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Gender Differences in Students' Attitudes Toward English Language Learning

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Abstract. This research explores the gender-based attitudes toward English language learning of the students in a senior high school, Boda School, Dianbai District, Maoming City, in China. Convenient sampling is employed to select 31 students for this research. This study's data are gathered using an adapted questionnaire. The acquired data are then analyzed with quantitative analysis using SPSS Version 26 with the aid of descriptive statistics. And the results are intriguing and can be presented from two perspectives. Firstly, from a broad perspective, the study's findings show that there is no statistically significant difference among their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes regarding learning English. However, from a microscopic perspective, the findings demonstrate that girls have a more positive attitude compared to boys. These findings can help second language learners in adjusting their attitudes and approaching language acquisition more effectively in the future.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Attitude, Students, Language Learning, English language

1. Introduction

It is challenging to learn a second language. A positive attitude among learners is necessary to facilitate and quicken the learning process in addition to other needs like putting time and effort in creating a good conductive learning environment. In general, having a positive attitude is a powerful motivator that inspires people to carry out specific tasks [1]. Globalization motivates many people to study English today. Therefore, people throughout the world have a fundamental need to acquire English in order to fulfil their economic, political, and cultural requirements. Alternatively, English currently has the status of a lingua franca [2].

Additionally, English is one of the official languages of a large number of international organizations, including the United Nations and its various agencies. At the national level, different nations employ English in various ways. Technology advancements like the Internet have made it possible for people to connect globally, which has helped English reach its current status. Due to the current circumstances, more people are currently learning and teaching the English language as a second language than any other language in the globe [3].

As English has become a common language in the world, it's now a compulsory subject in China. Additionally, English has grown in importance on the Chinese college entrance exam. Therefore, both male and female teenagers take English lessons and learn English virtually every day during

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the three years of high school. However, male and female teenagers perform very differently in English learning process. Thus, the researcher is curious to know if gender influences English learning and what aspects of gender lead to this kind of variation.

Gender has a role in the social and cultural construction of both men and women. We refer to these differences as gender differences. Gender differences can also reveal social variations in thought, behavior, and language, such as when learning a language like English. Different areas such as commerce, academia, politics, and the arts reflect gender disparities. In the academic field, students' language attitudes reveal gender differences. One of the key elements affecting language learning performance is attitude [4]. Different behaviors can demonstrate variations in attitudes. And how students conduct their language studies can impact students' language learning [4]. For example, gender disparities affect the way students learn English and are further reflected in the outcomes. According to [5], gender differences exist in the whole process of an individual mastering a second language, including language development, acquisition, comprehension, and production.

This study intends to examine the relationship between gender and students' language attitude through a quantitative method. To be more specific, this study is to explore the gender differences in attitudes towards learning English among students in one private senior high school, Boda School, Dianbai District, Maoming City in China.

In order to fulfil the goal of this study, the following specific research questions should be carried out:

1.What are the differences in students' attitudes toward English language learning in terms of their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects?

2.How does gender affect students' attitudes toward English language learning?

Considering the specific procedures for fulfilling the study's purpose, the following objectives should be implemented:

1.To explore gender differences towards English language learning between male students and female students in terms of their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects.

2.To analyze the impact of gender on students' attitudes toward English language learning.

2. Methodology

This chapter provides a thorough explanation of the methodology that will be used in this study, including the analytical techniques that will be used, a description of the methodologies selected to collect the data, information about the participants and the research tool, and a process for analyzing the data.

Attitudes are considered complex because they have several aspects and expressions. To measure attitudes, Garrett [6] in his book "Attitudes to Language" claimed that there are three components of attitudes: cognition, affect, and behavior. Actually, Gardner developed the AMTB table to assess attitudes and motivation in 1985 to support his socio theory. And he divided attitudes into cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes in his book "Social psychology and second language learning. The role of attitudes and motivation". However, as cited and referenced by many researchers, the three components of attitude have gradually developed into behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes that appear to be verbally comprehensible. To explore the relationship between gender and attitude, the attitudes of male students and female students are analyzed respectively for each one of these three components.

