Gender Oriented Performance of Language Learners: Examining the Case of Business Schools in Karachi

Samiullah Sarwar, Masood Hassan, Zara Hadwani, Urooj Azmat, Salman Manzoor

Abstract

In the light of previously conducted studies regarding English as Second Language (ESL) learning, it is assumed that female language learners usually achieve higher grades than that of the male language learners. Keeping this assumption in consideration, the present study aimed at addressing the need of motivational factor required by the ESL learners keeping their genders in mind. From this perspective, this study examined if gender difference played any role to increase the motivational level of ESL learners in their improved performance. From this perspective, 44 assignments and 59 final reports submitted by business management students enrolled in different semesters were analysed to understand the performance of students based on their genders. Through quantitative analysis of the results received from the ETS report, the study reached to its findings that there is not a statistically significant difference between the two genders of business students on their performance regarding the production of scholarly text in the English language. Furthermore, this study also explored that there is not a statistically significant difference between the two different levels of business students (BBA and MBA, when distinguished by their different genders) on their performance regarding the production of scholarly text in the English language. In the light of the findings, this study recommends that any criteria suggested to measure business students' adequacy of academic writing should keep gender difference aside, as gender does not play any role in the performance of business students.

[1]Ph.D Scholar/Senior Lecturer at Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi.
Email: masoodhassan1@hotmail.com
[2]Department of Education, University of Loralai. learnedsami@gmail.com
[3]Department of Business and Administration, University of Sialkot ramzanmehar7@gmail.com

1.   INTRODUCTION

Production of scholarly text within the English language by most of the Business students can be stated as a difficult task, particularly the students for whom English is not their first language or mother tongue. This is particularly because producing scholarly text within the English language requires the enhanced written communicative skills and comprehensive linguistic background (Bailey, 2014) as well as students' motivation. A wide range of business students, particularly in Pakistan, does not have a comprehensive linguistic background that leads them to lack the enhanced written communicative skills to produce the scholarly text. According to Nordquist (2017), business writing is based on scholarly text having comprehensive and sound academic principles. The term "Business Writing" can be defined as organisational communication, which is used for both purposes i.e. internal and external communication. Smith (2010) figures out that plain English should be used for business communication; nevertheless, selection of effective words is very important for the convenience of readers of different types. Furthermore, due care of the grammar, sentence structuring, punctuation, and other mechanisms must be taken to make writing more precise and educated, which is only possible with the increased level motivation towards language learning.

Hosseini and Pourmandnia (2013) believe that various factors influence on learning any language. Among them, perception and attitude of learners toward their target language are considered to be most important. These are "the concepts which have been the focal points of sociolinguists as far as learner behaviour is concerned" (p. 63).This is particularly because both of the factors are directly linked to the language aptitude and motivation of the students. From this perspective, Ushida (2005) puts special emphasis on language aptitude and motivation considering two as significant determinants

of language achievement. Gender also plays a significant role in the language aptitude and motivation, as female learners seem more motivated towards the social conversation and thus they can have more chances to achieve their language goals faster than that of the male learners.

Gender theory provides a constructive framework to examine the "cognitive processing" of information. There are social differences between men and women. According to Nemati and Bayer (2007), "Two of the most significant theories on social differences between males and females are difference theory and dominance theory" (p. 186). In the light of difference theory, men and women, living in same or different groups, demonstrate separate or different cultural world and thus they promote different speaking ways (Nemati & Bayer, 2007). On the other hand, dominance theory stats that men and women live in a linguistic and cultural world, where status and power are distributed unequally. Although the second theory is more tending towards the Male Dominance found in certain societies, but both can be taken as a tool that differentiates between the Communication Styles of men and women. For example, Merchant (2012) explains the major difference of communication styles between men and women that depend on their different intention of conversation. For example, the use of language by men is mainly to achieve concrete outcomes and exert dominance, while women consider communication as an instrument for the enhancement of social connections and creation of relationships. According to Lightbown, Spada, Ranta, and Rand (1993), learners are obliged to negotiate for meaning when they are given the opportunities meant to be designed to engage them in meaningful activities. Therefore, through meaningful activities, learners can be provided with the opportunities not only to express a lot but also to clarify their thoughts, intentions, and opinions, and so on in the way allowing them to reach a mutual understanding, regardless of their gender. This concept of language learning not only reflects on the theory presented by Stephen Krashen with the name of "Natural Communication" but also on the Social Interaction Theory in which

