

## Considering Gender with Attitudes and Motivation of EFL Students

### Yabancı Dil Öğrencilerinin Tutum ve Güdülerinde Cinsiyet Farkı

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#### *Abstract*

This study aims to examine the influence of gender of Turkish students on their attitudes and motivation towards foreign language learning. It investigates the following factors: attitudes towards the British and Americans; motivational intensity; interest in foreign languages in general; attitudes towards learning English; instrumental and integrative orientation; English class anxiety; family encouragement; the English teacher and course. An adapted version of Gardner's (1985) Attitude Motivation Index (AMI) was used. Quantitative results indicate that female students have higher motivation than the male ones in the following factors: attitudes towards the British, motivational intensity, attitudes towards learning English and languages in general, integrative attitude and attitudes towards the English teacher. With the rest of the factors no difference of gender has been found.

*Key words:* Gender difference, motivation, attitudes.

#### *Öz*

Bu çalışma, Türk öğrencilerinin cinsiyet farklarının, onların yabancı dil öğrenimine yönelik tutum ve güdülleri üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışma özellikle şu etkenleri içermektedir: Öğrencilerin Amerikalı ve İngilizlere yönelik tutumları, güdü yoğunlukları, genel olarak tüm yabancı dillere olan ilgileri, İngilizce öğrenmeye karşı tutumları, araçlı ve bütüncü oryantasyon, İngilizce sınıfı endişesi, aileden gelen teşvik, İngilizce öğretmeni ve İngilizce dersine olan tutum. Araştırmada Gardner'ın (1985) geliştirdiği Tutum Güdü Ölçeği uyarlanarak kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçları, erkek öğrencilerle karşılaştırıldığında ve aşağıda belirtilen etmenler göz önüne alındığında, kızların güdülerinin daha yüksek olduğunu göstermiştir: İngilizlere yönelik tutumlar, güdü yoğunluğu, İngilizce ve diğer dilleri öğrenmeye yönelik tutumlar, bütüncü güdü ve İngilizce öğretmene yönelik tutumlar. Diğer etmenlerle cinsiyet farkının arasında hiçbir ilişki bulunmamıştır.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Cinsiyet farkı, güdü, tutum.

#### Introduction

It has generally been assumed that in the field of second/foreign language learning there are various factors, social and/or psychological, that affect language learning. The role of the first language, role of methodology and instruction, individual learner differences and setting or environmental differences can be mentioned as the most outstanding ones. Among

the individual learner differences one can include gender, age, motivation, attitudes, aptitude and anxiety. The need for this particular study is that in Turkey, interest towards learning English has been increasing fast in recent years with more and more private and/or state English medium high schools and language schools opening. Universities are no different: with a new law allowing foundations to open private universities, English medium universities have been spreading fast, too. The present study will deal with the gender differences in attitudes and motivation of the English language learners in Turkish high schools. The aim of this article, therefore, is to examine the difference

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between the attitudes of female and male students in relation to the aforementioned factors, namely towards the British and Americans, learning foreign languages in general and English in particular, their English teacher and course. Furthermore, this study aims to find the gender differences in terms of their motivational intensity towards English, their instrumental and integrative orientation, English class anxiety and family encouragement.

Williams and Burden (1997, 111) state, "If asked to identify the most powerful influences on learning, motivation would probably be high on most teachers' list". Therefore it is not surprising to observe that in the last half century there has been an increasing interest towards the role of affective factors in SLA such as attitudes and motivation. The most influential research on attitudes and motivation was initiated by Gardner and Lambert (1972) who claim that positive attitudes towards the L2 one is learning and its people and culture serve as motivation for the learner which in turn helps the learner to learn the L2 much better than those who do not have positive attitudes. A distinction is made between two kinds of orientations for language learning: instrumental and integrative (Gardner, 1985). The former presents external factors such as passing an exam, getting a good job, or a better salary while the latter is a wish to be a part of the culture of the language one is learning and when the learner identifies him/herself with the people of that language. Gardner, then, presents his Socio-educational Model (1985) which is based on a socio-psychological approach and which has been supported by an attitude test battery called 'Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery, AMTB. This model, however, is challenged by some researchers (Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Crookes and Schmidt, 1991). These challenges are answered by Gardner and his followers (Gardner, Trembley and Masgoret, 1997; MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; Schmidt, Boraie and Kassabgy, 1996; Trembley and Gardner, 1995) who conclude that motives are dynamic; they rise and fall over time; motivation may be under internal or external control and that we are not always aware of our motives.

