

# WHY (NOT) LEARN ENGLISH: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND DEMOTIVATION

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## Abstract

Individual differences, like motivation, aptitude or age are widely accepted to be the key factors that influence second language learning success and as such have been a major area for research. Unlike aptitude or age, motivation is a factor that a learner can have an influence on. This paper focuses on motivation and demotivation of English language learners at the University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprrešić. Dörnyei (2001) defines motivation as the choice of a particular action, the amount of effort exerted in it and the persistence with it. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001) defines a demotivated student as someone who was once motivated but lost his or her interest for some reason. The first part of the paper lists key definitions and types of motivation and demotivation. Previous studies have revealed that in today's world learners in general learn English out of practical reasons (they think they will need it in the future), i.e. they see English as lingua franca. When it comes to demotivation, there are two sets of factors: extrinsic (teacher, course materials) and intrinsic (attitudes, self-esteem). To continue, the second part provides an overview of previous surveys aimed at determining gender differences in motivation and presents the results of a quantitative survey that was conducted on a sample of 62 first year business, cultural management and office management students at the University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprrešić. The aim of the paper is to determine whether gender differences in motivation and demotivation for learning English exist and to describe them. The initial hypothesis states that there are some differences in motivation and demotivation among the genders. The results of the research will provide guidelines for future research and teaching practice, likewise.

Keywords: Demotivation, gender, motivation, second language acquisition.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Learners of foreign languages differ in many ways: by age, gender, learning styles, learning strategies, language aptitude, motivation, etc. The key factor in developing an environment that promotes second language learning, as well as second language learning success, is taking into consideration all those individual differences. In comparison to age or language aptitude, motivation is a factor which learners have direct influence on. Furthermore, Medved Krajnović claims that high correlation between motivation and second language learning success proves that they are really connected. [1] These may be the reasons why there has been an abundance of research into motivation. As Dörnyei puts it: "Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of foreign language (L2) learning". [2]

The aim of this paper is to determine gender differences in motivation and demotivation, as well as to present the results of a quantitative survey that was conducted on a sample of 62 first year business, cultural management and office management students at the University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprrešić.

## 2 LEARNERS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Motivation can be defined as the choice of a particular action, the amount of effort exerted in it and the persistence with it. [3] Gardner and Lambert conducted first significant research on motivation in second language acquisition. [4] Gardner makes a distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations in language learning motivation. An integrative orientation occurs when the learner is studying a language because of a wish to identify with the culture of speakers of that language. Instrumentally oriented learners learn because they want to achieve a practical goal, i.e. pass examinations or advance in their career. Dörnyei and Ushioda refer to this period of research in motivation as social-psychological period. [5] More recently, Dörnyei connects integrative and instrumental orientation with the Ideal Self and Ought-to-Self. [6] He focuses on second language learners' self-perception and proposes the following construct: Ideal L2 Self (the person we would like to become), Ought-to L2 Self, (what we

believe we should become in order to avoid possible negative outcomes) and L2 Learning Experience (e.g., the positive impact of success or the enjoyable quality of a language course). He then connects Ideal L2 Self with the learners who learn a second language because they think they will need it in their future career, and Ought-to L2 Self with the learners who learn only to pass an exam.

In Croatia, Mihaljević Djigunović, unlike Gardner, does not connect integrative orientation with the wish of the learner to identify with the culture of speakers of that particular language (in the case of English, with the British or American culture), but, in the context of globalization, with the wish to integrate into the world. [7]

To continue, Saito, Dewaele and Hanzawa examined the motivational orientations of 40 first year university students in Japan and discovered that they learn English not because they want to communicate only with the British or Americans, but because they see the English language as a *lingua franca*, i.e. as a means of communicating with people all around the world. [8]

### **3 LEARNERS' DEMOTIVATION TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE**

A demotivated student is someone who was once motivated, but for some reason lost his/her interest. [3] Based on previous research we can define the most common demotivating factors and divide them into two groups: intrinsic and extrinsic. [9] Some of the intrinsic demotivating factors are the lack of self-esteem, negative attitudes towards second language, negative attitudes towards the speakers of the second language, inadequate learning strategies. On the other hand, extrinsic factors comprehend the teacher (personality, dedication, abilities, and teaching methods), teaching materials, inadequate equipment, too many students in the group, peer pressure, etc. Comparing demotivation to motivation, it is a field that has, to our knowledge, not been thoroughly researched.

### **4 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATION AND DEMOTIVATION**

We can often hear that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. However, when it comes to learning do we differ so much according to our gender? In second language acquisition, researchers have found some evidence implying the existence of gender differences in motivation.

