

Gender Differences in Motivational Factors for Japanese Language Learning

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Abstract

Motivation plays an important role in language acquisition, and understanding how it varies between genders can enhance teaching and learning practices. This study explored gender differences in motivational factors influencing foreign language learning. Data were collected from 201 respondents from university students using a questionnaire that assessed six motivational factors: intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, task value, learning beliefs, self-efficacy and performance, and test anxiety toward Japanese language learning. The finding revealed both genders are motivated to learn language for exploring Japanese culture and future career. The students also belief that their strongest skill is listening skill. A good listening skill is important for learners to be successful in communication in a foreign language. There are no significant gender differences in overall motivation factors. Both genders demonstrate higher levels of mean on extrinsic goal orientation, task value, self-efficacy and performance than intrinsic goal orientation, self-beliefs and test anxiety. However, the analysis showed female students have a slightly higher mean than male student in each motivational factor. These findings suggest that there is the need for flexible approaches on teaching and learning language to optimize Japanese language learning outcomes for both genders.

Keywords: Gender, Motivational Factors, Listening, Japanese Language, Foreign Language Learning

Introduction

Background of Study

Learning the Japanese language is one of the world's most rapidly growing interests, and for multitudes of reasons. Generally, they are classified by their intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. For an intrinsic dimension, learners are often fascinated by Japanese culture with

its complex history, unique traditions, peculiar literature, and entertainment. The popularity of Japanese media, especially anime, manga, and video games, on a global scale, has also fueled this interest so that language acquisition is not only the form of communication but also a key to cultural immersion (Jones, 2021). For many, the ability to understand the language is a source of delight by itself in these cultural products; it makes that person relate on a deeper level with Japan and its people. The extrinsic motivations for learning Japanese are equally significant. Japan's status as one of the largest economic powers in the world greatly contributes to the general desirability of Japanese proficiency for professionals and students. It is not only through business, technology, education, and diplomatic careers that a person can travel and work in many other parts of the world, but these are also strongly motivating factors for learning the language. In addition, there are academic reasons for learning Japanese, given that several works in engineering, science, and arts have been published by many universities and research institutions. In this regard, people seeking academic excellence are thus bound to learn Japanese for them to secure substantial resources, research, and networks within the academic environment in Japan (Kawakami, 2020). Social and personal reasons also make learners find interest in learning Japanese. People who wish to stay in Japan, be it for short periods, say in exchange programs, or for long-term purposes, obviously need to learn the language to enhance integration (Takeda, 2022). Moreover, internationalization has introduced great cross-cultural dealings, and students of the Japanese language are in turn urged to forge relationships and communicate interculturally. This social need and, consequently, the urge for fluency to liaise with ease in life in Japan can increase the strong determination and commitment toward learning the language (Nakata, 2018).

Motivation is a key factor in language learning, driving learners to persist through challenges, engage with the material, and ultimately achieve proficiency. Motivation influences the intensity and duration of effort learners invest in acquiring a new language and is often linked to successful language outcomes. In the context of language learning, motivation can be influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including personal interest, goals, the learning environment, and social or cultural expectations. Motivational factors in language learning often distinguish between intrinsic motivation—where learners are driven by an internal desire to learn for personal satisfaction—and extrinsic motivation, where external rewards such as grades, recognition, or career advancement fuel their efforts (Er et al. 2024; Nor et al. 2019; Khong et al. 2017). Understanding the complexities of motivation is essential for researchers, teachers and learners to have a positive impact on both the process and success of language acquisition.

The motivation to learn a new language can change depending on many factors, each of them may have different effects on the learner. Among them, the performance of the learner's motivation, that is to learn the language to satisfy some of his or her needs, is one of the most important factors. The use of intrinsic motivation could make the rewards of an experience in language acquisition sweeter as compared to a less motivated one from within because it is self-determined and has interest in the learning process (Resendez, 2023). However, there is motivation which may be also highly influential in the process of learning a foreign language, and it is called the extrinsic motivation which results from the use of such tools as, for example, rewards or other practical concerns. This means that even though extrinsically motivated learners may get what they want and achieve the laid down language objectives,

they are likely to engage the learning content in a 'what's in it for me' manner. Learners look at language learning in a broader perspective and thus the differentiation between integrative and instrumental motivation seems to add more complexities to language learning. Some learners use the ability to integrate in the community of the target language as a motivation while others are motivated by the desire to accomplish certain personal or professional goals using the new language (Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012). Ultimately, motivation to learn Japanese can either be personal, cultural, academic, or driven by careers. Understanding these motives does not only help to form effective strategies for the acquisition of languages but also explicates the dynamic relationship between language learning and the socio-cultural and economic context in which it occurs.