the role of gender is involved because of their different purposes of conversation.

This study aims at addressing the need of business students' motivational factor towards the production of scholarly text within the English language keeping different genders in consideration. For this purpose, it explores if gender difference plays any role to increase the motivational level of business students. Considering this, the present study presents the following hypotheses:

H1: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students, in general, does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

H2: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for BBA does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

H3: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for MBA does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Academic Writing

As the number of business students is being increased day by day, being taught in English language (EL), it has increased the demand EL learning as EL proficiency in general and academic writing in particular (ITS Corporate Training, 2017, p.n.d). According to ITS Corporate Training, 2017, "Effective communication is the key to success. No matter how good your selling techniques are, or how good your marketing proposal is, poor language skills inevitably destroy all your efforts" (p.n.d). Considering this perspective, Attali and Powers (2008) point out that one of the fundamental skills of scholars is

academic writing, as it plays a significant role in academia from the elementary grades. Successful writing is not only required as academic success, rather it is also required for a successful business.

2.2   Gender Differences and Language Learning

According to Northwestern (2016), "Although researchers have long agreed that girls have superior language abilities than boys, until now no one has clearly provided a biological basis that may account for their differences" (p.n.d). In the same way, Zoghi, Kazemi and Kalani (2013) argue that considering the evidence it can be stated that female language learners usually achieve higher grades than that of the male language learners in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) though both male and female have improved the performances. From this perspective, gender is widely regarded as a significant factor, which plays a dominant role as well as influences on the second language learning. Zoghi, Kazemi and Kalani (2013) strongly believe that languages of men have a noteworthy different proportion from the languages of women and no social or educational conditioning is able to completely remove these differences. Considering the perspective of Aslan (2009), he states, "traditional gender perspectives, the superiority of female language learners being the first, persist among TESOL educators" (p. 14). SLA research, as well as practice, holds the assumption that gender difference is a concrete factor in the context of language learning. For example, a large number of research studies have concluded that female learners have a concrete advantage over the male language learners both in first and second languages. Therefore, female superiority in the context of language development is still believed to exist (Kayaodlu, 2012). Nevertheless, Lopez Rua (2006) points out that social interaction can be stated as an important variable in the language learning of girls. Lopez Rua (2006) also discusses five types of different variables related to the achievement in the second language through interaction.

2.3   Language Learners' Motivation

According to Bernard (2010), the motivational level of language Learners plays a noteworthy role to Succeed. If language teachers are not able to understand the connection between motivation and its effect on language learning, they cannot effectively teach the language they are supposed to teach. Dornyei (2010) states that motivation can be stated as an important factor for the learning success and thus the skills of teachers regarding motivating the learners are central to the teaching effectiveness. In the same way, in the field of psychology, the motivational factor is considered as an important concept for language learning as well. Students and teachers commonly use the term "motivation" to explain the causes of failure and success in learning the language. From this perspective, it would not be wrong to state that motivation provides the principal impetus in initiating foreign or second language learning that, later on, becomes the driving force for the learners to sustain a long as well as tedious learning process. Considering gender-oriented language learning, Asgarabadi, Rouhi, and Jafarigohar (2015) point out, "There are some studies on the role of the learners' genders where significant differences between male and female learners in the reading comprehension have been reported. The authors of these studies reported that females outscored the males in their reading comprehensions, in general" (p. 2558).

