

Gender Differences in the Integrative Motivation of Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract: Females are known to be more motivated than males in learning a foreign language. In this paper, we investigated gender differences in the motivation of foreign language learning. By focusing on the integrative motivation of foreign language learning as measured using the adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), the results showed that there was no gender difference on the overall construct of integrative motivation in English language learning among 76 English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). However, gender differences were observed in the sub-constructs of integrativeness and motivation. The t-test results characterize the nature of gender in predicting levels of integrative motivation in a South East Asian EFL context. The findings contribute to understanding the construction of integrative motivation in EFL learning which is gender- and culturally-specific.

Keyword: Gender; Integrative Motivation; Foreign Language Learning; Lao People's Democratic Republic

INTRODUCTION

It is generally perceived that females are more motivated to learn a second language or a foreign language than males (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Kissau, 2008; Kissau & Salas, 2013; Kobayashi, 2002). In this paper, the abbreviation 'L2' is used interchangeably to refer to the learning of a second language or a foreign language. The most common explanation put forward to illustrate gender differences in L2 motivation is the fact that L2 study is considered as a feminized academic choice (Kobayashi, 2002) which would ultimately lead to a soft career option such as teaching or editorial professions which are considered as less lucrative than careers in engineering or law (Carr & Pauwels, 2006). Besides that, foreign language learning is considered to be a social-oriented type of learning activity, such as conversational practice or performing speaking activity in a group, which better suits the learning style preference of female rather than male students (Kissau, 2007, 2008).

As an extension, gender differences in L2 motivation are often interpreted as differences along the continuum of integrative-instrumental motivational distinctions. Researchers such as Baker and MacIntyre (2000) found that male students had higher instrumental motivation in L2 learning, while female students had higher integrative motivation. This means that male students were more likely to study L2 for practical reasons, such as to fulfill university or job entry requirements (Kissau, 2008; Polat, 2011), as compared to female students who were studying a second language due to their interests to understand and communicate with people from the L2 community (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Kissau & Salas, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to investigate gender differences in the integrative motivation of foreign language learning in a traditional collectivist's society as represented by the local community in the Lao PDR.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender disparities in instrumental versus integrative motivation of L2 learning could be related to gender differences in self-construal. When discussing the impacts of gender-oriented self-construal in L2 learning, Henry and Cliffordson (2013) cited the typology of self-construal proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) – independent vs interdependent self-construal. Independent self-construal stems from one's inherent separateness from others, while interdependent self-construal is linked with being related to others and being embedded in a larger social whole (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, as cited in Henry & Cliffordson, 2013). In relation to this, females were found to have stronger interdependent self-construal which prompts them to emphasize interdependence and to appreciate being connected with the broader community (Peker et al., 2018).

Integrative and Instrumental Motivation of Foreign Language Learning

Gender differences in L2 motivation are closely linked to their integrative and instrumental motivational distinctions. Broadly speaking, integrative motivation is considered as a self-oriented motivation. The driving force of learning in integrative motivation is related to affective reasons, such as learning for pleasure or self-satisfaction. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is more related to pragmatic reasons of L2 learning such as learning for education or job attainment (Dornyei, 1998). Pertaining to this, Gardner (2007) argued that integrative motivation is more integral to the context of language learning as it involves the self-identification of the learners to the target language and its associated culture, while instrumental motivation is merely an extension of motivation toward classroom learning, which reflects the learners' perceptions of the learning tasks at hand (Gardner, 2007; p.11).

