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## Language learning motivation and gender: The case of Poland

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### Abstract

Gender differences in language learning motivation have not been extensively examined. Thus, this survey study explores gender differences in the population of 599 Polish learners of English aged 14-16. Unlike other studies, it does not only compare means but investigates whether there are gender differences in the way the variables interact with each other. Findings show that females scored higher than males on scales of international orientation, ideal L2 self and self-regulation. No gender differences were observed on instrumentality, self-efficacy beliefs, English self-concept and intrinsic motivation. There is also a significant difference in the strength of links between self-regulation and instrumentality, self-efficacy beliefs as well as English self-concept. Thus, gender effects appear more extensive than previous research has shown.

Keywords: motivation, gender, L2 motivational self-system, ideal L2 self, individual learner differences

Różnice między płciami w motywacji do nauki języka angielskiego nie zostały szeroko zbadane. Celem niniejszego badania jest analiza różnic w motywacji 599 polskich uczniów w wieku 14-16 lat. W przeciwieństwie do innych badań, to badanie nie tylko porównuje średnie wyniki, ale także analizuje, czy płeć wpływa na to, w jaki sposób różne czynniki motywacyjne ze sobą współdziałają. Wyniki wskazują, że dziewczęta wykazują mocniejszą międzynarodową

orientację, idealne L2 ja i samoregulację. Różnic natomiast nie zaobserwowano na skalach motywacji wewnętrznej, własnej skuteczności, angielskiego 'Ja' oraz orientacji instrumentalnej. Istnieje również istotna różnica w sile korelacji pomiędzy samoregulacją a orientacją instrumentalną, własną skutecznością i angielskim 'Ja'. Prowadzi to do wniosku, że wpływy płci na motywację są rozleglejsze niż wskazywały na to poprzednie badania.

**Słowa** klucze: motywacja, płeć, model motywującej osobowości L2, idealne 'ja', różnice indywidualne

## Introduction

Recent research data indicate that female learners tend to score higher than male learners on different measures of language achievement, such as accuracy in oral production (Chavez, 2014), general English proficiency test (Główka, 2014), judgements of accents in terms of likeness to native speakers (Polat, 2011), lexical availability (Fernandez Fontecha, 2010), and vocabulary production tests (Jimenez Catalan, 2010). Further, Chavez's (2000) review of studies looking at gender and achievement confirmed that females outperformed males in placement tests and were graded more highly, although she also concluded that "as far as assessments in experimental settings are concerned, the female advantage is much less clear" (Chavez, 2000, p.67).

The cause of the gender gap in language learning achievement might be traced back to factors such as language learning motivation, which has been previously reported as linked to achievement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Hernández, 2008). Gender differences in language learning motivation have been researched in a number of contexts, such as Hungary (Zoltán Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002), the US (Kissau, Quach Kolano, & Wang, 2010), Turkey (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), Japan (S. Ryan, 2009) and the UK (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). These studies concluded that female learners are more highly motivated than their male colleagues. However, a small number of studies reported lack of such differences (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015). There might be a number of reasons for these conflicting results, for example Kissau and Turnbull (2008) review a number of studies that reveal that male learners perceive certain languages as more 'feminine' than others. Hence, there still exists a need to investigate gender differences.

Studies which have focused on gender differences in language learning motivation have tended to employ Gardner and Lambert's (1972) construct of integrative motivation, while other theories and constructs have received less attention. However, Gardner and Lambert's construct has come under criticism, primarily with regard to the issue of identification with the target language community, in particular with reference to English (Dörnyei, 2009). Consequently there is a need to

systematically examine the extent to which gender can affect all aspects of motivation, such as goals, capability beliefs and emotional arousal processes (Ford, 1992).

In Poland, one of the biggest countries in the European Union (EU), female learners aged 15-16 have been found to score higher than their male peers in the national exam in a foreign language (CKE, 2014, 2015). However, only one study has investigated gender differences in language learning motivation (Okuniewski, 2014). Yet this study, like other studies examining gender differences, did not explore how gender might affect the interaction between motivational variables. The study reported in this paper aims to examine the extent to which gender affects different aspects of Polish learners motivation to learn English in terms of reported levels of their motivation and the relationships between motivational variables. .

