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## THESIS

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Submitted by: Asma KACHA

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**The Collaborative Learning Strategy and Socio-Cultural  
Behaviours' Impacts on Gender Differences in EFL Students'  
Speaking Skills**

A Comparative Study between the EFL Learners' Group Tasks  
Contributions and Outcomes at the Departments of English, Universities of  
Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf

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## **Declaration**

I, Asma KACHA, hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation, and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers. I am duly informed that any person practicing plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary sanctions issued by University authorities under the rules and regulations in force.

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Dr. Asma KACHA

## **Abstract**

A complex interplay between gender and classroom communication exists, where both teacher' input and expectations as well as student' output and expression can be subtly influenced by underlying biases. Consequently, the present study aims to examine the impact of these gender disparities on learning in three distinct academic environments located in different regions, each characterised by unique social and cultural patterns. These areas include the northeast region, the internal eastern region and the south eastern region, specifically the Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf, respectively. To achieve this aim, a comparative study is conducted through employing a mixed research method that places emphasis on the use of questionnaires, pre-observation, and observation variations to gather data. The findings of this study indicate that students at the University of Bejaia and the University of Khenchela tend to perform better academically and display a relatively acceptable level of participation within group work tasks when they are assigned to mixed-gender groups. Conversely, learners at the University of Oued Souf demonstrate a clear reluctance and apprehension towards working in mixed-gender groups, resulting in higher speaking abilities and more frequent contributions when they are grouped with individuals of the same gender. It is also worth mentioning that implementing certain types of tasks like group work at the University of Oued Souf can potentially demonstrate higher achievement rate within mixed-gender groups. Yet, the in-group quality and turn-taking distribution is more often doubtful. In short, social and cultural specificities ingrained in different regions acted as distinct filters, shaping the results in each target area and producing a diverse range of findings.

**Keywords:** gender differences, speaking skill, group work tasks, social and cultural difference, EFL students, collaborative work.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

A:	Agreeableness.
AAUW:	American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.
ASKe:	Assessment Standards Knowledge Exchange.
BCIT:	British Columbia Institute of Technology.
C:	Conscientiousness.
CLT:	Communicative language teaching.
E:	Extraversion.
FFM:	Five Factor Model.
FFG:	Female single-gender groups.
FFMG:	Mixed-gender group in which females outnumber males.
FL:	Foreign Language.
FTA:	Face Threatening Act.
MFG:	Mixed-gender groups with equal numbers of males and females.
MMFG:	Mixed-gender group in which males outnumber females.
MMG:	Male single-gender groups.
N:	Neuroticism.
NEO:	Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness
NEO-PI-R:	NEO Personality Inventory Revised
O:	Openness to Experience
S-GG:	Single-gender group
SL:	Second Language
SPRinG	Social Pedagogic Research into Grouping
SRI:	Sex Role Inventory
TL:	Target Language

## **List of Appendixes**

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# **General Introduction**

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Since the English language has gained a wide international recognition, students all over the world have been urged to learn the communication skills of English as a target language (Saxina et al. 2022). The classroom is indeed the commonplace platform to learn those skills. In this regard, teachers have to be aware of the obstacles learners encounter and try to implement a variety of teaching strategies in order to improve their learners' speaking skills. This will be possible when they consider different class managements, like group division, as they design the different in-class tasks.

The ability to work collaboratively is of paramount importance in current reforms, and now group work is considered as a basic medium that fosters communication skills. This effectiveness has already been highlighted in papers (Harmer, 2001; Gamu, 2021; Madjid, 2019; Reynolds & Miller 2003; Richards, 2008). These studies, and many others, have confirmed that Students who participate in group work tasks in speaking sessions tend to have better learning outcomes and higher speaking achievements because group work actively and effectively increase their contributions. Practicing speaking in such a supportive environment leads to deeper learning and better speaking skills.

Interestingly, grouping is a way to give a more authentic and realistic practices in the speaking and the listening skills at the same time through creating a sound classroom ambiance. Teachers, then, should carefully consider some essential aspects when designing group work tasks, such as group composition, which means deciding who will be grouped together.

In the present research, then, we have focused on the aspect of gender. The latter triggered the attention not merely because it is a prominent factor in group work involvement but also due to the common teachers' biasing and learners' stereotyping (Anderman &Anderman, 2009; Grossman & Grossman, 1994).

Indeed, Communicative classrooms encourage learners to interact and use the language to express and exchange ideas, and language is learned best when it is used in real-world contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This has basically urged learners from opposite genders to work collaboratively and interact freely without referring to stereotypes, especially during the speaking session wherein the exploratory talk classroom atmosphere is encouraged.

Significantly, a number of research studies delved deeper into the notions of mixed- and single-gender types of grouping to figure out possible effects of each on the learners' outcomes in the speaking session. In fact, no exact agreement on these effects and how they

influence interactions and learning has been comprehensively provided. Some researchers (Wilson et al., 2013) believed that single-gender grouping is more effective, and helps students focus on their studies and avoid distractions.

To illustrate, they figured out that girls' self-concept and confidence in cognitive domains were more recurrent in female-only environment. Additionally, Robbins and Fredendall (as cited in Takeda & Homberg, 2014) have revealed that "diversity in observable attributes such as race, ethnic background, nationality, gender and age prevents smooth group integration in team work process", and that "homogeneity (in terms of gender) is positively related to team success and motivation" (p. 08). Likewise, males are more dominant and assertive when they interact with opposite-gender (Lakoff, 1975; McConnel-Ginnet et al., 1980; Zimmerman & West, 1975). They also use more cognitive processes and share more rational ideas, unlike women who are more emotional, polite, cooperative and sometimes submissive (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2013). This, according to the literature checked, causes different educational experiences and affects the amount and the quality of the interactional performances in classroom group work tasks (Eckert & McConell-Ginet, 2013).

However, other research studies (Ahmad et al., 2014; Almasri et al., 2021; Eisenkopf et al., 2015; Park, 2018) have shown that mixed-gender learning groups are more effective than single-gender groups as they provide students with a wider range of perspectives and experiences to learn from. In other words, they can provide a more enriching and inclusive learning experience for all students because a variety of attributes (achievements, experiences, gender-mix, ethnic and linguistic mix and so on) occur (Stewart, 2014).

### **Statement of the problem**

As a basic agreement, gender is a key social determinant of students' academic performance and learning outcomes (Anderman and Anderman, 2009). Teachers, then, should steadily consider gender differences when they design the different class tasks, especially as they arrange their students in groups or pairs.

A considerable amount of research, as aforesaid, has been carried out on the impact of gender disparities in second and foreign language learning to determine possible effects on learners' outcomes in the speaking sessions. Accordingly, it is difficult to decide which type of grouping arrangement (single-gender or mixed-gender) is more likely to promote active interaction, understanding and performance in the speaking task within an exploratory talk

class atmosphere. Therefore, Kacha (2019) has carried out a research to consider one of the suggested studies as far as the Algerian context is concerned, more precisely case of Khenchela University.

Kacha (2019) has emphasised that gender differences can lead to different educational experiences, which can in turn affect the quantity and quality of contributions in group work classroom tasks. As a basic conclusion, the researcher has confirmed that mixed-gender groups have positive effects on learning; this type of arrangements outperformed same-gender groups in terms of contribution, interaction, and sharing. Significantly, the results reached could be relevant to other teaching/learning contexts; they could be applicable in other than the department of English at Khenchela University.

At this point, we needed to consider the social, cultural and regional similarities of the neighbouring regions' Universities as they shared similar mindset and attitudes towards gender. These regions (like Batna, Tebessa, and Oum Al Bouaghi, etc) relatively placed a greater emphasis on gender differences than others; they were more likely to perpetuate gender stereotypes and assumptions. Therefore, the findings could be overgeneralised to second year students at the Universities of those regions. However, there is an evident deficiency of accurate and practical data on other regions and university contexts.

### **Research questions**

Thus far, different conclusions have been reached, and opposing research studies have already been underlined. Then, we have inevitably been faced with different research questions which are, in fact, complementary and serve as a continuation to Kacha's (2019) study:

- To what degree are gender differences apparent in higher education in Algeria?
- Do these differences affect the frequency and the quality of the learners' contributions in group work tasks at all of the Algerian Universities?

It is definitely obvious that not all of the Algerian Universities can be separately searched and covered in one investigation. Then, we have used a comparative approach to analyse the results collected from three different universities: the University of Bejaia (Northeastern region), the University of Khenchela (Internal eastern region), and the University of Oued Souf (Southeastern region). As one can notice, the selected universities belong to different regions maintaining vertical geographical allocation.

This specific choice was neither arbitrary nor random. In fact, it joins three different contexts with different regional and cultural patterns to ascertain variation and avoid monotonous results. Here, it is worth mentioning that Algeria is home to a wide range of regional specificities and multidimensional heritage which reflect the country's diverse history and population (Sadouki, 2018). Therefore, more research questions emerge:

- Are the findings of Kacha's study applicable at the University of Bejaia?
- Can these research findings be implemented at the department of English, University of Oued Souf?
- Do these University contexts share the same/similar regional and cultural aspects?
- Which type of grouping is more appropriate to match the exploratory talk principles in these Universities?

### **Aim of the study**

We address the above questions and test our hypotheses over the course of our research. Then, it is important to define a clear and achievable aim of study beforehand. The present research seeks to explore the relationship between gender and learning. It aims to identify whether gender (mainly males' assertiveness, dominance, interruptions, arguing, rational way of thinking and females' politeness, gossiping and emotional way of thinking) differences have an effect on the learning outcomes within the exploratory talk classroom mood in three different Algerian Universities belonging to three different regions: north east (University of Bejaia), internal eastern region (University of Khenchela) and south-east (University of Oued Souf).

Through this research, a comparative study is done to identify any differences and similarities in how students perform during group work classroom tasks. Additionally, we have been examining the role of cultural and social differences in mediating learning in those three regions, with a focus on students' choices, preferences, awareness, and apprehension.

### **Significance of the study**

The different key words and variables covered in the present study (gender, talk and group work) have undoubtedly been explored by many researchers. Yet, few of them have tackled those variables assembled in one research paper. The connection between these notions, then, has not always been lucid, intelligible and sufficiently enriched. Therefore, the present research hopefully offers relevant literature related to the topic of group work and gender in speaking sessions all together.

This work would, hopefully, provide EFL teachers across the country with reliable research evidence to support the use of group work tasks for increasing the frequency and quality of student contributions. It importantly shows them how gender disparities affect the teaching/learning process, and explains how gender plays a significant role in shaping the students' educational experiences and achievements. Moreover, it attempts to enlighten that Algeria is a culturally and socially vibrant country with a rich tapestry of cultural and social influences. We presume, then, that this cultural diversity would probably affect learning contributions and group interaction when the exploratory talk principles are emphasized.

### **Research methodology**

This study examines the impact of gender differences on the frequency and quality of student contributions in group work tasks that adhere to the principles of the exploratory talk. To do so, we have chosen a mixed-method approach in which we collect and equally prioritise independent forms of data that complement each other to answer our research questions. This is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools that allow getting a more complete and elaborate picture of the phenomenon under research. Data collection, interpretation and analysis, hence, were made in a convergent parallel design. In this regard, the preliminary data from the questionnaires is helpful but needs to be further explained and elaborated through an observation stage to ensure more trustworthiness and clarity in attaining the research aim and answering its questions.

Data collection tools, in the study at hand, have been deployed in the three different universities (stated above). The eventual data gathered have been analyzed and interpreted to get significant and constructive results for the three contexts selected. Overall, the research has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of EFL teaching in Algeria. By comparing the three contexts and highlighting the regional characteristics and specificities, we attempt to provide Algerian EFL teachers with valuable insights that can help them improve their teaching practices and to better serve their students.

### **Data collection instruments**

After developing the research questions and objectives, it becomes clearer for the researcher to underline the necessary method of investigation. Likewise, the choice of the method also decides about data collection tools that would most perfectly serve the hypothesis validation. Thus, a mixed-method approach has been administered involving three different

key tools of investigation: the questionnaires (quantitative method), the observation (qualitative method) and the tasks provided to students (qualitative method).

The first method used for the study aim fulfillment is the questionnaire: one was administered to teachers and another one to students at the three different Universities (Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf). This instrument can give a good starting point that helps obtain the most complete and accurate information possible and focuses on large-scale data collection. Although they might not be enough, they would surely be interpreted into useful pieces of information. The questionnaire is an effort to gather information about what is actually happening in the classroom. This includes information about the students' interactions with each other, the teacher's interactions with the students, and the overall learning environment.

In the undertaking, a pre-observation phase has also been separately conducted during which some tasks intentionally target the skills and the tactics students need to proceed during collaborative work. The skills emphasized, at this stage, comprises 'listening to others without interrupting their flow of thought', 'exchanging and respecting ideas as well as rationally challenging them', as well as 'making joint decisions' within groups. These have been chosen to match the exploratory talk principles asserted in this work. They should definitely be taught implicitly through time and throughout the different tasks assigned to students from the beginning of the year (pre-observation). This step is a necessary part of the research to make sure all learners are aware of the skills mentioned previously, and that they share more or less the same knowledge and basic concepts about how group work is supposed to flow.

The qualitative method has also been conducted. It is essential for the validity and authenticity of the findings as it provides the researcher with firsthand data collected in a natural setting. Generally, when researchers observe participants in their natural environment, they are able to see and hear things that participants may not be willing to share in a survey or interview for example. Accordingly, the observation has been administered over a six-month period within the classroom borders to observe the students real in-group actions and reactions. During this period, the researcher assumed the role of the teacher and observed both the events and behaviours of the participants in order to develop more effective interventions. Importantly, she tries to take notes about the events- as far as the amount and the frequency of the students' contributions is concerned- occurring while the task is being performed. She also puts efforts on recording their behaviours while interacting, particularly males' dominance, assertiveness and rational/emotional thinking as well as females gossiping and politeness.

All of the tasks provided in the undertaking are in a form of group work task. It is an important teaching activity that helps promote and enhance the students' interactions in speaking classes. By providing them with opportunities to work collaboratively, teachers also preserve an appropriate environment for developing critical thinking and team-work unity skills. In the present investigation, some of these tasks, in fact, have been either adapted or adopted from researchers' suggestions (e. g. the balloon debate by Harmer) or online resources (decision-making activities), and some others have been designed by the researcher herself (storytelling and problematic situations).

### **Research structure**

The present research incorporates four different chapters. The first chapter is divided into two sections. The first covers different views as the core of the relevant literature regarding the speaking skill and the importance of developing it in the target language learning. The second section then, demonstrates the way teachers should vary the speaking sessions' practices so as to avoid monotony and boredom. At this level, the researcher has suggested group work as an alternative way to enhance the learning process.

The second chapter goes further to narrow down the topic investigated. It provides related studies about an important aspect teachers have to consider while grouping learners: 'gender'. First, we have cleared up the ambiguity between sex and gender. Then, we have determined gender differences seen from different perspectives, mainly how these differences affect males' and females' personalities and behavioural performances. After that, we have ended up this point with relating the notion of gender with the educational context and language teaching and learning in particular. Another part of the chapter was also devoted to introduce Algeria's regional and cultural diversity. Throughout this part of the research, we tried to explain how Algeria is a culturally rich country and how this richness can have an effect on the individual's behaviours as far as gender differences are concerned. In other words, we reviewed the relationship between cultural patterns and gender as well as their association with the learning process, particularly collaborative work.

In the third chapter, the research process of investigation has been explained. The researcher has elaborated detailed clarifications about the choice of the target population and the sample group, the method conducted and the different instruments used to answer the research questions and to verify its hypothesis.



In the last chapter, then, the researcher reaches the step of reporting, interpreting and analysing the previously collected data. As far as the questionnaires are concerned, the researcher has tried to outline report and interpret the data from the informants' answers (teachers and learners). As a second step, the researcher reported and interpreted the data gathered from the second method with highlighting potential similarities and differences pertaining to the different university contexts.

Finally, we have tried to conclude the research process and to propose some pedagogical implications for teachers of English as a foreign language. These implications would help them enhance the quality of learning in general, and decide how to arrange students in group work tasks during the speaking skill. Then, the researcher has demonstrated some limitations that hindered the quality of the research findings and highlighted some suggestions for EFL students to further investigate the current topic, and ending up with and thorough research answers' provision.

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**Chapter One: Relevant Literature  
on Speaking Skill and Group  
Work**

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## **Introduction**

Language is essential for human interaction and cooperation. It allows us to share information, ideas, and emotions in a way that would not be possible otherwise. As for the English language, one's mastery is generally measured by one's ability to communicate effectively in both oral and written. Richards (2008) pointed out that "learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency." (p. 19). The speaking skill, thus, is enormously important; it is, indeed, the most direct and immediate way to communicate. Without the ability to speak, language is indeed fallen to a mere abandoned script (Burkart & Sheppard, 2004). In the classroom setting, learning a language is governed by the learner's ability to perform and interact orally. This, in fact, becomes an ambitious task and sometimes burdensome since it is the most common and natural way to use a language in 'real time' that requires the speaker to be clear and comprehended enough with less, and sometimes no, opportunities to revise or edit (Burkart and Sheppard, *ibid*).

The speaking skill can be introduced to the learners in different ways and through different types of materials and tasks. The latter should be varied and motivating in order to avoid lack of interest and boredom, and consequently, unwillingness to work and to achieve the different tasks' objectives. In this respect, quite a few alternative tasks have been suggested to EFL teachers to design and assign their students with (Bailey & Nunan, 2004) to reduce the teacher's amount of talk and increase the students' in-class oral performances and contributions (Ur, 1996). This comprises group work tasks; commonly acknowledged as collaborative work/learning.

## **1. Studies in the speaking skill**

### **1.1 General background**

It is important to note that EFL learners have always been encouraged to get a regular exposure to the target language and to practice that language in authentic language interactions and persistent intercommunications. In accordance to this, researchers (Berns, 2010; Cornbleet & Carter, 2001; Thornbury, 2007, Harmer, 2010; Bygate, 1998) believed that the core of communicative language teaching (CLT) is basically to engage the learners in communication through developing their ability to effectively use the language in real-world situations. Bygate (1987) pointed out that "Speaking is the vehicle par excellence of social solidarity, of social ranking, of professional advancement and of business .It is also the

medium through which much language is learnt, and which for many is particularly conducive for learning. Perhaps, then, the teaching of speaking merits more thought" (P, 1).

### **1.1.1 Definition of speaking**

Speaking is extensively defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning that generates receiving input, processing information and producing output through interactional performances. It is one of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) that EFL learners need to be exposed to in order to reach an acceptable mastery in the target language. Speaking can be accurately determined as the productive aural/oral skill that "consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning" (Nunan, 1999, p. 48), i.e., it allows us to communicate and share meaning with others orally. To do this effectively, we need more than just knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (linguistic competence). We also need to understand how to use language appropriately in different social contexts (sociolinguistic competence).

This thorough definition is often differently displayed in other literature. Some researchers have defined speaking in two different manners; as a bottom-up or top-down process of learning (Torky, 2006). Proponents of the bottom-up view, including Cornbleet & Carter (2001) pointed out that speaking entails combining sounds in a systematic way, according to language specific principles, to form meaningful utterances. In terms of teaching, then, this approach suggested that we need to start with teaching the smallest units, sounds and move through mastery of words and sentences to discourse. Alternatively, a top-down view of speaking has been advocated by some other researchers (Bygate, 1998). This gave credits to interactional skills which involve making decision about communication. Here, learners were encouraged to take part as active participants in spoken discourse rather than introducing discrete units, form well-structured sentences, then putting them into authentic use.

### **1.1.2 Speaking and the other language skills**

Speaking and writing have always been interrelated considering their productive nature. Their on-going process and product require the students to produce an output being oral or written vis-à-vis listening and reading which are considered as "receptive skills". Here, learners receive the necessary input and language knowledge from different sources and materials being heard or read. These four language skills are generally instructed separately.

Yet, speaking is always used since it is the only indispensable and naturally used skill for the accomplishment of the teaching process through written, read or heard materials alike.

Speaking diverges from writing at many different levels summarised by Lier (1995) in the table that follows:

**Table 1.1:** Difference between Speaking and Writing (Lier, 1995)

<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Writing</b>
Auditory	Visual
Temporary; immediate reception	Permanent; delayed reception
Prosody; intonation, rhythm, stress	Punctuation
Immediate feedback	Delayed feedback
Planning and editing limited by channel	Unlimited planning, editing, revision

Lier (1995) has explained why people who learn a foreign language strictly from textbooks tend to be “bookish”. Textbooks can only teach you grammar and vocabulary of a language; they cannot teach you how to use the language naturally and fluid in real-world contexts. Nonetheless, target language practice and frequent use help you learn about the culture of the language speakers which, subsequently, help avoid making cultural ‘faux pas’.

Considering Algerian students’ oral expression abilities, their performances sound bookish because of the deficient exposure to the native-like speaking interactions. This, consequently, causes lack of some important speaking attributes like prosody, intonation, rhythm, stress and so on.

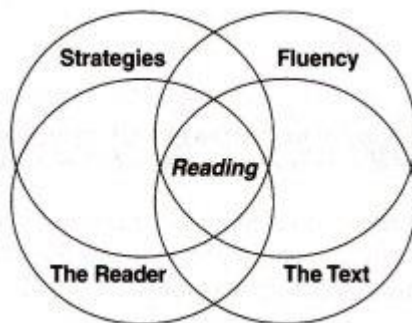
It is commonly believed that listening and speaking go hand in hand as they, both, construct the oral communication process. Accordingly, Oprandy (1994; as cited in Torkey, 2006) stated that “Every speaker is simultaneously a listener and every listener is at least potentially a speaker” (p. 14). Moreover, the oral communication goes in a ‘two-way’ orientation between the speaker and the listener. It equally values the productive output through speaking and the receptive skill of understanding. Yet, listening is sometimes privileged since it is the initial step towards communication and interaction. In this regard, Renukadevi (2014, p. 60) stated that “listening helps the language learner to understand the beauty of the language” and continued:

It is the most significant part of communication as it is pivotal in providing a substantial and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language for

communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax and the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based solely on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. (ibid)

As far as the reading skill is concerned, an undeniable link with speaking is increasingly maintained. Mart (2012) has explained that “there is no question that people who develop large reading vocabularies tend to develop large speaking vocabularies” (p. 91). Doubtlessly, extended vocabulary repertoire highly depends on how much reading is done in the target language. Again Mart (ibid) continued “reading power relies on continuous improvement in vocabulary knowledge that provides communication”. Therefore, reading is of paramount importance in language learning as it helps to enrich and to vary the vocabulary items, eventually, used while speaking. In short, “Where there is little reading there will be little language learning” (Bright and McGregor, 1970, p.52).

The figure below determines how reading incorporates different elements when the reader is provided with a text. It clearly shows that fluency has a two-way impact. In other words, reading improves vocabulary and reaches relative fluency, meanwhile, high range of vocabulary items and fluency brings up fluent reading and quick understanding.

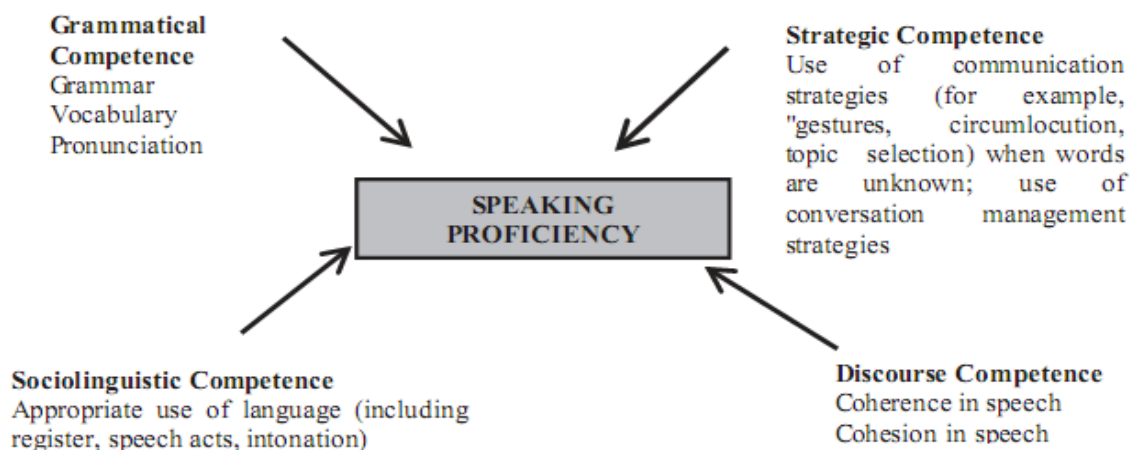


**Figure 1.1:** Definition of reading (Nunan, 1999. p. 72)

### 1.1.3 Speaking and pronunciation

For so long, speaking was primarily restricted to pronunciation and word oral production and articulation in different approaches to language learning such as the direct method and the audio-lingual approach (McCarthy and O’Keeffe as cited in Berns, 2010). Now, new language learning perspectives and views have been introduced as to encourage authentic communicative interactions and oral performances. Many people, though, still

overvalue pronunciation in speaking the target language merely because of its irregularity, difficulty and challenging nature. Literally, pronunciation alone does not guarantee good speaking proficiency; perfectly pronouncing an utterance does not mean you speak the language. For sure, a well-articulated word can be meaningless or used in wrong contexts like when you say 'thank you' (with its same correct articulation) to someone who has done something rude/wrong or using 'hello' in a formal context. Therefore, the ability to communicate effectively requires more than just being able to pronounce words correctly. It also requires understanding the meaning and how can it be employed (Griffiths, 2008). Moreover, Scarcella and Oxford (1992, p. 154) pointed out the skills underpinning the speaking competences in figure below. It reveals that speaking is a multi-competences skill; the more you develop these competences, the better your speaking proficiency will be.