2.4   Language Learners' Aptitude

The term "Language Learning Aptitude" is used to estimate how well an individual is able to learn the second language under set conditions and within a specified amount of time. Like the learning motivation, language aptitude has also been considered as the main individual difference variable in learning the second language. As defined by Dornyei (2010), Language Learning Aptitude is "the learner characteristics that have been found to exert the greatest amount of consistent influence on the SLA process" (p. 247).

3. METHODOLOGY

In the present study, a research methodology that is based on Error Analysis (EA) (Mungungu, 2010) was applied considering the following possible errors in language writing:

- Grammatical error.
- Mechanical error.
- Stylistic error.
- Usage error.
- Spelling error.

All of the mentioned aspects of EA measured the appropriate usage of context, clear syntax and correct grammar.

3.1 Types and Source of Data

In order to describe the academic writing deficiencies of business students based on their different genders, it was very important to have in-depth assessment of the submitted assignments and reports. For the present study, 44 assignments and 59 final reports (103 altogether) submitted by business management students enrolled in different semesters were the samples of written manuscripts. It was made sure that all of the assignments and final reports were submitted through Turnitin, initially known as a plagiarism checker technology used by both students and teachers.

3.2 Instrument

The submitted assignments and final reports were analysed based on the Error Analysis through an automated scoring system known as ETS, available as built-in with the Turnitin to access the performance scores achieved by the business students. The following table 1 further describes the detailed scoring criteria of ETS under the possible errors in language writing.

Table 1: Main Features for Error Analysis

Features	Description
Grammatical Errors	ETS measures the grammatical errors based on the errors associated with subject-verb agreement, proofreading error, word error, garbled sentence (confusing statement), fragment error, missing possessives, run-on sentence, pronoun error, and verb error
Mechanical Errors	ETS measures the mechanical errors based on the errors associated with hyphen error, duplicate word, proper noun error, missing comma, missing punctuation, sentence capitalization, compound, fused sentence, missing apostrophe, missing question mark
Stylistic Errors	ETS measures the stylistic errors based on the errors associated with the style of language i.e. overly used of passive voice sentences, very long and/or very short sentences used, sentences started with the coordinated conjunctions, inappropriate use of phrases or words (tone)
Usage Errors	ETS measures the usage of the written language based on the errors associated with confused words, wrongly used or missing articles, wrong form of words, faulty comparison, preposition errors, use of non-standard words, and wrong use of negation
Spelling Errors	Spelling errors

Each of the characteristics mentioned above has been taken from criterion used in ETS e-rating system for electronic scoring of submitted manuscripts produced and subsequently submitted by students as their either assignments or final reports. Sajid and Siddiqui (2015) figure out that ETS e-rater can be applied by educators as a scoring tool to mark, grade, and annotate the written texts submitted electronically by students.

On the other hand, Statistical Package (SPSS) was applied to analyse the gathered data to evaluate the percentage of errors, frequency of errors, comparisons as well as other concerned indicators. From this perspective, independent sample T-Test was applied to compare the performance scores achieved by the business students based on their gender difference. Gender difference of the business students was also distinguished based on the

programmes students were enrolled for i.e. BBA and MBA. Finally, the same SPSS package was applied for the descriptive statistics of the participants as well as the frequency of errors.

4.   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

To measure the demographic description of students whose submitted assignments and final projects were taken for the analysis, the following table 2 describes the statistical description in line with the academic programmes and genders of the students:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Students	Frequency	Percent
BBA	36	35
MBA	67	65
Total Female Students	30	29.1
Total Male Students	73	70.9
Female students in BBA	15	41.7
Male students in BBA	21	58.3
Female students in MBA	15	22.4
Male students in MBA	52	77.6
Total	**103**	**100**

In the light of table 2, it is clear that the total percentage of MBA students (65 %) is higher than that of the BBA students (35 %). On the other hand, the total percentage of male students (70.9 %) is much higher than that of the female students (29.1 %). Nevertheless, if the gender of students is compared based on their different genders at BBA level (female = 41.7 % vs. male = 58.3 %), the difference does not exist at its significant level comparing to the MBA level (female = 22.4 vs. male = 77.6). Based on the mentioned above descriptive statistics, it can be stated that male students are more inclined towards taking admission in the business studies.

