



## Instrumental Motivation and Self-Efficacy of Indonesian L2 Learners of English: Does Gender Play a Role?

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### Abstract

Extensive research on second and foreign language learning suggests that gender can significantly influence language acquisition. While some studies indicate that female learners often outperform males in language tasks, the evidence is inconsistent, and findings may vary depending on the learning context. This highlights the need to explore further how gender interacts with other factors, such as motivation and self-efficacy, in shaping L2 learning outcomes. This study explores how gender affects learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy in learning English as a second language. A total of 144 L2 learners from non-English departments at a private university in Java, Indonesia, participated in this research, which utilized a survey design. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed to participants, who were recruited through convenience sampling. The findings revealed that female learners reported slightly higher levels of instrumental motivation (Mean female = 43.40) than male learners (Mean score-male = 42.78). However, the difference was not statistically significant,  $t = .86$ ,  $p = .15$ . In terms of self-efficacy, male learners demonstrated marginally higher levels (Mean score-male = 47.71) than females (Mean score-female = 46.32), but again, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t = -1.48$ ,  $p = .14$ . These findings suggest that, while gender differences in motivation and self-efficacy are often highlighted in L2 research, their impact may vary based on specific learning contexts. Further research is needed, incorporating additional learner variables, to clarify the complex relationship between gender and L2 learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Gender, instrumental motivation, self-efficacy, English as a second language, foreign language

### INTRODUCTION

A wide range of factors influences second language acquisition (SLA). It is a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, each contributing to how effectively and quickly an individual can learn a new language. The process of second language acquisition highly individualized. It means, learners experience these influences differently based on their social background and cognitive styles, included their gender.

Gender remains a subject of ongoing debate in educational contexts. As second language learning has gained prominence in contemporary discussions, the role of gender in shaping learners' experiences has increasingly drawn the interest of researchers. It has attracted the attention of second or foreign language (L2) researchers as a potential variable affecting the success of L2 learning (Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For instance, studies have explored gender differences in various L2 areas, including listening skills (Alamdari & Bozorgian, 2022), grammar acquisition (Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh, 2020), the use of effective learning strategies (Yilmaz, 2010), and writing proficiency (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020).

In second language acquisition, instrumental motivation and self-efficacy play crucial roles in shaping learners' success. Instrumental motivation drives learners by focusing on the practical, whereas external rewards gained through mastering a new language, such as better job opportunities, academic success, or personal fulfilment (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017; Siahaan et al., 2022). These learners often prioritize the tangible benefits of language learning, using the language as a tool to achieve specific outcomes rather than for intrinsic enjoyment. Thus, understanding the level of instrumental motivation is vital, as it significantly impacts learners' persistence, engagement, and overall success. Similarly, self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks—critically influences how learners tackle language learning challenges.

Additionally, a high sense of self-efficacy boosts confidence, leading learners to exert more effort, display greater tenacity, and persist through difficulties, thereby achieving higher levels of proficiency; conversely, low self-efficacy can diminish the effort and increase the likelihood of giving up (Graham, 2022; Genç et al., 2016; Raoofi et al., 2012). Both students and educators play important roles in fostering self-efficacy, making it an essential element to explore in language learning. Understanding learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy levels provides valuable insights into their approach to language acquisition and the support they may need to succeed.

On the other part, studies indicate that men and women display different characteristics in second language acquisition (Van Der Slik et al., 2015). It is happened likely due to various social influences such as family expectations, teacher attitudes, perceived academic difficulty, career aspirations, and entrenched gender stereotypes. These differences are essential to understanding how gender may affect language learning outcomes. Many researchers agree that female students often perform better than their male counterparts in language-related tasks (Al-Saadi, 2020; Główska, 2014).

Furthermore, research on gender differences in motivation often shows that female learners exhibit higher motivation levels than male learners. For example, a mixed-methods study in Türkiye involving 383 L2 learners by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) found that although female learners reported higher anxiety levels, they also demonstrated higher motivation compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Cahyono and Rahayu's (2020) study of 55 Indonesian L2 learners revealed that female learners were significantly more motivated in writing than male peers. However, other studies present different outcomes; Dhakal's (2018) research with 315 Thai L2 learners reported no significant differences in motivation between female and male learners, highlighting the context-specific nature of gender differences in L2 motivation.