**Figure 1.2:** Skills Included in the Speaking Skill (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992)

#### 1.1.4 Purpose of the speaking skill

The significance of the speaking skill has been widely emphasised in second or foreign languages. As for thus, many researchers have extensively enriched the literature with necessary knowledge about the purpose of the speaking skill. In this respect, Sadeghi and Richards (2015) have explained that speaking can be transactional or interactional. On the one hand, transactional discourse is predictable and used to achieve a specific goal; i.e. the language is used to get something said or done like asking for directions, making a purchase at a store, phoning to ask for a taxi, hotel booking, news broadcasts, narrations and so on (Nunan, 1989). On the other hand, interactional discourse is a type of communication used to build and maintain social relationships. It is unpredictable in the sense that it does not follow a set pattern, and the target language is used to preserve a phatic function. For example, if you are having a conversation with a friend, you might talk about a variety of different topics. The

conversation might flow in different directions because interactional discourse is not focused on achieving a specific goal, but rather on building and maintaining a relationship (Nunan, *ibid*).

Despite the fact that these two categorisations have been explained as separate functions to fulfil the speaking intentions, one could simultaneously use both types to ease the transactional tasks and meanwhile to keep good social relationships with others (Brazil, 1995). Therefore, many speaking contexts can interpose a mixture of interactional and transactional purposes, and both can be viewed as two dimensions of the spoken interaction according to Burns and Joyce (1997).

Regarding the purposes stated above, Kingen (2000) tried to combine them through listing a broad set of categories that serve as language functions the speaker may use while speaking depending on the context and the speaker's intentions. These functions are as follows:

- a. **Personal:** expressing opinions, emotions, beliefs...etc.
- b. **Descriptive:** describing people, objects, or places.
- c. **Narrative:** telling stories or giving events in a chronological order.
- d. **Instructive:** giving instructions/ directions.
- e. **Questioning:** asking questions for specific information.
- f. **Comparative:** comparing two people, objects, places, ideas for judgments.
- g. **Imaginative:** expressing imaginative events, people, objects, places...etc.
- h. **Predicting:** anticipating possible future events.
- i. **Interpretive:** making hypothetical studies and exploring meaning...etc.
- j. **Persuasive:** arguing in order to change someone's point of view or behaviour.
- k. **Explanatory:** clarifying and supporting ideas.
- l. **Informative:** conveying messages and sharing information with others.

### **1.1.5 Aspects of the speaking skill**

The speaking skill has different aspects. The speaking task could not be successfully performed unless this set of aspects is identified and well-examined. These aspects could definitely provide guidance for learners to understand and take part in the learning tasks, and for teachers to design instructional activities.

**Speaking is face to face:** the speaking performance is generally face-to-face as both interlocutors exist in the same setting. This aspect is significantly important, as emphasised by Hinkel (2006). He believed that Face-to-face interaction is the foundation of teaching and



learning because it allows participants to receive instant feedback on their understanding and empathy (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001). Some examples of how face-to-face interaction can promote learning are when the teacher gives a student immediate feedback on their answer to a question or when a student gets feedback from their peers on their work or develops empathy for their peers by learning about their experiences and perspectives.

It is also noteworthy that oral communication requires facial expressions, gestures and even body movements depending on the interlocutors' gender, age, intentions and cultural background. When women interact, for example, they are more polite than men, more caring and responsive; they show more sympathy and avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) (Tannen, 1990). These differentiations, indeed, exist but meanwhile culturally based since they are more emphasised in some cultures than others (Ekert as cited in Bucholtz, 2004). In fact, this would be a foundation to the study we have been through.

**Speaking is interactive:** According to Bygate (1998), the conversation flow is generally delivered smoothly when the language is used with one or more participants; conversations are a collaborative process where people take turns speaking and listening. This process is often fluid and seamless, like a wheel turning effortlessly. Along the conversation, people usually take turns in conversation without thinking about it. However, it is definitely a complex social skill that is influenced by a variety of factors as culture and gender; different cultures and genders have different ways of handling and signaling turn-taking (Mackey; Gass & McDonough, 2000). Men, for example, are known to be more dominant, assertive and interruptive in mixed or even single-gender interactional performances (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Eckert & McConell-Ginet, 2013).

**Speaking happens in real time:** because speech performances take place in real time, they represent a unique form of communication that requires the speaker to think on their feet and respond to the audience in real time. This can be a challenge, especially for inexperienced speakers, because the listeners' reactions are unpredictable and immediate, they might be criticising and judging for example (Foster et al., 2000). As a result, the speaker's readiness and predisposition to organise his/her ideas and control the language used is negatively and stressfully affected. From a different angle, speech productions is a complex process that may begin with false or blurred starts because the speaker might be nervous, distracted, tired or simply discussing about a complex topic. Consequently, the speaker may feel the need to modify, adjust or clarify what have been exposed. He may also forget what he wants to say or

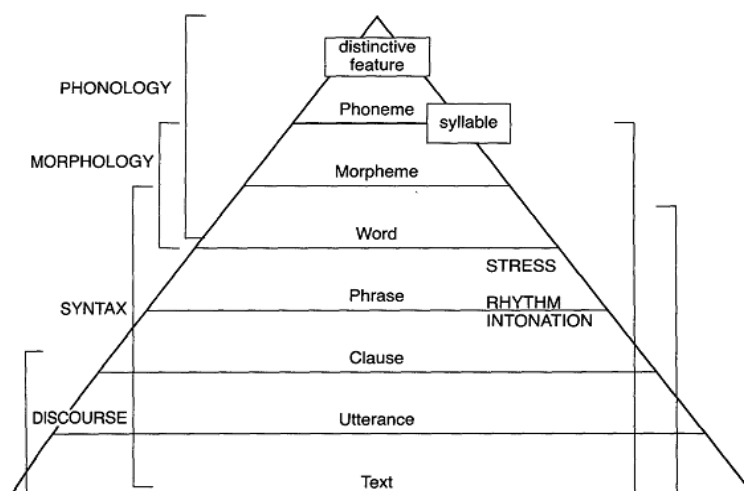
things he has previously said. At that stage, making mistakes is quite typical and acceptable (Miller, 2001).

In this regard, Bygate (1987) has suggested to speakers use formulaic expressions (fixed sequences of words like Hello, how are you?, Good morning/ afternoon, See you later, Take care, What's new? etc) , hesitation devices (also called filler words/phrases used when pausing/thinking like Um, Uh, You know, Well, Kind of, like, etc), self-correction, rephrasing, and repetition strategies. This can help them sound more natural and fluent, and henceforth, cope with the conversation real-time requirements. Again, this helps in improving their oral production competences and overcoming the difficulties they encounter.

## **1.2 Teaching the speaking skill**

One of the primary concerns teacher of foreign/second language has is how to get learners develop their language competences. Literature in speaking has revealed great attention and emphasis on language teachers and learners alike because of their extreme equal and shared significance to ascertain an efficient language learning mood. Traditionally, this importance was not highlighted as much; teachers used to introduce speaking solely through repeating words, phrases, sentences, memorising vocabulary, forms, rules and dialogues in the TL. They used to provide learners with discrete language elements to put them together in order to communicate and convey meaning. This pure behavioural process of teaching and learning required students to rehearse and memorise, away from real-life and authentic language use (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

In the late twentieth century, though, new ideas to teaching /learning a second/ foreign language has emerged since requirements shifted the goals and objectives of teaching speaking from mere memorisation of words and word combinations to actually improving students' communicative skills and oral performances. This led to the emergence of the communicative language teaching approaches that has deliberately encouraged learners to use the language in real-life situations. Learning, then, has become learner-oriented based on peers' performances and realistically communicative interactions (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).



**Figure 1.3:** Interaction in the Language Curriculum (Lier, 1996)

As shown in the figure above, oral contributions may range from the phonological/morphological to syntax and discourse levels depending on the teachers' course provided, the objectives predefined as well as the learner's oral proficiency level (beginner, pre-intermediate, intermediate, pre-advanced, advanced).

As the present research considers post-intermediate/pre-advanced levels of learners' speaking performances (2<sup>nd</sup> year students at the Universities chosen, department of English), learners level of the language mastery is supposed to be positioned in the pyramid's basis. Thus, the researcher (playing the role of the teacher) is recommended to prepare the lessons and design the communicative tasks according to that level.

### **1.2.1 Teachers' role during the speaking activities**

In most EFL classes, teacher-student interactions have little communicative worth because there is no real and needed information being exchanged. Conventionally, it is very typical that a teacher asks a "display" question (a question whose answer is already known by the instructor), and an individual student answers. Then, the teacher gives feedback, evaluates or corrects that answer. In fact, this has been proven an unrealistic use of language that have substantially clear limitations in terms of how much authentic communication practice the student is exposed to (Dinapoli, 2000). Consequently, teacher-student and student-student talk should go beyond this sort of questions and exchanges, and get out of the zone that deals with what they already know to what they actually want to discover (Liao, 2001). In this respect, there has been a clear shift, through time, from a highly structured, teacher-oriented language instruction to a task- oriented, communicative, and learner-centered teaching.

Through this ambiance, teachers may get engaged with their learners in the speaking task. Students are more likely to be involved and motivated in tasks when their teachers participate because they generally provide feedback, support, encouragement, and they can also help to create a more relaxed and informal atmosphere. Teachers may also join conversations, role-play different scenarios with their students, or play educational games with them (De Vries et al., 2015). Actually, their participations are not harmful providing that they do not dominate the classroom talk (Harmer, 2007). Harmer also believed that teachers need to be aware of how the speaking activity is going and be prepared to step in when the task is not going ‘smoothly’ or when the conversation starts to ‘dry-up’ in a supporting and respectful way as to provide clarification or assistance, ask more guided questions, adapt and do some pauses.

### **1.2.2 Problems with the speaking activities**

Ur (2009) Researchers have investigated the potential challenges that learners may face in speaking sessions.

**Inhibition:** EFL learners often feel shy and hesitant to use the target language (TL) because of many reasons like lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes or pronunciation difficulties. They have had worries because their language is not fully fluent and accurate with many pauses and hesitations, or simply afraid of being in the center of attention. Ur (ibid) has revealed that:

Unlike reading, writing and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts” (p. 121).

This seemingly occurs in female communicative interactions as they show more polite and submissive reactions with face threatening acts avoidance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975; McConnel-Ginnet et al.; 1980).

**Nothing to say:** Sometimes learners are not shy or hesitant to participate orally, but they still choose to remain silent and unwilling to contribute and share. This might be due to uninteresting topics, unvaried tasks or difficult topics with many unfamiliar register.

**Low or uneven participation:** learners may have limited opportunities to speak, experience unfair turn-taking, and sometimes have no chance to interact and share their ideas. In large groups, then, it may be difficult to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to contribute and take part in the tasks provided because of some teachers' wrong practices in class and group management, some learners' dominant and assertive behaviours. This, unfortunately, may create a sense of frustration and disengagement among learners; a classroom environment where some learners feel more valued than others.

**Mother-tongue use:** In a classroom where most or all of the learners have the same mother tongue, it is likely that they use their mother tongue to communicate with each other even if they are instructed to use the target language, as it feels more natural and comfortable than using a foreign or second language. This can be problematic for certain reasons. It can prevent learners from practicing and improving their foreign language skills, create a classroom environment where some learners feel more comfortable and valued than others and, in its worst case, lead to social exclusion of learners who do not use the language.

### **1.2.3 Characteristics of a successful speaking activity**

As a definite agreement, the speaking skill has proven its complexity in foreign language teaching and learning. Yet, a successful speaking activity can be relatively guaranteed if the characteristics stated below have been kept and achieved (Ur, 1996; p. 120):

**Learners talk a lot:** although this seems obviously wrong, teachers often dominate classroom talk by speaking for long periods of time or pausing to compensate for the learners' lack of language skills, lack of interest or unwillingness to participate in class interactions. Teachers, therefore, may feel responsible for delivering the content of the lesson and for ensuring that all students understand. Other teachers, also, may feel themselves the authority figure in the classroom that have to be controlling and dominant which entails very limited students' talk.

**Participation is even:** classroom turn taking and floor giving should not be restricted to a specific group of students; the teacher should not favour certain students over others when giving them opportunities to speak and participate in class, neither refers to their school achievements nor their gender. This is substantially important because of some reasons. First, it helps to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and to grow as they feel more motivated and engaged. Second, it helps create a more inclusive and equitable learning atmosphere since all learners are treated fairly. Third, it teaches students important life skills,

such as how to listen to others, how to share one's own ideas, and how to work collaboratively as a team.

**Motivation is high:** By designing varied and interesting tasks, teachers can engage students and encourage them to participate more frequently and actively; it would allow more frequent and varied contribution to occur; and consequently, better outcome and task objective achievement. Interestingly, motivation also gets higher when teachers put thought and efforts to assign tasks that are relevant to the learners' interests/experiences, challenging but achievable, backed up with several choices, and why not presented through technological educational tools and resources.

**The language is of an acceptable level:** Teachers should use the target language in a way that is relevant to the learners' interests and experiences, comprehensible, and appropriate for their abilities and language proficiency level. This would not be possible unless they plan and prepare their lessons beforehand with considering different teaching methods and materials, word choice, and topic selection. In the research at hand, we have chosen second year University students who belong to post-intermediate/pre-advanced level of the language proficiency. All of the input and learning tasks, thus, have to meet that level. The researcher's role is to get the students use the target language with little teachers' interference, guidance and monitoring.

#### **1.2.4 Principles of teaching the speaking skill**

The characteristics stated above cannot be reached unless some are taken into account to make the communicative tasks as successful and interesting as possible principles (Bailey and Nunan, 2004). These include:

**Awareness of the difference between foreign and second language learning contexts:** The amount of exposure to the target language (TL) depends on the context in which it is used. Foreign language (FL) learners typically have less exposure to the TL than second language (SL) learners because they are not surrounded by the TL all the time. Teachers should be aware of this difference and help FL learners by creating more opportunities to use the TL in the classroom through introducing a variety of activities like role-playing, group discussions, presentations and giving access to TL resources like books, movies, song, etc.

**Giving students practices to develop both fluency and accuracy:** The teacher gives varied tasks to help students improve their language use and usage as well. They should also acknowledge that errors are a natural part of language learning the process. The present

research focuses mainly on the language use as its aim promises, but the researcher may also provide feedback related to the language usage and correctness meantime.

**Providing opportunities for students to speak using group or pair work activities with limited teacher's talk:** Group and pair work activities are alternative classroom activities that maximise the students' speaking time and minimise the teacher's talk, given that students' exposure to the target language is generally limited. Ur (2009) believed that this type of activities "increases the sheer amount of learner talk going on in a limited period of time and also lowers the inhibitions of learners who are unwilling to speak in front of the full class" (p. 121). In accordance to this, we went in the undertaking for group work type of tasks to vary the classroom performances and provide equal opportunities for interactive and silent students as well.

**Planning speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning:** in this type of tasks, learners interact to communicate meaning, through checking for understanding, clarifying, explaining, confirming, paraphrasing, illustrating, repeating and so on. Importantly, negotiation for meaning is the process by which speakers and listeners work together to understand each other, even when they have different backgrounds or experiences

**Designing classroom tasks that gather guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking:** Teachers design classroom tasks that provide opportunities for students to learn and practice both transactional (complete specific tasks like asking for directions) and interactional (build and maintain relationships like conversation with a friend or family member) speaking functions which, with no doubt, will help students develop the skills they need to communicate effectively in a variety of learning contexts.

### **1.2.5 Types of activities in the speaking session**

In conventional speaking classrooms, practices were often in a form of drills in which the instructor asks a question and the learner gives the answer. Both the questions and the answers were pre-structures and planned with only one predictable, predetermined, correct answer (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). By the increasing interest in language teaching/learning strategies, a few types of classroom activities have been suggested. These activities have been very promising as they could help improve the learners' participation, attract their attention and raise their interest in the classroom tasks. Harmer (2010, p. 129) have suggested the following:

**Information gap activity:** is a type of communicative activities where students are given different pieces of information to use and do the task collaboratively. This could involve putting together a story, a map, or a diagram, or simply sharing information with each other through activities like jigsaw, two truths and a lie, information gap puzzles and so on.

**Telling stories:** teachers may provide their learners with topics or pictures that illustrate famous stories or recognisable events. Then, learners are required to tell that story or describe that event through describing the pictures revealed.

**Role plays/meeting and greeting:** is a type of communicative activities where students act out different scenarios. This can be done in pairs, small groups, or even as a whole class. Role-plays can be used for specific purposes and to promote a transactional function like buying, ordering food, negotiating the price. They can also fulfil interactional purposes like making small talk and sharing thoughts and emotions.

**Surveys:** They can be used in language classrooms to have students interview each other. This can be a great way for students to practice their speaking skills, as well as to learn more about their classmates' thoughts and viewpoints. Learners may also conduct questionnaires which are, in fact, similar to surveys but typically more formal and are used to collect data on a specific topic.

**Students' presentations:** students are asked to prepare and deliver oral presentation as individuals or as groups. They are provided with the necessary time to work on their presentations about a topic suggested by the teacher or chosen by the students themselves. The other students listen to their peers' oral performances, take some notes, write questions, or give feedback about the topic, the flow of ideas, their peers' oral routine and so on.

**Balloon debate:** students envisage they are in a damaged basket of a balloon which is losing air. Only one of them can stay and survive, and others have to jump out of it. Individual students representing famous characters (Napoleon, Gandhi, Cleopatra, etc) or professions (teacher, doctor, lawyer, etc) have to argue why they should be allowed to stay in the balloon and survive. The Balloon Debate activity is a great way to get students talking and using their language skills. It is also a great way to teach students about critical thinking and persuasion.

These, and many other suggested tasks (like jigsaw, games, picture storytelling), can be used to develop the students' oral communicative skills. The teacher's choice of tasks is mainly dependent on the learners' interests and educational experiences, the predetermined learning objectives, the context of learning/teaching, and the level of difficulty. Some of these



tasks also have been adapted or adopted to serve the aim of the current research context like the 'balloon debate' and the in-class storytelling and anecdotes.

### **1.2.6 Types of talk in the language classroom**

All classroom activities involve students talking to each other. The type of talk can diverge depending on the objectives it emphasises and the classroom ambiance it creates. According to Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008), there are three ways of talking and thinking. The first way of talking is the disputational. It involves students disagreeing with each other and defending their points of view. Disputational talk can be a valuable way for students to develop their critical thinking and communication skills. However, it is important to create a safe and respectful environment where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions, even if they are different from the opinions of their classmates. For Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008), diputational talk should not be excessively considered because of some reasons:

- There is a lot of disagreement and everyone just makes their own decisions.
- There are few attempts to pool resources, or to offer constructive criticism.
- There are often a lot of interactions of the 'Yes it is! - No it's not!' kind.
- The atmosphere is competitive rather than co-operative.

The second type of talk is Cumulative. It involves students building on each other's ideas to create a shared understanding of a topic. Although cumulative talk can be a great way for students to learn from each other and to develop their collaborative skills, it substantially limits critical thinking as learners more often accept, admit and agree with what others have said. Cumulative talk is also characterised by repetitions, confirmations and elaborations of others' ideas without carefully evaluating, correcting or challenging them.

The last type is the exploratory talk. This type of talk involves students exploring new ideas and concepts together. It is a great alternative for them to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They are actively, critically and meanwhile constructively engaged with each others' ideas and points of view. This type of talk would not be implemented unless some principles should be taken into account:

- Everyone listens actively.
- People ask questions.
- People share relevant information.
- Ideas may be challenged.
- Reasons are given for challenges.

- Contributions build on what has gone before.
- Everyone is encouraged to contribute.
- Ideas and opinions treated with respect.
- There is an atmosphere of trust.
- There is a sense of shared purpose.
- The group seeks agreement for joint decisions.

Teachers can also, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, use a variety of different types of classroom talk to create a stimulating and engaging learning environment for their students. In this research, we have been prioritising the Exploratory Talk classroom atmosphere. This has been primarily selected because all of its principles encourage communicative and genuine contributions with critical and constructive basis that underlines the competency based approach in its best configurations. In the present research, then, tasks have been designed in accordance to these principles. Nevertheless, only three principals have been foregrounded because of time constraints.

## **2. Studies in group work**

Society's requirements have urged people to change their attitudes when dealing with others. They have been encouraged to be more considerate and flexible towards opposite, creative in thinking and auto criticism, effective in problematic situations, efficient in decision making, sociable, outgoing and interactive as well. Henceforth, educators have been inspired to introduce in-class collaborative work arguing that syllabi and curricula should not solely give learners information and knowledge, but also socialise and prepare them for future real-life experiences as they provide provide learners with 'the know how to be' and 'the know how to do/act/react' in social contexts (Damon, 1984).

Considering the classroom practices, group work is one of the most important teaching techniques implemented in speaking sessions to foster socialisation upbringing (Bailey & Nunan, 2004). We, therefore, underline group work activities in the research at hand, cover and investigate relevant points that, restrictedly, serve the predefined research questions and aim.

### **2.1 Definition of group work activities**

Group work is an educational mode that advocates learning and socialisation among students. It upgrades inclusive and collaborative processes in target language learning and helps achieve a range of teaching and learning objectives as far as the process and the product

of learning are concerned Frykedal & Chiriac (2017). Three different types of group work have been identified regardless to their varied terminologies in different literature: informal learning groups, formal learning groups, and study groups (Davis, 1993). Informal groups include a cluster of students who work collaboratively to discuss issues, whereas formal groups are created to accomplish a specific task in one planned session or over several days/weeks. Study groups, from another side, are arranged to provide orientation and support to their members.

In the present research, we have focused on formal learning groups to investigate in-class cooperative learning scope through small groups of students using the TL to achieve common task objectives. To make it clearer, Johnson et al. (1991) has defined group work as the use of in-class small groups through which students work together to reach shared goals and to promote their own and others' potential. Additionally, Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Lee, 2005) have similarly put forward that:

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups such that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. In cooperative learning situations, there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments; students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals (p. 117).

Additionally, group work task is explained differently as the scholars' perceptions and standpoints have diverged. In this regard, varied elements might be overemphasised by different researchers like internal, external motivation, learning development, social or cognitive processing that have eventually built up different theoretical perspectives (Robert et al., 2003).

## **2.2 Major theoretical perspectives**

In working groups, learners tend to intensify understanding, enhance their learning and promote social relationships. For cooperative learning to be thoroughly successful, four major perspectives have been suggested by different researchers (Robert et al., 2003): motivational, social cohesion, developmental, and cognitive perspectives. This divergence is more or less related to the different elements prioritised in these perspectives.

### **2.2.1 Motivational perspectives**

In this perspective, motivation is tremendously favoured in group work, and learning cannot be attained unless the group members are successfully motivated-internally or externally. Meanwhile, motivation develops learning, interaction and helps to fulfill task objectives. Thus, collaborative learning through groups and motivation has a reciprocal relationship; each affects and is affected by the other. Accordingly, Robert et al. (2003) have claimed that “motivational perspectives on cooperative learning presume that task motivation is the most important part of the process and hold that the other processes are driven by motivation.” (179).

### **2.2.2. Social cohesion perspective**

Social cohesion perspective is very similar to the motivational as they both forward motivation. In the motivational perspective, learners encourage their peers participation and collaboration for their own benefit; group members’ motivation helps them achieve the task objective. Notwithstanding, in the social cohesion perspective, learners help each other because they mind about each others’ understanding and progress; learners are more likely to help each other when they feel connected to each other and when they believe that everyone's success is important. Consequently, students engage in the task and help their group-mates to work for mutual success which entails integration and high inclusiveness.

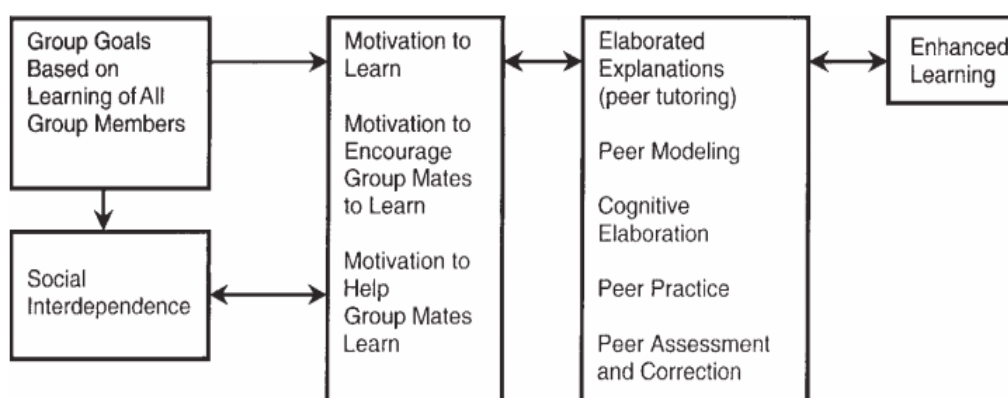
### **2.2.3 Developmental perspective**

Literature review reveals that in-group interaction increases learning; students learn from each other and concurrently complete the information gaps. This makes reference to Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development which has disclosed that “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). That is to say, group work can help learners bridge the gap between what they already know and what they should eventually be able to do the teacher’s guidance and peers’ collaboration. In this respect, Reynolds and Miller (2003) have revealed that “collaborative activity promotes growth because children of similar ages are likely to be operating within one another’s proximal zones of development, modeling in the collaborative group behaviors that are more advanced than those that they could perform as individuals” (p. 182).

### 2.2.4 Cognitive perspectives

In this perspective, no pertinence is actually granted neither to motivation nor social cohesion. It, instead, emphasises the cognitive processing through reasoning, explaining logically and convincing, for instance.

It is also worth mentioning that the above perspectives are, in fact, complementary rather than contradictory since group work tasks fulfillment combines multiple components like motivation, interpersonal relationships, and cognitive elaborations and so on. These components are interrelated and complementary. The figure below demonstrates this interdependence.



**Figure 1.4:** Functional Relationships among the Major Interaction Components of Group Learning (Reynolds & Miller, 2003)

Damon (1984) has also incorporated these perspectives to construct a ‘conceptual foundation for a peer-based plan of education’ in group work. Significantly, peers motivate one another and seek better solutions through mutual feedback, debate and discussion. As they interact, they become subject to the process of generating ideas which provides an opportunity for discovery learning, and creative thinking. Moreover, the experience of peer communication through group work can also introduce different social processes such as participation, argumentation, and cognitive processes, such as verification and criticism.

