The Role of Gender in Language Perception among Saudi ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

In this systematic review, the role of gender in the perceptions of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners will be explored, specifically how these students perceive English language learning. There have been many studies that explore the perceptions of ESL learners regarding their motivation for learning English, while some research has concentrated on investigating these gender differences. However, much of this research has focused on quantitative data, with existing literature exploring the gender differences in ESL learners' performances and academic achievement, such as scores on tests and grade point averages. Overall, there is considerable consensus that females are superior overall males in terms of their academic performances in English language learning. Nonetheless, this study instead aims to explore qualitative data primarily, examining the perceptions, experiences, perspectives, attitudes, and opinions of ESL learners in general – and the gender differences that exist specifically. There is a lack of consensus regarding gender differences among ESL learners and how they perceive English language learning. While some of the studies found that there were statistically significant differences between male and female students in their perceptions, other articles did not come to the same conclusions. Therefore, this systematic review highlights the need for additional research on this topic, with more studies help uncover unique insights.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), gender differences, perceptions, EFL.

1. Introduction

The role of gender in how English as a Second Language (ESL) learners perceive English Language Learning is a critical area of research. These learners have differing perceptions towards their English Language Learning experiences, as all students are unique and will undoubtedly have their own unique perspectives regarding this learning. However, these distinctions may be even more apparent when considering the variable of gender and its role in these perceptions. As Nagasundram et al. (2021) explains, gender's role may unfortunately not be studied as much as it deserves to be, as English language curriculums and teaching strategies are typically standardized, using a one-size-fits-all concept for these classrooms. In doing so, the various learning styles and needs of ESL learners are not taken into consideration (Nagasundram et al., 2021).

Research indicates that gender differences express themselves in how educators teach within English Language Learning classrooms (McCaughan, 2009). For example, in an older study by Sunderland (1994), the researchers determined that teachers treat students differently in EFL classrooms, with boys usually getting more attention, whether negative or positive. In a study with seven EFL students, Sunderland (1994) found that four students reported experiencing differences, with these students perceiving that the teachers expected more from girls in terms of being polite and their written work. Additionally, it was determined that girls perceived they were being called upon more when no one raised their hand, while also being given more encouragement and praise (Sunderland, 1994). If one gender is receiving more interest from their teachers than another, this can play a huge role in how they perceive their classrooms and overall learning experiences.

However, these results need to be validated, as not only was this study conducted nearly three decades ago, but also the fact that these findings seemed to contradict one another. For example, Sunderland also reported that girls were more likely to be ignored, which is in direct opposition to them being called on more than boys. McCaughan (2009) explored these conflicting findings, suggesting that some students perceived that boys were asked more difficult questions as a way to threaten or punish them, or even "preserve the males' egos." Based on Sunderland's early research, the argument has been made – which is backed by McCaughan – that it is likely that differential teacher treatment will always be a part of mixed-sex classrooms. After all, gender is considered a social construction (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Ellili-Cherif, 2017; McCaughan, 2009).

Gender has historically played a significant role in ESL research, with some studies determining that females are superior in English Language Learning (McCaughan, 2009). While some research has pointed to the societal or cultural differences between males and females (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Ellili-Cherif, 2017; McCaughan, 2009), other research has instead focused on the biological differences between gender (Qian, 2015). However, more modern research has found that the role of gender is more complicated that simply one gender being more successful in English Language Learning than the other (Saaty, 2022). In fact, there have even been some studies that did not find gender to have any impact on the perceptions of ESL learners (Główka, 2014; Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003).

Since there is still much left unanswered in terms of the role of gender on ESL learners' perceptions, this research aims to explore how gender affects these ESL learners' perceptions of their classrooms and English Language Learning programs. The research question that the study will answer is, does gender have an influence on

ESL learners' perceptions towards English language learning? To answer this research question, a systematic literature review will be conducted. Since ESL learners' academic performances or grades will not be examined, quantitative data will not be focused on. Thus, qualitative research will be prioritized within this systematic literature review, as the qualitative methodology gathers data that is subjective in nature, such as perceptions, perspectives, thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014; Tenny et al., 2022).1).

