

The Study of the Difference between Gender and English Learning Achievement—A Case Study of Sixth-Graders in Pingtung County

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Abstract

Since English education in elementary schools was implemented in Taiwan in 2001, many researchers are interested in investigating its effectiveness in English teaching in elementary schools. Gender is a distinctive characteristic in school; some studies have shown that males and females differ in how they learn. Therefore, it is worthy studying whether gender is a factor causing the difference between females and males in English learning achievements. The study selected sixth-graders in Pingtung County as subjects, and chose English Listening and Reading Comprehension Test B as the instrument. When the participants took the English test, they needed to identify their gender. After the researchers collected the data and analyzed the data by the software of SPSS, the researchers found that there is a significant difference between males and females in English learning achievement. The result showed that females scored better than males in English achievement. The researchers offer some suggestions according to the results and give some implications for future studies.

Keywords: gender, English learning achievement

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I. Introduction

Study motivation and study object

Having taught English for many years, the researchers are happy to see English education implemented in elementary schools since 2001. In other words, the younger generation's contact with English occurs much earlier than it did for most of us, and globalization and internationalization will influence them. Whether the females have more potential in English learning than the males is often discussed by many researchers. Until now, we could not make a conclusion about this topic. Therefore, it is worth pursuing this research and offering more literature to this field.

II. Literature Review

According to some research findings, individual background variables influence the outcomes of learning foreign languages (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988; Pajares & Valiante, 1999, 2001; Pajares, 2002), such as gender, learning experience (Koizumi, 1993). Some researchers believed that females had greater language proficiency than males (Chen, 1994); others had different opinions about the relationship between gender and learning achievement. For example, Ehrman and Oxford (1988) suggested that learning style has a significant influence on students' choice of learning strategies, and that both styles and strategies affect learning outcomes. Pajares and Valiante (1999) found that girls were more competent writers than were boys; Pajares (2002) also showed that a learner's self-efficiency could predict his or her learning achievement. Therefore, it seems worth exploring the factors influencing learning achievement. This study focused on the relationship between gender and learning achievement and would compare with previous studies in the section of discussion.

(I) gender related to learning achievement

There were some studies discussing the relationship between gender and learning achievement. For example, Hearn (1990) reported that 45% of students at top institutions were female based on his analysis of the High School and Beyond data. Moreover, Felson and Trudeau (1991) showed that male students had higher math performance than female students. And Lu (1992) used 1117 night school junior high students as subjects and found that there was significance between gender and learning achievement; Chou (1995) selected 928 college students (564 males, 364 females) as subjects to examine the interaction effect of gender and achievement motivation in physical education on learning achievement and found

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that male students had higher learning achievement than females in physical education.

In addition, Chang & Chang (1998) chose 1006 junior high students in Taichung County as participants to study the relation between English learning strategies and learning achievement, and they found that there were some factors affecting English learning strategies, including participants' gender, previous English language experience, experience of traveling abroad, and SES (socioeconomic status). Their findings also showed that participants' gender, English learning experience, and SES influenced participants' English learning achievement. Their result indicated that there was a low-medium positive correlation between junior high students' English learning strategies and English learning achievement. And Sheorey (1999) chose 1261 Indian college students as subjects and the results indicated that Indian college students' cultural and educational backgrounds seemed to influence some of the strategies they used and proved that female students reported significantly more frequent use of strategies than male students, as did students whose proficiency in English was high.

Furthermore, Yang & Liu & Li (2000) stated that there were some specific correlation among child behavior problem, academic achievement, and family background and environment and they found that boys and girls were different in some correlation. In 2002, Hsiang selected 1099 junior high school, grade five and six students as subjects and found that female students employed different learning strategies from male ones and females got higher learning achievement than males.

Besides, Ye (2002) used 770 tenth graders as subjects and showed that female students had higher learning achievement than male ones; females and males used different learning strategies when learning. And Lin & Hsieh (2003) found that female learners had higher academic achievement than male ones. Yuan et al. (2003) selected 515 non-English-majoring students as subjects, and Yuan et al. (2004) chose 317 English-majoring students as subjects, their findings indicated that females had better performance than males in English learning. Moreover, Da (2005) chose 213 junior high school students as subjects and found that female students had higher English performance than male ones; in 2006, Yuan and Zhao (2006) chose 271 English-majoring students as subjects; in the same year, Shi and Liu found that female English-majoring sophomores had much better English achievement than male ones.