Cultural patterns recognised in group work have also been emphasised by another group of researchers. They have matched learning in groups to the cultural identities attributed to their members (Payne et al., 2004; Allen, 2012). There is, therefore, an interdependent relationship wherein group work affects and is affected by its group members. These members have purposefully been arranged into small and separate communities of students who keep their own identities and sense of responsibility towards the task and the other

partners (Allen, 2012). They also explore different cultural backgrounds and beliefs through the materials they are exposed to or simply from their peers (Payne et al., 2004).

It also important for teachers to be aware of the potential impact of culture on task design since the task itself might be influenced by the shared culture. This means that the way a task is designed may be influenced by the students' shared cultural values, beliefs, and practices. For example, a task designed for students from a collectivist culture may focus on collaboration and teamwork; while a task designed for students from an individualist culture may emphasise independence and self-reliance. Also, in a culture that favours masculine actions and reactions, they accept assertive and dominant behaviours; whereas nurturing and caring for people are definitely valued in more feminine cultures (Sinha, 2014; Triandis, 2001).

The present research, in actual fact, has considered an amalgamation of all the stated elements. The tasks and the information have been designed and arranged in accordance to these perspectives all together. Students need to be motivated by the varied and interesting tasks, to value cooperation and team work to reach shared objectives (e. g. joint decision making), and to complete information gaps and develop cognitive abilities as well.

### **2.3 Importance of group work**

Group work is widely used as an effective teaching strategy. According to Thornbury (2007 ; cited in Gamu & Damole, 2021), group work is, by excellence, a communicative language teaching tool that “offers a safer environment for students to try out their speaking because fewer people hear them, but all students have opportunities to speak and listen” (p. 114). This, in return, can help students develop their self-esteem while interacting with their group partners. Moreover, students’ oral exchange can also give insight for teachers to decide about the learning input and skills that can promote learning and enhance the students’ speaking proficiency (Harmer, 2001). The University of Wellington’s Teaching Development Center’s guidelines (2004) have revealed that “a well-designed and conducted group work leads to greater retention and understanding of what is taught”. It helps to achieve remarkable progress in the language proficiency level and breaks up the classroom monotony and boredom since learners are actively and effectively engaged in the process (Davis, 1993; Merla, 2019).

Again, the University of Wellington's Teaching Development Center programme has documented an assortment of academic and social advantages of group work. They include:

- The development of co-operation and planning skills;
- Opportunities for leadership and shared leadership;
- Increased active participation and involvement in the course;
- Improved student performance;
- Opportunities for students to work on large and/or complex projects;
- The promotion of student autonomy by transferring some of the responsibility for teaching and learning to students.

More comprehensive set of benefits has been suggested by Burke (2011) and Blatchford et al. (2005). They pointed out that group work task is a highly promising teaching strategy for students and teachers alike.

### **For Students**

*a. Groups have more information than a single individual:* since groups encompass at least three to four students (having different information and learning experiences), their steadily frequent contributions would definitely enrich their learning.

*b. Groups stimulate creativity:* variety in group arrangement and task design brings out creative ideas and constructive behaviours. When students are grouped in different ways and given different types of tasks, they are more likely to be challenged and think out of the box.

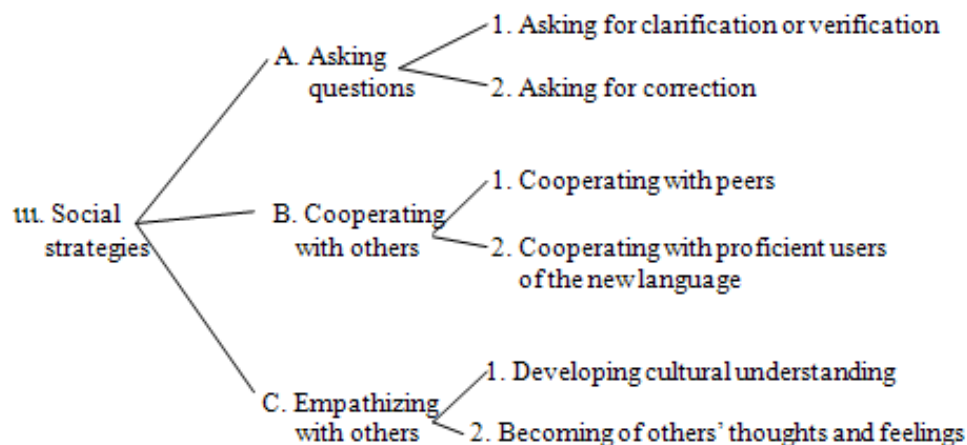
*c. People remember group discussions better:* comprehension and memorisation are at their highest level when learners work in groups. The same input is grasped and memorised in group better than when it is taught otherwise.

*d. Decisions that students make yield greater satisfaction:* when students reach a joint in-group decision, they feel satisfied because their decision making was independently processed without the teacher's assistance or interference.

*e. Students gain a better understanding of themselves:* group interaction helps students form a plainer self-concept. They recognise how other peers see them and develop a mind-set on learning and collaboration.

*f. Team work is highly valued by employers:* group work is highly recommended because it develops interpersonal and social interaction skills for post graduation requirements. Employers look for multi-skilled graduates with interpersonal tactics, problem solving abilities, self-control and team work qualifications.

**g. Group work promotes the process of socialisation:** means the ability to develop social skills such as expressing ideas openly and confidently through being exposed to collaboration and sharing. More social skills have been explained in the figure below.



**Figure 1.5:** Social Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

**For Teachers:** group work helps teachers, according to Blatchford et al. (2005), to:

- Enhance their own professional skills and confidence in adapting group work strategies for different purposes and tasks.
- Shift the emphasis from teacher-centered to more pupil-centered learning by enabling pupils to work in small groups to reach common goal.
- Empower learners to engage in peer teaching, learning and assessment to show what they know, understand and can do, and identify what they have yet to learn in a ‘low risk’ situation.
- Devote more time to reflect on and think strategically about their teaching once learners are able to demonstrate increased effectiveness and autonomy in group work situations and require less teacher intervention,.
- Promote improved teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships.
- Celebrate collaborative efforts with pupils.

## 2.4 Difficulties of classroom group work

As any other form of teaching/learning, group work may show possible pitfalls. Although many teachers are willing to use this type of activities, a number of potential problems may occur. In this context, staff and students at the University of Sydney (2003) have highlighted some concerns that can be faced as group work task proceeds. These include:



- Poor internal group dynamics
- Exclusion or marginalisation of individual group members
- Inappropriate tasks or assessment criteria for the subject or the range of students
- Less than desired levels of academic support or intervention
- Assessment of group work where there is no acknowledgement of differences in individual contributions
- Excessive amounts of group work where compared with individual work in a course or programme.
- Favouring competition for good grades than good learning
- Overuse of group work; imbalance between group and individual work.

Burke (2011) has also explained how the teachers' lack of confidence, skills and experience may negatively interrupt the flow of the collaborative work. In a less serious case, some teachers might exclude this task simply because they do not want to 'risk losing discipline and control' over challenging classes/pupils (basically trouble-making students and large classes). Burke (ibid) has also advocated 'group dissonance' as a ground to group work failure. This denotes the lack of harmony between the group members because of their personal conflicts, lack of in-group leadership or plainly because members are not motivated enough, embarrassed or do not know how to use the target language accurately which rouses L1 interference.

Despite of all the above mentioned problems, scholars still forward group work tasks and promise they have much to offer. Consequently, many strategies to improve collaborative work have been suggested.

### **2.5 Strategies to enhance collaborative work**

There have always been ways to overcome challenges that might be encountered during group work tasks. As an initial step towards its realisation and success, teachers should have the necessary skills and will for employing this type of activities. In this context, Stewart (2014) emphasised that "it is important for teachers to be prepared to 'let go' and develop the confidence to try out more process oriented learning such as collaborative group work" (p. 05). They should basically try to decrease in-group 'dissonance' as well as 'group hate' and avoid dissolving it even when it seems deteriorated (Davis, 1993; Sorenson, 1981) through trying different options and orienting learners' cooperation. They may, for instance, be involved in information gap and jigsaw activities, predicting, brainstorming, games, group

discussions and so on (Cohen et al., 2007). These entail a noticeable increase in the students' frequency and quality of contributions.

In addition to these directions, Stewart (2014) has recommended a set of strategies for a successful collaborative work:

**Provide pupils with clear structures to work together as a group beforehand:** a harmonious in-class group work task requires the teachers to be clear when explaining how the different steps should be carried out. Unclear instruction may impede the task progression. In addition to providing a rationale for using group learning, the instructor sets the mood by introducing an icebreaking activity, for instance (Instructional Job Aid, British Columbia Institute of technology, nd).

**Establish and constantly reinforce clear ground rules and procedures so that pupils know how and why to communicate and use group work:** students should be taught how to work together as a team to complete tasks successfully. This includes teaching them how to communicate effectively, to resolve conflicts, and to manage their time which, unquestionably, helps to guarantee a successful activity and to conceal what hinders cooperative learning and shared outcomes.

**Support the language of the group by providing language frameworks:** using the target language is not always an easy task for learners. Teachers, then, can use a variety of strategies to encourage students contribute and use language in class, such as providing hints and suggestions, inviting students to share their opinions, and challenging them to think critically. These strategies will certainly help learners build up language structures and thus consolidate the quality of their talk.

**Consider class dynamics and the nature of the group task when arranging groups:** group arrangement and setting up have a great impact on class dynamics. This arrangement is usually based on learners' abilities, skills, achievements, frequent contributions, experiences, backgrounds, gender, etc. in other words, these factors should be considered while designing or providing a group work task. Indeed, some tasks involve mixed group division to promote diversity and equality, some other tasks require random division to encourage learners work with new peers, but others may contrariwise need to form friendship groups to promote sharing and in-group trust building.

**Have clearly defined tasks:** all of the details related to the task need to be extensively explained beforehand. Teachers are requested to elucidate all of the task steps, descriptions

and instructions. They should also choose logical, clear and possibly attainable objectives with the needed time allocation and the shared positive cooperation.

**Allocate roles or invite pupils to select/rotate a role:** role allocation is more often decided by the teacher. Students are not always given the freedom to choose their partners and positions within the group since it leads them to frequently choose their friends and safe positions. Therefore, role rotation should be regularly introduced to maximise the individual learning experiences. Additionally, the instructor promotes students' engagement with equal contributions and no single member domination.

**Observe pupils, monitor interaction and intervene as needed during the task:** after explaining the instructions and offering a full description of the task with its time constraints, the teacher keeps observing the students without actually intervening; he/she indirectly monitors and orients when necessary without being over-controlling. Nevertheless, a persistent help is to be provided when students lack involvement and motivation, are not cooperative or do not manage their time appropriately.

**Provide closure to the group activity:** allocate enough time for task closure; few minutes to conclude what have been reached so far. It is doubtlessly a prominent step in group work realisation that makes learners recognise and share the product of their collaborative work and subsequently, value cooperation itself.

## **2.6 Characteristics of a successful group work**

To corroborate group work effectiveness, some tips and guidelines to follow have, by common consent, been propounded by a wide number of scholars in the field of education (Beebe & Masterson, 2003; Cooper, 1990; Connery, 1988; as cited in Burke, 2011; CAD Guidelines, 2013; Csernica et al. 2002; Dorothy et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 1991). These encompass what follows:

**Group size:** As learners gain more confidence from pair and individual work activities, they should be exposed to larger group membership. In this respect, multiple choices about group size are available depending on the context of the task, the nature of the learning outcomes, the whole class size, etc. However, small groups are widely approved as they raise the students' likelihood to contribute in the task as Harmer (2010) emphasised, "small groups provoke greater involvement" (p. 165). Again, a small group is a point of disagreement in the literature we have been reviewing. Davis (1993) considered that groups of four to five students are more functional, while others (Csernica et al., 2002) believed that groups of three

to four maximum are more efficient. In the present study, we shall choose mediating alternative and work on groups of four.

**Group composition:** the teacher governs groups and usually arranges them randomly to increase the in-group heterogeneity and diversity, or sometimes according to some other features (Race, 2007) including:

- Groups with some common historical or social basis (e.g., friendship, nationality, geographical).
- Performance-related groups (e.g., highly ambitious, moderately ambitious, indifferent, high achievers, low achievers).
- Skill based groups or learning teams (with a mix of complementary skills).
- Hybrid groups (e.g., balancing a mix of gender, social backgrounds, nationality and performance/skills ability, etc.).

Teachers may also allow friendship groups. In point of fact, this type of grouping can reveal quite a negative outcome since learners generally choose their friends and roommates (Kutnick as cited in Blatchford et al., 2001).

In the present research, the researcher predominantly highlights group composition as far as gender division is concerned. Accordingly, two different groupings may arise: single-gender groups vs. mixed-gender groups.

- Single-gender groups (also matched-gender groups): groups that are composed of one gender; male-male or female-female grouping.
- Mixed-gender groups: groups that are composed of different sexes; male-female groups.

**Teacher's monitoring and support:** as mentioned before, the teacher's role in group work is of paramount importance as to instruct, to explain and to guide. He/she can be more involved with the different groups; yet, his talk should be limited as compared to his/her students'.

**Learning Task:** the task should be challenging enough, but neither too easy nor too difficult with sufficient time allocation. Students, obviously, get bored if the task is too easy, and give up if it is too difficult. The instructor should also give motivating tasks or cultivate that interest through predetermined collaborative work activities throughout the year. Interestingly, teachers can consider early opportunities as icebreakers (Lehfeldt, nd).

**Curriculum Area:** from the course curriculum, teachers decide about the exact content, themes and objectives. He/she determines the topics that necessitate collaborative work and

how to arrange his/her students correspondingly. In other words, group work should be integral with the preplanned syllabus and complementary with the course objectives (Johnson et al., 1991).

## 2.7 Group work evaluation and assessment

### 2.7.1 Evaluation vs. assessment

Before assigning a group work task, the instructor should think about whether it should be assessed or evaluated, how to evaluate/assess, and what to evaluate/assess. All of these underlined requirements are, in fact, determined by the course objectives and the predefined learning syllabus.

The terms evaluation and assessment are often used interchangeably. However, this use is claimed by educators as inaccurate and misleading. Angelo and Cross (1993) pointed out that assessment is a part of on-going learning and focuses on how learning progresses to demonstrate strengths and weaknesses, and consequently, improves the learning process. Whereas evaluation exclusively emphasises the final product and helps to verify whether or not the desired outcomes have been reached and accomplished through observing the learners' post-evaluation grades. The following table summarises these differentiations:

**Table 1.2:** Difference between Assessment and Evaluation (Angelo & Cross, 1993)

<b>Dimension of difference</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>Content:</b> timing, primary purpose	<i>Formative:</i> ongoing, to improve learning	<i>Summative:</i> final, to gauge quality
<b>Orientation:</b> focus of measurement	<i>Process-oriented:</i> how learning is going	<i>Product-oriented:</i> what's been learned
<b>Findings:</b> uses thereof	<i>Diagnostic:</i> identify areas for improvement	<i>Judgmental:</i> arrive at an overall grade/score

It is also worth mentioning that the nature of the collaborative task and its objectives give an idea about who is to be assessing the activity; the instructor or the group members or both (ASKe, 2017). Teacher's assessment involves class monitoring and feedback provided by the teacher him/herself; while students' assessment entails reflecting, commenting, providing constructive feedback on peers contributions and shared outcomes (Race, 1998; Wride, 2017).

### **2.7.2 Issues in assessing/evaluating group work**

The collaborative work assessment and evaluation is not that easy. Several critical questions float around. At this level, the teacher should clearly answer the following inquiries before settling the assessment procedure (CAD Guidelines, 2013):

- Should you give students all the same mark or a mark based on each person's contribution to the group performance?
- If you assess each student's contribution, how will you know what each person has contributed?
- What proportion of a student's course mark should be allocated to group work?
- Is it appropriate to include an 'opt-out' clause for students who do not want to work in this way?
- What do you do if a group member leaves, thus leaving the group with a gap in the allocation of duties to members?
- What do you do if a group falls apart or if a member fails to do their share?

### **Conclusion**

Speaking manifests a serious struggle for EFL learners and teachers alike. Yet, the skill is decisively overestimated in the teaching/learning process because of its prominent interference in all of the language knowledge learning processes. It is required for the fulfilment of any orally performed task and authentic communicative interaction. Speaking, then, is the means through which learners can express meaningful and communicative messages within, and may be out of, the classroom borders.

To increase the learners' oral contributions and promote their efficiency, some techniques and strategies have been suggested, to ELF teachers, in a considerable part of literature in the field of education. Group work and class collaboration has considerably been highlighted as a great option to enhance the frequency as well as the quality of the learners' oral contributions; and as a foregone conclusion, it fosters learning and structures teaching. In the current investigation, group work tasks have been studied as related to the aspect of gender and its effects on learning, particularly the speaking skill.

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**Chapter Two: Relevant  
Literature on Gender and its  
pertinent Association with Social,  
Culture and Educational Aspect**

---

## **Introduction**

EFL teachers could face various concerns when grouping their students during speaking sessions. Teachers should be thoughtful about learners' abilities, cultural and social backgrounds, achievements, skills, gender and more (Liu et al., 2022). These concerns may impact the students' communicative performances and interactional outcomes. Therefore, they should be thoroughly diagnosed, examined, and considered while arranging groups, particularly in speaking sessions. In this respect Stewart (2014) claimed that:

As factors such as pupil experience, ability/disability, communication skills, age, gender and cultural background can all impact on group dynamics and the intended outcomes of the group task, it is important to weigh these up when considering group composition. This will help get the right mix for the task and nip any potential areas of conflict in the bud before they are allowed to surface, interfere with pupil learning and impact on the potential success or failure of the collaborative task (p, 12).

As for the research at hand, we have been focusing on the aspect of gender as a significant factor in group work learning. Gender differences certainly impose notable differences in the way students communicate and interact within the classroom. EFL teachers, then, need to be aware of these differences and try to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment that respects diversity (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020).

It is also noteworthy that gender is an attribute that has a mutual influence with culture; they both affect and are affected by each other. Prominently, culture shapes our understanding of gender roles, gender identity, and gender expression. It also influences our expectations of how males and females should behave and interact with each other. This relationship indirectly interferes in settling group work and enhancing or undermining its outcomes.

## **1. General studies on gender**

### **1.1 Importance of gender**

Gender plays an important role in our lives and in society as a whole. It outlines our behaviours, conversations, and performances from our homes to institutions, shops, and beyond (Kangas, 2014). Gender is always present, whether we are aware of it or not. It is, in



fact, deep-rooted in our behaviours in ways that often seem natural and unnoticeable, as claimed by Sunderland (2000) it is “something not always apparent, but always present” (p. 203).

Although the aspect of gender is constantly veiled in society and unrevealed by its members, it is considered as a complex and ever-evolving concept that begins to form even before we are born; when people around us start making assumptions and guesses about our gender based on sex given at birth. This process continues along our development as we are exposed to different gendered messages and experiences. As early as the person’s childhood, he starts to learn about gender from their caregivers; parents and other adults in a limited environment. Then, in adolescence, he discovers more and more about his own gender identity and gendered expression which offers an opportunity for remarkable change and personality reshaping. In a more open environment, he continues to be influenced by gender roles and expectations during his adulthood. He may also experience gender discrimination or teasing because of his gender identity (McConnel-Ginnet et al., 1980).

As a prominent part of our lives, education is also greatly influenced by gender. Many researchers (Nasser, 2016; Arms, 2007) have revealed that gender differences are evident in schools as males and females coexist in the same classroom setting and participate in the same learning activities. They undergo different educational experiences with different learning outcomes even when they are exposed to the same material. This difference, in turn, affects the input students receive (the teacher’s choice of different materials and topics of interest, for example) and the output they share (for example the frequency and quality of their contributions). In this respect, Petruskevich (1997, p. 16) stated that “the issues of gender and education have been recognized as important areas of study in relation to equality and equity”. Teachers are, therefore, required to explore the field of gender in education to improve the contributions and learning outcomes of both boys and girls, particularly in group work tasks.

Saying the word "gender" can sometimes lead people to confuse it with the word "sex" because they are often used interchangeably. It is important, then, to be aware of the difference between the two terms to be more precise, accurate and avoid any confusion or misunderstanding.

## **1.2 Gender vs. sex**

Linguists have carefully distinguished between the words "gender" and "sex" even though the two terms may sometimes overlap. The American Psychological Association (APA as cited in Hacker et al., 2009) "recommended that 'sex' may be misinterpreted as sexual activity and encouraged researchers to use the term 'gender'" instead (p. 227). Yet, in some languages, the word 'gender' does not exist; the word 'sex' is used to refer for both biological and social intents. At this level, different terms can be employed like 'biological sex' to mean 'sex' itself and 'cultural/social sex' to refer to 'gender' (Betti, 1999).

The World Health Organization (2021) has also explained the difference between sex and gender stating that sex refers to "the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc" (para, 2), while gender is

The socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups...While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviors – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places(para, 1).

This categorization has also been defended by other scholars including Shapiro (as cited in Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003, p. 22). He believed that "sex and gender serve a useful analytic purpose in contrasting a set of biological facts with a set of cultural facts", and continued, sex is only about biology while gender refers to the social, cultural, psychological constructs that could be imposed upon that biological differences.

This difference has been further determined in terms of the nature-nurture dichotomy. Sex is the biological, natural category that a person is assigned with at birth, while gender is the sociolinguistic category that a person acquires throughout his developmental stages, as Simone de Beauvoir suggested "women are not born, they are made", and the same is for men. In this context, West and Zimmerman (1987) claimed that "gender is not something we are born with, but something that we have, we do and we perform" (p.10).

This ebb and flow of beliefs about gender and sex has also been sustained by Mac Connel-Ginet's (2003). The researcher has illustrated the nature-nurture dichotomy as a small boy reproducing his father's actions when he 'swaggers' and 'sticks out his chest'; he does

anything to look like his father, like a man. A young girl also imitates her mother putting her mother's high heels, wearing makeup and 'minces' around the room; she also does anything to look like a woman. These imitations would not necessarily and exactly occur in their adulthood, but they would definitely display in a way or another.

In a more *extreme* view, some researchers suggested that the clear and sharp demarcation between sex and gender wholly fades away (Butler, 1991; Fausto-Sterling, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). They claimed that gender is not naturally based on sex and that the nature-nurture dichotomy is not a perfect way to understand the two terms. Sex and gender are complex and fluid concepts that are influenced by a variety of factors, including biology, culture, and personal experience. Accordingly, a person may be born with male sex characteristics (e.g., XY chromosomes, testosterone hormones, and male genitals) but chooses to identify as female, femboy, non-binary or transgender. Similarly, a person may be born with female sex characteristics (e.g., XX chromosomes, estrogen hormones, and female genitals) but chooses to identify as tomboy, non-binary or transgender as well. In this regard, Fausto-Sterling (2005) believed that

Labelling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place. (p. 3)

Although this flexibility in choosing one's gender is widely encouraged by the vast majority of researchers worldwide, gender identification in Algeria is not that complex. Gender identity is determined by the sex assigned at birth; it could be socially and culturally influenced but never radically changed. This is considered as a religious, social and cultural taboo (Halbaoui & Rebahi, 2021; Gharouba, 2018).

### **1.3 Gender differences**

The scientific research has widely been enriched with vigorous generalisations about how males and females differ across domains, cultures, and developmental stages (Ellis et al., 2008). The investigated disparities were considered universal and pertinent to all cultures. However, they unquestionably vary in scope and magnitude. In certain cultures, then, gender disparities might be emphasised (generally in modern cultures like Netherlands and Finland);

while in others, they could be wrapped and shrunk (generally in more traditional cultures like Pakistan, Nigeria and Algeria) (Eckert as cited in Bucholtz, 2004).

### **1.3.1 Gender differences and biological findings**

There is a scientists' increasing interest in how biological factors, such as chromosomes, hormones, and brain structure, influence gender identity and expression. They have been trying to find out potential effect of biology on the person's gender. Many findings have systematically confirmed this relationship and tried to provide various interpretations of how and why individuals, as male or females, behave. Eckert and McConnel-Ginnet (2003) believed that "hormonal levels, brain activity patterns, and even brain anatomy can be a result of different activity as well as a cause" (p. 12). This indicates that our actions can affect our hormones, brain activity, and brain structure, and vice versa. For example, engaging in physical activity can increase testosterone levels, which can lead to increased muscle mass and strength. Moreover, learning a new skill can change the structure of the brain, making it easier to learn new skills in the future (Estumano et al. 2019; Di Liegro et al., 2019). Thereby, quite a few neurological, hormonal and brains differences of both males and females have been brought to light (Berenbaum, 1999; Legato, 2005& Tyre, 2005 as cited in Griffiths, 2008; McConnel-Ginnet et al., 1980).

- a. Women have more nerve cells in the left half of the brain where language is centered and produced, and have a richer connection between the two sides of the brain.
- b. Women seem to use more of their brains to listen and to speak.
- c. Women activate more areas in the brain than men do. This gives them more communicative abilities.
- d. Girls have 'language centers' that mature and develop earlier than that of boys.
- e. Higher levels of testosterone lead men to be more aggressive than women, and left-brain dominance leads men to be more rational.
- f. The relative lack of brain lateralization leads women to be more emotional and this explains the emotional-oriented thinking as opposed to males' rational reasoning in performing the tasks designed by the researcher.
- g. Women's corpus callosum, the link between the two brain hemispheres, is relatively larger than men's which results to greater integration between the two hemispheres.
- h. Sex differences in androgens during early development affect interests, activities, and aggression.

