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Gender Difference in Medical College Students' English Competence

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This study looks into gender difference in medical college students' English competence by comparing their English grades and the TOEIC scores. A total of 90 subjects, 46 sophomore medical (M2) students of English Reading & Writing and 44 first-year students (M1) of Practical English and Advanced Conversation English in 2008 at E University were examined. The students who did excellent presentation, class performance, and coherent writing were praised with English awards. The questionnaires were administered to learn if the awards helped them participate actively and receive better grades. It was further to see if there was gender difference in the number of award winners. The results showed that female students' English grades were higher than those of male students (fM1=88.25 and 88.75, fM2=87.12; mM1=81.56 and 81.72, mM2=81.89). However, the TOEIC scores revealed different results with male sophomore students' highest mean score (fM1 TOEIC=724.55, fM2 TOEIC=793.33; mM1 TOEIC=679.00, mM2 TOEIC=827.86). Over twice as many female students were awarded (fM1=58%, fM2=59%) as males (mM1=25%, mM2=24%) in English classes. Female medical students at this particular institution showed better competence in English classes although it did not hold true with the results of the TOEIC showing sophomore females' lower scores than those of males. Both M1 and M2 female students were better motivated and performed well because of the awards in English classes.

[gender difference/English competence/English grades/TOEIC scores]

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I. INTRODUCTION

The gender difference has drawn many researchers concerning individual variables, such as intelligence, language learning behaviors, personality and cognition. Female students 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. Also a number of elementary and secondary teachers posit that male students' lack of interest in language learning and difficulty of having them concentrate on study in classroom might generate gender difference. However, such claim that female students are superior to males creates controversy since many studies show different views.

Numerous studies have been done on the topic of gender difference. Some researchers including Blair (2000), Ehrman and 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 Holmes (1991, 1989), Lakoff (1975), McKay (2005), Nilsen et al., (1977), and Tannen (1996, 1990). Among American English speakers, girls have been found to produce more "standard" language than boys, a pattern that continues on through adulthood. Women appear to use language that expresses more uncertainty, such as hedges, tag questions, and rising intonation on declaratives than men, suggesting less confidence in what they say. Men have been reported to interrupt more than women, and to use stronger expletives, while the latter use more polite forms. Tannen (1996) and others have found that males place more value, in conversational interaction, on status and report talk, competing for the floor, while females value connection and rapport, fulfilling their role as more "cooperative and facilitative conversationalists, concerned for their partner's positive face needs" (Holmes, 1991, p. 210). 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.

According to the researchers of Gender-Specific Medicine at Columbia University, women's memories have been shown to be superior to men's in a couple of key 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 (see Reader's Digest, May 2, 2008, p.107). Consequently, this physiological attribute may partly explain women's superiority in language learning.

This study was aimed at examining to see if there is any gender difference in both first and second year medical college students' English competence by analyzing their English grades and the TOEIC scores. It was further to see how these students were affected by the awards given as a means of encouraging them to actively participate and perform well in English classes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Gender Differences in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

1) 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; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 2000). A historically significant and one of the best-known studies on motivation in SLA was done by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and motivation was examined as a factor of many 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. The instrumental side of the dichotomy referred to acquiring a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical material, translation, and so forth. The integrative side described learners who wished to integrate themselves into the culture of the second language group and become involved in social interchange in that group (See Brown, 2007, p. 170).

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. They hypothesized that women demonstrated a more integrative motivation when learning a foreign language than men based on the finding that their native communicative style was more socially based than the style of men. On the other hand, men were hypothesized to demonstrate a more instrumental motivational orientation in that they were learning a foreign language in order to be more competitive professionally. 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 a significant factor as motivational intensity. Amid numerous studies revealing different results on motivation, 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).

For the study on gender difference in motivation and attitude in second language acquisition, Powell and Batters (1985) conducted a survey with 459 boys and 494 girls from six mixed comprehensive schools in the UK. The study found that female students perceived studying of foreign languages in a more positive way.

