



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Social Aspects of Gender Differences in Learners' Motivation to Learn English in a Pakistani Social Context of South Punjab**

Muhammad Imran<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Faisal Hanif<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mamuna Ghani<sup>3</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & IT, Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Lecturer Government College Kabirwala, District Khanewal, Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Ex-Dean Faculty of Arts, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

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**Corresponding**

**Author:**

imran@kfueit.edu.  
pk

**ABSTRACT**

This paper endeavors to probe into the motivational patterns associated with gender in a particular Pakistani social context. For this purpose a self-report questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire included different measures adapted from Gardner (1985), Dornyei (1990, 2001), Clement (1994) and Ghani (2002). Data were collected from three different campuses of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Besides questionnaire, participants were also given FCE (First certificate in English) test regarding reading comprehension and use of English along with a cloze test to judge their proficiency in English language. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 16) for windows and results manifested that there existed notable gender-based differences in learners' motivation to learn English and their English language proficiency

**Introduction**

Language learning has been an extensively researched phenomenon since the world has advanced towards globalization. Besides the influence of different social, cultural, psychological and cognitive aspects on second language learning, investigation of biological differences has also been a focus of researchers (e.g. see Williams et al. (2002); Glowka, (2014); Dornyei et al., (2006). The research findings have always rendered different results about influence of gender on language learning in different social contexts(Field, (2000); Williams et al., (2002); Ghazivini and Khajehpour, (2011); Dornyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, (2006); Mori & Gobel, (2006); Polat, (2011); (Ryan, 2009). The present study is an attempt towards identifying gender differences in motivation towards English language learning in a Pakistani social context of southern Punjab.

## **Gender and Social Context**

For the past few decades, a significant difference in the correlation between gender and target language learning has been observed due to certain hypothesized perceptions of gender in language studies (Glowka, 2014). Recent studies view gender as an undercurrent or nuance that considerably depends on social context (e.g. see Ellis, 2012). Following this dimension of research that basically supposes that success difference within the same gender may vary depending on specific social context as some studies have reported poorer level of English proficiency among immigrant females as compared to immigrant males in Canada and the reason behind this difference in performance has been ascribed to limited educational and interactional opportunities available for women (Norton, 2000; Norton, et al. 1993). Women from traditional male dominant contexts encounter various restrictions in the way of their access to English language. This difference, therefore, is social rather than intrinsic.

Williams et, al.(2002) gave an account of decrease in level of motivation to learn foreign language among young male learners during the span of their school life. This predisposition, that is a common phenomenon, is associated with their general attitude towards learning in classroom environment which they usually pay less attention to. A feeling of disrespect towards French as a compulsory foreign language taught at schools in Ireland was reported because Irish males consider French a feminine subject. It is socio cultural environment that forces young male learners to adapt such behavior (i.e. To show disrespect towards French language) that is regarded as masculine (Field, 2000). On the other hand, learning German is considered a masculine activity and most of Irish young learners conform to this social behavior and give German preference over French language (Williams et al., 2002; Field, 2000).

The above discussion clearly manifests that studies conducted to explore the effect of gender on a second/foreign language learning have reflected the impact of learners' attitude towards target language, that is an outcome of learners' socio cultural environment, on the level of success in learning target language.

A majority of researchers have come up with the conclusions that manifest the superiority of female learners over their male fellows. Williams et al. (2002) came across and witnessed higher level of motivation among female learners contrary to their male equivalents. A study conducted by Dornyei et al. (2006) approves the preeminence of female Hungarian school students regarding their motivation to learn English. Supremacy of female learners over their male counterparts in regard to their L2 motivation level is also supported by a study conducted among Iranian second language learners (Ghazivini and Khajehpour, 2011). Girls are likely to perform better than boys in most of the cases (Gardner and Lambert (1972); Gardner and Smythe (1975); Dornyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, (2006); Mori & Gobel, (2006)).

Besides, a few studies have rendered opposite results leaned toward male half. This tendency was reported by Polat (2011) among Turkish students and by Al-Bustan and Al-Bustan (2009), among Kuwaiti students. This inconsistency compelled researchers to study and explain gender differences in L2 motivation according to social context. Dornyei (2005) considers social context a contributory factor that bring about gender differences in L2 motivation. Perceptions about second language that exist in a society forms positive or negative dispositions among its members. In Japan, females think that English language offers a greater degree of freedom of expression as compared to Japanese language. They, therefore, perform better in English in contrast to male learners because Japanese language has restrictive features for females while English holds no such constraints (Ryan, 2009).