## Motivation and gender differences

Since the beginnings of language learning motivation field, a plethora of constructs has been used to research it. In this study, the choice of variables is guided by Ford's (1992) Motivational Systems Theory, which sees motivation as consisting of three main components: goals, personal agency beliefs and emotional arousal processes. The aim of goals is to direct the effort (Ford, 1992). The most commonly researched language learning goals are instrumentality and international orientation. Personal agency beliefs, which are beliefs about one's ability to carry out a task in a specific context, act as filters rejecting unattainable goals from those considered attainable. Bandura's (1977) construct of self-efficacy beliefs and self-concept play a similar role. A concept that bridges the gap between goals and personal agency beliefs is ideal L2 self. Emotional arousal process, anchored in goals, help sustain the action in the short term. Intrinsic motivation is a construct that subsumes positive emotions stemming from language learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These three components influence the individual's activity, here operationalised as self-regulation. This section discusses the research conducted into gender effects on language learning goals, personal agency beliefs, emotional arousal processes, self-regulation and the interaction of motivational variables. Each of these is described in more detail below.

Some language learning goals have received more attention in studies examining gender differences in motivation than others. Instrumentality, which refers to learning a language for utilitarian purposes (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), has been often researched alongside integrative motivation. Yet, the picture here is rather complex with some scholars reporting differences on this language learning goal (Kissau, 2006; Kissau et al., 2010; Okuniewski, 2014) and others not (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), depending on the context and language studied. In contrast, there are no studies exploring gender influence on international posture, or "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to study or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners and ... a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures" (Yashima, 2000, p. 57).

Research on self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs provides mixed evidence of gender differences. Self-concept, or "a person's perception of himself" (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976, p. 411) and self-efficacy beliefs, defined as an individual's perceptions of their ability to successfully complete a particular task (Bandura, 1997), have been reported to differ according to gender. For example, females were reported to have higher levels of verbal self-concept (Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988), writing

self-concept and writing self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares & Valiante, 2001), as well as self efficacy beliefs for self-regulation to learn French (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007) than males. In contrast, Kissau et al. (2010) found no gender difference in efficacy beliefs of American learners of Spanish. Additionally, according to Bandura (1977) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2004), female students often underestimated their abilities when reporting them, whereas male students tended to overestimate them. Thus, the potential discrepancy in self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs between genders might be bigger than the data suggest.

A growing body of research examines the role of gender from the perspective of Dörnyei's (2009) Motivational Self System, which includes the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience. The findings regarding the ideal L2 self, or an image of oneself as a proficient speaker of an L2 (Dörnyei, 2009), are conflicting. Female learners have reported more robust visions of themselves as successful language users than their male peers in the studies looking at Japanese learners of English (S. Ryan, 2009) and Swedish L3 learners of German, French and Spanish (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013). Henry and Cliffordson (2013) propose that the reason for this difference is that females are more likely than males to construct interdependent selves, which stress interaction with others, leading to more robust ideal L2 selves. However, a number of studies looking at learners of English found no evidence of gender differences (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015; Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2014), suggesting that the combination of language and context matters.

Few studies looked at gender differences in the ought-to L2 self (Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2014), which refers to qualities that one should possess to avoid negative consequences (Dörnyei, 2009). The reason behind the relative lack of interest in the ought-to L2 self might be problems with the construct validity in European settings (Csizér & Kormos, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Consequently, this concept is not investigated in the present study.

Language learning experience, which concerns the influence of the immediate environment on language learning (Dörnyei, 2009), has not been investigated in light of gender differences. This coincides with a general tendency not to include this construct in research, perhaps due to difficulties with its operationalisation. An exception to this is a study by Csizér and Kormos (2009), in which the operationalisation of language learning experience implied a strong focus on positive language learning attitudes (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). Thus, in the present study, language learning attitudes, rather than language learning experience, are examined.