Although the abovementioned differences give lucid and scientific explanations of how some biological predispositions affect gender identity and expression, biology failed to fully explain why men and women are different. Accordingly, Eckert and McConell-Ginet (2003) mentioned that:

To whatever extent gender may be related to biology, it does not flow naturally and directly from our bodies. The individual's chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics do not determine occupation, gait, or use of color terminology....If gender flowed naturally from sex, one might expect the world to sit back and simply allow the baby to become male or female. But in fact, sex determination sets the stage for a lifelong process of gendering, as the child becomes, and learns how to be, male or female (p. 13-16).

This deficiency has altogether accelerated other investigations studying gender-linked differences from behavioural and psychological perspectives.

### **1.3.2 Gender differences and behavior**

Seemingly, men and women respond differently in different situations because of gender roles, expectations, and biases, most particularly as they deal with mixed-gender partners. For example, men are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, while women lean more to safe zones and choices. Additionally, men are more assertive, competitive and dominant, whereas women seem more submissive, cooperative and polite (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975). In the present research, some amongst these gender disparities have been accentuated including assertiveness, politeness and interruption).

#### **1.3.2.1 Assertiveness**

On the whole, teachers may interact with male students more recurrently than with females. One possible reason is due to males' assertive actions and reactions. Seifert and Sutton (2009) revealed that "if boys are speaking up more frequently in discussions or at other times, then a teacher may be 'forced' to pay more attention to them" (p. 74). As opposed to tentativeness, assertiveness is according to Eskin (2003) "an important social skill which promotes personal well-being" (p.07). More precisely, it refers to the ability to express one's

thoughts, feelings, and needs directly, persistently and honestly while still being respectful of others.

The ability of being assertive has generally been a challenge ascribed to females. Assertiveness is an important gender difference which is often identified in male's speech and behaviour (Lakoff's, 1975). In addition to expressing ideas openly and forcefully, males also show some body language features that reflect him to be assertive. He stands straight, steady, and directly face people he is addressing with maintaining eye contact. He also speaks in a clear, firm and loud enough voice confidently and with no hesitations. Conversely, female non-assertive reaction and tentativeness is more often displayed in her less powerful and very much less authoritative speech with the inclination to swear less, speak more politely, use more tag questions and hedges (LSUSHC, 2010, p. 1).

In the research at hand, females' tentativeness as well as males' assertiveness has also been visibly discerned resulting less frequent female contributions, especially in mixed-gender groups.

### **1.3.2.2 Politeness**

A lot of evidence has corroborated gender differences in males' and females' language use. One of the most significant differences in communication is the use of politeness strategies. As early as 1970's, Lakoff examined gendered behaviours and suggested 'three rules of rapport' that individuals need to be aware of and respect while being involved in discussions; this comprises 'Don't impose, Give options, Be friendly'. Right afterwards, Leech (1983) has further recognised a more detailed proposal of how one develops polite attitudes; the individual should 'minimise the expression of impolite beliefs' and respects the 'six maxims' of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. By the late 1980's, Brown and Levinson offered a new perspective through emphasising universal principles in polite utterances construction.

These 'know how to be' rules introduced by the pioneering research studies in the area of gender differences has simultaneously been accompanied by descriptions and definitions of what the word politeness reveals. Gleason and Ratner (1998) pointed out that

politeness means acting so as to take care of the feelings of others and

involves both those actions associated with positive face (the wish to be

approved of) and negative face (the wish to be free from the imposition, unimpeded, or left alone) (p. 286).

In general, it is a way of behaving and interacting through which the person shows awareness of how others feel. He shares more indirect and friendly structures to preserve the interlocutor's face. This has also been explained by Brown (2015) stating that "Politeness is essentially a matter of taking into account the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated, including behaving in a manner that demonstrates appropriate concern for interactors' social status and their social relationship" (p. 326).

Additionally, many researchers (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975) have been involved in debates about whether women are more polite than men. For this to be proven, two distinct theories have been set; politeness and face, and politeness and gender.

### ***Politeness and Face***

Politeness and face theory has been clearly foregrounded by Brown and Levinson (1987). They adopted their theories' first element, the term face, from Goffman's (1955) work that originally explained what the word face stands for. Goffman (as cited in Redmond, 2015) believed that "face is the positive public image you seek to establish in social interactions" (p. 2). In other words, it refers to the image the interlocutors seek to preserve during the course of conversation.

Brown and Levinson (1987) have used Goffman's research as a reference and provided more detailed facets. They expanded face theory to include two types of faces; positive face which is based on "a desire for approval and acceptance by others" and negative face which is based on "a desire to proceed without being impeded upon" (Redmond, 2015; p. 4).

During interactions, we might sometimes fail to maintain a particular face, positive or negative. In this case, the face is, intentionally or unintentionally, being challenged and impaired by external factors like negative comments, disregard and criticism for instance. This results what Goffman conceptualised 'the wrong face/to be out of face/shamefaced/or threats to face'. Thereby, the shamefaced experiences negative feelings of f embarrassment, shame, humiliation, agitation, confusion, defensiveness, or chagrin that embody Face Threatening Acts.

### ***Politeness and Gender***

Young girls are socialised to speak and behave in a feminine and lady-like manner. They are taught to behave womanly as to avoid strong language or swear words, and to speak in a soft and gentle voice. They are also urged to be polite and respectful, and to avoid being aggressive or unnecessarily assertive. Commonly, girls utilize tag questions to give choice, and neither force agreement nor acceptance of the hearer. Boys, however, are not stopped or treated severely like girls are when they use ‘rough talk’, rude and vulgar words; they have more behavior choices and less language constraints. This would probably result in what Lakoff (1975) calls ‘genderlect’; a style of speech that characterizes one gender than the other.

#### **1.3.2.3 Interruption**

Another gender difference that has traditionally been underlined is interruption. In fact, the recurrent presence of overlap does not form a sufficient evidence for interruption. Accordingly, Zimmerman and West (1975) have discerned the difference between interruption and overlap. They claimed that an overlap happens when one interlocutor begins speaking before the first finishes; it is a simultaneous talk throughout active listening. Overlapping is also not interruptive if it occurs as the other person is likely to finish speaking anyway. This could be signalled through pausing and slowing down one’s speech which anticipates a new turn to begin. Interruption, however, is an abuse and violation to turn-taking conventions, and “takes place when the first speaker is unable to finish making a point, the topic is cut short by the intrusion.....it is a break-down of the normal turn-taking aspects of conversations” (Sacks et al., 1974).

As far as gender differences are concerned, research studies have confirmed that men are more likely to interrupt; while women tend to overlap more and support other’s ideas. In this respect, West and Zimmerman (1975) observed that “interruptions occur more in mixed-sex encounters than in same-sex interactions and that men initiate more of the interruptions”(p. 498).

It is also important to mention that researchers have identified a number of gender-related differences other than the abovementioned. They have provided an extensive list of eminent differentiations among men and women. These comprise the following:

- While men are hierarchical, women are egalitarian (Tannen, 1990).



- While women are cooperative and supportive, men are competitive and dominant (Kiesling, 1997).
- Generally women do not tell jokes, especially in public, unlike men who have a more sense of humour (Bucholtz, 2004).
- In mixed-gender settings, women speak much less than men; women are silenced (James & Drakich, 1993; as cited in Nevalainen, 2002), and their ability to gain the floor is much less than men's (Zimmerman & West, 1975).
- Women are generally assumed to be less competent than men (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977), and their use of tentative language further reduces their perceived competence (Bradley, 1981).
- The woman is generally seen as a caretaker, passive bystander, and as physically and emotionally weak. However, men are still expected to be stronger, more aggressive (Kincheloe & Horn, 2007).

### **1.3.3 Gender differences in personality traits**

The five-factor model of personality, also known as the Big Five, is a dimensional theory of personality structure that identifies five broad traits thought to encompass the most important facets of human personality. It has, at the outset, been recommended by Costa and McCrae's (1978/1990) to offer a framework for understanding borderline of personality disorder as 'a maladaptive variant' of general personality structure (Widiger & McCabe, 2018). Overall, the Five Factor Model provides a comprehensive outline for understanding and assessing personality traits and disorders. The traits underlined include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, and the following table summarizes them with the sub-dimensions they assess:

**Table 2.1:** Costa and McCrae's Big Five Model (1990)

<b>Neuroticism</b>	<b>Extraversion</b>	<b>Openness to experience</b>	<b>Agreeableness</b>	<b>Conscientiousness</b>
Anxiety	Warmth	Fantasy	Trust	Competence
Hostility	Gregariousness	Aesthetics	Straight forwardness	Order
Depression	Assertiveness	Feelings	Altruism	Dutifulness
Self-consciousness	Activity	Actions	Compliance	Achievement Striving
Impulsiveness	Excitement Seeking	Ideas	Modesty	Self-Discipline
Vulnerability to Stress	Positive Emotion	Values	Tendermindedness	Deliberation

As the model started to gain fame and expansion, Costa et al. (2001) have identified gender differences with regard to the Five-Factor Model (FFM). They state that “The NEO-PI-R is an operationalization of the Five-Factor Model (FFM), which structures specific traits in terms of five broad factors to summarize known gender differences in terms of the FFM” (p. 322). In this inventory, gender differences have been associated to:

### **1.3.3.1 Neuroticism (N)**

This trait checks how emotionally stable and resilient someone is. It is actually the broad area under which negative emotions are studied. It suggests that neurotic people tend to be more anxious, stressed, and irritable, while emotionally stable people are more calm and well-balanced. Gender differences on traits related to (N) have witnessed women reflecting higher levels of neuroticism than men (Lynn & Martin, 1997; as cited in Costa et al., 2001). Moreover, researchers have also proven that women scored higher in anxiety (Feingold, 1994); in symptoms of depression, sadness and fear (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987) and lower in measures of self-esteem and anger (Costa et al., 2001).

### **1.3.3.2 Interpersonal traits**

According to Costa et al. (2001), Bem’s (1974) Sex Role Inventory (SRI) is a prominent self-report questionnaire that measures an individual's masculinity and femininity. Several gender-related disparities have been discussed under the dimension of extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A). Generally, it has been reported that women are warmer and more submissive, while men tend to be colder and more dominant (Sadler & Woody, 2003). Additionally, women have been found to be more sensitive to others' aversive behaviours, particularly coldness, across different types of relationships (Shih & Eberhart, 2010); whereas men have been found to be more sensitive to warmth. In terms of power and social influence, as well, men generally possess higher levels of ‘expert and legitimate power’, while women possess higher levels of ‘referent power’ (Thorbeck & Grotevant, 1982).

### **1.3.3.3 Openness to experience (O)**

Researchers (Feingold, 1994; Weisberg et al., 2011) found that women and men process information in different ways which results different cognitive styles. Although they are both susceptible to motivated reasoning, men and women tend to prioritise different stances when making decisions, for example. In this regard, men tend to be conducted by reason, while women are more controlled by emotions. High scoring also has been attributed to women’s aesthetic and feeling. Conversely, men are more intellectually oriented as they score higher in

openness to ideas. This difference grants women more sensitiveness to emotions that, subsequently, helps them build up the ability to decode non-verbal signals (Miller et al., 1989).

#### **1.3.3.4 Conscientiousness (C)**

Conscientiousness is a personality trait that is characterised by a tendency to be organised, responsible, hardworking, impulse controlling and goal-directed. Conscientious people are also more likely to adhere to rules and norms. As far as gender differences are concerned, women perform slightly higher than men in some aspects of conscientiousness like organization, dutifulness, and self-discipline; whereas men often achieve higher in competence and high-quality work (Feingold, 1994; Philips et al., 2023).

Many gender differences have, indeed, been observed throughout the undertaking. These disparities may predetermine some negative consequences regarding the amount and the quality of the students' contributions; we presume, though, this variety would sustain equilibrium in behaviors, contributions and learning outcomes (e. g. balance between males' rational and females' emotional thinking, females' organization and males' competence and more).

#### **1.3.4 Gender differences related to speech activities**

The ability to participate in speech activities is essential for expressing one's ideas and points of view in interactions and verbal communication. A speech community is generally involved in a set of speech activities on a daily basis such as: lecturing, sermonising, gossiping, griping, joking, arguing, fighting, therapy talk, small talk and so on. These refer to specific types of human activities that engage the active and purposeful speech messages production in interactions between people. They also provide a rich environment for meaningful communication to take place, allowing students to develop their interactive skills necessary for life (Eckert & McConnel-Ginet, 2003).

Speech activities also witness a set of gender-linked disparities. In the realm of verbal exchange and interactions, according to Carli (1990) and Eckert & McConnel-Ginet (2003), there exists a perceptible divergence between men and women in their inclination to select particular speech activities. In the present inquiry, our attention was particularly directed towards certain gendered Speech activities that may potentially prompt adverse consequences for single-gender groups primarily.

Women have a tendency to engage in more frequent and extensive conversations of a personal and informal nature, known as gossip, compared to their male counterparts. In the field of gender studies, gossiping is identified from two different angles. According to Cameron et al. (1988) it is a “talk among women about absent others by no means, always implies a focus on making absent others look bad” (p. 100). In other words, gossiping is observed to be more prevalent among women than it is among men. It designates the act of engaging in discussions emphasising unfavorable characteristics or actions of individuals who are not present to encourage others instigate negative attitudes towards them. However, according to the scholarly work of Coates and Cameron (1988), it is a usual and informal talk occurring within the context of intimate female relationship. They stated that this type of conversations does not necessarily yield unfavorable outcomes. Yet, it involves a thorough judgment of actions and behaviors of individuals present and absent during the discussion. Despite the contrasting definitions, Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) regarded both interpretations as female-linked speech activities.

Another instance of an extensively gendered verbal engagement is arguing. Its meaning again may diverge but, in general, it is a “statement of the pros and cons of a proposition; discussion, debate (esp. contentious); a verbal dispute, a quarrel”, Tannen (1990; as cited in Eckert & McConnel-Ginnet, 2003). In this regard, arguing and quarreling, as both generally attributed to males, are certainly different (McConnel-Ginnet et al., 1980). Wierzbicka (1987) went further in comparing both terms indicating that quarreling has a heightened emphasis on personal dynamics, whereas arguing is essentially centered on the subject matter. He put forward, “quarrelling involves a struggle of wills and a display of tempers” (p. 138). However, argumentation involves conviction, compelling rationale, and intellectual skill.

### **1.3.5 Differences in language use**

Lakoff's (1975) research delved into the examination of gender differences in the realm of language use. The study critically analysed the divergent linguistic patterns exhibited by both males and females, particularly focusing on the choice and frequency of words, the application of specific linguistic structures in given contexts, and the intonation nuances. An illustration of lexical differences suggested by Lakoff and Ide (2005) is to imagine a man and a woman looking at the same wall adorned with a pinkish shade of purple. The woman would have the ability to verbalise and express her thoughts and observations and uses the exact word "mauve". If man utters the same sentence ‘the wall is mauve’, one might think he is engaged in a sarcastic imitation of a female, a homosexual, or an interior designer/decorator’.

Therefore, scholars substantiated that females use more precise discriminations (like beige, mauve, and ecru, aquamarine, lavender) in naming colours than their male counterparts.

Another distinction that could be underlined is the use of particles. Men and women use of particles is demonstrated in the subsequent set of sentences advocate by Lakoff as well:

- Oh dear, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.
- Damn it, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.

Most people, indeed, would agree that the first sentence is uttered by a woman whereas the subsequent one is said by a man. Additionally, this would also allude to the proclivity of women to employ courteous and polite language, while men tend to opt for less courteous vocabulary.

Other areas of vocabulary may also highlight some gender-related distinctions, particularly the use of what Lakkof refers to as 'empty adjectives'. She believed that a certain set of these adjectives does not reveal any gender bias; they are neutral and can be utilised by both men and women. Another set, however, is predominantly associated with women's discourse. Below are representative lists of both types:

<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Women only</u>
great	adorable
terrific	charming
cool	sweet
neat	lovely
	divine

**Example:** a. What a *terrific* idea! (adjective of neutral use).

b. What a *divine* idea! (adjective used by women only).

Women speech patterns are also characterised by the inclusion of tag questions, intensifiers, and hedges. First, the tag question is a linguistic phenomenon that pertains to declarative statements accompanied by a question which inquires about the truthfulness and validity of the aforementioned statement such as 'she's a doctor, isn't she?' Lakoff has further drawn attention to the idea that tag questions essentially engender a confidence and assertiveness drop within the statement. Second, intensifiers are adverbs that serve to accentuate or emphasise certain elements within a sentence like 'so' and 'very' in 'she looks *so/very* pretty'. Yet, they are perceived as relatively feeble and less powerful in comparison to more definitive superlatives. Third, hedges -such as sort of, perhaps, maybe, and probably-, are adverbs or adverb phrases that diminish the strength of a declaration and introduce an

element of uncertainty. Their purpose is to mitigate the words' and phrases' significance and prevent them from sounding excessively direct, for example: “*maybe* we should talk to him about the issue” (less direct than: we should talk to him about the issue), “could you *just* post this letter for me?”(less direct than ‘post this letter for me’) (Lakoff, 1975).

Performing these dissimilarities results in the formation of what is known as ‘genderlect’ which pertains to the linguistic style employed by a particular gender classification. Accordingly, Robson and Stockwell (2005, p. 02) claimed that the use of characteristics associated with a specific gender classification serves as a distinguishing factor for the genderlect; for instance, the repetition of the following features construct the concept of ‘women genderlect’ or ‘feminine genderlect’:

- Over-hesitancy, including pausing, stuttering, ‘um-ing and ah-ing’, and uncompleted sentences.
- Non-assertiveness, including the avoidance or hedging of phrases, and the use of a rising intonation that invites agreement and support.
- Self-reference in subject matter, and a tendency to personalise by using first person pronouns, inclusive and intimate ‘we’, and possessives.
- Avoidance of swearing and other taboo forms.
- Super-politeness and high degree of positive and supportive words (sure, yep, mmm).
- Non-interruption (especially of men) in conversation.

In the present research, indeed, a multitude of gender differences abovementioned has been consistently observed while students undertake their assigned tasks. They have been checked to help the researcher in identifying any manifestations of behavioral differences between genders.

#### **1.4 Grammatical gender**

The expression and reinforcement of gender are carried out by language through its morphological features that are specific to each gender. While this phenomenon may be more implicit in languages such as English, totally absent in genderless languages like Persian and Turkish, it is undoubtedly more evident in others such as Arabic and French. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, p. 65) have proposed a collection of instances that demonstrate the existence of gender within the language morphological level.

**Example 01**

In the Arabic language, there exists a distinct use of pronominal and verb forms for both the second-person singular and plural, as well as the third-person singular, dual, and plural. The selection of these forms is contingent upon whether the intended recipient or subject is of the male or female gender.

**Table 2.2:** Grammatical Gender at the Morphological Level (e.g. Arabic and English) (Eckert & McConnel-Ginnet, 2003)

Male	Female
katabta ‘you (masc. sg.) have written’/wrote	katabti ‘you (fem. sg.) have written’/wrote
katabtum ‘you (masc. pl.) have written’/wrote	katabtunna ‘you (fem. pl.) have written’/wrote
kataba ‘he has written’/wrote	katabat ‘she has written’/wrote
kataba: ‘they two (masc.) have written’/wrote	katabata: ‘they two (fem.) have written’/wrote
katabu: ‘they (masc. pl.) have written’/wrote	katabna ‘they (fem. pl.) have written’/wrote

**Example 02**

Unlike English, nouns in French are distinguished as either feminine or masculine. This distinction is clearly shown in their grammar:

Regardez la maison. Elle est grande  $\implies$  Look at the house. It is big.

Regardez le camion. Il est grand  $\implies$  Look at the truck. It is big.

‘Maison’ is a feminine word while ‘camion’ is masculine. This elucidates the use of the feminine and masculine articles (*la* maison and *le* camion) and the gendered personal pronouns *elle* and *il*, respectively.

**1.5 Gender differences through human developmental stages (Preschooling)**

Although a limited number of biological distinctions can be evidently identified between the male and female genders, it is important to acknowledge that a multitude of behavioural disparities inevitably manifests over the course of time. The development of these disparities is intricately intertwined with the influence of the surroundings and the profound impact they have on the individual's upbringing. Indeed, gender differences are reinforced by adults from early stages of childhood.

In point of fact, adults send implicit messages about gender through various forms of treatment with the intention of facilitating infants' acquisition of gentlemanly and feminine behaviours and manners. This process of acquisition and differentiation in experience

certainly continue throughout the subsequent developmental stages; from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Baxter (as cited in Slavin, 2006) notes that:

Male and female babies have traditionally been treated differently from the time they are born. The wrapping of the infant in either a pink or a blue blanket symbolises the variations in experience that typically greet the child from birth onward. In early studies, adults described boy or girl babies wrapped in blue blankets as being more active than the same babies wrapped in pink. Other masculine traits were also ascribed to those wrapped in blue (p. 119).

From the moment of birth, gender bias is apparent; yet, very young children are not conscious of these distinctions. Subsequently, children begin to recognise these distinctions at approximately three or four years old (Griffiths, 2008). Afterwards, children gain a heightened awareness as they undergo the socialisation process at the educational institutions. In this context, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) pointed out that male and female babies cry the same amount, but boys cry less as they grow older due to the different ways that boys and girls are treated by their caregivers, and later by their teachers.

### **1.6 Gender and education**

The process of schooling and education plays a crucial role in consolidating gender disparities and actively participates in their perpetuation. This phenomenon is commonly recognised as gender bias within the educational environment. According to Anderman and Anderman (2009, p. 425)

Gender bias occurs when people make assumptions regarding behaviors, abilities or preferences of others based upon their gender. Because there are strong gender role stereotypes for masculinity and femininity, students who do not match them can encounter problems with teachers and with their peers.



This generates a set of convictions that uphold negative evaluations of individuals who do not conform to common gender norms which inevitably lead to sexism. The latter refers to the belief in the superiority of one gender over the other (Wallace Carter, 2002).

Throughout the schooling process, girls and boys gradually develop an increasing sense of consciousness regarding the biological disparities and socio-cultural variances that distinguish them (Rycroft-Smith & Andre, 2019). Moreover, their instructors implement distinct approaches that accentuate these differences, and ultimately widen the gap and further diverge males' and females' cognitive processes (Parker & Rennie, 2002). Research, therefore, affirms that teacher-student and student-student classroom interactions are profoundly influenced by gender which has also been brought to light in the present research's teacher questionnaire as well. Some of the gendered classroom practices include the following:

- Teachers unintentionally demonstrate gender bias in classroom in three principal ways: reinforcing gender stereotypes, maintaining sex separation, and differentiating treatment based on the students' gender (Grossman & Grossman, 1994).
- Group work and discussions are often dominated by males, leading to males' monopolisation of teacher attention. (Lee, 2005).
- Men and women may learn differently and women commonly associate their success and accomplishment to fortuity or effort, whereas men ascribe success to ability and competence (Fennema, 1990).
- Men outperform women in problem solving. (Casey, 2001).
- Boys inherently demonstrate exuberant and disorderly conduct, possess intellectual capabilities, employ rational thinking, and exhibit limited social communication skills, whereas girls embody tranquility, courtesy, and dedication to academic pursuits (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

In fact, the restriction of gender biasing contributes to the enhancement of the classroom atmosphere that we offer. For this to happen, three fundamental principles for teachers have been suggested by Slavin (2006). Firstly, teachers must refrain from using stereotypes; they should not treat students based on their gender because they may limit their reactions and behavioural performances to conform to their teachers' expectations.

In the context of collaborative tasks, for instance, teachers should avoid assuming that boys are predisposed to be leaders while girls are predisposed to be passive and reliant followers.

Secondly, teachers are required to foster the process of assimilation and integration by encouraging male and female students to collaborate and engage in joint efforts to complete assignments and carry out various projects (this has been employed in this study; mixed-gender cooperative work). Thirdly, teachers must be cautious when granting students the opportunity to speak, engaging them in collaborative tasks, assuming responsibilities, and providing feedback. In this regard, the concept of ‘equity’, arisen alongside the advent of women's advocacy movements during the 1970's, has emerged. It denotes fairness and equilibrium between the genders within the educational setting.

It is also important to mention that the terms equality and equity actually diverge. According to the AAUW (1998a, p. 261)

Equality sets up a comparison between males and females and asks the question: Are they receiving the same education? Gender equity poses a different question for the classroom dynamic: Do students receive the right education to achieve a shared standard of excellence?”

Equality, therefore, entails the reception of identical input, while equity pertains to the reception of appropriate input in order to attain the same outcomes. Significantly, Reynolds and Miller (2003) believed that the attainment of shared outcomes does not necessitate the provision of identical resources to both males and females stating that “gender equity is not sameness or equality; it is equity of outcomes, equal access to achievement and opportunity. Hence, equitable education addresses the needs of girls and boys rather than questions whether each receives the same thing” (p. 261). Therefore, a variety of learning topics and tasks are provided to target the students’ diverged needs with equal opportunities for learning instead of equal learning input.

## **2. Gender as a cultural aspect**

### **2.1 Definition of culture**

Culture is a concept that has long been a subject of debate and discussion among scholars and academics due to its elusive and intricate nature. The term culture represented a real challenge in terms of its precise definition and understanding because of its multifaceted and ever-evolving characteristics (Makhmudova, 2022). In general, culture is defined in Britannica Encyclopedia (2022) as a behavior particular to human beings. More precisely, the comprehensive analysis conducted by the prominent American anthropologists Kroeber and

Kluckhohn (1952) consisted of a thorough and in-depth examination of various concepts and definitions pertaining to culture. Through their rigorous examination and exhaustive review, they compiled a comprehensive list comprising 164 distinct definitions, each offering a unique perspective and understanding of this complex concept. They stated that

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action (cited in, Adler, 1997; p. 14)

In simpler words, it refers to a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tyler, 1870; cited in; Avruch, 1998, p. 6).

By the end of 1930’s, the anthropologist Margaret Mead juxtaposed the two concepts ‘culture’ and ‘a culture’ and delved into the intricate relationship between these two distinct yet interconnected concepts to highlight the complexities and nuances in the study of human societies. She considered culture as “the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation”; whereas “a culture is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time” (cited in; Birukou et al., 2013. p. 2). This reveals that culture is more general and universal while a culture is specific and is hold by a particular group or community.

