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THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON ENGLISH RECEPTIVE SKILLS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

EL IMPACTO DE GÉNERO EN LAS HABILIDADES RECEPTIVAS DEL INGLÉS: UN ESTUDIO DESCRIPTIVO

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ABSTRACT

Proficiency in a second language is imperative for effective communication in today's globalized society, with receptive skills playing a pivotal role in language acquisition. This research delves into the influence of gender on receptive skills in the English language, specifically examining the performance of male and female students in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency exam. The study relies on a purely quantitative approach, utilizing historical CEFR reports spanning from 2021 to 2023 as the sample dataset. The selected reports are sourced from students who undertook the exam during this period at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca. Employing a descriptive methodology, the research aims to comprehensively understand how gender impacts English receptive skills among higher-level students. By contributing valuable insights to the field of language acquisition, this study also seeks to support the development of more effective teaching practices.

Keywords:

English, proficiency, exam, skills, gender.

RESUMEN

El dominio de una segunda lengua es imprescindible para una comunicación eficaz en la sociedad globalizada actual, y las destrezas receptivas desempeñan un papel fundamental en la adquisición de idiomas. Esta investigación profundiza en la influencia del género en las habilidades receptivas en lengua inglesa, examinando específicamente el rendimiento de estudiantes masculinos y femeninos en el examen de competencia del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER). El estudio se basa en un enfoque puramente cuantitativo, utilizando informes históricos del MCER que abarcan desde 2021 hasta 2023 como conjunto de datos de muestra. Los informes seleccionados proceden de los alumnos que realizaron el examen durante este periodo en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca. Empleando una metodología descriptiva, la investigación pretende comprender de forma exhaustiva cómo influye el género en las destrezas receptivas del inglés entre los estudiantes de nivel superior. Al aportar valiosos conocimientos al campo de la adquisición del lenguaje, este estudio también pretende apoyar el desarrollo de prácticas de enseñanza más eficaces.

Palabras clave:

Inglés, suficiencia, examen, habilidades, género.

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is a vital component of global communication and plays a crucial role in various academic and professional domains (Smith & Johnson, 2020). The acquisition and development of receptive skills, specifically reading and listening comprehension, are fundamental for successful language learning at university settings (Mahmud, 2015; Magyar et al., 2022). While extensive research has been conducted on factors influencing language proficiency, there remains a significant knowledge gap regarding the potential impact of gender on English receptive skills (Bloshchynskiy et al., 2022). Existing literature has primarily explored other aspects of language acquisition, such as speaking or writing skills, with limited attention to the receptive ones (Anderson & Brown, 2017). The relationship between gender and Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT) results is complex and not fully understood (Papp & Walczak, 2016). By narrowing the research scope to the descriptive analysis of the students' CEPT results, this study aims to fill the existing gap and contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between gender and English receptive skills, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of language acquisition and proficiency.

This study adopts a descriptive approach to examine the impact of gender on English receptive skills by analyzing students' receptive outcomes. Through this analysis, we seek to enhance our understanding of the potential role that gender may play in shaping language learning outcomes, ultimately facilitating the development of more inclusive and effective language education practices. This understanding is not only academically significant but also holds practical implications for language educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers (Główka, 2014). By identifying any gender-related differences or similarities in English receptive skills, educational interventions can be tailored to address specific needs and promote equitable language learning environments (Bećirović, 2017).

With this in mind, this study aims to shed light on any potential variations between male and female students in their ability to comprehend and interpret written texts and spoken English (Newman et al., 2008) and to contribute to the existing literature on language acquisition by investigating the impact of gender on English receptive skills (Ehrlich et al., 2017).

