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## Investigating University Students' Attitudes towards Learning the English Language

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### Abstract

Attitudes towards language learning play a crucial role in the overall success of the acquisition process. Positive or negative perceptions can significantly influence learners' motivation, engagement, and performance. This study investigates university students' attitudes towards learning the English language, with a particular focus on identifying any significant differences based on gender and institutional affiliation. The research was conducted at the University of Sanghar, involving a purposive sample of 97 undergraduate students who use English as a medium of instruction. The study employed a quantitative research design, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS software to assess the general trends in learners' attitudes and to examine any demographic variations. The findings indicate that the participants generally possess a positive attitude towards learning English, reflecting a high level of acceptance and motivation to develop proficiency in the language. Moreover, the analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in attitudes between male and female students, nor between students from different departments or faculties within the university. These results suggest a consistent and favorable perception of English language learning across the study sample. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of nurturing such positive attitudes through supportive institutional policies and effective instructional strategies, which can further enhance students' language learning experiences. The findings may also inform curriculum developers and educators aiming to improve English language teaching at the university level in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Gender, cognitive component, affective component, behavioral component.

### Introduction

Several researchers (Dörnyei, 2005; Baker, 1992; Gardner, 1972) have attributed the lack of proficiency in foreign language learning to various influential factors. Among these, anxiety, motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, and attitudes are widely recognized as central variables affecting the learning process. Attitude, which serves as the focal point of the present study, has been identified as a key



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determinant in English language acquisition. Learners' attitudes represent a set of psychological indicators that exert a considerable influence on both language policy and the language learning process (Snow, 2007; Young, 2006).

As highlighted by Savignon (1997), the ultimate success in acquiring and using a second language largely depends on the learner's attitude. Students who maintain a positive attitude towards communicative language learning tend to develop the language more smoothly and effectively. In contrast, those who exhibit negative attitudes often encounter difficulties throughout the learning process. Gardner and Lambert (1972) further emphasized that the capacity to learn a second language is influenced not only by cognitive abilities and linguistic skills but also by learners' attitudes and perceptions. These attitudes can extend beyond individual learning to shape students' behaviors and beliefs toward different languages, reflecting their inclination and motivation to acquire the target language.

Supporting this perspective, Tahaineh and Daana (2013) noted that attitude significantly affects learners' behavior. It acts as an internal force that drives and directs behavior in a particular direction, thereby indirectly influencing second language performance. In this context, promoting and nurturing positive attitudes among students becomes essential for encouraging their desire and readiness to acquire additional language skills (Shah et al., 2025).

According to Dörnyei and Csizér (2002), negative attitudes can serve as psychological barriers to learning, while positive attitudes facilitate and enhance foreign language acquisition. Attitudes can vary along a continuum from negative to neutral to positive, and this spectrum plays a crucial role in determining the overall success or failure of a student's language learning journey. Thus, cultivating a positive outlook toward the target language can significantly ease the learning process, while a negative attitude can increase the difficulty. Additionally, gender has been identified as a potential factor influencing learners' attitudes. However, findings in this area remain inconsistent (Aydın, 2007; Kobayashi, 2002; Dörnyei & Shoaib, 2005; Atlı, 2008). Comparisons between male and female students often reveal differences in behavior, interests, and performance related to English language learning.

Attitudes toward second language acquisition are widely acknowledged as predictors of achievement in language learning (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005). In the Pakistani context, English is extensively used in education, employment, and interpersonal communication, making it a vital skill for students. Nonetheless, individual attitudes shaped by gender, institutional environment, and social context can influence students' motivation and performance in learning English. At the university level, where English is frequently used as the medium of instruction, students' attitudes may be shaped by various factors such as educational background, teaching methodologies, and peer influence. Gender-based disparities may also affect students' confidence and motivation to use a second language (Kobayashi, 2002; Dörnyei & Shoaib, 2005), yet there remains a lack of empirical research exploring how these factors influence attitudes among university students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate university students' attitudes—both positive and negative—toward learning English, and to examine whether gender and institutional differences significantly affect these attitudes.