Table 3: Summary of Main Features for Error Analysis

	N	Sum	Std	Mean
Grammatical Errors	103	1401	10.16	13.60
Mechanical Errors	103	1417	10.18	13.76
Stylistic Errors	103	401	4.71	3.89
Usage Errors	103	5673	33.27	55.08
Spelling Errors	103	786	10.94	7.63

Table 3 describes the summary of errors based on the main features. From this perspective, it was found that errors related to usage were the most frequently occurred with 5673 as a total number of errors, 55.08 as the mean value of errors, and 33.27 as standard deviation.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Grammatical Errors

	N	Range	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subject-Verb Agreement	103	19	482	4.68	4.38
Word Error	103	10	47	.46	1.51
proofread	103	14	313	3.04	3.03
Garbled Sentence	103	3	81	.79	1.03
Fragment	103	4	66	.64	.862
Run-on Sentence	103	9	46	.45	1.32
Possessive	103	5	105	1.02	1.1
Verb	103	9	209	2.03	2.15
Pronoun	103	4	52	.50	.862

In the light of Table 4, subject-verb agreement is the most frequently occurred grammatical error with maximum range = 19, sum = 482, mean = 4.68, and standard deviation = 4.38. On the other hand, Run-on Sentence was found as the less frequently occurred error of grammar category with maximum range = 9, sum = 46, mean =.45, and standard deviation = 1.32.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Mechanical Errors

	N	Range	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hyphen	103	14	144	1.40	2.560
Proper Nouns	103	2	26	.25	.479
Duplication	103	17	90	.87	2.969
Missing ","	103	38	931	9.04	8.354
Sentence Cap	103	6	92	.89	1.386
Missing punctuation	103	1	5	.05	.216
Compound Sentences	103	11	59	.57	1.563
Missing Apostrophe	103	22	57	.55	3.051
Fused Sentences	103	1	4	.04	.20
Missing "?"	103	1	9	.09	.284

Table 5 describes the missing comma as the most frequently occurred mechanical error with maximum range = 38, sum = 931, mean = 9.04, and standard deviation = 8.36. On the other hand, Fused Sentences were found as the less frequently occurred error of mechanical category with maximum range = 1, sum = 4, mean =.04, and standard deviation = .20.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Stylistic Errors

	N	Range	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Passive Voice	103	13	331	3.21	3.22
Coordination Conjunction	103	12	38	.37	1.92
Tone	103	2	8	.08	.37
Short Sentences	103	9	20	.19	1.26
Long Sentences	103	2	4	.04	.28

Table 6 describes the Passive Voice as the most frequently occurred stylistic error with maximum range = 13, sum = 331, mean = 3.21, and standard deviation = 3.22. On the other hand, Long Sentences were found as the less frequently occurred error of stylistic category with maximum range = 2, sum = 4, mean =.04, and standard deviation = .28.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Usage Errors

	N	Range	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preposition	103	22	555	5.39	5.19
Confused Sentences	103	13	239	2.32	2.69
Article Error	103	108	4492	43.61	25.44
Faulty Comparison	103	4	13	.13	.59
Nonstandard Sentences	103	3	6	.06	.42
Negation	103	13	38	.37	1.85
Wrong Form	103	7	81	.79	1.70
Wrong Article	103	12	249	2.42	2.70

Table 7 describes the Article Error as the most frequently occurred usage error with maximum range = 108, sum = 4492, mean = 43.61, and standard deviation = 25.44. On the other hand, Nonstandard Sentences were found as the less frequently occurred error of usage category with maximum range = 3, sum = 6, mean =.06, and standard deviation = .42.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Spelling Errors

	N	Range	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sp.	103	76	786	7.63	10.95

Table 8 describes the frequency of spelling error with the maximum range = 76, sum = 786, mean =7.63, and standard deviation = 10.95.