2. Methodology

The systematic literature review will be used for this research's methodology. Through conducting a systematic literature review, researchers can descriptively review and summarize existing literature on a topic of interest, collecting information that expands upon the topic's context and/or substance (Kastner et al., 2012). After a research problem or question is determined, a review protocol is developed, ensuring that a comprehensive literature search is undertaken using a validated method (Jahan et al., 2016). A search strategy is employed with key words and phrases, along with limiters and Boolean phrases, using a database search to identify articles and studies that can help to answer this research problem or question (Jahan et al., 2016). The articles are then screened for inclusion based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, after which a validated critical appraisal tool is used to evaluate their quality (Jahan et al., 2016). The data from these studies and articles are then analyzed, with researchers interpreting the findings and conclusions (Xiao & Watson, 2017).

Therefore, this systematic literature review outlines a unique search strategy, clearly listing the key words and phrases that were used. The various databases searched were identified as well, while specifying both inclusion and exclusion criteria. Tables were also created to show these search terms and search strategies, as well as the criteria for which articles were chosen to be included in this review. Finally, the PRISMA flow diagram was employed to determine which articles would ultimately be examined.

2.1 Search Strategy

The search strategy used in this systematic literature review required three databases, including ProQuest, CINAHL, and Scopus. Additionally, to fully search the existing literature and find even more relevant studies, Google Scholar was also searched. Key words and key phrases searched included, along with Boolean phrases, 'gender' AND 'student perception' OR 'learner perception' AND 'English as a Second Language' OR 'ESL' AND 'English Language Learning' OR 'ELL.' (See Tables 1 and 2). Using the Boolean phrases limited the articles, while the searches were combined as well to yield more articles in the searches.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

There were inclusion and exclusion criteria specified (See Table 3). For example, only articles that were written in the English language were included. Additionally, limiters were also used to ensure that the articles and studies were published within the last 15 years (2008 to 2023). All articles had to be peer-reviewed (which only needed to be checked on Google Scholar, as the databases only publish peer-reviewed studies). As previously mentioned, since the aim of this study is to explore ESL learners' perceptions, qualitative studies were the focus. Hence, qualitative articles were chosen, although mixed methods studies (qualitative plus quantitative) were also included. There were no restrictions based on location, such as geographic area. Exclusion criteria specified that if the articles and studies did not help to answer the research question, they were not included in the systematic literature review. Additionally, if the articles only focused on quantitative measures, they were also excluded.

Table 1

Search Terms

First Search Terms	
Second Search Terms	
• **(Gender) AND**	• (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND
• **(Student perception OR**	
• **Learner perception)**	• (English Language Learning OR
	• ELL)

Table 2

Search Strategy

	ProQuest (Search date: 1/27/2023)	
Search	**Search Items**	**Results**
1	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception)	587
2	(English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	463
3	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception) AND (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	107
	CINAHL (Search date: 1/27/2023)	
1	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception)	205,871
2	(English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	117,972
3	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception) AND (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	5,623
	Scopus (Search date: 1/27/2023)	
1	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception)	1,243
2	(English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	897
3	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception) AND (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL)	231
	Google Scholar (Search date: 1/27/2023)	
1	(Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception)	87

| 2 | (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL) | 62 |
| 3 | (Gender) AND (student perception OR learner perception) AND (English as a Second Language OR ESL) AND (English Language Learning OR ELL) | 15 |

Table 3

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Written in English language. • Peer-reviewed original research studies o Qualitative or mixed methods studies • Published within last 15 years (2008-current)	• Not relevant to answering the research question. • Quantitative studies

3. Studies Included in the Review

In the PRIMSA Flow Diagram (See Figure 1), the results of these studies are shown, including the reasoning for why certain articles were excluded. After conducting the search on all three databases and Google Scholar, along with the limiters and Boolean phrases, three total searches were undertaken (S1 AND S2 AND S3). Considering only the third search (which combined searches one and two), the total number of articles identified was 5,976. Then, a total of 3,621 articles were eliminated because they were not relevant to answering the study's research question. This left 2,355 articles, of which 2,303 were also eliminated as they were duplicates. Out of the remaining 52 articles, 23 were then removed as they were outside the scope of this study. Finally, 19 articles were taken out, leaving a total of 10 articles for this systematic literature review.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram