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Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, enabling them to implement more effective strategies to enhance English language learning and create a more supportive academic environment. This study focuses specifically on university-level students and aims to contribute to the growing body of research on attitudes in second language acquisition.

### Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of Sanghar students toward learning the English language at the university level?
2. Is there a significance difference between male and female students in terms of their attitudes toward learning the English language?

### Literature Review

In the field of second and foreign language learning, attitudes are widely recognized as a significant psychological factor that influences learner performance. Numerous scholars have emphasized that attitudes play a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of language acquisition (Gardner, 1985). Attitudes are not solely psychological orientations; they also encompass social and emotional frameworks through which learners interpret their language learning experiences.

According to Allport (1967), attitudes are a mental and neural state of readiness, shaped through experience, and exert a dynamic influence on an individual's response to specific stimuli. Oppenheim (1992) further stated that attitudes can be expressed both in speech and behavior. Similarly, Ajzen (1988) defined attitude as a predisposition to respond either positively or negatively toward a person, object, concept, or event. These foundational theories collectively support the notion that attitudes are formed over time and significantly influence one's actions, beliefs, and decisions.

Gardner (1985) argued that attitudes are among the strongest predictors of success in language learning. Learners with positive attitudes toward English demonstrate higher motivation, persistence, and receptivity to language input, which ultimately improves their performance. In contrast, negative attitudes can create psychological barriers that hinder progress in language acquisition.

Triandis (1971) conceptualized attitudes as consisting of three interconnected components:

- **Cognitive Component:** This involves learners' beliefs and perceptions about the English language, often shaped by personal experiences and social influences, which affect how they value and interpret the challenges of learning English.
- **Affective Component:** This refers to learners' emotional responses toward English—whether they feel anxious, enthusiastic, or indifferent. Positive emotions are linked to increased motivation and engagement.
- **Behavioral Component:** This pertains to learners' actions based on their attitudes. Students with positive attitudes may be more likely to practice, participate in class, or seek additional resources to enhance their language skills.

These components collectively shape learners' approaches to studying English. Importantly, attitudes are not uniform; they vary in intensity, direction (positive



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or negative), and expression (public or private). They are also dynamic and subject to change due to experience, peer influence, and environmental factors (Oxford, 1994).

### **Empirical Studies on Attitudes Towards English Learning**

A broad range of empirical studies across diverse cultural and academic settings has explored how student attitudes impact English language learning. In Iran, Eshghinejad (2016) examined university students' attitudes and found that both male and female students generally held positive views, although notable differences emerged between the genders. The study utilized validated instruments, such as Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, ensuring reliability in data collection.

Gence and Aydın (2017) conducted a similar investigation in Turkey involving over 400 participants. Their findings revealed significant gender-based differences, with female students showing more positive attitudes. However, while attitudes and motivation were positively correlated, they did not directly predict academic performance or vary significantly across fields of study. Dehbozorgi (2012) explored the relationship between students' attitudes, risk-taking tendencies, and actual proficiency in English. Despite the prevalence of positive attitudes, the study found that this did not guarantee higher language achievement, suggesting that effective strategies and instructional support must complement positive attitudes.

In Bangladesh, Mamun et al. (2012) investigated how globalization influenced students' enthusiasm for learning English. Participants viewed English as a gateway to global opportunities and employment, which contributed to strong positive attitudes toward the language. A large-scale study by Latif et al. (2011) in Malaysia, involving over 700 participants, confirmed that students with positive attitudes toward English tended to perform better. The study also revealed that motivation and instrumental goals, such as job prospects, significantly shaped these attitudes.

### **Relevance to the Current Study**

These empirical studies provide valuable insights into the role of attitudes in English language learning across various contexts. However, there remains a notable gap in localized research, particularly in rural or underrepresented regions such as Sanghar, Pakistan. Students in these areas may face distinct challenges and possess unique motivations compared to their counterparts in urban or well-resourced environments. Furthermore, limited research has specifically examined gender-based differences in students' attitudes toward English in such contexts. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the attitudes of university students in Sanghar and assessing whether gender plays a significant role.