Table 9: Top 5 Most Frequently Occurred Errors

o.	Features	Range	Features	Sum	Features	Mean
	Article Error	108	Article Error	492	Article Error	43.61
	Missing ","	38	Missing ","	31	Missing ","	9.04
	Preposition	22	Preposition	55	Preposition	5.39
	Missing Apostrophe	22	Subject-Verb Agreement	82	Subject-Verb Agreement	4.68
	Subject-Verb Agreement	19	Possessive Voice	31	Possessive Voice	3.21

Table 9 reveals the top 5 most frequently occurred errors in the scholarly text produced by the business students. Nevertheless, all of the errors mentioned in table 9 are the part of coursework designed for elementary grades in almost every country where English is used as a second language (Leech & Svartvik, 2013; Osmond, 2015; Borjars & Burridge, 2013).

Table 10: Independent Samples Test for Overall Performance of Business Students

		LTEV*		t-test for EM					CID	
		F	Sig.	t	df	S2	MD	SED	Lower	Upper
Total	EVA	5.45	0.02	0.41	101	0.68	0.27	0.67	-1.05	1.6
	EVNA			0.35	41.21	0.73	0.27	0.77	-1.29	1.83

	Gender	N		Mean	SD	SEM
Performance Scores Achieved	Female	30		3.83	3.86	0.7
	Male	73		3.56	2.71	0.32

EVA= Equal variances assumed

EVNA = Equal variances not assumed

LTEV = Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

T-test for EM = t-test for Equality of Means

CID = 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

MD = Mean Difference

SED = Std. Error Difference

S2 = Sig. (2-tailed)

SD = Std. Deviation

SEM = Std. Error Mean

As the sig value in the "Levene's Test for Equality of Variances" in Table 10 is less than .05 (i.e. .02), it reveals that the variability in the performance of both of the genders enrolled in either BBA or MBA programmes is different from each other. On the other hand, the 2-tailed Sig. value is .73, which is greater than .05 and thus not able to demonstrate the statistically significant difference between the performance scores achieved by the two different genders. From this perspective, it would not be wrong to state that the difference between the performance scores achieved by either BBA or MBA students, based on their different genders, (mean score of female students = 3.83 and mean score of male students = 3.56) is more likely due to chance rather than the gender difference. Results found in the light of Table 10 lead towards the retention of very first null hypothesis i.e. performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students, in general, do not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

Table 11: Independent Samples Test for Performance of Business Students enrolled in BBA

		LTEV		T-test for EM					CID	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	S2	MD	SED	Lower	Upper
Total	EVA	6.35	0.02	0.52	34	0.60	0.61	1.17	-1.76	2.99
	EVNA			0.46	17.71	0.65	0.61	1.32	-2.16	3.38

	Gender	N	Mean		SD	SEM
Performance Scores Achieved	Female	15	4.23		4.79	1.24
	Male	21	3.57		2.06	0.45

As the sig value in the "Levene's Test for Equality of Variances" is less than .05 (i.e. .02), it reveals that the variability in the performance of both of the genders enrolled in BBA programmes is different from each other. In other words, the performance scores achieved by the male students are different from that of the performance scores achieved by the female students. On the other hand, the 2-tailed Sig. value is .60, which is greater than .05 and thus not able to demonstrate the statistically significant difference between the performance scores achieved by the two different genders. From this perspective, it would not be wrong to state that the difference between the performance scores achieved by either BBA or MBA students, based on their different genders, (mean score of female students = 4.23 and mean score of male students = 3.57) is more likely due to chance rather than the gender difference. Results found in the light of Table 11 lead towards the retention of second null hypothesis i.e. performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for BBA do not statistically differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

