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A Gender-Based Exploration of the Perceived Importance of Learning English Among PAAET Students, Kuwait

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***Abstract*—Research has established a dominant connection between learners' beliefs and their attitudes towards learning in general, and ultimately, their academic performance (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Block, 2012). This is why a constant revisit of what learners think about their language learning experiences should be considered as a springboard for reform in academic institutions. The current research utilises responses from a quantitative questionnaire administered to students from three vocational colleges in Kuwait to explore the key aspects concerning the nature of their language learning-related perceptions. Additionally, the study aims to investigate whether there are any gender-related differences in learners' perceptions of learning the English language, focusing on how these beliefs serve to optimise or hinder their learning experiences. Findings yield some interesting inferences regarding the differences between gender groups in their conceptualisation of the learning process, its difficulty, and their ability to approach it successfully. They also highlight the impact of the broader social and cultural context of each gender group, as well as their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in the learning process. Such inferences provide insight into the importance of considering the learners' perceptions when preparing and enacting plans for language courses in any institution, as well as considering the unique contextual aspects in which these learners are involved.**

***Index Terms*—gender differences, learners' perceptions, language learning**

I. Introduction

The power held by human beliefs as a catalyst guiding their reactions and practices in a given situation has been recognised in the literature on the nature of teaching and learning experiences, including its impact on motivation, self-efficacy, and learning behaviour (e.g., Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Bernat et al., 2009; Borg, 2015; Kormos et al., 2011; Verloop et al., 2001). Kalaja and Barcelos (2013, p. 5) posit that 'learner beliefs about aspects of language learning are much more crucial than was thought before in determining how learners approach their learning of second or foreign languages and as such are complex mediational tools intertwining with learner action in complex ways'. Yang and Kim (2011) suggest that factors like learners' depiction of their goals and social interactions can influence learning outcomes. They state that failing to 'personalize' the significance of learning can lead learners to lose their purpose, eventually hindering success.

Learners' beliefs have been explored from different perspectives in the literature. These views agree that beliefs are mediators that influence the type and direction of actions, guiding learning experiences. Put simply, the beliefs about their language learning enable them to construe their current scenarios and the individuals involved, e.g. teachers and peers, significantly affecting how they approach tasks and course content (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Ellis, 2008).

The relationship between beliefs and practices is dynamically bi-directional: beliefs can inform what learners do, learn, and how they learn (Yang & Kim, 2011), and can also be informed by learners' experiences, engagement with others, and actions by them and their surroundings (Mercer, 2011). This can impact their motivation (Yang & Kim, 2011; Yashima et al., 2017), learning strategies (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2013; Mercer, 2011), and autonomy and self-directed learning (Borg & AL-Busaidi, 2012). Understanding learners' beliefs and their relationship with these variables can help learners become aware of their beliefs and approach learning more effectively, abandoning ineffective methods for better ones. Yang and Kim (2011, p. 2) caution that unless beliefs have the power of imposing, normalising, or changing the course of actions, they can be deemed as 'vague ideas crafted from others' opinions, representing less successful remediation'.

Due to the complexity of defining beliefs, researchers have examined this domain from various perspectives, providing different insights into explaining the concept of learner beliefs. Ellis (2008) and Kalaja and Barcelos (2013) review key studies and highlight four main approaches: normative, metacognitive, contextual, and metaphor analysis. The normative approach is content-based and factually oriented, while the metacognitive approach considers the experiential side and the relationship between beliefs and practices as complex, involving learners' awareness of their

experiences. The contextual approach explores the learning process and the dynamic influence between beliefs and practices, emphasising the role of others in belief construction. Metaphor analysis creatively elicits beliefs related to the 'affective' aspects of learning, targeting tacit beliefs through metaphors about experiences. The normative perspective identifies trends within a context, whereas the contextual perspective views beliefs as constantly shaped by changing factors during learning.

II. Literature Review

The study examines gender differences in learners' beliefs about their English language learning experiences, challenging the depiction of learners as 'neutral, objective, and universal' (Block, 2012; Kubota & Chiang, 2013). Social differences influence how individuals see themselves and their sense of belonging to social groups like cultural, ethnic, and religious ones. Globalisation and multiculturalism impact gender roles, but people often base their gender identities on their collective sense of belonging (Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Despite ongoing 'self-reconstruction' of gender identities due to changing circumstances, attachment to social group membership persists. While research on gender differences in language learning focuses on differences in learning styles and strategies (Kormos et al., 2011; Aliakbari & Tazik, 2011), more attention is needed on how gender influences learners' beliefs and how to shape these for more effective language learning. Studying social differences helps understand how identities influence learning attitudes and behaviours. Research shows variations based on ethnic, national backgrounds (Sabatin & Ibrahim, 2013), gender (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), and socioeconomic status (Butler & Le, 2018). These factors affect motivation (Kormos et al., 2011), learning styles (Grainger, 2012), and attitudes towards learning (Bernat et al., 2009).

