



Original article

Study on gender and motivation in learning Italian as a foreign language

Estudio sobre género y motivación en el aprendizaje del italiano como lengua extranjera

Estudo sobre gênero e motivação na aprendizagem do italiano como língua estrangeira

Chess Emmanuel Briceño Núñez¹

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1712-4136>

¹ National Open University. Caracas DC, Venezuela.

 chesspiare@gmail.com

Received: July 2, 2022.

Accepted: January 26, 2023.

ABSTRACT

This article presents research on the relationship between gender and motivational levels in learning Italian as a foreign language in Ecuadorian students. The objective of the research was to establish the relationship between gender and motivation in the study participants. The study was developed in a private educational institution in the Guayaquil canton, Guayas province, Republic of Ecuador. The sample consisted of

120 active students at the Basic General Education level. In the first instance, a version of the Attitude Test, designed by Gardner, was applied to assess the learning of English as a foreign language. The variables considered were: level of motivation, gender and educational level of the students. The results show that, in both cases, both male and female students are highly motivated to learn Italian as a foreign language.

Keywords: teaching; gender; Italian; foreign languages; motivation.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una investigación sobre la relación entre el género y los niveles motivacionales en el aprendizaje del italiano como lengua extranjera en estudiantes ecuatorianos. El objetivo de la investigación fue establecer la relación entre el género y la motivación en los participantes en el estudio. El estudio se desarrolló en una institución de enseñanza privada del cantón Guayaquil, provincia de Guayas, República del Ecuador. La muestra estuvo conformada por 120 estudiantes activos en el nivel de Educación General Básica. En primera instancia, se aplicó una versión del Test de Actitud, diseñado por Gardner, para evaluar el aprendizaje del inglés como una lengua extranjera. Las variables consideradas fueron: nivel de motivación, género y nivel educativo de los estudiantes. Los resultados demuestran que, en ambos casos, tanto los estudiantes hombres como las estudiantes mujeres se encuentran altamente motivados al aprendizaje del italiano como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: enseñanza; género; italiano; lenguas extrajeras; motivación.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma pesquisa sobre a relação entre gênero e níveis motivacionais na aprendizagem do italiano como língua estrangeira em estudantes equatorianos. O objetivo da pesquisa foi estabelecer a relação entre gênero e motivação nos participantes do estudo. O estudo foi desenvolvido em uma instituição educacional privada no cantão de Guayaquil, província de Guayas, República do Equador. A amostra foi constituída por 120 alunos ativos do nível do Ensino Básico Geral. Em uma primeira instância, uma versão do Attitude Test, elaborada por Gardner, foi aplicada para avaliar o aprendizado de inglês como língua estrangeira. As variáveis consideradas foram: nível de motivação, gênero e escolaridade dos alunos. Os resultados mostram que, em ambos os casos, tanto os alunos quanto as alunas estão altamente motivados para aprender o italiano como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: ensino; gênero; Italiano; línguas estrangeiras; motivação.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, language learning has gone from being a characteristic attached to academic and work elements, to recently becoming something practically essential. Languages like French, Portuguese, German, Mandarin and Italian have gained greater appeal, by virtue of the innumerable possibilities and communicative advantages that they present. The Italian language has approximately 120 million speakers, including ethnic groups and those who use it as a second and/or foreign language. It is true that Italian is the official language of Italy, Switzerland, San Marino and Vatican City, but it is also a frequently used language in Malta, parts of Croatia and Slovenia, not to mention the abundant settlements of

Italian colonies around the world. world who speaks this language; the main ones are in Germany, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The main attraction in learning Italian as a foreign language, when referring to Spanish speakers, is linked to the Latin root that it shares with Spanish. This great advantage encourages adults, young people and children, since both languages are considered clear, legible and equivalent in terms of a large lexical and linguistic portion.

Another reason that could promote learning Italian is its distinctive consideration as a great competitive advantage in the labor, commercial, industrial and business sectors, since little by little new spaces have been created in the European Union. A third reason that encourages Spanish speakers is the well-known cultural wealth of Italy, due to its undeniable association with art, literary works, science, gastronomy and love. There are many who feel the need to learn the language in which some of the most transcendental events of humanity took place.

