

## Investigating Gender Differences in Senior High School Students' Motivation to Learn English Online During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Wahyu Setyo Prihandono<sup>1</sup>, Bibit suhatmady<sup>2</sup>, Weningtyas Parama Iswari<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>zee.giant@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>bibitsuhatmady@fkip.unmul.ac.id, <sup>3</sup>weningtyaspiswari@fkip.unmul.ac.id

### ABSTRACT

A lot of research has been conducted to examine the effect of gender differences on language learning motivation in various learning environment, yet the outcomes remain contradictory. This study investigates gender differences in 568 Indonesian senior high school students' motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this quantitative enquiry, the data were collected using a motivational questionnaire containing a number of items indicating motivational components. One-way MANOVA was performed to examine not only the students' overall motivation, but also the effect of gender differences on three motivational variables, namely instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation. The findings revealed that the students' overall motivation differs by gender. Furthermore, it was indicated that, in general, female students possessed higher levels of motivation than male students in learning English online. The results support the growing stereotype claiming that female learners tend to outperform their male peers in language learning. The analyses on the motivational variables indicated that female students had higher level of instrumental orientation and they were more self-regulated compared to male students. In terms of their self-efficacy beliefs, no significant differences detected between male and female students in learning English online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** gender differences, motivation, instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, self-regulation

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, considered as one of the most devastating disasters in the history of humankind, has caused a major impact in all aspects of human lives, especially education. Closing schools, colleges, and universities has become one of the mainly essential policies taken by the countries around the world, including Indonesia. As an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, this action is considered highly required as it will reduce contact and save lives. However, the direct or face to face teaching and learning activities will stop, affecting not only students' learning process but also their social lives (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). One of the most obvious options to keep the educational activities running is by establishing online learning in which information and communication technology, especially the internet, plays the most significant role. Nevertheless, despite its promising potentials to maintain the establishment of education in a save way, online learning comes with certain challenges and requirements. One major challenge that can be considered as the most influential is that online learning requires strong self-motivation. Much evidence has proven

that it is really hard to maintain students' learning motivation without physical interaction or face to face communication Tamm (2019).

Focusing on English language learning, there has been a growing stereotype indicating that female learners tend to outperform male learners in foreign language learning achievements, including English (Iwaniec, 2019). Studies done by Chavez (2014) regarding oral production and Główka (2014) which focused on English Proficiency test, and Jimenez Catalan (2010) on vocabulary production test have shown that female students are more likely to perform better than male students. Having associated with learning achievement in some prior research findings, motivation is considered as one of the main contributors to gender divergence in English language learning accomplishment (Iwaniec, 2019). Diverse respondents from several countries have been researched in order to investigate the relationship between gender differences and English language learning motivation such as India (Kumali & Sangwan, 2021), Saudi Arabia (Sabry Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020), Poland (Iwaniec, 2019); Okuniewski, 2014), Bosnia (Bećirović, 2017), and Turkey (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), which mostly resulted that, in general, more enthusiasm was shown by female students in learning English compared to male students. Nonetheless, several motivational aspects showing no significant differences were also indicated (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015)

Many experts have suggested that one of the most important aspect which gives significant impact towards language learning is motivation. Thus, with the aim of generating the ultimate learning environment, discovering what motivates different group of language learners is very crucial (Iwaniec, 2014). Regarding the growing stereotype indicating that female learners outperformed male learners in language learning (Iwaniec, 2019), the investigation to the effects of gender differences on language learning motivation in this study followed the concept of Motivational Systems Theory addressed by Ford (1992) which mainly suggests that motivation is determined by three components namely personal goals, capability beliefs or personal agency beliefs and emotional arousal processes. Many aspects can be elaborated from these three components, all of which can be utilized as motivational variables. In this study, each component of Ford's Motivational System Theory will be represented by one variable namely instrumentality or instrumental orientation, self-efficacy belief, and self-regulation respectively.