By understanding how attitudes—and gender differences—impact English learning in a localized setting, the findings of this study can inform educators and policymakers in designing more effective and contextually relevant English language programs tailored to the needs of learners in rural and semi-urban areas.



## Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate university students' attitudes toward learning the English language at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sanghar Campus. The primary objective was to identify students' overall attitudes and explore possible differences based on gender and academic background.

A total of 97 students participated in the study. All participants were enrolled at the Sanghar Campus of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University. To ensure diversity in perspectives, the sample included both male and female students representing various academic disciplines. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, which allowed the researcher to include readily accessible individuals from the university population.

The data collection instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire, which served as the sole method of data collection. The questionnaire comprised 13 closed-ended items based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The items were designed to assess several key dimensions of students' attitudes toward English language learning, including enjoyment, confidence, motivation, gender perspectives, and teaching preferences.

Data were collected using online distribution methods, and participants were informed in advance about the objectives of the study. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants gave their informed consent.

Following data collection, responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Measures such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency were calculated to determine overall trends and patterns in the students' responses. In addition, bar charts were utilized to visually represent the data and facilitate a clearer interpretation of students' attitudes. This analysis allowed for the identification of general patterns as well as any significant differences related to gender or other motivational factors in English language learning.

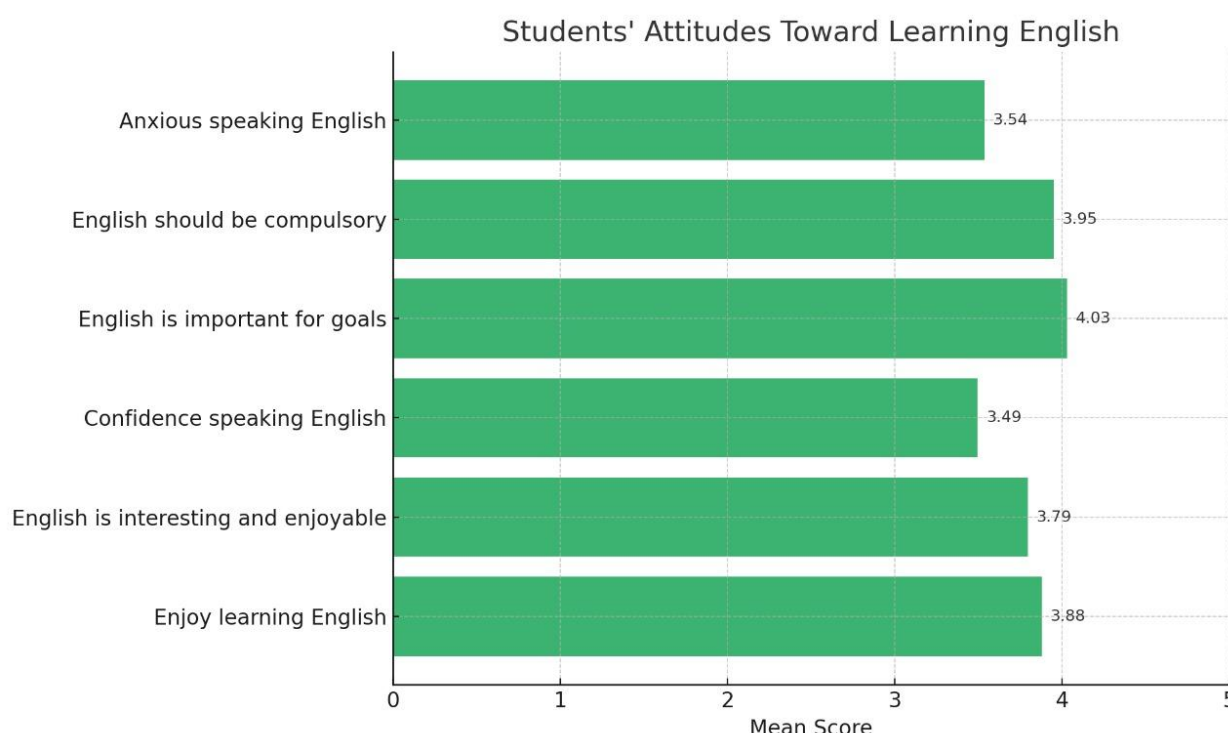
This methodological approach provided a reliable framework for exploring students' perceptions and offers a basis for understanding how various demographic variables influence their attitudes toward English language acquisition.

