Interactional Competence and Gender Impacts on EFL Learners' Self-Perceptions of Its Sub-Constructs

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Even though interactional competence (IC) has recently been at the center of attention, its constructs/sub-components and influencing factors still require profound scrutiny. The features associated with IC have indeed been probed in various language learning and teaching realms. However, the effect of language learners' gender on their perception of IC remains to be addressed. To bridge this gap, the present research, as one of the stages of development and verification of the Learners' Interactional Competence Questionnaire (LICQ), investigated how gender may affect IC and its sub-constructs as perceived by males and females. A total of 407 male and female intermediate-level Iranian EFL learners, selected through convenience sampling from several language institutes, participated in the study and responded to the LICQ. Subsequently, a two-group multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to measure the potential effects of students' gender on perceived IC, including conversational management, speech acts, register, nonverbal semiotics, and requests and complaints. The results showed that gender has a small significant effect on learners' perceived interactional competence. Even though this effect is not visible in conversational management, but exists in the other four sub-components, namely speech acts, register, nonverbal semiotics, and requests and complaints. Language teachers could consider the different perceptions of male and female learners of IC as an influential aspect of IC realization and development in the language classroom setting. Besides, the study findings provide learners with a self-assessment scale to identify their present state of IC perception and monitor its development through time. ***Keywords:*** English learners; interactional competence; gender; questionnaire development/validation

1. Introduction

The interaction taking place between instructors and learners of language is enormously significant throughout the procedure of language learning. This can improve the cooperative relationship between teachers and students, support students' learning, and supply them with the ability to utilize several facets of language, and interactive abilities can improve language management in different contexts in addition to collaboration (Kecskes, et al., 2018; Misesani & Lestari, 2017; Roever & Kasper, 2018). Hence, if different facets of interactional competence (IC) are not dealt with properly, learners could lose some chances for development in the communicative aspect, which can affect their language performance negatively. According to Young (2013), IC is a specific competence involving participants making "skillful use of resources in the joint construction of" structure, meaning perception, people's identity, feelings, and other culture-based features (p. 20). As Young puts it, IC is not an attribute of an exact individual, and therefore it is not possible to say that one is competent at the level of interaction. Accordingly, IC is a feature co-constructed simultaneously by all individuals participating in an interaction. Thus, IC involves the knowledge of how to construct a group of resources through which an interactive practice can be carried out. Therefore, as Young (2013) stipulates, IC includes being acquainted with sources of language (namely, lexis and syntactic structures) involving special activities, pragmatic abilities, such as raising a new topic and maintaining it, taking one's turn as well as management and the order and sequence of a conversation, as well as the roles they play at the level of communication dedicated to the practice. Consequently, in recent decades, IC has gained much consideration in the language learning context.

Realization of facets of IC in the process of second language learning, or L2-IC, is highly needed for the students' effective conveyance, reception, and perception of linguistic messages and ideas. Second language (L2) IC covers a good command of language subsystem (i.e., resources), comprising (1) resources related to identity, (2) resources dealing with linguistic features or the so-called Linguistic Resources (LR), and (3) resources specific to the interactional aspects or IR (Young, 2011).

IC signifies the practices and resources language learners and users draw on to attain and maintain intersubjectivity, or the so-called mutual understanding (Hall & Pekarek-Doehler, 2011; He & Young, 1998). Despite a great deal of consideration of various facets of IC, some influential factors seem to be missing. One such factor is gender, which is an influential parameter in many spoken interaction areas. Studies on language and gender have been conducted for nearly four decades. It has led to a noticeable body of literature, comprising some overviews of the topic (e.g., Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003), a handbook on the subject matter (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003), and the journal *Gender and Language*, appearing in 2007. Through time, many changes

have occurred in the kinds of inquiries that have been raised, the procedures that have been utilized, and the kinds of descriptions that have been pursued. This type of development is not exclusive to this specific area of inquiry; instead, it goes to various spheres and reveals shifts in paradigms in linguistics and women's/gender research and the ways through which notions of gender and interaction are dealt with. This facet seems to be a missing link in studies of IC, and there is no precise analysis of how various features of IC are perceived and realized by male and female language learners.

