

# Gender Difference in Medical Students' English Performance

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## Abstract

This study is an updated version of medical students' gender difference in English performance by comparing 2010 students' English grades and the TOEIC scores to those of Lee's (2008) study. A total of 41 subjects (15 females, 26 males) at E. University were examined. The English awards were given to the students with excellent presentation, active class performance, and coherent writing. The questionnaires were administered to learn their opinion on the awards and to determine the awards better motivated them. The results confirmed that the female students' English grades and the TOEIC scores were higher than those of the male students. They were also better motivated to perform well to get the awards in English class and showed better performance in both English grades and the TOEIC scores.

## Keywords

gender differences, English competence, English grades, TOEIC scores

## 1 Introduction

Women are often regarded as better learners in language studies. Some people claim this gender difference may be attributed to the fact that male students are not as focused as female students.

Numerous studies have been done on the topic of gender difference. Some researchers like Blair (2000), Ehrman & Oxford (1989), Kobayashi (2002), Lakoff (1975), and Oxford (1993) showed the differences in general social behavior, verbal ability, use of language, and language learning behaviors. Also Davis & Skilton-Sylvester (2004), Skehan (1989), and Sunderland (2000) did studies on gender differences in second language acquisition. In the studies of Coates (1986) and Eckert (1989), gender is the term used to describe socially constructed categories based on sex.

Differences between the way males and females speak have been noted in studies of McKay (2005), Tannen (1996, 1990), Holmes (1991, 1989), Nilsen et al., (1977), and Lakoff (1975). The gender variable has

especially been attended as independent by Oxford & Shearin (1994) and Skehan (1989) in second language acquisition.

This study is aimed at examining whether there is any gender difference in medical students' English performance by analyzing their English grades and TOEIC scores. It was further to see if the awards in English class motivated male and female students differently.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Regarding Motivation

Motivation is a highly affective variable for any kind of learning, and it plays a key role in second language learning. The subject of motivation, especially in the field of second language acquisition, has generated plenty of attention (see Dornyei, 2005, 2001a, 2001b, 1998; Dornyei & Schmidt, 2001; Spolsky, 2000; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). A historically significant and one of the best-known study on motivation in SLA was done by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and motivation was examined as a factor of a number of different kinds of attitudes. Two different clusters of attitudes divided two basic types of what Gardner and Lambert identified as instrumental and integrative orientations to motivation. Ehrman and Oxford (1989) have challenged the common belief that females tend to reach a higher level of L2 proficiency because they have a greater aspiration for social approval. Their findings showed that a majority of males signed up for foreign language classes because they believe them to be useful (instrumental motivation), whereas female students were more likely to register for foreign language classes because they were interested in the target language culture and planned to travel and live in the target language country, meaning more closely related to integrative motivation.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Spolsky (1969)

found that integrativeness generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency tests in a foreign language. However, Lukmani (1972) demonstrated in the study of Marathi-speaking Indian students learning English in India that those with instrumental orientations scored higher in tests of English proficiency. On the other hand, Warden and Lin (2000) found no support for an integrative orientation among university English majors in Taiwan. Also, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) demonstrated that integrativeness was not as significant a factor as motivational intensity. With such different studies, Brown (2007) concluded that both integrative and instrumental orientations may be important factors accounting for successful language learning, and that the degree of impact of either orientation will depend on individual learners, educational contexts, cultural milieu, teaching methodology, and social interaction (p. 172).

## 2.2 Regarding Attitude

Like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, attitudes develop early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, of contact with people who are "different" in any number of ways, and of interacting, affective factors in the human experience. The effect of attitudes on language learning was examined in Gardner and Lambert's (1972) studies. Some studies were done on the relationship between attitudes and language success such as Oller, Hudson, & Liu (1977), Chihara & Oller (1978), and Oller, Baca, & Vigil (1978). These researchers examined the relationship between Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican students' achievement in English and their attitudes toward self, the native language group, the target language group, their reasons for learning English, and their reasons for traveling to the U.S. They identified a few meaningful clusters of attitudinal variables that correlated positively with attained proficiency.

According to the additional study conducted by Sim (2007) with a purpose of determining the factors that affect motivation and attitude and of determining gender-biased factors, boys were found to have more negative attitude towards learning English with a tendency of being more independent and solitary while girls were far more positive in their motivation and attitude with more social and interactive orientation.

Brown (2007) states that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and, in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency.

## 3 Method

During the fall semester of 2010, 41 fresh-year medical students (M1), registered for a 3-credit-hour course that met twice a week for 15 weeks, were examined for both English grades and the TOIEC scores.

The M1 students were required to take the TOIEC during the second semester in 2010, preferably in November, as a self-check measure as submission of the results was a requirement by the end of the second year.

The English awards were given to those who performed well in class presentation, wrote coherent writing, and participated actively in class discussion and/or activity. The results of the awardees and non-awardees along with female and male students were also compared to see if the awardees were better motivated and if there was any gender difference in their performance in English.

## 4 Results

The ratio of the male and female students was 37% females and 63% males. The mean TOEIC scores of M1 females were much higher (874) than those of the males (808). The mean scores of female awardees were 926 whereas male awardees 864 showing that both-gender awardees performed better. The same results applied to the English grades revealing the mean scores of 97.6 female awardees and 87.2 male awardees. These scores were much higher than the overall mean scores.

Apparently, the female awardees were better motivated according to the response of the subjects, showing 46% males and 80% females replied they were better motivated.

These results confirmed that female students' English grades were higher than those of the males revealing the similar results in 2008 study. The only discrepancy was the female students' TOEIC scores. They seemed to be indifferent in the 2008 study; however, in the current study, they showed much higher mean scores of 926 for female awardees than the overall female mean scores of 874 and overall

male mean scores of 808.

## 5 Conclusion

The gender difference has drawn many researchers concerning individual variables, such as intelligence, language learning behaviors, personality and cognition. Gender differences arise from numerous causes. Socialization for one appears to play an important role and brain hemisphericity has certain influence on human behaviors. Cognitive differences between males and females may not exclusively from inherently natural and static neurolinguistic preferential network. The socialization process may play a much stronger role in shaping cognition. According to Kubota (2003), the ways men and women learn and use a language are not determined by their gender but they are constructed, negotiated, and transformed through social practices which are informed by particular social settings, relations of power, and discourses.

It was found in Lambert (1972) and Spolsky's (1969) study that integrativeness generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency tests in a foreign language whereas in Masgoret and Garner's (2003) study, integrativeness was not as a significant a factor as motivational intensity. These studies can be concluded that both integrative and instrumental orientations may be important factors accounting for successful language learning and that the degree of importance of either orientation depends on individual learners. Female medical students seemed to be better motivated in both orientations and this phenomenon helps them better focus on learning English.

Studies of the researchers of Gender-Specific Medicine revealed that women's memories have been shown to be superior to men's in a couple of areas because of a higher rate of blood flow to certain part of the brain including those that control language as well as higher concentrations of estrogen. This revelation also explains the gender difference in medical students' English competence.

Through the interview, female students expressed they needed to strive even harder than male students to survive and be accepted in the medical field, once dominated by males although it is gradually changing.

The study is limited in the scope since it was done at only one medical school with a rather small subject of 90 students. Therefore, generalizing all the

females at the medical schools are superior would not be appropriate. A larger sample size study would generate a more general conclusion.

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