Personal goals are defined as "thoughts about desired or (undesired) states or outcomes that one would like to achieve (or avoid)" (Ford, 1992: 248). Motivational Systems Theory states that personal goals are very important because they signify both the values a person is trying to achieve and the direction of the progress utilized by that person to yield the values (Richardson, 2009). One of the main components of personal goals is the cognitive organization which refers to the outcomes regarding thinking and perception and include understanding and

intellectual creativity goals. This cognitive organization embodied in instrumental orientation aspect which is defined by Lai (2013) as learning a second language or foreign language for practical motives, such as getting a better occupation or a higher income.

Personal agency beliefs refer to analytical views which correlate the goal and the expected values. One aspect of personal agency beliefs is capability beliefs which means an individual's confidence in owning the capacity, expertise, or skill to achieve a goal and it is utilized as self-evaluation tool in measuring his own capacity subjectively (Ford, 1992). This concept has the equivalent idea with self-efficacy beliefs which could be defined as individual insights of their capability to effectively do a certain task (Iwaniec, 2019). Ford (1992) defines emotional arousal process as systematized practical designs that containing affective, physiological and transactional mechanisms that assist both a regulatory and energizing function. Emotions provide insight into a person's interaction with their environment and the extent to which they perceive goals as being attainable. Although indirectly, emotional arousal process can deliver vision in the way that it affects learning, decision making and problem solving into desired goals. This is in line with the concept of self-regulation which refers to "the degree to which individuals are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (Zimmerman, 1989: 4, as cited in Iwaniec, 2019).

It appears that further investigations towards the effect of gender differences on motivation which specifically focuses on English language learning are still in demand due to its dynamic fashion. It is proven by the existing studies done by researchers who keep on examining this issue up to the present year. Moreover, none of the previously mentioned studies were particularly conducted in online learning environment. Furthermore, investigation of the issue may not have been done in Indonesian context, especially in secondary level of education. In Indonesia, where English is still considered as a foreign language, English subject is taught in secondary level (high school) as a compulsory subject. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in accordance with the Ministry of Education's policy, for safety reasons, the learning process has to be conducted online during the pandemic, requiring teachers and students all across Indonesia to adapt with the new online system. Therefore, considering the different aspects and characteristics between the classic face to face style and online learning system, it is highly possible to indicate different research outcomes.

Based on this gap, this research sets out to investigate gender differences on senior high school students' motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research data are analyzed to indicate gender differences not only on students' overall motivation, but also in more detailed investigation through three motivational variables namely instrumental orientation, self-efficacy belief, and self-regulation. The outcomes of the study are expected to give some contributions in designing the most suitable learning environment which

could be equally utilized by both genders during the pandemic to achieve their maximum potentials. Thus, the study reported in this paper aims to investigate the issue by addressing the following research questions:

1. Does senior high school students' motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic differ based on gender?
2. Do gender differences affect the levels of instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation of senior high school students' motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **METHOD**

This study involved 568 participants (252 males, 316 females). The participants were aged 14-18 and enrolled in a private senior high school in Bontang City, East Borneo. The participants included 174 students of the tenth grade (82 males, 92 females), 212 students of the eleventh grade (95 males, 107 females), and 182 students of the twelfth grade (75 males, 109 females). The reason of choosing this population was because the school from which the population were taken provided and facilitated all students to internet access during the online learning by utilizing *google suite for education* to all teachers, employee, and students. This platform enabled the school to conduct online learning efficiently by using all applications provided by google platform, such as *google classroom*, *google meet*, *google form*, etc. Additionally, every student had the same time allocation for English subject every week. This equality could support the validity of the data.

Female students and male students representing gender acted as the independent variables. Motivation, a latent variable, which cannot be observed directly, were reflected by three components namely instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation, acting as the dependent variables. In line with the operationalization of Motivational System Theory (Ford, 1992), the three motivational components represented the three factors indicating motivation level namely goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotional arousal process. Another reason of choosing these three motivational variables, as utilized in previous research by Iwaniec, (2019), was because they represented some aspects that were most suitable with the characteristics of the research population.