To this end, this study aimed to investigate the influence of gender on IC as perceived by Iranian English language learners. Bearing this purpose in mind, the present study examined how male and female EFL learners perceive various aspects of IC. This study is a stage of development and validation of the Learners' Interactional Competence Questionnaire (LICQ) (Jajarmi, 2022).

2. Literature Review

To deal with the nature of knowledge or language ability, the notion of IC was presented by Kramsch (1986) as a vibrant communication procedure shaped via the cooperative endeavor of the participants in an interactive setting. In his work to depict the role played by interaction features in L2 verbal communication, Hall (1995) theorized the idea of IC in second language acquisition (SLA) studies. Based on Hall, IC could be regarded as the ability and knowledge to utilize linguistic and paralinguistic features of language in communicative settings.

According to the existing literature on the research conducted on IC (e.g., Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Kasper, 2006; Walsh, 2012), conversation analysis seems to have had a maximum effect on the explanation of the aspects of IC, such as sequential and preference organization, the capability of turn-taking, designing and ordering turns, formatting various types of action, and repair procedures. The capability of topic opening and expansion has drawn more attention in the evaluative context (see Cekaite, 2007; Galaczi, 2013; Galaczi & Taylor, 2018; Gan, 2010; Masuda, 2011). As May (2011) puts it, the notion of IC has been generally examined in the studies related to the assessment of speaking since they take into account various features of the interactional realm like topic initiation and development, asking for clarification, (etc.) (Brooks, 2009; Taylor & Wigglesworth, 2009). These studies have explored IC realization by participants, concentrating on managing the dialogue instead of their dominance of structural facets of language. Moreover, Young (2008, 2011) and He and Young (1998) considered the notion of interaction through the explanation of resources interactants take advantage of in their discursive performances. As He and Young mentioned, such pragmatic linguistic resources encompass familiarity with syntactic forms, rhetorical settings, and lexical aspects that illustrate a particular practice and knowledge of turn

management, topic organization, and boundary marking between practices and moves in the interaction process.

Fundamentally, IC deals with what occurs between interactants and how that communication is accomplished. Instead of considering fluency, one needs to concentrate on what McCarthy (2005) refers to as the process of causing verbal language flow, hand in hand with other interactants, namely confluence. Spoken confluence vastly emphasizes the techniques through which participants deal with the contributions of others and collectively concentrate on the creation of meaning. Besides, the confluence is a notion lying at the core of almost all communicative language classrooms, where learners continually endeavor to make sense of one another, exchange meanings, help, request, back each other, elaborate on what they say, and so on. In the classroom context or out of it, we could say that being confluent is more required to conduct effective interaction than just being fluent. This is dealt with in the so-called area of classroom interactional competence (CIC), which is "a relatively new area in teacher cognition to which scant attention has been devoted" (Nemati, et al., 2022, p. 132).

Ever since Kramsch dealt with the notion of IC in 1986, many scholars have dealt with the notion without arriving at a definite and feasible definition. Recently, studies have pinpointed that IC is relevant to the context and deals with how interactants co-construct meanings, despite considering characteristics of participants' performance that are part and parcel of communicative competence. For instance, compare the variances existing in the sources of interaction required in a setting where transactions receive attention, such as ordering food in a restaurant using fixed expressions or the resources needed for interaction to participate in a conversation on a topic. Obviously, in the first situation, superficial knowledge of some English phrases and expressions will be enough for the participant to order food with minimum dominance over IC. On the other hand, in the second context, which could be regarded as a prototype of many classroom settings, more IC resources are demanded that could lead to successful control of the floor, taking and passing turns, attending to what the other interactant has said, interrupting the flow of conversation, clarifying, and so on. Jafarigohar et al. (2021) state that: "successful communication requires mutual collaboration. Learners should be aware that an efficient interactant often uses interactional resources of act selection, repair, turn-raking, and boundaries to maintain the conversation within a sphere of mutual understanding" (p. 111). These two examples show that context plays a crucial role in interactional competence as well as the speaker's intent while participating in an interactional procedure.