Statement of Problem

The field of language learning has witnessed significant shifts in recent decades, transitioning from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches and highlighting the importance of understanding the learning processes employed by students (Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020). Additionally, the research highlighted that factors such as working experience, rather than gender, had a more pronounced impact on the motivation levels of college students (Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020). One crucial aspect of this exploration is the role of gender in language learning motivation, which has been the focus of various studies. Existing research indicates that even both genders share some interests or motivation for learning English, but they differ in some cultural factors that influence or hinder their learning. Female students' integrative motivation and attitudes towards English are higher than male students (Harthy, 2017). However, another study conducted in a foreign language context revealed that the differences in language learning motivation between genders were not significant. Hou-Keat et al. (2017) studied student motivation and gender differences in learning Spanish as a foreign language in the Malaysian context and found that there were no significant differences between integrative and instrumental motivations based on gender.

These contrasting findings suggest that the relationship between gender, motivation, and language learning is complex and context-dependent between each foreign language. Previous research has yielded conflicting results; while some studies agreed that gender has no significant impact on language learning, others disagreed and reported that motivation, self-efficacy, cognitive load, and learning styles, among other factors, may differ between males and females when it comes to language learning (Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020; Harthy, 2017; Hou-Keat et al. 2017). Therefore, there is the need to bridge these gaps to enhance understanding and improve language learning outcomes for all genders.

Objective of the study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore the gender differences in motivational factors for Japanese language learning as a foreign language in a Malaysian public university. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions.

1. What are motivational factors that influence Japanese language learning?
2. Are there any mean differences in the motivation factors between male and female learners?

Literature Review

Motivations in Foreign Language Learning

Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between gender and foreign language learning. Several studies have looked at the role that gender can play in learning a language, anxiety, motivation, and general success. To provide a comprehensive knowledge of the ways in which gender influences foreign language learning, this literature review incorporates findings from several past study studies. Learning a language depends critically on motivation, and research has shown that motivation varies by gender. According to research on Chinese high school students, female students outperformed male students in terms of total Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) (Huang and Jiang, 2022). Improved learning outcomes were associated with this increased satisfaction. In addition, a Malaysian study (Khong et al., 2018) discovered that female students were more productively motivated to learn Spanish, suggesting that context and gender might have a substantial impact on motivation. Learners' gender has important effects on language learning. In language learning settings, females generally show a higher motivation for the language and interest in foreign countries while males show less persistence (Carreira, 2011). Generally, female students tend to outperform males in the realm of languages. However, learners' gender is related to their achievement and beliefs in different domains of study (Eccles et al., 1993). Females show a greater tendency towards engagement in language-oriented pursuits, including foreign language, while males tend to engage less in these domains (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017).

Research in the domain of foreign language learning has consistently shown an advantage for female learners (Henry, 2009; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017). Even as early as elementary school, males show low interest in learning foreign languages (Carreira, 2011), a trend which appears to continue into secondary school and beyond (Baker and MacIntyre, 2000; Fryer & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Henry & Cliffordson, 2013). As a result, male learners perform lower than female learners on language proficiency measures (Education First, 2019). It is crucial to find its nature and origin; understanding learners' individual proclivities for language based on gender early on in their language studies can help define this point of origin. It is crucial to explore the nature and origin of language preferences by recognizing learners' individual tendencies related to gender early in their language studies.

There is also a widespread impression that language learning is a feminized field, which partly comes from the enrollment pattern in language-related courses. Kobayashi (2002) cites MEXT's 1998 report that says 67% of foreign language majors in Japanese universities are females. Similarly, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), 72.5% of bachelor's degrees in foreign languages and literature in the U.S. were earned by females. Some studies have empirically shown gender differences in motivation, attitude, and performance (Gardner, 1985; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Clark & Trafford, 1995). Sung and Padilla (1998) showed that female students at American elementary and secondary schools have higher motivation to learn Asian languages than male students. The study done by Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) demonstrated the superiority of girls in the measures of attitudes and motivation. Additionally, Arabic students in Canada indicate that females have more positive attitudes toward the host culture and a higher level of integrative motivation while males tend to have a higher extent of instrumental motivation (Abu-Rabia, 1997).