According to the above researches, they all showed that the relationship between gender and learning achievement was significant. Some of those studies referred that males had higher learning achievement than females; the others got the opposite findings. However, they all proved that there was some significance

between gender and learning achievement.

(II) gender unrelated to learning achievement

In fact, not all studies agreed that gender was related to learning achievement significantly. Some studies found that there was no significance between gender and learning achievement. For example, Yang (1990) found that gender was unrelated to English learning, and Chen (1994) chose 509 senior high students as subjects, then found that a student's English achievement was not related to his or her gender. In addition, Cheng (2002) chose 121 sixth graders in Kaohsiung County as subjects, and he found that there were no significant differences between male and female sixth graders in achievement motivation, academic achievement and academic attributions.

And Wu (2003) chose 195 college students in mid-western states of the U.S. to conduct research about the relationship between Japanese learning motivation, attitude, and efficiency; and she found that synthetic learning motivation had more effect on the participants; in addition, there was no significant difference between participants' background variables, Japanese learning motivation, attitude, and efficiency. However, female participants had a stronger learning motivation, and their learning efficiency was also more significant. Moreover, Wu found that the students with past Japanese learning experience had higher learning motivation, attitude, and efficiency than those without previous Japanese language experience. Furthermore, Wu showed that there was significant relation between Japanese learning motivation, attitude, and efficiency. Moreover, Lo (2005) chose 44 grade eight students and showed that gender was not related to academic achievement significantly.

Based on the above studies, there seemed no significance between gender and learning achievement. Obviously, the relationship between gender and learning achievement did not reach agreement yet. Moreover, most of those studies nearly used high school students or college students as subjects, it is necessary to explore the relationship between gender and language learning achievement when the subjects are grade six students.

III. Method

(I) Subjects of the study

The study selected sixth graders in Taiwan as target population and the 11,275 sixth graders in Pingtung County were the approach target population. The researchers divided Pingtung County into three groups according to the level of urbanization. The study adopted stratified random sampling, and the criteria of

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stratification were based on the location of the school in Pingtung County (urban, rural, aboriginal). The researchers selected six schools from two towns in the urban group, testing 566 sixth graders from 18 sixth grade classes (40.63% of sample), 714 sixth graders from 24 classes from eight schools in eight towns in the rural group (51.26% of sample), and 113 sixth graders from seven classes from six schools in four towns in the aboriginal group (8.11% of sample). The study total sampled 49 sixth grade classes from 20 schools in Pingtung County.

(II) Instrument

The study selected English Listening and Reading Comprehension Assessment B of Elementary School Students in Tainan City as the achievement instrument (attached in the Appendix II). The description and rules of Assessment were shown in Chinese to ensure subjects understood what they needed to do in the assessment. The Assessment included Assessment A, B, and C, and the norm of the assessment is about 2,310 participants. As the quality of the assessment, the items of the assessment were suitable to elementary school students and its accuracy-rate is 0.63—0.69 (0.695 in Assessment B). This study used The English Listening and Reading Assessment for Elementary School Students in Tainan City as the testing instrument; the assessment includes three tests—A, B, and C. The Assessment used 2,310 elementary school students as the norm, and it was neither too difficult nor too easy. Its average rate of correctness was in the range from 0.63 to 0.69 (test B was 0.695); the average point biserial correlation was in the range from 0.46 to 0.48 (test B was 0.471). This study chose Test B test to assess the sixth graders' English listening and reading proficiency (see Appendix II). Generally speaking, the Assessment is quite good, and the average index of discrimination was 1.239 (test B was 1.172); Cronbach α of test B was 0.88. Test information and error curve showed that it was in the range of standard deviation, and proficiency estimating error was lower than 0.35. The assessment has 31 items, including six sections—letter-finding (6 items), word-recognition (5 items), illustrations (5 items), dialogue-response (5 items), dialogue-comprehension (5 items), and short-essay comprehension (5 items).