Thus, we can assume that main reasons of discrepancies in L2 motivation among males and females are social rather than biological. There has been a keen tendency of researchers to associate gender relevant differences to socio-cultural environment (Ekstrand 1980 cited in Sunderland 2000).

Gender related studies have shifted its perspective from essentialism, which studies gender related language difference assuming male and female characters as fixed and static phenomena, to social constructionism, which, on contrary, is based on diverse and dynamic characteristics of gender differences. Social constructionism assumes that development of language learning behavior of individuals is influenced by practices and ideologies that exist in a society instead of a generally accepted notion of masculinity or femininity (Glowka, 2014). But we cannot neglect the importance of essentialism because of its focus on learning itself instead of learning opportunities and because of its emphasis on exploitation of linguistic resources ( Ellis, 2012). Linguistic forms chosen by male and female individuals also reflect their identities and it will be amateur to assume the all linguistic practices attributed to gender are identical for both males and females.

Compliant with traditional mode of inquiry, the present paper presents the outcomes of investigation regarding gender-based variations in learners' motivation and its influence on their achievement in social context of Southern Punjab in Pakistan.

### **Material and Methods**

The present study is based on survey questionnaire which also includes FCE language proficiency test. Only reading comprehension and English usage tests along with a cloze test were conducted to measure the proficiency of participants. Questionnaire was adapted from Ghani (2002) which was comprised of AMTB (Attitude Motivation Test Battery) by Gardner (1985). For present study certain modifications were brought into the questionnaire. Some items that could not reach the desirable level of reliability were excluded. Moreover, some parts of the questionnaire were adapted from Dornyei (2001) and Clement (1994).

### **Research Design**

Principally, the study was cross-sectional and questionnaire based like previous studies on motivation (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Dornyei, 1994, 2001 etc.). A major difference the present study and previously conducted studies is context. Data was collected from three university campuses in Bahawalpur division.

### **Main Focus of the Study**

The main emphasis of present study is to discern the gender differences and find out the gender based variations regarding English language proficiency and learners' attitudes and motivation towards English language learning.

### **Participants**

The participants of present study were 308 both male and female learners of English studying at different campuses of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB). They were all students of master classes who had an educational background of at least 14 years of education. Their age was between 22 to 26 years. The departments selected were those where English Courses were offered as a compulsory subject. When data was collected, IUB had three campuses i.e a main campus at Bahawalpur and two sub-campuses at Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan (RYK). Sub campuses offered a limited number of disciplines, therefore, similarity of departments among three campuses was taken into account for the selection criteria.

There were four disciplines that RYK campus offered admission in i.e. Education, Commerce, Management Science and Computer Science. At Bahawalnagar campus six departments were functional i.e. English, Economics, Education, Commerce, Management Science and Computer Science. Bahawalpur Campus, in contrast, offered an array of disciplines of study but departments selected for data collections from this campus were those which were functional at other two or at least one of the sub-campuses. The table below presents participants' distribution with respect to their pertinent campus and department.

**Table 1**  
**Campus and Department-Wise Distribution of Sample**

No	Department	Campus		
		Bahawalpur	Bahawalnagar	Rahim Yar Khan
1	Computer science	16	14	20
2	English	41	14	-
3	Education	19	17	12
4	Commerce	10	24	19
5	Economics	21	21	-
6	Management Science	18	18	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>75</b>

## Instruments

The questionnaire used in present study to collect data included items adapted from well recognized and authentic questionnaires by Gardner (1985), Dornyei(1990) and Clement (1994) to develop a multipart questionnaire to measure attitudes and motivation of Pakistani learners towards English language learning. Studies conducted to explore the influence of attitudes and motivation on learning another language reflected a tendency to enlarge and expand the construct of motivation to obtain more elaborate and deeper insights into the matter (Crookes and Schmidt (1991), Oxford (1994), Gardner and Tremblay (1995),Dörnyei (1994b), Dornyei (2001). Gardner (1985) says about socio-educational model that it is not a full and final model because it involves many aspects that would keep on evolving with the progress of research in this field of study.