Currently, the issue of learning associated with gender must be considered as a transcendental and even imperative element when imagining educational plans and the way in which knowledge is transmitted, since the way in which gender is perceived will help create environments of equality where encouragement prevails towards those who need it. Because in the educational act the individual is always assumed as a social subject that interacts dynamically and constantly with their peers and with the environment.

The equal and equitable participation of groups of men and women in the acquisition of foreign languages must be perceived as something necessary and essential when conceiving a sustainable and sustainable

future. It is true that in the school there should be no gender division, since every apprentice is fundamental when creating the conditions of the educational act.

Studies that expose the possible relationships that regulate the learning of a foreign language in light of the individual and collective motivational degree are not only relevant, but also add value to the way in which inter and extra-classroom teaching and learning processes are built. Teaching foreign languages, specifically Italian, goes far beyond the transmission of a set of theoretical statements that achieve mastery of the target language in the individual; More than that, the enjoyment of the processes through which the acquisition of the language itself takes place must be guaranteed. The degree of motivation that one has and its relationship with gender, in the early stages of academic life, will allow teachers to achieve greater unity in the differentiation of groups and individuals.

For Germain (1993), the learning of a foreign language consists of the formation of rules that allow the creation of new statements, without necessarily repeating those heard previously, with thought playing a role in the discovery of the rules of formation of sentences. these statements. According to this judgment, there must be rules that lead to the formation of sentences that give meaning to each of the statements.

The learning of a foreign language, like that of an ethnic language, is mainly based on a communicative approach oriented towards the development of one's own communication skills, sustained by satisfying the needs, motivations and interests of learners in relation to what you want to communicate, considering the theoretical elements as one of the basic units of communication. This brings with it the challenge of being able to execute grammatical reflection, based on the use of

authentic lexical material and in a specific context.

For their part, Williams and Burden (1999) propose that the acquisition of a language entails much more than a system of rules, skills or grammatical command, but also implies the alteration of self-concept, the individual incorporation of new social behaviors and even cultural, and possibly new ways of being, so learning a foreign language is a process that produces an impact on the social nature of the individual. Recent research confirms the existence of high motivational levels in learning different languages.

In the work *Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, Balboni (2014), presents specific aspects related to learning Italian as a foreign language (and not as a second language), highlighting the linguistic *input* to which students are exposed. When Italian is not studied in Italy, but in another country, the linguistic contribution is usually a fact that depends, in many cases and exclusively, on the teacher, since his language and ways of transmitting it become the model to follow. In such a way that Information and Communication Technologies in the area of languages play a fundamental role so that students have contact with native speakers more easily.

Santipolo (2006) presents the role of the teacher in learning Italian as a foreign language as a mediator of sociocultural references, having the power to select, manipulate and adapt its elements, choosing which aspects are to be shared or not with their students. It is clear that when learning Italian as a foreign language there is a lower probability of being exposed directly to the language, but it is equally clear that a recursive teacher will look for a way to present authentic materials that allow for at least direct exposure, real.

The authentic materials allow the comparison between the Italian spoken and taught by the teacher and other varieties existing in Italy. On this, (Begotti 2006) points out that these materials are always motivating for the foreign language student if they approach the needs and interests of the learners, while presenting the foreign language in a precise context, increasing the understanding of the message. communicative and, therefore, positively influencing motivation, illustrating different models of oral and written language and different sociolinguistic variations depending on the medium used, the register, the social class and the geographical origin of the interlocutors.

Likewise, Feery (2008) exposes that gender studies have been neglected and ignored in relation to foreign languages, since they are often not even mentioned and, when they are, they are frequently dismissed or minimized by simplistic statements, relegated to playing games. a role of minority factors that little affect the acquisition of a language, whether native or foreign. However, the author ensures that there is sufficient evidence to support that gender is an aspect of individual differences and social and identity problems that affect the acquisition of both a foreign language and a second language, in the same way that occurs in the process of development, acquisition and performance of a mother tongue.

Despite the fact that certain factors such as language, materials and command of classroom discourse seem to be elements that favor men around the formal learning of a second language, the performance of these is poor on the results of tests of second language acquisition and proficiency. The biological factors and the attitude of the teacher do not seem to be sufficient reasons that respond to the fact that many consider language learning as a markedly feminine activity that affects motivation and attitude in a certain way, which are considered

fundamental facts during the acquisition process. of a second language.

