

# GLOBAL-MINDEDNESS THROUGH THE EYES OF EFL LEARNERS: GENDER AND LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY IN FOCUS

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**Abstract.** The major aim of the present study is to find connections between global-mindedness and some important factors such as gender and level of proficiency. To this end, 182 language learners, 92 females and 90 males, participated in the study. These students were selected and categorized based on one-stage cluster sampling from 16 branches of different language centers, namely Safiran, Shoukoh, and Kish. The main phase of the study was conducted through the use of Google Docs platform that provides the researchers with the well-organized data. Language learners were asked to answer all the demographic information by considering their anonymity during the process of data collection. The result of the study, through t-test, showed that there was a significant difference between male and female language learners regarding their level of global-mindedness. The result also showed that the level of proficiency of the female language learners does not influence their level of global-mindedness.

**Keywords:** *global-mindedness, gender, EFL, communication, level of proficiency.*

**Джавад Агмаді Фаталакі, Рунган Жанг. Глобальне мислення студентів, які вивчають англійську як іноземну: проблема гендеру та рівня володіння.**

**Анотація.** Мета дослідження полягає в знаходженні зв'язку між глобальним мисленням і деякими важливими чинниками, як-от стать і рівень майстерності. У дослідженні взяло участь 182 особи, з яких 92 особи жіночої статі та 90 осіб чоловічої статі. Студенти були відібрані і поділені на групи за принципом одноступінчастого кластеру з вибіркою 16-ти філіалів різних мовних центрів, а саме «Сафіран», «Шоуко», і «Кіш». Основний етап дослідження було проведено за допомогою використання сервісу Google Docs, що забезпечує дослідників добре впорядкованими даними. Студентам було запропоновано надати повну демографічну інформацію про себе зі збереженням принципу анонімності протягом процесу збору даних. Результати Т-тесту (t-критерій Стьюдента) показали велику різницю глобального мислення між мовою осіб чоловічої і жіночої статі. Серед студентів жіночої статі вагомої різниці між глобальним мисленням і рівнем володіння мовою не було виявлено.

**Ключові слова:** *глобальне мислення, гендер, англійська мова як іноземна, комунікація, рівень володіння мовою.*

## 1. Introduction

Communication itself can not be solidly discussed through one specific dimension and there is no clear-cut boundary to circumscribe its widespread realm. Moreover, the study of communication truly empowers multidisciplinary co-constructions and interventions. The fact that cultural norms and conventions impose several attributes upon the nature of the communication is undoubtedly of paramount significance because such norms constantly shape orientations within communication in broader

sense. Therefore, there is a necessity to prepare local students confronting with evolving conditions in transnational communities. This preparation is not only assured through communicative competence, but also it needs intercultural competence and, especially, reinforcement of the commonalities among parties of interaction. These commonalities engender desirable conditions which induce higher reciprocity between contributors in communications. Besides, the betterment of the relationship between people with different nationalities can be achieved, appropriately, through their heart. In other words, people should carry their carry-on heart when they contact people with different nationalities and reinforce commonality regardless of all incongruities.

Smallman and Brown (2011) stated that the nature of the global interconnectedness is the process that affects every individual's perception of the culture and identity. A quick glance at global problems, such as global warming, war and range of natural disasters around the world, can indicate the extent to which such interconnected process are operative motives in the evolution of the worldviews. This evolution necessitates, chiefly, policy makers in broader sense to count on the influential role of every individual in this vast planet. At least, they should believe in the 'Butterfly effect' which metaphorically claims on the slight effect of every organism on global issues, and they should also align their palette of policy making based upon such understandings. In general, these deep concerns for transnational issues cause permeability of sympathy over the border of the countries in which firm patriotic beliefs took precedence over 'cosmopolitan outlook'. However, this cosmopolitanism is not in concordance with what is meant by globalization in Giddens' (1991) view because he asserted that globalization is the act of homogenizing the world by gathering ideas together and bringing a unified system of thought, though newer perspective over the globalization not only rejects this unification, but also it insists on incongruities and diverse cultural backgrounds.

This study aims at determining the extent to which gender and level of proficiency of language learners, who attended foreign language programs, influence their global-mindedness. The result of the study can also shed light on the development of the intercultural communicative competence models based on the students' backgrounds.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Intercultural competence**

Although there is no consensus over any terminology for intercultural competence, there are quite a few studies which adopted different terms to resolve the opaque theme of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011). All in all, one of outstanding examples of such a terminology is Sercu's (2005) one. She defined intercultural competence as the willingness to communicate appropriately with foreigners, to develop self-awareness, to think outside the box, to play the role of cultural mediator, to analyze others' point of view in a broader sense, and to extrapolate the new cultural contexts from previously learned skill. The assessment of intercultural competence, however, evolved it into a dilemma (Fantini, 2009). The lack of assessment may be because of what FitzGerald (2003) called as 'fluidity of intercultural competence'. Byram, Zarate & Neuner (1997) also mentioned that assessment of intercultural competence is well-nigh impossible because of multidisciplinary nature of intercultural competence and several considerations over the

socio-cultural competence. This issue arose simply due to the necessity of assessment of socio-cultural aspect of every language which broadens its scope from language to language users. Hence, what problematizes the concept of intercultural competence is the widespread misunderstanding regarding the assessment of such term due to its fluidity in nature. But having said that, a new instrument needs to be constructed to fully assess what it should assess regarding the profound cultural awareness and understanding.

