

The Impact of Co-Education on Spoken Language in University Settings

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of co-education on spoken language development in university settings, with particular emphasis on opposite-gender interaction. With a quantitative approach, the data were collected through questionnaires consisting of 100 EFL university students. The study aims to investigate how mixed-gender communication influences specific language skills such as fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. The findings revealed that university life fosters language development, with lexical gains, increased motivation, and improved fluency observed through mixed-gender interaction. Participants reported higher confidence and recognized mixed-gender interaction as a valuable tool for language growth. Overall, the results highlight the positive role of co-education in enhancing spoken language proficiency.



Introduction

In Pakistan, tertiary education—including both undergraduate and graduate programs—largely follows a co-educational model, especially in private and many public universities. At this level, co-education brings learners from different genders, linguistic backgrounds, and socio-cultural environments in classroom settings where spoken language plays a crucial role in classroom discussions and academic Interaction. Co-education is the practice of educating males and females together in the same academic environment. This is practiced in higher education institutions across Pakistan. Its increasing acceptance reflects the country's broader push towards gender inclusion, cost efficiency, and exposure to real-world diversity.

Recent researches highlight the several ways in which a co-educational setting can influence the spoken language development, particularly by creating opportunities for verbal interaction and cultural exchange. Co-education enhances communication skills when learners engage in group discussions, class debates, which foster the ability to express their ideas confidentially and clearly. At the tertiary level, learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, where co-educational settings create a complex environment where code-mixing and code-switching are common strategies. While these can support comprehension, they may also hinder fluency in formal spoken English (CISSMP 2024).

The Pakistani cultural context further reflects challenges to spoken language development in co-educational systems. Societal conservatism, particularly in rural areas, often imposes psychological barriers such as shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence, which are less common in urban areas. Additionally, gender stereotypes, social pressure to conform, and fear of judgment may inhibit learners from expressing themselves, especially in an open class. (Delaney, 2024; OFSTED). However, such barriers are often temporary. As Tannen (1990) notes that the fear of being judged and lack of confidence last for a very short time, and as learners adjust, co-educational interaction may promote language development and greater confidence, which are later reflected in their spoken output.

Although co-education has become a common practice in Pakistani universities, there is limited empirical evidence on how opposite-gender interaction specifically impacts spoken language proficiency. The study explores the impacts of co-education, with a strong focus on opposite-gender interaction, on the development of spoken language among university students. The study emphasizes that such interaction may enhance specific skills related to spoken language, such as fluency, vocabulary building, and self-expression. Universities can create more effective environments that develop spoken language by understanding the key impacts of co-education, which the present study investigates.

Problem Statement

Although co-education is common among Pakistani universities, the effects of opposite-gender interaction in these institutions are overlooked on the development of spoken language. There is a strong need to investigate how opposite-gender interaction influences students' fluency, vocabulary building, and confidence in spoken English in a diverse academic environment.

Research Objectives

- i. To explore the role of opposite-gender interaction in enhancing language development among university students.
- ii. To investigate how communication with the opposite gender contributes to the improvement of specific language skills such as fluency, vocabulary, and confidence.
- iii. To identify specific language development outcomes that students attribute directly to their interactions with the opposite gender.

Research questions

- i. How does interaction with the opposite gender contribute to your overall language development?
- ii. How can communicating with the opposite gender help improve your speaking fluency, vocabulary, or confidence?
- iii. How do students describe the impact of communication with the opposite gender on their language proficiency?

Literature Review

With the emergence of English as a lingua franca, language development has been one of the vital concerns in educational settings, particularly where English is taught as a second or foreign language. In today's interconnected world, the focus on spoken and communicative language has significantly increased. The English language has attained a dynamic power worldwide and has become a means of communication to interact with each other. Co-educational settings, where males and females share the classrooms and learn together, provide this opportunity to enhance one's spoken proficiency through interactive engagement.

Tannen (1990) states that the style of males' and females' communication is different in many ways, and when they interact with each other, they shift their language from informal to formal styles. When they communicate in academic settings, they become more conscious of their language use. Although this sometimes may cause anxiety, this awareness promotes accurate language use, which leads to the development of better spoken communication skills.

Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis suggests that learners acquire language when they are exposed to the target language more as compared to their current level of language. Krashen's Input Hypothesis is one of the theories of language learning, which is based on the idea that interaction enhances language learning. In the co-educational settings, learners are exposed not only to the formal language but also to peer discourse, which varies in accuracy and lexical richness. This provides valuable linguistic input that influences the output of the learners in the future in their fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and lexical richness, particularly in classroom discussion, presentations, and peer activities.

Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis argues that input alone is not sufficient in learning a language, but when they are asked to produce the language themselves, especially in meaningful conversations. He argues that such production is fostered in co-education where learners are encouraged to participate in mixed-gender interaction, academic debates, group-based tasks, and peer-to-peer informal discussions.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory highlights the importance of social interaction in language development. The university learners work collectively and collaboratively, especially in mixed-gender groups and pairs, and mediate language learning. The concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) is relevant here, as learners support each other's spoken language progress through peer correction, negotiations, and consultations that create correction correction-friendly environment where learners are more motivated and actively participate in the learning process that further enhances spoken proficiency.

Holmes (2013) states that sociolinguistic factors such as politeness, face-saving strategies, and code-switching are more noticeable in socialization. Women tend to use more polite and cooperative language, and men use more assertive or informal language. She argues that such factors influence the choice of language a speaker chooses while interacting with the opposite gender.

Saeed and Khafaga (et el) (2022) explore how mixed-gender environments such as co-educational settings influence self-efficacy and engagement, highlighting that female university students often exhibit higher confidence and involvement. This suggests that in these mixed-gender contexts, female learners tend to appear more confident and engaged compared to their male counterparts.

Aashiq & Zahid (2024) find that limited exposure and low self-confidence block students' spoken English proficiency and language development, while motivational factors, including exposure to peers and opposite gender interaction, enhance fluency and lexical enrichment that develop language proficiency unconsciously.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983), which suggests that language develops through meaningful interaction with others. According to this theory, when learners engage in verbal exchanges, especially with diverse interlocutors, their comprehension and output improve due to negotiation of meaning and modified input.

Methodology

Research design

The study used a quantitative method to investigate the influence of conversation between opposite genders on the language development process in a university setting. The method was used to provide digital data that can easily be projected and understood by the learners and to avoid bias in the interpretation.

Participants

The participants of the study were EFL learners from different academic years at the University of Sahiwal, Pakistan. The participants in the study were 100 in total, aged from 20 to 25, belonging to diverse social and cultural backgrounds. To ensure equal representation, the sample consisted of both male and female learners. Out of 100 participants, we had 70% female and 30% male students.

Data collection

A comprehensive questionnaire was designed, consisting of closed-ended questions to get the quick pulse of the participants on the impacts of the opposite-gender interaction, either positive or negative. The questionnaire is designed with simple "yes" or "no" answers to ensure clarity and simplicity. The method focused on essential language development areas, such as confidence, fluency, and perceived development of language skills while communicating with the opposite gender.

Data analysis

The collected data will be tabulated and analyzed using digital tools to generate visual representations such as bar graphs, pie charts, 100% stacked horizontal bar, and other graphical formats, as well as Napkin AI for data visualization. The results will be projected through bar graphs, pie charts, and statistical steps that will make the interpretation easy to read and comprehend. Statistical steps will also be applied to ensure accurate and meaningful analysis.