To specify particular aspects of IC, Young (2003) refers to some interactional resources comprising particular strategies for interaction like turn-taking, topic management, signaling boundaries, (etc.) Markee (2008) suggests the following constituents for IC:

- Language as a formal system (comprising grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation);
- Semiotic systems comprising turn-taking, repair, and sequence organization;
- Gaze and paralinguistic characteristics (i.e., nonverbal semiotics).

According to Markee, the development of IC in the L2 setting includes learners' mutual construction of meaning and ideas, leading to a fluent conveyance of meaning. Young (2008) defines the notion of IC as the association among participants' utilization of resources from both linguistic and interactional spheres and the contexts in which they are used.

On the other hand, the notion of gender is to be dealt with. Gender has been a well-known idea in the study of language learning. Concentrating on this factor's influence on language could be traced back to the fifth century BC when the idea of 'grammatical gender' in Indo-European languages was considered concerning 'natural gender,' namely the gender of human beings denoted by such words. Turning to modern linguistics, the pioneering area was sociolinguistics – in its explanation of this variation (e.g., Labov, 1972) – which introduced 'sex' as an independent variable that, in addition to style, age, and class, is in relationship with the appearance of precise linguistic variables to explain distinctions and clarify language changes (Wodak & Benke, 1997).

Nevertheless, the notion of gender witnessed its utmost emergence through the women's movement in the late 1960s, leading to a revisit of the field of linguistics from the standpoint of sexism against the female gender. The publication in the linguistic realm that highlighted this transition in an exemplary manner was Robin Lakoff's article 'Language and Woman's Place' (1973). Not long after, studies concentrated on gendered interaction and were, later on, followed up on Lakoff's (1975) observations on the features of women's linguistic representations compared to men's and climaxed in Tannen's (1990) publication on the origins of miscommunication occurring between men and women. A tremendous body of research, mainly regarding English and Anglo-Saxon societies, has been conducted with substantial variation in the type of linguistic facets explored, the contexts and settings in which these facets are utilized, and the types of speech events and genres scrutinized.

Some studies were carried out to observe how aspects of interaction are realized in language classroom settings and how they could be different. Other studies focused on the learner's compliance and stipulated that within the classroom interaction setting, girls' non-compliant turns to the instructor manifested in various types of disagreeing, arguing, complaining, etc., are primarily related to the management of classroom issues, turn-taking, etc. In contrast, boys' turns in similar circumstances mainly concentrated on the lesson's content (Pavlidou, 2003). A noticeable instance of such a generalization could be found in the notion presented as the work women do to

keep the interaction going (Fishman, 1983), encompassing the rise of questions, taking advantage of devices to absorb the attention of interlocutors, and utilizing replies to motivate a speaker to continue. This latter strategy leads to another generalization: females are inclined to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men (Holmes, 1998, p. 68). In consort with supportive feedback and facilitative tags (i.e., tags that offer the interlocutor to take part in a conversation) (Holmes, 1995, pp. 55–59 and 79–86), it was found that females use additional linguistic items that indicate intimacy and team spirit. Compliments, for instance, are one type of such feature: among a range of cultures, females prefer to give and get more compliments than males (Holmes, 1995; Sifianou, 2001).

Overall, the research studies mentioned earlier do not set forth decisive unifying results concerning the presumed impact of gender on how second language learners perceive IC and its sub-constructs. This study, thus, was designed to enquire into this facet of IC via the Learners' Interactional Competence Questionnaire (LICQ), which has already been validated in this respect (Jajarmi, 2022). Moreover, the present study aimed to enrich previous research by addressing the variable of gender to see whether it has any significant impact on IC. To this end, the research question addressed in the present study was: Is there any difference in male and female Iranian EFL learners' perceived interactional competence and its sub-constructs?