Specifically, gender differences were viewed as presupposed entities based on male superiority. Recent perspectives see these differences as contextual, influenced by sociocultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic factors (Kubota & Chiang, 2013). As such, gender differences are now seen as products of discursive construction, focusing on perceptions and actions rather than inherent traits. Social hierarchies often involve unequal power, affecting interactions, decisions, and worldviews. Studying these differences is vital for understanding their impact on language learning, teaching, and policy-making. Critical linguists like Appleby (2009) and Pennycook (2010) argue that gender roles are contextually defined, practised, and normalised within specific settings. In a 'symbolic power game' (Hua & Kramsch, 2016), roles are negotiated and shaped by constructs such as religion, norms, traditions, and politics, influencing perceived rights and duties. This interaction can impact language learning, guiding teaching experiences differently for each gender and shaping gendered identities. For instance, Menard-Warwick (2008) found that a teacher's beliefs led her to 'socially position' learners based on gender, ethnicity, social class, and socioeconomic status, which influenced her instruction.

It is also worth mentioning in this realm that language teaching experiences are linked to their contexts. The relationship between gender and social constructs can lead to different scenarios and inferences. For instance, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) found gender-based differences in learners' beliefs; females attributed success to personal intelligence, while males found learning more enjoyable. Chan (2018) confirmed gender differences in attitudes, with females focusing on native speaker models, and males tolerating non-native models. Cultural and contextual factors also posed challenges, but participants often defied gender stereotypes, influenced by self-image and self-agency (Kobayashi, 2002). Gordon (2004) noted Lao female immigrants in the US felt freer and learned more English than males. Exploring these differences helps educators improve their teaching strategies.

Discussing learners' gender beliefs highlights the concept's complexity and the need for ongoing research to understand how gender influences learning perceptions and approaches. Educators should recognise and explore diversities among learners to identify issues affecting their learning. Different perspectives offer valuable insights into these beliefs, practices, and reactions. Given the gender focus of this study, a normative approach to exploring learners' beliefs about their educational experiences (Ellis, 2008; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2013) can be a vital first step in understanding these beliefs.

III. Methodology

A. Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the following research questions:

- In what ways do students perceive their experience studying a foreign language?
- What beliefs do learners have about learning a foreign language differently based on their gender?

B. Context and Participants

The study involves three of the diploma-awarding colleges subsidised by the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET): the College of Technological Studies (CTS), the College of Nursing (CN), and the College of Health Sciences (CHS).

These colleges were established to meet Kuwait's need for technical manpower in the technological, health sciences, and nursing fields, providing vocational training that combines academic knowledge and practical skills.

The current study's context was chosen for specific reasons. It is a general perception in Kuwait that many PAAET learners have low English proficiency upon college admission, posing challenges in studying English at a tertiary level,

as confirmed by teachers in studies across different PAAET institutions (Alazemi & Alenezi, 2022; Alotaibi et al., 2014). Among PAAET colleges, CTS, CN, and CHS are mostly popular due to better employment prospects after graduation. To maintain consistency in the targeted sample, these colleges were purposefully selected for this study because they employ an EMI plan; other colleges mainly teach discipline courses in Arabic, with some GE and ESP courses by their English units. English is considered highly important in these three colleges, with even the higher administrative personnel placing greater importance on English in their programs. Thus, the environment in these colleges promotes a higher level of awareness about learning English, though some students may still struggle with their language courses.

The statistical data confirming gender gaps in targeted colleges is shown in Table 1. Existing gender imbalances include more males at CTS and more females at CN and CHS, likely due to the nature of professions after graduation. Males tend to dominate technical and field-related professions typical of CTS, while females are more engaged in nursing. It would be interesting to explore learners' views, especially from the opposing gender in each specialisation.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF REGISTERED STUDENTS IN THE TARGETED COLLEGES BASED ON GENDER

Academic year/ semester	*College*	*Males*	*Females*
2024- 2025 (second semester)	CHS	1290	1515
	CTS	5999	1099
	CN	803	1013
2023-2024 (First semester	CHS	1074	1347
	CTS	6093	779
	CN	719	913
2023-2024 (Second semester)	CHS	1162	1401
	CTS	6296	1044
	CN	765	

Learners at three levels—elementary/remedial, intermediate, and ESP—were recruited from three colleges to track changes in their beliefs across different English language program levels. Convenience sampling recruited participants as researchers approached class teachers to recruit students. Learners' approval was obtained, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Students received an electronic link to the questionnaire and completed it on their own devices.