The objective of the research was to establish the relationship between gender and motivation in the study participants. Likewise, the educational level of the students in the sample was considered, in order to identify if there is greater or lesser motivation in relation to gender and grade being studied.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the study, a version of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) was used, designed by Gardner (1985) to assess the learning of English as a foreign language. This instrument has been frequently used by the scientific-investigative community to measure and establish the levels of motivation present in foreign language students.

The version of the test presented seeks to individually assess the motivation levels (Table 1) of each participant through 35 items with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Totally Agree (TA) to Totally Disagree (TD). For this, a scale was used to measure the levels of motivation in the students, in order to subsequently carry out a comparative study between motivation and gender, aimed at learning Italian as a foreign language. The present investigation, by its nature, is non-experimental of an exploratory type with a transectional design.

Table 1- Scale to measure the levels of motivation presented by students of Italian as a foreign language

Motivation level	Score
Maximum (Highly motivated)	175
High (Highly motivated)	between 174-89
Medium (Moderately motivated)	88
Low (Little motivated)	between 36-87
Minimal (Very little motivated)	35

The version of the Attitude/Motivation Test that has been applied has a total of 35 propositions, which seek to identify the motivational level of each individual and their relationship with their gender. The instrument was applied in a single session, lasting 45 minutes. Each participant was instructed to use the additional minutes to check that all the answers were selected if they finished early. The application of the instrument was carried out in the academic environment itself. The students were invited not to overanalyze each alternative, but to develop them in the most natural way possible and to avoid any feeling of social pressure, since it was an anonymous survey.

The collection, organization and subsequent analysis was carried out using statistical tables. 100 % of the data obtained were considered and analyzed with the computer program "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" by its acronym in English SPSS, which uses basic processes of descriptive statistics.

This research was developed in a private (private) teaching institution located in the Guayaquil canton, Guayas province, Republic of Ecuador. The sample consisted of 120 students, students of the Basic General

Education level, of Sublevel 3 of Basic Media, which corresponds to 5th, 6th, and 7th grades, aged between 9 and 12 years, and students of Sublevel 4 of Basic Superior, which corresponds to 8th, 9th and 10th grades, with ages between 12 and 15 years. Before the application of the instrument, each student was asked to self-recognise himself biologically and mentally as a man or a woman. It is vitally important to highlight this factor, since in a study associated with gender it is pre-eminent to establish the binding features that determine the results. Therefore, specifically, the instrument was applied to subjects who identified and recognized themselves physiologically and mentally as men or women; It was applied to 10 male students and 10 female students for each course.

RESULTS

Motivation level of students of Italian as a foreign language

The results obtained show that, in general, the students (see table 2) are highly motivated to learn Italian as a foreign language. The motivational mean of the students was 167 out of a maximum possible level of 170, with a standard deviation of 0.80.

Table 2- Levels of motivation that students presented for Italian as a foreign language

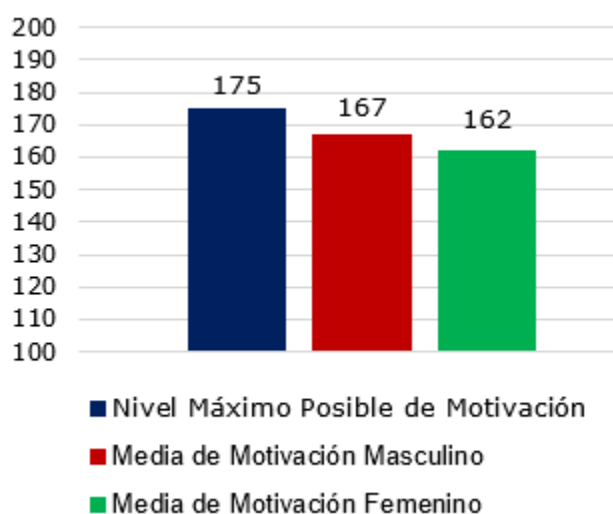
Number of students	Mean motivational level reached	Typical deviation	Minimum level of motivation presented	Maximum level of motivation presented
120	167	0.81	120	170

Source: information obtained from the application of the research instrument

Relationship between gender and the level of students' motivation for Italian as a foreign language

The results obtained were analyzed in order to identify the relationship between gender and the levels of motivation of students of Italian as a foreign language, in sublevel 3 of Basic Intermediate and sublevel 4 of Basic Higher Education. For this, the groups were segmented, identifying each student according to their gender and considering the academic level to which they belonged. The means for the levels of general motivation were obtained by processing the results obtained.

