitudes towards speakers of the target language
Ludwig (1983)	male learners are more instrumentally motivated

Bacon and Finnemann (1992)	female learners of L2 Spanish at university level had the stronger instrumental motivation
Bacon (1992)	men use translation strategies more than woman

Finding specific justifications for these findings is difficult. The following explanations are theoretical in nature. Women's generally positive attitudes are one clear rationale for their increased performance in L2 learning in classroom settings. In contradiction data is also available about the role of gender and sex in second language learning, as well as whether one gender is more successful than the other (Ellis, 1994).

Table 3. Males and female Performance in L2

Females are better at rejecting forms of language that are not proper.
Females have better listening skills.
Females are more concerned with input. (Listening)
Females tend to have better attitudes towards learning.
Males are less sensitive.
Males tend to stick to forms that may not be correct.
Males are more concerned with output. (Talking)
Males think more analytically than females

According to Zimmerman and Pons's (1990) research Oxford(1989), metacognitive strategies are employed by females as planning and monitoring techniques. Certain research suggests that there may not be a clear correlation between gender and the adoption of learning strategies (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Oh, 1996; Park, 1999 in Lee & Oxford, 2008).

Oxford identified twelve basic features of learning strategies that are oriented with the development of communication competence in a foreign language that includes interaction between learners. Language Learning Strategies:

- 1) Contribute to the main goal, communicative competence.
- 2) Allow learners to become more self-directed.
- 3) Expand the role of foreign language teachers.
- 4) Problem-oriented.
- 5) Specific actions taken by the learner.
- 6) Involve many other aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
- 7) Support learning both directly and indirectly.
- 8) Are not always observable.
- 9) Are often conscious.
- 10) Can be taught.
- 11) Are flexible.
- 12) Are influenced by a variety of factors.

Oxford (1989) in her Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) emphasized six categories namely: Memory strategies (e.g., grouping, representing sounds in memory), cognitive Strategies (e.g., repeating, analyzing, getting the idea quickly and taking notes), compensation strategies (e.g., switching to the mother tongue, using other clues), metacognitive strategies (e.g., linking new information with already known ones, self-monitoring), affective strategies (lowering anxiety by use of music, encouraging oneself and discussing feelings with others) and social

strategies (asking for clarification, cooperating with others and developing cultural understanding).

According to Oxford, language learning strategies are divided into two major classes: direct and indirect. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups (memory, cognitive, and compensation under direct class; metacognitive, affective, and social under the indirect class) (García et al., 2024).

Chamot (1989) says that there is a significant correlation between the use of various learning strategies applied by foreign language learners and their learning achievement. Hosenfeld (1976) also supports the statement above, he said that good language learners use a large number of effective learning strategies, unlike the less successful learners. Good learners are also able to select and combine strategies that are appropriate to the task. Oxford and Crookall (1989) believes that successful learners combine certain cognitive strategies (translation, analysis, noting) with specific metacognitive strategies (self-evaluation, planning and organizing).

Gimeno (2002) says that less successful learners use fewer strategies, and their strategies are limited by the type of strategy. Often, less successful learners are not aware of the strategies they use. Then if a less successful learner is aware of his/her use of strategies, he/she can combine them and use them in a successful way. Stern conducted a very interesting study of good foreign language learners and identified learning strategies used by good learners.

Fortes (2023) and Jamiah (2016) found females are high strategy users of social strategies in learning L2. Whenever they do not understand something in English, they ask the person to slow down or say the word or statement again. In addition, Zeynalli (2012) revealed female learners also have a tendency to use overall language learning strategies more often than males. This trend has been observed in various studies across different cultures, indicating that females show more interest in social activities and are less competitive and more cooperative than males. In a study of 149 Iranian EFL learners, it was found that female learners used overall language learning strategies more often than males, with a significant difference in the use of social/affective strategies. Similarly, a study on ESL/EFL learners showed that female learners used memory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies more frequently than male learners.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it indicates that female students tend to be more motivated in learning English than male students. The highest percentage of respondents agreed that female students have stronger motivation and show greater passion for learning language and its culture. Female students also tend to participate more in classroom discussions than male students. In terms of learning style, respondents gave positive results that female students are more adaptive in any learning style stated in the questionnaire. Female students also outperform male students in the context of learning strategy. The study suggests that teachers should prioritize pair and group work to increase motivation in language learners.

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