Gardner and Tremblay (1994b) clearly affirm that socio-educational model is flexible enough to integrate further motivational constructs into it.

Data was collected from 50 participants for pilot study. Based on the results of pilot study the questionnaire was slightly modified. It includes exclusion of some scale items and insertion meanings of few difficult words. A total of 109 items were incorporated in the initial questionnaire which were reduced to 89 items after the pilot study and after piloting there remained 89 items that comprised the final version of questionnaire. There were total 18 variable in the questionnaire but in this paper four variables has not been included as they are not directly concerned with the scope of this paper. Appendix A offers the information for each of these measures aboutskewness and kurtosis, minimum and maximum range, mean and standard deviation. A five point Likert type scales was used to obtain data regarding different measures. A pilot study was conducted and the Alfa coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) was calculated to determine the internal consistency reliability of all scales used in the study. The scale descriptions and their reliability values are presented below.

**Table 2**  
**Scale Reliability**

No.	Scale	Cronbach's Alfa	No. of Items
1	Parental Encouragement	.787	10
2	Degree of Instrumentality	.750	12
3	Degree of Integrativeness	.850	09
4	Attitude Towards Learning English	.804	10
5	Attitude Towards English People	.741	03
6	English Class Anxiety	.830	05
7	Ethnocentrism	.623	02
8	Cultural Identity	.724	05

9	Fear of Assimilation	.743	06
10	Need for Achievement	.508	06
11	Interest in Foreign Languages	.793	07
12	Linguistic Self-confidence	.712	04
13	Motivational Intensity	.704	06
14	Desire to Learn English	.765	07
15	Self	.748	30
16	Ideal-Self	.854	30
17	Pakistani People	.923	30
18	English People	.776	30
19	Self Evaluation	.831	04

### Sample and Population

Data was collected from 308 students studying English at master level. The questionnaire was distributed among 357 participants. Some extreme cases were excluded after screening process. All such questionnaires were discarded that were not filled appropriately.

Three major cities of Bahawalpur division i.e. Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan, were visited to collect data from students. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur has established its campuses in all these cities. Main campuses i.e. Baghdad-ul-Jadeed Campus and Abbasia Campus are situated in Bahawalpur. Rest of the two campuses are Bahawalnagar Campus and Rahim Yar Khan Campus. A description of male and female participants along with their concerned campus is presented in table 1.

### Results and Discussion

To start with we took percentage of participants' scores on self-evaluation scale to get a general idea of learners' English proficiency as perceived by the learners themselves. The table below presents the descriptive results students' self-rating of their proficiency level.

**Table 3  
Learners' Self-Evaluation Of English Proficiency**

<b>I read English</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Male	0	28.2	59.7	12.1
Female	0	32.1	57.5	10.4

Numbers in uppermost row refer to four point likert type scale, 1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3=Quite well, 4= Fluently

**I understand English**

Gender	1	2	3	4
Male	0	31.4	61.3	7.3
Female	0	33.1	62.8	4.1

Numbers in uppermost row refer to four point likert type scale, 1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3=Quite well, 4= Fluently

**I write English**

Gender	1	2	3	4
Male	0	28.2	54.8	16.9
Female	0	25.5	65.5	9.0

Numbers in uppermost row refer to four point likert type scale, 1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3=Quite well, 4= Fluently

**I speak English**

Gender	1	2	3	4
Male	4.0	41.9	48.4	5.6
Female	2.1	49.7	46.9	1.4

Numbers in uppermost row refer to four point likert type scale, 1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3=Quite well, 4= Fluently

Students are sometime not aware of their own proficiency, therefore, we may expect flawed besides pretentious and affected results but it gives us a general view of participants' proficiency in four language skills. Overall results indicate that there does not exist any major gender-based difference in the English proficiency level of learners. Results also indicate that reading and writing are learners' stronger areas whereas speaking is learners' weakest area of language skills.

It is a fact that in Pakistan English grammar translation method is used to teach English in majority of the educational institutes. Reading and writing skills are emphasized while a very little attention is paid to listening and speaking skills. Despite the element of over exaggeration generally associated with such self-evaluation scales the results approve of what we expected about learners' proficiency level regarding four basic language skill.