Intrinsic motivation, defined as “an inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70) subsumes a range of constructs, such as positive attitudes and interest (Deci & R. M. Ryan, 1985). Studies show that female learners tend to be more intrinsically motivated than their male peers (Kissau, 2006; Lee & Kim, 2014; Okuniewski, 2014; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015). Moreover, boys’ intrinsic motivation was found to decrease faster with age during middle high school and then to increase at a slower rate than that of girls (Lee & Kim, 2014; Yeung, Lau, & Nie, 2011). Kissau and Salas (2013) propose that, to boost boys’ motivation, it is not only sufficient to employ adequate strategies but it might be necessary for teachers “to develop a caring relationship with them based on respect in an environment where both students and teacher feel at ease and free to be themselves” (p. 88).

Research on differences in self-regulation, or “the degree to which individuals are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process” (Zimmerman, 1989, p. 4), between male and female language learners has been limited. Kissau and Quach (2006) report that boys were more likely than girls to attribute their successes and failures in learning French to uncontrollable causes, such as luck. Research on related constructs also suggests that self-regulation might be subject to gender influences. For example Oxford (1994, p 146) concluded that females use a wider range of learning strategies than males and their use of strategies is often qualitatively better. In addition, Clark reported (1998) that girls deal better with tasks from a language class that might appear boring to boys. This implies that girls have higher level of satiation control, one of the facets of self-regulation (Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmitt, 2006). Moreover, research into constructs related to effort investment, such as motivational intensity and motivated behaviour, has consistently reported higher levels of effort investment of female than male learners (Kissau, 2006; Kissau et al., 2010; Okuniewski, 2014; S. Ryan, 2009; Williams et al., 2002).

Previous quantitative studies on gender differences discussed in this review focused on establishing whether there are differences between male and female learners in terms of their reported levels of motivation. However, even though investigations into the relationships between motivational variables are common (Csizér & Kormos, 2009, 2014; S. Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009), there has been only one attempt to examine whether relationships between variables differ according to gender (Yashima, Nishida, & Mizumoto, 2017), and its results show that such differences do indeed exist. As the aforementioned study investigated one specific context only, there is a need for further exploration of this issue.

### Research questions

The picture that emerges so far shows that the existing research has focused on comparing motivational scores of females and males on some variables, for example instrumentality, ideal L2 self, self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs. However, the results of these studies are often inconsistent. There has been relatively little work on the role of gender in international orientation and self-regulation. Moreover, there have been no attempts to look at the potential impact of gender on the relationship between motivational variables. Given this gap, the present study sets out to examine the role of gender in language learning motivation in the Polish context by addressing the following research questions:

1. To what extent does gender affect levels of language learning motivation?
2. To what extent does gender affect the relationships between motivational variables?

### Methodology

This study utilises the survey design to address the research question. The data were collected using a motivational questionnaire, tailored to the population examined, and analysed quantitatively.

The motivational questionnaire (Iwaniec, 2014) contained seven scales. Additionally, seven items eliciting background information about the participants were included. The participants had to indicate on a five-point Likert scale to what extent

they agreed or disagreed with the statements. The answers included ‘I absolutely agree’, ‘I agree’, ‘I neither agree nor disagree’, ‘I disagree’ and finally ‘I definitely disagree’. In detail, the scales were as follows:

1. Instrumental orientation (7 items) – language learners’ perceptions of the utilitarian benefits connected with proficiency in English, in particular those connected with professional careers. Example: I study English as it will help me to earn good money. The scale has been adapted from Csizér and Kormos (2009).

2. International orientation (4 items) – language learners’ perceptions of English as a lingua franca of today’s world, facilitating communication with other speakers of English drawing on Yashima’s (2000) concept of international posture. Example: If I could speak English well, I could get to know more people from all over the world. This scale has been developed based on Clément, Dörnyei and Noels’ (1994) and Csizér and Kormos’ (2009) scales.