Gender and English receptive skills, namely reading and listening comprehension, are closely intertwined. To understand the differences between male and female students, it is important to draw upon several key theoretical frameworks. Cognitive psychology theories, such as

Anderson (1983), information-processing model, focus on the cognitive processes involved in reading and listening comprehension. These theories highlight activities like encoding, storage, and retrieval of information, as well as constructing mental representations from text and auditory input, with differences in cognitive processes like working memory and attention affecting comprehension. Social Learning Theory, as presented by Bandura (1977), emphasizes the role of socialization in shaping behavior and cognitive processes, suggesting that gender roles and societal expectations impact how students understand a second language. Gender Schema Theory, proposed by Bem (1981), asserts that gender schemas influence reading and listening comprehension strategies. Intersectionality Theory, as outlined by Crenshaw (1991), stresses the importance of considering multiple social identities when examining disparities, revealing how gender differences in reading comprehension can be further nuanced by other social factors. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for exploring the relationship between gender, cognition, and English receptive skills, shedding light on potential disparities and commonalities in language acquisition and proficiency.

Studies have demonstrated that women are generally perceived as better than men in language acquisition (Guimond & Roussel, 2001). Some evidence also indicates that women appear to have benefited more than men from completing college in terms of spoken English proficiency since the male-female gap narrows among the highly educated. In this respect, the evidence that women have an advantage over men when attaining a second language is strong. To go along with this, investigators have also stated that women perform better in grammar learning, while men outperform women in phonetic speech imitation ability (Wucherer & Reiterer, 2018). Regarding receptive skills specifically, not many findings are interpreted to suggest that women are more likely than men. However, some authors have been consistent in demonstrating that women are more efficient learners than men, even though both students and teachers believed that gender played no major role in language learning (Exel et al., 2000; Pritchard & Maki, 2006; Główka, 2014). In general, women had better cognitive function than men, whereas men had higher grip strength measures (Ahrenfeldt et al., 2018).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology employed in the study titled "The Impact of Gender on English Receptive Skills: A Descriptive Study" was designed with the purpose of investigating and understanding how gender may be related to English receptive skills. It was designed using data from the historical

records of the Language Center – Universidad Católica de Cuenca for the years 2021-2023. The following is a detailed description of the methodology used:

Study Design:

This study is based on a descriptive research design that leverages existing historical records from the Language Center for the period between 2021 and 2023. The primary focus is to analyze and describe the relationships between students’ gender and their English receptive skills using previously existing data.

Data Source:

The data used in this study were obtained from the historical records of the Language Center. These records include demographic information of the students, such as gender and age, as well as records of grades or levels of English receptive skills obtained by students when taking placement exams.

Variables:

The main study variables were as follows:

Gender: It was coded as a categorical variable with three categories: male (1), female (2), and undefined (3).

Age: It was treated as a numerical variable representing the age of the students in years.

English Receptive Skills: They were coded using an ordinal scale covering different levels of proficiency: BELOW A1 (5), A1 (6), A2 (7), B1 (8), B2 (9), and C1 or higher (10).

Data Analysis:

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive analysis was conducted to calculate measures of central tendency and dispersion for the variables of interest, such as mean, standard deviation, and variance.

Furthermore, multiple correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the variables: gender, age, and English receptive skills using the available data. Pearson’s correlation was used to assess linear relationships between variables and determine the significance of two-tailed correlation.

Ethics:

Since the data were obtained from existing historical records and no data were collected directly from the students, consent was obtained from the Language Center’s management for the use of such records. Regarding additional data, privacy and confidentiality will be maintained to uphold ethical research principles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on examining how gender may be related to receptive skills in English. Based on the provided data, we can make some initial observations:

Sample size (table 1). The research is based on a considerable sample size, with a total of 1,187 participating students. This provides a solid foundation for data analysis and increases the reliability of the results. Prior to the development of the correlational analysis, it is important to mention that three variables were considered in the study: gender, receptive skills in English (level), and age.

Table 1. Classification of the study group by gender.

Gender	Quantity
Male	545
Female	619
Undefined	23
Total	1187

Source: Authors’ elaboration

To understand the distribution and characteristics of the data, descriptive analysis is presented for each variable (gender, receptive skills in English, and age).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Gender variable.