## Findings

**RQ1.** What are the attitudes of Sanghar students toward learning the English language at the university level?

The blow chat representation of students' responses highlights key dimensions of their attitudes toward learning the English language. The mean scores range from 3.49 to 4.03 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive attitudes among the respondents.





### 1. English is Important for Goals (Mean = 4.03)

This item received the highest mean score, showing that students strongly associate English proficiency with their personal, academic, and career aspirations. It reflects a practical and instrumental motivation, suggesting that learners see English as a gateway to success in a globalized world.

### 2. English Should Be Compulsory (Mean = 3.95)

A high level of agreement was also observed regarding the compulsory status of English in education. This indicates broad support for institutionalizing English learning as a mandatory component of academic curricula, further emphasizing its perceived importance.

### 3. Enjoy Learning English (Mean = 3.88)

Students generally enjoy learning English, as reflected by the strong mean score. This positive emotional orientation contributes significantly to learner motivation and suggests that English language instruction is being received well by the majority.

### 4. English is Interesting and Enjoyable (Mean = 3.79)

This score aligns with the previous item and confirms that learners find English engaging. The affective dimension of language learning is crucial, and this result points to a healthy emotional connection with the subject.

### 5. Anxious Speaking English (Mean = 3.54)

While this mean is moderately high, it represents a level of anxiety among students when speaking English. This finding signals a psychological barrier that may affect oral communication and classroom participation, despite overall positive attitudes.

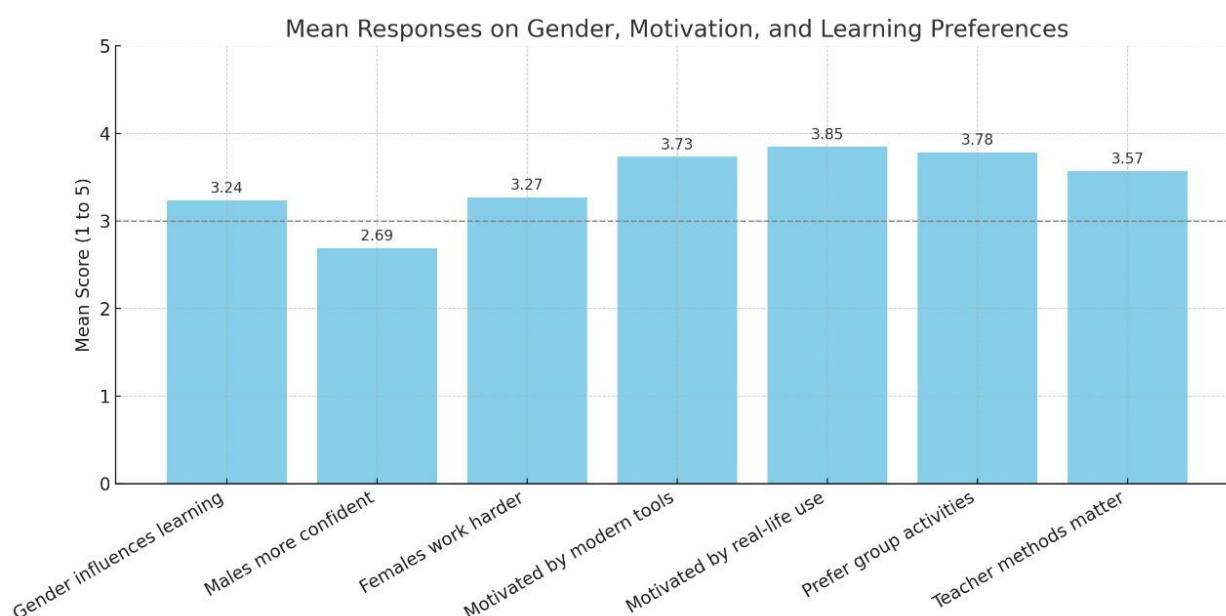


## 6. Confidence Speaking English (Mean = 3.49)

This item received the lowest mean score, indicating relatively low confidence in speaking English. Although students are motivated and value the language, their lack of self-assurance in speaking situations suggests the need for more speaking-focused practice and supportive classroom strategies.