Kobayashi's (2002) reported that female Japanese high school students have significantly more positive attitudes toward and are more interested in learning English. Similarly, Yashima et al. (2009) conducted a study to investigate whether there is a gender difference in motivation and anxiety. Results showed that females were shown to have higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation than males although they were not any more motivated than male learners. Generally, the gender difference is greater in higher self-regulated types of motivation. There was no gender difference in the total scores for the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which gives the impression that the overall anxiety level does not differ between males and females.

Language and Gender

Several studies have found that gender has a major influence on language learning outcomes. Główska (2014) stated that female students outperformed male students in studying English as a foreign language. This was explained by the fact that women are better at eliminating interlanguage forms that go against target language norms and are more flexible to new linguistic forms. Research has also been done on the connection between gender and anxiety related to language acquisition. Although women typically have higher levels of anxiety related to learning foreign languages, research on meta-analysis using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) found that these differences were not statistically significant (Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022). This implies that other variables that may be more important in determining language anxiety include age, the target language, and the local context.

Language learning experiences can also be impacted by gender stereotypes. A study based on Bandura's social cognition theory discovered that both teachers and students were aware of gender stereotypes in language acquisition, which influenced their experiences and behaviors. It was discovered that such stereotypes affected behavioral, personal, and environmental processes that produced different learning experiences for male and female learners. A study by Kutuk et al. (2021) highlighted how learners' self-efficacy in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) could be impacted by gender stereotypes, especially for female students.

Gender and language skills

The role of motivations in foreign language (FL) instruction is widely recognized. However, few studies explored motivational factors across various language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Even fewer studies have specifically focused on the motivational factors of FL learners during the process of learning to listen, which reflects the general lack of exploration of listening compared to other language skills. While reading motivation has received considerable attention, listening motivation has been largely overlooked by researchers, teachers, and learners. Listening, as one of the two primary channels for receiving language input besides reading, plays a crucial role in the initial stages of developing foreign language proficiency.

Using exploratory-descriptive research and a qualitative approach, Quinapallo et al. (2024) analyzed scientific literature to explore the link between motivation and language proficiency, with a focus on listening and speaking skills. The study highlighted the significance of understanding intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivations, as well as the

interplay between personal and environmental factors. This suggests that motivation is crucial for language learning, especially in developing listening and speaking skills which are valuable for both language teachers and learners, as different types of motivation affect performance and persistence in language learning. Furthermore, an individual interest is a more significant predictor of self-efficacy in advanced listening skills than proficiency itself (Kim, 2022). Therefore, sustaining student interest is important for their progress in language learning, which is crucial for improving listening skills, particularly for students with lower proficiency.

Similarly, Tsang (2022) examined the interrelationships between three predictors (FL listening motivation, interest, and linguistic self-confidence), and an outcome (overall proficiency) found that all four variables were strongly correlated with each other. However, the path analysis found that the only significant relationship was a complete double mediation pathway (motivation → interest → confidence → proficiency). The study emphasizes the significance of listening motivation, deepens our insight into how it connects with foreign language interest and confidence, and elucidates how it affects overall proficiency through two mediators.

Using a relational screening model, Dölek (2022) explored the relationship between listening motivation and frequency of listening strategies used. The study revealed that there is a moderate positive correlation between listening motivation and both the use of listening strategies and their sub-dimensions, listening motivation accounts for 19.4% of the variance in how often listening strategies are used and is a significant predictor of their frequency, listening motivation and strategy use are consistent across gender and students' grade level, and although there are differences in coefficient values between 5th and 8th grades, the positive and statistically significant relationship between listening motivation and strategy use remains moderate at both grade levels.

The relationship between gender, motivation, learning strategies and foreign language skills reveals significant insights into how gender influences language learning. Research indicates that females generally exhibit higher motivation and achievement in foreign language learning compared to males, particularly in listening comprehension contexts. Bećirović (2017) conducted a study that demonstrated female students outperform male students in learning English as a foreign language across all grade levels. The study also highlighted statistically significant correlations between achievement and motivation when using the most effective approaches for teaching and learning English. Similarly, Chean et al. (2023) investigated how gender and foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA) influence listening comprehension among university students in China. The findings revealed that listeners with low anxiety listened significantly better than listeners with moderate and high levels of anxiety. Moreover, females outperform males in listening comprehension and exhibit higher levels of FLLA compared to their male counterparts.