The impact of gender on self-efficacy presents mixed findings in the literature. While some studies report no significant gender differences, others suggest variations. For example, [Truong and Wang \(2019\)](#) conducted a study involving 767 Vietnamese college students and found no significant differences in self-efficacy between male and female students, though the self-efficacy of female learners was marginally higher. In contrast, [Shi \(2018\)](#) examined 198 L2 learners in the United States and discovered that female students exhibited significantly higher self-efficacy levels than their male peers. These contradictory findings imply that the relationship between gender, motivation, and self-efficacy in L2 learning is likely influenced by specific cultural and educational contexts, indicating a need for further investigation.

The insights above highlight that the relationship between gender and its influence on motivation and self-efficacy in second language (L2) acquisition has been the subject of extensive research. However, the findings remain varied and, at times, inconclusive. This persistent inconsistency underscores the need for further exploration into the impact of gender on the L2 learning process. Alongside other factors such as motivation, age, and personality, gender has emerged as a critical area of focus in the study of second language acquisition, emphasizing its importance in understanding the complexities of L2 learning.

Therefore, the present study offers a novel contribution by specifically examining the role of gender in influencing L2 learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy, building on the findings of two preceding studies. While previous research has established that learners exhibit moderate to high levels of self-efficacy across various language skills and possess strong instrumental motivation, the potential impact of gender on these factors remains underexplored. This study aims to answer the research question: To what extent does gender play a role in influencing L2 learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy? This investigation is expected to offer valuable insights that could inform tailored educational strategies to support L2 learners more effectively.

## METHOD

The present study employed a quantitative survey design, distributing a paper-based questionnaire to the target participants. This study is a continuation of two previous studies investigating learners' self-efficacy and instrumental motivation. Like the previous studies, this research involved 144 L2 learners of English from non-English departments at a private university in Java, Indonesia. These learners were selected through convenience sampling based on the researchers' ease of access and convenience ([Gray, 2022](#)). At the time of data collection, the participants were enrolled in general English classes and non-credited college English courses at the same university. These participants were distributed across seven academic departments which are Accounting (13 participants), Architecture (16 participants), Informatics (45 participants), Information Systems (16 participants), Management (37 participants), Medical (13 participants), and Product Design (4 participants). The Informatics department had the highest representation, with 45 students, while the Product Design department had the fewest, with only 4 participants.

The paper-based questionnaire set used in this study comprised three main sections, which are a demographic information questionnaire, an instrumental motivation questionnaire, and a self-efficacy questionnaire—the demographic section collected data on

participants' gender and academic departments. The instrumental motivation and self-efficacy questionnaires were adapted from previous studies and employed a Likert scale format to measure participants' responses. The instrumental motivation section included ten items, while the self-efficacy section consisted of twelve items designed to assess different aspects of the learners' attitudes and beliefs regarding their language learning process.

The items for the Instrumental Motivation questionnaire were sourced from a combination of established studies. Specifically, six items were adapted from [Al-Ta'ani \(2018\)](#), three items from [Matsuzaki-Carreira \(2005\)](#), and one item from [Kashefian-Naeeni et al. \(2018\)](#). The Self-Efficacy questionnaire was organized into four distinct areas corresponding to different language skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. The writing self-efficacy items were adapted from [Teng et al. \(2017\)](#), the reading self-efficacy items from [Mills et al. \(2006\)](#), the listening self-efficacy items from [Smith et al. \(2011\)](#), and the speaking self-efficacy items from [Asakereh and Dehghannezhad \(2015\)](#). This methodical adaptation from well-established sources ensured that the questionnaires were grounded in reliable and validated measures, specifically tailored to assess the study's key variables.

The adapted questionnaires underwent rigorous testing for validity and reliability prior to data analysis to address the research questions. Validity was evaluated through Pearson's correlation coefficients, assessing the strength of the relationship between each item and the overall construct, ensuring accurate measurement of the intended variables. All ten items on the Instrumental Motivation (IM) questionnaire and all twelve items on the Self-Efficacy (SE) questionnaire showed statistically significant correlations with their respective constructs. Each correlation coefficient exceeded the critical value for Pearson's correlation ( $N = 144$ ,  $df = 142$ ) of .15, affirming the questionnaires' validity. Reliability was determined using both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients. The IM questionnaire achieved a McDonald's omega of .79 and a Cronbach's alpha of .77, reflecting strong internal consistency. Likewise, the SE questionnaire yielded a McDonald's omega of .82 and a Cronbach's alpha of .81, indicating robust internal reliability.