The majority of the population is Kuwaiti, with a small percentage of learners from other nationalities, such as GCC citizens or scholarship recipients from different countries. While this may not foster multicultural learning, this consistency addresses issues related to gender differences linked to national backgrounds, as identified in previous studies (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007).

C. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data collection occurred in the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Horwitz's BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) (Horwitz, 1987) was used to understand learners' views on their language learning experiences and potential gender-based differences. Although BALLI is widely used to depict language learning beliefs (Alhamami, 2019; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Bidari, 2021), in this study, it was employed to highlight gender-related differences in the conceptualisation of language learning.

From a quantitative perspective, questionnaires help in catering to a large number of students. Since the current research does not aim to yield generalizable findings, it seeks to generate exploratory findings that can provide valuable insights into the researched topic (Nardi, 2018).

The questionnaire had five sections: Foreign language aptitude, perception of language learning difficulty, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. It included 31 items using a Likert scale. This tool was developed after reviewing regional and international ESP literature to identify key issues, especially gender and political aspects of the teacher-learner relationship. The items were translated and piloted for clarity.

IV. FINDINGS

A. BALLI Reliability & Validity

Factor analysis was used to investigate the applicability of BALLI's Arabic version in Kuwait. The factorability of students' responses was tested by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test (Table 2), indicating a KMO value of 0.824 (> 0.5) (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Bartlett's test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) provided a significant chi-square $\chi^2(210) = 2334.87$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the matrix is not an identity matrix and therefore confirming that the factor analysis is suitable (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Since KMO indicates

sample adequacy and Bartlett's sphericity test shows the item correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, we can proceed with the FA (Netemeyer et al., 2003).

TABLE 2
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.824
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2334.865
	df	210
	Sig.	< .001

The next step involves factor extraction and rotation. Principal axis factoring (PAF) was used to determine the underlying factors of a set of items (Burton & Mazerolle, 2011). Varimax rotation was used as an orthogonal rotational method to obtain interpretable results and because data meets priori assumptions. The results in Table 3, showing factor loadings of each BALLI item on each factor, revealed that the five-factor solution from the students' responses differs from BALLI item structure. The model included 21 valid items with acceptable communalities (h2) and MSA. Items with communalities below 0.2 and factor loadings below 0.3 were dropped, as they do not contribute to the variance.

The first factor included items 14, 19, 23, 26, and, 27; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies with motivation and expectations. It had an eigenvalue of 4.20, contributed to 9.12% of the variance, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.695, indicating satisfactory reliability level. The second factor included items 2, 6, 8, 10, 20, and, 25, suggesting beliefs about foreign language aptitude. This factor had an eigenvalue of 2.42, explained 7.74% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.608, indicating acceptable reliability. The third factor involved items 4, 12, 29, and, 30; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies with motivation and expectations. This factor had an eigenvalue of 1.28, explained 7.19% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.632, indicating acceptable reliability. The fourth factor involved items 7, 15, and, 16; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies. It had an eigenvalue of 1.23, explained 4.45% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.437, indicating low reliability. Finally, the fifth factor included items 5, 13, and, 17; suggesting beliefs about the nature of language learning. It had an eigenvalue of 1.09, explained 4.39% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.549, indicating questionable reliability.

TABLE 3
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE BALLI RESPONSES WITH PAF & VARIMAX ROTATION METHOD

	Factor Loadings						
BALLI item number and its description	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	h^2	**MSA**
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	.548					.408	.841
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	.628					.454	.845
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	.528					.419	.856
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	.401					.284	.878
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	.583					.422	.851
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.		.576				.364	.796
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.		.386				.211	.837
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.		.480				.262	.805
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.		.373				.259	.768
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.		.421				.206	.765
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.		.396				.328	.863
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.			.466			.330	.806
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.			.615			.439	.803
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.			.362			.204	.848
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.			.577			.391	.831
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.				.341		.306	.679
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.				.471		.331	.653
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.				.500		.262	.816
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.					.420	.389	.821
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.					.487	.338	.856
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.					.421	.299	.835
Eigenvalue	4.200	2.422	1.283	1.225	1.086		
% of Variance = 32.893%	9.121	7.740	7.192	4.452	4.388		
Cronbach's alpha = .757	.695	.608	.632	.437	.549		

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Based on factor analysis results, students' responses to the BALLI questionnaire were valid and reliable, with 32.89% total variance explained and Cronbach's alpha of 0.757, indicating reliability.