While existing studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between various types of motivation and language acquisition outcomes, more nuanced investigations are necessary to better understand the specific mechanisms through which motivation influences language learning. Exploring how different motivational strategies affect learners with diverse backgrounds, ages, and language learning contexts could provide valuable insights for

educators and policymakers aiming to enhance language education programs. As globalization continues to increase the importance of multilingualism, deepening our understanding of motivation in foreign language learning remains essential for promoting successful language acquisition and long-term proficiency.

Methodology

This quantitative study investigated learners' motivation in learning the Japanese language at a local university in Malaysia that involved 201 Japanese learners. Section A of the questionnaire gathered demographic profiles of the respondents, while Section B focused on motivational factors. The research instrument was a questionnaire based on the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990). Six motivational factors were composed as variables including intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, task value, learning beliefs, self-efficacy and performance, and test anxiety. As a result, 31 items were investigated using 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree). as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	FACTORS	SUB-FACTORS	NO. OF ITEMS
A	Demographic	Demographic Profile	2
		Learning Profile	2
		Total No. of Items	4
B	Motivational Factors	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4
		Extrinsic Goal Orientation	4
		Task Value	6
		Learning Belief	4
		Self-Efficacy & Performance	8
		Test Anxiety	5
		Total No. of Items	31

A survey was collected online using Google Forms and the data were analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data analysis included calculating percentages and mean scores to address the research questions. Table 2 presents the reliability statistics for the instrument, with the SPSS analysis revealing Cronbach's alpha of .902, indicating high internal reliability.

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.902	31

Findings

This section analyzes the demographic and learning profiles using percentages, which are displayed in pie charts. The subsequent section presents the findings for five motivational factors using 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree). The data for these factors is analyzed using mean scores.

Findings for Demographic Profile

1. Gender

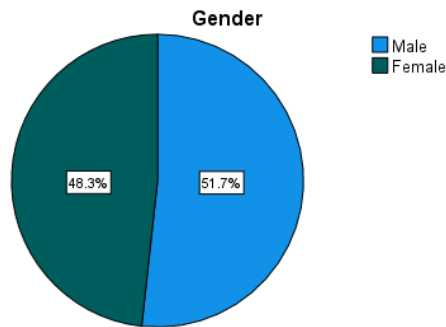


Figure 1 - Percentage for gender

Figure 1 above presents the distributions of respondents in percentage. Of the 201 responses obtained, many of the respondents were 51.7% are male and 48.3% female.

2. Discipline

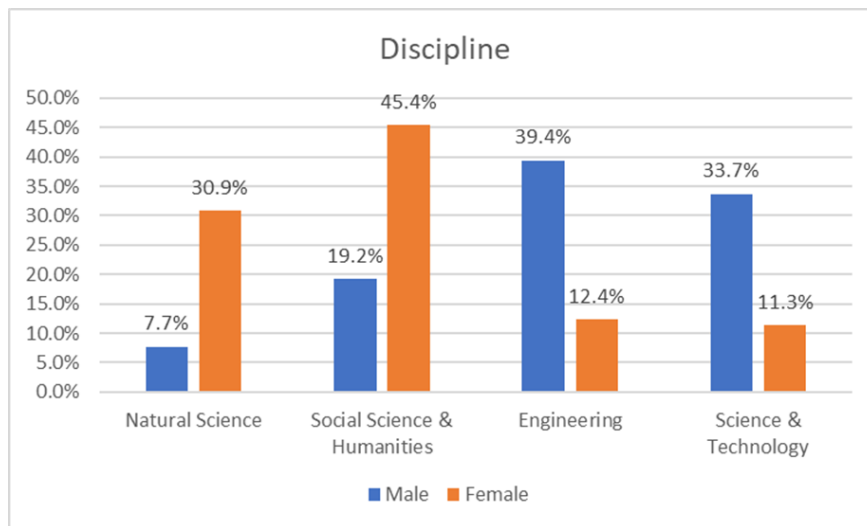


Figure 2 - Percentage of discipline among gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents' discipline, indicating that 45.4% of the respondents are female from Social Science and Humanities followed by female from Natural Science students (30.9%) and Engineering students (12.4%). The least female respondents are from Science and Technology students (11.3%). As for the male respondents, the highest goes to Engineering students (39.4%) followed by male from Science and Technology students

(33.7%) and Social Science and Humanities students (19.2%). The least male respondents are from Natural Science students (7.7%).