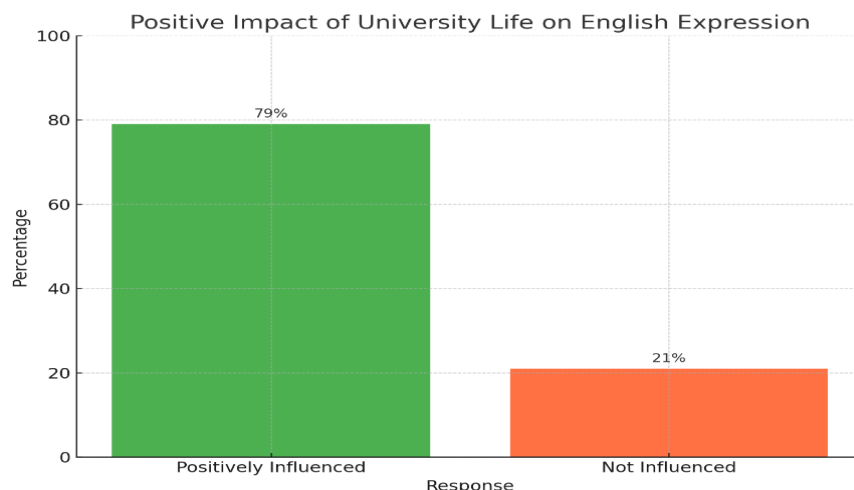
Ethical considerations

The research adhered to the ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity, honor, and safety of all the participants. The participants' privacy was strictly maintained. They were given the chance to withdraw at any time and told that the study would solely be used for academic purposes.

Findings

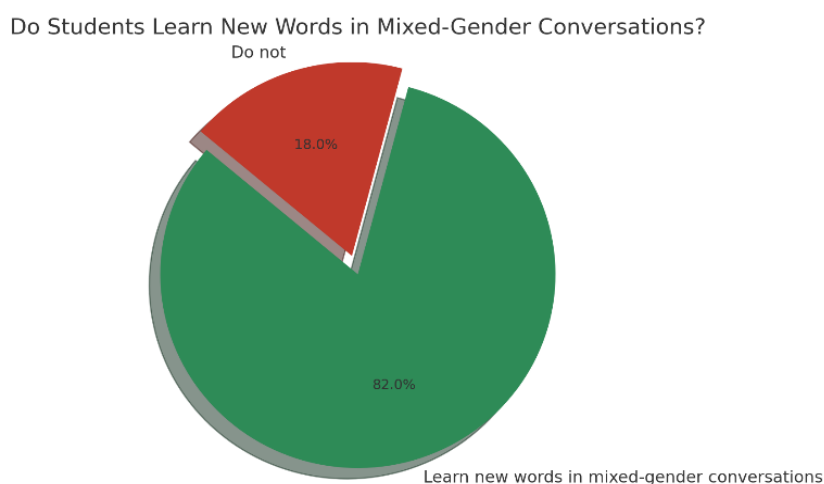
University Life as a Catalyst for Linguistic Development

Out of 100 participants, 79% of learners acknowledged that university life has greatly influenced the way they express themselves in English. This acknowledgement of the participants affirms the hypothesis of the study that the academic setting plays a crucial role in language development.



Lexical Acquisition Through Mixed-Gender Conversations

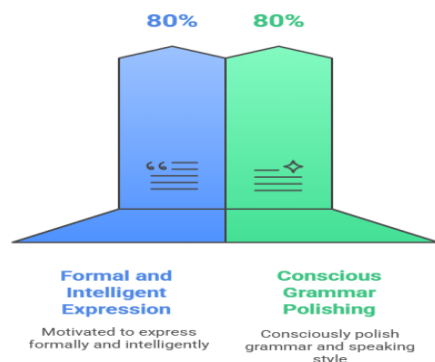
82% of participants acknowledged that they often learn new words and expressions in mixed-gender conversations. This aligns with the hypothesis of the study that males and females have somewhat different vocabulary, and while interacting with others, they express those words, and the opposite gender often finds this helpful in the process of language development. This indicates that mixed-gender settings enhance lexical enrichment and expose them to language awareness and its use.



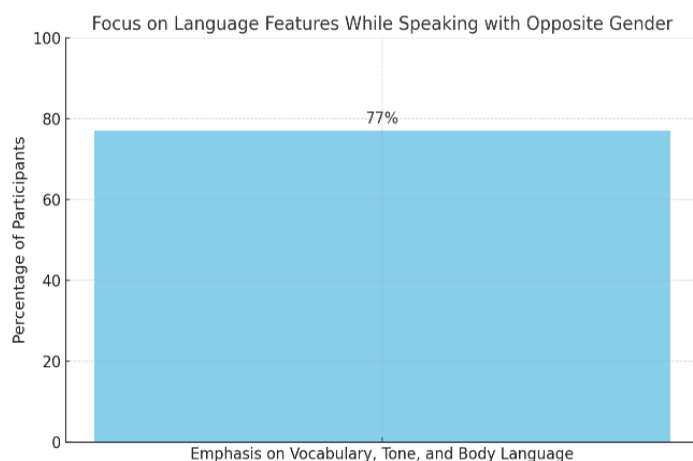
Motivation to Communicate More Formally in the Presence of the Opposite Gender

80% of participants stated that mixed-gender settings often motivate them to express themselves more formally and intelligently in English. 80% of participants stated that in mixed-gender conversations, they consciously polish their grammar and speaking style.