B. Research Question 1: In What Ways do Students Perceive Their Experience Studying a Foreign Language?

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, mean, median, and the standard deviation are presented in Table 4. Overall mean of the five beliefs equals 3.57 with a median of 3.53 and standard deviation of 0.372, indicating average to good beliefs about their experience studying a foreign language. They had the highest beliefs regarding motivations and expectations, scoring a mean of 4.10 with a median of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.543. The lowest beliefs were about learning and communication strategies, with a mean of 3.32, median of 3.33, and standard deviation of 0.552; followed by difficulty of language learning with a mean of 3.37, median of 3.33, and SD of 0.671. Foreign language aptitude had a mean of 3.49, a median of 3.44, and SD of 0.454. Lastly, the nature of language learning had a mean of 3.51, a median of 3.50, and SD of 0.522.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF BALLI AREAS AND BELIEFS

BALLI Items	Frequency					Descriptives		
	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Md	StD
Foreign Language Aptitude	**(2.5)**	**(8.7)**	**(22.0)**	**(38.0)**	**(28.7)**	**3.49**	**3.44**	**.545**
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	4 (.7)	24 (4.0)	86 (14.3)	248 (41.2)	240 (39.9)	4.16	4.00	.859
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	12 (2.0)	46 (7.6)	143 (23.8)	263 (43.7)	138 (22.9)	3.78	4.00	.951
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	4 (.7)	11 (1.8)	74 (12.3)	287 (47.7)	226 (37.5)	4.20	4.00	.771
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.	20 (3.3)	86 (14.3)	165 (27.4)	202 (33.6)	129 (21.4)	3.55	4.00	1.078
18. Women are better than men at learning languages.	22 (3.7)	82 (13.6)	208 (34.6)	197 (32.7)	93 (15.4)	3.43	3.00	1.023
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	11 (1.8)	25 (4.2)	175 (29.1)	259 (43.0)	132 (21.9)	3.79	4.00	.893
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	26 (4.3)	93 (15.4)	154 (25.6)	207 (34.4)	122 (20.3)	3.51	4.00	1.107
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.	22 (3.7)	80 (13.3)	123 (20.4)	203 (33.7)	174 (28.9)	3.71	4.00	1.128
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	15 (2.5)	27 (4.5)	65 (10.8)	194 (32.2)	301 (50.0)	4.23	4.50	.981
Difficulty of Language Learning	**(1.6)**	**(7.1)**	**(16.4)**	**(40.9)**	**(34.1)**	**3.37**	**3.33**	**.671**
3. Some languages are easier than others.	1 (.2)	10 (1.7)	31 (5.1)	207 (34.4)	353 (58.6)	4.50	5.00	.688
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	14 (2.3)	66 (11.0)	146 (24.3)	246 (40.9)	130 (21.6)	3.68	4.00	1.004
24. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	13 (2.2)	53 (8.8)	119 (19.8)	285 (47.3)	132 (21.9)	3.78	4.00	.958
Nature of Language Learning	**(6.3)**	**(13.7)**	**(21.3)**	**(35.9)**	**(22.8)**	**3.51**	**3.50**	**.522**
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.	30 (5.0)	87 (14.5)	192 (31.9)	213 (35.4)	80 (13.3)	3.38	3.00	1.044
9. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	4 (.7)	22 (3.7)	75 (12.5)	317 (52.7)	184 (30.6)	4.09	4.00	.793
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	12 (2.0)	12 (2.0)	70 (11.6)	215 (35.7)	293 (48.7)	4.27	4.00	.889
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	23 (3.8)	99 (16.4)	157 (26.1)	236 (39.2)	87 (14.5)	3.44	4.00	1.047
21. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	144 (23.9)	236 (39.2)	126 (20.9)	49 (8.1)	47 (7.8)	2.37	2.00	1.159
22. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translation.	13 (2.2)	38 (6.3)	150 (24.9)	268 (44.5)	133 (22.1)	3.78	4.00	.933
Learning and Communication Strategies	**(6.5)**	**(18.6)**	**(30.0)**	**(26.6)**	**(18.3)**	**3.32**	**3.33**	**.552**
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	2 (.3)	9 (1.5)	56 (9.3)	252 (41.9)	283 (47.0)	4.34	4.00	.735
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	42 (7.0)	149 (24.8)	213 (35.4)	145 (24.1)	53 (8.8)	3.03	3.00	1.059
11. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	85 (14.1)	92 (15.3)	285 (47.3)	63 (10.5)	77 (12.8)	2.93	3.00	1.153
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	40 (6.6)	176 (29.2)	175 (29.1)	138 (22.9)	73 (12.1)	3.05	3.00	1.128
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	19 (3.2)	131 (21.8)	197 (32.7)	169 (28.1)	86 (14.3)	3.29	3.00	1.057
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	48 (8.0)	115 (19.1)	156 (25.9)	193 (32.1)	90 (15.0)	3.27	3.00	1.166
Motivations and Expectations	**(11.1)**	**(20.9)**	**(19.3)**	**(26.7)**	**(21.9)**	**4.10**	**4.17**	**.543**
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	-	5 (.8)	23 (3.8)	218 (36.2)	356 (59.1)	4.54	5.00	.613
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.	58 (9.6)	155 (25.7)	174 (28.9)	126 (20.9)	89 (14.8)	3.05	3.00	1.201
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	23 (3.8)	67 (11.1)	142 (23.6)	241 (40.0)	129 (21.4)	3.64	4.00	1.055
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	58 (9.6)	169 (28.1)	153 (25.4)	147 (24.4)	75 (12.5)	3.02	3.00	1.188
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	143 (23.8)	166 (27.6)	116 (19.3)	111 (18.4)	66 (11.0)	2.65	2.00	1.316
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	120 (19.9)	193 (32.1)	90 (15.0)	122 (20.3)	77 (12.8)	2.74	2.00	1.329
Total	**(5.7)**	**(14.0)**	**(22.4)**	**(33.3)**	**(24.6)**	**3.57**	**3.53**	**.372**