Having grasped general perceptions of learners about their proficiency, the researcher moved towards main analysis of data to further probe into the matter. With this intention a gender-based correlation analysis was performed. Correlation between different variables of motivation questionnaire and measures of achievement (i.e. percentage of marks in the subject of English in the most recent exams; Proficiency test scores and Self evaluation of English proficiency) was calculated. Results of correlation analysis have been presented in the table below.

**Table 4**  
**Correlations of motivational factors with percentage of marks, test score and self evaluation of English proficiency with additional gender analysis**

		% of Marks	Test score	Self evaluation of English proficiency
Parental Encouragement	Male	.16**	.23**	.30**
	Female	.28*	.31**	.06
	Total	.26**	.28**	.14*
Degree of Instrumentality	Male	.40**	.54**	.38**
	Female	.31**	.41**	.29**
	Total	.32**	.47**	.33**
Degree of Integrativeness	Male	.19*	.13	.18*
	Female	.24**	.36**	.13
	Total	.19**	.25**	.16**
Attitude Towards Learning English	Male	.21**	.21**	.21*
	Female	.03	.36**	.23**
	Total	.13*	.28**	.22**
Attitude Towards English People	Male	.40**	.41**	.41**
	Female	.41**	.42**	.42**
	Total	.33**	.32**	.42**
English Class Anxiety	Male	-.41**	-.63**	-.54**
	Female	-.31**	-.50**	-.30**
	Total	-.33**	-.55**	-.44**
Ethnocentrism	Male	-.06	-.20*	-.15
	Female	-.15	-.19*	-.15
	Total	-.09	-.19*	-.14*
Cultural Identity	Male	-.17*	-.37**	-.22**
	Female	-.14	-.44**	-.35**
	Total	-.16**	-.40**	-.27**
Fear of Assimilation	Male	-.16	-.24**	-.22**
	Female	.07	-.08	.09
	Total	-.04	-.16**	-.10
Interest in Foreign Languages	Male	.12	.28**	.19*
	Female	.05	.10	.03
	Total	.05	.20**	.11
Linguistic Self confidence	Male	.52**	.54**	.52**
	Female	.31**	.45**	.46**
	Total	.38**	.48**	.50**
Motivational Intensity	Male	.25**	.42**	.29**

	Female	.05	.21**	.12
	Total	.18**	.31**	.17**
Desire to Learn English	Male	.39**	.41**	.35**
	Female	.49**	.32**	.36*
	Total	.45**	.38**	.25**

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 offers the correlations between the measures of motivation and of achievement. The results of total population have been presented along with separate results of male and female participants for comparison. Parental support and backing appear to be prominent forecasters of success for females than for males. Gardner (1968) divides parents' roles regarding child's achievement into two types i.e. active and passive roles. Parents, whose role is active, buoy up their children to learn the language. Through provision of necessary stuff, by providing assistance in assigned work, incentivizing them to work hard and by showing interest in child's performance, such parents positively inspire their child's slant towards second language learning. Gardner has developed an assumption that to some extent, variance in learner's L2 performance influences variance in encouragement from parents. On contrary, parents with passive role or subtle role, as Gardner calls it, are usually not conscious of their negative attitude towards foreign language and its culture. Parents' disposition towards target language, its people and culture substantially influences the construction of child's attitude.

Correlation of Instrumentality with measures of proficiency is higher for males as compared to their female counterparts while female learners' integrative orientation bears higher correlation with achievement in comparison with male learners. Attitude towards learning English scale scores correlated higher with achievement with an exception for % of marks in Graduation exam papers for females while for male learners, attitude towards English people is a stronger indicator of success in English language learning. As far anxiety and achievement, there exists a negative correlation between them. Anxiety, both for male and female learners, correlated negatively with achievement but its relationship with achievement is stronger for boys. Negative impact of Cultural identity on achievement was higher for female learners than it was for their male counterparts. Correlation between Linguistic self-confidence and achievement was high for boys while strength of correlation against these variables was medium for girls. For male learners the measure of 'Motivational intensity' appeared to be a strong predictor of success and for female learners it a small strength correlation was found only with test score. Desire to learn English came across to be a more significant factor to predict success in males than in females.

### **Gender Based Variations in Individual Difference Variables Related to Attitudes and Motivation**

According to Dornyei (2005) there hardly exist any quantitative studies, conducted to explore the attributes or achievements of males and females, that did not reported any significant differences.

