

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

ESL learners may encounter a number of challenges while learning English as a foreign language. Gender difference is one of the crucial aspects that affect in language learning. This study aimed to identify what is the impact of gender on learners' performances in learning English as a foreign language. This study was conducted at 22nd secondary school at Mirishkor District in Kashkadarya, Uzbekistan. A total of five classes were selected for participation in this experiment based on deeply specialized criteria and methods. At the end of the study, it was concluded that gender plays a crucial role on learning English due to environment as well as societal factors. In other words, males prone to learn languages mainly through using their senses. Therefore, it is highly suggestable for teachers to implement materials during the lessons that involve learners' senses, and with this they may keep the balance between sexes.

KEYWORDS: *ESL Learner, Student Perception, Gender Differences, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Auditory Learners.*

INTRODUCTION

As English has become one of the widely learnt languages in Uzbekistan in the past few decades, it has been studied as one of the major compulsory subjects in both primary and secondary schools for recent years. A huge amount of educational, governmental, business and media related information are also run in this language. For this reason, multifarious methods, techniques, styles have been made by language experts and are being conducted in all public and private language teaching organizations in order to train people to use grammar and structures appropriately in both formal and informal forms (Azizova, 2007). However, it is sometimes sorrowful that many study books and materials are structured to carry out in study organizations as a standardized style, and do not take the learners' gender into consideration where after the learners' needs and learning styles are simply overlooked. A number of language scholars attempted to explain the core reasons of students' constant failure in learning English as a foreign language (Qian, 2015), and found out that women's brains are more active and show better results in language encoding while men's brain can grasp more LL information by seeing and listening. This is mainly because, men and women not only think differently, but their way of learning languages is also biologically different (Boivin & Plomin, 2003).

This paper is noteworthy because it demonstrates a huge amount of data about gender gap in SLA. In this research the main factors are thoroughly examined which are related to the reasons

of why children sometimes fall behind their studies even though they study hard all language-based textbooks and techniques.

Literature review

In this part, it is aimed to review the current research related literatures and findings. In other words, some of the past studies done by previous scientists will be observed. To begin with, Boyle (1987) performed research on gender interference in learning languages with his 490 students (257 boys and 233 girls) of Hong Kong University, China. He finished his study with concluding that females had superiority into learning languages compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, Burstall (1975) also claimed that women are more successful in learning English as a foreign language. It was proved by him with conducting study with his 6000 primary school ESL learners. Conversely, in his study, Ford et al. (1988) thoroughly proves that women and men have nearly equal perceptions in their oral abilities. Furthermore, other scientists like Oxford & Ehrman (1996) found out that female LL volunteers utilize a number of ways and strategies while learning English. We can witness this same perception in Nyikos's and Oxford's (1989) studies. One of the studies that was carried out by Burman, Bitan, and Booth revealed that female learners' brains processed and connected more actively rather than male learners. These scientists examined 30 male and 30 female learners at the ages of up 9 to 15 by utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) while they are asked to complete oral and writing tasks. Without listening the original pronunciation, the learners were subjected to read some words as well as guess the words after hearing them. What occurred from the research was that the female participants showed a huge amount of positive result in areas that connected to abstract comprehension and speech patterns. In contrast, male participants' results were high in areas that cover oral and visual areas. According to these findings, it is obvious that boys and girls are differ from each other in their skill levels through distinctive language acquisition method (Bitan, Burman, & Booth, 2007).

As for many researchers, language acquisition (LA) is considered to be dominant in females' brain functions, mainly for women in secondary education. One of the head of experts in the area of secondary language education claimed that "language is the one field of the secondary education where feminism is mostly dominant" (Rogers, 2006, p 135). Another study conducted globally by Rebecca Rogers through taking the survey from Babble language learning software followers in 2016 reveals that more women had interest in learning languages than men. "In a global scale, we come up with the idea that a great number of women have enthusiasm to learn language rather than men" says one of the researchers. (Noack, 2016, para. 1). As his created program involved a number of languages to learn, men occurred to have an interest in learning German, Russian and Portuguese while women had preference to select French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch (Noack, 2016, para. 1). According to Babble program survey those three languages that chosen by men were selected to help with their jobs whereas among women there were various purposes in learning those languages. This study caused to continue another research that performed to identify what purposes are hidden under learning these languages. For example, German, French, Russian, Portuguese as well as ASL, Arabic, Spanish and Mandarin are learnt for business purposes. In other words, with being able to speak these languages people can obtain pay increases, career developments, a useful candidate to offer to better job vacancies (Fowler, 2019).

Methodology

In this part it is expected to reveal differences in language learning strategies between men and women and their effects in learners' achievements in English. The study was conducted at 22nd secondary school at Mirishkor district in Kashkadarya region, Uzbekistan. Total of five class students participated in the research. In order to conduct the experiment, the students were to divide into groups according to their language proficiency level. For this reason, three classes were organized, namely Class A (elementary), Class B (intermediate), Class C (upper-intermediate) based on the results that students obtained from the test. Placement test type was used to divide the participants into subgroups. Besides, there was an additional Pro course that was intended to prepare students who finished all 3 courses but could not pass the proficiency exam at the end of the main course.