In connection with the affective factors in SLA, the variable of gender has been discussed. As Sunderland (1998) notes, there is usually a distinction made between

'sex' and 'gender'; the former suggesting a biological distinction while the latter a social one. Agreeing with the definition of 'gender' concerning the social characteristics, Humm (1989) uses the word to refer to culturally shaped attributes of males and females. This social/cultural distinction has always been interesting to researchers trying to find gender differences in most fields. Socio and psycholinguistic research has identified gender differences in SLA as far as attitudes towards learning SLA, test scores, learner/learning strategies, classroom behaviour and attribution of success are concerned.

Concerning attitudes towards learning an L2, we are able to cite a few studies which suggest that females have more favourable attitudes to learning an L2 than males. Burstall (1975) reports on a study which shows that low-achieving males tended to drop French as their second language more than low-achieving females. Furthermore, females showed more positive attitudes towards learning French than did the males. Gardner and Lambert (1972) got a similar result from one study. Females learning French as L2 in Canada were more motivated than males. They also had more positive attitudes towards speakers of the target language. Parallel to those findings, Spolsky (1989) report that female learners of Hebrew as L2 in Israel displayed more favourable attitudes to Hebrew, Israel and Israelis than male learners. Similarly, a study by Bacon and Finnemann (1992) showed that females learning Spanish as a foreign language at university level had stronger instrumental motivation than did the males. Baker (1992) notes a number of studies (Jones, 1982; Sharp et al., 1973; Jones, 1950) suggesting that female students learning Welsh had more favourable attitudes to Welsh than male students did. Clark and Trafford (1996) report, among a range of research findings on L2 learning gender differences, that females have a more conscientious approach towards their work than males. Similarly, male students give less attention to course work and their lessons than females do.

Other studies draw attention to the fact that there is a gender difference in the test scores in L2 classrooms. Burstall (1975), for instance, reports in her longitudinal study with 6000 children starting French as L2 at eight years of age in English primary schools that females scored significantly higher than males on all tests

measuring achievement in French. Similarly, Boyle (1987) found in one study of 233 female and 257 male Chinese university students in Hong Kong that females achieved higher overall means on tests of L2 English proficiency. Boyle, however, reports in the same study that males were superior to females in listening vocabulary tests. Arnot, David and Weiner (1996) point out that males taking A level exams achieve higher performances in relation to their entry than females almost in all subjects. Farhady (1982), on the other hand, has some conflicting results with those of Boyle's and Arnot et al.'s. He reports on a study of 800 university students in which female students significantly outperformed the male ones on a listening comprehension test as a part of an obligatory replacement test. In addition to this study, Eisenstein (1982) reports similar results of a study done on another kind of listening task, dialect discrimination: he shows that females performed significantly better than males. Bacon (1992), however, found no gender difference in listening tasks.

As for the learner strategies, it is possible to cite a few studies which suggest that females deal with L2 learning differently than males. Oxford (1992), for example, suggests that female students use learning strategies more often and more than male students do. Gass and Varonis (1986) report on a study of conversational behaviour of male and female L2 learners that male students prefer interaction because it will give them a chance to produce more output whereas for females it is a chance to acquire more input. The researchers concluded, therefore, that males gave more importance to speaking practice whereas females to the comprehensible input since meaning in such interactions was much more important to them than to males. A study done by Shehadeh (1999, 256) found certain similarities with the above findings: "...that men take advantage of the conversation in a way that allows them to promote their performance/production ability, whereas women utilize the conversation to promote their comprehension ability." Furthermore, Bacon and Finnemann (1992) found that before they speak, female learners rehearse in their heads what they are going to say, to convey the meaning properly. Males, on the other hand, do not think too much before they speak. Nyikos (1990) showed that memorization is a much more preferred strategy for female learners than male ones.