The method of evaluating students' English achievement was different from a traditional paper-pencil test. The participants accessed the website of National Tainan University and entered their passwords to take the test online in a computer lab, as the researchers were given the permission to use the online assessment from the Tainan City Government. In addition to finishing the assessment, the participants also needed to answer some questions about their past English learning experience and background; the researchers used code number in place of students' class numbers in order to protect the privacy of participants. In fact, the code

number on the questionnaire was the participant's password to access the website. After a participant finished his or her 31 items, the computer immediately showed the result of assessment; if the participant got 26-31 correct items, he or she fell into the high score group, if 0-17 correct items, low score group, if 18-25 correct items, intermediate group.

The study distributed 1,413 questionnaires (see Appendix I), and 1,393 questionnaires were returned at a rate of return of 98.58%. After discounting 56 incomplete questionnaires, 15 careless questionnaires, and 5 questionnaires due to the participants' low reading comprehension ability, the study counted 1,317 effective questionnaires with an efficiency rate of questionnaires at 94.54%.

(III) Methods of testing

The study analyzed the source related to learning achievement, and used questionnaires to collect the data of the sixth graders' gender and English learning in Pingtung County, and then applied the software of SPSS to conduct the analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section mainly studied the difference between male and female sixth-graders in the English learning achievement. In order to understand whether there is difference between male and female sixth-graders in English learning achievement, the researchers chose the gender of sixth-graders as an independent variable and the English learning achievement of sixth-graders as a dependent variable and then conducted t-test.

(I) The analysis of the relationship between gender and English learning achievement

The result was as followed,

Table 1: The Summary of t-test

Gender	No.	Mean	SD	F	t
male	695	57.90	19.49	1315	-5.84***
female	622	64.41	20.90		
total	1317				

***p<.001

Table 1 shows that the mean of male samples and female ones was 57.90 and 64.41 respectively; SD was 19.49 and 20.90 respectively. The study found that there is a significant difference in results by gender, and $t=-5.84$, $p<.001$. That is to say, there is a significant difference between male and female students.

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Generally speaking, females may have a natural gift in language learning from birth. If they were willing to studying hard, they can achieve great performance in language learning. In addition, achievement often played a critical role in learning motivation (the domain of expectation and value); therefore, when females received satisfaction from achievement, they would have more learning motivation. Then the cycle continues allowing females to have better performance than males in English learning achievement.

(II) Discussion

The results showed that the t-value reached significant level meaning that there was difference between female sixth-graders and male ones in English learning achievement; the study found that females had higher English achievement than males. The finding was consistent with the studies of Hearn (1990), Chen (1994), Chang & Chang (1998), Sheorey (1999), Hsiang (2002), Ye (2002), Lin & Hsieh (2003), Yuan et. al (2003, 2004), Da (2005), Yuan & Zhao (2006) and Shi & Lin (2006). Those studies all indicated that females' learning achievement was better than males'. However, the result did not agree with the study of Felson & Trudeau (1991) and Chou (1995); they all found that males had higher learning achievement than females. The reason would be that Felson & Trudeau (1991) focused on math, and Chou (1995) physical education but not language learning. Moreover, the result was not accordance with the study of Yang (1990), Chen (1994), Cheng (2002), Wu (2003) and Lo (2005). They showed that there was no significance between gender and learning achievement. The reasons could be Yang (1990) chose high school students as subjects; Chen (1994) focused on math learning; although Cheng (2002) also chose sixth graders as subjects, he focused on math learning; Wu (2003) chose college students as subjects and focused on Japanese learning; Lo (2005) chose eighth graders as subjects.

In general, adult learning was different from youth learning; in the phase of elementary school, females had better performance in social science and humanity than males. Therefore, it seemed natural that females performed better than males in learning English when they were in elementary school. However, math was an important course for evaluation in school, and many females paid more attention to achievement than males. Perhaps females' logical thinking could not catch up with males', leading females to work harder under the pressure of exams. Therefore, females in elementary school had similar performance in math learning. On the other hand, English was not a required course for exams in elementary school, under this condition, females learned English naturally without pressure; therefore, females performed better in English learning.