3. English self-concept (7 items) – language learners’ perceptions of themselves as learners of English based on social comparisons with others and their past experiences. Example: Compared to other students I’m good at English. The scale has been adapted from Marsh (1990) Academic Self-Description Questionnaire.

4. Ideal L2 self (6 items) – language learners’ vision of themselves using English successfully in the future. Example: I often imagine myself writing emails in English. This scale has been developed by Iwaniec (2014).

5. Self-efficacy beliefs (8 items) – language learners’ beliefs in their ability and skills to use English successfully in the future. Example: I am certain that I will be able to understand a conversation in English. This items have been created by Iwaniec (2014).

6. Intrinsic motivation (10 items) – language learners’ internal motivation to study English fuelled by the urge to learn, explore, and extend one’s capacities, often resulting in feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. Example: I am interested in English. The items address a number of aspects of intrinsic motivation such as the feelings of pleasure and satisfaction experienced when studying English, interest in English, and mastery orientations. The items for this scale have been adapted from Gardner (1985).

7. Self-regulation (12 items) – the degree to which students are motivationally, metacognitively, and behaviourally active participants in the process of learning English (adapted from Zimmerman, 1989, p. 4). Example: I have my own ways of studying English vocabulary. The items have been adapted from Tseng, Dörnyei and Schmitt (2006).

## Participants

599 Polish students of English from ten schools filled in the motivational questionnaire (295 males, 298 females and six failed to provide gender data). 331 students came from rural schools (170 females, 158 males, 3 missing) and 268 from urban schools (128 females, 137 males, 3 missing). In total, the students were aged 14-16 and enrolled in the third (final) year ( $n = 465$ ) or in the second year of gymnasium<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Compulsory middle school for students aged 13-16

(n = 134). The reason behind the choice of this age group was that on graduation from gymnasium, students no longer follow a uniform curriculum but can decide which subject areas they want to focus on in more detail. Hence, their language learning motivation at the time might influence what type of language classes they will enrol in in the future.

### Procedures and data analysis

First, the headteachers of the ten schools were contact in order to secure initial consent for conducting the study. The students were encouraged to participate in the study by the researcher, who also explained to them that the participation is voluntary and anonymous. The participants completed the questionnaire during their English classes. Apart from the researcher, there was always a class teacher present in the classroom to oversee the procedures.

The questionnaire data was analysed quantitatively using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 19. The analysis in SPSS included factor analysis, reliability analysis, MANOVA and correlational analysis. Prior to main analysis, preliminary assumption testing was conducted and showed that there were no serious violations of normality, linearity<sup>2</sup>, outliers<sup>3</sup>, and multicollinearity<sup>4</sup>. Factor analysis (Maximum Likelihood with Direct Oblimin rotation) was used to identify the underlying variables. This was followed by the reliability analysis, as a result of which the items that decreased the reliability of the scales were removed. One-way MANOVA was used to examine whether there were any significant differences in the levels of motivation reported by male and female participants. MANOVA was chosen over t-tests in this case as there are more than one related dependent variable in this study and to avoid the risk of 'inflated Type 1 error', namely finding significant differences where, in fact, they do not exist (Pallant, 2010). Correlations were run separately for female and male participants to explore the relationships between motivational variables for the two groups. To establish if the differences between correlations are significant, Fisher r-to-z value transformation was performed (Lowry, 2017).

## Results

Factor analysis (maximum likelihood with Direct Oblimin rotation) was used to identify variables underlying the items from the motivational questionnaire. The results showed that all the factors emerged. As can be further seen in Table 1, the reliability of the scales, as measured with Cronbach's alpha, was good as it ranged between 0.84 for self-regulation and 0.92 for self-efficacy beliefs (Pallant, 2010). Table 2 presents the factors loading of the individual scales.

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<sup>2</sup> To assess normality and linearity, first 5% trimmed mean was compared with the original mean for both males and females for all variables. In all cases, the differences in values were negligible, suggesting that the more extreme cases. The tests for normality were significant. However, the inspection of the normal probability plots confirmed that the distribution was reasonably normal.

