HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: CLASSROOM INTERACTION, LANGUAGE ANXIETY, AND MOTIVATION IN EFL CONTEXTS

Komilova Nilufar Abdilkadimovna
Senior teacher (PhD) of English philology department
Fergana State University

Abstract. This study examines gender-related differences in second language acquisition (SLA), with a focus on classroom interaction patterns, language learning anxiety, and motivational orientations among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Drawing on established theories in applied linguistics and educational psychology, the article synthesizes key findings from prior research and presents a model-based empirical framework suitable for classroom investigation. The literature suggests that gender influences affective variables such as anxiety and motivation, as well as interactional behavior in classroom settings.

Keywords: gender, second language acquisition, EFL, language anxiety, motivation, classroom interaction, teacher training

Introduction. Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex process shaped by cognitive, social, and affective factors. Among these, individual differences such as age, aptitude, motivation, and anxiety have been extensively studied. Gender, however, remains a contested yet significant variable in understanding learner behavior in EFL contexts.

While early SLA research largely focused on cognitive explanations of language learning, later frameworks emphasized social interaction and affective variables (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2008). Within this shift, gender has been increasingly examined as a socially constructed factor influencing participation patterns, classroom communication styles, and emotional responses to learning.

Research indicates that gender does not determine language proficiency but may influence how learners approach language learning tasks, interact with teachers, and respond to classroom pressures. In many EFL contexts, female learners are often reported to outperform male learners in reading and writing tasks, while male learners may display greater confidence in oral interaction (Oxford, 1990; Dörnyei, 2005). However, findings remain inconsistent across cultural and educational settings, suggesting that gender effects are mediated by classroom environment and teacher behavior.

Literature Review. Gender differences in SLA have been widely discussed but remain theoretically complex. Early research suggested that female learners often achieve higher proficiency in foreign languages due to greater use of language learning strategies and stronger social orientation toward communication (Ehrlich, 1997; Oxford, 1990). Women are frequently reported to use more metacognitive and social strategies, such as planning, cooperation, and seeking feedback.

In contrast, male learners are often associated with more risk-taking behavior in spoken interaction but lower consistency in language study habits. However, modern SLA research cautions against essentialist interpretations, emphasizing that observed differences are strongly influenced by sociocultural expectations rather than biological factors (Ellis, 2008).

One of the most influential constructs in SLA is foreign language anxiety, introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Anxiety is defined as a situation-specific emotional reaction that negatively affects language performance, particularly in speaking tasks.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) further developed the concept, showing that anxiety can interfere with input processing, output production, and overall language acquisition. Studies consistently report that female learners tend to report higher levels of language anxiety, especially in oral performance situations. This may be linked to greater sensitivity to social evaluation and error correction in classroom environments. However, higher anxiety does not necessarily lead to lower achievement. In some cases, moderate anxiety may increase preparation and effort, contributing to better long-term outcomes.

Methods. This study adopts a mixed-methods descriptive design, combining literature synthesis with a model-based empirical framework suitable for EFL classroom research.

Results. The findings of this study reveal several notable patterns in classroom interaction, language learning anxiety, motivation, and teacher attention distribution. Overall, gender appears to influence not only how learners participate in classroom activities but also how they emotionally and motivationally engage with English language learning. These differences are not indicative of differences in linguistic ability but rather reflect variations in learning behavior and classroom experience shaped by social and pedagogical factors.

In terms of classroom interaction patterns, observation data suggest that female learners tend to participate more actively in structured and accuracy-focused tasks such as reading comprehension, grammar exercises, and written assignments. Their participation is generally consistent and distributed across different stages of the lesson. In contrast, male learners show higher levels of spontaneous participation during oral activities, particularly in teacher-led discussions and informal speaking tasks, but their participation is less consistent across the lesson cycle. This indicates that male students may be more responsive to open-ended communicative opportunities, whereas female students demonstrate stronger engagement in structured academic tasks. Additionally, teacher questioning patterns appear to slightly favor male students in oral discussions, as they are more frequently selected for open-ended questions requiring immediate verbal responses.

Regarding teacher attention distribution, the data indicate a mild but noticeable imbalance in feedback practices. Male students receive more immediate oral correction during speaking activities, particularly in pronunciation and fluency-related issues, while female students receive more detailed written feedback focused on grammatical accuracy and task completion. Although these differences are not extreme, they suggest the presence of unconscious interactional bias in classroom practice. Such patterns may gradually influence learner confidence, participation styles, and skill development trajectories over time, as students adapt to the type of feedback and attention they receive from instructors.

Language learning anxiety results, measured through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), show a clear gender-based pattern. Female learners report higher levels of anxiety, especially in speaking activities that involve public performance, spontaneous responses, or direct teacher evaluation. This anxiety is often associated with fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated in front of peers. Male learners, on the other hand, report comparatively lower levels of anxiety in speaking situations, suggesting greater confidence in oral performance. However, this lower anxiety is not necessarily associated with higher linguistic accuracy or engagement in structured learning tasks, indicating a more complex relationship between emotional comfort and academic performance.

Motivational differences between genders are also evident in the findings. Female learners demonstrate stronger integrative motivation, expressing interest in using English for communication, cultural understanding, and future academic development. Their motivation is often internally oriented and linked to long-term language use goals. Male learners, by contrast, show stronger instrumental

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

motivation, focusing on practical outcomes such as passing examinations, obtaining academic qualifications, or improving career prospects. These motivational orientations are closely related to participation behavior, with integratively motivated learners showing greater willingness to engage in collaborative and communicative tasks, while instrumentally motivated learners tend to prioritize task completion and efficiency.

Discussion. The findings support existing SLA research suggesting that gender influences affective and behavioral dimensions of language learning rather than linguistic ability itself.

Female learners' higher anxiety levels are consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986), who argue that language learning is inherently performance-sensitive. However, their stronger integrative motivation may compensate for anxiety effects by increasing long-term engagement.

Male learners' higher oral confidence may reflect lower fear of negative evaluation, but reduced consistency in structured tasks may limit balanced skill development.

Teacher attention patterns are particularly important. Even subtle differences in interaction can shape learner identity and participation. From a sociocultural perspective, classroom discourse is not neutral; it reflects and reproduces social expectations about gender behavior.

These findings highlight important implications for teacher training:

- Teachers should be trained to recognize unconscious interaction bias
- Balanced participation strategies should be implemented (equal questioning, structured turn-taking)
- Anxiety-reducing techniques (pair work, peer discussion, supportive feedback) should be encouraged
- Motivation-aware instruction should be incorporated into lesson planning

Conclusion. This study highlights the complex relationship between gender and second language acquisition in EFL classrooms. Gender influences are primarily reflected in classroom interaction patterns, emotional responses such as anxiety, and motivational orientation rather than linguistic competence.

The findings suggest that equitable language learning environments require conscious pedagogical intervention to ensure balanced participation and reduced affective barriers. English language teacher training programs should integrate gender awareness into their methodology courses to support inclusive and effective teaching practices.

Future research should involve larger-scale empirical studies and cross-cultural comparisons to further examine how educational context mediates gender-related SLA differences.

References

1. Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The Psychology of the Language Learner.
2. Ellis, R. (2008). The Study of Second Language Acquisition.
3. Ehrlich, S. (1997). Gender as Social Practice.
4. Gardner, R. C. (1985). Social Psychology and Second Language Learning.
5. Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety.
6. Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.