In conclusion, this research uses an analytical framework adapted from the concepts from Garrett [6] and Gardner [7] to analyze the attitudes of students, as shown in Figure 1. The research focuses on two perspectives: the attitudes of all students combined and the separate attitudes of male and

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female students. Besides, we divide the attitudes into three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. We analyze each perspective's attitude based on these three components.

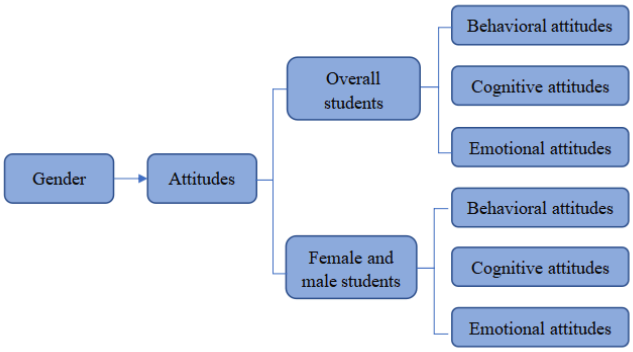


Figure 1: Research framework of gender and attitudes

2.1. Research design

This study uses a quantitative design to carry out its investigation. Therefore, an adapted questionnaire is utilized as a measurement tool. The participants in this research are expected to respond to the questions truthfully and accurately, providing their genuine perceptions of their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes towards learning the English language as well as demographic information like gender.

2.2. Participants and sampling

This research has 31 students as participants. Among them, 13 are males (41.94%) and 18 are females (58.06%) from one private senior high school. The participants are all Chinese. Therefore, Mandarin Chinese is everyone who responded to the survey's mother tongue, while English is their second language.

Besides, their ages ranged from 17 to 19, and they all attended the same class to ensure that all external factors were the same. The students in the same class share identical external setups, including the English teacher, English textbook, English course, and English test. Moreover, the students in the same class have the same level of English at the beginning, as the school's policy is to assign students with comparable English proficiency to the same class. To facilitate access to the participants and the authenticity of the answers, the researcher uses a convenience sampling method with the help of the homeroom teacher.

2.3. Instrument

This study uses a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB, 1985) [7] to investigate the students' attitudes toward learning English language according to their genders on three sub-levels: conative/behavioral, cognitive, and affective/emotional. There are a total of 30 items. Among them, 1-10 for the conative/behavioral aspect of attitude, 11-20 for the cognitive facet of attitude and 21-30 for the affective/ emotional aspect of attitude. On the whole, 12 of the 30 items are negative while 18 of them are positive. The distribution of negative and positive elements in each attitude component varies when it comes to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes. The difference would be elaborated in the discussion

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part. For the evaluation, ratings range from 1 to 5, with 5 being a strongly agree and 1 representing a strongly disagree.

Since all participants are Chinese, the version of adapted questionnaire is bilingual in English and Chinese. Moreover, the purpose of the questionnaire is explained at the outset in order to make participants understand the significance of the data and how important it will be for them to participate in this activity.

3. Result

Table 1 details the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes of male and female students toward learning the English language. In relation to this point, male students' mean scores in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes are 3.52, 3.81, and 3.84 with standard deviations of 0.93, 0.80, and 0.79 and standard errors of 0.26, 0.22, and 0.22. In addition, female students' mean scores in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional attitudes are 3.08, 3.58, and 3.70 with standard deviations of 0.59, 0.51, and 0.50 and error standard deviations of 0.14, 0.12, and 0.12. The content that follows will go over behavioral attitudes, conscious attitudes, and emotional attitudes one by one at a time.

Table 1: Group statistics for males' and females' attitudes

variables	options	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
conative/behavioral	male	13	3.52	0.93	0.26
	female	18	3.08	0.59	0.14
cognitive	male	13	3.81	0.80	0.22
	female	18	3.58	0.51	0.12
affective/emotional	male	13	3.84	0.79	0.22
	female	18	3.70	0.50	0.12

As for behavioral component of an attitude, men have a greater mean value for the behavioral aspect of attitude than women do. This indicates that men's behavioral attitudes are better than women's, and men engage in more activities like reading English-language articles, watching movies in English, and speaking with native English speakers than women do. Besides, the standard deviation of males is larger than that of females, indicating that male attitudes differ significantly from one another while those of females are more comparable. Additionally, the standard error mean for males is larger than for females, indicating that the mean value for females is more indicative of the mean value for the entire group.