<sup>3</sup> A small number of outliers were observed on the variable of international orientation only (11). None of them were extreme outliers. Hence, it was decided not to remove them from further analysis.

<sup>4</sup> The maximum Mahalanobis distance was 29.21, which was higher than the critical value of 24.32. However, further analysis showed that this value was exceeded only in 5 cases, hence the decision was taken not to remove these cases from the data file.

The results of MANOVA confirmed that there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of their overall motivation (Pillai's trace = .102,  $F = 7.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the effect size was moderate (partial eta squared = .102). To identify differences on motivational scales, Bonferroni correction was applied to alpha. As a consequence, the significance level was reduced to .007 (Pallant, 2010). As seen in Table 3, three significant differences were detected, namely on the scales of ideal L2 self, self-regulation and one of the language learning goals examined, i.e. international orientation. In all cases, female participants scored higher than their male peers. The effect sizes were small. There were no significant differences detected on the scales of instrumentality, self-efficacy beliefs, English self-concept and intrinsic motivation.

The results of correlational analysis for the cohort split according to gender show that there are four significant differences in the strength of relationship between motivational factors (see Table 4). All the significantly different correlations are those between self-regulation on the one side and self-efficacy beliefs, English self-concept, intrinsic motivation, and instrumental orientation on the other side. In all cases, the relationship is stronger for female than male learners.

Table 1: The results of factor and reliability analyses

Variable	No. of final items	Reliability	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Mean	Std. dev.	KMO <sup>5</sup>	BST <sup>6</sup>
Self-efficacy beliefs	8	.92	4.73	59.10	3.37	.90	.942	2804.67*
Ideal L2 self	5	.85	2.64	52.85	2.72	1.00	.851	1125.36*
English self-concept	6	.91	3.72	61.95	3.21	.96	.906	2061.32*
Instrumentality	6	.87	3.19	53.09	3.36	.95	.862	1615.58*
Intrinsic motivation	8	.90	4.16	51.99	3.14	.90	.922	2122.87*
International orientation	5	.85	2.42	48.45	3.96	.81	.873	1157.62*
Self-regulation	9	.84	3.39	37.62	3.05	.78	.878	1478.80*

\*  $p > .05$

Table 2: Factor loadings of emerging scales

International orientation	FL*	Ideal L2 self	FL	English self-concept	FL	Instrumentality	FL
Inter_1	.800	Ideal_1	.809	Self_1	.821	Instr_1	.798
Inter_2	.678	Ideal_2	.754	Self_2	.815	Instr_2	.786
Inter_3	.668	Ideal_3	.740	Self_3	.797	Instr_3	.731
Inter_4	.653	Ideal_4	.704	Self_4	.791	Instr_4	.694

<sup>5</sup> Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Sampling Measure of Sampling Adequacy

<sup>6</sup> Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Inter_5	.634	Ideal_5	.614	Self_5	.750	Instr_5	.685
				Self_6	.744	Instr_6	.668
<b>Self-regulation</b>	<b>FL</b>	<b>Intrinsic motivation</b>	<b>FL</b>	<b>Self-efficacy beliefs</b>	<b>FL</b>		
Reg_1	.695	Intrinsic_1	.816	Efficacy_1	.846		
Reg_2	.662	Intrinsic_2	.804	Efficacy_2	.810		
Reg_3	.639	Intrinsic_3	.759	Efficacy_3	.805		
Reg_4	.614	Intrinsic_4	.681	Efficacy_4	.786		
Reg_5	.607	Intrinsic_5	.677	Efficacy_5	.759		
Reg_6	.600	Intrinsic_6	.668	Efficacy_6	.735		
Reg_7	.566	Intrinsic_7	.647	Efficacy_7	.714		
Reg_8	.564	Intrinsic_8	.625	Efficacy_8	.682		
Reg_9	.558						