(1)
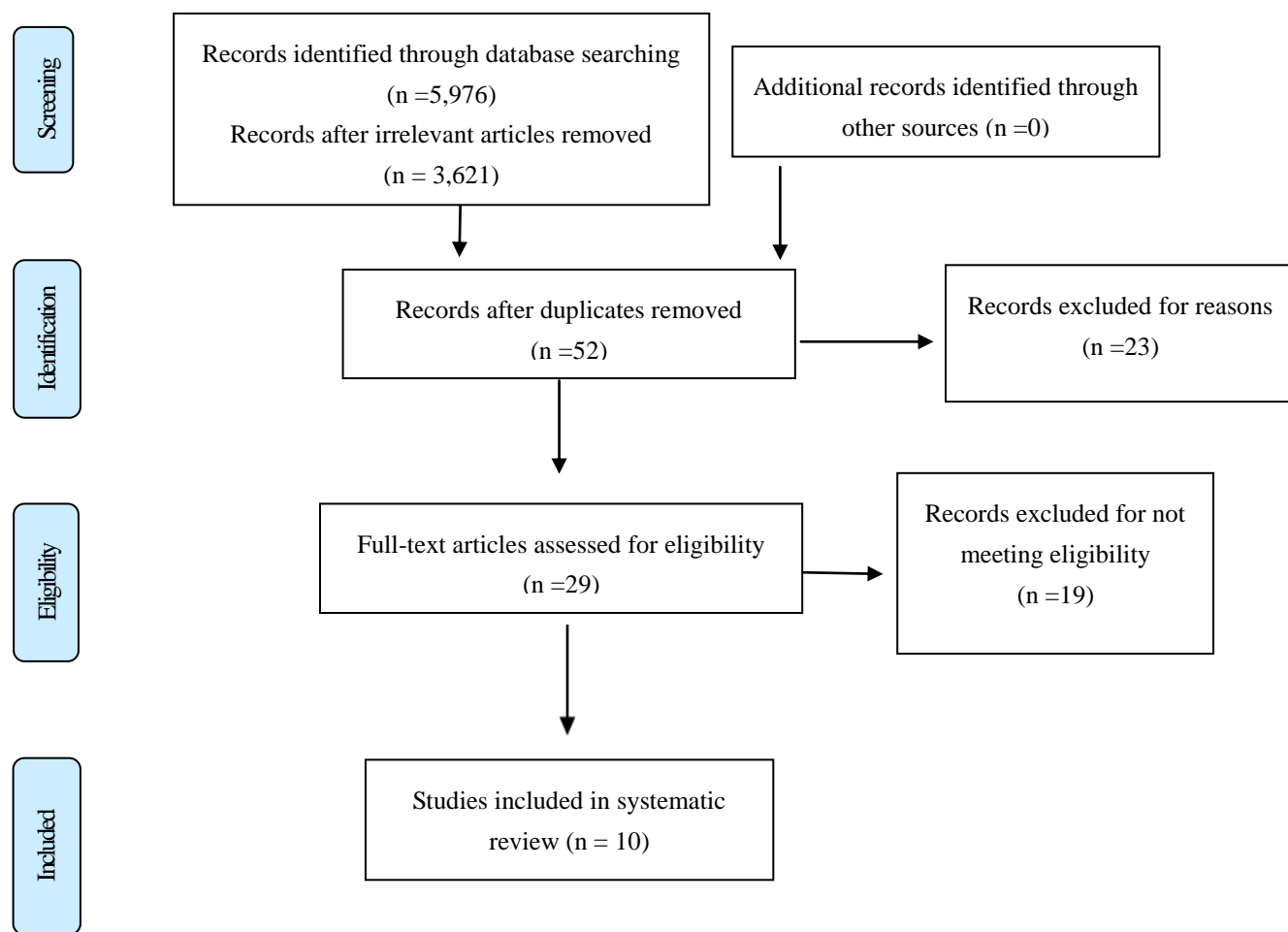
4. Results and Discussion
Table 4

Data in the Literature

Author, year	Country	Title	Sample	Outcome	Relevant Findings
Saaty, 2022	Saudi Arabia	The Role of Motivation and Gender in English Language Learning for Saudi Students.	15 Saudi students enrolled in English as a second language classes	Positive	Saudi females showed more motivation in learning English language than Saudi males
Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018	Turkey	Guiding Curriculum Development: Student Perceptions For the Second Language Learning in Technology Enhanced Learning Environments.	875 Turkish undergraduate students enrolled. in technology enhanced second language learning environments	Negative	Gender did not play a vital role in regard to the perception of students towards technology. enhan ed learning environment for the English language learning
Sakai, Takagi, & Chu, 2010	East Asia Japan Taiwan	Promoting Learner Autonomy: Student Perceptions of Responsibilities in a Language Classroom in East Asia.	73 East Asian university students 44 students from Japan 29 students from Taiwan	Negative	While there were gender differences in terms of confident and performance, the qualitative portion demonstrated no significant differences

Richter, 2022	Korea	An Investigation of Learning English as a Second Language in Korea.	14 Korean students from different universities	Negative	There were no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the students when learning English as a second language
Yoonjung, Young, & Hea-Suk, 2022	Korea	Effects of EFL Learners' Perspectives on Online English Classes: Gender, Major, and Proficiency	336 Korean university students from 10 different classes, registered in TOEIC-based General English and Practical English	Mixed	There were no statistically significant differences in gender on students' perspectives on online learning. However, a non-statistically significant finding was that female students viewed these classes more positively compared to male students
Sabti & Chaichan, 2014	Saudi Arabia Malaysia	Saudi high school students' attitudes and barriers toward the use of computer technologies in learning English.	30 Saudi high school students (15 males and 15 females)	Positive	There were significant differences, with female students demonstrating more positive attitudes compared to male students

					towards the use of computer technologies in learning English
Kim, 2019a	Korea	Effects of gender difference on English learning with technology.	204 Korean Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) student	Negative	There was no significant gender difference in TEFL students, with both genders showing positive perceptions of language lessons.
