

The Differences of Individual Learners in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Second language acquisition is believed to be affected by many factors such as external factors including communicative environment factors, comprehensive inputs, etc.; moreover, inside-learner factors or individual learner differences such as the physiology, namely, aptitude, age of onset, gender, emotion, or motivation of learning, and strategies adopted also contribute significantly to the process of learning. This literature review is predominantly to investigate individual differences towards second language acquisition and the relationship and correlation of the factors.

Keywords: age, gender gap, individual differences, motivation, second language acquisition, strategies

Background of the study

Individuals are the same, but simultaneously, people are species of mankind and share features in common; however, no one is exactly similar to anyone else. This results in how differently everyone has access to something, namely language acquisition. It is clear that the age-related factor is no longer an unfamiliar term in second language acquisition. Children spend a sensitive period from birth to puberty for exposure to languages, and their left brain hemisphere is steadily specialized for language (Lenneberg, 1967, as cited in Finn, 2010). Therefore, creating motivation for the youngster to acquire or learn the second language, or even adult learners, is an essential demand. Any success must be based on the high efforts that are put into, positive attitude, and extreme desire. People usually call these psychological comprises motivation (Pourhosein Gilakjani, Leong, and Saburi, 2012, as cited in Alizadeh, 2016). Motivation plays a role as a torch and leads the learners to the destination. Without it, people will face many difficulties (Alizadeh, 2016). Motivation performing in the gender gap is also a disputatious issue; however, Muhammad and Ghani (2013) claimed that gender does not matter between males and females in their motivative and desirable forces to learn a new language. Besides, the relationship and correlation of those matters will be discussed and investigated.

Researches have been conducted on the factors comprising the dissimilarities and how they have impacts on the language learning/acquiring process. This work is considered as a literature review of twenty previous studies to take into account factors of individual learner's differences such as age, gender, personality, strategies, as well as motivation, and by this, this article examines what extent and how they affect the process of language acquisition to give a closer look on this issue.

Age of Onset

Hammad (2016) conducted a study to examine whether young learners can learn the second language better at earlier ages and have native-like speaking skills to investigate if older ones are more suitable for learning grammar and syntax. The writer employed a qualitative method that the researcher analyzed the data collected from the speaking and writing samples of an eight-year-old girl from the Maldives. She studied at a usual primary school and had access to English at two; later, he compared to observe the outcome and improvement of the language skills she made. As a result, the research can not answer the question it is better to learn a second language at an earlier or later age; notwithstanding, with the data collected and how it demonstrates, it can be assumed that earlier beginning of learning a second language brings many benefits to speaking skills, especially the sound patterns and native-like accent. No less important, the result provided evidence to prove later age gain such knowledge as grammar, syntax, styles, vocabulary, etc., better.

This research was to examine the theoretical framework of researchers about the age factor in second language learning. The result showed that adult L2 learners have no chance to gain native-like ultimate attainment. Additionally, fewer young L2 learners achieve it than the number in the initial assumptions. Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009) carried out a large-scale study of Spanish/Swedish bilinguals within two years. They selected 195 participants, including 132 females and 63 males, from 1 to 47 years old, with Spanish as the native language and ten native Swedish speakers as judges; all of them must meet certain criteria. They made three advertisements for the detailed age group respectively 19 years old and older only (but it had been biased to very young children, they had to change two later times), older than seven only, and above ten only, on a daily newspaper, took samples from a 15-minute interviewing call, then figured and analyzed.

Wang (1991) investigated how differently younger and older adult learners acquired the second language. The author recruited 30 voluntary immigrant women who speak Mandarin and learn English in the Canadian context; these participants lived in Canada for at least six months and at most sixty-six months. Then, he divided them into two groups called the earlier age of arrival (AOA) group (from 25 to 35 years old) and the later AOA group (between 40 and 55 years old) and asked them to take part in an individual interview. They needed to answer three lists of questions with regard to experiences with English, thoughts about oral skills improvement, and ideas if age affects L2 acquisition. He next recorded the interview, collected, and analyzed the data to draw a conclusion that younger adults could learn a second language better than the older ones. However, this result must be confirmed by some more experiments or interviews with other groups such as the male group of varied ages.