2) 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. In Gardner and Lambert's (1972) studies, the effect of attitudes on language learning was examined. After studying the interrelationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes.

Some studies were done on the relationship between attitudes and language success (Chihara & Oller, 1978; Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1978; Oller, Hudson, & Liu, 1977). 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.

There have also been some domestic studies done on Korean students' attitude suggesting that female students have more positive attitude for language learning. Among them was Lee and Oh's (2000) study that compared 522 Korean middle and high school students' attitudes according to level of school, gender and proficiency in English.

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) stated 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. Yet, he further asserts that the teacher needs to be aware that everyone has both positive and negative attitudes. Teachers can aid in dispelling what are often myths about other cultures, and replace those myths with an accurate understanding of the other culture as one that is different from one's own.

This study was to examine the gender difference, if there is any, among the first and second year medical college students at E University in English grades and the TOEIC scores. It was further to explore if awards play a role in the students' motivation and attitude toward English classes, participation and academic performance.

III. METHOD

1. Data

During the first semester of 2008, 47 sophomore medical (M2) students registered for English Reading and Writing, a 4-credit-hour course that met 2 hours each, twice a week for 16 weeks. One student dropped out later in the semester, so 46 M2 students participated in the study. All of them, prior to this course, have completed two semesters of the same English program that first-year students were taking. Another group for the study was first-year medical (M1) students in two English courses, one Advanced English Conversation which met two hours a week and the other, Practical English, 3 hours a week for 16 weeks during the second semester of 2008. Data were collected from these three English classes for the study.

Obtaining at least a minimum passing score from one of the official English tests by the end of the 2nd year is a requirement for M2 students to fulfill the pre-medical curriculum at E University. A majority of them take the TOEIC and only a few students take either the TEPS or the TOEFL, though very rarely. A minimum passing score is 700 TOEIC, 650 TEPS, and 210 CBT TOEFL or 84 IBT TOEFL (70% of the test). The first-year students were strongly advised to take the test during the second semester in 2008 as a self-check measure while M2 students were required to submit their scores by the end of 2008.

With a purpose of encouraging students to participate actively in class and inducing their

motivation, hard working students were praised with English awards. For all three English classes, those who performed well in the class presentation, wrote coherent writing, and participated actively in class discussion received awards. The criteria for the awards were not based on the grades but the students' performance on the tasks and presentation. The results of the awardees and non-awardees were also compared to see if there was any gender difference in the number of award recipients and the results of the English grades.

2. Data Analysis Procedure

The final grades of all three English classes were analyzed along with the results of the TOEIC scores. Seven male M1 and one female M1 students did not take the TOEIC whereas one male M2 and two female M2 students did not turn in their scores by the day this study was done. Since the ones with below the passing score are bound to repeat another year according to the school policy, they were given one last chance to take the test in December and turn in the result by the end of January 2009. One male M2 and one female M2 took the TEPS, and these scores were excluded from the statistical analysis. The mean scores and standard deviation of both male and female students were calculated and compared. For the data analysis, two sample t-test and Mann-Whitney test were done using SPSS WIN 12.0

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Female students usually comprise 30 to 40 percent of the total though the ratio varies each year. The number of female M1 students enrolled in 2008, however, was slightly low, 12 out of 44 (27%) and female M2 students, 17 out of 46 (37%). The next table shows the ratio of both genders in M1 and M2 students.

TABLE 1
Number of Male & Female Students

Gender	M1	M2
Male	32(73%)	29(63%)
Female	12(27%)	17(37%)
Total	44(100%)	46(100%)

Table 2 and 3 show the mean scores of male and female medical students' English grades and the TOEIC.

TABLE 2

Mean Scores of Male M1 Awardees and Non-awardees

Number	Practical E.	Conversation	TOEIC
A (8)	84.88	84.38	725.00
N (24)	80.46	80.83	667.50
T (32)	81.56	81.72	679.00

A: awardees, N: non-awardees, T: total subjects

As shown above, eight male M1 students (25%) were awarded, and their mean scores were 84.88 in Practical English, 84.38 in Conversation, and 725.00 TOEIC, showing higher scores than the non-awardees and the average. These scores indicated that the awarded students performed better than the non-awarded students. The detailed table is listed in the appendix.