Kim, 2019b	Korea	A study on gender differences in Korean students' foreign language learning: Effects of gender on oral proficiency improvement across proficiency levels.	204 Korean students (100 males and 104 females) enrolled in a 16-week class	Positive	There were significant differences in gender, with female students at advanced levels not only performing better than males, but also viewing this learning more positively compared to males.
Zoghi, Kazemi, & Kalani, 2013	Iran	The effect of gender on language learning.	100 guidance school students (50 males and 50 females) selected from	Positive	There is a significant associated between EFL learning and gender,

			four different classes		especially in terms of performance on achievement tests.
Ko, 2018	Korea	Practical implications for EFL students' foreign language anxiety in relation with gender and teachers.	210 Korean college students	Positive	There were significant gender differences, with females' speaking anxiety being higher than males in both classes, while females also reported feeling that the relaxing learning environment was more important compared to males

4.1 Study characteristics

Table 4 above shows the 10 articles and studies that were reviewed in this systematic literature review. All were published in the English language, with different countries of origin. Specifically, there was a total of six different countries: five articles from Korea, two articles from Saudi Arabia, one article from Iran, one article from Turkey, and one article from East Asia (Japan and Taiwan). All of the articles were also peer-reviewed, with six articles using qualitative methods only and the remaining four articles using a mixed methodology (collecting both qualitative and quantitative data). Eight of the articles used college students as the participants in these studies, while one article used high school students and one article used guidance students (between the ages of 12 and 14). Finally, the distribution of studies was separated based on the

outcomes: five articles had positive outcomes, four articles had negative outcomes, and one article had mixed outcomes.

4.2 Positive Results

In the study by Saaty (2022), the researchers used a mixed-methods approach to examine the variables that impact the English language learning process, including both gender and motivation. Qualitative data were gathered using both a self-determined motivation questionnaire along with a self-assessment chart (Saaty, 2022). There was a total of 15 male and fifteen female Saudi students who were recruited for this study, all of whom were studying English in the U.S., pursuing their university-level education (Saaty, 2022). The findings showed that the female participants were more likely to be motivated towards learning the English language compared to the male participants (Saaty, 2022).