In line with this view, Integrative Motivation (IM) was the focus of this study because it is considered as a more language- and culturally-specific attribute of L2 motivation as compared to instrumental motivation, whose effects can be generalized across different languages (Bernaus, Masgoret, Gardner, & Reyes, 2004) or across different types of learning tasks (Gardner, 2007). In general, the construct of integrative motivation covers four sub-constructs of individual differences described by Gardner (2001, 2009) namely integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation and language anxiety. Gardner (2009) considered an integratively motivated L2 learner as someone who (1) is motivated to learn the language, (2) exhibits openness to other cultural communities (integrativeness), (3) has favorable attitudes toward the learning situation, and (4) reflects low levels of language anxiety. Given this interpretation, he introduced a formula to compute the aggregated score of integrative motivation, $IM = INT$ (integrativeness) + ALS (attitudes toward learning situation) + MOT (motivation) – ANX (language anxiety) (Gardner, 2009).

The first sub-construct of integrative motivation, i.e., integrativeness, was originally defined as a genuine interest in learning a foreign language which is reflected in the emotional and cultural identification with the foreign language community (Gardner, 2009; Zhang et al., 2020). This notion of integrativeness has been widely criticized following globalization and the emergence of World Englishes, where English is no more a symbolic representation of the Anglo community, but it is currently being established as the world's lingua franca (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021; Lamb, 2004; Noels et al., 2000; Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018). In his later researches, Gardner (2007) used the term 'openness' or 'openness to cultural identification' to define the broader sense of integrativeness, in which integrativeness is considered as reflecting attributes that can be linked to the cultural context of language (p.15). In other words, in the context of EFL learning, integrativeness can be considered as openness to the culture of English speakers, rather than the narrower sense of identification with the native English-speaking Anglo community only.

The second sub-construct of integrative motivation is the learner's attitudes toward the learning situation, including attitudes directed toward the teacher, the course, the classmates, the course materials and the activities (Gardner, 2001). The third sub-construct, motivation, refers to the driving force in learning, which includes the effort, desire and positive affect that are necessary for persistent and consistent learning (Gardner, 2001). In other words, motivation includes motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and attitude toward learning the language (Gardner, 2009).

Gender Differences in Integrative Motivation

As previously mentioned, past researchers had documented that female foreign language learners were associated with stronger integrative motivation in foreign language learning, while male foreign language learners were associated with stronger instrumental motivation instead (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000). In this paper, we sought to explore whether gender differences are traceable within the construct of integrative motivation itself. We hypothesized that there is a strong likelihood that gender differences are expected for integrative motivation of foreign language learning considering that integrative motivation is fundamentally an affective motivational construct, which the affective attitudinal aspect of this construct would naturally favor the female group of learners. However, we also realize that integrative motivation as defined

by Gardner (2009) is composed of four different sub-constructs, i.e., integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation and language anxiety as outlined above. Correspondingly, it is possible that the gender effects are not as straightforward as what we would have predicted. Therefore, in the cultural context of a collectivist's society, we sought to investigate gender differences in the construction of integrative motivation among the tertiary EFL learners in the Lao PDR.

METHODS

A survey using the adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 2004) was administered to a sample of English-major undergraduates in a university in the northern state of the Lao PDR. Firstly, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the university administration. Then, the first author obtained permission from the language instructors to administer the pen-and-paper survey with the undergraduates during their English language classes. The undergraduates were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The survey was completed in about 40 minutes in all classes.

Respondents

A total of 76 undergraduates participated in the survey, which represented 85.4% of the students registered in the English-major program (N=85) during the time of the study (refer to Table 1). The respondents were from three different years of study: 37 students from Year 2, 21 students from Year 3 and 18 students from Year 4. The respondents were represented by 68.4% males (n=52) and 31.6% females (n=24). The large majority of the respondents only started to learn English in secondary school (92.3% male, 95.5% female). While in the university, most of them were studying English for more than 6 hours per week (96.2% male, 91.7% female). None of their parents were proficient in English. More male (19.2%) than female (4.2%) respondents reportedly had received support from their parents to learn English, though the difference was not statistically significant.

Research design

This was a qualitative research design with focus group discussion (FGD) using semi-structured interview protocols. It involves a systematic analysis procedure with the reference of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The IPA method consists of steps of analysis starting with (i) reading and reviewing the transcriptional text repeatedly, (ii) identifying superordinate themes, (iii) grouping the textual information according to the subordinate theme and (iv) presenting the distribution of themes in the table. Each superordinate theme is developed from the distribution's subordinate theme.