V. Conclusion

From the result and discussion, the research found that the English learning achievement of female sixth graders was significantly higher than that of males. The result also showed that gender seemed to be a significant factor related to English learning achievement in elementary schools; in this study, female sixth graders consistently performed higher than males in English learning achievement.

VI. Implications

I. Practical Suggestions

(I) The parent or caregiver

From the result of this study, female sixth graders have better performance than males in English learning achievement. As a parent or caregiver, it is essential to give children encouragement and praise no matter whether the child is female or male. Praise and encouragement will cause positive stimulus and increase a person's learning motivation.

(II) The instructor

Most instructors are happy to see students have great learning achievement; however, not every student can meet teachers' expectations. Though the finding showed that female students had better English learning achievement than males, instructors should let students understand gender can be a factor having an effect on learning achievement but not the only factor. Therefore, instructors should work toward increasing all students' learning motivation. And instructors should have high expectations for both male and female students, understanding that English achievement may not come as naturally for the males. Moreover, instructors can give students some learning strategies to help them learn English more effectively.

(III) The learner

The learner should create good relationships with instructors and classmates as learning resources. After all, most of us are not geniuses. However, everyone can learn more if he or she is willing to learn. If a learner maintains a positive relationship with instructors and classmates, he or she would feel learning is a wonderful experience making it much easier to gain higher learning achievement. In fact, gender is a fixed variable relating to English learning achievement. A learner should build self-confidence from role models. If the learner is female, she should have more confidence in learning English according to the result of this study. If the learner is male, he should find male role models with great English learning achievement to give himself hope and a positive outlook.

II. Suggestions for future research

(I) The research frame

Different variables could be considered in future research; for example, the subject's IQ, blood type, astrological sign, order of birth, English teaching materials, teaching aids, and so forth. Then the study would be more thorough.

(II) The research subject

Because the subjects in the study were sixth graders in Pingtung County, subjects in the future studies could extend to sixth graders in other counties in Taiwan. Then the study results would be generalized.

(III) The research instrument

In the scale of English learning strategy, using Internet or computer to be a learning aid could be taken as a learning strategy because the Internet era has arrived. Perhaps using computers or the Internet for English language learning is a potential English learning strategy to use more often in the classroom.

(IV) The methodology

This study used literature and surveys as the main research method and also used interviews to understand the subjects' viewpoints of English learning. However, if it is necessary to more understand elementary school students' English learning strategies, then observation, ethnography, and other qualitative methods may be utilized to make the result more comprehensive and persuasive.

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Appendix I

小朋友你好，

這是一份英語學習問卷調查表，爲了了解屏東地區六年級學生學習英語的情形，並當成未來國小英語教學的參考，請各位小朋友仔細填答下面的問題，並請你一定要全部填寫完整，不要遺漏任何題目，這份資料對屏東地區國小英語教學非常非常重要，謝謝你的合作，也祝你學業進步，生活愉快。

一、你的性別是 1.()男生 2.()女生

二、你現在居住哪裡？

三、你父母對於你學習英語的態度是 1.()非常關心 2.()關心 3.()普通
4.()不關心 5.()非常不關心

四、你現在有補英文嗎？

五、你小五以前學過多久英文？ 1.()三年以上 2.()一到三年 3.()不到一
年 4.()沒學過

六、你出過幾次國？ 1.()三次以上 2.()一到三次 3.()沒出過國

七、你和同學相處的情形是 1.()愉快 2.()普通 3.()不好

八、你和英文老師相處的情形是 1.()愉快 2.()普通 3.()不好

Appendix II

台南市國小英語聽力與閱讀理解電腦化評量

乙式

(試題題本)

【評量系統說明】

台南市國小英語聽力與閱讀理解電腦化評量，目的在以生活化的情境，評量六年級小朋友英語聽力和閱讀理解的表現水準，以作為國中老師教學安排的參考，作答時，請小朋友安靜專心的聆聽線上播音的作答說明和題目內容，以滑鼠點選正確答案並按確定鍵，完成作答。