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TABLE 3

Mean Scores of Female M1 Awardees and Non-awardees

Number	Practical E.	Conversation	TOEIC
A (7)	90.29	90.00	716.43
N (5)	85.40	87.00	738.75
T (12)	88.25	88.75	724.55

Seven out of twelve female students (58%) were awarded and their mean scores were 90.29 in Practical English, 90.00 Advanced Conversation, and 716.43 TOEIC showing higher English grades than the non-awardees and the average. However, the awardees' TOEIC scores were lower than the non-awardees and the average female TOEIC scores.

Table 4 and 5 show the mean scores of male and female M2 students' English grades and the TOEIC.

TABLE 4

Mean Scores of Male M2 Awardees and Non-awardees

Number	English Reading & Writing	TOEIC
A (7)	93.71	865.00
N (22)	78.14	768.25
T (29)	81.89	793.33

Among the group of sophomore medical students, 7 males (24.14%) received awards.

Their mean scores were 93.71 for English Reading & Writing and 865.00 TOEIC showing significantly higher scores than those of the non-awardees (78.14 and 768.25) and the average (81.89 and 793.33).

TABLE 5

Mean Scores of Female M2 Awardees and Non-awardees

Number	English Reading & Writing	TOEIC
A (10)	91.30	847.22
N (7)	81.14	799.00
T (17)	87.12	830.00

As can be seen in the above table, 10 out of 17 female students (58.82%) were awarded. Their mean scores were 91.30 in English Reading & Writing and 847.22 TOEIC showing lower than those of the awarded male students (93.71 and 865.00) but still higher than the mean scores of the fM2 (87.10 and 830.00). There was no gender difference between male and female award recipients of the M2 students. However, the mean scores of female M2 students showed higher English grades and the TOEIC scores than those of male students.

The following four tables show the results of the questionnaire that was ministered to learn of the students' motivation, attitude, memory and opinion on the awards with the Likert scale, 5 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree (3 undecided).

TABLE 6

Students' Response on Motivation

"Are you better motivated by the awards?"

Gender	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)
Male(n=55)	10(18%)	26(47%)	14 (26%)	5 (9%)
Female(n=27)	12(44%)	9 (32%)	5 (20%)	1(4%)

TABLE 7

Students' Response on Attitude

"Is your attitude better to perform in class because of the awards?"

Gender	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)
Male(n=55)	9(16%)	25(45%)	15(28%)	6(11%)
Female(n=27)	12(44%)	11(41%)	3(11%)	1(4%)

TABLE 8

Students' Response on Memory

"Do you remember what you learned in class?"

Gender	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)
Male(n=55)	5(9%)	20(36%)	26(48%)	4(7%)
Female(n=27)	6(22%)	11(41%)	10(37%)	0(0%)

TABLE 9

Students' Opinion on the Awards

"Does the award help you participate actively and perform well in class?"

Year	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)
Male(n=55)	10(18%)	28(50%)	14(27%)	3(5%)
Female(n=27)	14(52%)	10(37%)	2(7%)	1(4%)

The results showed that 65% of male and 76% of female students were better motivated by the awards. With the question on the attitude, 62% male and 85% female students responded their attitude in class was better due to the awards. Relatively more female students (63%) answered they remembered what has been taught in class then male students (45%). Also a majority of female students (89%) responded that the awards helped them participate actively in class and perform better whereas lower percentage (68%) of male students did. Female students seemed better motivated to get the awards as their responses showed accordingly and the number of the award recipients were more than double the number of male recipients (fM1=58%, fM2=59%; mM1=25%, mM2=24%).

With the Mann-Whitney test, the results show that female students showed higher English grades than those of male students, and the difference was statistically significant (female M1's p-value=0.016 & 0.022; female M2's p-value=0.033; therefore, p-value<0.05). However, the results did not hold true with the TOEIC scores.