According to the data presented in graph 1, the motivational mean of male students is 167, while the mean of female students is 162. When comparing them with the established general motivational scale, it is found that in both cases the students are highly motivated towards learning Italian as a foreign language. However, despite the fact that they are within the same motivation range, when analyzing them in detail it will be possible to notice how men are slightly more motivated than women.



Graph 1- Relationship between gender and the levels of motivation of students of Italian as a

foreign language
Source: information obtained from the application of the research instrument

The results presented suggest a contradiction, both in the research by Calvet (2008) and in that of Callaghan (1998), in which they state that the learning of specific foreign languages is a "stereotyped female" activity, which presupposes a generational change. In which the perception of men towards the usefulness of languages is quite different from the past. It is evident how the difference between the means of the motivational level of both groups is not so marked, so delving deeper and reaching a more specific analysis will allow us to recognize if these differences in terms of motivation are due to temporary factors or to certain constructs and elements characteristic of each genre.

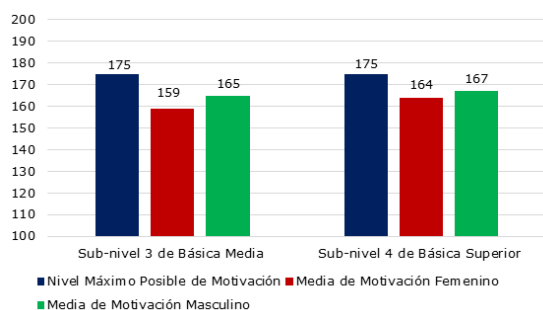
Levels of motivation by sublevel in relation to gender

According to the results presented in table 3 and graph 2, it can be said that in general the students of sublevel 3 of Basic Media were slightly more motivated than the students of sublevel 4 of Basic Media. The students of the 5th, 6th and 7th grades exhibited an average of 162 while the students of the 8th, 9th and 10th grades had an average of 167. In both cases, the levels of motivation were presented as high, since they remain very close to each other. Of the general level of motivation found in students of Italian as a foreign language.

Table 3- Levels of motivation by sublevel in relation to gender

Motivation by sublevel and gender	Mean level of motivation achieved
Sublevel 3 of Basic Media / Female Gender	159
Sublevel 3 of Basic Media / Male Gender	165
Sublevel 4 of Upper Basic / Female Gender	164
Sublevel 4 of Upper Basic / Male Gender	167

Source: information obtained from the application of the research instrument



Graph 2- Levels of motivation by Sublevel in relation to gender

Source: information obtained from the application of the research instrument

The results showed that the motivation averages for the female gender tend to be lower in terms of those of the male gender, both in sublevel 3 of Basic Intermediate and for sublevel 4 of Basic Higher Education, which once again disagrees with previous studies. on gender and learning a foreign language, specifically with those proposed by Kissau and Wierzalis (2008), who propose that the learning of Romance languages is seen by students as a predominantly feminine subject, since articulation, pronunciation and even the unconscious gestures that accompany conversations in this language are of a markedly feminine nature.

For their part, the male students belonging to both groups are highly motivated within

the scale, but there is a slight change when the means of both male groups are compared; It is found that the average of men in sublevel 4 of Basic Higher Education is above the average of sublevel 3 of Basic High School, so it could be inferred that this is due to the number of didactic resources or even to the contents studied in a level relative to the other.