一、找出字母

【作答說明】第 1 題至第 6 題為字首與字尾字母的辨識。分為字首與字尾字母區辨兩部分。請根據線上播音內容與螢幕上的圖片作答。在每一題的敘述句中，你會先聽到一個完整的句子，針對該句子的目標字，播音系統會複誦兩次；請在該題選項中找出正確對應的字首或字尾字母，以滑鼠點選該選項代號，並按確定鍵，完成作答。測驗即將開始，現在請注意聽：

A. 選出目標字的字首字母

【作答說明】請選出目標字的第一個字母。

例題：

()

- a. g
- b. c
- c. t
- d. k

說明：

答案為 a。目標字是 girl，它的第一個字母為 g，所以答案是選項 a。
作答時先點選 a，再按確定鍵就完成作答。



() 1.

- a. h
- b. k
- c. j
- d. g



() 2.

- a. c
- b. z
- c. t
- d. s



() 3.

- a. l
- b. s
- c. r
- d. g



B. 選出目標字的字尾字母

【作答說明】請選出目標字的字尾字母。

例題：

()

- a. r
- b. g
- c. l
- d. h



說明：答案為 c，目標字為 girl，它的字尾字母為 l，所以答案為 c。作答時先點

選 c，再按確定鍵完成作答。

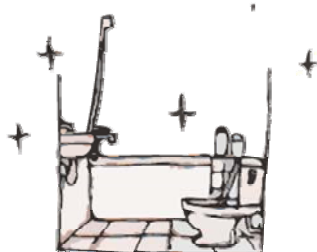
() 4.

- a. b
- b. p
- c. c
- d. g



() 5.

- a. v
- b. m
- c. r
- d. n



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() 6.

- a. s
- b. m
- c. q
- d. d



二、語句單字辨識

【作答說明】第 7 題至第 11 題是要同學先聽一個句子，再選出其中一個兩次複誦的目標字。螢幕上每個題目都有四個選項，請在聽線上播音的句子及其中複誦的單字後，從四個選項中點選出正確的選項，並按確定鍵完成作答。

- 例題：
- a. night
 - b. right
 - c. ride
 - d. light



說明：答案為 b。在此例題中，你所聽到的單字是 right，所以點選 b，再按確定鍵就完成作答。

- () 7. a. cake
b. bake
c. take
d. make



- () 8. a. watch
b. match
c. which
d. catch



- () 9. a. kind
b. find
c. mind
d. side



- () 10. a. star
b. start
c. stay
d. stand



- () 11. a. fine
b. nine
c. night
d. nice



三、看圖辨義

【作答說明】第 12 題至第 16 題是要同學依據圖畫、線上播音的問題和回答選項，選出最適切的回答。螢幕上會呈現每一張圖畫，而每一張圖畫有 1~3 個相關問題，每題請聽完線上播放的題目以及四個選項後，以滑鼠點選出與所看到的圖畫最相符的答案，並按確定鍵完成作答。每題題目將會複誦兩次，選項只念一次，請仔細聽。

例題：

- a. No. It's a notebook.
- b. Yes. It's a notebook.
- c. No. It's Tom's pencil box.
- d. Yes. It's my pencil box.



說明：這題的答案為 a，所以點選 a，再按確定鍵就完成作答。

() 12.

- a. They are running a race.
- b. They are playing basketball.
- c. They are jumping ropes.
- d. They are riding bicycles.



() 13.

- a. It's a book.
- b. It's a ball.
- c. It's a puppy.
- d. It's an eraser.



() 14.

- a. swim
- b. dance
- c. fly a kite
- d. sing a song



() 15.

- a. He gets up at six o'clock.
- b. He gets up at six-thirty.
- c. He gets up at seven o'clock.
- d. He gets up at seven-thirty.



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() 16.

- a. They're at the beach.
- b. They're at the amusement park.
- c. They're at the zoo.
- d. They're at the museum.



四、對話回應

【作答說明】這個大題主要是評量在情境中選擇適切回應的句子能力。題目部分並沒有呈現在螢幕上，請仔細聽播音系統的問題內容。每個題目，播音系統都會播放兩次，每一題都會有四個選項，選項部分會出現在螢幕上，請依據播音系統的題目，點出最適切的回應，並按確定鍵完成作答。

例題：

- a. No, it's so good.
- b. Yes, I like your new shirt.
- c. No, I like your new hat.
- d. Yes, I like your new hat.