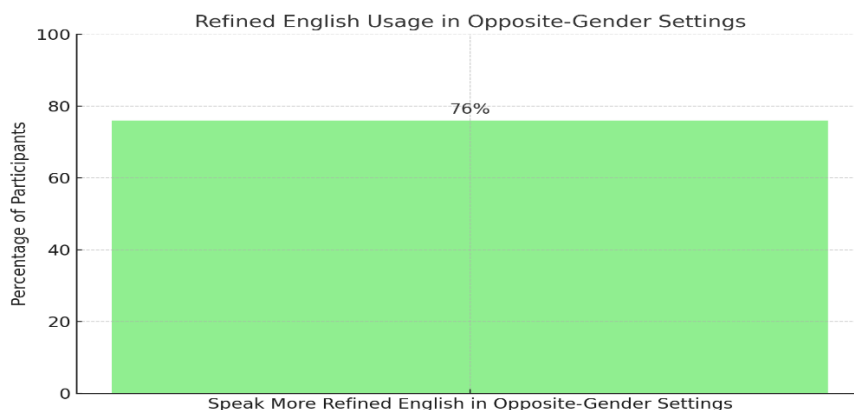
Impact of Mixed-Gender Settings on English Expression

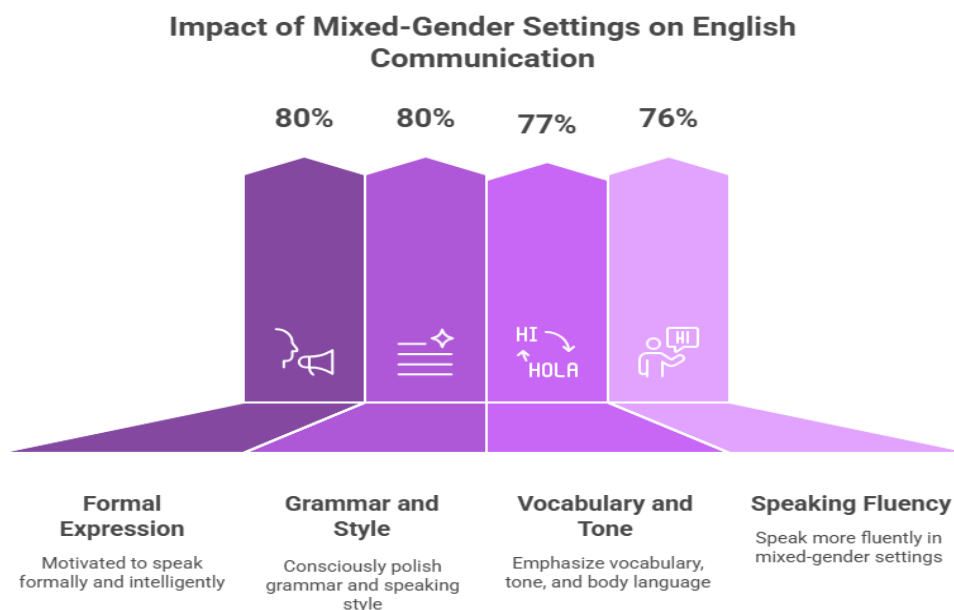


While speaking with the opposite gender in English language 77% of participants admitted that they put more emphasis on their vocabulary, tone, and body language.



Among the participants, 76% stated that they speak more refined English in opposite-gender settings compared to same-gender settings.