One study (Bacon, 1992) found that males used translation strategies while females preferred monitoring their comprehension skills. However, one other study (Pica et al., 1991) suggests that there is no gender difference of L2 learners as far as interactions are concerned.

According to some studies reported by Swann (1993) and Clark and Trafford (1996), gender differentiation is maintained in the behaviour of L2 learners in the language classrooms, males being more dominating. According to Pachler and Field (1997), females tend to be less demanding of time and attention from the teacher than males and they are less disruptive and less confident about speaking but more concerned about giving the right answer. Other research finds similar characteristics among English language, maths and science students stating that male students on the whole talked more than females (Sadker, M, and Sadker, D., 1985). Especially when interruption of each other during lessons is concerned, males were found to have a greater tendency to do so (Brooks, 1982). Similarly, it was noted (Eccles, 1983) that teachers expect fewer behaviour problems from females. Many teachers have pointed out that at the elementary level they expect female students academically to perform better but at the secondary level worse than males especially in the maths and science classes. However, there are some studies presenting a different picture such as males having no dominance in classrooms (Boersma et al., 1987).

As for the evaluation of their success, males and females seem to have some difference as far as the research tells us. Harris (1998, 57) reports that according to Clark and Trafford (1996) and Graham and Rees (1995),

"... boys attribute their lack of progress to the fact that if the work seems irrelevant to them and fails to meet their 'personal agenda', they feel justified to 'muck about'. Girls on the other hand were more likely to respond to lack of success by a feeling of anxiety and of working harder, often by settling down to rote-learning of vocabulary or grammar".

On the other hand, it was found that females have lower self-perceptions of ability than males (Wigfield, Eccles and Pintrich, 1997). This looks contradictory

with the actual situation which shows that females outperform males in many subjects (Linn and Hyde, 1989). This discrepancy between actual achievement and self-perceptions of ability may be due to males being more self-congratulatory and females being more modest. What is more, when subject areas were considered, male students were found to have higher self-perceptions in sports and maths, and females in English (Wigfield et al., 1991; Phillips and Zimmerman, 1990; Marsh, 1989; Eccles, 1983; Jones, 1950). This low self-rating of females starts as early as the elementary age children (Frey and Ruble, 1987; Entwisle and Baker, 1983).

Although gender difference on none of the issues aforementioned (attitudes towards SLA, test scores, learner/learning strategies, classroom behaviour or attribution of success) has been reported in Turkey so far, it was pointed out in one study that motivation towards learning English and other foreign languages has both instrumental and integrative orientations, instrumental orientation being higher than the integrative one (Kiziltepe, 2000). Families highly encourage their children towards learning a language in general but English in particular. But is there a difference between female and male students in terms of the intensity and kinds of motivation they have, their attitudes towards the people and culture of the language they are learning or the family encouragement they are getting to learn English?

Turkey is believed to be socially and geographically a unique country because of its religion and nature of the political arrangement it is governed with: It is a moslem country like most of its eastern and southern neighbours but secular at the same time like the western ones. Being a moslem country, it might have been believed that females are given less importance by their families with regard to education and males more opportunity. The state being secular is assumed to compensate for the presumed gender difference with its equality laws in politics, education and/or social life. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, women were given the right to vote, go to school, get educated, get dressed in the western style and to stand side by side equally with males almost in every aspect. The country then, underwent a great social change as well as a political one.

Geographically, Turkey is in the most confusing place, having its lands both in Europe and Asia, functioning as a bridge between the two continents. The conflict can be seen in some categorizations: Sometimes it is written under European countries (Automobilclub von Deutschland, 1999; Euro-Atlas, 1991-92), sometimes Asian (Lewis, 1982) or as Cem (1999) declared Turkish people are both European and Asian. It is not surprising to see that it is considered as an eastern country by the westerners and a western by the easterners. The reflection of such social, political and geographical factors on gender difference was thought to be worth examining from the point of view of second language learning. Our research question is, therefore, is there a gender difference in terms of attitudes of students, their motivations towards L2/English learning or as far as parental encouragement, attitudes towards the English teacher or course are concerned?

