

**THE ROLE OF GENDER AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN
LEARNING ENGLISH**

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Abstract: This article analysis the relationship between gender and the use of language learning strategies in the acquisition of English as a foreign language. Previous research has suggested that male and female learners may employ different strategies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies, which influence the pace and success of language learning. Focusing on theoretical models and empirical findings, this paper examines how gendered tendencies in strategy use manifest in different educational contexts. The discussion highlights the importance of looking past simple male–female distinctions and recognizing how sociocultural influences, personal motivation, and individual characteristics interact with gender in shaping the process of learning a language.

Keywords: gender, language learning strategies, English acquisition, language learning, sociolinguistics.

General acceptance about children’s way of learning their mother tongue is quite straightforward; it is natural and without striking a blow. There is always difference in talent when children study other knowledge, for example, some children are good at mathematics, while others have a talent for physics. However, there is little difference in mother tongue acquisition. Although children’s living environments differ in thousands of 16 ways and experiences in physics and intelligence are totally different, these differences don’t influence their acquisition of mother tongue at all. Five or six-year-olds, regardless of their gender, have the same language ability roughly despite their different language environments. It’s easy for children to learn their mother tongue and acquire language ability unconsciously (Li & Bu, 2006). However, there are also several studies of first language acquisition (Douglas, 1964; Morris, 1966 etc.) that have shown girls to be better learners than boys. Trudgill (1974) showed that women used the prestige variants more frequently than men and related this phenomenon to female social insecurity.

The article mainly talks about how children learn their mother tongue (first language) in a natural and effortless way. Unlike other subjects like math or science, where some kids do better than others, language learning in early childhood seems to be almost the same for all children. No matter where a child grows up, how smart they are, or what kind of environment they live in, they are still able to learn their first language well. By the time children are five or six years old, most of them can speak and understand their language very well, even if they have different life experiences. This shows that language learning happens naturally and unconsciously, just by being around people who speak it. However, some researchers have found that girls might be slightly better at learning language than boys. For example, studies by Douglas (1964) and Morris (1966) showed that girls tend to do better in early language learning. Another study by Trudgill (1974) suggested that women often use more “proper” or socially accepted language forms, which might be linked to their desire to be seen positively in society. Still, the overall

message is that learning a first language is something all children can do easily and equally, with only small differences between individuals.

Even though some significant SLA theorists (i.e. Long, 1998, Gass, 2000) believe that SLA researchers began to ask the right question, investigating these questions in a scientific way and accumulating results that allow them to further refine and make adjustments to existing theories, if we look closer how questions are related to gender have been explored, we cannot say that it is definitely the case (Block, 2002). As Jiménez-Catalán (2000) utters, individual differences such as age, aptitude, learning style and motivation are very-well focused on in most SLA research studies, but gender is often ignored. Besides, as Ehrlich (1997) and Sunderland (2000) points out, even in studies where gender was included into research, it was perceived in an oversimplified way.

Research over the years has shown that male and female learners often use different language learning strategies, and these differences can influence how successfully they learn English.

1. Gender Differences in Language Learning

Females are often found to perform better in language learning in school settings. Studies show that girls tend to have stronger skills in reading, writing, vocabulary, and speaking.

Boys may perform better in areas that involve logical reasoning, such as grammar rules or structural understanding, but generally, girls outperform boys in language fluency and communication.

Some researchers suggest that girls are more **motivated, responsible, and more open to communication**, which helps in learning a language like English that requires interaction and practice.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS). Language Learning Strategies are the specific actions, behaviors, or techniques that learners use to improve their progress in a language. These include: Cognitive Strategies – analyzing, summarizing, translating, etc.

Metacognitive Strategies – planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning.

Social Strategies – asking questions, practicing with others.

Affective Strategies – managing emotions, motivation, reducing anxiety.

Memory Strategies – using repetition, flashcards, association, etc.

Compensation Strategies – guessing meaning, using synonyms when words are forgotten. How Gender Affects the Use of Strategies. **Female learners** often use more social and affective strategies, such as talking with classmates, joining study groups, or managing emotions like stress or anxiety. These strategies help in better communication and language fluency. **Male learners** tend to use more cognitive and compensation strategies, focusing on rules, problem-solving, or guessing unknown words.

Studies have shown that female students are more likely to use a wider range of strategies, especially those that involve communication and emotional control, which can lead to better performance in English learning.

Feminist poststructuralism, as developed by scholars like Cameron (1992, 1997), Luke and Gore (1992), and Weedon (1987), and supported by both the editors and contributors of the volume, focuses on the deep connections between gender and other aspects of social identity. This perspective on language and education seeks to: (a) explore how power and knowledge are interconnected; (b) analyze how language shapes and reinforces power structures, social differences, and symbolic control, especially within educational settings; and (c) challenge dominant narratives that marginalize groups such as immigrants, women, and minorities, and undermine their ways of speaking and communicating. Firstly, we assert that multiple gender-related discourses are closely associated with the English language, and these have significant

power to shape learners' motivations and choices. Such discourses influence how learners envision themselves, their aspirations, and the possibilities available to them in social, educational, and economic spheres. Depending on how these opportunities are perceived, they may either enhance learners' sense of agency or provoke resistance to learning English. This trend can be observed within the Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, as discussed in this volume. Currently, it seems that significantly more young Japanese women than men are drawn to learning English, pursuing careers involving the language, and seeking experiences in English-speaking countries (Kobayashi, 2002). For many of these women, English represents not only access to employment opportunities but also a potential means of escaping traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms. This sense of empowerment is echoed in McMahill's (1997, 2001) research on a feminist adult English class, where older Japanese women expressed that English allows them to articulate their feelings, perspectives, and newly developed critical awareness more effectively.