## **2.2. World-view**

How people approach life depends on the values that they encounter and accept through the process of socialization in which people shape and being shaped through the appropriate mediation in the societies. However, this mediation can be accompanied with the manipulation of the reality that leads into diversity of interpretation of one single entity. In other words, some people think that they are watching the world through one big window, while such assumption can be changed totally into a hallucination and in higher cases localization of the concept of the reality. In this sense, reality is reflected through one gigantic mirror in which people see their religion, culture, tradition, and language of utmost significance. With such perspective, it is unavoidably evident that people's world-views would be limited to their ethnic boundaries. What sets this shackled nations free of such ideologies was the World War II. People got united for one specific purpose regardless of their nationalities to defeat Nazism. Thereafter, this event, idealistically, propelled people to come to think of a united nation in which physical borders were determined through soil, while the real border was passage way for the supranational interactions.

### **2.2.1. International vs. world-mindedness**

To begin with the preliminary concepts regarding global perspectives, one should peruse the course of the history to see some constructs that worked as touchstones to assay nations' emotionality toward global communities in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among such constructs, international-mindedness and World-mindedness played and still play the pivotal role in perceiving nations' attitudes and perspectives. Although these terms have been used interchangeably, some believed that each one of them should be defined distinctively and discussed along with their weak points in coverage of what they measure.

World-mindedness is every individual's worldview regarding national and supranational problems of human-being regardless of any bias toward national affairs in order to develop a sense of mankind in broader scopes out of national boundaries (Sampson & Smith, 1957). They also made a clear distinction between world-mindedness and international-minded through the following assertion:

International-mindedness refers to interest in or knowledge about inter-national affairs ; factual and topical statements frequently serve as items in scales that measure international-mindedness. The concept world mindedness, in contrast, designates purely a value orientation, or frame of reference, apart from knowledge about, or interest in, international relations. We identify as highly world minded the individual who favors a world-view of the problems of humanity, whose primary reference group is mankind, rather than Americans, English, Chinese, etc. Such a person may or may

not have a heightened interest in and knowledge about international affairs. (Sampson & Smith 1957: 99)

International-mindedness is defined as a curiosity about the people’s diverse cultural backgrounds (Hill.2007). International mindedness lets people see themselves as the part of the larger community and feel the sense of kinship and personal responsibility for other members of global community (Muller, 2012). Duckworth, Levy, and Levy (2005) stated that international-mindedness can be manifested, implicitly, through individuals’ understandings of their own actions to change the whole global community. Moreover, the new definition of international mindedness encompasses several attributes, such as Ethical practice, Global literacy, Linguistic fluency Global issues, Learning access, Service learning, and Student leadership.

**2.2.2. Global-mindedness**

Few years later, Hett (1993:4) defined global mindedness as “a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the global community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members. This commitment is reflected in the individual’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” (as cited in DeMello, 2011: 41). She also developed a full-fledged scale for assessing global-mindedness. Hopefully, this work buttressed the fundamental steps in designing a model for the assessment of global mindedness.

In prima facie, global mindedness resembles, to some extent, international-mindedness and world-mindedness. World and Global mindedness both deal with individual’s worldview which can be within the range of ethnocentric to globalcentric inclinations. Olsen, Lodwick & Dunlap (1992) stated that the shift from ethnocentrism to more globally-oriented worldview can be achieved through socialization and social interactions. Duckworth, Walker-Levy, and Levy (2005) claimed that international-mindedness and global-mindedness are synonym, while there are some slight differences between such terms that are depicted in table 1:

*Table 1*

**Comparison of Characteristics of GM and IM**

<b>Characteristics of global-mindedness (Hett, 1993)</b>	<b>IB learner profile attributes (Hill, 2007)</b>
Personal attributes	Inquirer; balanced
Oppose prejudice	Principled
Responsibility & care	Caring
Activists	Risk-taker
Additional language ability	Communicator
Seek to learn	Knowledgeable; reflective; thinker
Unity of humanity	Open-mindedness
Environmental concern	Not identified
Cultural pluralists	Not identified
Interconnectedness	Not identified
Futurist perspective	Not identified