Data analysis was conducted in SPSS 25 following the validation and reliability testing. Participant responses were recorded numerically: "Female" was coded as "0," "Male" as "1," and numbers 1 through 7 represented the participants' departments. For the Likert-scale items, responses were scored as follows: 5 points for "Strongly Agree," 4 for "Agree," 3 for "Undecided," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree." The questionnaires were distributed in Indonesian, the participant's first language, to minimize cognitive load, aligning with the principle of non-maleficence. Two steps were taken to address the research question. First, total scores for instrumental motivation and composite self-efficacy (including L2 reading, listening, writing, and speaking self-efficacy) were calculated. Second, an independent sample t-test was performed using gender as the grouping variable to determine whether gender influenced these test variables.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to compare the instrumental motivation and L2 self-efficacy levels between female and male learners. This analysis aimed to determine whether gender significantly influences these key factors

in second language acquisition. By conducting independent sample t-tests, the study sought to identify potential gender-based differences in learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy.

**Table 1.** Results of independent sample t-test of female and male learners' instrumental motivation and l2 self-efficacy

	Female (N=68)		Male (N=76)		T-test	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Instrumental Motivation	43.40	4.06	42.78	4.55	.86	.15
L2 Self-efficacy (composite)	46.32	5.56	47.71	5.67	-1.48	.14
L2 Reading Self-Efficacy	11.31	1.86	11.67	1.91	-1.15	.25
L2 Listening Self-Efficacy	11.56	1.91	11.79	1.75	-.76	.45
L2 Writing Self-Efficacy	11.53	1.90	11.91	1.88	-1.20	.23
L2 Speaking Self-Efficacy	11.93	1.57	12.34	1.66	-1.54	.13

Several key findings can be highlighted from the results presented in Table 1. The study found that female learners' instrumental motivation ( $M = 43.40$ ,  $SD = 4.06$ ) was slightly higher than that of their male counterparts ( $M = 42.78$ ,  $SD = 4.55$ ); however, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(142) = .86$ ,  $p > .05$ . Similarly, male learners reported a slightly higher composite self-efficacy across four language skills ( $M = 47.71$ ,  $SD = 5.67$ ) compared to female learners ( $M = 46.32$ ,  $SD = 5.56$ ). However, this difference was also not statistically significant,  $t(142) = -1.48$ ,  $p > .05$ . Further analysis showed that male learners had higher self-efficacy in reading ( $M = 11.67$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), listening ( $M = 11.79$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ), writing ( $M = 11.91$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ), and speaking ( $M = 12.34$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) compared to female learners' reading ( $M = 11.31$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ), listening ( $M = 11.56$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), writing ( $M = 11.53$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ), and speaking self-efficacy ( $M = 11.93$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ). Despite these observed differences, none were statistically significant,  $p > .05$ . Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that while female learners reported slightly higher levels of instrumental motivation and male learners reported slightly higher levels of self-efficacy, gender did not significantly influence these outcomes.

The survey results revealed that although female learners reported slightly higher levels of instrumental motivation, the difference was not statistically significant. Instrumental motivation is driven by external factors, such as job opportunities, promotions, and other tangible benefits of learning a second language (Papi & Hiver, 2020). In a context like Indonesia, where gender equality is widely promoted and encouraged, both male and female learners may have comparable expectations regarding career prospects and the economic advantages of learning English. This similarity in motivation could also be linked to cultural attitudes toward English, which is likely viewed by both genders as a valuable tool for personal and professional advancement (Getie, 2020). Social influences, including friendliness, peer pressure, and parental support, may also contribute to this phenomenon, with both male and female learners being encouraged to achieve proficiency in English to the same extent (Effiong, 2015; Wang & Littlewood, 2021). On a broader scale, globalization, equal access to technology, and the demands of the job market may further explain the similar levels of instrumental motivation across genders. Both male and female learners are



likely exposed to English through various media and cultures, which could inspire a shared desire to learn the language (Abdullah et al., 2019). Additionally, the job market often requires equal English proficiency from all candidates, reinforcing similar motivation levels among learners of both genders. These factors, whether acting individually or in combination, contribute to the comparable levels of instrumental motivation observed in this study.