According to Kruger and Casey (2000), focus group sessions allow the participants to express opinions within the same equivalent atmosphere where it exists as participants who influence or are influenced by the topic discussed (Plummer-D'Amato, 2008). It was aligned with this research design where the equivalence factors of participant background and experiences i.e. special education teachers are counted. They are working together towards the ideal results of the AAC programme for the benefit of their students.

Participants

The participants were six teachers who worked with children with severe communication difficulties and met the following selection criteria: (a) academic qualification in Special Education and related fields, and (b) had three and more years' experience working with preschool children with communication difficulties in school. All teachers were selected from the four main districts of Perak.

Table 1.

Background information of the respondents

	Male (n=52) % (n)	Female (n=24) % (n)	Chi- Square	Sig.
Age				
18-19 years old	3.8 (2)	0		
20-21 years old	40.4 (21)	54.2 (13)	2.859	.414
22-23 years old	36.5 (19)	37.5 (9)		
More than 23 years old	19.2 (10)	8.3 (2)		
Year of study				
Year 2	48.1 (25)	50.0 (13)	.162	.922
Year 3	26.9 (14)	29.2 (9)		
Year 4	25.0 (13)	20.8 (2)		
Initial exposure to English				
Before kindergarten	1.9 (1)	0		
In primary school	3.8 (2)	4.2 (1)	6.462	.167
In secondary school	73.1 (38)	50.0 (1)		
In university	19.2 (10)	45.8 (22)		
Duration of studying English per week				
2-4 hours	1.9 (1)	4.2 (1)	.663	.718
5-6 hours	1.9 (1)	4.2 (1)		
More than 6 hours	96.2 (50)	91.7 (22)		

Instrument

The adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 2004) was used in the current investigation. The original version of the AMTB (English version) consisted of 104 items which covered 12 scale points. Likert scale: 1 for Strongly disagree, 2 for moderately disagree, 3 for slightly disagree, 4 for slightly agree, 5 for moderately agree and 6 for strongly agree. In the current investigation, it was replaced by a 4-point Likert scale: 1 for Strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree and 4 for strongly agree to ease interpretation. The first author translated the AMTB (English version) into a bilingual Lao-English version. The bilingual questionnaire was checked by two language instructors in the university who were proficient in both English and the Lao language. Discrepancies in the translation were discussed and resolved.

In the current investigation, the data analysis only included 10 out of the 12 scales mentioned above. Table 2 outlined the scales included in the data analysis. The first nine scales in the table contribute to the model of integrative motivation proposed by Gardner (2009), $IM=INT+ALS+MOT-ANX$, while the last scale was the mediating variable investigated in the current study, namely parental encouragement. The scales of interest in foreign languages (10 items) and instrumental orientation (4 items) in the original AMTB (Gardner, 2004) were not included in the current analysis. All the negative statements were reservedly coded prior to analysis.

Table 2.**Ten scales in the adapted AMTB included in the analysis**

Integrativeness, INT
Scale 1: Integrative orientation (4 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., Studying English is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak English.</i>
Scale 2: Attitudes toward English-speaking people (8 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends.</i>
Attitudes toward the learning situation, ALS
Scale 3: Language teacher evaluation (10 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., I look forward to going to class because my English teacher is so good.</i>
Scale 4: Language course evaluation (10 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., I would rather spend more time in my English class and less in other classes.</i>
Motivation, MOT
Scale 5: Motivational intensity (10 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., I make a point of trying to understand all the English I see and I hear.</i>
Scale 6: Desire to learn English (10 items)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>e.g., I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.</i>
Scale 7: Attitudes toward learning English (10 items)

- *e.g., Learning English is really great.*

Language anxiety, ANX

Scale 8: English class anxiety (10 items)

- *e.g., I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.*

Scale 9: English use anxiety (10 items)

- *e.g., I would get nervous if I had to speak English to a tourist.*

Parental encouragement

Scale 10: Parental encouragement (8 items)

- *e.g., My parents try to help me to learn English.*

Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis and t-test analysis were performed to examine the gender difference in integrative motivation measured, using SPSS version 27.0.