**RQ2.** Is there a significance difference between male and female students in terms of their attitudes toward learning the English language?

The responses presented in this chart offer insights into students' perceptions related to gender roles, motivational drivers, and learning preferences in the context of English language acquisition. The mean scores range from 2.69 to 3.85, indicating a mix of moderate to strong agreement across various dimensions.



### 1. Motivated by Real-Life Use (Mean = 3.85)

This item received the highest mean score, indicating that practical relevance is the strongest motivator for students. Learners are highly driven when they perceive English as useful for employment, travel, social interaction, and digital engagement. This reinforces the idea that English is increasingly seen as a functional life skill, not just an academic subject.

### 2. Preference for Group Activities (Mean = 3.78)

Students express a clear preference for collaborative learning environments. Group activities and peer-based interactions are not only enjoyable but also help build communication skills and reduce anxiety. These findings support the integration of interactive, student-centered strategies in English language classrooms.

### 3. Motivated by Modern Tools (Mean = 3.73)

The high score in this item indicates a strong receptiveness to technology-enhanced learning. Students benefit from using multimedia, mobile apps, and digital resources in language acquisition. This suggests that incorporating modern educational tools can enhance motivation and engagement.



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#### **4. Teacher Methods Matter (Mean = 3.57)**

The effectiveness of teaching methodologies continues to be a key influence. Students recognize that supportive, engaging, and learner-friendly approaches from teachers significantly shape their learning experiences. This underscores the need for pedagogical training and innovation in instructional practices.

#### **5. Gender Influences Learning (Mean = 3.24)**

Responses to this item are neutral to moderately positive, indicating ambivalence or mixed views on whether gender plays a role in English language learning ability. This suggests that while some students may believe gender impacts learning, it is not seen as a dominant factor.

#### **6. Females Work Harder (Mean = 3.27)**

Students moderately agree with the perception that female students tend to be more hardworking. This belief could reflect observations of classroom behavior or societal expectations, but it remains a perception rather than a determinant of success.

#### **7. Males Are More Confident (Mean = 2.69)**

This item received the lowest mean score, suggesting that students generally reject the notion that male students are inherently more confident in learning English. This reflects a shift away from traditional gender stereotypes, signaling greater gender equity in attitudes toward English learning.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The findings reveal that students in Sanghar hold strongly positive attitudes toward learning English. They recognize its academic and professional value and express interest and enjoyment in learning the language. However, despite this motivation, students report moderate levels of confidence and experience anxiety when speaking English, particularly in public or classroom settings. This suggests a need to focus more on confidence-building and speaking practice in language instruction. Students are most motivated when English is connected to real-life applications such as jobs, communication, and global mobility. They show a strong preference for modern tools (e.g., multimedia, apps) and interactive, group-based learning activities. Teacher methods also significantly affect motivation. Gender-related beliefs do not strongly influence learning outcomes, as students generally reject stereotypes about male confidence and show neutral views on gender's role in learning.

### **Discussion**

The present study aims to gain a better understanding in regard of Sanghar University students' attitudes toward learning the English language. The study addressed whether students have positive or negative attitudes towards learning the English language, as well as the difference between males and females in regard to their attitudes.