\* Factor loading

Table 3: MANOVA analysis of motivational variables according to gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. dev.	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Intrinsic motivation	female	3.32	.92	7.12	.008	.015
	male	3.08	.97			
English self-concept	female	3.23	.96	.03	.873	.000
	male	3.25	1.00			
Self-efficacy beliefs	female	3.35	.92	.85	.358	.002
	male	3.43	.95			
Instrumentality	female	3.45	.95	2.51	.114	.005
	male	3.31	.96			
International orientation	female	4.13	.74	14.29	.000	.015
	male	3.86	.83			
Ideal L2 self	female	2.88	1.08	7.95	.005	.017
	male	2.61	.91			
Self-regulation	female	3.15	.84	7.25	.007	.015
	male	2.94	.82			

Table 4: Correlations between motivational variables, by gender

Motivational scale	Motivational scale	Female	Male	P-value†
Self-efficacy	Ideal	.679*	.591*	0.080
Self-efficacy	English self	.726*	.687*	0.358
Self-efficacy	Instrumentality	.698*	.652*	0.317
Self-efficacy	Intrinsic motivation	.772*	.708*	0.093
Self-efficacy	Self-regulation	.667*	.546*	0.023
Self-efficacy	International orientation	.624*	.653*	0.562
Ideal L2 self	English self	.514*	.443*	0.276
Ideal L2 self	Instrumentality	.602*	.551*	0.368

Ideal L2 self	Intrinsic motivation	.653*	.652*	0.984
Ideal L2 self	Self-regulation	.602*	.551*	0.368
Ideal L2 self	International orientation	.593*	.553*	0.478
English self	Instrumentality	.569*	.537*	0.582
English self	Intrinsic motivation	.708*	.617*	0.053
English self	Self-regulation	.653**	.493*	0.004
English self	International orientation	.464*	.466*	0.976
Instrumentality	Intrinsic motivation	.663*	.624*	0.430
Instrumentality	Self-regulation	.606*	.490*	0.049
Instrumentality	International orientation	.692*	.753*	0.1285
Intrinsic motivation	Self-regulation	.812*	.679*	0.001
Intrinsic motivation	International orientation	.644*	.655*	0.818
Self-regulation	International orientation	.520*	.502**	0.772

†Based on Fisher's z-score \* $p < .01$

## Discussion

In the present study, a significant difference between Polish female and male learners of English in terms of their overall motivation was found, with female learners reporting higher levels of motivation than their male peers. These findings are consistent with the previously reported findings in the Polish context (Okuniewski, 2014) and those from other contexts, such as Japan (S. Ryan, 2009), Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002) and Turkey (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), which also reported the advantage of female over male learners in language learning motivation. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that the effect size of the individual differences reported here is small, which means that the results affect only a small proportion of the population. This might explain Główska's (2014) findings, in which she reported that over half of Polish students and teachers chose gender as the least important factor affecting attainment in a foreign language out of a pool of nine social characteristics in Poland, and yet she observed gender differences in achievement.

International orientation was the only goal affected by gender in the current study. Girls appeared to be more interested in communication with speakers of English around the world than boys. There have not been any previous reports of gender differentiation on international orientation, presumably because a large group of studies examined gender differences using integrative motivation as their main framework (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Kissau et al., 2010; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Williams et al., 2002). The sources of a higher endorsement of international orientation could be a stronger preference for communication amongst females than males (Chavez, 2000).

Female students were also found to have more robust visions of themselves as future successful users of English than their male peers. Whereas the result is consistent

with findings reported by Okuniewski (2014), who found female learners of German scored higher on the ideal L2 self than males in Poland and S. Ryan (2009) who uncovered the same difference in Japan, it differs from Henry and Cliffordson's (2013) finding, as they reported lack of gender variation in English ideal self in their sample of Swedish secondary school students. This discrepancy is not surprising, as Sweden is considered to be the country with the highest gender equality in the world, where the differences between males and females blur according to the United Nations Human Development Programme (UNHDP, 2011), whereas Poland's place in the ranking is lower in this respect. Moreover, the role of English is different in the two countries (Eurobarometer, 2012), which might also explain the differences in findings. The reasons behind gender differences on the ideal L2 self scale might be prevalence of interdependent self-construal among females, as opposed to the independent self-construal among males (Cross & Madson, 1997). This explanation is further strengthened by the finding in the current study that the female learners have had higher levels of international orientation than the males, implying that the girls in this study were more strongly inclined than boys to communicate with other speakers of English.