## **2.2 Key characteristics of culture**

The term ‘culture’ holds various interpretations and encompasses a multitude of elements, making it challenging to encapsulate its essence within a concise definition. The perplexity of the ‘culture’ characteristics, in turn, further complicate the process of defining them, as they encompass a vast array of elements including but not limited to language,

customs, traditions, values, beliefs, and social norms. In this regard, Spencer-Oatey (2012) has compiled a list of different characteristics of culture. These include the following.

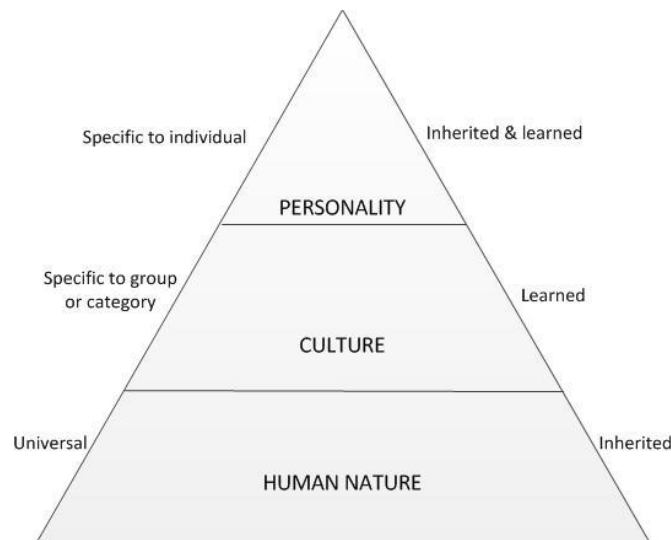
**a. *Culture is manifested at different layers of depth:*** in the examination of the culture within a specific group or community, according to Spencer-Oatey (2012), it is advantageous to discern three essential levels in which culture becomes evident: observable artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts

Include everything from the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity, and other phenomena, to the more permanent archival manifestations such as company records, products, statements of philosophy, and annual reports (Schein, 1990, p. 111).

Moreover, values are the things that people say are important to them and that guide their behaviour; they motivate them to act in a certain way. For example, if someone values honesty, they are more likely to be honest in their interactions with others. When values are non-debatable, unquestioned and taken for granted are called assumptions instead; for instance, the belief in many cultures that men are stronger than women.

**b. *Culture affects behaviour and interpretations of behaviour:*** regarding this point, Hofstede (1994) emphasised that while some aspects of culture may be physically observable, their significance is hidden. This denotes that Behavior is a visible manifestation of culture, but its underlying meaning may not be immediately apparent and obvious. Hofstede illustrated this through the 'ring gesture' (thumb and forefinger tips touching). This may be interpreted as conveying agreement, approval or acceptance in some countries like the USA, the UK and Canada, but as an insult or obscene gesture in several Mediterranean countries. In the current investigation, we also strive to ascertain the influence of culture on behaviors and to identify the ways in which culture shapes our actions through establishing a comparative study between three distinct university contexts.

**c. *Culture can be differentiated from both universal human nature and unique individual personality:*** Culture is definitely different from the inherent characteristics of human beings and from the distinctive traits that define an individual's character and personality as the figure below displays.



**Figure 2.1:** Three levels of uniqueness in human mental programming (Hofstede, 1994, p. 6)

**d. *Culture influences biological processes:*** the behaviors that arise from our basic biological requirements, such as eating, coughing, and defecating, are often subject to the impact of one's culture. In this context, Clyde Kluckhohn (1968; as cited in; Spencer-Oatey, 2012) has provided a striking example through narrating a story that reflects how culture can affect biological processes.

I once knew a trader's wife in Arizona who took a somewhat devilish interest in producing a cultural reaction. Guests who came her way were often served delicious sandwiches filled with a meat that seemed to be neither chicken nor tuna fish yet was reminiscent of both. To queries she gave no reply until each had eaten his fill. She then explained that what they had eaten was not chicken, not tuna fish, but the rich, white flesh of freshly killed rattlesnakes.

The response was instantaneous – vomiting, often violent vomiting (p. 7).

The cultural belief that rattlesnake meat is disgusting actually caused the normal digestive process to be suddenly interrupted. Likewise, we presume that culture can also affect some behaviours as far as gender differences are concerned. Politeness as attributed to female gender, for instance, is differently emphasised and practised in different cultures.

**e. *Culture has both universal (etic) and distinctive (emic) elements:*** these highlight the common, shared and typical aspects that form the mother culture as well as the more specific and distinct variations that shape subcultures. Both levels are actually apparent in the Algerian context as the present research underlines (Algerian culture as a mother culture and the different subcultures attributed to the three regions selected).

**f. *Culture is a descriptive not an evaluative concept:*** culture is often seen as the product of a long process of human development which includes education, refinement, and the development of civilised values and behaviors. However, culture is not something that belongs to a select few; it is inclusive and shared by all members of a society. Moreover, there is no good or bad culture; no culture is perfect, but all cultures have something to offer. As a matter of course, all cultures are equally valuable and worthy of respect, but only diverge in what they actually emphasise and value. This has also been taken into account throughout the present research process as it encourages developing awareness about the cultural specificities rather than stereotypes and judgments.

**g. *Culture is associated with social groups:*** culture is a phenomenon that is not limited to the experience of a single individual; it is inherently a shared construct among at least two or more individuals. In fact, societies -which are the tangible manifestations of culture- always encompass a larger scope than the minimal number of individuals involved in its formation. Moreover, people essentially possess numerous tiers of mental programming, according to Hofstede (1994, p.10), each corresponding to different levels of cultural background. For instance:

- **A national level according to one's country** (or *countries* for people who migrated during their lifetime). (In our context, the Algerian national culture).
- **A regional and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistic affiliation**, as most nations are composed of culturally different regions and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or language groups. (In this context, we may bring to light Islam as the national religion, Chaoui regional culture and linguistic affiliation, Kabyl regional culture and linguistic affiliation, and Oued Souf regional culture).
- **A gender level**, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy. In this context, both genders has been underlined and investigated in mixed-collaborative tasks as well as single-gender groups.
- **A generation level**, which separates grandparents from parents from children. Here, the research population refers to second year university students; most of them 20 years old and more.
- **A role category**, e.g. parent, son/daughter, teacher, student. Obviously, we have been dealing with students, in the present research.
- **A social class level**, associated with educational opportunities and with a person's occupation or profession.

- For those who are employed, an organizational or corporate level according to the way employees has been socialized by their work organization.

Other than the characteristics stated above, Spencer-Oatey (2012) has mentioned the following:

- h.** Culture is both an individual construct and a social construct.
- i.** Culture is always both socially and psychologically distributed in a group, and so the delineation of a culture's features will always be fuzzy.
- j.** Culture is learnt.
- k.** Culture is subject to gradual change.
- l.** The various parts of a culture are all, to some degree, interrelated.

### **2.3 Gender and culture in the Algerian context**

As globalisation began to spread worldwide, the United Nations organisation, along with its affiliated agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNIFEM, expanded its role beyond providing financial aid and services to encompass the implementation of diverse social legislation and regulations. The UNO requested its member nations to endorse these legal instruments as a means to foster global ethical uniformity (Mechri, 2019). Consequently, the concept of gender and the promotion of gender equality around the world, and Algeria is not an exception, have become prominent and highly advocated for since the convening of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994.

In the Algerian context, the laws seem promising and ideal as the constitution explicitly affirms the equitable treatment of all individuals, and as all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their birth, race, sex, and so on (Bouagache, 2021). In 2014, the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in Algeria was addressed by the authorities through the provision of financial compensation to women who were victimised by sexual offenses committed by the armed factions during the civil conflict in the 1990s. Furthermore, Algeria passed a law criminalising domestic violence and sexual harassment in public spaces in 2015.

Although Algeria has witnessed significant advancements and transformations in assigning gender roles and promoting gender equality, considering these traditional roles does not imply endorsing the philosophy of gender in its entirety. The Algerian society, indeed, does not accept the idea of absolute gender equality which deliberately espouse homosexuality and the existence of more than two distinct gender identities and inclinations (Mechri, 2019).

Given the focus of our inquiry being on the realm of education, our primary objective revolves around fostering the principle of gender equity, rather than an emphasis on achieving absolute equality. Furthermore, it is **our duty** to elevate awareness and acknowledgement of the various educational **experiences** that arise as a result of **gender differences**. It also falls within our responsibility to investigate Algeria's cultural wealth and raise recognition of its diversity and direct impact on education and learning.

## **Conclusion**

As speaking is a difficult skill to teach and even more challenging to learn, it necessitates both teachers and learners to acknowledge its intricacy and complexity. Consequently, they are compelled to explore and investigate various strategies and recommendations that can improve and enhance oral communication within the classroom setting. One of the suggested methods, by researchers, is to incorporate a diverse range of classroom activities -such as group work tasks-which foster collaboration among learners and facilitate the exchange of ideas, and thus promoting peer-learning. Researchers assert that engaging in small group discussions not merely exposes learners to the target language but also encourages active participation, surpassing the level achieved through individual or paired work.

Groups may be arranged according to the learners' abilities, such as high achievers and low achievers. They can also be divided basing on social backgrounds, age (where older students who have repeated a year are often grouped together), and gender (either single-gender or mixed-gender groups). These factors can have a significant impact on the successful completion of tasks and the level/amount of participation among group members. Gender, in particular, plays a crucial and influential role in the formation of learner groups, despite the fact that gender-related disparities are often overlooked by teachers. It is, in fact, an important determinant of students' behaviours and responses.

In point of fact, learners are socialised to believe that there are inherent differences between boys and girls. Consequently, their classroom behaviours are closely tied to gender. In addition, teachers unintentionally exhibit bias when interacting with their students by treating them differently based on their gender. For instance, boys are often given more opportunities to participate compared to girls, girls may be given less time to share their ideas, and it may be assumed that boys are always the leaders in group work tasks. This treatment perpetuates gender differences, with boys becoming increasingly dominant and girls



becoming even more submissive, among other behavioural distinctions. Therefore, this study aims to examine these distinctions in order to determine the extent to which they impact the frequency and quality of students' contributions. Eventually, the objective is to ascertain which form of grouping is most appropriate for enhancing in-class group work.

It is also worth mentioning that gender is a characteristic that exhibits a reciprocal connection with culture. Both gender and culture have an impact on one another and are mutually influenced. This intricate association indirectly intervenes in the process of establishing collaborative work and has the potential to either enhance or undermine its outcomes.

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# **Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedure**

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## **Introduction**

After presenting pertinent literature in the domain of academic inquiry concerning various ideas and theoretical frameworks, the current chapter provides additional sight to the practical application of research through the examination of methodology, techniques, and procedure utilised to address the research inquiries and substantiate the proposed hypotheses. This particular chapter endeavours to set down and elucidate the investigative process and the course of action undertaken by the researcher in order to corroborate or disapprove the aforementioned hypotheses.

It is imperative to employ an appropriate research design as an organised, methodical, and scientific strive. It is of utmost importance to establish the requisite criteria in advance. The researcher therefore, must ascertain the variables of interest; she must identify the variables that can be manipulated, observed, or tested through experimentation. Consequently, these variables need to be associated with a specific target population, as well as a representative sample group, to which the research findings will be generalised. Additionally, the researcher must select suitable materials, relevant to the investigation and conforming to the learners' proficiency level, to facilitate the implementation of the research methods.

### **1. Overview of the method**

This particular investigation, as previously mentioned, seeks to examine the impact of gender differences among students on the frequency and quality of their contributions within group work tasks that adhere to the principles of exploratory talk in three different universities in Algeria (Bejaia University, Khenchela University and Oued Souf). In order to accomplish this objective, we have employed a mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods administered in the universities we have selected. This approach is characterised by the collection, analysis, and integration of data from both research approaches. Its fundamental presumption is that the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, yields a more comprehensive understanding of research problems compared to using either method alone (Creswell, 2011). The following table summarises the utility and the difference between the two research methods.

**Table 3.2:** Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research (El Gendi, 2017)

Criteria	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Purpose	To understand and interpret social interactions	To test hypotheses, look at cause and effect, & make predictions
Group Studied	Smaller & not randomly selected	Larger & randomly selected
Type of Data Collected	Words, images, or objects	Numbers and statistics
Form of Data Collected	Qualitative data, such as open-ended responses, interviews, participant observations, field notes, & reflections	Quantitative data based on precise measurements using structured & validated data-collection instruments
Type of Data Analysis	Identify patterns, features, themes	Identify statistical relationships
Objectivity and Subjectivity	Subjectivity is expected	Objectivity is critical
Role of Researcher	The researcher participates and becomes immersed in the research/social setting	The researcher is ideally an objective observer who neither participates in nor influences what is being studied
Results	Detailed context-based generalisations	Universal context-free generalisations
Scientific Method	A hypothesis is not needed to begin the research Inductive in nature	A hypothesis is formulated before research begins Deductive in nature
View of Human Behaviour	Dynamic, situational, social, and personal	Predictable

The present study collected and accorded equal importance to both dependent forms of data collection because they are complementary with reciprocal enhancement to address the research inquiries. Therefore, the data collection, interpretation, and analysis were carried out using a convergent parallel design. In fact, the preliminary findings derived from the questionnaires were insufficient; nevertheless, it was imperative to provide further explanation and elaboration. This multiplicity of perspectives enabled the triangulation of the collected data, thereby ensuring a heightened level of credibility and trustworthiness. Furthermore, we possessed the conviction that the use of these complementary approaches would effectively serve the purpose of the research and ultimately provide answers to its questions.

Following the collection of relevant findings from the target universities, a comparative analysis was conducted. The results were categorised and organised to facilitate the identification of similarities and differences amongst the three institutions. These similarities and differences were, then, associated with the regional and cultural pattern of each university in order to offer plausible justifications and interpretations for the observed differences.

## **2. Target population**

Before delving into the methodology, it is essential to identify the target population to ensure the methodology's effectiveness at the outset. In academic research, the term population designates the specific group of individuals that are the subject of inquiry and pertain to the same category or share similar characteristics (Willie, 2022). Accordingly, the researcher conducts the method with solely a portion of the population which has been randomly selected; driven by the investigation's objectives.

Given that the current research established a comparative parallelism between three Algerian universities from diverse cultural regions, we aimed to broaden the applicability of our findings to second-year students across all three institutions. The addressed students, adhering to the structured higher education syllabus, have not only attained the same level of academic rigor but have also been subjected to similar learning materials and inputs and requested to produce comparable outputs. As a matter of fact, two primary criteria have been employed in selecting this category of learners: linguistic abilities and psychological traits.

From the one scope, second-year university students are typically presumed to have demonstrated a satisfactory level of language proficiency. Anticipating a post/upper intermediate level of language proficiency among the participants will significantly reduce the linguistic barriers during the investigation. Furthermore, choosing a language proficiency level beyond the second year of undergraduate studies (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master) is not deemed suitable for our observation because this category of learners is expected to develop advanced and more complex speaking abilities. Consequently, there is no need for them to engage in separate speaking or oral expression sessions. In the context of the research at hand however, it was essential to examine and observe variables during the speaking sessions while ensuring that chosen proficiency level is feasible in the population representing the research corpus. From the other angle, second-year university students experience a greater degree of psychological comfort in group work settings, demonstrating greater adaptability to mixed- or single-gender group arrangements and reduced reluctance and hesitations to collaborate with opposite-gender partners. The total research population has been summarised in the table below:

**Table 3.1:** Departments’ group divisions (Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf) (from the official universities’ websites, and departments’ official Facebook pages)

Univs	Bejaia								Khenchela								Oued Souf							
<b>Total Number</b>	104								161								143							
<b>Department's group divisions</b>	<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>		<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>		<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>	
	29	19	27	21	25	23	40	40	40	41	38	37	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	10 males	19 females	06 males	21 females	03 males	22 females	06 males	17 females	08 males	32 females	12 males	28 females	04 males	36 females	12 males	33 females	12 males	26 females	11 males	26 females	07 males	27 females	02 males	32 females

### 3. Sampling

The selection of the sample group has been done from the target population due to the researcher's inability to study the entire population with its considerable number. In view of that, Tipton (2022) underscored the significance of selecting a ‘representative group’ that exhibits the overall qualities of the entire population of interest. Given various constraints such as time, energy and other required skills such as deepest studies related to the cognitive, social and behavioural domains, it is not feasible and realistic to engage with every individual from the target population. Therefore, if a finding applies to the sample group, it can be assumed to apply to the entire population.

The individuals comprising the sample group were selected in a random manner so as to eliminate any potential bias among participants. It was necessary for these individuals to be members of the same group and from the same department, as the investigative study took place during the scheduled Oral Expression Class (as indicated on their timetable).

In the present research, sampling has obviously been selected from three departments of English belonging to three different universities (Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf Universities) in the same academic year. One group in each department, which represented more than one quarter of the overall population, has been under research.

It is also worth noting that the participants were intentionally kept unaware of the investigation being conducted on them in order to avoid the influence of potential biases. From another side, two questionnaires were administered to teachers and students in the three university contexts, with twenty (20) teachers and ninety (90) students in each university, participating in this data collection process.

## **4. Data collection instruments**

The methodology and tools adopted to investigate a specific topic are typically dictated and shaped by the research questions and the required objectives. Through using certain instruments, researchers may have an interest in acquiring data that enable them uncover not only language-related aspects like linguistic identities, learning styles and strategies, attitudes towards the language, but also other essential elements such as gender differences and personality traits (Canals, 2017). In this particular investigation, the concept of gender was under-searched within the Algerian educational setting (University level; three universities were targeted) through employing three major tools: questionnaires (a quantitative method), observation (a qualitative method), and tasks given to students (a qualitative method).

### **4.1. Questionnaires**

The initial approach employed, for the purpose of achieving the research objective, revolves around the use of questionnaires. In order to acquire a more substantial sample size and a diverse range of perspectives, two separate questionnaires were administered: one to teachers and the other to students at the targeted Universities (Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf). The utilisation of this particular research instrument offers a multitude of advantages. Most notably, it enables the researcher to gather a larger number of participants, thereby increasing the overall reliability and validity of the study. Moreover, by presenting the responses in numerical form, the researcher is able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the prevailing opinions and attitudes. It is important to note, however, that while these numerical representations may not be sufficient in themselves to definitively validate or refute the hypothesis; they do provide valuable insights and serve as informative data.

In the process of constructing the questionnaires, numerous factors were given significant attention. These factors included the number of questions, their pertinence to the respective field and research subject matter, the arrangement and prioritisation of these inquiries as well as researcher's ethical mindset. Furthermore, these questionnaires were supplemented by an additional qualitative investigative tool in order to optimise the scope of the data collected and its subsequent interpretations.

The two questionnaires were conducted to collect data regarding the specific circumstances within the classroom setting and aimed to provide insights on the overall dynamics of learning and teaching. From the one hand, the students' questionnaire sought to ascertain the preferences and the level of awareness among learners, particularly in speaking

sessions. Additionally, the researcher assessed learners' inclinations and suggestions that may either facilitate or impede their progress in group work tasks. This questionnaire attempted also to gauge learners' consciousness, willingness, and reluctance towards various classroom actions. The second questionnaire, on the other hand, was administered to teachers and yielded valuable information on their instructional practices, primarily within the context of speaking sessions involving group work tasks. These findings served to reinforce the researcher's hypotheses and constituted a foundation that further corroborated the remarks noted during the pre-observation and observation phase alike.

It is also worth mentioning that findings from the two questionnaires administered in the three universities were ultimately compared and contrasted. In other words, learners' awareness and preferences in the target university contexts were juxtaposed to identify potential similarities and/or differences related to the four areas of research (speaking, collaboration, gender and cultural impact). Similarly, the common teachers' inclinations and practices in the universities of interest were also compared to initially figure out whether the change in regional and cultural attributes entailed different teaching and learning experiences.

#### **4.1.1 Students' questionnaire**

The questionnaire was divided into four different sections in accordance with the point being addressed. The first section encompassed six inquiries about the target language four skills and the learners' inclinations.

##### **Section one: Target language skills and learners' preferences**

The initial section encompassed a total of six inquiries related to the learners' awareness and preferences regarding the four language skills. This section was designed to progress from the broadest perspective (i.e., the four language skills in general) to the most detailed viewpoint (i.e., the speaking proficiency and the recommendations for enhancing its acquisition and performance). Thus, the objective was to identify areas of familiarity, proficiency, and insufficiency (strengths and weaknesses).



1. Which language skill do you find most difficult? Please rank them in order of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

In this question, the researcher asked individuals involved to rank the four language skills in the above table, which listed the four skills (on the left) and the varying degrees of complexity (at the top). Participants were instructed to place a checkmark adjacent to the designated response.

The aim of this question was to ascertain the students' awareness regarding the varying degrees of complexity associated with different language skills, particularly speaking (which was highlighted in the first chapter). In reality, we anticipated that a significant proportion of students would acknowledge the arduous nature of the skills, most particularly the productive ones. This subsequently allowed for an examination of the learners' apprehensions, lack of enthusiasm, and instances of withdrawal.

2. Which language skill do you find most rewarding? Justify.

- a. Listening.
- b. Speaking.
- c. Reading.
- d. Writing.

3. Which language skill are you most interested in? Justify.

- a. Listening.
- b. Speaking.
- c. Reading.
- d. Writing.

The second question assessed the students' views on the four language skills and which was most beneficial to them. The third question then focused on their preferences and the skill they were mostly interested in with providing justifications in both responses.

The aim of the second and the third questions was to find out whether or not the complexity of the speaking deterred the participants from acquiring the skill and involving in the various tasks. In all scenarios, the researcher should take into account the participants'

responses, as any refusal, diffidence or unwillingness to engage in the speaking tasks might potentially impede the process of learning and hinder the investigation as well.

For the justification partition, the researcher asked students to demonstrate their reasons and objectives for learning that specific skill. This was intended to help them with self-discovery and to subsequently focus on their weaknesses in that skill.

4. What are the most common difficulties you face during speaking sessions?

Question four further narrowed the scope of the research by focusing on a single language skill: speaking. Within this question, the researcher sought to identify the challenges commonly encountered by students during oral communication sessions. The major objective was to gather data regarding their proficiencies and deficiencies so as to design and assign appropriate speaking activities, remedial work, and icebreaking activities if necessary.

5. Do you think that the speaking skill is: (put a cross next to the answer you find more appropriate).

- a. Extremely important in TL learning.
- b. Important in TL learning.
- c. Not really important in TL learning.

In this question, the individuals involved were mandated to provide their perspectives on the significance of the speaking skill in the target language learning. Interestingly, the examination of existing literature revealed that recognising the value of the productive skills, particularly speaking, could greatly enhance and stimulate the dedication and diligence of the learner in that particular skill. Moreover, the researcher attempted to assess the learners' awareness regarding the importance of speaking which would ultimately help the investigator select the appropriate input resources and construct suitable tasks.

6. What recommendations can teachers follow to ensure the success of speaking sessions?

The participants were asked to suggest ways for EFL teachers to improve speaking sessions. These suggestions might help the researcher in conforming the learning situations, in-class actions, interactions, and tasks to the students' interests and preferences. Consequently, corresponding to these suggestions could capture the learners' attention and engagement. Additionally, we credited that this question would smoothly transition the focus of the questionnaire to the second section, as group work tasks (discussed in section two) was significantly important in the speaking sessions (discussed in section one).

## **Section two: Class management and types of arrangements**

The succeeding section of the questionnaire comprised six questions pertaining to the learners' inclinations and awareness regarding classroom management and organization; various forms of in-class activities in a broad sense, grouping in particular. The questions were developed as follows:

7. Rank the following activities in order of preference, using numbers from 1 to 3.
  - a. Individual work activities.
  - b. Pair work activities.
  - c. Group work activities.

In this question, the researcher intended to determine the learners' preferences regarding the various formats of classroom organization and arrangement during the oral expression sessions. This would probably validate the information gained from the pre-observation phase as the investigator would grant students the autonomy to select their partners for the tasks during said phase. Consequently, these preferences would manifest in the classroom tasks, and would ultimately serve as a foundation upon which the observation would be conducted.

8. Justify your choice.

The researcher was curious as to the rationale behind the informants' inclination towards a particular class arrangement over another. Knowing these motivations would enable the researcher to make informed decisions regarding the essential skills and tactics to employ in order to effectively communicate and teach during the pre-observation.

9. If you prefer group work activities, would you rather like to:
  - a. Be assigned to a group by the teacher?
  - b. Choose your own group members

10. Justify your answer.

We were primarily interested in learning about the learners' preferences for group work arrangements, specifically whether they preferred to be assigned to groups by the teacher or to choose their own group members with justifying the choice.

During the preliminary observation stage (pre-observation), the researcher would grant the students freedom to select their partners. Nonetheless, once the observation phase commenced, the researcher opted to assemble them into groups by herself. Thus, knowing the informants' inclinations and preferences in choosing in-group mates would enable the researcher to effectively respond to the students' conduct, performances, and interactions within their respective groups.

11. If the teacher assigns students to groups, what should be the primary consideration?

(Check the one option that you choose):

- a. Gender of the learners in the group (males, females).
- b. Abilities of the learners (high achievers, low achievers).
- c. Origins of the learners (social, cultural, regional).
- d. Personalities of the learners (extroverts, introverts, etc).
- e. None of the above.

12. If you have chosen 'e', suggest others.

The researcher decided to arrange, herself, the groups during the observation phase. It became, then, imperative to determine the learners' perspectives regarding the aspect that should predominantly be taken into account when dividing the members of the group in speaking. Furthermore, the researcher would discern whether the students placed excessive emphasis on gender; consequently, introducing the third area of focus in the endeavour.

### **Section three: Gender differences and classroom work in the speaking session**

The third section encompassed a total of six questions about the students' awareness of gender and its impact on learning.

13. If one were to consider gender, which form of arrangement do you believe is more advantageous for enhanced educational attainment?