Regarding the first question's result, it comes to be compatible with the results of (Al-Tamimi and Shuib, 2009; Abu-snoubar, 2017; Ziyad, 2015; Al Mamun et al) studies that revealed students generally have a positive attitude towards learning the English language. Many students showed interest in





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improving their speaking and communication skills, but reported challenges such as a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. Moreover, the data showed that students felt more engaged when modern teaching aids, such as multimedia and interactive platforms, were used in the classroom. However, this result contradicts with some previous studies (Abidin et al, 2012; shams, 2008) that positive attitudes toward learning the English language mean recorded a low score comparing to the negative attitudes one Dornyei and csizer (2002) stated that positive attitudes smooth the process of learning a foreign language; conversely, negative attitudes act as a psychological barrier against learning. Hence, attitude could be classified into three states: positive, neutral, and negative, which define the scope of failure or success, over the process of learning a foreign language. As for the second question, the result is consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Karatas (2016) and Jabeen (2011), which have disclosed that there is no significant difference observed between male and female students in learning the English language. The gender based responses showed some differences, with female students often demonstrating more interest and motivation in learning English. This aligns with findings from previous studies, which reported that female students tend to show more favorable attitudes towards English language learning (Tosun, 2012).

According to results, the importance of providing a supportive, interactive, and technologically enriched learning environment, along with training teachers to use student-centered methodologies effectively. The statement “English is important for goals” had the highest mean score (4.03), reflecting a strong awareness of the role English plays in professional success and higher education. The majority of Students also agreed that English should be made required at all educational levels, and most found the language interesting and enjoyable. However, the comparatively lower mean score for confidence in speaking English (3.49) and the moderate level of anxiety when speaking (3.54) suggest that students may face psychological obstacles such as fear of making errors or limited speaking practice.

According to analysis factors related to gender and learning preferences, students showed significant motivation when English learning was connected to real-life utility (mean = 3.85) and modern teaching tools like multimedia (mean = 3.73). They also expressed a preference for group activities and discussions (mean = 3.78), indicating a desire for more interactive and communicative learning environments.

It is interesting to note that while students mostly disagreed with the belief that males are more confident in learning English (mean = 2.69), they moderately agreed that females work harder (mean = 3.27). Responses to whether gender affects English learning ability were neutral (mean = 3.24), suggesting that the majority of students do not believe that gender is a major factor influencing English proficiency.

## Conclusion

The current study was conducted to investigate the attitudes of Sanghar students toward learning English at the university level. of the study show that a positive attitude toward learning English. They recognize its importance for future success and enjoy engaging in the language, especially when modern tools and interactive strategies are used. Despite their motivation, some students suffer



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from a lack of confidence in speaking, which could hinder their progress if not addressed.

Additionally, the study identified minimal gender-based differences in attitudes, suggesting that teaching strategies and individual motivation are more influential than gender in shaping English learning outcomes. To bridge the gap between attitude and performance, education institutions must place a high priority on practical and communicative methods that develop both skills and self-assurance.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance further university students' attitudes toward learning the English language:

1. **Enhance Speaking Practice Opportunities:** To address the lack of confidence and anxiety related to speaking English, it is crucial to increase structured speaking activities. Incorporating presentations, debates, group discussions, and oral practice sessions can significantly improve students' speaking confidence and reduce language-related anxiety.
2. **Integrate Educational Technology:** Students demonstrated a strong preference for learning through modern tools. Therefore, integrating multimedia resources, language learning applications, and interactive digital platforms into classroom instruction can sustain students' motivation and engagement, making the learning experience more dynamic and effective.
3. **Promote Interactive and Collaborative Learning:** To build communication skills and increase learner participation, teaching strategies should emphasize peer collaboration, group projects, role-plays, and other student-centered activities. These methods encourage teamwork, mutual support, and a comfortable environment for language use.
4. **Invest in Teacher Training and Methodological Development:** Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes. Professional development programs should focus on student-centered pedagogies, classroom interaction techniques, and anxiety-reducing strategies to create a more supportive and motivating language learning atmosphere.
5. **Ensure Gender-Inclusive Language Education:** While gender was not identified as a significant factor, addressing implicit gender biases and fostering inclusive practices is essential. Encouraging equal participation and support for all students, regardless of gender, will contribute to a more equitable and respectful learning environment.

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