Note: SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly agree, M=Mean, Md=Median, StD=Standard Deviation.

(a). Foreign Language Aptitude

Students had average beliefs about foreign language aptitude, with a mean of 3.49±0.454, and a range of means between 3.43 for “Women are better than men at learning languages” and 4.23 for “Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language”, indicating average to high perceptions. Percentage of agreement ranged from 48.2% for “Women are better than men at learning languages” to 85.2% for “It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one”. That is, 85.2% of students believe that it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one. More insights about foreign language aptitude are as follows:

- 82.2% of students believe everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.
- 81.1% of students believe learning a foreign language is easier for children than adults.
- 66.6% of students believe some people are born with a special ability to learn a foreign language.
- 65.0% of students believe that people who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.
- 62.6% of students believe Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.
- 55.0% of students believe they can learn foreign languages.
- 54.7% of students believe people who speak different languages are very intelligent.
- 48.2% of students believe women are better than men at learning languages.

(b). Difficulty of Language Learning

Students had average beliefs about language learning difficulty, with a mean of 3.37±0.671, and a range between 3.68 and 4.50, indicating good beliefs. For instance, 93.0% think some languages are easier, 69.3% say reading and writing English is easier than speaking and understanding, and 62.5% believe speaking is easier than understanding a foreign language.

(c). Nature of Language Learning

Students generally understood language learning well, with a mean of 3.51±0.522. Beliefs ranged from 2.37 for “learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects” to 4.27 for “learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words." The analysis revealed:

- 84.4% of students think learning a foreign language mainly involves memorising vocabulary words.
- 83.2% of students believe learning English is best in an English-speaking country.
- 66.6% of students think learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translation.
- 53.7% of students think learning a foreign language mainly involves learning lots of grammar rules.
- 48.7% of students believe knowing foreign culture is necessary to speak the language.
- 15.9% of students believe learning a foreign language differs from other academic subjects.

(d). Learning and Communication Strategies

Students had lower belief levels in learning and communication strategies, with a mean of 3.32±0.552. Scores ranged from 2.93 for “it’s OK to guess if you don’t know a word in English” to 4.34 for “it is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation." The following results are also found:

- 88.9% of students believe it is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.
- 47.0% of students think that if beginning students make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
- 42.4% of students feel shy when speaking English with others.
- 35.0% of students believe it is important to repeat and practice often.
- 32.9% of students think they shouldn’t speak English until they can do so correctly.
- 23.3% of students think it’s OK to guess when unsure of a word in English.