Null hypothesis: There is no difference between the males and females in their perceived interactional competence.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The current study employed a group of 407 EFL learners attending private language institutes in Iran. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. They had already attended English courses for about three years. Intermediate-level course books (mostly Top Notch and Touchstone) were taught twice a week, each session lasting 1.5 hours. They all expressed their consent to take part in the study. They were informed that the responses provided by them, as well as any data they input in the questionnaire, would be merely utilized for research purposes and considered confidential, and no third party is entitled to access them. Besides, the participants did not have to input their names. No participant spoke English as their mother tongue; since their mother tongue was Persian/Farsi, they were considered non-native EFL learners. To avoid age as a determining factor affecting IC and learners' perceptions of it, only participants in their twenties were included in the study. Moreover, only intermediate-level students were included to avoid proficiency level influencing the study's results and to ensure their proficiency level those who had already taken Oxford Placement Test and were approved as intermediate-level learners by their language schools or in other studies

previously were included in this study. Table 1 represents the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	133	32.7
	Female	274	67.3
Age Group	20-25	287	70.5
	26-29	120	29.5

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Learners' Interactional Competence Questionnaire (LICQ)

The LICQ includes 26 items: five for interactional semiotics, three for register, seven for speech acts, eight for conversational management, and three for request and complaint as sub-constructs of IC. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of .91 was calculated for the 26-item of LICQ. Besides, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin was applied to estimate the adequacy of the sampling demanded. It was displayed that KMO was .86, which is more than the .6 proposed by Tabachnick & Fidell (2013) and adequately large enough to conduct an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Third, Bartlett's test of sphericity was X^2 (1275) = 6963.95, p =.00, demonstrating that the correlations magnitude existing between each of the items had been large enough for conducting exploratory factor analysis accurately.

Regarding the correlation of LICQ, it is noteworthy that the KMO measure was run to evaluate the suitability of utilizing FA on the data set. Bartlett's test had also been run to recognize whether identical variances of a continuous or interval-level dependent variable exist among some groups of an independent variable. The KMO value obtained was more than 0.5, and Bartlett's test significance level fell below.05 showing that there exists a considerable correlation in the data.

3.3. Procedure

The study was carried out utilizing Google Docs, employing a web-based invitation link that was created to administer the LICQ. The web link was distributed among participants using WhatsApp, Telegram, and SMS. Three sections were regarded for the questionnaire. Firstly, basic information about the questionnaire was provided to the participants in English and Persian. Secondly, questions were raised aiming to gather demographic information of each participant. Finally, the primary set of LICQ items was provided for the participants. The scale arrangement was based on a 4-point Likert scale, namely 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly agree.

3.4. Data Analysis

Using the SPSS version 23 (2019), a two-group Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was utilized to measure the possible impacts of students' gender on perceived interactional competence and its extracted factors. More precisely, MANOVA was implemented in order to investigate the impacts of gender on five constructs of learners' perceived interactional competence: conversational management, speech acts, register, nonverbal semiotics, and requests and complaints, considered as five main dependent variables (DVs) in this analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Regarding the measurement of these five DVs, it should be mentioned that all of them were regarded as the covert composites. Therefore, the means calculated for students' answers to the factor items were calculated and utilized in MANOVA. After the measurement of those five DVs, we compared male and female groups of learners, that is, ones (the two-level independent variable is gender here in this part of the analysis), to see whether they were different concerning different constructs of their perceived interactional competence (see Table 2 for more information on learners' perceived interactional competence).

Table 2

Gender Groups Descriptive Statistics in Different DVs

Factor	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Conversational Management	Male	2.84	0.53	133
	Female	2.86	0.49	274
	Total	2.85	0.50	407
Speech Acts	Male	3.09	0.44	133
	Female	3.23	0.43	274
	Total	3.18	0.44	407
Register	Male	2.86	0.63	133
	Female	3.09	0.61	274
	Total	3.01	0.62	407
Nonverbal Semiotics	Male	2.89	0.54	133
	Female	3.02	0.48	274
	Total	2.98	0.50	407
Request and Complaint	Male	2.93	0.53	133
	Female	3.09	0.52	274
	Total	3.04	0.53	407

Before conducting MANOVA, we checked the univariate normality assumption, and the total skewness measures stood between -2 and +2. Therefore, this supposition was acceptable. Moreover, the scatterplots inspected the multivariate normality without finding any violations. Likewise,

the equality Box's test surveying matrices related to covariance did not yield a significant value, thus the above-mentioned assumption was also tenable (See Table 3). Finally, Levene's test considering the equality related to variances of error (the test of the null hypothesis that the error variance of a dependent variable is equal across groups) did not return any significant results on any DVs; thus, the assumption was supported (see Table 4).