The last scale on which female and male learners were found to differ was self-regulation. This means that male learners were less likely to take an active approach to their own learning by creating a conducive learning environment, employing efficient learning strategies and reflecting on their own learning. This finding is not surprising as results pointing indirectly to higher self-regulation among girls than boys have been related before (Clark, 1998; Kissau, 2006; Kissau et al., 2010; Okuniewski, 2014; Oxford, 1994; S. Ryan, 2009; Williams et al., 2002). This finding is also in line with the one reported by Kissau and Quach (2006), who found that boys perceive to have had less control over their language learning than girls. Taking control is an integral part of self-regulatory processes (Zimmerman, 1989); hence, without it learners are less likely to initiate and engage in self-regulation.

Surprisingly, no significant differences were found on personal agency beliefs. The actual means on scales of self-efficacy beliefs and English self-concept were slightly higher for boys than girls. This implies that learners of both gender felt equally capable of learning English. This is at odds with popular stereotyping, according to which girls are better at language learning than boys (Chavez, 2000; Clark, 1998; Schmenk, 2004). It also, to some extent, contradicts previous research findings that point to higher levels of self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs in a broad area of languages (Marsh et al., 1988; Mills et al., 2007; Schunk & Pajares, 2001). One explanation of this unexpected finding might be that females tend to underestimate their abilities, whereas males tend to overestimate them, when reporting their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) and self-concept (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2004). Another potential cause could be the rising importance and status of English, which is now often perceived as a basic skill (Erling & Seargeant, 2013), without which young people cannot compete on the job market.

Male and female learners reported similar levels of positive language learning attitudes and enjoyment of learning, which is in contrast to previous findings (Lee & Kim, 2014; Okuniewski, 2014; Sylvén & Thompson, 2015). One explanation for this discrepancy might be a more stringent statistical analysis adopted in the present study as compared to studies by Okuniewski (2014) and Sylvén and Thompson (2015). In the present study, MANOVA was used, whereas the other two studies employed one-way ANOVA to analyse their results. Pallant (2010) recommends the use of MANOVA,

when the study compares the results on more than one related variable, in this case motivational variables, as other methods, such as t-tests or ANOVA, are more vulnerable to ‘inflated Type 1 error’, which means that differences are found to be significant, even though they are not (Pallant, 2010). Table 3 reveals that the significance level for intrinsic motivation was only slightly higher ( $p = .008$ ) than the significance level recommended for this analysis by applying the Bonferroni correction ( $p > .007$ ). Thus, a change in the analysis would likely lead to a change in the result.

This study did not detect gender differences on the scale of instrumentality, which runs contrary to some of recent research findings (Kissau, 2006; Kissau et al., 2010; Okuniewski, 2014) and yet confirms the finding by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013). An inspection of the aforementioned studies reveals that whether gender differences are identified might be dependent on the language studied with studies focusing on other languages other than English consistently reporting gender differences (Spanish - Kissau et al., 2010; French - Kissau, 2006; German -Okuniewski, 2014), whereas Öztürk & Gürbüz (2013) and the present study, both of which focus on English, did not. This might be a result of special position of English as a lingua franca enabling communication between people from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 155). Thus, its utility on the job market might not be limited to language specific professions, such as language teachers or translators, which tend to be considered a female domain (Eccles, 1994), but extends to a much larger variety of professions. Hence, while the perceptions of utility of other foreign languages tend to differ across genders, this is not the case with English.