For example, Dörnyei and Clement suggest that females score significantly higher on direct contact with second language speakers, integrativeness and cultural interest. [10]

In Japan, Mori and Gobel wanted to explore differences in motivation based on gender. Four hundred fifty-three second-year students from Japan participated in their study. The authors found that female participants have a greater interest in the cultures and people of the target language community, show a greater desire to make friends with those people and are more interested in travelling and/or studying overseas than male participants. These findings suggest that gender may be a strong predictor of attitude and interest in interaction with target culture. [11]

In England, Williams, Burden and Lanvers conducted a research on secondary school students' motivation to learn French. Two hundred twenty-eight pupils took part in the research. The results indicate that girls expressed a significantly higher degree of liking and desire as well as a greater integrative orientation. [12]

In Croatia, Koludrović and Ercegovac examined age and gender differences in goal orientation of the students, as well as the relationship between motivation and academic achievement. The research comprised 650 male and female students of both primary and secondary school. The results show significant gender differences. Female students scored significantly higher on task commitment, dedication, concern for others, and belonging, while male students scored significantly higher on competition, domination and rewards. Based on the results, the authors conclude that girls are more intrinsically motivated in comparison to boys. [13]

### **5 METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this paper is to determine whether gender differences in motivation and demotivation for learning English exist and to describe them. More precisely, we wanted to see what items specifically reflect gender differences in learners' motivation and demotivation.

#### **5.1. Sample**

The research comprised 62 first year students at the University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprrešić, Croatia. The students were enrolled in three different undergraduate professional study programmes: Business Economics and Finance, Office management and Cultural management. All participants were full-time students. Out of 62 participants in the research, 39 were women and 23 men, as shown in Fig. 1.

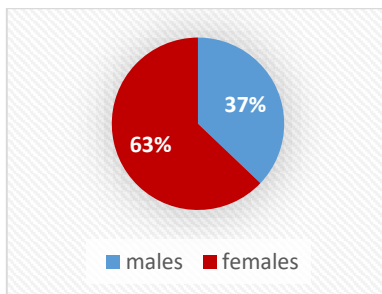


Fig 1. Distribution of participants according to gender (%).

As seen in Fig.2. most participants were 19 years old (36 out of 62), while the youngest participant was 18 years old, and the oldest 28 years old. The average age was 19 years and 9 months (N=61), so we can say that all participants were in early adulthood.

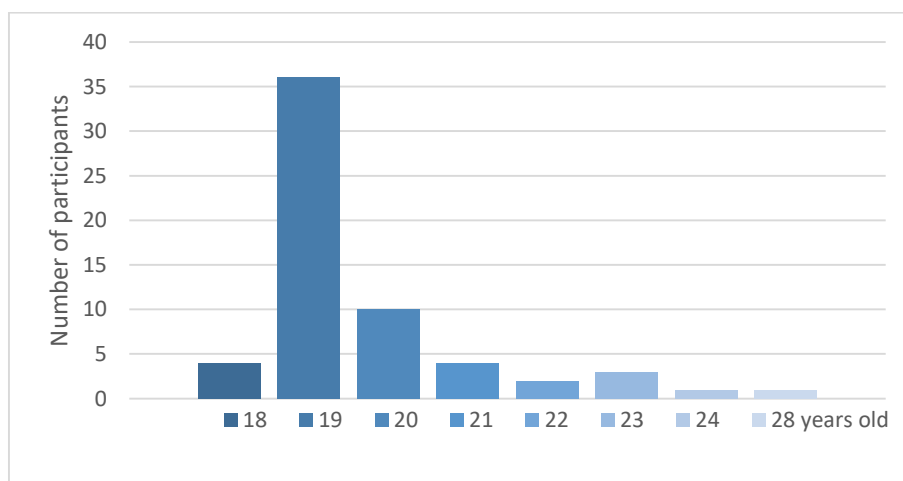


Fig 2. Distribution of participants according to age

All participants have been learning the English language for at least 3 years, and some of them even for 20 years. In average, they have been learning English for 12 years and one month (N=61).

## 5.2. Instrument

The questionnaire had two parts. One part contained a demographics section from which the above information was retrieved. Furthermore, participants were asked to respond to 20 items describing their motivation and demotivation to learn the English language on standard 5-point Likert scales with the anchors “absolutely disagree” = 1, “disagree” = 2, “neither agree nor disagree” = 3, “agree” = 4, “strongly agree” = 5. The questionnaire comprehended 9 items written to reflect learners’ motivation and 11 items written to reflect learners’ demotivation. The items comprised instrumental (*I learn English because I need it in everyday life*), communicative (*I learn English because most people I have contact with speak or study English*) and affective-cultural orientation (*Learning English makes me happy*). As demotivating factors, we included extrinsic factors such as teacher’s influence, bad marks, teaching materials, size of groups, and intrinsic factors: inadequate level of proficiency, lack of self-esteem and negative attitudes towards the English language. The questionnaire was created using Google tools, and it was available on LMS Moodle. The students were asked to do it in their English language courses using mobile phones. The participation in this research was voluntary and anonymous.

## 6 RESULTS

The purpose of the quantitative data we collected was to identify the specific items where values of male and female participants differed significantly.