說明：最適切的回應是 d. Yes, I like your new hat. 所以點選 d，再按確定鍵完成作答。

() 17.

- a. It's so funny.
- b. I can't do it.
- c. It's sunny.
- d. Take it easy.



() 18.

- a. It's very big.
- b. It's good.
- c. It's OK.
- d. It's ten dollars.



() 19.

- a. I'm Helen.
- b. Good morning.
- c. What's your name?
- d. Good-bye.



() 20.

- a. My name is John.
- b. I'm fine, thank you.
- c. She's OK.
- d. John is my brother.



() 21.

- a. Hold on, please.
- b. Yes, I am.
- c. No, I'm not.
- d. Yes, she isn't here.



五、對話理解

【作答說明】每個大題會播出一段對話，再問一個相關的問題，同學要依據所聽到的對話內容及問題選出適切的答案。對話與問題部分並沒有呈現在螢幕上，請仔細聽播音的內容。每個題目，線上播音都會念兩次，螢幕上，每一題在題號後都會有四個選項，請依播音內容，點選最適切的答案，並按確定鍵完成作答

例題：

- a. Jane is David's brother.
- b. Jane is David's sister.
- c. Jane is David's friend.
- d. Jane is David's mother.



說明：最適切的回應是 c. Jane is David's friend. 所以點選 c，再按確定鍵完成作答。

() 22.

- a. Joy
- b. Joy's brother
- c. Joy's sister
- d. Joy's mother



() 23.

- a. He is Bob's father.
- b. He is Bob's friend.
- c. He is Bob's brother.
- d. He is Bob's teacher.



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() 24.

- a. Tom
- b. Tom's mother
- c. Tom's father
- d. Tom's sister



() 25.

- a. It's on the chair.
- b. It's on the desk.
- c. It's under the chair.
- d. It's under the desk.



() 26.

- a. Kelly has no ruler.
- b. Kelly has many rulers.
- c. Andy has no ruler.
- d. Andy has a ruler.



六、短文理解

【作答說明】這一個大題是要同學仔細閱讀一段短文，閱讀完短文之後，會有 5 個相關問題。每個問題都有四個選項，請依據短文內容與問題，從提供的四個選項中選出一個最適切的答案，並點選該選項代號，再按確定鍵完成作答。

It's Sunday morning. Everyone is busy. Mr. Lin is feeding his dog. Mrs. Lin is reading the newspaper. Mr. and Mrs. Lin are our neighbors. My dad is washing his car. My mom and sister are making a cake. My baby brother John is sleeping. My name is Joy. I'm playing with Mr. Lin's dog.

() 27. Today is _____.

- a. Saturday
- b. Monday
- c. Sunday
- d. Tuesday

- () 28. a. Joy
b. Mr. Lin
c. John
d. Mrs. Lin
- () 29. They are _____.
a. Joy's teachers
b. Joy's students
c. Joy's neighbors
d. Joy's classmates
- () 30. He is _____.
a. Mr. Lin's friend
b. Joy's brother
c. Mrs. Lin's brother
d. Joy's friend
- () 31. a. Mr. and Mrs. Lin
b. Joy's mom and sister.
c. Joy's dad and brother.
d. Joy and John.

性別與英語學習成就之研究—以屏東縣小六學童為例

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摘要

國小英語教學實施多年以來，已引起許多學者專家的探討，性別在學校裏是極易形成區別的特性，許多研究亦指出男女生在學習上具有差異，因此，性別究竟會不會造成英語學習成就上之差異值得關心，本研究以屏東縣國小六年級學生為研究對象，研究者以台南市國民小學英語聽力與閱讀理解電腦化評量題庫中的乙卷為研究工具，並調查受試者之性別，資料蒐集後以 SPSS 進行統計分析，本研究發現男女生在英語學習成就上有明顯差異，女生顯著地高於男生。研究並根據研究結果提出建議，以提供相關人士之參考，進一步期許台灣之國小英語教學更具成效。

關鍵字：性別、英語學習成就

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