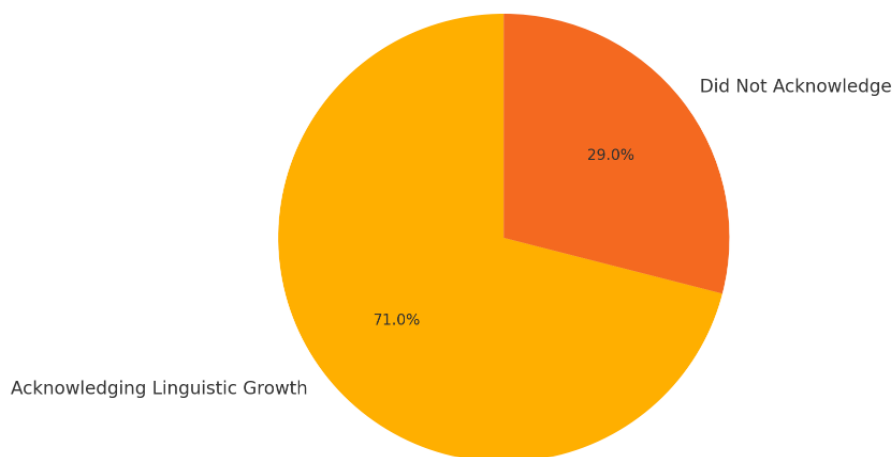




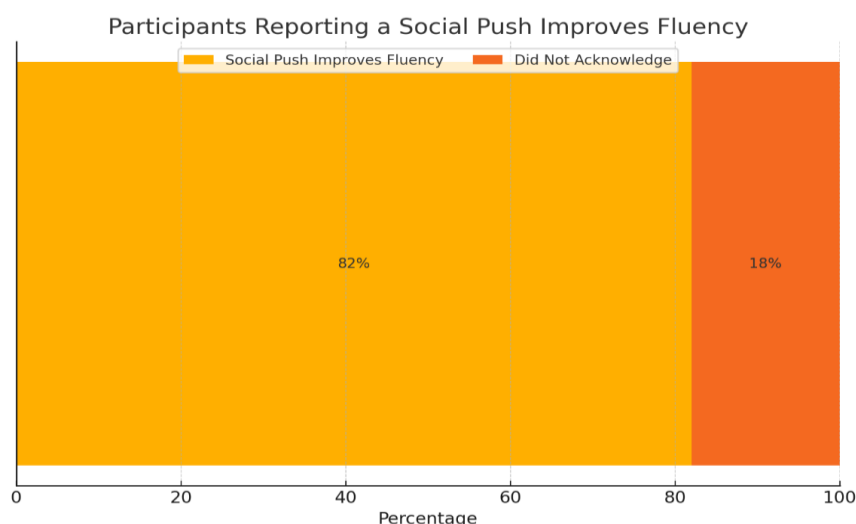
Confidence and Fluency Enhancement in Mixed-Gender Environments

71% of participants, both males and females, acknowledged that the presence of the opposite gender contributes to their personal and linguistic growth.

Participants Acknowledging Linguistic Growth from Opposite-Gender Interaction

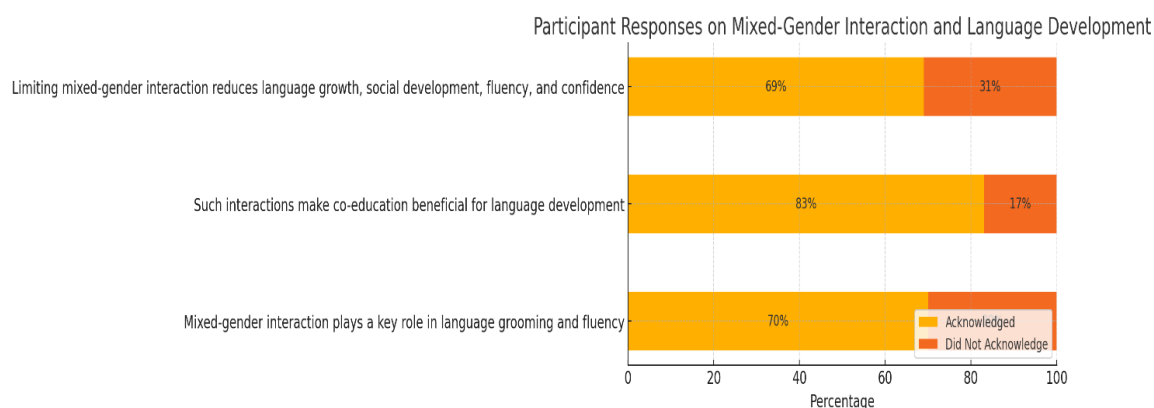


While talking to the opposite gender, they use more refined English language, and later on, this improves their fluency and confidence in case of projecting their topics in front of the class and teachers. Based on these findings, 82% of the participants expressed that such an environment provides motivation that improves their fluency. This reveals that co-educational exposure enhances self-confidence while communicating in English.