## Method

### *Subjects*

Being the biggest metropolitan city of Turkey, Istanbul was chosen as the site of the study. 308 students in four high schools whose age ranged between 15 and 18 participated. 4 % of them were 15 years old; 44 % were 16 years of age; 49 % of them were 17 years old and 3 % were 18 years of age. The majority were thus 16 or 17. Of the 308 students, 44 % were female and 56 % male. 31 % of them was placed in the intermediate level and 69 % in the advanced level of English proficiency as measured by their own schools.

### *Materials*

The data were collected using an adapted version of Gardner's (1985) Attitude Motivation Index (AMI) and thus used for the first time in Turkey, after being tested in places like America, Canada and Asia. It consisted of 11 major parts plus demographic data where the school, class, age and sex of the student were elicited. The level of their English knowledge was sought and the grade they got from their English course in the previous term was asked for. It was particularly emphasized to the respondents to take their time and tell the truth and that they should ask questions about any points they did not understand. The eleven main parts measured the following: Attitudes toward the British people, attitudes

towards the American people, motivational intensity, instrumental orientation, interest in foreign languages, attitudes toward learning English, integrative orientation, English class anxiety, family encouragement; my English teacher and my English course.

In order to adapt Gardner's AMI for this particular context, the following changes were made (Kızıltepe, 2000): In the original questionnaire by Gardner, the second language in question is French. Since English is being considered here, it was thought that both British and American people should be included. In the fifth part, in item 2, "... even though Canada is relatively far from countries speaking other languages" is omitted from the original because Turkey is not far from countries speaking other languages. In part 9, item 2 "...because we live in Canada" is omitted because there is only one official language in Turkey: Turkish. For each item in parts 1,2,5,6,7,8,9,10 and 11 subjects were asked to consider and evaluate their attitude on a 5 point scale instead of a 7 point scale in the original questionnaire because it was thought that students would not be able to differentiate the slight difference between the original scales and it would affect the study in a negative way. Thus the scale is as follows: -2: I strongly disagree with what is said in this item; -1 : I slightly disagree with what is said in this item; 0: I am neutral to what is said in this item; 1: I slightly agree

with what is said in this item and 2: I strongly agree with what is said in this item.

The questionnaires were administered by the researcher on four consecutive days for 4 different schools. After they were filled out by the respondents, they were given back in the next few days. They could not be administered in class on one single day because taking their class time was not permitted by their teachers. They were analysed with a t-Test through SPSS.

### Results and Discussion

The analysis of gender differences in attitudes and motivation of EFL students revealed some similarities and differences between male and female students as reported in Table I. As can be seen, the mean and standard deviation of both females and males were found and a t-test with a 2-tail probability (with  $p < 0.05$ ) was applied to those results to find out whether the differences between gender in each item were significant or not.

No significant difference was found between gender as far as attitudes towards Americans, instrumental motivation, English class anxiety, family encouragement and the English course were concerned. In other words, male and female students had more or less the same attitudes towards Americans and their English course, the

Table 1  
*Gender differences in attitudes and motivation of EFL students*

	mean		S.D.		t- value	DF
	females	males	females	males		
Attitudes towards British	3.41	-1.47	8.06	9.99	4.73**	304
Attitudes towards Americans	8.22	8.83	9.74	11.86	-0.49	303
Motivational intensity	22.93	21.90	3.37	3.22	2.28*	200
Instrumental motivation	2.96	2.75	1.21	1.30	1.22	211
Attitudes towards languages in general	14.34	10.87	5.02	5.85	5.58**	302
Attitudes towards English	12.95	10.82	4.36	6.44	3.46**	300
Integrative motivation	5.48	3.78	2.71	3.44	4.12**	219
English class anxiety	-0.42	-1.43	5.74	5.62	1.54	283
Family encouragement	8.59	9.12	6.49	6.35	-0.71	281
Attitudes towards English teacher	20.43	14.06	20.58	23.68	2.52*	301
Attitudes towards English course	11.93	9.67	21.66	25.70	0.84	303