- a. Mixed-gender groups (comprising both males and females) or
- b. Single-gender groups (consisting of only females or only males)?

14. What are the underlying reasons?

The researcher revealed a keen interest in discovering the kind of group work arrangement that students tend to favor, along with the underlying rationale for their chosen preference. Through analysing their responses, the researcher would be able to identify any potential reluctance to collaborate with partners of the opposite gender.

15. Do you think that classroom behaviors are tied to gender?

- a. Yes.    b. No.

The aim of the third question was to examine the students' cognizance of the relationship between gender and behavior in the classroom setting.

16. Do you think that the type of gender grouping (single-gender/mixed-gender) affects learning? (Put a tick by your choice).

- a. Yes.    b. No.

17. Is this effect:

- a. Positive or

b. Negative.

The participants were asked to indicate whether they believe that the type of gender grouping affects learning, and if so, whether the effect is positive or negative for EFL learning in general and for speaking skills in particular. This inquiry aimed to aid the researcher in identifying the underlying causes of students' reluctance and unwillingness to engage in collaborative work within mixed-gender groups. Consequently, the researcher could ascertain the specific tasks and competencies that are crucial for addressing this issue.

18. How do you think gender grouping might influence students' learning outcomes?

This question examined the perspectives of the learners regarding the two distinct forms of gender grouping and their impact on the process of learning. Similar to its preceding counterpart, the fifth question would orient the researcher towards taking action and responding in diverse learning or problematic situations (e.g. the teacher's response to certain behaviors exhibited by learners during tasks), as it would also provide guidance in terms of teaching and crafting various input and learning tasks. Furthermore, gaining this information would facilitate the execution of both the pre-observation and observation phases, and thereby aiding to address the research inquiries and to confirm/refute its hypothesis.

**Section four: The interrelation between gender and culture**

The last section comprised two major questions. These questions generally examined the participants' views about how gender, culture and learning, particularly collaborative, are associated.

19. It is commonly believed that gender is a characteristic that exhibits a reciprocal connection with culture. In fact, both gender and culture have an impact on one another and are mutually influenced. Do you agree? Explain.

At this level, participants in the questionnaire were requested to take a clear stand that substantiated or discredited the connection between gender and culture with providing explanations for both views. This would help the researcher draw conclusions about Algerian students' awareness of the cultural specificities not merely occurring in their respective regions, but also in the other cultural and regional areas of the vast land of the country.

20. Does the association between the two terms intervene in the process of establishing collaborative work?

In this question, the researcher intended to explore the respondents' views of the existing relationship between gender and culture and how this could affect the learning process and in-class collaboration. Similarly, this question contributed in scrutinizing the

participants' understanding of the differences their mates, or other students elsewhere, exhibited because of the different cultural attributes they share.

#### 4.1.2 Teachers' questionnaire

The questionnaire administered to the teachers consisted of twenty five (25) questions. It was organised into four distinct sections, each corresponding to one of the three focal points emphasised in this study. These sections were primarily dedicated to examining the attitudes, actions, and reactions of EFL instructors at the universities of interest (Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf) during group work tasks in speaking sessions. The questionnaire would further explore the current teaching/learning situation revealed by the students' questionnaire and would also strengthen the current research assumptions.

##### Section one: The target language skills and the teachers' practices

1. Which of the following skills you find challenging to teach? Classify them according to their level of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

The very first question in this section was simultaneously asked to learners in the first questionnaire. The researcher instructed the participants to rank the four language skills listed in the table above, considering both the four language skills (left side) and the different levels of difficulty (top of the table). The respondents (teachers) were required to arrange these skills in order of difficulty in their teaching process.

As indicated in the scholarly literature, developing the speaking skill presents a considerable challenge in pedagogical settings, particularly when learners exhibit disinterest, lack of enthusiasm, or low performance due to linguistic or psychological factors. Consequently, the aim of this question was to explore the teachers' responses, related to this particular point, and thus would validate the assertions expounded in the first chapter. Furthermore, developing an understanding of the actual instructional context would help in establishing the ultimate pedagogical implications.

2. What features of a speaking session can enhance student engagement and improve their speaking skills?

The question was centered upon the diverse attributes that would contribute to the utmost success of the speaking session. The primary aim was to find out whether instructors commonly regard the standards of a prosperous speaking session, which would serve as a foundation for suggesting the concluding research implementations.

3. What is/are the problem/s that you frequently encounter when conducting speaking sessions?
  - a. Learners' low language proficiency level.
  - b. Learners' inhibitions.
  - c. Mother tongue interference among learners.
  - d. Lack of motivation and the low participation.
  - e. Shortage of ideas in specific topics.
  - f. Others.
4. Please share any additional challenges you face when facilitating speaking activities.

The researcher aimed to identify the primary difficulties and issues encountered by teachers during speaking sessions. Focusing on these obstacles is crucial as it can potentially lead to the discovery of solutions that enhance learning, promote interactions, and improve oral performances. Understanding the nature of the problem is essential in order to effectively address it.

5. In the speaking session, teachers typically incorporate a range of classroom activities like storytelling and jigsaw; could you mention some specific examples of speaking activities that you have already employed with your students?

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current teaching practices, teachers were asked to list the classroom activities they regularly conduct with their students. This information would serve as the foundation for establishing general guidelines that would be eventually advocated.

### **Section two: Class management and types of arrangements**

The identical developmental structure in the students' questionnaire and the research literature was also adhered to in the questionnaire administered to teachers (investigating the speaking skill, collaboration, gender disparities, and cultural influence, respectively). The second section of this questionnaire, then, inspected the teachers' preferences for either type

of grouping and management during speaking sessions' group work tasks. It encompassed a total of six questions built up as follows:

6. It is stated that classroom arrangement can have a direct effect on the students' engagement, attention, and academic performance. What is the in-class arrangement that you frequently lean toward during speaking sessions in order to improve learners' contributions?

7. Explain your choice.

The first couple of questions required the participants to select the particular mode of group arrangement they favoured during the speaking sessions, as well as the underlying rationales for their selection. Importantly, the data collected from this question would be juxtaposed with the data obtained from the corresponding query in the students' questionnaire. Consequently, the conclusions drawn from both investigative tools would be accentuated or disproved by its culmination.

8. When incorporating group work activities, do you favor:

a. Smaller groups (less than five participants) or

b. Larger groups (more than five participants)?

9. Explain your choice.

At this level, informants were invited to express their opinion on the optimal group size for fostering favourable learning outcomes. The purpose of these two questions was to assess the teachers' ability in managing group work tasks and their adaptability to the group size they deemed most effective.

10. These groups are generally arranged by:

a. The teacher himself. Or

b. The students.

11. Explain your choice.

The researcher sought to determine whether group formation was typically dictated by teachers or student-driven, and to understand the justification behind these choices. Our main objective was primarily to compare the teachers' and the students' preferences and reactions in the same question asked simultaneously in two distinct questionnaires, which would provide more motives for the observation phase to be carried out. This would also offer the shift key of the subsequent point developed in the third section of questionnaire.



### **Section three: Gender and classroom work**

In this section, we have included five different questions obviously pertaining to the third point of discussion in the undertaking. These questions progressed to investigate the teachers' views about gender and its impact on learning, more precisely group work contributions and learning outcomes.

12. When given the option to choose their partners, do students generally gravitate towards:
  - a. Single-gender grouping,
  - b. Mixed-gender partners, or
  - c. Simply prefer to work with friends regardless of their gender?

The researcher attempted to discern the type of grouping (related to gender) their students generally prefer in group work tasks. As this question was also asked to students in the first questionnaire, data obtained from this inquiry would unequivocally corroborate its corresponding answers in the students' questionnaire as well. Indeed, both questions, distributed in the two tools of investigation, would provide insight into the learners' eagerness or apprehension towards collaborating with partners of the opposite gender. This would subsequently be underlined and addressed in the pre-observation phase as well as the ice-breaking activities.

13. Which group composition promotes more active participation and engagement from learners?
  - a. Single-gender groups? Or
  - b. Mixed-gender groups?

14. Please, explain how.

Teachers were invited to share their opinions on the type of group arrangement that yielded the most desirable contributions and educational outcomes for their students. The teachers' responses from this question would deliberately be compared to the students' from the first questionnaire as well as with the researcher's assertion at the beginning of the investigation. This comparison would purposefully favour and bring to light one group arrangement rather than the other.

15. If you arrange your students in single-gender groups, do you give equal opportunities to learners' participations from opposite gender groups?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No.

16. Please, explain.

17. In case you assign them to work in mixed-gender partnership, do you grant equal opportunities to learners' contributions from opposite gender within the one group, itself?

18. Explain why?

19. Do you consider role rotation in mixed-gender type of grouping?

20. Explain your choice.

In all of these questions, the respondents were thoroughly required to share their perspectives about how equal or equitable their teaching practices are. Indeed, this would reveal whether Algerian teachers approve equality or equity between students from opposite gender within the educational setting.

#### **Section four: The interrelation between gender and culture**

The questionnaire's final section consisted of three different questions. These inquiries, in a broad sense, explored the perspectives of the participants regarding the associations between gender, culture, and learning, with a particular emphasis on collaboration.

21. If you are required to teach in another town, what major considerations do you prioritise to adapt your teaching style to the learners' needs and ensure effective instruction?

- a. Learners' behaviors affected by the location.
- b. Gender stereotypes related to that place.
- c. The input you are going to provide/ the syllabus you are going to teach.
- d. The tasks you are going to assign.

22. Justify your choice.

23. How can the culture of the target region affect gender identity and behavior?

24. Does the change in culture and region potentially entail changing the teaching reactions and practices?

25. How?

Teachers were certainly cognizant of the prevalent regional and cultural trends inherent in the areas they belong to, which facilitated their determination of the measures taken and methodologies employed. All along this section, however, the researcher aimed to trigger their imagination and thoughtfulness about the likelihood of changing that area. Respondents needed to be considerate of the shift of interest that could occur due to this change, which we presumed to affect the students' behaviors, gender responses, and collaborative learning outcomes.

## **4.2 Pre-Observation**

The apparent ease of employing group work tasks in speaking sessions wraps its underlying complexity, as acknowledged by a significant body of research documenting the challenges faced by both teachers and learners. Importantly, a multitude of factors must be diligently considered before an instructor decides to incorporate group work activities within his lesson. Various aspects can be consolidated under the umbrella of size matters (large, small groups, exact number of group members), composition (taking into account ability grouping or gender considerations for example), and the objective of the task (learners will have attained certain capabilities after completion of said task), etc.

Effective group work requires also learners to develop a comprehensive understanding of the skills and tactics that foster collaboration and enhance group outcomes. In this Endeavour, the prior observation tasks have placed a significant emphasis on these abilities, which encompassed active listening without disruption of one's train of thought, exchange and respect of ideas, and rationally challenging them. Furthermore, there was an interest on engaging students in mind-ful group decision-making process that comprises the following steps: problem identification, consideration of possible alternatives, information gathering, assessment of advantages and disadvantages, making final decisions, and ultimately evaluation. In fact, these strategies and skills should be implicitly taught over time through the various tasks assigned to students from the commencement of the academic year. In essence, the intricacies of group work necessitate both teachers' and learners' careful consideration and demanded thorough planning and preparation to maximize its effectiveness and boost collaborative learning.

The researcher, assuming the role of an instructor in the present research, was required to implement a series of group work activities across multiple sessions and covering diverse topics throughout a three-month period. This phase of the research served as a crucial prerequisite to ensure that all learners possessed a shared understanding of the previously discussed skills and a common level of knowledge regarding the group work procedures. Moreover, the pre-observational tasks proposed by Lehfeltdt (nd) functioned as icebreakers, allowing students to become comfortable working with opposite-gender partners and reducing any apprehension they might have. These tasks also facilitated familiarity with the teacher's proximity and individualized attention to each group.

In the first task assigned in this phase, the researcher granted students the freedom to self-select their groups and partners. It was noticed that the majority of the learners formed single-gender and friendship groupings, as they all opted for same-gender partners and friend mates, which mirrored the questionnaires' findings through providing substantial validation to both of them. Although this type of grouping might offer some advantages in certain types of activities, it could also impede the delivery of a lesson or the completion of a task. Often, friends would gather to exchange stories and engage in gossip rather than focusing on the assigned tasks.

To address potential behavioural challenges and minimise any apprehension among students regarding opposite-sex partnerships, the researcher (teacher) chose to arrange the groups herself, opting for a mixed-gender grouping structure. She also tried to maintain an active, dynamic and mobile presence; walking around the classroom, sometimes positioned at the front, the back, or amidst groups. She occasionally engaged with group members to help them acclimate to her presence and movements. This deliberate action aimed to promote a sense of comfort among the students, thereby enhancing their performance during the assigned task.

### **4.3 Observation**

An observation has subsequently been conducted during the course of this investigation. It proved to be a highly effective research process that granted the researcher access to genuine, real-world data occurring in natural setting. Within this context, the researcher garnered pertinent information, particularly regarding non-verbal behaviour, from its actual occurrences without relying on second-hand information. Generally, these observations could be focused on various aspects such as '*factual*' details like the number of students in classes or the number of students frequenting libraries, or on '*events*' such as the extent of teacher-student discourse or the level of collaborative work, or even on '*behaviours*' and characteristics like assessing the teacher's affability or the students' assertiveness (Cohen, et. al., 2007).

In this particular study, the act of observation played a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the research findings. Consequently, it was imperative to either confirm or disprove the initial hypothesis through the implementation of the observation phase, which spanned six-month duration within the confines of the classroom. During this designated timeframe, the researcher assumed the role of the teacher and carefully monitored

both the unfolding ‘events’ and the exhibited ‘behaviours’. On one hand, thorough notes were taken to document the occurrences and the extent of student involvement throughout the assigned tasks. On the other hand, the researcher focused on shedding light upon various behaviors, including male dominance, assertiveness, and rational/emotional thought processes, as well as female engagement in gossip and displays of politeness.

As it has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, three sample groups have been selected from the three university contexts according to their departments’ group divisions. The tables below explain and summarize how sample groups have been further arranged when the different tasks were assigned:

**Table 3.3:** Group work arrangement during the observation phase

University	Bejaia									
Total Number	29 students									
	Observed and reported							Observed but not reported		
	20							9		
	Group ‘A’			Group ‘B’				Group ‘C’		
Group Arrangement	Single-Gender			Mixed-Gender				Single-Gender		
	MMG	FFG		Male outnumber	Female outnumber	Equal number of males and females		FFG	FFG	
University	Khenchela									
Total Number	40 students									
	Observed and reported					Observed but not reported				
	20					20				
	Group ‘A’		Group ‘B’			Group ‘C’			Group ‘D’	
Group Arrangement	Single-Gender		Mixed-Gender			Single-Gender			Mixed-Gender	
	MMG	FFG	Male outnumber	Female outnumber	Equal number of males and females	FFG	FFG	FFG	Male outnumber	Female outnumber
University	Oued Souf									
Total Number	38 students									
	20					18				
	Observed and reported					Observed but not reported				
	Group ‘A’		Group ‘B’			Group ‘C’			Group ‘D’	
Group Arrangement	Single-Gender		Mixed-Gender			Single-Gender			Mixed-Gender	
	MMG	FFG	Male outnumber	Female outnumber	Equal number of males and females	FFG	FFG	Male outnumber	Female outnumber	

As illustrated in the tables above, the students' total number in each group have been divided into two main subdivisions: observed and reported and observed but not reported since we needed equal number of groups with equal number of males and females to increase reliability and validity of the observation findings.

During the speaking sessions, instructors should have predominantly encouraged an 'Exploratory Talk' environment, in which a set of stipulations were adhered to. These stipulations substantially facilitated the enhancement of both the teachers' and the learners' discourse and interactions (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In this particular investigation, the researcher solely concentrated on a mere three stipulations (Mercer & Hodgkinson, *ibid*) that were explored over a six-month period of Oral Expression sessions. Each couple of months was dedicated to the observation of events and behaviours related to one specific stipulation, which are as follows:

- The group seeks agreement for joint decisions: refers to the collective attempts to achieve consensus in making decisions together.
- Every one listens actively: means each individual actively engages in attentive listening.
- Ideas may be challenged and logical reasons are given for challenges: denotes that ideas are open to scrutiny and challenges, with logical justifications provided for such challenges.

In the initial two months, the different groups were assigned identical collaborative tasks, with maintaining the same group division. Each task was designed to fulfil the first Exploratory condition. At this stage, the researcher, elucidated the instructions and gave the students sufficient time to engage in their work, share their ideas, and contribute as cohesive team members. Throughout this period, the researcher diligently observed the behaviours exhibited by the participants, particularly focusing on the presence of politeness, argumentation, gossip, dominance, assertiveness, and rational/emotional reasoning displayed by both genders. Subsequently, each group was instructed to disclose the content of their discussions to the entire sample. Once again, the researcher scrutinised the students' level and frequency of contributions and active participation. In essence, the observation phase aimed to ascertain whether or not the aforementioned gender disparities impeded the students' collective learning and hindered their ability to achieve the initial condition.

In the second and third two months, the second and the third stipulations of the Exploratory Talk' were addressed, respectively. In these sessions as well, the researcher maintained the same grouping but assigned distinct tasks that aimed to examine the two

additional Exploratory Talk' conditions; two collaborative work activities were predominantly underlined during each observational period.

#### **4.4 Tasks**

Group work activities served as the foundational structure for task implementation in this research. It was, indeed, a significant activity that instructors might employ in the oral communication class with the intention of fostering and enhancing learners' interactions. This special interest in essentially because the opportunities for exposure to and exchange of the target language were very limited, and often absent outside the classroom borders. Scholars assumed that this type of activities greatly intensified and increased the quantity and quality of talk within a restricted time frame, while also reducing learners' inhibitions and hesitations. Furthermore, group work activities played a crucial role in establishing and sustaining an atmosphere conducive to exploratory conversations.

In the research at hand, some of these tasks have either been adopted or adapted from researchers' suggested activities like the balloon debate developed by Harmer. Some have also been taken from online resources such as decision-making activities, while others have been developed by the researcher herself (e.g., storytelling, problematic situations).

##### **4.4.1. Observing the learners in the first two months**

The researcher's observation, as discussed earlier, was structured into three distinct phases over the course of six months. In the initial two months, two different tasks involving group decision making were implemented during separate sessions in order to observe learners' behaviors. The researcher observed and documented instances of male-dominant, assertive, and interruptive behaviors, as well as female-centric emotional ideas and polite reactions during group discussions aimed at reaching joint decisions. It is also important to note that the researcher primarily identified and recorded data of the two tasks yielding identical results.

###### **4.4.1.1 Task one**

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** gender consideration.

**Duration:** 30 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional discourse. It may include personal, descriptive, predicting, persuasive, explanatory functions.

**The main objective:** Students develop joint decision making skills as they follow the process:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Considering your choices
3. Gathering information
4. Considering advantages & disadvantages
5. Making your decision
6. Evaluating your decision

**Description**

Each cohort of students was provided with an envelope containing separately clipped sections describing the steps of the decision-making process. For the purpose of consolidating their knowledge of this process, groups were instructed to reassemble the clipped-apart segments in the correct sequence. Concurrent with the learners' engagement in the activity, the researcher (teacher) moved around the classroom, monitoring the order of the steps and providing guidance until the correct sequence was achieved:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Considering your choices
3. Gathering information
4. Considering advantages & disadvantages
5. Making your decision
6. Evaluating your decision

Students were, then, provided with the necessary material for further usage.

**The material:** Dani's Story

Dani is on a weight loss plan to lose 30 lbs. She has been trying really hard to eat healthy food and watch her fat and calories intake. So far, she's been successful and seen results. She's been invited to a party where there are a lot of unhealthy food choices. She isn't so sure that she'll be able to resist the temptation to eat these foods. She really wants to be social but her friends don't understand how difficult this is. Dani doesn't want to be a food snob but she doesn't want to blow her diet either. This would really mess up her progress so far. After all, healthy eating and exercising has not been easy, nor has the will power she's developed. Her friends are really putting the pressure on her.

(<http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/The-Decision-Making-Process-500775>)



**Instruction:** What should Dani do? Apply the decision-making process to effectively address the problem. But before, you need to agree on the following comprehension points:

1. What was the issue?
2. What are Dani's values?
3. What were her goals?
4. What circumstances do we need to consider? (Success/ failure of weight loss/ will power? feelings).

At this particular stage, the students engaged in a discussion and simultaneously made written notes. The instructor, then, distributed a 'choice card' to each group of students that consisted of an all-inclusive array of options that Dani might consider adopting under the influence of her friends' persuasion to consume unhealthy food. As a group, the learners were required to empathise with Dani's situation and collectively determine the most suitable decision for her. Following this, they were instructed to collaborate in order to showcase and analyse the pros and cons of the chosen action/ decision.

**The choice card:** Dani may:

- Say 'No thanks', eat nothing, stay strong.
- It's only one time, what damage could it do?
- Say 'maybe later I'll eat...not hungry right now'.
- Say YES, but only eat little portions of healthy foods and nibble.
- Say YES, eat whatever looks good.
- Storm out of party telling friends if they really cared they wouldn't pressure and they would be more understanding.
- Say yes to the food and run 5 miles on the treadmill before bed.
- Eat any food you want tonight but skip all meals the next day.
- Tell friends you already ate (even if you haven't).
- Make a big scene to let everyone know you're on a diet.
- Eat and then take diet pills to reverse the effects of eating.
- Fill plate full of food to make it look like you are eating, but flush it down the toilet.
- Ask your friend upfront if you can bring anything to the party (then you'll know there will be something you can eat).

Students can propose and explore additional options.

Learners were instructed to eliminate options that could be unsafe, illegal, or unrealistic and to identify those that warranted further consideration. Through guided questioning, group members were required to evaluate the decision made, leading to the collective understanding that current choices have future consequences.

**Guiding questions:**

- Where could her decision lead?
- Could others be affected? Who? How?
- How would her reputation or character be affected?
- How would her friends view her choice?

Throughout the activity, the teacher provided guidance and feedback to students as they engaged in the decision-making process and discussions. Her observation strategy involved alternating between observing the groups from a distance to capture the overall dynamics and moving closer to engage with individual students and gain a more nuanced understanding of their interactions. While the learners engaged in group work, the teacher diligently recorded their behaviours within the collaborative working environment they had jointly created, fostering an environment of open and exploratory discourse. In this activity, the researcher, assuming the role of a teacher, paid particular attention to the male students' tendency to dominate discussions and decision-making processes, while female students exhibited polite responses and avoided FTAs.

**4.4.1.2 Task two**

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** according to gender

**Duration:** almost 30 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional. It may include personal, descriptive, predictive, persuasive and/or explanatory functions.

**The main purpose:** Students should get together as a group and participate in a group decision-making process.

**Description:**

The teacher introduced a thought-provoking, hypothetical and critical scenario challenging students to collaboratively determine the most appropriate course of action.

**The scenario:**

“You are a surgeon at a well-known hospital. The hospital committee and you must take a very important decision. Seven patients need heart transplant and there is only one heart donor. All the patients are physically able to receive that heart; all of them have compatible tissue and blood typing. As a group, which patient would you choose to transplant the heart to?”

The waiting patient list:

- 50 year old male: a scientist, important research studies, unmarried.
- 12 year old female: orphan, poor, and blind.
- 35 year old male: from different origins, doctor, at the height of his career, 2 children.
- 80 year old female: have severe diabetes and blood pressure, 4 married children, 10 grandchildren.
- 30 year old female: married, 6 months pregnant.
- 40 year old male: Imam, married, 4 young children.
- 19 year old female: shopkeeper, secondary school dropout, supports/cares for a brother who is severely disabled.

After weighing the available options and reaching a collective agreement on the most deserving heart recipient among the seven patients, each group shared their decision, rationale, and evaluation to the entire class. The instructor provided guidance to each group, inquiring of its members the following questions:

- 1) What was your decision?
- 2) How did you reach your decision?
- 3) What decision-making method did you use (consensus, voting.)?
- 4) How was your decision influenced by your values? Attitudes? Prejudices?
- 5) Who provided leadership in your group?
- 6) How were disagreements and conflicts handled?

Once the task was completed, representatives from each group were asked to present their decisions to the entire class. The teacher's primary function throughout the research remained focused on documenting observations relevant to the hypothesis established at the outset. These notes captured detailed observations of gender differences, particularly those highlighted beforehand, and their influence on small group discussions and large group sharing. The researcher further examined whether these gender-based differences helped the group members in achieving the task's objectives.

#### **4.4.2 Observing the learners in the second two months**

Two different group work tasks were implemented in separate sessions during the subsequent two months to primarily observe gender-linked behaviours (dominance, assertiveness, rational thinking, and politeness) as they manifest in the expression of feelings and emotions, rather than examining their impact on reaching collective decisions. The researcher sought to determine whether these gender differences influenced the students' interactions. To this end, she tried to identify potential impacts of those differences to verify that the 'second exploratory talk' classroom condition was effectively implemented.

##### **4.4.2.1 Task one**

To enliven the classroom atmosphere and deviate from the usual routine, the researcher tried to inject an element of fun and disrupt the class monotony through assigning students with a group work activity designed as a game. We wholeheartedly endorse the incorporation of games into speaking sessions, as they can be effectively implemented in various group arrangements, from large class discussions to one-on-one interactions.

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** considering gender.

**Duration:** 20 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional. It may include personal, descriptive, informative, questioning and/or comparative.

The main objective: Learners should develop the habit of attentive listening, respecting the contributions of others with showing deference to their ideas without interrupting their flow; fostering active listening with minimal interruptions.

**Description:**

Students were provided with slips of papers depicting various facial expressions. Each face represented a specific mood or emotional state. Then, each individual learner within the respective groups were instructed to randomly select a slip of paper and proceed to recount a short narrative or anecdote that correlated with the mood or emotion portrayed on the face. Learners could also express their feelings and emotions towards a person, a place, or an entity with regards to the depicted expression.