3. Reason for taking Japanese Language Course

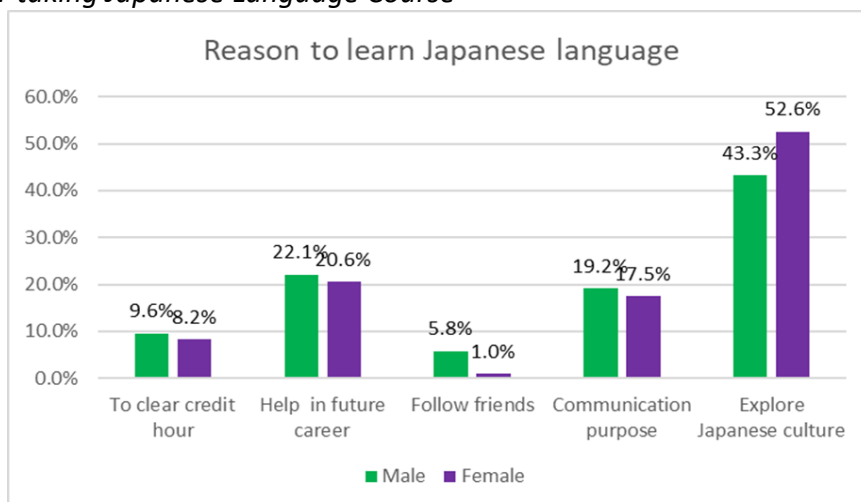


Figure 3 - Percentage of reason for Taking Japanese Language

Figure 3 shows the reasons why male and female students take Japanese language courses. Both genders are highly motivated by an interest in Japanese culture, with 52.6% females than males 43.3% choosing this reason. Career advancement is another important factor, with males (22.1%) being slightly more motivated than females (20.6%). Males also show a higher interest in learning Japanese for communication, while the desire to follow friends is more common among 5.8 % males than 1.0%females. Clearing credit hours is a less popular reason for both, but males show a slightly higher interest in it.

4. The most confident skill in learning Japanese language.

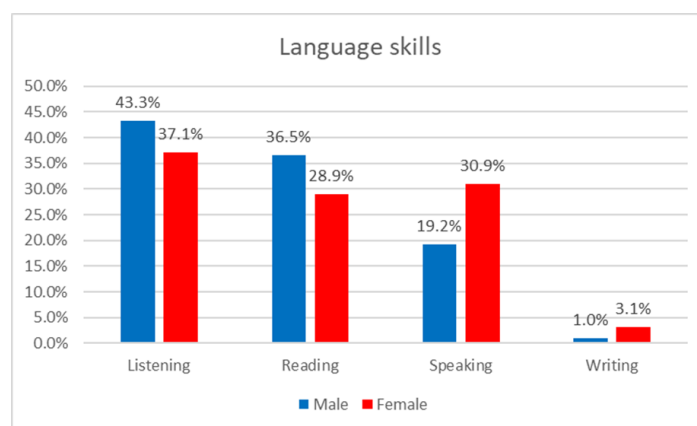


Figure 4 - Percentage of the skill in learning Japanese language

Figure 5 shows the language skills that male and female learners focus on when studying Japanese. Listening is the top skill for both groups, with 43.3% of males and 37.1% of females preferring it. Reading comes next, chosen by 36.5% of males and 28.9% of females. Females, however, show more interest in speaking, with 30.9% compared to 19.2% of males. Writing is the least preferred skill, though more females (3.1%) focus on it than males (1.0%). In

general, males tend to focus more on listening and reading, while females give more attention to speaking and writing.

Findings for Motivational Factors

1. Descriptive Results of Overall Motivation between Gender

Table 3

Mean for Overall Motivation between Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	104	3.903	.4900
Female	97	4.012	.5128
Total	201	3.956	.5029

University learners are motivated to learn Japanese as foreign language. The descriptive analysis shows the total mean from both participants is $M=3.95$ and standard deviation is $SD=.502$ (Table 3). However, female students show slightly higher motivation ($M=4.01$, $SD=.512$) than male students ($M=3.90$, $SD=.490$).