	N	Mean	Std.deviation	Variance
Gender	1187	0,50	0,538	0,289
Valid N (listwise)	1187			

Source: Authors’ elaboration

The mean of 0.50 in table 2 suggests that, on average, students have a relatively equal distribution between female and male genders, with a possible small number of students with an undefined gender. The standard deviation of 0.538 indicates that there is some variability in the gender distribution, but it is not very wide.

Variable: Age

For the “Age” variable, the mean of 23.89 indicates that the average age of students in the study is approximately 24 years. The standard deviation of 5.209 suggests that there is some variability in the ages of students, with some younger students than others in the study group. The variance of 27.138 supports this idea of variability in ages (table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics: Age variable.

	N	Mean	Std.deviation	Variance
Age	1187	23,89	5,209	27,138
Valid N (listwise)	1187			

Variable: Receptive skills in English

Source: Authors' elaboration

The mean of 6.77 suggests that, on average, students have receptive skills in English close to the "A2" level. The standard deviation of 1.139 indicates that there is some variability in the skills, meaning that some students may have lower or higher levels than the mean. The variance of 1.297 confirms this variability (table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics: Receptive skills in English.

	N	Mean	Std.deviation	Variance
Overall Grade	1187	6,77	1,139	1,297
Valid N (listwise)	1187			

Source: Authors' elaboration

These descriptive analyses provide an overview of the characteristics of the variables, which helps to better understand the distribution and dispersion of the data before conducting correlation analyses.

To examine the relationships between the three variables, multivariate analysis techniques (multiple correlation) are used. This method allows for evaluating how age and gender are related to receptive skills in English simultaneously.

The correlation results obtained using SPSS indicate the following correlations between the variables:

Correlations

Table 5. Gender correlations.

		Gender	Overall Grade
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	,036
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,219
	N	1187	1187
Overall Grade	Pearson Correlation	,036	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,219	
	N	1187	1187

Source: Authors' elaboration

The analysis of the correlation (Table 5) results between the "gender" variable and the "receptive skills in English" variable reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.036 and a two-tailed significance of 0.219. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is a measure that ranges from -1 to 1 and describes the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. In this case, the value of 0.036 indicates an extremely weak correlation between gender and receptive skills in English. Additionally, the two-tailed significance of 0.219 is much greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating that the correlation is not statistically significant.

The results suggest that there is no significant relationship between students' gender and their performance in receptive skills in English in this study. The correlation is extremely weak and does not reach the threshold of statistical significance, meaning that we cannot conclude that gender has an appreciable impact on receptive skills in English in this specific sample or context.

Table 6. Age correlations.

		Age	Overall Grade
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	,115**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	1187	1187
Overall Grade	Pearson Correlation	,115**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	1187	1187

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the correlation results between the “age” variable (Table 6) and the “receptive skills in English” variable shows a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.115 and a two-tailed significance of 0.01.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1 and measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. In this case, the value of 0.115 indicates a weak but significant positive correlation between students’ age and their receptive skills in English.

The fact that the two-tailed significance is equal to 0.01 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, meaning that it is highly unlikely to be due to chance.

In practical terms, the positive correlation suggests that, in this study, as students’ age increases, their receptive skills in English also tend to improve. However, it is important to note that this correlation is of weak magnitude, meaning that the relationship is modest and that other factors may significantly influence receptive skills in English besides age.

These results suggest that age may have a modest but significant impact on students’ receptive skills in English in the specific context of the study. However, further research is required to fully understand the nature and cause of this correlation.

In this study, the relationship between gender, age, and receptive skills in English was explored in a specific educational context. The results yielded findings that warrant detailed analysis:

Correlation between Gender and Receptive Skills in English: The analysis of the correlation between students’ gender and their receptive skills in English revealed an extremely weak correlation ($r = 0.036$) that was not statistically significant ($p = 0.219$) conversely to what some previous research have warned (Exel et al., 2000; Guimond & Roussel, 2001; Pritchard & Maki, 2006; Główka, 2014; Wucherer & Reiterer, 2018; Bernhard & Bernhard, 2021). These results indicate that, in this study and particular context, there is no substantial relationship between gender and performance in listening and reading skills in English.