Table 3
Matrices for Equality of Covariance Box's Test

Box's M	15.46
F	1.04
df1	15.00
df2	288466.44
Sig.	0.42

Table 4
Equality of Error Variances Levene's Test

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Conversational Management	1.72	1	405	0.19
Speech Acts	2.47	1	405	0.12
Register	0.60	1	405	0.44
Nonverbal Semiotics	3.37	1	405	0.07
Request and Complaint	0.64	1	405	0.42

The results obtained out of the two-group MANOVA displayed that the general multivariate null hypothesis was not significantly different between the two gender groups on the five constructs of learners' perceived interactional competence (that is, conversational management, speech acts, register, nonverbal semiotics, and requests and complaints), and hence, was rejected. *F* Wilk's Lambda $(5, 401) = .94$, $p = .00$ (see Table 5), with partial eta squared of .06, is regarded as a small effect. As a result, we can get to the fact that gender has a small significant effect on learners' perceived interactional competence as a whole.

Table 5

Multivariate Tests for Investigating the Holistic Effect of Gender on five Constructs of Learners' Perceived Interactional Competence

Effect		Value	F	H df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.99	5433.28	5.0	401.0	.00	.99
	Wilks' Lambda	.01	5433.28	5.0	401.0	.00	.99
	Hotelling's Trace	67.75	5433.28	5.0	401.0	.00	.99
	Roy's Largest Root	67.75	5433.28	5.0	401.0	.00	.99
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.06	5.36	5.0	401.0	.00	.06
	Wilks' Lambda	.94	5.36	5.0	401.0	.00	.06
	Hotelling's Trace	.07	5.36	5.0	401.0	.00	.06
	Roy's Largest Root	.07	5.36	5.0	401.0	.00	.06

To have a more analytic perspective on students' differences considering their perceived interactional competence, five tests of univariate F (set in the two-group MANOVA) were utilized to explore the probable effects of gender, as an IV, on our five DVs (five extracted factors of learners' perceived interactional competence) separately. Univariate F tests (see Table 6) for those five factors illustrated that there were group differences on factor 2 (speech acts), $F_{(1, 405)} = 9.66$, $p = .00$, partial eta squared of .02 (regarded as a small effect), factor 3 (register), $F_{(1, 405)} = 11.71$, $p = .00$, partial eta squared of .03 (small effect), factor 4 (nonverbal semiotics), $F_{(1, 405)} = 6.05$, $p = .01$, partial eta squared of .01 (small effect), and factor 5 (requests and complaints), $F_{(1, 405)} = 8.59$, $p = .00$, partial eta squared of .02 (small effect) (See Tables 7 and 11 for more information regarding groups' means on different factors and their univariate tests). As a result, it can be determined that gender had a small, significant influence on four elements of learners' perceived interactional competence.

Table 6

Test of Between-subjects Effects

IV	DV	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	F1	.05	1	.05	.18	.67	.00
	F2	1.83	1	1.83	9.66	.00	.02
	F3	4.45	1	4.45	11.71	.00	.03
	F4	1.52	1	1.52	6.05	.01	.01
	F5	2.37	1	2.37	8.59	.00	.02
Error	F1	102.20	405	.25			

	F2	76.66	405	.19
	F3	153.91	405	.38
	F4	101.61	405	.25
	F5	111.67	405	.28
Total	F1	3418.38	407	
	F2	4205.31	407	
	F3	3857.44	407	
	F4	3708.76	407	
	F5	3873.67	407	
Corrected Total	F1	102.25	406	
	F2	78.49	406	
	F3	158.36	406	
	F4	103.13	406	
	F5	114.04	406	

Note: F1 = conversational management, F2 = speech acts, F3 = register, F4 = nonverbal semiotics, F5 = requests and complaints, IV = Independent Variable, DV= Dependent Variable