Motivation

Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

Carrió-Pastor and Mestre (2013) conducted a study to explore the correlation of motivational formation. Two questionnaires of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation were created to collect data from participants. He selected two groups of freshmen in Universitat Politècnica de València, twenty majoring in Electrical Engineering (Group A) and twenty in Geometrics and Topography (Group B) for qualitative research on motivation. English was taught in connection with the engineering handbook as well as the controlled tasks were given for group A; simultaneously, Group B was with general English. Various resources were provided, and more free tasks were asked to be finished. At the end of the term, these two groups filled in the questionnaires, and the data was collected to analyze and examine. The results showed that Group A was more likely to relate to instrumental motivation. They would

like to develop English for their profession in the future; conversely, Group B is integrative motivation and merely tended to learn a foreign language.

To investigate the extent of the motivation of the Filipino foreign language learners, Gonzales (2011) chose 150 students who studied foreign language from three universities from Metro Manila to fill two questionnaires anonymously. The first one created by him in 2000 to measure the degree whether they agree or disagree by using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with six motivational orientations in learning the L2, including an ambition for career and academic development, the need for turning out global citizen, the ability for communicating with foreigners, desire for satisfying themselves, improving self-confidence, and integration with multi-culture. The second one is about some information about the learners and the language they were learning. The data were analyzed by a statistical software called SPSS. The result showed that the participant mostly learned a foreign language mainly for their career opportunity, followed by communication and integration with the target culture. What is more, female learners would like to know the second language for communication and self-efficacy more than males; while the oldest learners (20 years old and above) prefer satisfying themselves, the younger would like to become global citizens by learning a second language.

Thirty freshmen from Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology of Thammasat University were requested to fill in a 20-item questionnaire based on the Likert Scale format of Gardner's Attitude and Prapphal's Attitudes Testing as well as open-ended questions about the difficulty they had when learning English. Wimolmas (2013) collected and analyzed the data by SPSS program to examine the extent and kind of English language learning motivation of the student in the second semester, 2012. The result showed that instrumental motivations dominated more slightly than integrative motivations. The students thought that writing skills were the most difficult skills to improve, respectively speaking, reading, and listening. In addition, he recommended the survey should be participated by various students from different years and majors for more reliability and validity.

Gonzales and Lopez (2015) carried out a study to recheck if the questionnaire of foreign language teaching motivation (Gonzales, 2006) reliable and valid and measured the different types of motivation of students learning a foreign language. The foundation was still FLLMQ, but in this study, there were 40 items used and more deeply analyzed in the revised FLLMQ. They took 640 college students from universities who, at least, had learned English for one semester as participants (160 students from each foreign language class including Mandarin, Nihongo, French, and Spanish. Measurement models GFI, AGFI, NFI, NNFI, CFI, and RMSEA were used to collect the data, and SPSS version 20 and Statistica analyzed them. The result showed that the reliability and validity of the new version of Gonzales's FLLTM are high, and the motivation and proficient skills must go together to learn the language successfully.

Cocca et al. (2017) carried out a study to measure the motivation level of students of the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL) in Mexico as well as to examine the validity of the attitude/motivation test battery (AMTB), which is the Mexican version. Two hundred forty-two students, including 191 males and 51 females at the Faculty of Sports Organization, were successfully administered to respond to a questionnaire. It consists of 43 items (initially 56 items) towards nine aspects of attitude and motivation such as interest towards foreign languages, the intensity of motivation, evaluation of English teaching, attitude towards learning English, attitude towards native English-speakers, integrative orientation, the will to learn English, assessment of the English course, and Instrumental orientation. The

results indicated that after the modification, the AMTB is better and more suitable than the original one.

Gender and Relations/Correlations

To inspect the gender gap in second language acquisition amongst English learners of Latin people to create a better and more suitable ESL curriculum, Peters (2019) designed a digital survey that included both short-answer questions and multiple-choice formats for more reliable and various data. Fifty participants from Mexico (50%), Colombia (14%), Venezuela (14%), Guatemala (10%), and the rest (12%), from 19 to 76 years old, identified their gender as female (44%), male (28%), and 28% preferred not to reveal. They answered the survey, and the result showed a surprising difference from some previous researches. According to the result, respectively, 92% and 94% of the survey takers stated that gender did not influence their education and English learning process. Additionally, they showed interest in learning pronunciation, grammar, and daily vocabulary.