While the students were actively engaged in the assigned task, the instructor closely monitored the participants in order to ascertain whether they were attentively listening to their peers or persistently interrupting them. The primary emphasis was placed on the interruptions

made by males and the politeness displayed by females, as well as their impact on meeting the second requirement of the exploratory discussion.

#### **4.4.2.2 Task two**

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** considering gender.

**Duration:** 24 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional. It may include personal, descriptive, questioning,

**The main objective:** learners should listen actively with less interruption frequency and seamless exchange of ideas.

#### **Description:**

In each group, one participant was tasked with initiating a narrative that was unfamiliar to their peers. Subsequently, each time a member of the group proceeded to contribute a portion of the story to their fellow group members; the remaining individuals attentively listened and speculated about the forthcoming developments in order to appropriately assume their turn in recounting the progression of events within the story, until the predetermined time limit (three minutes for each brief tale). Following this, another student within each group would commence a new story while the remaining participants continued to listen intently and make predictions in order to develop the narrative with subsequent events, until the conclusion of the second three-minute interval. This process was repeated every three minutes until the end of the instructional period. After that, the group members were instructed to provide a concise summary of their four stories and interconnect their events before presenting them to the entire class. This was done with the intention of constructing a more intricate series of events and a more comprehensive story.

In this activity, the teacher closely examined and assessed whether gender-related differences in communication, including politeness and frequency of interruptions influenced learners' interactions, particularly their ability to listen effectively to others' oral presentations. Indeed, the primary concern revolved around the act of either attentively listening to or interrupting the storytelling efforts of one's fellow group members.

#### **4.4.3 Observing the learners in the third two of months**

In the third couple of months, two distinct collaborative tasks were employed during separate sessions with the aim of investigating gender disparities, particularly dominance,

assertiveness, rational thinking, politeness, gossiping, and arguing within the realm of challenging and persuading. The researcher sought to ascertain whether these disparities had any impact on the interactions amongst the participants. Specifically, the researcher tried to determine whether males' reliance on logical reasoning and rational thinking, in contrast to females' tendency towards emotional inclination, had any effect on the quality of interactions. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to find out whether these gender differences facilitated or hindered the attainment of the desired classroom conditions, namely the ability to challenge ideas and provide logical reasons for such challenges, within the context of exploratory discussions.

#### **4.4.3.1 Task one**

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** considering gender.

**Duration:** 15 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional. It may include personal, descriptive, comparative, persuasive, informative and/or explanatory.

**The main objective:** Learners should enhance their persuasive abilities and employ sound logic to strengthen their arguments.

#### **Description:**

The instructor provided the students with the balloon debate task, as elucidated in the first chapter, part one. The students envisioned themselves being stranded in a damaged balloon with diminishing air supply. Merely one among them had the privilege to remain and endure, while the rest were compelled to evacuate. Individual students personified renowned characters and influential figures in society, such as Napoleon, Gandhi, and Cleopatra, or occupations of significance, such as teacher, doctor, and lawyer. Their task was to elucidate the reasons why they should be permitted to remain in the balloon and survive.

#### **4.4.3.2 Task two**

**Group size:** 04 students per group.

**Group composition:** considering gender.

**Duration:** 20 minutes.

**The general purpose of speaking:** interactional. It may include personal, descriptive, comparative, persuasive, informative and/or explanatory.

**The main objective:** Learners should enhance their persuasive abilities and employ sound logic to strengthen their arguments.

**Description:**

The teacher presented students with a series of challenging scenarios and thought-provoking dilemmas. She tasked them with carefully considering each situation and developing persuasive arguments to convince others of their viewpoints. The scenarios included:

**Situation 01**

“Your friend lost interest in school and her grades are suffering. As a result, she will be repeating the year. She decided to quit and work as a waitress to support herself. She says that she does not need to go to school.”

Construct a well-reasoned argument to persuade her to continue her education showcasing the tangible benefits it will bestow upon her.

**Situation 02**

“Your father was considering a job in Oran. If he takes the job, this means that your family had to relocate soon. For you, this means adapting to a new town, a new school, and new friends. Your parents solicited you in making decision about the situation.”

Construct compelling arguments to advocate for either relocating or remaining in your current location.

**Situation 03**

“Someone has stolen a precious object from a down town shop. After interrogating the shopkeeper, he declared that you were in the shop during the moment of theft and the accusation was directed towards you.”

Envision yourself being interrogated by police officers. Uncover persuasive arguments with evidence to assert your innocence.

**Situation 04**

“You are an employee in a new cosmetics’ brand company. Your job is to convince people to buy and try your products.”

Highlight the unique benefits, quality and durability of your products.

During these activities, the teacher meticulously observed participants' interactions to discern potential impact of the gender-related behaviours outlined above on the process of questioning ideas and reasoning.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to gathering, interpreting, and analysing the research data, the researcher was required to specify and deliberate on the methodology, methods, and procedures employed to address the research inquiries and substantiate its hypothesis. Within this part of the research, we endeavoured to elucidate and describe the investigative research process and the course of action the researcher undertook whether to validate or refute the aforementioned hypothesis.

The researcher commenced by precisely defining the target population and the sample group with whom the research process would be carried out. Subsequently, she ascertained and expounded on the method adopted and the tools employed for the purpose of data gathering. Eventually, the researcher provided an intricate account of the various tasks devised for the research objectives.

The next chapter is thoroughly devoted to analyse, interpret and discuss the findings to reach the targeted objective of the research at hand.



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**Chapter Four: Research  
Findings, Interpretation and  
Analysis**

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## **Introduction**

Having conducted a comprehensive review of relevant scholarly works to substantiate the underlying assumptions of the research, and having provided a lucid insight on the methods, procedures, instruments, and tasks employed, the present study has ultimately yielded its findings, interpretations, and analysis. This chapter, hence, delved into an exhaustive explication of the outcomes derived from the various investigative tools utilised. Moreover, diverse interpretations and data analyses were furnished in order to elicit cogent and reliable implications.

Since the main objective of the undertaking was to determine the applicability and generalisability of the results already found in previous research, a comparative approach was conducted identifying potential points of convergence and/or divergence between the target Algerian university contexts.

## **1. Questionnaires findings**

### **1.1 Learners' questionnaire**

The questionnaire was distributed to a total of two hundred and seventy (270) second-year students equally enrolled at the Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf. The participants were kindly requested to complete the questionnaire anonymously, thus fostering a sense of freedom and comfort in their responses to the various inquiries. Additionally, it was made clear to them that their answers would be handled with utmost confidentiality and solely used for the purposes of the current research.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty (20) different questions. It was categorised into sections based on the subject of inquiry, and included a variety of formats such as multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. The purpose of this tool was to establish a foundation for our engagement in the observational process.

### **Section one: The target language skills and the learners' preferences**

#### **Question one:**

Which language skill do you find most difficult? Please rank them in order of difficulty.

**Table 4.1:** Learners' difficulty level of the four language skills

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

According to the initial query, the responses from our sources (Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf) exhibited a striking resemblance and conveyed an almost identical perspective. The entirety of the respondents (90 students in each university context which represented 100%) expressed that both productive skills, namely speaking and writing, posed a significant challenge. Nonetheless, there was a divergence in opinion regarding the level of difficulty pertaining to the receptive skills. Their answers ranged from 'difficult' to 'very difficult' with regards to the listening skill, and from 'very easy' to 'easy' in relation to the reading skill. These findings revealed the fact that every learner had a clear understanding of the varying degrees of difficulty associated with different language skills, particularly the productive skills.

We believe that developing proficiency in expressive language, particularly speaking, is demonstrably difficult for both language learners and instructors. Speaking entails the ability to effectively communicate through oral means, ensuring clear comprehension by the listener. EFL learners frequently encounter obstacles in attaining such proficiency due to various factors, such as the limited exposure to the target language and the confined nature of classroom interactions. Furthermore, the authenticity and reliability of this classroom exposure may be subject to doubt, as learners are deprived of input from native speakers. As a consequence, certain facets of their speaking abilities may be flawed (e.g., the correct pronunciation of the final 'ed' sound is sometimes mispronounced even by certain teachers). This erroneous or inappropriate exposure may become internalised by learners, posing a challenge to their motivation for producing meaningful and intelligible language.

**Questions two:**

Which language skill do you find most rewarding? Justify.

- a. Listening.
- b. Speaking.
- c. Reading.
- d. Writing.

**Table 4.2:** The Learners' views about the language most rewarding skill

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Bejaia	02 ( $\approx 2.22\%$ )	81 ( $\approx 90\%$ )	01 ( $\approx 01.11\%$ )	06 ( $\approx 06.66\%$ )
Khenchela	03 ( $\approx 03.33\%$ )	85 ( $\approx 94\%$ )	00 (00%)	02 ( $\approx 02.22\%$ )
Oued Souf	04 ( $\approx 04.44\%$ )	79 ( $\approx 88\%$ )	02 ( $\approx 02.22\%$ )	05 ( $\approx 05.55\%$ )

The majority of respondents in all of the three target universities thought that speaking is more rewarding than the other language skills. Eighty one (81) informants at the University of Bejaia, eighty five (85) at the University of Khenchela and seventy nine (79) at the University of Oued Souf respectively representing 90%, around 94% and almost 89% of their total respondents' number deliberately prioritised speaking. The small number of the remaining participants across the three universities showed variation in their responses to the other language skills. At the University of Oued Souf, five informants (05/ 05.55%) credited worth to writing while six informants (06/ 06.66%) at the University of Bejaia and only two informants (02/ 02.22%) at the University of Khenchela approved its extreme significance. For the receptive skills, very few participants granted priority to listening with around 2.22%, 3.33%, and 4.44% at the University of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf, respectively. As for reading, it was the least privileged with around 01.11% at the University of Bejaia, 02.22% at the University of Oued Souf and 0% at the University of Khenchela.

We presume that the participants' ranking choice was basically due to the frequency of using speaking in all of language learning tasks. Speaking, for them, was very much overrated because it interfered in the whole process of understanding and executing knowledge exposed and shared in all of the skills.

**Questions three:**

Which language skill are you most interested in? Justify.

**Table 4.3:** The Learners' preferences concerning the language skills

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Bejaia	08 ( $\approx 8.88\%$ )	62 ( $\approx 69\%$ )	00 (00%)	20 ( $\approx 22.22\%$ )
Khenchela	02 ( $\approx 2.22\%$ )	60 ( $\approx 67\%$ )	01 ( $\approx 01.11\%$ )	27 (30%)
Oued Souf	04 ( $\approx 04.44\%$ )	65 ( $\approx 72.22\%$ )	03 ( $\approx 03.33\%$ )	18 (20%)

The table above shows that the majority of students being questioned (62 respondents at the University of Bejaia, 60 at the University of Khenchela, and 65 at the University of Oued Souf representing around 69%, 67%, and 72% respectively) indicated preference for the speaking skill. Most of them justified their preference citing both the personal satisfaction derived from TL oral practice and the belief that true language development hinged on the ability to converse. The second ranking position deservedly went to writing recording 20 students (22.22%) at the University of Bejaia, 27 (30%) at the University of Khenchela and 18 informants (20%) at the University of Oued Souf. Although less prevalent, some students opted for written communication, citing its inherent formality and the ease of idea articulation it provided; for them putting pen to paper was the magic formula.

The remaining very few respondents across the three university settings diverged in choice between the two receptive skills. Eight students (08/8.88%) at the University of Bejaia, four (04/4.44%) at the University of Oued Souf and only two (02/2.22%) at the University of Khenchela selected listening as their gateway to the TL learning. For them, immersing themselves in the sounds of the language was the first step towards building comprehension and pronunciation skills; it is, indeed, the key to unlocking fluency. The fewest number of informants, 03 students at the University of Oued Souf and 01 at the University of Khenchela, accorded importance and preference to reading. They identified reading, particularly exposure to diverse genres, as a potent instrument for language vocabulary expansion and improved sentence construction.

This indicated that learners held a strong appreciation for speaking despite acknowledging its challenging nature. This could be attributed to the diverse range of tasks and topics that learners were regularly exposed to during oral discussions. As a result, the value placed on speaking sessions by students increased when they engaged in a wide array of tasks using various materials, intriguing subjects, and diverse teaching aids such as audio or audio-visual resources.

#### **Questions four:**

What are the most common difficulties you face during speaking sessions?

Once again, the responses provided by the respondents were surprisingly similar across all of the universities suggested. Practically, all of them believed that their proficiency in speaking was hindered by inhibitions stemming from shyness; it really held them back from speaking confidently. When engaging in discourse in front of their peers, they exhibited a certain level of hesitation, most of our respondents explained. Furthermore, they indicated

that delivering a speech in front of an audience disrupted the accuracy and correctness of their language use/usage. They also expressed that their level of participation might be curtailed due to time constraints or dominance of certain classmates.

These findings implied that the primary challenges encountered by learners during speaking sessions were not directly and necessarily related to the language itself, but rather to the overall atmosphere of the classroom, which is influenced by both the teacher and the learners. In other words, internal factors played a relatively minor role in guiding the students' performance and interactions, compared to external pressures.

**Questions five:**

Do you think that the speaking skill is: (put a cross next to the answer you find more appropriate).

- a. Extremely important in TL learning.
- b. Important in TL learning.
- c. Not really important in TL learning.

**Table 4.4:** Importance of the speaking skill for learners

	Extremely important in TL learning	Important in TL learning	Not really important in TL learning
Bejaia	85 ( $\approx$ 94.44%)	05 ( $\approx$ 5.55%)	00 (0%)
Khenchela	80 ( $\approx$ 88.88%)	10 ( $\approx$ 11.11%)	00 (0%)
Oued Souf	78 ( $\approx$ 86.66%)	12 ( $\approx$ 13.33%)	00 (0%)

Despite different opinions on its degree of importance, all learners agreed that speaking was essential for mastering the target language (as shown in Table 4.4). While the majority (85/94.44% at the University of Bejaia, 80/88.88% at the University of Khenchela, and 78/86.66% at the University of Oued Souf) acknowledged it as being 'extremely important', only five, ten and twelve participants at the stated universities, respectively expressed that it was 'important'. In other words, they differed in how crucial they considered speaking, but none doubted or disputed its vital role in target language learning. For this vast majority, mastering the language involved, above all else, the ability to utilise it orally, and its proficiency assessment was predominantly linked to these oral performances. Consequently, it was worth noting that learners possessed a clear understanding of the indispensable nature of the speaking skill in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

**Questions six:**

What recommendations can teachers follow to ensure the success of speaking sessions?

**Table 4.5:** Learners' suggestions for teachers of the speaking skill

Some learners' suggestions for EFL teachers	Bejaia	Khenchela	Oued Souf
Use different materials/aids	90	90	90
Encourage unwilling students to participate	65	50	69
Give all learners equal opportunities to participate	85	76	55
Encourage students to listen to each other	59	69	71
Use variety of topics	90	90	90
Choose topics of interest	90	90	90
Use variety of activities like games and role plays in groups or pairs	90	90	90

Table 4.5 documents the most recurrent participants' answers related to the recommendations and suggestions for teachers to ensure successful speaking sessions and in-class communicative experiences. These suggestions were not literally and exactly stated by all of the respondents across the three university settings; they have been expressed differently but meant the same. All of our respondents belonging to the three universities; 90 in each university representing 100% of the total respondents' number, placed excessive importance on the use diverse materials and aids, along with a wider range of captivating and stimulating subjects and activities such as games. Other recommendations have varied between promoting reluctant students' participation and encouraging the others to actively and deliberately listen, all in pursuit of a truly inclusive learning space. Consequently, the questionnaire revealed respondents' insightful suggestions which proved the students' high awareness to enrich and streamline the oral expression class.

**Section two: Class management and types of arrangements**

**Question seven:**

Rank the following activities in order of preference, using numbers from 1 to 3.

- a. Individual work activities.
- b. Pair work activities.
- c. Group work activities.

**Question eight:**

Justify your choice.

**Table 4.6:** Learners' classroom arrangements preferences.

	<b>a-b-c</b>	<b>a-c-b</b>	<b>b-a-c</b>	<b>b-c-a</b>	<b>c-a-b</b>	<b>c-b-a</b>
<b>Univ- Bejaia</b>	10	09	04	25	07	35
	19 students choosing 'a' first (21.11 %)		29 students choosing 'b' first (32.22 %)		42 students choosing 'c' first (46.66 %)	
<b>Univ- Khenchela</b>	18	04	06	24	08	30
	22 students choosing 'a' first (24.44 %)		30 students choosing 'b' first (33.33 %)		38 students choosing 'c' first (42.22 %)	
<b>Univ- Oued Souf</b>	11	06	00	23	10	40
	17 students choosing 'a' first (18.88 %)		23 students choosing 'b' first (25.55 %)		50 students choosing 'c' first (55.55 %)	

Analysing the participants' answers revealed three distinct categories of viewpoints depending on the initial alternative they chose. Some prioritised pair work as a first option representing around 35% at the University of Bejaia, 27 % at the University of Khenchela and almost 21 % at the University of Oued Souf. Although the implementation of pair work facilitated the exchange of ideas and social interaction similar to the group work, individuals who assigned higher importance to working in pairs contended that engaging in individual tasks hindered their ability to think creatively and working in groups might result a chaotic incorporation of concepts, with loquacious and disruptive team members constraining the other participants' contributions.

Fewer students, however, advocated individual work representing around 17 % at the University of Bejaia, almost 20 % at the University of Khenchela and 15.3 % at the University of Oued Souf. This category of students attributed a higher degree of significance to the independent effort. They held the belief that they experienced confusion due to the



imposition of ideas from other members while working in pairs or in groups. In turn, they perceived that their own ideas and perspectives were disregarded.

The third category of students favoured working in groups. They represent the biggest majority across the three university contexts with almost 38 % at the University of Bejaia, around 34 % at the University of Khenchela and 45 % at the University of Oued Souf. They held the belief that the quality of interactions improved with their abundance, as different individuals brought forth distinct ideas and expanded the range of discussions. Additionally, collaborating in groups facilitated the establishment of stronger interpersonal connections; fostering the exchange of information and social integration.

Group work took centre stage for most learners, who perceived it as a powerful tool to boost learning, breathe life into speaking sessions and reap practical benefits. This revealed that they clearly understood the benefits of teamwork with its potential gains.

**Question nine:**

If you prefer group work activities, would you rather like to:

- a. Be assigned to a group by the teacher?
- b. Choose your own group members

**Question ten:**

Justify your answer.

**Table 4.7:** Learners' preferences of the type of group arrangement

Univ- Bejaia	Teacher's division	Learners' division
	22 (24.44 %)	68 (75.55 %)
Univ- Khenchela	Teacher's division	Learners' division
	29 (32.22 %)	61 (67.77 %)
Univ- Oued Souf	Teacher's division	Learners' division
	10 (11.11 %)	80 (88.88 %)

The table above provides a clear depiction of the fact that the majority of respondents- 61% + at the University of Bejaia, 54 % + at the University of Khenchela and 72% at the University of Oued Souf- expressed a preference for selecting their own partners. Their inclination stemmed from their desire to collaborate with either their acquaintances, which

would create a sense of comfort, or their skilled peers who are perceived as more capable and supportive, thereby enhancing the quality of their collective efforts. A fewer number of students, constituting around 19 % of the total population at the University of Bejaia, 26 % at the University of Khenchela and only 9 % at the University of Oued Souf, entrusted partner selection to the teacher. This particular group of respondents valued collaboration over specific teammates, trusting everyone's ability to contribute; for them, any collaborator offered potential assistance.

Data presented in the aforementioned table led us to conclude that the majority of learners exhibit reduced motivation when it comes to collaborating with peers chosen by the teacher, and instead, they gravitate towards tasks wherein they feel more acquainted with their group partners.

**Question eleven:**

**If the teacher assigns students to groups, what should be the primary consideration?**

**(Check the one option that you choose):**

- a. Gender of the learners in the group (males, females).
- b. Abilities of the learners (high achievers, low achievers).
- c. Origins of the learners (social, cultural, regional).
- d. Personalities of the learners (extroverts, introverts, etc).
- e. None of the above.

**Question twelve:**

If you have chosen 'e', suggest others.

**Table 4.8:** Considered aspects in group work arrangement

	Gender	Abilities	Origins	Personalities	None of them (friendship grouping)
Univ- Bejaia	19	47	00	00	24
	21.11	52.22 %	00 %	00 %	26.66 %
Univ- Khenchela	36	24	00	00	30
	40 %	26.66 %	00 %	00 %	33.33 %
Univ- Oued Souf	45	20	00	00	25
	50%	22.22 %	00 %	00 %	27.77 %

Students' responses exhibited a significant variation with respect to the consideration of gender ( $\approx 21\%$ ,  $40\%$ ,  $50\%$ ), abilities ( $\approx 52\%$ ,  $\approx 27\%$ ,  $\approx 22\%$ ), and friendship grouping ( $\approx 27\%$ ,  $\approx 33\%$ ,  $\approx 28\%$ ) in the respective universities. Percentages under the different aspects were sometimes substantially divergent across the three university contexts. When considering the gender column, it became evident that learners exhibited a progressive inclination towards gender-associated arrangement. This inclination begun with a mere  $21\%$  at the University of Bejaia, experienced a rise to  $40\%$  at the University of Khenchela, and ultimately reached  $50\%$  at the University of Oued Souf.

We presume that the variation in students' selection among the three universities primarily stems from their level of unease and unwillingness to collaborate with partners of the opposite gender they demonstrate. Cultural and social factors might explain this surprising and increasing prominence of gender in Oued Souf questionnaire responses compared to Bejaia and Khenchela.

### Section three: Gender differences and classroom work in the speaking session

#### Question thirteen:

If one were to consider gender, which form of arrangement do you believe is more advantageous for enhanced educational attainment?

- a. Mixed-gender groups (comprising both males and females) or
- b. Single-gender groups (consisting of only females or only males)?

**Table 4.9:** Students gender' group division preference.

Univ- Bejaia	Mixed-gender groups	Single-gender groups
	67 (74.44 %)	23 (25.55 %)
Univ- Khenchela	Mixed-gender groups	Single-gender groups
	40 (44.44 %)	50 (55.55 %)
Univ- Oued Souf	Mixed-gender groups	Single-gender groups
	24 (26.66 %)	66 (73.33 %)

#### Question fourteen:

What are the underlying reasons?

**Table 4.10:** Reasons of choosing same-gender partners

	<b>Numbers/ Percentages</b>	<b>I experience a sense of timidity and unease</b>	<b>Different ways of thinking</b>	<b>In-group struggle and stereotyping</b>
<b>University of Bejaia</b>	<b>N° S-GG</b>	06	09	08
	Percentage/23	26.08%/23	39.13%/23	34.78%/23
	<b>Total N°(90) percentage</b>	<b>6.66%/90</b>	<b>10%/90</b>	<b>8.88%/90</b>
<b>University of Khenchela</b>	<b>N° S-GG</b>	12	15	23
	Percentage/50	24%/50	30%/50	46%/50
	<b>Total N°(90) percentage</b>	<b>13.33%/90</b>	<b>16.66%/90</b>	<b>25.55%/90</b>
<b>University of Oued Souf</b>	<b>N° S-GG</b>	27	15	24
	Percentage/66	40.90 %/66	22.72 %/66	36.36 %/66
	<b>Total N°(90) percentage</b>	<b>30 %/90</b>	<b>16.66 %/90</b>	<b>26.66 %/90</b>

The analysis of the data presented in Table 4.9 has uncovered a notable disparity in the preference for group division among the three universities that were the focus of this study. A total of sixty-seven (67) respondents from the University of Bejaia, forty from the University of Khenchela, and only twenty-four students from the University of Oued Souf expressed a preference for mixed-gender group divisions. Conversely, twenty-three, fifty, and sixty-six participants from each respective university displayed a greater inclination towards collaborating with partners of the same gender.

Table 4.10, then, listed the more recurrent reasons for choosing single-gender type of grouping by the students participating in the questionnaire we have administered. All of the respondents, numbering 23 out of 90 at the University of Bejaia, 50/90 at the University of Khenchela, and 66/90 at the University of Oued Souf, have cited strikingly similar justifications for their inclination. Six respondents at the University of Bejaia, twelve at the

University of Khenchela, and an surprisingly twenty-seven at the University of Oued Souf declared that their preference for same-sex partners arose from their tendency to experience shyness and discomfort when paired with partners of the opposite gender. Another group consisting of nine students at the University of Bejaia, as well as fifteen students at both the universities of Khenchela and Oued Souf, mentioned that their choice was primarily motivated by divergent thought processes that could potentially lead to misunderstandings within the group. Some other students (08 at the University of Bejaia, 23 at the University of Khenchela and 24 at the University of Oued Souf) held the belief that engaging in partnerships with individuals of the opposite gender resulted in group struggles, misinterpretations, as well as reinforcement of gender stereotypical mindsets.

We presume that the observed variations in student perspectives can be traced back to their diverse social and cultural backgrounds, potentially coupled with exposure to classroom gender bias and reinforcement. Within our societal framework, diverse cultural and social characteristics manifest themselves in various regional settings, consequently eliciting varying degrees of gender emphasis, bias, and stereotyping.

**Question fifteen:**

Do you think that classroom behaviours are tied to gender?

- a. Yes.    b. No.

**Table 4.11:** Learners' awareness of the association between gender and behaviour in the classroom setting

Univ/Choice/%	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
University of Bejaia	69	76.66 %	21	23.33 %
University of Khenchela	72	80 %	18	20 %
University of Oued Souf	85	94.44 %	05	5.55 %

Table 4.11, once again, displayed a clear divergence in the level of awareness among our respondents regarding the correlation between gender and behaviour within the confines of the classroom. Sixty nine respondents, seventy two, and eighty five representing around 76%, 80 % and almost 95 % of the total population at the Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf, respectively, recognised that association and acknowledged the influence between the two concepts. Nevertheless, only twenty one participants ( $\approx 23$  %) at the University of Bejaia, 18 (20 %) at the University of Khenchela and 05 (5.55 %) at the University of Oued Souf denied its existence and impact.