4.2. Discussion

This study was intended to investigate the impact of gender on IC and its sub-constructs as perceived by Iranian EFL learners. All in all, the results revealed that EFL learners differed regarding gender while perceiving aspects of IC. The impact is significant, though small, and influences four factors of learners' perceived interactional competence: namely, nonverbal semiotics, register, speech acts, as well as request and complaint. The findings approved that gender has no significant impact on the conversational management perception of EFL learners. Regarding the nonverbal semiotics sub-construct, the results are in accordance with several other studies stipulating that gender makes a difference in the decoding accuracy of nonverbal aspects, mainly referring to a female as superior to males in this respect (Chan et al., 2011). Although some may raise the idea of cultural difference and whether it can affect gender-based nonverbal perception and decoding, there exist cross-cultural studies in contrary indicating that the cultural variation based on the nationality of the participants can not necessarily moderate the impact of gender on the accuracy of decoding (Hall, 1978; Izard, 1971; Merten, 2005; Scherer et al., 2001).

The other facet of IC dealt with in this study was speech acts, and it was concluded that males and females perceive it differently. Although this study looked at the sub-construct of IC holistically, the findings also highlight and accord with several studies dealing with such a difference. In a study dealing with refusal strategy as a sub-compartment of speech acts, Abbas and Berowa (2022) state that different refusal strategies are utilized when learners deal with various initiating acts, but female learners are more indirect and polite. Although this aspect of speech acts has been considered in learners'

performance, the expectancy and the way refusals are perceived by both genders differ accordingly. In another study, Sharqawi and Anthony (2020) analyzed the effect of gender on the speech act of suggestion. They concluded that gender influenced the utilization of "structural and directness strategies of suggestions" (p. 62). The impact was not observed on the politeness aspect of suggestions.

In this study, register, as a sub-construct of IC, is realized as the learners' endeavor to consider their teacher as a role model and try to copy them in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures teachers apply while interacting with their learners. This facet seems to be novel in this respect. However, several studies addressed gender differentiation in the perception of teachers' pronunciation. In her study, Kassaian (2011) mentions that gender is not a factor influencing how English sounds are perceived or produced.

Request and complaint is another sub-construct of IC dealt with in this study. The question may arise why LICQ considers these two features separately from other aspects of speech as a sub-construct of IC. This is following Roever and Kasper's (2018) speculation that preliminaries such as pre-sequences to requests and refusals, as well as listener responses, are certainly recognizable aspects of IC that have the potential to be utilized as indicators of proficiency. Besides, this could have happened due to variations expected in speech act recognition in various cultures. As Schröter et al. (2017) stipulate, evidence suggests that speech act concepts are not consistent cross-culturally. What may seem as equal to the concepts of "requests" and "complaints" in Anglo-American and specifically in non-European languages "soon turns out to be at variance with these in crucial details on intentions, presuppositions, emotional involvement, evaluations and felicity conditions" (p. 180). In this study, according to the analyzed data, there exists a slightly noticeable difference in gender in the perception of the request and complaint facet of IC. The request comprehension aspect of the study contrasts with the study conducted by Shams and Afghari (2011). Their study concluded that no significant statistical difference existed between males and females in the comprehension of the speech acts of indirect requests. Not only the perception but the utilization of requests and complaint has proved to be different between males and females in several studies. Sikder (2021), in an endeavor to recognize the kind of requests made by the learners taking part in some online classes in Bangladesh, concluded that female learners made 62.5% of requests. On the other hand, this amount was about 37.5% of male learners. Compared with male learners, females expressed both abundantly more requests and, at the same time, made more polite requests.

The study depicted no difference between males and females regarding conversational management, including initiation, maintenance, and passing turns. Despite this result, other studies approve of the differences in turn-taking between males and females. In a study by Azhar and Iqbal (2018), they regarded

gender differences in how male and female learners take turns and participate in a classroom, including both genders. They concluded that the gender of the teacher played an essential role in forming the discourse in a class setting. Still, in both cases (either male or female instructors), male and female learners act differently. In another study, Yakushkina (2018) considered gender-based acts in turn-taking organizations in an EFL setting. She concluded that the formerly reputable assumption of gender-based variances in conversational forms, with the vital difference being addressee-based female vs. self-based male form, has been approved, to a different extent, precisely in an EFL setting. Gender is counted as an essential component of interactants' turn-taking behavior. The reason for this difference could be that we basically focus on the aspect of perception, and the way both males and females act in practice while actively utilizing this IC feature could be highly different.