An independent sample t-test was applied to find out gender relevant variations in different variables of the study. T-test comparisons of eight main components of motivation are presented in the table below.

**Table 5**  
**Independent sample t-test of participants' scores on different measures based on gender variations**

	Gender	N	M	SD	d	T	Effect size <sup>a</sup>
Parental Encouragement					306	-3.70*	.046
	Male	142	3.43	.636			
	Female	166	3.68	.578			
Degree of Instrumentality					306	2.73*	.024
	Male	142	4.09	.622			
	Female	166	3.91	.546			
English Class Anxiety					305	-2.42*	.019
	Male	141	3.00	.806			
	Female	166	3.21	.720			
Linguistic Self confidence					302	2.56*	.022
	Male	139	4.05	.684			
	Female	165	3.86	.607			
Motivation					300	-2.95*	.028
	Male	138	2.92	.372			
	Female	164	3.05	.377			
Integrativeness					299	-3.20*	.033
	Male	140	3.51	.447			
	Female	161	3.68	.471			
Ethnicity					299	-1.029	.003
	Male	139	2.94	.617			
	Female	162	3.01	.596			
L2confidence					296	.195	.000
	Male	137	3.77	.702			
	Female	161	3.76	.621			

\*Difference is significant at .05 level

It is rather obvious that females outscored their male counterparts on measures of parental encouragement, English class anxiety, motivation and integrativeness, while males outscored females on degree of instrumentality and linguistic self-confidence. Besides these scales mentioned above no gender-based statistically significant variation was found for the rest of the two scale i.e. ethnicity and L2 confidence.

The results reflect female learners' more sensitive attitude towards encouragement provided by parents in study matters as compared to male learners who are naturally careless towards parental support and back up. In Pakistani context, we can say about boys that *with a larger tether may they walk than may be given to the girls*. Girls in Pakistan, especially in southern Punjab, go to their homes after their classes are off while boys, who, comparatively, enjoy more freedom, hang around with their friends till late night. In this way girls are better receivers of parents' attention and care. Therefore, girls receive better care and attention of their parents. It might be one of the important justifications of girls' more significant score on parental encouragement scale than boys.

English class anxiety is another variable on which female learners' higher scores than that of male learners indicate that females get more anxious than males. One of the probable explanations might be the natural temperament of female learners bestowed upon them by nature or it might be due to their lack of exposure to the out-side world. Boys being hard and tough naturally or due to their exposure to the world around them develop better abilities to manage stress and pressure in certain conditions than girls who are more subtle and delicate. It might be the cause of girls' higher anxiety level.

For motivation to learn English girls' higher score than boys shows their comparatively higher level of commitment towards goal achievement. Moreover, former's their attitude towards learning the target language, their motivational intensity and desire to learn English is greater than the latter.

Measure of integrativeness also received better endorsement from female side than their male equivalents and it reflects females' more positive attitude towards English people and their culture.

In comparisons with the dominance of integrative element in female students, achievement oriented traits that include; striving for better job opportunities, to get better grades in order to be competitive and the like, are characteristic of male students. Evidently, boys were found more instrumental than females.

According to (Neols& Clement, 1996) self confidence describes a person's conviction about the potential he or she holds to achieve a certain task. And the

results of self confidence reveal that boys self confidence is significantly higher than girls. English class anxiety scale and self-confidence scale are in contrast to each other. Analysis of these scales signify that higher the confidence, lower will be anxiety level of learners. There was found no significant difference on L2 confidence and Ethnicity scales, between males and females.

### **Conclusion**

In the end we would definitely agree with Dornyei's (2005) statement that it is quite usual that there do exist gender based differences especially when we investigate language learner traits. But as the context changes these differences also cannot help varying. Social environment molds our personality and as a result we set certain preferences regarding our gender while living under certain social influence. This is why the results of this study may differ from other studies conducted in different other social contexts. Present study shows that among the university students of Bahawalpur division, females have a higher desire to learn English, are more integratively oriented towards learning English, and are better achievers than males. Nonetheless, there are certain characteristic aspects of male students like; they are more instrumental minded, less anxious and more confident while pursuing their goals especially when it comes to language learning. Such an understanding of gender traits provides academicians with a vision that can help them cope better with the academic needs of learners.

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