Overall, we found that students of the University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprešić learn English out of practical reasons. The item that had the highest mean score for both female and male participants (M females=4.69, M males=4.30) is *Studying English is important to me because I think I will need it in the future (for my further education, future job)*. These findings support the idea that learners in today's world learn English because they see it as a way of communicating with the whole world, i.e. a *lingua franca*. Moreover, today's learners of English do not only want to identify themselves with the British and American culture, but they want to identify themselves as world citizens.

As the most demotivating factor for both genders, we identified the teacher (M females=4.21, M males=3.78). Out of 62 students 50 students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that teachers who do not provide enough support decrease students' motivation.

In order to assess gender differences in the motivation and demotivation items, a series of independent t-tests were performed (Table 1.) The analysis revealed that female participants differed significantly from males for 3 out of 20 items, using the standard  $p < 0.05$  criterion.

*Table 1. Differences between female and male participants in dependent variables, ranked according to the level of significance.*

Item	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean females	Mean males
The content is too easy.	3.353	60	0.001	2.26	3.09
I feel embarrassed when I have to speak in class.	-2.326	60	0.023	2.92	2.17
I study English because with English I can enjoy travelling abroad.	-2.200	30.845	0.035	4.46	3.87
The size of groups is too big.	1.706	33.264	0.097	2.00	2.61
Speaking English is considered to be a part of general culture.	-1.586	60	0.118	4.56	4.22
Studying English is important to me because I think I will need it in the future (for my further education, future job).	-1.488	27.098	0.148	4.69	4.30
Teachers who do not provide enough support decrease students' motivation.	-1.306	33.769	0.200	4.21	3.78
I study English because I want to work/study abroad.	1.157	60	0.252	3.21	3.57
I need English in my everyday life (PC, internet, games).	-1.143	60	0.258	4.15	3.87
The topics are not interesting.	1.122	60	0.266	1.85	2.13
I think others speak English better than me.	-1.055	60	0.296	3.23	2.91
I lose interest when I get a bad mark.	-0.993	60	0.325	2.64	2.30
I think others will laugh at me when they hear me speaking in English.	-0.962	60	0.349	2.38	2.09

The content is too difficult.	-0.944	60	0.349	2.31	2.00
I don't like English.	0.679	60	0.500	1.72	1.91
I am demotivated by boring and monotonous lectures.	0.175	50	0.537	2.67	2.91
Most people I have contact with know or study English.	-0.601	60	0.550	3.41	3.22
I want to familiarize myself with the culture of English language speakers.	0.445	60	0.658	2.51	2.65
Studying English makes me happy.	0.389	60	0.699	3.59	3.70
I study English because I want to make friends abroad.	-0.245	60	0.807	3.46	3.39

From Table 1. we can conclude that female participants differed significantly from the male participants in two demotivating factors and one motivating factor.

In terms of demotivation items, the results reveal that both female and male participants have low means on the item *I feel embarrassed when I have to speak in class*. Out of 62 students 29 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, 16 were indecisive, and 17 agreed or strongly agreed. The mean for males is 2.17 which shows that they mainly disagree or disagree strongly with this statement, while female students are more indecisive (M=2.92). Overall, we can conclude that although female participants differ significantly from male participants, neither gender shows lack of self-esteem.

To continue, more female participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the content is too easy, while males were more indecisive. These results show that female students found the course content adequate and were not demotivated by it.

In terms of motivation items, we found that significantly more female participants said they study English because they want to travel abroad. These results support the findings of Mori and Gobel who also found that female students showed more interest to travel than male participants. [11] However, it is important to highlight that both genders had high means on this factor.

No significant differences between the two genders emerged on other items.

Table 2. shows the differences between the means of the female and male participants for the three significant items.

*Table 2. Gender differences in motivation and demotivation.*

variable	gender	N	M	SD	t	p
I feel embarrassed when I have to speak in class.	M	23	2.17	1.370	-2.326	0.023
	F	39	2.92	1.133		
The content is too easy.	M	23	3.09	1.164	3.353	0.001
	F	39	2.26	00.785		
I study English because with English I can enjoy travelling abroad.	M	23	3.87	1.180	-2.200	0.035
	F	39	4.46	0.682		

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

This survey study investigated possible gender differences in language learning motivation and demotivation, in the specific EFL setting of a Croatian university. The results show that both genders learn English because they see it as the language which whole world speaks. Item-level statistical analysis revealed that female participants showed a greater desire to travel abroad than male participants. On the other hand, when we look at the results for demotivating factors, the teacher was the main demotivating factor for both male and female students. Considering other demotivating factors, more male participants thought that the content of the course was too easy and more female students reported that they feel embarrassed when having to speak English in class.

One limitation to the study is that the participants in this survey were all from one university. Accordingly, we have to emphasize that these results may be specific to one group and not generalizable to EFL learning as a whole.

However, the study does suggest possible factors that might be considered when teachers are looking for explanations for problems in language learning persistence in the EFL classroom.

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