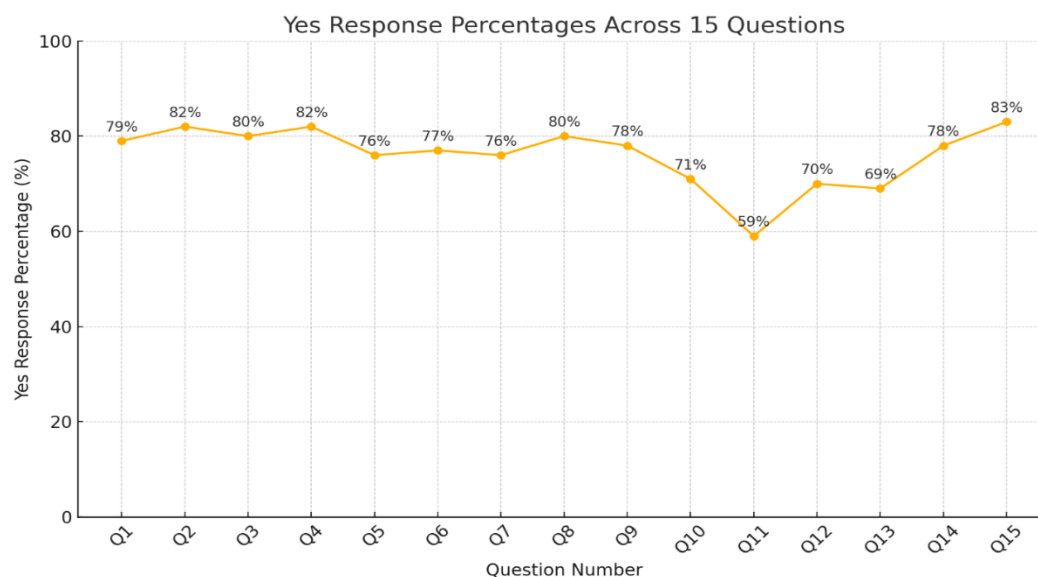
Mixed-Gender Interaction as a Tool for Language Development

70% of participants mentioned that mixed-gender interaction plays a vital role in language grooming and fluency. 83% of participants expressed that such interactions make co-education beneficial for language development. This supports inclusive communication environments where both genders can talk freely and exchange their views. On the other hand, we were also asked about the limitations of such conversations and their impacts on language development. 69% of the participants agreed that limiting mixed-gender interaction reduces language growth, social development, fluency, and confidence.



Overall Participant Attitudes Toward Gender-Based Language Development

Summing up all 15 questions from the provided questionnaire based on gender-based language development, approximately 75- 78% of participants responded “yes”, indicating strong support for the positive impacts of mixed-gender interactions on language development. This statistical analysis supports the hypothesis of the study that gender-based social interaction is a crucial element for second language learning and language development. The overall findings indicate that co-education settings are also significant for language development, either subconsciously or consciously. And 83% of the participants agreed that co-education is beneficial for language development.



The findings strongly support mixed-gender interaction socially, personally, and linguistically, highlighting their crucial roles in learners' confidence, fluency, and language growth.

Recommendations

This study is limited in its scope and method. Future research should involve larger samples and adopt longitudinal designs to track changes over time. Qualitative methods like interviews may provide deeper insights. Comparative studies between co-educational and single-gender settings, as well as exploration of sociolinguistic factors, are also recommended.

Conclusion

The study highlights the significant role of co-education, putting focus particularly on opposite-gender interaction, in enhancing spoken language development among university learners. The findings reveal that mixed-gender communication contributes positively to learners' fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence. Participants reported that they feel more motivated to use formal and accurate language in the presence of the opposite gender, leading to improved spoken proficiency. The overall results support the view that co-educational environments provide valuable opportunities for language growth, both socially and linguistically. Therefore, encouraging balanced gender interaction in academic settings can be an effective strategy for promoting language development among EFL learners.

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