Table 10 and 11 show the comparison of male and female students' English grades and the TOEIC for both M1 and M2.

TABLE 10

Comparison of M1 Students' English Grades and TOEIC in Gender

Variables	Male	Female	p-value
	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	
Practical English	N=32 81.56±7.05	N=12 88.25±8.13	.016

Advanced Conversation	N=32 81.72±7.26	N=12 88.75±8.64	.022
TOEIC	n=25 679.00±156.70	n=11 724.55±234.50	.129

TABLE 11
Comparison of M2 Students' English Grades and TOEIC in Gender

Variables	Male	Female	p-value
	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	
Reading & Writing	N=29 81.89±8.47	N=17 87.12±6.90	.033
TOEIC	n=27 793.33±156.70	n=14 830.00±234.50	.105

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Learning a language involves many factors, and individual learning behaviors may vary depending on the gender. Of the various learning factors, motivation and attitude are considered important. As researchers like Chihara and Oller (1978), Oller, Baca, and Vigil (1978), and Oller, Hudson, and Liu (1977) already studied three decades ago on the relationship between attitudes and language success, English competence of the medical college students at E University seemed to be related to the learners' attitude. When their English classes provided them with an environment in which they could be positively motivated as a form of award-giving, students' achievement in English showed improvement.

Some domestic studies were also done on Korean students' attitude claiming that female students have more positive attitude for language learning. One of such studies was by Lee and Oh (2000) and they compared 522 Korean middle and high school students' attitudes according to level of school, gender and proficiency in English.

Sim's (2007) study was done to determine the factors that affect motivation and attitude and also to determine gender-biased factors. According to the results of the study, boys were found to have more negative attitude towards learning English while girls were far more positive in their motivation and attitude with more social and interactive orientation.

The results of the current study showed the similar outcome of female students' more positive motivation and attitude.

Ehrman and Oxford (1989) have challenged the common belief that females tend to reach a higher level of L2 proficiency because of having a greater aspiration for social approval. They hypothesized that women demonstrated a more integrative motivation when learning a foreign language than men based on the finding that their native communicative style was more socially based than the style of men. Men, on the other hand, were hypothesized to demonstrate a more instrumental motivational orientation in that they were learning a foreign language in order to be more competitive professionally. Their findings showed that a majority of males signed up for foreign language classes because they believe them to be useful, categorized as 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.

Lambert (1972) and Spolsky (1969) claimed that integrativeness generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency tests in a foreign language. However, in Masgoret and Garner's (2003) study, integrativeness was not considered as a significant factor as motivational intensity. For these different viewpoints, Brown (2007) concluded that both integrative and instrumental orientations may be important factors accounting for successful language learning and that the degree of importance depends on individual learners.

Female medical subjects in this study seemed to be better motivated and better focused on learning English. The mean scores of both M1 and M2 female students showed higher performance in English grades (fM1=88.25 and 88.75, fM2=87.12) than male students' mean scores of mM1=81.56 and mM2=81.89. These female students were better motivated by the awards with higher attitudes toward English study. The gender difference showed significance in English grades. Part of the explanation can be backed up by the physiological difference noted in the study by the department of Gender-Specific Medicine. Studies of the researchers in Gender-Specific Medicine at Columbia University 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 may explain the gender difference in medical students' English competence since the English exam is based on how much they remember what they learned in class. More female students (63%) answered they remembered than male students (45%). Female students at medical school are said to strive harder than male counterparts to survive and be accepted in the medical field, that is still dominated by males as some of them responded on the questionnaire.

As already stated by Brown (2007) that second language learners do benefit from positive attitudes, these students' performance in English classes resulted in better grades with their positive motivation and attitude. Yet, Brown further asserted that the teacher needs to be aware that everyone has both positive and negative attitudes. Teachers can aid in dispelling what are often myths about other cultures, and replace those myths with an accurate understanding of the other culture as one that is different from one's own.