(e). Motivations and Expectations

Students appeared motivated with high learning expectations, averaging 4.10±0.543. Ratings ranged from 2.65 for “Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language” to 4.54 for “I believe I will learn to speak English very well”. Students also held additional beliefs:

- 95.3% of students believe they will learn to speak English well.
- 61.5% of students believe mastering English will improve their opportunities to use it.
- 36.9% of students think learning English well will get them better job opportunities.
- 35.7% of students would approach English speakers to practice speaking the language.
- 33.1% of students want to learn the language to connect with its speakers better.

C. Research Question 2: What Beliefs do Learners Have About Learning a Foreign Language Differently Based on Their Gender?

To answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted to find differences between female and male students' beliefs about learning a foreign language. Results in Table 5 show no significant difference in mean scores, $t(518.38) = -.487$, $p = 0.626$. Significant differences between male and female students were found in

Foreign Language Aptitude, Difficulty of Language Learning, and Learning and Communication Strategies. No differences appeared in the Nature of Language Learning and Motivations and Expectations scores. More differences were observed in belief items, as explained below.

TABLE 5
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST OF STUDENTS' BELIEFS BY GENDER

	Gender							
	Female (n=219)		Male (n=383)		T test			
BALLI Items	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	***t***	***df***	**Sig.**	***d***
Foreign Language Aptitude	**3.55**	**.439**	**3.46**	**.459**	**2.353**	**600**	**.019***	**.199**
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	4.23	.809	4.11	.885	1.561	600	.119	.132
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	3.34	1.098	3.23	1.202	1.095	600	.274	.093
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	3.51	.930	3.38	1.071	1.507	507.34	.132	.123
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.	3.67	.945	3.85	.921	-2.276	600	.023*	-.193
18. Women are better than men at learning languages.	3.28	1.106	2.72	1.132	5.917	600	<.001**	.501
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.39	1.096	2.36	1.195	.336	600	.737	.028
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	3.56	1.036	3.48	1.146	.840	492.18	.401	.069
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.	3.81	.850	3.78	.918	.458	600	.647	.039
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	4.19	.994	4.25	.973	-.763	600	.446	-.065
Difficulty of Language Learning	**3.24**	**.635**	**3.45**	**.679**	**-3.710**	**600**	**<.001****	**-.314**
3. Some languages are easier than others.	3.60	.895	3.88	.969	-3.471	600	<.001**	-.294
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	3.16	1.046	3.36	1.056	-2.299	600	.022*	-.195
24. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	2.96	1.192	3.11	1.205	-1.412	600	.158	-.120
Nature of Language Learning	**3.48**	**.491**	**3.53**	**.540**	**-.998**	**600**	**.319**	**-.085**
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.	3.02	1.127	3.02	1.222	.045	600	.964	.004
9. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	3.46	1.154	3.85	1.088	-4.071	432.27	<.001**	-.350
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	4.16	.742	4.04	.819	1.788	600	.074	.152
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	3.47	1.051	3.42	1.045	.615	600	.539	.052
21. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	3.72	.909	3.81	.984	-1.149	600	.251	-.097
22. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translation.	3.05	.971	3.02	1.107	.452	503.77	.652	.037
Learning and Communication Strategies	**3.39**	**.518**	**3.28**	**.567**	**2.331**	**600**	**.020***	**.198**
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	3.54	1.032	3.56	1.105	-.197	600	.844	-.017
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	3.02	1.104	3.06	1.142	-.464	600	.643	-.039
11. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	3.55	.889	3.27	1.112	3.367	537.27	<.001**	.269
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	4.59	.594	4.50	.622	1.730	600	.084	.147
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	3.00	1.341	2.45	1.261	4.992	600	<.001**	.423
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	2.61	1.253	2.81	1.368	-1.823	487.29	.069	-.151
Motivations and Expectations	**4.09**	**.495**	**4.11**	**.569**	**-.446**	**600**	**.565**	**-.038**
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	4.20	.750	4.20	.783	.008	600	.994	.001
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.	3.57	1.022	3.75	.989	-2.190	600	.029*	-.186
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	4.47	.679	4.51	.693	-.834	600	.405	-.071
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	4.27	.849	4.27	.912	-.028	600	.977	-.002
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	3.62	.962	3.66	1.105	-.452	506.49	.652	-.037
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	4.43	.690	4.28	.755	2.449	600	.015*	.207
Total	**3.55**	**.337**	**3.57**	**.400**	**-.487**	**518.38**	**.626**	**-.039**

(a). Foreign Language Aptitude

The independent-sample t-test in Table 5 showed a significant difference between male and female students' beliefs about foreign language aptitude, t(600) = 2.353, p = 0.019, Cohen's d = 0.199, indicating a small effect. Female students scored higher (M = 3.55, SD = 0.439) than males (M = 3.46, SD = 0.459), suggesting that females hold stronger beliefs about foreign language aptitude.