\*  $p < 0.05$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

same amount of instrumental motivation or family encouragement. Both of the groups had no anxiety in the English language classroom. However, the analysis revealed significant differences in favour of females with the other factors involved, namely attitudes towards the British, towards learning languages in general and the English language and the English teacher. Moreover, the motivational intensity and integrative motivation of females were more than those of males.

To be more precise, there was no significant difference found between gender when attitudes towards Americans ( $t = -0.49$ ,  $df = 303$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) were measured. Interestingly, however, there was a significant difference between male and female students in their attitudes towards the British with females having more positive attitudes ( $t = 4.73$ ,  $df = 304$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Unfortunately, we do not know why there is a difference of attitudes between those two English-speaking countries. There is certainly and clearly a need for more research into the nature of this difference.

Although the motivational intensity was found to be more in females than males ( $t = 2.28$ ,  $df = 200$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), both female and male students were found to have the same amount of instrumental ( $t = 1.22$ ,  $df = 211$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and integrative motivation ( $t = 4.12$ ,  $df = 219$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding that females have no less motivational intensity and instrumental motivation than males is quite encouraging and relieving. It shows that female students just like the male ones, have ambitions, aims such as having a good job, or a better salary, or a better social position for their future life.

Significant difference was found with the two items, attitudes towards languages in general ( $t = 5.58$ ,  $df = 302$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and attitudes towards English ( $t = 3.46$ ,  $df = 300$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Female students had more positive attitudes towards languages both in general and the English language in particular. This finding is supported in the study done by Leinhardt et al. (1979) where teachers were found to contact academically more with females on reading and with males on maths. Regarding females having more positive attitudes towards learning language in general or a second/foreign language they are learning in their country (in this particular study the English language), there appears to be support by other research, some already cited above (Bacon and

Finneman, 1992; Baker, 1992; Samimy and Tabuse, 1992; Spolsky, 1989; Jones, 1982; Burstall, 1975; Sharp et al, 1973; Jones, 1950 ).

So far as English class anxiety ( $t = 1.54$ ,  $df = 283$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), family encouragement ( $t = -0.71$ ,  $df = 281$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and attitudes towards the English course ( $t = 0.84$ ,  $df = 303$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) were concerned, there were no differences between male and female students. No gender difference in parental or family encouragement is supported by a study done by Sung and Padilla (1998). They examined the motivation held by elementary and secondary level students toward the learning of Chinese, Japanese or Korean in formal classroom settings in public schools in California, USA. It is encouraging to see similar results which show that families in the eastern part of Europe see no difference of gender in case of encouraging their children towards learning a foreign language. However, this finding with the instrumental motivation may be in contrast with the study reported by Davie, Butler and Goldstein (1972) who noted that females are constantly more oriented by their parents towards home and domestic matters than males.

Of particular relevance to this study is the finding that female students had more positive attitudes towards their English teachers ( $t = 2.52$ ,  $df = 301$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In Turkey, interestingly, there are rarely male teachers in most fields, especially in the field of English language teaching. Female students having more positive attitudes towards their teachers might suggest that they feel closer to them, having the same gender, understand their feelings better, can communicate with them more easily than male students can (Kızıltepe, 1982).

### Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyse the relationship between gender and second language learning, namely to find out if there is any difference between the sexes as far as English language learning is concerned. Quantitative results indicate that female students have higher motivation than male ones regarding attitudes towards the British, motivational intensity, attitudes towards learning languages in general and learning English, integrative attitude and attitudes towards the English teacher.

Being the first of its kind in Turkey, we feel that this piece of research has succeeded in contributing to the study of individual differences in the field of foreign/second language learning.

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