FINDINGS

Gender Differences in Integrative Motivation

Table 3 illustrates the comparison of the mean scores for the constructs and scales in the AMTB. For descriptive comparison, the female respondents (IM Mean = 7.80) had a higher aggregate score for integrative motivation than the male respondents (IM Mean = 7.51). However, the differences were not statistically significant. For the four constructs of IM (i.e., INT, ALS, MOT, ANX), the female respondents reported significantly higher integrativeness ($p < .01$) and motivation ($p < .05$) as compared to the male respondents (refer to Table 2). Specifically, their mean differences were noted in the scales of integrative orientation ($p < .05$), attitude toward English people ($p < .05$), desire to learn English ($p < .01$), and attitudes toward learning English ($p < .05$).

Table 3.

Gender Differences in the AMTB Mean Scores (n=76)

Constructs and Scales	Mean _{Male} (SD)	Mean _{Female} (SD)	t	Sig.
Integrativeness, INT	3.51 (.282)	3.69 (.170)	-3.437	.001**
Integrative orientation	3.71 (.341)	3.89 (.188)	-3.017	.004*

Attitude toward the English-speaking people	3.92 (.317)	3.49 (.303)	-2.267	.026*
Attitudes toward the learning situation, ALS	3.02 (.321)	3.06 (.224)	-.608	.545
Language teacher evaluation	2.78 (.375)	2.75 (.293)	.329	.743
Language course evaluation	3.25 (.388)	3.38 (.301)	-1.432	.158
Motivation, MOT	3.18 (.293)	3.32 (.199)	-2.337	.023*
Motivational intensity	2.77 (.268)	2.76 (.270)	.164	.870
Desire to learn English	3.34 (.349)	3.60 (.299)	-3.099	.003**
Attitudes toward learning English	3.44 (.366)	3.60 (.255)	-2.168	.034*
Language anxiety, ANX	2.20 (.344)	2.27 (.319)	-.883	.380
Language class anxiety	2.29 (.385)	2.44 (.367)	-1.583	.118
Language use anxiety	2.11 (.378)	2.10 (.341)	.018	.986
Integrative Motivation, IM=INT+ALS+MOT-ANX	7.51 (.954)	7.80 (.682)	-1.311	.194

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate gender differences in the integrative motivation of foreign language learning in a traditional collectivist's society as represented by the local community in the Lao PDR, where gender inequality issue in education was prominent (Berge, Chounlamany, Khounphilaphanh, & Silfver, 2017; Inui, 2015; Lao PDR Ministry of Education, 2005). Since the country adopted an open-door policy in the 1990s, there have been some positive changes following the women-rights efforts introduced by international agencies (Lao PDR Ministry of Education, 2005; Lee, 2011). However, the fact that there are significantly more males than females in the university program as recorded in this investigation, and also the fact that more males than females received financial support from their parents to learn English, simply reflect the current state of the societal situation in the Lao PDR community where the patriarchal system is still prominent (Berge et al., 2017).

Under these circumstances, we explored whether or not gender differences in the integrative motivation of EFL learning did exist. If so, we wanted to know whether the differences were mediated by parental encouragement. In this study, we found that gender differences in the construction of integrative motivation did exist among the respondents. In contrast to what would be expected from their background profiles, the female respondents actually reported higher mean scores for all the constructs of integrative motivation as compared to the males. Specifically, statistically significant differences were established for the sub-constructs of integrativeness and motivation. The gender differences in the sub-construct of integrativeness could be the effects of cultural factors, while the differences in the sub-construct of motivation could be related to learning preferences.