2. Descriptive Results of each Motivational Factor

Table 4

Mean for each Motivational Factor

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Intrinsic Goal Orientation	201	1.50	5.00	3.87	.739
Extrinsic Goal Orientation	201	1.50	5.00	4.26	.645
Task Value	201	2.00	5.00	4.13	.628
Learning Beliefs	201	2.00	5.00	4.05	.679
Self_Efficacy & Performance	201	1.88	5.00	3.81	.667
Test Anxiety	201	1.00	5.00	3.61	.850

Table 4 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviation for each motivational factor. The highest mean, $M=4.26$ and standard deviation $SD=.645$ is extrinsic goal orientation followed by task value ($M=4.13$, $SD = .628$) and learning belief ($M=4.05$, $SD = .679$). This result shows both genders are typically driven by a combination of internal and external motivations, with a stronger preference for external motivational factors. The least mean scores are intrinsic goal orientation ($M=3.87$, $SD=.739$), students' self-efficacy and performance ($M=3.81$, $SD=.667$). Students appreciate the tasks they undertake and hold positive beliefs and self-confidence about their Japanese language learning. The lowest mean score, $M=3.61$, $SD=.850$ for test anxiety, which varies in intensity among individuals.

3. Descriptive Results between Each Motivational Factors and Gender

Table 5

Mean for each Motivational between Gender

	Male			Female		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Intrinsic Goal	104	3.85	.677	97	3.89	.803
Extrinsic Goal	104	4.14	.674	97	4.39	.590
Task Value	104	4.04	.582	97	4.23	.664
Learning Belief	104	3.97	.640	97	4.14	.711
Self Efficacy & Performance	104	3.81	.622	97	3.81	.716
Test Anxiety	104	3.60	.843	97	3.62	.862

The descriptive results between gender and the motivational factors shows female students slightly higher mean score than male students at three motivational factors (Table 5), which are learning beliefs (female $M=4.14$, $SD=.711$; male $M=3.97$, $SD=.640$), extrinsic goal orientation (female $M=4.39$, $SD=.590$; male $M=4.14$, $SD=.674$) and task value (female $M=4.23$, $SD=.664$; male $M=4.04$, $SD=.582$). There is least difference of mean score for intrinsic goal orientation (female $M=4.89$, $SD=.8031$; male $M=3.85$, $SD=.677$), self-efficacy and performance (female $M=3.81$, $SD=.716$; male $M=3.81$, $SD=.622$), and test anxiety (female $M=3.62$, $SD=.862$; male $M=3.60$, $SD=.843$) for both genders.

Conclusion*Summary of Findings and Discussion*

The study showed there is significant motivation to learn the Japanese language. Even though the mean for each motivational factor showed higher motivation on extrinsic goal orientation, task values and learning beliefs than intrinsic, self-efficacy and performance, and test anxiety, overall mean showed female students' motivations slightly higher male students. This result showed a similarity with the research finding by Huang and Jiang (2022), Khong et al. (2018) about gender and language learning motivation. This also support Carreira (2011) statement that female students show a higher motivation for the language and interest in learning foreign language. Students are motivated to learn the Japanese language to explore Japanese culture, followed by future career opportunities. Female students tend to be more interested in Japanese culture and communication, while male students place more value on career development. This supports previous studies on the influence of gender on language learning motivation in which male and female students appear to be intrinsically motivated by curiosity and personal interest (Abu-Rabia, 1997; Harthy, 2017; Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012). Both genders believe they are good at listening skills. However, female students have a strong value on speaking and cultural components. However, male students focus more on more task-oriented objectives like reading. The higher mean for extrinsic goal orientation—specifically, obtaining better grades and demonstrating proficiency in Japanese—indicate that extrinsic factors carry a significant role in learning foreign language. Specifically, genders' levels of test anxiety show that, despite students' strong desire to succeed, pressure to perform well may continue to be an issue. This implies that even when students are highly motivated, teachers should think about lowering test anxiety by providing a variety of assessment options that complement both internal and external motivations.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

In summary, gender influences motivation, anxiety, accomplishment, and the impact of stereotypes in foreign language learning. Knowing these distinctions will help educators and policymakers in establishing more efficient and comprehensive language learning environments. To better understand this critical issue, future research should continue to investigate the complex interactions between gender and other individual differences. This study has discovered the difference of motivational and anxiety factors between male and female students in learning Japanese language. Future studies are encouraged to examine learning strategies for genders to explore the differences in language learning among genders more holistically. Learning strategies refer to specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques learners used to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the foreign language (Oxford, 1990b). Hence, other than motivational and anxiety factors, further studies of learning gender are an important topic in foreign language research.

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