This study was done quantitatively by employing survey design. Data were collected by utilizing an adapted questionnaire from Iwaniec, (2019). In line with the focus on the implementation of Motivational Systems Theory (Ford, 1992), as well as addressing the research question more accurately in regard to the characteristics of the research population, the seven variables in the original questionnaire were adapted by reducing them into three variables namely Instrumental orientation, Self-efficacy beliefs, and Self-regulation. These three

motivational variables, containing 27 items indicating motivational aspects, represented three main components of motivation based on Ford's Motivational Systems Theory. Every motivational variable contained several items in the form of statements where the participants were instructed to indicate on a five-point Likert scale to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements. The answers included 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Disagree', and finally 'Strongly disagree'. Table 1 presents the description of the questionnaire items.

Furthermore, because the original questionnaire was not designed to be conducted in online language learning environment, modifications on several items were performed so that the items contained in the motivational variables could address the investigation of gender differences on students' motivation in online learning settings. For example, one item in self-efficacy belief variable says, *"I am certain that I will be able to communicate in English"*. This item was then modified into *"I am certain that I will be able to communicate using English in online learning"*. Another example in self-regulation variable says, *"I try to find opportunities to practice my English"*. It was then adjusted into *"I try to find opportunities to practice my English during this online learning period"*. Moreover, because the target population of this research had different level of English proficiency, translations of the items in Bahasa Indonesia were provided by the researcher. Additionally, because this study was done during the COVID-19 pandemic in which interactions between teachers and students were all done via online systems, the written questionnaire, which was originally constructed in the printed version, was transformed into online format through *google form*.

**Table 1. Description of the questionnaire items.**

No	Motivational Variable	Number of items	Definition	Example
1.	Instrumental orientation	7	Language learners' perceptions of the utilitarian benefits connected with proficiency in English, in particular those connected with professional careers.	<i>I study English as it will help me to earn good money.</i>
2.	Self-efficacy beliefs	8	Language learners' beliefs in their ability and skills to use English successfully in the future.	<i>I am certain that I will be able to communicate in English.</i>
3.	Self-regulation	12	The degree to which students are motivationally, metacognitively, and behaviorally active participants in the process of learning English.	<i>I try to learn English by watching films in English and listening to music in English.</i>

The data collection process was started by communicating the school principal to secure primary permission of conducting the research. Then, the online questionnaire was distributed to all the participants with the help of their English teachers during their English classes. The students were encouraged to participate in the study by the researcher, who also made sure that the respondents were voluntarily involved in this research and explained to them that their participations were completely anonymous.

The research data were analyzed quantitatively using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 25. The analyses in SPSS included validity analysis, reliability analysis, and One-way MANOVA. Prior to the main analysis, preliminary assumption testing was conducted and showed that there were no serious violations of multivariate normality, outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, linearity, and multicollinearity. This was followed by validity and reliability test. Then, one-way MANOVA was used to examine whether gender differences affect not only the students' overall motivation, but also their levels of instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation. According to Pallant (2010), One-way MANOVA was chosen over t-tests in case of more than one related dependent variables were analyzed. Another reason of choosing One-way MANOVA over a series of repeated ANOVA was to avoid the risk of '*inflated Type 1 error*'. Pallant (2010) defines this error as finding significant differences which actually do not exist in reality.

## RESULTS

Pearson's product moment correlation was performed to test the validity of the research instrument. By comparing the R value (score obtained from Pearson's product moment analysis) and R table (score obtained from Pearson's R table), also by looking at the significance value from the Pearson's correlation analysis (Ghozali, 2018), the result of validity test of the research instrument indicated that all items indicating all motivational variables were valid. The reliability analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 25 to calculate the Cronbach's alpha coefficient which is the most commonly used method to estimate the reliability, or internal consistency, of a composite score. According to Pallant (2010), to be considered as reliable, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale or the items indicating the variables must be above 0.7. The result of the reliability analysis indicated that the variables indicators both in general and in each item indicating the motivational variables were all exceeds 0.7, as they ranged between 0.894 - 0.897. Therefore, the data were considered reliable. Table 2 illustrates the results of validity and reliability tests.