Furthermore, the study found that although male learners reported slightly higher levels of self-efficacy, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding aligns with several previous studies conducted in Iran (Bonyadi et al., 2012; Kargar & Zamanian, 2014) and Vietnam (Truong & Wang, 2019), which also reported no significant gender differences in self-efficacy, suggesting consistent results across various Asian contexts. Several factors might contribute to this uniformity, such as equal instructional support from teachers, equal access to learning resources, collaborative learning environments, and the increasingly equal gender roles in Indonesian society (Cirocki & Anam, 2021).

Self-efficacy relates to learners' beliefs in their ability to perform specific tasks and achieve desired outcomes successfully. Teachers' consistent support and encouragement play a significant role in fostering this confidence across genders. When teachers provide similar levels of constructive feedback and encouragement to both male and female learners, it can lead to comparable levels of self-efficacy, as both groups feel equally capable of achieving success in using the L2 (Guo & Zhou, 2021; Woodcock et al., 2022). Equal access to learning resources, including technological tools that offer flexible learning opportunities, further supports the development of self-efficacy by allowing all learners to enhance their skills equally. Additionally, the prevalence of collaborative learning activities in L2 classes may have contributed to this finding, as working with peers enables learners to build confidence through shared success and mutual support (Le et al., 2017). On a broader scale, the widespread gender equality in Indonesia may also contribute to the similar levels of self-efficacy reported by male and female learners. In a society where gender roles are increasingly equal, learners of both genders may have similar perceptions of their capabilities and potential achievements (Igbo et al., 2015). This context likely explains why participants in this study reported comparable self-efficacy levels, regardless of gender.

Finally, gender in L2 learning should be viewed not merely as a biological characteristic but as a social construct influenced by cultural and psychological factors. In environments where gender roles are relatively equal, learners' gender may not significantly impact L2 learning outcomes. However, in more patriarchal societies, where gender roles are more restrictive, different outcomes might be observed. Therefore, L2 teachers should consider gender as a nurture-based factor, shaped by socio-psychological and cultural influences, rather than a purely neurobiological determinant in language learning.

## CONCLUSION

This survey study explored the role of gender in influencing learners' instrumental motivation and self-efficacy in the context of second language (L2) acquisition. The research involved 144 Indonesian L2 learners from seven different academic departments. The analysis revealed that female learners exhibited marginally higher levels of instrumental motivation, but this difference was not statistically significant. Similarly, male learners

showed slightly higher self-efficacy levels, though the difference did not reach statistical significance. Furthermore, no significant gender differences were detected in self-efficacy related to specific skills such as reading, listening, writing, and speaking, despite male learners reporting marginally higher levels in these areas.

These findings have several implications for L2 instruction. Although no significant differences were observed, the tendencies for female learners to have higher instrumental motivation and male learners to exhibit higher self-efficacy suggest that language practitioners consider tailoring L2 instruction to address these groups' specific needs and strengths. For instance, male learners could be provided opportunities to leverage their confidence. Female learners might benefit from environments that foster psychological safety, allowing them to practice the language more freely despite potentially lower self-efficacy. Additionally, given learners' limited exposure to English outside the classroom, teachers should maximize class time to provide real-life contexts demonstrating how language skills can help achieve practical, utilitarian goals.

Moreover, the study's limitations should be acknowledged. Using a survey as the sole data collection method has inherent drawbacks, as the data rely on the participants' honesty in responding to the questionnaire. Additionally, while the sample size was sufficient, it needed to be more extensive for broad generalization in a quantitative study. Therefore, generalizations should be made cautiously, particularly when applying these findings to other contexts with characteristics similar to this study's participants.

Future research directions could include conducting surveys with L2 teachers to explore their perceptions of gender influence on L2 learning in specific contexts, such as Indonesia. Such studies could provide valuable insights into how teachers perceive gender's role in language learning. Additionally, future research could explore the impact of gender on other individual difference factors, such as anxiety in language skills, foreign language enjoyment, learning styles and strategies, and willingness to communicate. Finally, it may be worthwhile to conduct quasi-experimental studies to examine whether there are gender differences in the effects of specific teaching innovations.

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