These findings are consistent with Exel et al. (2000); Pritchard & Maki (2006); and Główka (2014), who pointed out that gender differences in foreign language learning can be modest or non-existent. Although differences have been observed in some circumstances, it is important to recognize that gender cannot be considered a solid predictive factor of receptive skills in English.

Correlation between age and receptive skills in English: The correlation between students’ age and their receptive skills in English revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.115$, $p = 0.01$).

The Pearson correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1 and measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. In this case, the value of 0.115 indicates a weak but significant positive correlation between students’ age and their receptive skills in English.

The fact that the two-tailed significance is equal to 0.01 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, meaning that it is highly unlikely to be due to chance.

In practical terms, the positive correlation suggests that, in this study, as students’ age increases, their receptive skills in English also tend to improve. However, it is important to note that this correlation is of weak magnitude, meaning that the relationship is modest and that other factors may significantly influence receptive skills in English besides age.

These results suggest that age may have a modest but significant impact on students' receptive skills in English in the specific context of the study. However, further research is required to fully understand the nature and cause of this correlation.

Implications and Future Considerations: These results have important implications for English language teaching and educational policies. They indicate that the gender variable should not be a primary consideration when designing pedagogical strategies or support policies in this specific context. Instead, age could be a factor to consider, although its influence is modest and requires further analysis.

For future research, it is suggested to explore other factors that may be influencing receptive skills in English, such as motivation, early language exposure, and teaching strategies. Additionally, research could be expanded to other educational and cultural contexts to determine if these results are generalizable on a global level.

Study Limitations: Despite the obtained findings, it is essential to recognize the inherent limitations of this study, as they offer important insights for future research and contextualize the interpretation of the results:

1. **Sample size and specific context:** The sample used in this study is limited to a specific educational context and could be considered relatively small compared to larger-scale studies. This could limit the generalizability of the results to other educational or cultural settings.
2. **Possible unconsidered variables:** Although the correlations between gender, age, and receptive skills in English were explored, there are other variables that may influence language performance that were not taken into account in this study, such as socioeconomic status, motivation, and teaching quality.
3. **Correlational nature:** This study was based on correlation analyses, which means that a causal relationship between the variables cannot be established. We cannot determine whether gender or age directly cause differences in receptive skills in English.
4. **Measurement variability:** Receptive skills in English can be measured in various ways, such as standardized tests, formative assessments, or self-reports. The choice of measurement can influence the results, and this study relied on a specific assessment method.
5. **Temporal factors and changes in context:** The study focused on data collected between 2021 and 2023, which means that possible temporal changes in English teaching or educational policies that could influence the results were not considered.
6. **Sample representativeness:** The sample may not be entirely representative of the student population in terms of gender and age. This could introduce biases into the results.
7. **Non-binary gender and other genders:** The study relied on a binary classification of gender (male and female) and a category of "undefined." This does not capture the diversity of gender identities and non-binary identities, which could be a limitation in understanding gender experiences.
8. **Unexplored interaction effects:** Possible interaction effects between gender and age in relation to receptive English skills were not examined. Future research could address this complexity.

These limitations offer opportunities for future research that comprehensively addresses the complexity of this relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender has limited influence on receptive English skills: The results of this study suggest that, in the specific context analyzed, gender has a limited influence on listening and reading comprehension skills in English. The correlation found was extremely weak and not statistically significant, indicating that other variables may play a more significant role in linguistic performance.

Age may have a modest impact: Although gender did not emerge as a determining factor in receptive English skills, age showed a weak but significant positive correlation. This suggests that, in this context, there is a modest relationship between age and English proficiency, with the trend that as age increases, so does linguistic performance.

The importance of a holistic approach: These results underscore the importance of a holistic approach in foreign language teaching and research. Linguistic performance cannot be solely attributed to gender or age, as other factors such as motivation, teaching quality, and learning strategies can have equally significant impacts.

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