In another study based in Saudi Arabia, Sabti and Chaichan (2014) explored the attitudes of Saudi high school students toward the use of computer technologies for learning English, while discussing any potential barriers that may impact how the students used these computers for learning. There was a total of 30 Saudi high school students in Malaysia, with an equal number of males and females (15 students each) (Sabti & Chaichan, 2014). Using the Scale of Attitude toward Computer Technologies (SACT) and Barriers affecting Students' Attitudes and Use (BSAU) to collect data, the analysis demonstrated the significant gender differences in regard to the students' attitudes toward using computer technologies to learn English (Sabti & Chaichan, 2014). Specifically, the female students exhibited more positive attitudes compared to the male students, although both genders did show positive perceptions as well for Usefulness and Ease of use of these technologies (Sabti & Chaichan, 2014).

In the article by Kim (2019b), the researchers examined the effects of gender differences among Korean students who were majoring in a Korean Information Technology (IT) university, exploring their levels of proficiency. There was a total of 204 participants, with 104 female students and 100 male students, all of whom had enrolled in a 16-week class with the aim of improving their English oral proficiency (Kim, 2019b). Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained, with the students taking an OPIc test (i.e., pre- and post-tests) to determine their English language proficiency level, representing the quantitative data (Kim, 2019b). They found that female students who were in advanced levels showed better performances compared to male students, although there were no differences at the intermediate or novice levels (Kim, 2019b). Additionally, the researchers conducted interviews with the students to gather qualitative data, with notable gender differences found in how they viewed these classes and English learning (Kim, 2019b). Specifically, female students perceived these classes in a more favorable and positive manner compared to the male students (Kim, 2019b).

In the article by Zoghi et al. (2013), the aim of the study was to investigate the impact of gender on English as a foreign language (EFL) achievement test at the Iran Language Institute, determining if the gender of students plays a part in how they learn English. There was a total of 100 guidance school students, with equal number of males and females, who were chosen to participate in this study from four different classes (Zoghi et al., 2013). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were then used, with the findings showing that EFL learning is closely associated with gender, as the female students not only performed better on the achievement test, but also perceived these classes in a more positive way compared to male students (Zoghi et al., 2013).

The article by Ko (2018) examined how gender impacts foreign language anxiety in native English-speaking teacher and non-native English-speaking teacher's classes, exploring gender differences. There was a total of 210 Korean college students enrolled in the study, all of whom experienced anxiety with learning the English language (Ko, 2018). Using an open-ended survey, the researchers both measured and compared this language anxiety based on gender (Ko, 2018). The findings of the study showed that female students had significantly greater speaking anxiety compared to male students, although both genders did express that speaking anxiety was their most pressing issue in these classrooms (Ko, 2018). Additionally, female students considered the relaxing learning environment as more essential and conducive to learning compared to male students, indicating significant gender differences (Ko, 2018).

4.3 Negative Results

In the study by Gürleyik and Akdemir (2018), the researchers wanted to better understand the perceptions of students who were using technology enhanced learning environments to learn second language skills. In this way, they could help to develop enhanced curriculums to aid student learning (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018). Using a qualitative survey design, 875 undergraduate students participated in the study (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018). These students were all enrolled in a university in Turkey that offered this type of technology-enhanced learning environment for learning English as a second language (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018). Overall, the findings were unexpected, showing that technology enhanced learning environments did not positively influence the students' perceptions (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018). Additionally, gender also did not play an influential role on how the students' perceived these learning environments (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018). Interestingly, however, the female students did demonstrate higher confidence levels when compared to the male students (Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018).

In the article by Sakai et al. (2010), the researchers examined learner autonomy and perspectives within East Asian university language classrooms. They focused on gender difference, as many studies have previously found that female students showed

better performances compared to male students in English language learning (Redfield et al., 2001). They conducted a mixed methods study, collecting both quantitative (phase one) and qualitative (phase two) data (Sakai et al., 2010). The participants included 73 students: 44 from Japan and 29 from Taiwan; of these, 45 of the participants were females and 28 were males (Sakai et al., 2010). All of the students were studying English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, while there were distinctions between the genders in the quantitative portion of the study, the qualitative phase did not show any significant differences between the male and female students (Sakai et al., 2010).