The perception of factors different from what has been proposed by other scholars could be due to the difference in the contexts where IC has been scrutinized. The present study was conducted in an EFL context where language learners get through a different procedure for learning English compared to an ESL context. This is aligned with the findings of a study done by Walsh (2012), in which he concludes that classroom interactional competence is "highly context-specific" (p. 12). This is also highlighted by Campbell-Larsen (2015), who proposes to raise students' awareness about the centrality of interaction to shape the language to coincide with local, context-bound interactional needs. Campbell-Larsen argues that interaction co-construction and intersubjectivity are to be pursued more than an abstract, idealized, and easily testable model.

The results of the present study are also in some sense in accord with the findings of Ying-Shu Susan Liao's study (2012). His study targeted two pieces of face-to-face conversation in Taiwan. One is between a male English learner and a female native English speaker (MNNS-NS). The other is between a female English learner and a female native English speaker (FNNS-NS). In his study, despite some similarities, it was concluded that the male NNS tended to apply a self-repair strategy while the female tended to discuss with her NS partner to deal with conversation troubles. Moreover, the male NNS participant overused lexical fillers as his signature phrase in his utterances without any interactional meaning.

5. Conclusion and Implications

In this study, we have offered a primary characterization of IC. The notion of IC has encompassed the concept of learner co-constructive development in theory and research and its practice within the last 20 years. However, research on interactional competence has not dealt with holistically and at the IC sub-construct level the influence it may receive from the side of gender. Gender is considered a powerful and pervasive social variable. Even if a person has relatively uniform societal domains in terms of background, values, social class,

political morals, or faith, settling in a world that is equal regarding gender would be exceptional. Gender is continuously apparent and pertinent, and individuals contemplate it, react to it, and endorse it in countless conscious and unconscious manners.

The results gained from this study could be helpful for learners and teachers. First, learners could utilize the LICQ intending to assess themselves and evaluate their existing level of IC knowledge and how they perceive IC sub-constructs. As one of the most significant features of language learning, IC plays a crucial role in learners' accomplishment in a communicative setting. Hence, being aware of various aspects of this competence and how it is developing could positively influence learners in the classroom language learning context and throughout the real communicative contexts subsequently. Second, teachers could consider the different perceptions of male and female learners of IC as an influential aspect of realizing and developing IC aspects in language classroom settings and set expectations and interactional settings accordingly. On the other hand, the procedure could be utilized as an awareness-raising means to identify male and female learners' realization of the process of interactional competence development. It is generally believed that language students know how to interact successfully. Consequently, little attention is paid to teaching learners how to manage and develop this procedure based on their gender differences. In other words, taking into account the gender impact on IC, teachers could aid learners' realization and development of this competence with compensative measures based on the differences existing in males and females.

For further research in this area, it is suggested that the probable effect of other variables, including age, personality trait, and level of proficiency, be explored. Longitudinal case studies could also be conducted to examine the realization and development of IC and its sub-constructs through time. Culture as an influential factor in sociolinguistic and discursive areas could be considered, and the perception of IC could be considered and scrutinized accordingly.

Last but not least, there were certain limitations characterizing this research. Although the LICQ was verified to have solid psychometric features to measure such awareness, it is still a self-report instrument. As with all self-report instruments, researchers might consider the LICQ as one source of information about the existing level of learners' awareness of interactional competence. Moreover, as with any other measuring instrument, the already developed and validated LICQ utilized in this study was highly context-sensitive. Researchers are thus called to exercise caution while utilizing the scale. Finally, as noted, no significant difference was spotted between male and female language learners in the area of conversational management, as one of the main sub-construct of IC and despite many studies dealing with

differentiation in the utilization aspect of this sub-construct, which awaits further studies.

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