**Table 2. The results of validity and reliability tests**

Variable	Total items	Validity* (Pearson Product Moment)	Reliability (Cronbach Alpha)
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		<b>R TABLE</b>	<b>R VALUE</b>	<b>Sig. value</b>	
Instrumental orientation	7	0.088	0.664	0.000	0.897
Self-efficacy beliefs	8	0.088	0.760	0.000	0.894
Self-regulation	12	0.088	0.604	0.000	0.896
<i>*item is considered valid if R VALUE &gt; R TABLE (significance level = 5%), or if the significance value &lt; 0.05</i>					

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate gender differences in motivation. Three dependent variables were used: instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation. The independent variable was gender. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, multivariate outliers, linearity, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted. There was a statistically significant difference between males and females on the combined dependent variables,  $F(3, 560) = 9.141$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .953; partial eta squared = .047. This could be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of their overall motivation.

Because a number of separate analyses were observed, Pallant (2010) recommended to reduce the alpha level to minimize the chance of inflated type 1 error (i.e. finding a significant result when in reality it does not exist) by performing Bonferroni adjustment. This procedure involved dividing the alpha level by the number of dependent variables. Since there were three dependent variables utilized in this study, the alpha level of 0.05 were divided by 3, yielding a new alpha level of 0.017. Therefore, the result of the test would be considered significant only if the probability value (sig.) was less than 0.017.

**Table 3. MANOVA analysis of motivational variables based on gender**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. dev.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Partial eta squared</b>
Instrumental orientation	Male	29.70	3.797	5.786	0.16	0.10
	Female	30.47	3.743			
Self-efficacy beliefs	Male	29.36	5.319	5.444	0.20	0.10
	Female	28.22	6.125			
Self-regulation	Male	45.16	6.428	6.737	0.10	0.12
	Female	46.68	7.231			

When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, as seen in Table 3, the detected differences to reach statistical significance, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.017, were instrumental orientation with the value of  $F(1, 562) = 5.786$ ,  $p = 0.016$ , partial eta squared = 0.010, and self-regulation with the value of  $F(1, 562) = 6.737$ ,  $p = 0.010$ , partial eta squared = 0.012. To calculate the effect size, Partial Eta Squared represents

the proportion of the variance in the dependent variables (instrumental orientation and self-regulation) that can be explained by the independent variable (gender). The values in this case were 0.010 and 0.012 which, according to generally accepted criteria (Pallant, 2010), was considered quite a small effect since these values represented only 1 percent of the variance in instrumental orientation score and 1.2 percent of the variance in self-regulation score explained by gender. No gender differences detected on self-efficacy beliefs with the value of  $F(1, 562) = 5.444, p = 0.020, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.010$ .

## **DISCUSSION**

In this study, Indonesian male and female senior high school students indicated a significant difference in learning English online with regard to their overall motivation. Additionally, a higher level of motivation was shown by female students over male students in learning English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. These results were in line with the findings of the previous study which were done in India (Kumali & Sangwan, 2021), Saudi Arabia (Sabry Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020), Poland (Iwaniec, 2019); Okuniewski, 2014), Bosnia (Bećirović, 2017), and Turkey (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), which also conveyed that female students were more motivated than male students. The findings of this study support the growing stereotype indicating that female learners are more likely to outperform their male peers in language learning motivation. This outcome might clarify Öztürk & Gürbüz (2013) findings, in which they suggested that the reason for this was caused by the increasing status of women in the society. Young females were more encouraged to elevate their position in the community and business world in which they realized that mastering foreign languages was an important qualification in establishing that status.

In the matter of online learning setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, this result supported the outcomes of the study done by (McKnight-Tutein & Thackaberry, 2011), which suggested that, because of the affective online learning methods utilized by female learners that supported them to have relational ways of learning through drawing on connections, made them become effective learners in a unique way, and eventually brought more success in online learning context compared to male students. However, although the difference that was found between male and female students' motivation levels was statistically significant, it should be noted that the effect size of this difference was relatively small. It means that only small proportion of the research population was affected by the research outcomes. The reason for this might refer to Główka (2014) findings which reported that, in foreign language learning environment, gender was considered as the least essential aspect according to 50% of Polish students and teachers being observed.