These findings were also corroborated in the study by Richter (2022), which explored students' perceptions regarding English as a second language (ESL), specifically in how they communicated, learned, and understood. The researchers used an exploratory descriptive study, interviewing 14 Korean students from different universities (Richter, 2022). They investigated variables such as gender and how this impacted the students' perceived confidence and ability in learning basic English language skills (Richter, 2022). The results showed that learning ESL is significantly impacted by student choices, such as in how they approach learning (Richter, 2022). Unfortunately, there were no statistically significant differences between the male and female students, indicating no gender differences in regard to students' perceptions in learning English as a second language (Richter, 2022).

Finally, in the article by Kim (2019a), the researchers concentrated on exploring the new instructional and pedagogical application of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), examining how gender plays a role. There were 204 TEFL Korean students enrolled in the study, which was undertaken during the 2017 academic year (Kim, 2019a). All the participants utilized technology to attend English class for three hours each week (Kim, 2019a). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data, with quantitative materials including both pre- and post-tests, while the qualitative methods employed structured interviews (Kim, 2019a). During these interviews, the researchers gathered the students' comprehensive view of technology-assisted English lessons (Kim, 2019a). The results of this study showed that there were no statistically significant differences in gender (Kim, 2019a). In fact, both male and female students were able to not only improve upon their English-speaking skills with the help of technology, but both genders also demonstrated positive perceptions of language lessons (Kim, 2019a).

4.4. Mixed Results

The article by Yoonjung et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between gender, language proficiency, major, and student perspectives toward an online educational setting. With 366 university freshmen attending 10 general English courses in a Korean university, these participants enrolled in online courses that utilized

pre-recorded video lessons and synchronous classes through Zoom (Yoonjung et al., 2022). These students were either in a TOEIC-based General English or Practical English, with them divided by gender, major into four groups, and proficiency level (Yoonjung et al., 2022). A questionnaire was used to collect data, with the results indicating that both gender and major had no effect on student perspectives toward online learning (Yoonjung et al., 2022). This included for student satisfaction, student preference, and student willingness to study online (Yoonjung et al., 2022). However, the female students did seem to demonstrate more positive views to learning English online compared to male students, but this finding was not statistically significant (Yoonjung et al., 2022).

4.5 Discussion

As many of these articles showed, the gender differences in how ESL learners perceive English language learning is not clear. Previous research has shown how influential a factor gender truly is, especially when motivating students to learn English as a foreign language (Akram & Ghani, 2013; Aldosari, 2014; Javid et al., 2012). The majority of the studies included in this systematic literature review did show a significant association between gender and motivation when learning a language, with reliable research demonstrating that females are more motivated when compared to males in terms of learning this new language (Dörnyei et al., 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006). Specifically, other research has found that females exhibit a greater willingness to put in the effort necessary to learn English, such as going to tutoring sessions as needed and setting aside time for studying (Al Harthy, 2017; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006).

For example, in the study by Sabti and Chaichan (2014), gender was found to be significant, particularly in the influence of participants' overall attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. Specifically, the female students demonstrated both stronger and more positive attitudes toward the use of computer technology when learning English compared to male students (Sabti & Chaichan, 2014). Again, other research has confirmed these results. Al Shammari (2007) examined Saudi students' attitudes toward using technology – specifically computers – to help them learn English as a foreign language. They found that gender played a significant role in influencing participants' attitudes regarding these classes and learning English (Al Shammari, 2007). Educational research over the years has shown that differences in gender have some part to play in how students not only achieve academically, but also their specific needs and interests (Collins et al., 2000; Halpern, 1986; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2000). Nonetheless, based on the different educational domains, there are varying assertions in regard to gender. For example, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theorists contend that female students demonstrate superiority in how they learn their second language (Boyle, 1987; Burstall, 1975; Ehrlich, 2001).