Table 12: Independent Samples Test for Performance of Business Students enrolled in MBA

| | | LTEV | | T-test for EM | | | | | CID | |
		F	Sig.	t	Df	S2	MD	SED	Lower	Upper
Total	EVA	0.578	0.45	-0.12	65	0.9	-0.1	0.85	-1.8	1.6
	EVNA			-0.13	24.1	0.9	-0.1	0.82	-1.79	1.58

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Performance Scores Achieved	Female	15	3.43	2.75	0.71
	Male	52	3.53	2.94	0.41

As the sig. value in the "Levene's Test for Equality of Variances" is greater than .05, it reveals that the inconsistency in the performance of both of the genders enrolled in MBA programmes is almost the same. The performance scores achieved by the male MBA students are not too much different from that of the performance scores achieved by the female MBA students. On the other hand, the 2-tailed Sig. value is .903, which is greater than .05 and thus not able to demonstrate the statistically significant difference between the performance scores achieved by the two different genders. From this perspective, it would not be wrong to state that the difference between the performance scores achieved by the MBA students, based on their different genders, (female students = 3.43 and male students = 3.53) is more likely due to chance rather than the gender difference. Results found in the light of Table 12 lead towards the retention of third null hypothesis i.e. performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for MBA do not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students.

Table 13: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Sig	Status
H1: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students, in general, does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students	.73	Retained
H2: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for BBA does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students	0.60	Retained
H3: Performance (based on Error Analysis) of male business students enrolled for MBA does not differ from the performance of female business students while producing scholarly texts compared to the female business students	0.45	Retained

5.   DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that business students to produce scholarly text do not differ based on their genders, male and female. This can be described in other words as if business students pay attention to the mentioned little errors, they might be able to show their competency in the academic writing (production of scholarly text) rather declaring it as a gender issue. Most of the business schools pay more attention to the production of empirical studies instead of teaching and developing the fundamentals of English language. This is particularly because they are expecting from the business students to be competent in the production of perfect scholarly text prior to the admission at business schools. From this perspective, Table 9 demonstrates, through the error analysis, the top 5 most frequently occurred errors, including Article Error, missing comma, preposition, missing apostrophe, and Subject-Verb Agreement, to be paid attention by the business schools open for the students with English as their second language. From this perspective, Breiseth (2016) asserts that the major function of reading is to build writing skills among Second language learners. Nevertheless, this skill is considered very difficult to master, particularly for English language learners (ELLs). Breiseth (2016) also points out a large number of approaches to build the writing skills of ESL including the standard strategies used by teachers in

mainstream classrooms, as such approach is tweaked with academic as well as language needs of ESL.

Nevertheless, the present study did not find the results what it initially claimed i.e. females business students perform well and thus achieve higher grades than that of the male business students. From this perspective, the reviewed literature also favours the initial claim made by the present study. For example, Zoghi, Kazemi and Kalani (2013) argue that female language learners usually achieve higher grades than that of the male language learners in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) though both male and female have improved the performances. Zoghi, Kazemi and Kalani (2013) strongly believe that languages of men have a noteworthy different proportion from the languages of women and no social or educational conditioning is able to completely remove these differences.

6.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the reviewed literature as well as the findings of the present study, the present study concludes that there is no difference between the performances (based on Error Analysis) of male business students and female business students in terms of producing scholarly texts. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to state that male students are more interested in business studies comparing with that of the female students. Based on its general applicability to the business students, the criterion is acceptable by any business school offers academic courses in English as a second language. Furthermore, different demographic variables should be used for the use of this criterion in practice to explore the differences found based on gender, race, ethnicity, background etc. However, the most important use of this 4-step criterion is to evaluate the academic writing deficiencies experienced by a particular group of business students. Therefore, the scope of this study is applicable, but not limited to the business schools students.

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