The present study also revealed that gender affected not only scores on individual variables but also how these motivational variables interacted with each other. In particular, some aspects of male learners’ motivation were less clearly related to self-regulation than that of girls’. Even though boys had similar levels of English self-concept and self-efficacy to girls’, instrumental orientation and intrinsic motivation, they were less likely to engage in self-regulated learning than girls. The explanation for the weaker relationship between personal agency beliefs, and self-regulation might lie in the understanding how females and males report their perceived abilities. Previous research reported tendencies among females to underestimate their abilities and for males to inflate their skills when reporting their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) and self-concept (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2004). As the boys’ evaluations of their skills are inflated, rather than being an honest representation of their skills, this negatively affects the strength of link between self-efficacy beliefs and English self-concept, and self-regulation.

The explanation presented above does not, however, address why the relationships between instrumental orientation, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation were also weaker for boys than for girls. Kissau and Quach (2006)’s findings that male learners are more likely than female learners to ascribe their successes/failures in language learning to uncontrollable causes can shed some light on this discrepancy. Ford (1992) proposes that goals, here instrumental orientation, have motivational power only if they are considered attainable. However, in light of Kissau and Quach’s results, male learners are more likely than their female peers to consider that success in language learning, hence the attainability of this goal, depends on luck, rather than effort. This, in turns, leads to decreased learning behaviour. As the criterion of goal attainability is not satisfied, the goals cannot play their directive role (Ford, 1992),

which, in turn, affects the links between other components of motivation, personal agency beliefs and emotional arousal process, and learning behaviour.

## Implications

This study has identified that, despite the predictions of prominent scholars to the contrary (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Neméth, 2006), gender differences in motivation to learn English still persist within the population explored by this study. Moreover, not only do boys on average report lower levels of a number of motivation than girls but also boys' motivation, as compared to girls' motivation, tends to be less closely linked with self-regulatory processes for language learning, which might have an effect on their ultimate achievement. Hence, there needs to be further investment in ensuring the youth of both gender can achieve their best.

Whereas this study did not explore the reasons behind gender differences, its results, to a certain extent, mirror the popular beliefs, which frame language learning as a feminine activity. Pedagogical interventions at a class level, such as designing individual tasks appealing to boys or utilising learning styles preferred by boys, might be therefore insufficient in addressing this issue. Instead, if the findings from this study represent the situation more broadly, interventions at a policy level might be required. These policies should position the mastery of foreign languages as necessary for all, regardless of gender. This could be achieved if the focus in the language courses is shifted from the language learning itself, which is considered feminine, to content teaching. An example of this could be a development of a curriculum, in which some classes are specifically dedicated to content teaching via the medium of English.

Creating opportunities for real life communication with other learners of English from around the world might also help address the discrepancy between levels of language learning motivation between female and male learners, in particular in their levels of international orientation. Such opportunities can be effectively created utilising modern technologies available in school, in particular online messengers and social media.

It may also be necessary to provide appropriate instruction and training in self-regulation for the existing gap between gender to be narrowed. This could be achieved in class by ensuring that the students have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with, reflect on and experiment with a range of learning strategies in order to find the ones that work best for them. In addition, strengthening attribution between effort and success in language learning is crucial for motivation to lead to increased effort investment. For this purpose, tasks and activities that provide clear evidence of the link between effort and improved performance could be used.

## Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the participants were drawn from middle size cities, towns and rural areas only. The inclusion of participants from large cities, especially those where learners experience more direct contact with English, might have yielded a different set of results, for example, Henry and Cliffordson's (2013) findings from Sweden suggest that gender differences in settings where English is used frequently are likely to be insignificant. Moreover, in the present study, only quantitative data was collected. Whereas it is useful to detect trends, it provides little

information on what these differences entail for learners of different gender, for example, whereas no quantitative gender difference was found in the present study, the qualitative data would likely offer more insights into what specific careers the learners of both gender had in mind. Finally, the placement test focused only on reading, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, whereas other skills and competences were not examined. It would be useful to see whether gender differences persist across all the skills and competences.

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