At the item level, female students scored lower on "I have the ability to learn the foreign language" (M = 3.67, SD = 0.945), than males (M = 3.85, SD = 0.921), t(600) = -2.276, p = 0.023; Cohen's d = -0.193, a small effect, suggesting males are more confident. Conversely, female students rated higher on "Women are better than men at learning languages" (M = 3.28, SD = 1.106), than males (M = 2.72, SD = 1.132), t(600) = 5.917, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = 0.501, a

moderate effect, indicating higher expectations for women.

(b). Difficulty of Language Learning

The independent t-test showed male students scored higher (M = 3.45, SD = 0.679) than female students (M = 3.24, SD = 0.635) on language learning difficulty, t(600) = -3.710, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = -0.314, a moderate effect. Male students are more likely to believe language learning is difficult.

Testing the item beliefs, male students were found to significantly have higher mean score of "Some languages are easier than others" (M = 3.88, SD = 0.969), then females (M = 3.60, SD = 0.895), t(600) = -3.471, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = -0.294, indicating moderate effect. It can be concluded that male students are more likely to believe that some languages are easier to learn than female students. Moreover, male students also were more likely to believe that it is easier to speak than understand a foreign language; i.e., male students had significantly higher mean score of "It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language" (M = 3.36, SD = 1.056), compared to female students (M = 3.16, SD = 1.046), t(600) = -2.299, p = 0.022; Cohen's d = -0.195, indicating small effect.

(c). Nature of Language Learning

The independent t-test revealed no significant difference between male and female student beliefs about the nature of language learning, t(600) = -0.998, p = 0.319. However, there was one significant difference in one of the item beliefs. Male students had significantly higher mean score of "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country" (M = 3.85, SD = 1.088), compared to females (M = 3.46, SD = 1.154), t(432.27) = -4.071, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = -0.350, indicating a moderate effect.

(d). Learning and Communication Strategies

The independent t-test showed a significant difference between female and male students' beliefs about learning and communication strategies, t(600) = 2.331, p = 0.020; Cohen's d = 0.198, indicating a weak effect. Female students tend to perceive learning and communication strategies more positively. More specifically, female students had significantly higher mean score of "it's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English" (M = 3.55, SD = 0.889), compared to males (M = 3.27, SD = 1.112), t(537.27) = 3.367, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = 0.269, indicating moderate effect. Also, female students had a significantly higher mean score of "I feel shy speaking English with other people" (M = 3.00, SD = 1.341) than males (M = 2.45, SD = 1.261); t(600) = 4.992, p < 0.001; Cohen's d = 0.423, indicating a moderate effect.

(e). Motivations and Expectations

The independent t-tests showed no significant differences between male and female students' beliefs about motivations and expectations, t(600) = -0.446, p = 0.565. However, two significant differences emerged in item beliefs. Male students scored higher on "If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language" (M = 3.75, SD = 0.989), than females (M = 3.57, SD = 1.022), t(600) = -2.190, p = 0.029; Cohen's d = -0.186, a weak effect. This confirms the results of the learning and communication strategies, where female students were shyer about speaking English. Conversely, females scored higher on "I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better" (M = 4.43, SD = 0.690) than males (M = 4.28, SD = 0.755), t(600) = 2.449, p = 0.015; Cohen's d = 0.207, a moderate effect.

V. Discussion

Overall, students expressed moderately positive views about their ability to learn foreign languages. Many agreed with statements like "Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language," reflecting a general optimism. However, when looking at gender differences, female students tended to hold stronger beliefs in natural language aptitude than their male peers. This aligns with research suggesting that females often perceive themselves as more capable in language learning, possibly due to cultural and social expectations (Li & McLellan, 2021; Li et al., 2025). Interestingly, male students were more confident in their own ability to learn a language, as indicated by the stronger agreement with statements like "I have the ability to learn a foreign language." Such patterns echo Bernat and Lloyd's (2007) findings, where female learners linked success in language learning to intelligence and perseverance, while male learners often showed more enthusiasm and confidence when approaching the learning process. In different parts of the world such as China (Ma et al., 2025), Saudi (Al-Khresheh, 2024) and Iran (Namaziandost et al., 2020), female students owned a higher sense of agency in the domain of learning another language, ultimately deeming the process of language learning as a 'feminine domain' (Li & McLellan, 2021). Such findings provide evidence for acknowledging the role of gender-based identity when planning and implementing educational practices, cultivating a high sense of self-efficacy found in females while raising male learners' awareness of their language learning potentials, regardless of the stereotypical images each gender group holds.