The research that focused on students' motivation and demotivation at the University of Applied Science when they learn English was conducted by Krčelić (2017). The purpose of this paper is to investigate if gender makes different motivation and demotivation for learning English and to show how if it has an effect on them. Sixty-two freshmen majoring in business economics and finance, office management, and cultural management were involved as participants, including 39 females and 23 males. All of them had at least three years of studying English and the average years of learning English is 12 years and one month. A two-part questionnaire was administered to the participants. The first part was used to collect demographic information, and the second one was the 5-point Likert-Scales and included 20 items (comprising nine motivational and 11 demotivational items). Google tools created them, and the participants voluntarily enrolled anonymously. The result showed that the most important thing that has an impact on motivation is that students think English can help with future education and jobs. Besides, teachers are the main reason for demotivation because they give a lack of support, and females were significantly different towards motivation and demotivation.

Reyes (2018) did research to check and evaluate how psychological personality factors affect English as a second language acquisition in elementary students. All of the 4th grade, the 5th grade, and the 6th-grade students of a public primary school in Bonao and Las Palmas Elementary School, Dominican Republic, are the participants because English is a compulsory subject there. The study used the observation method, which was obtained through a questionnaire focused on demographic information of students such as institution, grade, sex, and origin; and also three aspects including 16 items such as motivation of students (item 1-3), academic performance which was monthly evaluation (item 4), and characteristics traits which included shyness, extroversion, authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, Machiavellianism, anomia, record, eagerness for participation, empathy, cultural permeability, tolerance for ambiguous situations, state of anxiety (item 5-16). Quite like Likert-Scale, each item has got four degrees to choose from. The result showed that personality factors indirectly influence second language acquisition, especially the aspects of patience in work, authoritarianism, and low state of nervousness. Specifically, the 5th-grade students had a double authoritarian and anxious degree in comparison with grade four.

This article demonstrated how the difference in gender affects the second language learning process conducted by Catalán (2003). Two main questions that are likely to be answered in the study were the number of strategies and the range of strategies to learn vocabulary by male and female students. A questionnaire was administered to 279 males and 302 females who speak Spanish and learn Basque and English as their second languages. Four

hundred fifty of them were studying English in elementary, primary school, and university. The rest were adults and studying Basque in courses by the government. The questionnaire included personal information as gender, age, level, and mother tongue; and a checklist of 60 strategies to tick classified by determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. The results after data analysis inferred that both the number and range of learning strategies were significantly different between female and male students; specifically, the females applied more strategies than the males and the males with a larger range.

Coskun (2014) did research to examine the degree of motivation between boys and girls in two famous private single-sex schools in Albania (one is all-boy and one is all-girl), which asked for anonymity to obtain reliable outcomes. Two hundred thirty-five students who did not major in English were asked to do a 31-item survey questionnaire. Motivation Scale (MS) and SPSS were used to collect and generate data. The result indicated that female students were more motivated to learn English better than the male in a certain environment. However, he admitted that the limitation occurred to his research on account of the shortage of participants and the variety of schools. Furthermore, he suggested that single-gender schools are good for forming motivation for learners, and there should be a special curriculum created for such schools.

Ansyari and Rahmi (2016) conducted a piece of research to figure out the different language learning strategies with reference to the gender of grade ten students at State Senior High School 12 Pekanbaru in Indonesia. 90 girls and 90 boys were randomly chosen from classes (9 female and nine male students from each class) to complete Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning questionnaire, including some strategies such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. The data, later, were collected and generated by the Independent Sample T-test formula on SPSS version 17. The result presented that the participants mainly performed metacognitive strategies, and there were no considerable different strategies from boys to girls, and these results are pretty different from some previous research.

A study on how gender has an impact on foreign language speaking anxiety and motivation was carried out by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2012). 383 Turkey pre-intermediate students of Afyon Kocatepe University English preparatory program, during the 2010-2011 semester, were selected (158 boys and 225 girls) to be administered two questionnaires. Besides, 19 students were chosen to be interviewed (9 male and 10 female). The Motivation & Attitude Questionnaire (MAQ) including 30 items (21 integrative and 9 instrumental) and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire (FLSAQ) based on FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale), were used to collect data about motivation; for the interview, the participants have to answer three questions by telling (1) the reasons they want to learn English (2) the way they can measure their extent of motivation for learning English and (3) if they think speaking English is an obstacle in learning. All the answers and data were collected, analyzed, and transcribed by the researchers. The result showed that the girls had more motivation to learn English than the boys' by degree. However, the girls also were the ones who were more anxious than their counterparts.