The study is limited in the scope since it was done at one medical school with a rather small sample size of 90 students. Generalizing, therefore, that all the females at every medical school are superior to males would not be appropriate. A larger sample size study would generate a broader conclusion; however, based on the study for both first and second year medical college students at this particular school, female students showed better English grades in all three classes and were better motivated by the awards.

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Appendix A

Male M1 Students' English Grades & TOEIC Scores

Name	Practical E.	Conversation	TOEIC
KMS	77	79	760
KGB	71	87	635
KSM	85	80	795
KIT	90	90	685
KJE*	86	81	690
KJH	82	82	675
KCH	78	83	665
KHG	70	65	520
KHS	82	87	740
NMW*	88	90	945
MCH	74	81	735
PSH	92	88	X
PYS	74	80	655
PJG	82	89	600
SDH*	95	93	670
SJW*	75	78	X
SJH	74	85	775
ASB	81	76	X

AJH	73	73	575
OSH	80	77	615
OHG	93	85	655
YBH*	81	85	X
LDH*	93	85	560
LJS	83	90	575
LJ	80	66	795
LSH	87	90	X
CWW*	83	85	760
CJW	91	86	X
CHS	84	82	665
HY	77	67	515
HJW	71	72	715
HSY*	78	78	X
Average	81.56	81.72	679.00

* awarded male students (n=8)

x TOEIC not taken

Appendix B

Female M1 Students' English Grades & TOEIC Scores

Name	Practical E.	Conversation	TOEIC
KSY*	82	78	660
KNR	85	92	770
KHJ	95	98	835
KHJ	78	79	X
PHI*	91	90	655
LJM*	98	98	600
LJY	74	76	695
LJW*	97	97	940
LHA	95	90	655
CMH*	81	78	520
HSW*	95	92	785
CMK*	88	97	855
Average	88.25	88.75	724.55

* awarded female students (n=7)

Appendix C

Male M2 Students' English Grades and TOEIC Scores

Name	English Reading & Writing	TOEIC
LKH*	98	855
SYH*	97	900
OCR*	93	870
KMS	86	790
LJH*	96	965
LJH	88	725
SYJ*	93	805
LBH	84	735
YJH	76	800
KMH	82	750
LJJ	80	775
KSI*	95	785
BSC	78	835 TEPS
CWR	74	780
SMC	82	810
BJH	80	780
KSH	75	705
KYH	85	760
KGH	82	775
SHS	72	820
LHG	70	865
BGH*	84	875
CSH	73	755
KJH	71	770
SSW	76	745
AYS	81	820
LSH	76	700
PYJ	70	705
KHY	78	X
Average	81.89	793.33

* awarded male M2 students (n=7)

TEPS was not included in the average TOEIC score.

Appendix D

Female M2 Students' English Grades and TOEIC Scores

Name	English Reading & Writing	TOEIC
KSY*	98	990
KSH*	90	765
HB*	96	840
EJ*	94	830
BJW*	90	678 TEPS
CYH*	94	860
NSG*	89	750
SJY*	92	870
SGW	88	765
KEH	79	900
YHJ*	83	850
KHJ	87	X
NYJ	75	770
JYR*	87	870
HYE	84	X
LHE	78	725
HYB	77	835
Average	87.12	830.00

* awarded female M2 students (n=10)

Appendix E

Student Questionnaire

For the questions 1 through 6, please indicate the number from 5 to 1 depending on your answer: (5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 undecided; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree).

1. Are you better motivated by the awards?
2. Is your attitude better in class to perform well to receive an award and high grades?
3. Does the award help you participate actively and perform well in class?
4. Is English an interesting subject for you?
5. Do you believe you improved your English through this course?
6. Do you remember what you learned in class?
7. What is the best part in the English class?

8. What is the worst part in the English class?
9. What part of English do you need to study more?
10. Please write any suggestions you might have.

Examples in: English
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Levels: Elementary/Secondary/College

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