Regarding the cognitive component of an attitude, the mean value of males is also higher than the number of females. This suggests that, compared to women, men have stronger beliefs in the value of studying English language, such as "learning English is vital". In addition, since males' standard deviation values are higher than those of females, it implies that males hold a variety of beliefs about English language learning, whereas females maintain a more consistent belief. Furthermore, because the standard error mean value of males is larger than that of females, females' mean value of the cognitive attitude can be more representative of the average mean value overall.

In terms of the emotional component of an attitude, the mean value of males is still larger than that of females. From this perspective, it might be said that males are found to be more optimistic than females in this respect. Besides, it is reasonable to claim that emotional attitudes are more different among males and more similar among females as a result of the higher standard deviation of males. Additionally, because the standard error mean for females is lower than that for males, it

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can be inferred that the mean value for females is more accurately indicative of the mean value for people in the same age group.

Overall, the findings indicate that the mean values of male attitudes are significantly higher than those of females in terms of the behavioral, cognitive, and affective components of attitudes. And these three facets of attitudes among males are more diverse, while among females are in a more similar way. Additionally, the mean values of all three aspects of the attitudes among females can be more representative of the mean values of the overall in behavioral, cognitive and emotional attitudes. To verify the statistical significance of the aforementioned differences, an independent sample test is run.

4. Conclusion

The ability of a learner to pick up a second language may be impacted by a number of variables. Among these variables, the attitude of the learner is crucial to the learning process. Regarding attitudes, it is an overall abstract concept which can also be divided into three aspects based on Gardner' theory for easy qualitative measuring. Moreover, learner's attitudes can be affected by different genders. Therefore, finding the correlation between gender and attitudes is the goal of this study.

According to public stereotypes, girls are always more capable of learning languages, receiving higher marks, and having better attitudes toward language acquisition than boys. However, from a broad perspective, the findings in this research prove this kind of typical stereotype is not always correct. The truth is that different genders cannot have an impact on language attitudes which include behavioral attitude, cognitive attitude and emotional attitude.

However, it is interesting to note that, from a micro perspective, attitudes between males and females continue to differ greatly. According to the aforementioned findings, the option with the biggest disparity between men and women is option 4 (agree) regarding the behavioral attitude, cognitive attitude and emotional attitude. Additionally, option 4 always has a higher proportion of female students than male students.

In addition, all these items concern option 4 when men and women differ most significantly from one another are positive items. Moreover, option 3 (neutral) is the choice with the second-largest disparity between male and female options regarding the three aspects of attitudes. All of these items are negative, and option 3 is where men and women differ the most. These findings demonstrate that female students have a positive attitude toward the positive aspects of learning the English language and a neutral attitude regarding the negative aspects. This further reveals that, in comparison to male students, female students have a more optimistic attitude regarding studying English.

Therefore, further studies need to be done to explore more factors that may affect gender differences and attitudes. If the factors are discovered, teachers can enhance their lesson plans and teaching strategies, and apply various moral teaching models for boys and girls in a focused way. As for students, they are able to recognize their own limitations, proactively reinforce and improve those areas, and become aware of the strengths of students of the other gender.

Though this study uncovers that attitudes have no impact on scores, attitudes are still crucial to mastering a second language, including English in any situation. The ability to learn something new without worries is essential to cultivate a positive mindset. Similar to this, having a good attitude toward that particular language is extremely vital and significant for efficiently English learning, or any other language. The attitudes of the learners influence whether the process and results of developing any ability are successful or not. This is also true for learning a language because it is the individual's tendency towards something that matters.

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Moreover, gender differences are ubiquitous. They are not only limited in the area of academics but also in other fields such as business, politics, arts. Even for the academic area, gender differences are not only reflected in the English language learning but also in other subjects such as mathematics. Regarding the field of mathematics, there is also a typical stereotype that boys are always superior to girls, regardless of aptitude or attitude. This impression is in sharp contrast to the prevalent perception of boys and girls in the English field. Apart from academia, more gender inequalities are represented than in any other field. Given that gender is connected to various fascinating phenomena, numerous studies may be conducted in the future to look into these topics and add to the body of knowledge regarding gender differences.

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