Following Hett's study (1993), handful of research utilized the same scale for the measurement of individuals' global perspectives. However, in twenty-first century, this number increased by the emergence of new trends in intercultural studies. Gillian (1995) conducted a survey on the level of global mindedness of university students who lived in USA. She concluded, in line with Hett's study (1993), that females enjoyed higher sense of global mindedness. Few years later, Zhai & Scheer (2004) reemphasized the role of gender in the level of global mindedness. In an attempt to synonymize international and global mindedness, Duckworth et al. (2005) used Hett's scale in order to measure pre-service and in-service teachers' international-mindedness. Unlike the previous studies, they didn't find any significant relation between the level of global-mindedness and gender. They also concluded that age, ethnic background, length of residence in foreign countries, types and the number of the languages that one knows didn't have any significant relation to global-mindedness. All in all, living in foreign countries for the long period of time and gender were among the most influential factors for the level of global mindedness. In the similar vein, Kehl and Morris (2007) investigated the effect of college students' length of residence in foreign countries for the short and long period of time to fulfill their academic education and claimed that those who resided more than eight weeks and approximately one semester received higher level of global mindedness in GMS.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there any difference between male and female language learners regarding their level of global-mindedness?
2. Is there any relationship between female English language learners' level of proficiency and their level of global-mindedness?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study attempts to find the role of gender in the EFL language learners' global-mindedness. The reason behind the implementation of the study lies in the role of the global-mindedness in intercultural communication and the necessity of positive attitude towards the global partners. The second aim of the study is the investigation of the relation between the level of the proficiency and Global-mindedness.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Participants**

The current study included 182 participants who were studying English as a foreign language at different language institutes ( Safiran, Shoukoh, and Kish language centers). All participants were aged between 21–34 years. The proficiency level of the participants ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate. They all completed the consent form in order to take part in the present study. The participants were 92 female and 90 male language learners.

### **3.2. Instrumentation**

The researchers in this research implemented the global-mindedness scale that is devised by Hett (1993). Hett (1993:143) divided the scale (consisted of 30 items) into

five dimensions, that is, Responsibility, Cultural Pluralism, Efficacy, Globalcentrism, and Interconnectedness. The items were accompanied by the 5-point Likert scale response ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These multidimensional aspects for the development of the global mindedness are depicted in Table 2:

*Table 2*

**Global Mindedness Dimensions**

Responsibility	Having a personal responsibility to concern for supranational problems or even collective responsibility to improve the quality of others' life.
Cultural Pluralism	Respecting others' cultures with all diversities and accepting their values despite their incongruity with the local culture. This dimension runs on a parallel with cultural literacy. According to Schmelkes (2009), respect for the diverse cultural background of ethnic groups leads into the enrichment and cultivation of human being.
Efficacy	Holding this belief that every individual's action will be beneficial and quite remarkable for the global community
Globalcentrism	Considering the world as one unified land where one enjoys the benefit of what s/he does in a reflexive mirror. Such belief rejects any ethnocentric judgments
Interconnectedness	Having the sense of the connectedness to the people around the world. Such understanding leads into sense of global belonging and kinship among individuals with diverse cultural background.

**3.3. Procedure**

Data collection in the current study took 3 months to be completed. The researchers asked the respondents to carefully tick the response pattern that is too close to their views. Also, they were asked to complete the whole scale in 20 minutes. Google Docs platform was used for the ease of the final evaluation and the access to the respondents who live in different cities during the implementation of the study. The proficiency level of the participants was assessed through FCE test that identifies intermediate and upper-intermediate learners with B1 and B2 according to CEFR leveling.

**3.4. Data analysis procedure**

SPSS 20 was used to analyze the data both in descriptive and inferential sense. Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated to work on the appropriateness of the questionnaire in the new context ( $r=.72$ ). Regarding the first and the second research questions, Independent samples t-test was used. The first t-test was the indicator of the relationship between gender and global-mindedness and the second t-test was used to show the potential effect of the language learners' level of proficiency on their global-mindedness.

**4. Results**

In the present study, the first research question is designed to indicate whether male and female language learners have different levels of global-mindedness or not. Table 2 and 3 show the Mean and Standard deviation of both groups in descriptive sense and indicate whether there are statistically significant difference between male and female language learners regarding their level of global-mindedness.

*Table 3*

**Descriptive Statistics: Gender and Global-mindedness**

VAR00001		Statistic	Bootstrap <sup>a</sup>				
			Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower	Upper	
VAR00002	Female	N	92				
		Mean	104.7717	.0528	1.7506	101.2265	108.2391
		Std. Deviation	17.39275	-.11630	1.26210	14.78223	19.74046
		Std. Error Mean	1.81332				
	Male	N	90				
		Mean	98.1333	-.0213	2.0060	94.1810	101.8934
		Std. Deviation	19.08479	-.16753	1.78066	15.50156	22.55450
		Std. Error Mean	2.01171				

As table 2 indicates, mean and stand deviation of the female participants' GM is 104.77 and SD=17.39 and that of male participants' is 98.13 and SD=19.08. This information shows that female participants had higher level of global mindedness. However, it is not clear whether this difference is in the margin of significance or not.