Gargalianou et al. (2015) researched how characteristics and sex impact foreign language anxiety among mature multilingual people who have Dutch as their first language and English as their second one. A Dutch university created a web-based survey and requested 320 bilingual adults enrolling in a business program course with an average age of 18,8 to participate (106 females and 214 males). An online questionnaire was used to obtain the learners' personal information such as age, gender, major, etc., and to what extent they get anxious when using the foreign language. All the information was kept confidential. The result

indicated that gender does not really affect the process of foreign language acquisition. Besides, the ones with high emotion and conscientiousness perform better in learning a foreign language, especially for women.

The study was conducted by Nikitina and Furuoka (2007) to examine the belief about the language learning process from male and female learners' perspectives. The participants were 107 Russian learners at University Malaysia (the academic year 2005/2006), including 65 female and 42 male students. The majority of them are Chinese and Malay, which are also their mother tongues; besides, Indian, Kadazan, and others. Forty-one students could speak three, twenty-three students could speak four, and 15 students could speak five dialects or languages. They were administered a questionnaire including 34 statements following five themes of language learning (aptitude, difficulty, motivation and expectations, strategies, and the nature of language), and it employed a five-point Likert-Scale. The result inferred that women learn languages better than men; moreover, the men claimed that those who are good at mathematics and science have trouble being good language learners.

This study was predominantly conducted by Bernat and Lloyd (2007) to examine 155 females and 107 males who were taking courses of English in an Academic English Program. They were requested to respond to a 34-item survey from Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) about five areas of English language learning as foreign language aptitude, the obstacles of language learning, the natural factors of language learning, communicative and learning strategies, and motivations and desirable outcome. The data was collected and analyzed by SPSS version 14.0. Moreover, the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was implemented to investigate the relationship between beliefs about language learning and sex. The results demonstrated that, generally, male and female students had got the same beliefs about language learning. Only one item was statistically significant, and another one was with lateral signification. These results were quite different from some previous studies carried out in the U.S.A.

The research carried out by Radwan (2011) mainly focused on examining the relationship between the use of language learning strategies (LLS) and sex difference and measuring English proficiency by using three norms as students' grade point average (GPA) in English courses, time of studying in the English Department, and students' self-rating awareness. A questionnaire was given to 147 students from regular classes who major in English at Sultan Qaboos University, but only 128 students finished and sent it back. The participants were freshmen (30), sophomores (21), juniors (39), and seniors (38) consisting of 39 males and 89 females and aging from 18 to 23; what's more, all of them had got at least eight years of learning English as a foreign language before university. Oxford's SILL version 7.0 was used to administer 50 statements as a questionnaire to students with the five-point Likert-type scale following six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Results of analysis of variance inferred that, firstly, the students preferred metacognitive strategies to others, and memory strategies were the least favorable. In addition, male students are prone to social strategies than females, and better performed students applied more cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies than the less proficient. Finally, first-year students used more strategies than juniors, seniors, and sophomores, respectively.

This research was conducted by Viriya and Sapsirin (2014) to investigate how different sex affects language learners' styles and strategies. The perceptual learning-style preference questionnaire (PLSPQ) and version 7.0 of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford were applied to examine the learning strategy preferences of 150 first-year students at the faculty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) of a university in

Thailand. The authors administered a 50-item questionnaire followed by the five-point Likert-type scale to collect the data. The results indicate that gender, for tactile, does affect language learning style, and for individuals, females favor the minor learning style, whereas male students prefer the major one. However, there is no evidence for the consideration that gender differences affect their language learning strategies.

Conclusion and implications

There are many viewpoints about the array of factors such as age, motivation, and gender gap of individual differences and their effects on second language learners. After studies on this subject, controversial results and findings are usually given out and lead to other conflicting studies to reexamine and criticize. However, these articles above partly help us with the knowledge and awareness of the effect of individual differences on second language acquisition. Teachers can reflect and contemplate to understand more about the students to implement and weigh up more carefully what and how to do better. Therefore, this issue demands more effort and discussion to work out in the future.

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