Students' views on the difficulty of language learning were moderate. Most agreed that "Some languages are easier than others," with male students more likely to see learning a language as generally difficult. Female learners seemed to be more meticulous about the different aspects of language learning. This perception may shape how they approach learning, possibly leading to more cautious or less persistent behaviours among males. In general, the findings support the work of Kormos et al. (2011), who highlight how motivation and perceived difficulty influence language learning

choices and effort. These results could also be interpreted in light of female learners' perceptions of their self-efficacy in language learning, as shown above.

Motivation stood out as a decisive factor, with students showing high hopes for the benefits of learning English, such as better job prospects or personal growth. Gender differences were relatively minor, though male students reported being more likely to initiate conversations in English. Meanwhile, female students expressed a stronger emotional desire to connect with English speakers. These findings support Yang and Kim's (2011) emphasis on aligning learning goals with personal interests to keep students engaged and motivated. The motivational factor could also be seen in the context of learners' conceptualisations of their identities as language learners.

Students also seemed to have a stronger understanding of what language learning involves, with strong agreement on the importance of vocabulary and grammar. Both male and female students generally shared these views. However, male students were more likely to believe that "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country," pointing to a preference for engaging in immersive experiences as a proxy for better language learning. This reflects Ellis's (2008) view that learners' beliefs are often shaped by their surrounding environment and personal experiences. As described by Kutuk (2023), the significant others surrounding learners contributed to how they approached their learning experience, considering certain language aspects (i.e. pronunciation) as more feminine and accordingly showing unwillingness towards working on the improvement of the skill. In general, and as explained by Namaziandost et al. (2020), female learners have a higher tendency towards dealing with linguistic obstacles, making them more perseverant in their language learning experiences. This, as described by Kutuk (2023), was more socially expected of female learners, as females were generally seen as more persistent. Such conceptualisation puts female learners at an advantage in achieving a more sustainable approach to learning, since they are expected to have better coping mechanisms when facing linguistic hurdles.

When it came to strategies for learning and communicating in a new language, students reported lower confidence, especially in taking risks, such as guessing words based on contextual clues. Female students were more open to guessing when unsure of a word, while male students were more hesitant. This may be linked to cultural attitudes toward risk and public speaking. Additionally, many female students reported feeling shy when speaking English. Although such findings might be convergent with those found in studies such as Al-Khresheh (2024), this highlights the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety for both gender groups. Such insights also align with Mercer's (2011) notion that learners' beliefs about social interaction and self-efficacy can strongly impact their learning strategies. In the study of Kutuk (2023, p. 14) for example, female learners were seen to have "a greater sense of organization and a more systematic approach to their language learning", while Al-Khresheh (2024) reported females' superiority over their male counterparts when it comes to productive language skills (i.e. speaking). This was attributed by Kutuk (2023) to factors such as the self-image males held of themselves and the practices they have adopted to protect such image.

VI. Conclusion

This study sheds light on how beliefs, gender, and learning experiences interact for language learners at PAAET, Kuwait. By addressing areas where support is needed and building on students' intrinsic motivation, educators can create more inclusive and effective language learning environments. The results also contribute to a broader understanding of language learning beliefs and provide helpful guidance for shaping educational policy and curriculum in similar settings. The current study holds significant implications in the field of language learning:

First and foremost, the differences between male and female students exhibited in the study suggest that teaching strategies could be more personalised. Confidence-building activities may help female students, while male students might benefit from support in managing perceived learning difficulties. Additionally, since students were generally cautious about taking risks, teachers could design activities that make it safe and acceptable to make mistakes, such as role-plays or collaborative tasks.

As also indicated in the findings, students' interest in immersive learning opportunities highlights the value of offering options such as virtual language exchanges using multimedia tools or encouraging learning environments that utilise augmented reality tools. Given the high motivational level students have shown towards learning English, educators can connect language learning to real-world benefits by bringing in guest speakers, organising career-focused workshops, or highlighting success stories of multilingual professionals.

This study has its limitations. Relying on self-reported data means that there may be some bias, and since the context is specific to Kuwait, the results may not be applicable broadly. Longitudinal studies could be utilised to track trends in learners' beliefs over an extended period or to examine how targeted teaching interventions might influence students' attitudes toward language learning.

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