*Table 4*

**Independent Sample T-Test for Gender and Global-mindedness**

		Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	Equal variances assumed	.002	.963	2.454	180	.015	6.63841	2.70557
	Equal variances not assumed			2.451	177.66	.015	6.63841	2.70834

As table 3 shows, there is significant difference between male and female language learners regarding their level of global-mindedness ( $t(180) = 2.45, P = .015$ ). The second research question, which dealt with the relationship between the level of proficiency and global-mindedness, is addressed in Table 4 and 5:

Table 5

**Descriptive Statistics: Global mindedness and Level of Proficiency**

VAR00001		Statistic	Bootstrap <sup>a</sup>				
			Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower	Upper	
VAR00002	Upper	N	43				
		Mean	107.4884	.1032	2.4198	102.8098	112.2363
		Std. Deviation	16.19578	-.27900	1.76500	12.47941	19.44794
		Std. Error Mean	2.46983				
	Inter	N	49				
		Mean	102.3878	-.1030	2.5615	97.4551	107.5456
		Std. Deviation	18.20922	-.28331	1.65119	14.58128	21.09319
		Std. Error Mean	2.60132				

Table 4 shows the mean of both intermediate (M=102.38) and upper-intermediate students (M=107.48). Based on this data, this is evident that the level of global-mindedness was higher for upper-intermediate students. The next table (Table 5) shows whether this difference is in the margin of significance or not.

Table 6

**Independent Sample T-Test for Global mindedness and Level of Proficiency**

Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	Equal variances assumed	1.276	.262	1.411	90	.162	5.10062	3.61475
	Equal variances not assumed			1.422	89.990	.158	5.10062	3.58705

As table 5 shows, there is no significant difference between intermediate and upper-intermediate students regarding their level of global-mindedness ((t (90) =1.41, P =.162).

**5. Discussion**

Global-mindedness works hand in hand with intercultural communication. The degree to which one is successful in intercultural and international communication depends on his/her awareness of the target culture features and, mostly, the attitude s/he has regarding the target community. As Hett (1993) stated, globally-minded students are more connected to the global community and, also, they express their concern about the global problems rather than the local ones. Thus, this can be implied that globally-minded students are less ethnocentric. Hill (2007) considered



international-mindedness the curiosity that people have towards the target culture. This curiosity may be related to the concept of cultural intelligence that has been proposed by Earley and Ang(2003). Cultural intelligence may be regarded as the predisposition people have towards the new cultural features of the target culture. However, this concept does not satiate researchers to confront with the new contextual features. Thus, global-mindedness is in vogue to compensate the dynamic sense of culture.

Regarding the first research question, the result of the study shows that female language learners enjoyed the higher level of global-mindedness ( $t(180) = 2.45$ ,  $P = .015$ ). This result shows that female language learners are more concerned with the global community and its problems and features. In a general sense, Wardhaugh (1992) discussed the role of gender in the pattern of communication. Also, Lakoff (1973) emphasized the role of gender in the channels through which people use language to serve the social and cultural purposes. There are few studies that deal with the role of gender in the level of global-mindedness. In this regard, Gillian (1995) in her study concluded that female learners have higher level of global-mindedness. Per contra, Duckworth et al. (2005) did not find the significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their level of global mindedness. Although the present study supports Gillian's study, this is necessary to conduct more studies to discover the role of gender in different contexts.

The result of the study regarding the second research question shows that there is no significant difference between intermediate and upper-intermediate students with regard to their level of global-mindedness ( $t(90) = 1.41$ ,  $P = .162$ ). Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud, S. (2006) stated, level of proficiency plays a significant role in intercultural communication. In the study conducted by Kehl and Morris (2007), longer exposure to the target culture influenced the level of global-mindedness. This exposure to the foreign culture may be quite different from the one students receive in their own country but this shows that through the appropriate exposure the higher level of global-mindedness is achievable.

## **6. Conclusions and implications**

This research was conducted to determine the role of gender and level of proficiency in English language in the level of global mindedness. The relation between gender and global-mindedness is a far cry from the relation between the level of proficiency and global-mindedness because gender is in the identity of the language learners but level of proficiency is related to the environmental forces. Therefore, the present study brought both the role of identity and the environmental factors into focus. Based on the results of the study, gender influenced the level of global-mindedness but level of proficiency does not necessarily have the same impact on the language learners. The result of the study may shed light on the concept of the educationability of features of intercultural communication. In other words, global-mindedness as one of the features of the intercultural communication may not be achievable by simple instruction even over the long period of time.

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