When considering proposition 15 of the test "My Italian classes have a dynamic and interesting style", it is found that for the male students of sublevel 4 of Básica Superior there was an average of 5, while for the male students of sublevel 3 of Basic Media there was a mean of 3. From these data it can be inferred that in the case of the male gender, students in 8th, 9th and 10th grades could be more motivated due to the dynamism of the class or the interesting resources available. while in the case of grades 5, 6, and 7 it could be a factor that affects the motivation levels of male students. However, it should be emphasized that there is no transcendental difference in terms of the motivational difference, since in both sublevels (3 and 4) the students were highly motivated.

DISCUSSION

There are positions that propose specific factors (language, didactic materials used in the teaching act, biological elements, the role of the teacher and even cultural perception) as traits that positively affect language learning and, at the same time, suggest that the gender issue is not a relevant component in the acquisition of a foreign language. Therefore, an in-depth study on these same factors would be convenient, considering the variable of gender and age to determine the relationship.

It is necessary to inquire about emerging patterns that effectively and definitively theorize learning by gender in the field of languages. Likewise, it is convenient that in the future comparative studies of gender be carried out, associated with the learning of foreign languages, specifically with Italian.

Currently there is great controversy about the differences that exist between the social constructs of gender and sex, the association of these with the different stages of human learning and teaching performance. For the purposes of this research, the terms gender and sex were considered equivalent.

Based on the results obtained, it was identified that, in general, the students are highly motivated to learn Italian as a foreign language, exhibiting a motivational mean of 167 out of a maximum possible on the established scale of 170 points, with a standard deviation of 0.80, ensuring reliability in the results.

By segmenting the population to process and analyze the results, it was obtained that the male students were highly motivated with an average of 167, while the motivational levels of the female students were 162, and are found, in the same way, highly motivated towards learning Italian as a foreign language.

It should then be noted that, although both groups are within the same motivational range, the difference between the means is significant; more so if old preconceptions associated with the study are considered, such as that women are more organized, orderly and disciplined and that, therefore, there is a natural inclination to achieve linguistic efficiency.

In a more detailed way, it is found that the students of sublevel 3 of Basic Media were more motivated than the students of sublevel 4 of Basic Media. The 5th, 6th and 7th grade students presented an average of

162 points, while the 8th, 9th and 10th grade students had an average of 167 points. It is undeniable that in both cases the motivational levels were high, but the differentiation (although not so noticeable) that exists within the ranges presented is still interesting. It should be noted that in both cases these levels are very close to the general level of motivation of students of Italian as a foreign language.

In the same way, emphasis could be placed on the fact that not only were men more motivated, but also that the motivational index in both groups is close, dispelling the presumptions in which certain languages were stereotyped as masculine and others as feminine. This could be related to the increasing exposure to different global cultural factors, in which opportunities are presented based on eligibility that comes from individual preparation, rather than gender factors.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Balboni, P. E. (2014) *Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, Torino, Bonacci Loescher.
- Begotti, P. (2006). *L'insegnamento dell'italiano ad adulti stranieri: risorse per docenti di italiano come L2 e LS*, Perugia, Guerra.
- Callaghan, M (1998). An investigation into the causes of boys' underachievement in French. *Language Learning Journal*, (17), pp 2-7.
- Calvet, L (2008) *Le Français, langue féminine? Le français dans le monde*, N° 358, pp. 54
- Feery, (2008). *Current Perspectives on the Role of Gender in Second Language*

- Acquisition (SLA) Research. *The ITB Journal*, 9(1).
- Gardner, RC. (1985). Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation. London: Edward Arnold.
- Germain, C, (1993). Évolution de l'enseignement des langues: 5000 ans d'histoire. Paris: CLE International.
- Kissau, S., Wierzalis, E. (2008). Gender identity and homophobia: The impact of adolescent males studying French. *Modern Language Journal*, 92(3), 402-413
- Santipolo, M., (2006). L'italiano. Contesti di insegnamento in Italia e all'estero, Torino, UTET Università
- Williams, M. y Burden, R. (1999). Psicología para profesores de idiomas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Conflict of interests:

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

Contribution of the authors:

The author participated in the design and writing of the work, and analysis of the documents.

Cite as

Briceño Nuñez, C. (2023). Study on gender and motivation in learning Italian as a foreign language. *Mendive. Revista de Educación*, 21(2), e3148.
<https://mendive.upr.edu.cu/index.php/MendiveUPR/article/view/3148>



This work is [licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).