The results of this systematic literature review provided evidence in support of this belief, with notable gender differences observed in the studies reviewed.

However, nearly the same number of studies found the opposite results, with no statistically significant gender differences with regard to student perceptions in learning English as a second language. These findings are also consistent with existing research (Balta & Tzafilkou, 2019; Kaya & Balta, 2015; Liu, 2011; Yoon, 2020). The studies that found negative outcomes were those that used the mixed methods research design, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the researchers in these articles did determine that there were quantitative variations between male and female students, such as in terms of academic performances and superiority in learning English as a foreign language, with female students showing a clear advantage over male students. However, these studies did not find any qualitative distinctions in terms of the students' perceptions or attitudes toward these ESL/ELL classrooms. Unfortunately, these studies directly contrasted with the other articles that did indicate positive outcomes when considering gender differences regarding perceptions.

Finally, there was one study that found mixed results. In the study by Yoonjung et al. (2022), there were mixed results, as the findings were not statistically significant, although the researchers did find that female students were more likely to view these classes more positively compared to male students. The study by Voyer and Voyer (2014) corroborated these mixed findings, with their results indicating that female students did demonstrate more positive perspectives in regard to learning the English language online. Furthermore, it must be noted that when considering quantitative measures such as performances and academic scores, studies do clearly show that female students have an advantage over male students (Yoonjung et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings for both the positive and negative outcomes were corroborated by existing studies. Hence, the research exploring gender differences in ESL learners – particularly in regard to their perceptions and attitudes toward learning the English language – is quite mixed. While on the one hand, some researchers have discovered that female students do view these classrooms in a more favorable light, on the other hand, other studies have not been able to verify these findings. It seems that while many scholars and educators might agree that there are gender discrepancies in terms of how students perform academically – with females being superior to males, earning higher grades and excelling in their studies to a higher degree than males – this consensus has not been generated toward each gender's attitudes and perceptions of ELL. Thus, the results from this systematic literature review are similar to other existing systematic literature reviews, with researchers being unable to decisively prove that female ESL students perceive these ELL classrooms differently compared to male ESL students.

5. Implications

There are many implications of the results from this systematic literature review. For example, the findings lend evidence to the assertion that gender differences play a key role in learning English as a foreign language or English language learning among ESL learners. Gender represents a significant aspect of this learning, even if only quantitatively. Specifically, most of the studies (for those that used mixed methodologies, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data) did report at least quantitative differences, with females showing superiority in learning the English language. Female students were able to do better on academic tests, indicating their advantage over male students in regard to learning and performing well in these classes.

Additionally, half of the studies in this systematic literature review found that there were also qualitative gender differences in ESL students, which was the scope of this study, as the goal was to explore the role of gender on how these students learn in ELL. Specifically, the research question asked if gender has an influence on ESL learners' perceptions towards English language learning. With the qualitative and mixed method studies, the findings of five of the articles indicated that there were also statistically significant gender differences in terms of how students felt about these classrooms. Not only were female students more motivated to learning English compared to male students, but they also viewed these classes in a more positive and favorable light. However, it should be noted that the other half of the studies included in the systematic literature review did not have the same results, with four of the articles not observing any significant differences between the male and female students.

When considering gender influences, the results of this study can be used to help ELL teachers and educators in their development and design of these curriculums. Since the findings are so mixed, it clearly indicates that ELL teachers may find it difficult to understand the perceptions and attitudes of their ESL students. Therefore, ELL and ESL teachers and educators need to pay more attention to how their students are learning, recognizing their individual learning styles. Additionally, these teachers should take into consideration how their students perceive these classes, observing their attitudes and taking note of any differences that may be evident. Through carefully observing their students, or even conducting surveys or questionnaires to gather qualitative information on these perceptions and inclinations, ELL and ESL teachers can use this data to inform their teaching practices.