Pertaining to the sub-construct of integrativeness, Gardner (2012) has posited that it is timely to move forward from the narrow view that integrativeness simply refers to identification with the native language community. In recent years, Gardner (2012) has advocated that integrativeness in the construction of integrative motivation refers to the broad notion of openness to culture associated with the usage of the target language. In the EFL context of this study, integrativeness would refer to the positive attitudes toward people who speak English, including the elite community members in the local society, the expatriate people who are working in the local community, and even the larger community in South East Asia. Inevitably, integrativeness involves the transition and balancing of having a local identity and a global identity, following the acquired competencies of knowing a foreign language (Lamb, 2004; Noels et al., 2000; Ushioda & Dornyei, 2009). In past research with a traditional community in Indonesia, Lamb (2004) realized that such transition is easier for females than males, who are typically associated with the responsibility of carrying a local identity of cultural inheritance.

For the sub-construct of motivation, past researchers such as Carr and Pauwells (2006), Kissau and Salas (2013), and Kobayashi (2002) had established the view that foreign language learning is a feminized academic activity that better suits the learning preferences of female students, rather than the male students. The teaching and learning of a foreign language is typically conducted in a social learning context which necessitates conversational exchanges and group learning. The feminized way of teaching and learning a foreign language explains why more female students rather than male students have stronger desire to learn a foreign language and have positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language (Kissau, 2007). The results from the motivation sub-construct that favored the female respondents in this study supported this perspective, despite the fact that there are actually more male than female students in the English-major program. The gender inequality in the enrolment was simply an extension of gender inequality in higher education in the local context of the Lao PDR (Berge et al., 2017), which did not justify the respondents' course preference. The findings from the sub-construct of motivation highlight that female respondents have a stronger motivation to learn English than the male respondents, despite inequality in educational accessibility that they faced locally (Berge et al., 2017; Inui, 2015).

The findings from this study contribute important insights to EFL teaching and learning in the Lao PDR and other traditional collectivist communities alike. To a certain extent, it is possible to draw the conclusion from the current investigation that the female EFL learners in this study had stronger integrative motivation to learn English than the male learners. The exhaustiveness of this conclusion was affected by the fact that gender differences in attitudes toward the learning situation and language anxiety, the other sub-constructs of integrative motivation, were not established. However, from the perspective that the sub-constructs of integrativeness and motivation denote the more integral notions of integrative motivation, then the projection of conclusion is sound.

If it is true as Gardner (2007) argued that integrative motivation is the strongest determinant of success in foreign language learning which would determine automaticity and ultimate proficiency that links to language identity. Then it seems possible to predict that the female EFL learners in the Lao PDR as investigated in this study would be more successful in EFL learning as compared to their male counterparts. In this era where English is becoming the lingua franca in international conferences and other intellectual domains, those with better English proficiencies would be more privileged.

In regards to this, one would ask the question whether the male undergraduates in such context would slowly lose their competitiveness in job markets as it is currently happening in some South East Asian countries, such as in Malaysia (Mellstrom, 2009).

There are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the study focused on English-major students only. Therefore, the findings might not reflect all undergraduate students in Laotian universities in large. Second, the study was conducted in the northern state of the Lao PDR, which the sociolinguistic experience of the undergraduate students might be different from others in the other geographical region of the Lao PDR. This added limitation to the generalization of the findings. Despite the limitation, the findings provided important empirical evidence for further studies to refer and compare, in relation to gender differences in the integrative motivation of EFL learning in the context of Lao PDR.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the findings from this study demonstrate gender differences in the integrative motivation of EFL learning. The findings further contribute to understanding the construction of integrative motivation in EFL learning which is gender- and culturally-specific. As a result, the exploration of the relationships between gender, parental encouragement and integrative motivation in EFL learning as attempted in this study should be continued as the findings have added to an understanding of the wider social, educational and cultural issues which are faced by local communities internationally following the emergence of World Englishes.

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