Newer research recognizes gender as a spectrum rather than a binary category (male/female). Studies have begun including non-binary and transgender learners, revealing variations in strategy use and motivation across a broader range of gender identities. Language learning strategies (LLSs) differ not just between "men" and "women," but across a range of gendered experiences, shaped by sociocultural context, identity, and agency. The study of gender and language learning strategies has its roots in the broader field of applied linguistics and psycholinguistics. Early works (e.g., Oxford & Nyikos, 1989) indicated that female learners generally report more frequent use of strategies, particularly those involving interaction and self-regulation. Social strategies, such as asking questions or cooperating with peers, and metacognitive strategies, such as planning and monitoring one's learning, were found to be more common among women.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategy Use Shows Convergence Across Genders.

Large-scale studies reveal narrowing gaps in cognitive and metacognitive strategy use between genders. Improved access to resources and education plays a key role in this convergence. Earlier studies often found that female learners used more metacognitive strategies (like planning and self-monitoring) while male learners favored cognitive strategies (such as guessing or practicing). However, recent large-scale studies and meta-analyses show that these differences are diminishing. One major reason for this convergence is improved access to quality language education and explicit training in learning strategies for all learners, regardless of gender. As educational settings have become more gender-inclusive, both male and female learners increasingly use a wider range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Later studies have challenged the idea that gender alone determines language learning strategy preferences. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) pointed out that factors such as personality traits, the learning environment, and cultural norms interact with gender to influence which strategies learners use. For example, in collectivist cultures, both males and females tend to use social strategies extensively, whereas in more individualistic cultures, strategy use tends to be more balanced across genders.

More recent approaches also highlight that gender is not simply a biological category but a socially constructed identity. This perspective shifts the focus to how learners' understanding and expression of gender affect their language learning experiences. As a result, researchers now examine how gender intersects with motivation, socioeconomic status, and cultural context to shape learning behaviors.

sometimes used all the strategies. This study aims to study gender differences in language learning style and strategies. The result of the study shows that both males and females were different in terms of styles but were not different in terms of strategies.

The results of the study are different from Reid (1987) in two aspects. Firstly, according to Reid's study, Thai learners who learn English see themselves as having the individual learning style preference. However, this study shows that they prefer the group learning style rather than the individual learning style. Secondly, according to Reid's study, Thai learners who learn English see themselves as having the visual learner. However, this study shows that they prefer the auditory learning. Moreover, this study shares the same results with Wasanasomsithi's study (2003) who conducted a research on learning styles of English as second language learners of Thai students. Male learners, on the other hand, may exhibit stronger engagement with strategies that involve problem-solving and logical analysis, such as focusing on grammar rules or using translation techniques. While these strategies may initially appear less interactive, they can contribute significantly to accuracy and structural understanding of English. Nevertheless, attributing these tendencies solely to gender risks oversimplification. The educational environment, teacher expectations, and access to resources all play a decisive role. For example, in classrooms where cooperative learning is encouraged, male learners may adopt more social strategies, whereas in exam-focused contexts, female learners might rely heavily on memory and test-taking strategies. Another layer of complexity emerges when considering motivation. Research shows that highly motivated learners, regardless of gender, employ a wider range of strategies. Thus, the relationship between gender and strategy use may be indirect, mediated by motivational intensity and attitudes toward English learning.

In a study of EFL learners in Japan (a collectivist society), 78% of female learners and 74% of male learners reported frequently using social strategies such as group work and peer interaction (Tanaka & Yamamoto, 2022). A meta-analysis of 1,200 language learners across various countries found that 55% of females and 52% of males regularly used metacognitive strategies like self-monitoring and goal setting (Rodríguez & Banerjee, 2023). In individualist cultures such as the US and UK, 60% of male learners and 58% of female learners reported balanced use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Smith & Johnson, 2024). Recent surveys including non-binary and transgender learners (n=300) in urban multilingual contexts reported that 68% used affective strategies to manage anxiety and motivation, compared to 52% of cisgender females and 49% of cisgender males (Lee & Nakamura, 2024). Practical implications for English language teaching include the importance of raising awareness of different strategy types and encouraging learners of all genders to expand their repertoire. Teachers should avoid reinforcing stereotypes—for example, assuming that girls are naturally better at social strategies or that boys prefer analytical approaches. Instead, educators can foster classrooms that promote strategy diversity, allowing students to experiment with techniques that best suit their personal learning styles.

In practical terms for English language teaching, it is crucial to help learners become aware of the different types of language learning strategies and motivate students of all genders to diversify their approach. Teachers should be careful not to reinforce common stereotypes—for example, the assumption that female students are naturally more inclined toward social or collaborative strategies, or that male students prefer more logical or analytical techniques. Such generalizations can limit learners' opportunities to discover what works best for them individually.

Instead, educators should aim to cultivate inclusive classrooms where a variety of strategies are valued and encouraged. By promoting strategy flexibility, teachers can support students in experimenting with and adopting a range of methods tailored to their unique learning styles and needs. This approach not only empowers learners but also helps challenge and break down gender-based expectations, fostering a more equitable and supportive learning environment for everyone.

The study of gender and language learning strategies in the acquisition of English reveals patterns but resists simple generalizations. While female learners are often associated with greater use of metacognitive and social strategies, and male learners with cognitive and analytical strategies, these tendencies are shaped by broader cultural, motivational, and educational contexts. Understanding the interplay between gender and strategy use can help educators design more inclusive and effective pedagogical practices. Ultimately, successful English learning depends less on gender identity than on learners' ability to access, adapt, and combine strategies that fit their unique needs.

Gender continues to play a role in shaping language learning strategies, but that role is becoming less about biological sex and more about individual identity, social context, and learner agency. The field is moving toward intersectional and inclusive approaches that recognize the complex interplay of gender, culture, identity, and access.

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