Instrumental orientation was the variable representing personal goals which significantly affected by gender differences in this research. Female students seemed to have higher practical motives than male students. This means that female students had more robust vision in learning English for utilitarian purposes, such as getting more promising jobs or earning more money. The findings were consistent with the outcomes of previous study in Saudi Arabian context (Sabry Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020) which reported that female learners were more instrumentally oriented because they consider instrumental orientation as a crucial aspect of future success such as finding jobs or financial rewards. During the online learning as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, female students appeared to have higher level of awareness that mastering English was a crucial matter that can positively affect their future goals. As a result, female students could utilize the internet more effectively in accessing learning materials, creating interactions with other learners, and obtaining support during the learning process.

The findings of this study also revealed that female students were more self-regulated than their male peers. This means that female students were metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally more active in their own learning process. Iwaniec, (2019) suggested that female learners had more tendency in establishing a conducive learning environment, utilize efficient learning strategies and did some reflections on their own learning so that they could have a better self-regulation. This is in line with the outcomes of the study by Bećirović (2017), addressing that, in foreign language environment, female students were considered more passionately involved to the foreign language they were studying. Additionally, because female students had more emotional experiences than male students, they were more likely to strive as maximum as possible to conquer the fear in learning English as foreign language in dealing with the anxiety levels towards negative outcomes. In connection with online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic underlying this research, the higher level of self-regulation performed by female learners could be the result of their confidence and independence as language learners, which were better than male students.

Male and female students indicated similar level of self-efficacy beliefs as there were no significant differences detected. This finding may suggest that female and male learners were equally confidence in learning English online. Following the rapid growth of internet usage, the online learning system implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic might have contributed various benefits and advantages to both male and female students in that it supports their learning processes. This situation may have caused rapid changes of the use of English among young people, and it has highly implicated their cultural practices. Thus, gender differences were not found (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013). Moreover, in contrast with the findings on the other two motivational variables, male students seemed to have slightly better individual insights of their capability to effectively do a certain task. The possible reason for this might lay

in the way male and female students reported their self-efficacy beliefs. Male students were likely to overestimate their skills, whereas females tended to underestimate them (Iwaniec, 2019).

Despite the contrary results reported by some previous studies (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015), the findings of this research have revealed that gender differences in language learning motivation remain exist within the research participants. It is highly likely that these differences would influence their online English learning accomplishments. Therefore, some effective solutions should be addressed to overcome these problems. One possible action that can be addressed is pedagogical interventions. These interventions could be in the forms of constructing some activities in online learning that are more attractive to male students, choosing certain materials or topics preferred by male learners, or selecting teaching style which is more interesting to boys. However, these class-level interventions might not be enough to handle the problems in a large scale or national level. In order to get wide-ranging and comprehensive impacts, educational policy makers and curriculum developers should design and develop special guidelines or strategies which address that possessing English proficiency is essential for both male and female learners equally.

Reinforcing the association between mastering English and more successful careers in the future is important to lead to increased practical motives in learning English. This can minimize or even eliminate the discrepancy between male and female students in their levels of instrumental orientation. Additionally, giving proper self-regulation instructions and trainings might be needed. In online class setting, this could be done by allowing the students to not only familiarize themselves with various learning methods, but also giving them opportunities to reflect on the methods and to experiment with those methods in order to select the most suitable ones with them.

## **CONCLUSION**

This quantitative study is aimed to investigate gender differences in senior high school students' motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analyses not only observed gender differences in their overall motivation, but also examined their levels of instrumental orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation. The findings have shown a significant difference, with female students reporting higher levels of overall motivation than male students. Furthermore, one-way MANOVA analysis has resulted that gender differences significantly affect the levels of students' instrumental orientation and self-regulation. The result has indicated that female students are more self-regulated and possess a better instrumental orientation compared to their male peers. It appeared that female students consider instrumental orientation as a crucial aspect of future success and they are more likely

to be cognitively and behaviorally active in their learning than males. Conversely, no significant differences are found between male and female students in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs. It seems that both female and male students were equally confident in learning English online.

Although this study has some limitations regarding its small scope, methodology, and the number of variables, the results indicated that the discrepancy between male and female students' motivation in learning still exist and may influence their learning accomplishments. Pedagogical interventions on class level and educational policy makers involvement on national level might be needed to overcome the problems so that both male and female students can equally reach their maximum potentials in online English learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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