For example, when applying these findings into the ESL/ELL classrooms, teachers may implement mixed gender classes or study groups. This would leverage the greater motivation that female students demonstrate and the greater confidence that male students exhibit – overcoming any learning anxiety that female students may feel well

as the lower academic performances of male students. By having these genders work together inside the classroom, they each can use their individual strengths to overcome their weaknesses. The female students may help to motivate the male students to participate more in class and utilize available learning materials (while also studying more and applying themselves). Likewise, the male students' confidence, especially in terms of speaking in these classrooms, can help make the female students more comfortable, lessening their anxiety. Together, all students can enjoy greater academic performances as well as more positive experiences learning English. Another benefit by having the two genders work together in these ESL/ELL classrooms is that it can help to eliminate existing gender stereotypes. For example, by collaborating on their learning and helping one another to perform better and enjoy these classrooms more (including the learning process), mixed groups of students can challenge the stereotypes that exist – both for males and females. While male students may feel they are biased against, with teachers calling on female students more often, when they are in these groups, it can facilitate more equal opportunities to participate in these classrooms. Similarly, male students can help to encourage the female students, enabling them to have greater confidence in their abilities. By doing so, it can enable these female students to feel more comfortable in the classrooms, which itself is conductive to better learning.

It is also important to consider the implications of these findings in terms of research. It is clear that additional research is definitely needed on this topic. The existing literature seems to still be quite divided, with some studies showing gender differences while others do not (especially in terms of qualitative research). There is no consensus in regard to how gender plays a role in learning within ESL and ELL classrooms, as students learn the English language. In fact, there is no real agreement among scholars and educators in the role of gender overall, whether in education classrooms or other studies. Therefore, these results should act as a encouragement for other researchers, who can continue this research and add to the existing literature. More original studies – especially qualitative or mixed methods – need to be undertaken, so that a better understanding on gender's role in how students perceive these classrooms can be obtained.

6. Limitations

There were several limitations in this systematic literature review. First, its methodology required secondary research only, as no primary research was obtained. Hence, this was not an original study, but only a review of existing studies. This meant the researcher had no control over who the participants were, what type of study was conducted (such as the data collection and analysis methods), or even how this data was interpreted by the researchers. A systematic literature review involves reviewing studies and literature that have already been undertaken, which restricts

what type of information can be gleaned.

Another limitation was the articles chosen for this study. There were not many studies that only used qualitative research, so a large majority of the articles reviewed utilized mixed methods research. This provided both quantitative and qualitative data. While this may seem to be a benefit in terms of having additional information to review, it may have taken away from the focus of this study, which was on ESL students' perceptions in regard to learning English. Additionally, this systematic literature review was not comprehensive, with only 10 articles selected and reviewed. Finally, there were many different countries included, which represents a key extraneous variable that possibly should have been controlled.

Therefore, it is recommended that not only do researchers conduct original research studies on this topic, but that any future systematic literature reviews limit the articles to one country of origin. Education varies drastically across nations, which leads to the assumption that the gender differences would also vary. This is especially true when considering that gender itself is a social construct. Interestingly, in this study, most of the articles were from Korea – and they were equally divided between positive and negative outcomes.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic literature review examined gender differences in ESL/ELL classrooms. The studies included were chosen based on if they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, specifically requiring that only qualitative or mixed methods studies be reviewed. Quantitative studies were excluded. The research question asked was if gender has an influence on ESL learners' perceptions towards English language learning. There were 10 articles selected for review and critical appraisal, half of which were studies from Korea. The others included two articles from Saudi Arabia along with one article each from Iran, Turkey, and East Asia. Overall, half the studies demonstrated positive outcomes, meaning that they showed statistically significant gender differences in how students perceived these classes and English language learning. However, almost the same number of articles (four) instead exhibited the exact opposite findings – that there were no statistically significant gender differences. Only one article had mixed results.

Therefore, this study has verified the assertion that there is not any consensus in regard to gender differences and the role they play in how students perceive ESL and ELL classrooms. While some studies showed that female students had greater motivation and viewed these classrooms more positively compared to male students, the other articles did not draw the same conclusions. A few of the articles did admit that there may have been some small differences between male and female students, they were not enough to be statistically significant. Thus, this systematic literature review offers unique insight for educators and teachers, recommending that they

recognize the gender differences that may exist within their students. They can use this knowledge to help improve their own teaching practices and strategies, ensuring that these classrooms are more conducive to learning – for both male and female students.

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