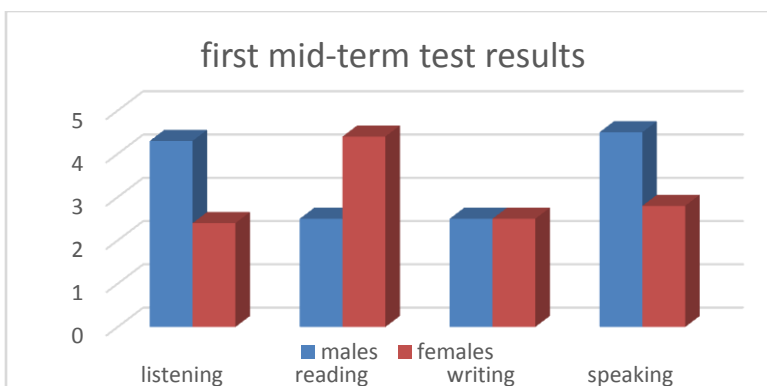
In order to be transferred to another level, learners should study three months in each level course. If participants could not gain required marks from the midterm exams, they were subjected to retake the same course for three months. Participants were chosen mainly from Intermediate (B course). Each week they received 27 hours of instruction that are contained 4 hours for writing and 23 hours for the fundamental basic course that made up of listening, reading, speaking skills. Book named "Headway" for pre-intermediate and intermediate were chosen to make syllabus. Besides, various reading, listening handouts, vocabulary materials were distributed as a form of supplementary materials. Each class was based on a certain skill development lessons and presentations. During their presentations students worked both individually and group work and answered all the questions if there any. All test questions and teaching materials were based on unique style and did not separate to gender preferences, so male and female students received the same question papers.

Participants

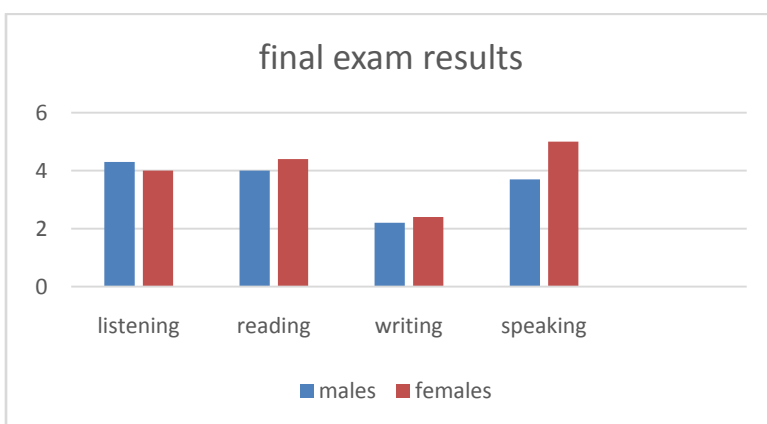
Participants were chosen from 5 different classes and were divided into groups using Aptitude test and there were 26 students in total at the age between 14 and 18 (16 were male 10 female students). All of them were placed according to their knowledge. These students were chosen for convenience as this research aimed to identify the forms of mistakes that made by the learners, so 26 were enough to come up with final conclusion. Intermediate level is an appropriate stage of language to test the language competence of the learners and errors that they produce (Ellis, 1995).

Result

Looking at the outcomes, I can say that although the learning process of girls went slowly compared to their counterparts, at the end it was occur that girls could grasp more rules with using correctly in a sentence. There are step-by-step results of learners' performances. The speech of men and women have always been distinctive in terms of their phonological patterns that can be observed in all languages. According to the graph below we can witness that girls were good at pronouncing even unfamiliar words. Girls' pronunciation occurred to be better than boys', especially the words with suffix "-ing" were more authentic. A number of sample list of stimuli used in the research and there is demonstrated below.



Graph 1



Graph 2

Looking at the test results we can see from the bar graphs that after the first mid-term exam, girls showed lower language acquisition. In more detail, although the distributed materials were the same for both genders, the progress in girls' language development was comparatively slow. Taking the listening part into consideration we can observe that boys made few errors compared to girls. However, when the errors were checked, I witnessed that listening questions that require more thinking, logical comprehension type of questions mostly had done correctly by girls. During the classes girls tried to learn all type of frequently used words with their usage and synonyms. In my opinion, for this reason the females' progress had significantly improved by the end of the course. We can see this in writing part as well. Despite the girls' slow progress, they managed to examine as many as new vocabularies and their usage. Learning new vocabularies with their spelling and true meaning immensely helped the girls in their better performances in all skills. All in all, although girls progressed slowly, they learned all skill development materials thoroughly that can be seen at the end of the course.

CONCLUSION

From the given research and results, it is obvious that females are more likely to learn foreign languages more frequently than men. As demonstrated through various studies, women have propensity to be more active language learners from their very young ages. Interestingly, we did observe that men and women learn languages for various goals. Maybe, this can be a main reason why learning languages are sometimes gendered. Once girls are superior over men in

learning languages, should men stop learn languages? Absolutely not, yet ESL teachers ought to consider various learning styles of men. According to the researchers that we looked at some of their findings above such as Bitan, Booth, & Burman (2008), it is effective for male learners to learn through using their senses. In that case, teachers are better to use as much activities as possible that include visual aids and auditory tasks o as to give greater chance to male learners to learn languages effectively (Coskun, 2014). When it comes to exams, the findings show that oral examinations are good for boys as they do not cope with writing tests or some activities related to writing on a piece of paper. However, what about females learning styles? How it can be found the balance between boys and girls learning styles at educational workplaces? Actually, females do not need any special or unordinary teaching styles compared to males, they can successfully adopt any method and style and be successful learners in any method.

According to the findings we can ay that there should be some changes in education system. For this, teachers should take their students' needs, gender into consideration and ought to make their syllabus to be effective for both genders in their classes.

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