The perception of a connection between student gender and their behaviours appeared to become more prevalent among the population as we traversed different social and regional layers in Algeria. The table above, indeed, identified a correlation between social and regional background and the tendency to associate student gender with their exhibited behaviours. This association gradually and clearly increased as we vertically move downwards in the Algerian social and regional areas (as far as the targeted regions are concerned). Furthermore, it is observed that the university samples, which place significant emphasis on gender and stereotypes, relatively recognise the close association between gender and behaviour, with gender often determining both classroom reactions and behaviours.

**Question sixteen:**

Do you think that the type of gender grouping (single-gender/mixed-gender) affects learning? (Put a tick by your choice).

- a. Yes.    b. No.

**Question seventeen:**

Is this effect:

- a. Positive or  
b. Negative.

**Question eighteen:**

How do you think gender grouping might influence students' learning outcomes?

**Table 4.12:** The effect of gender on learning

Univ/Choice	Yes	No	Positive	Negative
Univ-Bejaia	80 (88.88 %)	10 (11.11 %)	76 (84.44 %)	04 (4.44 %)
Univ-Khenchela	90 (100 %)	00 (0 %)	43 (47.77 %)	47 (52.22 %)
Univ-Oued Souf	90 (100 %)	00 (0 %)	34 (37.77 %)	56 (62.22 %)

Table 4.12 presented the participants' perception regarding the potential impact of gender on the learning process. The initial two columns aimed to clarify whether they held a belief in the existence of such an influence, whereas the subsequent two columns provided a comprehensive account of the specific nature of the prevailing impact. The table also demonstrated that the vast majority of our respondents from the three designated universities unequivocally recognised the effect of gender on their educational journey. Nevertheless, the responses pertaining to the particular type of influence varied across the different university contexts.

From the one hand, seventy six students out of ninety at the University of Bejaia, forty three at the University of Khenchela and thirty four at the University of Oued Souf affirmed its positive effect. They embraced the idea that learner heterogeneity enriches the learning environment, prompting varied learning paths and outcomes. In other words, learner variance fuels diversity in learning. On the other hand, four students, forty seven, and fifty six at the respective universities claimed that gender differences had greater potential to negatively affect the learning experience. For them, shared social identities, while not guaranteed identical thinking, could foster empathy and understanding, leading to less bias and stereotypical thoughts. Consequently, this might decrease the intensity and the frequency of in-group conflicts and a corresponding enhancement in understanding. Other responses also substantiated that certain individuals of the opposite gender exhibited immature responses through interruptions and assertive conduct. Once more, we assume that these varied rationales were grounded in the educational institutions' inclinations toward promoting either gender equity or inequity.

#### **Section four: the interrelation between gender and culture**

##### **Question nineteen:**

It is commonly believed that gender is a characteristic that exhibits a reciprocal connection with culture. In fact, both gender and culture have an impact on one another and are mutually influenced. Do you agree? Explain.

**Table 4.13:** Learners' awareness of the association between gender and culture

<b>University/Choice/%</b>	<b>Yes, I agree.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>No, I don't.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	90	100 %	00	0 %
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	90	100 %	00	0 %
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	90	100 %	00	0 %

##### **Question twenty:**

Does the association between the two terms intervene in the process of establishing collaborative work?

**Table 4.14:** Learners' perception about the effect of gender and culture on classroom collaboration

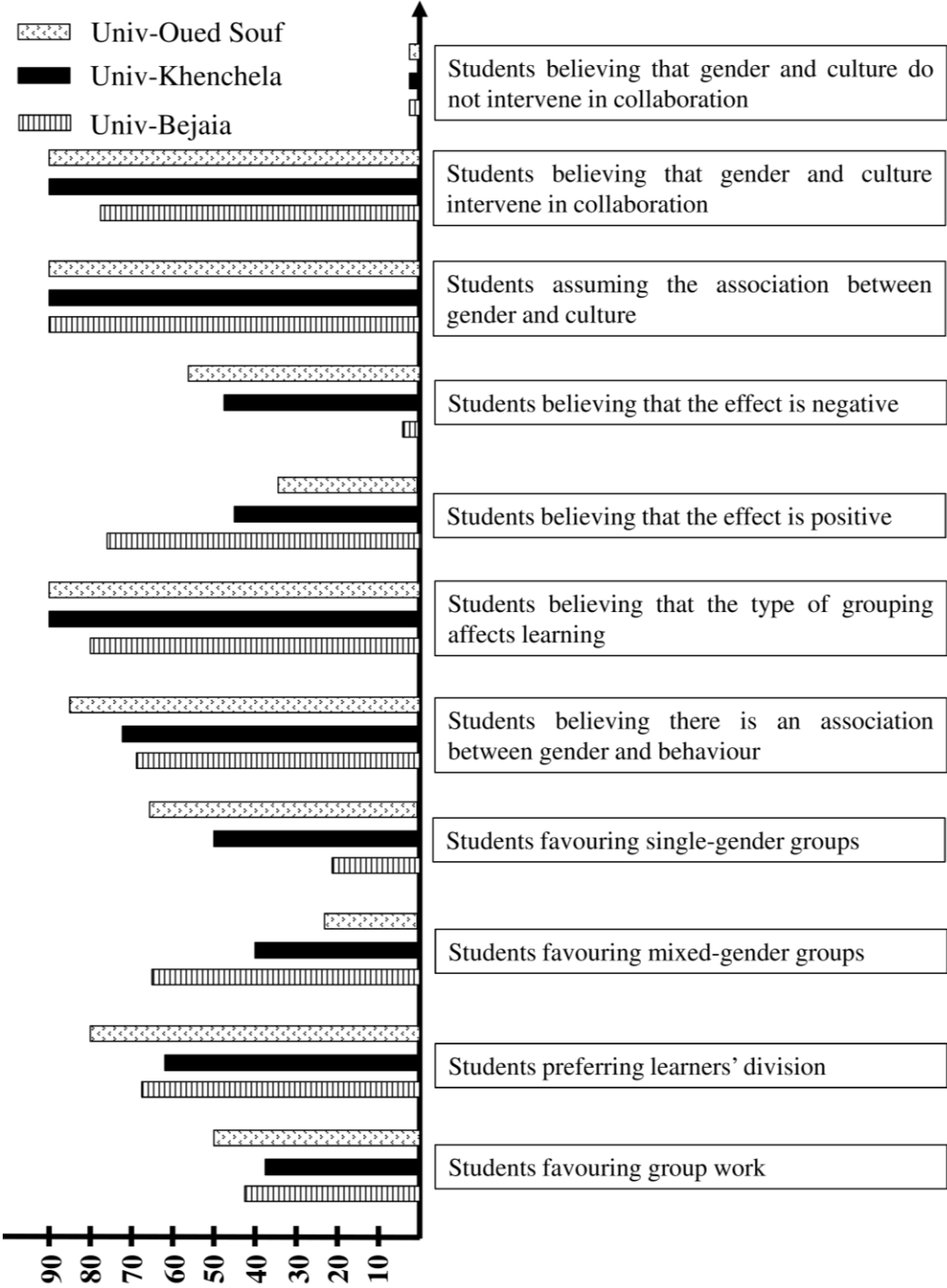
<b>University/Choice/%</b>	<b>Yes, it does.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>No, It doesn't.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	87	96.66 %	03	3.33 %
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	90	100 %	00	0 %
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	90	100 %	00	0 %

Tables 4.13 and 4.14 encapsulated numerical data and statistics pertaining to the students' awareness of the prevailing association between gender and culture, and whether this association intervenes in the process of establishing in-class collaborative work. All of the respondents enrolled in the three universities under research (90 respondents representing 100 % of the total population in each university) have shown a clear understanding of how gender and culture are interrelated. No one refuted the existence of the mutual influence established between these two concepts. Moreover, almost all of them believed that this interrelation definitely intervened when group work tasks were assigned. Accordingly, we assume that experiences with gender equity/inequity, in and out of the school/classroom context, shaped students' understanding and awareness of this association which might positively or negatively affect their learning. In other words, the greater level of equitable classroom/society practices students were exposed to resulted in a more favourable perception they maintained regarding the relationship between gender, culture, and collaborative work.

### **1.2 Summarising and comparing results**

From the entirety of the information that have been gathered and summarised in the various tables of the students' questionnaire, we have further synthesised our data into a comprehensive graphic display with the intention of facilitating the identification of similarities, closeness, or differences among the three universities that have been subject to our investigation.





Bar Graph 4.1: Students' summarised data

From the graphic representation illustrated above, we could finally draw the following conclusions:

- ✓ In the three universities, a significant proportion ranging from over one third to half of the participants expressed a preference for engaging in group work as opposed to other forms of group arrangements, thereby highlighting the collective spirit of collaboration demonstrated by our students across various regions of the nation.

- ✓ The great majority in the three universities preferred learner division and group arrangement rather than the teachers’.
- ✓ When considering the various types of group arrangement, there has been a gradual decline in the selection of mixed-gender groupings. This trend has been observed in the University of Bejaia, which documented the highest percentage at 74.44%. Following this, the University of Khenchela reported a percentage of 44.4%, while the University of Oued Souf recorded the lowest percentage at 26.66%.
- ✓ For single-gender partnership, however, we have witnessed an absolute increase with the University of Bejaia obviously recording the lowest (25.55), the University of Khenchela around 55 %, and the University of Oued Souf reporting the highest percentage with 73.33 % of its population preferring same gender group mates.
- ✓ Respondents have demonstrated a profound understanding and awareness of the correlation between gender and behaviour, substantiated by the inclusion of statistical data representing 69%, 72%, and 85% of the entire population enrolled at the universities of Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf, respectively.
- ✓ In the two very last inquiries of the questionnaire, numbers and percentages have reached their peak. Almost 100% of the respondents across the three academic institutions have admitted that regardless of the group arrangement type students and teachers favour, it definitely affects the learning process.
- ✓ All respondents in the three universities showed a profound recognition of the interconnectedness between gender and culture. Furthermore, nearly 100% of the individuals participated in the questionnaire held the conviction that this association could potentially influence the dynamics of collaboration and teamwork within the educational setting.

More generalised conclusions can be derived from the graphic display above:

- ✓ A significant number of students across the Algerian universities place great importance on collaboration and teamwork, with the majority expressing a preference for learner group organisation and friendship grouping.
- ✓ Cultural and social contexts appear to influence student preferences for group types. Mixed-gender arrangements find more support in Bejaia, while single-gender groupings gradually increase in prevalence southward, in internal and more southern areas.
- ✓ The majority of the Algerian students around the country affirm the association between gender and behaviour inside the classroom as well as the connection between gender

and culture with their direct influence on learning and collaboration inside the classroom.

### 1.3 Teachers' questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to ten (10) teachers at each of the university contexts under research. They were aware of the procedure and kindly requested to complete the questionnaire anonymously for enhancing their ease when answering the different inquiries. Additionally, the participants were duly notified that their responses would be handled with utmost confidentiality and used for the purpose of this investigation.

The questionnaire comprised twenty five (25) questions. It was structured into four distinct sections, each corresponding to one of the three main points emphasised in this investigation (Speaking, collaboration, gender, and cultural attributes).

#### Section one: The target language skills and the teachers' practices.

##### Question one:

Which of the following skills you find challenging to teach? Classify them according to their level of difficulty.

**Table 4.15:** Teachers' most challenging skill to teach

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

Interestingly, the participants' responses in relation to the difficulty level of language skills exhibited a striking similarity. While they had varying views regarding the receptive, all ten respondents (100%) agreed that the productive skills were practically challenging to teach. We postulate that this could be ascribed to the learners' level of proficiency in the language and their level of engagement in various tasks. In other words, the learners' limited linguistic and cultural competencies acted as barriers and impeded both the teaching and learning processes. Moreover, individuals with lower motivation had a negative effect on the quality and frequency of contributions in the classroom. Another factor that could potentially influence this situation is the learners' limited use and exposure to the target language. This created numerous obstacles and difficulties for learners to effectively perform orally or

written, and consequently affecting the teaching strategies, techniques, and time allocated to various activities.

**Question two**

What features of a speaking session can enhance student engagement and improve their speaking skills?

Once again, a total agreement was noted among all instructors, in the three universities investigated, regarding two key attributes that could foster a more fruitful learning experience during the oral expression class. They expressed their strong belief that it was imperative for teachers to assign their pupils with captivating and diverse forms of tasks, while simultaneously establishing a learner-centred ambiance within the speaking classroom. We also believe that these recommended characteristics play a pivotal role in boosting motivation levels of teachers and stimulating greater student engagement.

**Question three**

What is/are the problem/s that you frequently encounter when conducting speaking sessions?

- a. Learners' low language proficiency level.
- b. Learners' inhibitions.
- c. Mother tongue interference among learners.
- d. Lack of motivation and the low participation.
- e. Shortage of ideas in specific topics.
- f. Others.

**Question four**

Please share any additional challenges you face when facilitating speaking activities.

In this particular question, all of the suggested options have been ticked. All of the respondents' answers were, more or less, similar; there was an absolute agreement that all of the obstacles above could be persistently and relatively encountered in speaking sessions. In other words, all of the challenges could potentially occur with different occurrence rate in different classes and with different students.

Another challenge repeatedly appeared was about the unavailability of certain teaching aids and equipments which could hinder the teaching process. Actually, the recurrence of these obstacles could be generalised to all classroom contexts and students, they could, in a way or another, present a stumbling step to effective language learning. They really suppressed valuable target language exposure and limited opportunities for shaping oral skills.

The salient alignment of teachers' viewpoints suggested teacher's keen understanding and awareness of the challenges impacting teaching and learning.

**Question five**

In the speaking session, teachers typically incorporate a range of classroom activities like storytelling and jigsaw; could you mention some specific examples of speaking activities that you have already employed with your students?

According to the aforementioned question, a significant proportion of the techniques employed by the participants during the oral expression sessions were very similar. All of the questionnaire respondents claimed that they generally imparted a diverse range of pedagogical activities to their students, such as jigsaw tasks, challenging and problematic situations, narratives and storytelling, role plays, oral presentations, and the like. This assortment of activities may, indeed, serve as a means to captivate the learners' attention and engender their curiosity, thus leading to heightened motivation and active involvement within the educational setting.

**Section two: Class management and types of arrangements**

**Question six**

It is stated that classroom arrangement can have a direct effect on the students' engagement, attention, and academic performance. What is the in-class arrangement that you frequently lean toward during speaking sessions in order to improve learners' contributions?

**Question seven**

Explain your choice.

**Table 4.16:** Teachers' Opinions and preference of the different in-class arrangements.

		<b>Groups</b>	<b>Pairs</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Equally important</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	<b>Theoretically believed</b>	<b>All of them should be used</b>			<b>10/100%</b>
	<b>Actually practised</b>	<b>collaboration avoidance</b>		<b>03 (30%)</b>	<b>07 (70%)</b>
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	<b>Theoretically believed</b>	<b>All of them should be used</b>			<b>10/100%</b>
	<b>Actually practised</b>	<b>collaboration avoidance</b>		<b>04 (40%)</b>	<b>06 (60%)</b>
<b>Univ-OuedSouf</b>	<b>Theoretically believed</b>	<b>All of them should be used</b>			<b>10/100%</b>
	<b>Actually practised</b>	<b>collaboration avoidance</b>		<b>03 (30%)</b>	<b>07 (70%)</b>

According to the data gathered from question six, it was unanimously agreed upon by all the participants across the three universities, identical to the scholarly works we have reviewed, that the various class arrangements discussed in the study held practical benefits and were of equal importance in developing speaking skills. However, it was claimed that the actual implementation of these arrangements could be hindered by the teaching and learning environment, particularly in group work activities. Out of the total number of informants, seven teachers at the University of Bejaia and Oued Souf (representing 70% in each) and six at the University of Khenchela (60%) pointed that all different class arrangements should be utilised as a means to disrupt the classroom monotony and enhance student motivation regardless the existing classroom atmosphere. From another angle, three participants at the University of Bejaia and Oued Souf (30% in each) and four at the University of Khenchela (40%) revealed that they occasionally avoided incorporating cooperative learning into their teaching practice. Their most recurrent explanation was attributed to either the large class size or the general behavioural practices exhibited by students. This particular category of teachers believed that managing and controlling group work tasks in larger classes, especially with troublesome students, posed a significant challenge.

Consequently, it can be understood that some teachers opted for cooperative learning as it served to break the monotony of traditional classroom settings and foster active student

involvement. However, there were others who did not favour cooperative learning due to either personal factors, such as their own inability to effectively manage and control the activity, or external factors, such as the sheer number of learners in the class.

### Question eight

When incorporating group work activities, do you favour:

- a. Smaller groups (less than five participants) or
- b. Larger groups (more than five participants)?

### Question nine

Explain your choice.

**Table 4.17:** Teachers' group size preference

Univ/Group size preference	Small groups	Large groups
Univ- Bejaia	10 (100%)	00 (0%)
Univ-Khenchela	10 (100%)	00 (0%)
Univ-Oued Souf	10 (100%)	00 (0%)

All informants (a remarkable 100% out of a sample size of 10 teachers at each of the universities studied) expressed a clear inclination towards the practice of dividing their students into smaller groups, ideally consisting of no more than five members. The rationale behind this preference was based on the belief that a reduced number of students per group generally paved the way for enhanced engagement and increased opportunities for participation and discussion among the individual members within the group. Furthermore, collaboration within small groups, from them, could cultivate a sense of shared risk and reward, where individual inhibitions were mitigated by the collective responsibility and motivation for success with shedding light on all members including introverts and low achievers. Driven by strong evidence and robust processes, this option has gained significant support among researchers, solidifying its usefulness as pointed in chapter one, part one which actually revealed our respondents' deep understanding of the most functional and productive classroom practices.

### Question ten

These groups are generally arranged by:

- a. The teacher himself. Or
- b. The students.

### Question eleven

Explain your choice.

**Table 4.18:** Teachers' group arrangement preference

	Teachers' arrangement	Students' arrangement
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	02 (20%)	08 (80%)
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	00 (0%)	10 (100%)
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	01 (1%)	09 (90%)
<b>Total Number/Percentage</b>	<b>03 (10%)</b>	<b>27 (90%)</b>

As shown in the table above, 90% out of the total numbers of the teachers questioned across the three universities investigated (8/10 at the University of Bejaia, 10/10 at the University of Khenchela and 09/10 at the University of Oued Souf) granted their students an increased level of autonomy when it came to selecting their partners for group work tasks during the speaking sessions. These teachers believed that allowing students to determine their own group arrangements fostered a sense of confidence and comfort among group members, thereby facilitating the generation of more diverse and innovative ideas, as well as reducing inhibitions. Conversely, only three informants representing 10% of the total number expressed preference for the teacher's role in assigning groups. This particular category of teachers maintained that the greater the degree of flexibility given to students in terms of group formation and arrangement, the more likely it was for disruptive and unmanageable behaviours to arise.

We were of the opinion that the discrepancy in the perspectives of the teachers was primarily influenced by the collective behaviour of the class as a whole. That is to say, students' self-arrangement could definitely be constructive, but it also had the potential to create a disorderly atmosphere within the classroom. We presume that this conceivably depended on the existence of some factors that could shape the dynamics of the classroom environment such as the learners' responses to collaborative work, their willingness to accept their peers as partners within a group, and their determination to successfully accomplish the objectives of the given task.



**Section three: Gender and Classroom Work**

**Question twelve**

When given the option to choose their partners, do students generally gravitate towards:

- a. Single-gender grouping,
- b. Mixed-gender partners, or
- c. Simply prefer to work with friends regardless of their gender?

**Table 4.19:** Students’ group members’ preference

<b>University/Choice</b>	<b>Single-gender partners</b>	<b>Mixed-gender partners</b>	<b>Friends regardless their gender</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	02 (20%)	04 (40%)	04 (40%)
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	05 (50%)	01 (10%)	04 (40%)
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	06 (60%)	00 (00%)	04 (40%)
<b>Total numbers/%</b>	13 (43.33%)	05 (16.66%)	12 (40%)

A clear divergence was documented in our informants’ inclinations towards single-gender partner preference and friendship grouping when their students were granted the autonomy to select their group members. For the University of Bejaia, no great preference score was recorded. Among ten respondents, partner selection revealed a range of preferences; 20% opted for single-gender groups, 40% for mixed-gender groups, and 40% prioritised friendship-based groupings, transcending gender. Mixed-gender collaboration took a backseat at the University of Khenchela, with a substantial surge in single-gender partnering preferences: five teachers (50%) preferred it, compared to only one (10%) advocating for mixed-gender groups. Then, Single-gender preference continued its upward rise at the University of Oued Souf with a resounding six teachers choosing it. Friendship grouping preference also marked its occurrence with four teachers, leaving mixed-gender collaborations entirely scoreless.

The unsurprising yet complementary nature of these data, indeed, provided valuable reinforcement of the student questionnaire findings listed above as it validated students’ responses related to their group composition preference.

### Question thirteen

Which group composition promotes more active participation and engagement for learners?

- a. Single-gender groups? Or
- b. Mixed-gender groups?

### Question fourteen

Please, explain how.

**Table 4.20:** Type of group arrangement enhancing learners' contributions

University/Choice	Single-gender partners	Mixed-gender partners
Univ-Bejaia	05 (50%)	05 (50%)
Univ-Khenchela	07 (70%)	03 (30%)
Univ-Oued Souf	08 (80%)	02 (20%)
<b>Total numbers/%</b>	20 (66.66%)	10 (33.33%)

Table 4.20 indicates that the majority of the respondents across the three university contexts (a significant 66.66% or 20/30) exhibited a clear inclination towards opting for a single-gender group arrangement as a means to enhance the overall learners' in-class contributions. This selection gradually increased as we moved southward, with 05 teachers at the University of Bejaia, 07 at the University of Khenchela and 08 at the University of Oued Souf. All of the questionnaire respondents agreed on and firmly believed that mixed-gender group arrangement had a profound impact on encouraging their students to actively share and participate in various class tasks as they felt more at ease and comfortable when interacting with same gender peers. We assume that this specific category of teachers accorded utmost priority to the implementation of this type of group division so as to effectively steer clear of in-group gender stereotypes that might be prevalent.

However, it is worth noting that only a mere five, three, and two respondents at the respective universities believed that a mixed-gender division was significantly more efficient to foster a sense of collaboration within the class, thereby leading to enhanced in-group participation. Additionally, introducing in-group variation, for them, effectively led to the emergence of a wide array of diverse contributions, and thus, helped to generate more comprehensive range of ideas and successfully complete more assigned tasks.

**Question fifteen**

If you arrange your students in single-gender groups, do you give equal opportunities to learners' participations from opposite gender groups?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

**Question sixteen**

Please, explain.

**Table 4.21:** Teachers' floor giving opportunities from opposite gender groups

University/Choice	Yes	No
Univ-Bejaia	06 (60%)	04 (40%)
Univ-Khenchela	04 (40%)	06 (60%)
Univ-Oued Souf	05 (50%)	05 (50%)
<b>Total numbers/%</b>	15 (50%)	15 (50%)

Table 4.21 offers a visual representation of teachers' selection and floor giving for students within single-gender groups, using both numbers and percentages for clarity. Among the total number of respondents, six individuals (equivalent to 60%) at the University of Bejaia, four (40%) at the University of Khenchela and five (50%) at the University of Oued Souf indicated that they generally provided equal opportunities to their students, regardless of their gender or the specific tasks they were engaged in. All of these informants justified their stance by emphasising the teachers' ethical obligation to treat all students impartially, without any form of bias or favouritism. The remaining participants (4, 6, and 5 at the respective universities) did not automatically distribute equal floor opportunities among genders belonging to different single-gender groups. The need for differentiated instruction emerged in the responses, with the respondents' emphasis on providing customised support to students regardless of gender, considering factors like motivation and language proficiency. Therefore, targeted support and dedicated focus were identified as key to navigating their weaknesses and challenges.

These justifications could relatively be correct and feasible, warrant further consideration from teachers regarding the distribution of floor opportunities in order to optimise the potential for student learning. Accordingly, it is imperative for educators to prioritise equity in their decision-making process and in-class practices, ensuring no possibility for gender bias to occur. As a result, teachers can hopefully create an inclusive and

supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs and abilities of all students, regardless of their gender.

**Question seventeen**

In case you assign them to work in mixed-gender partnership, do you grant equal opportunities to learners' contributions from opposite gender within the one group, itself?

**Question eighteen**

Explain why?

**Table 4.22:** Teachers' floor giving opportunities to learners from opposite gender within the one group

University/Choice	Yes	No
Univ-Bejaia	05 (50%)	05 (50%)
Univ-Khenchela	06 (60%)	04 (40%)
Univ-Oued Souf	04 (50%)	06 (50%)
<b>Total numbers/%</b>	15 (50%)	15 (50%)

Table 4.22 discloses a comprehensive numerical representation of the teachers' allocation to floor giving opportunities for learners from opposite genders and belonging to the same group. The table shows that an equal number of teachers in the three universities studied corresponding to 15 (50%) had an inclination towards giving unequal opportunities to learners' contributions from opposite gender as members of the same group. These teachers unanimously agreed on the importance of delivering personalised and adapted support to each student, taking into account their individual motivations for participating in tasks as well as their proficiency in the language. Notably, these teachers refrained from making comparisons between students or referencing to others when offering this support.

The remaining fifteen respondents (50%), however, demonstrated a tendency towards offering balanced floor opportunities. According to their perspective, the provision of fair floor opportunities within the same group fostered a sense of trust and comfort among its members, consequently leading to enhanced frequency and quality of contributions within the group. This particular group of teachers believed that by favouring in-group dynamics, they could create an environment that encouraged a higher level of engagement and participation from the learners.

**Question nineteen**

Do you consider role rotation in mixed-gender type of grouping?

**Question twenty**

Explain your choice.

**Table 4.23:** Teachers' in-group role rotation provision

University/Choice	Yes	No
Univ-Bejaia	06 (60%)	04 (40%)
Univ-Khenchela	05 (50%)	05 (50%)
Univ-Oued Souf	07 (70%)	03 (03%)
<b>Total numbers/%</b>	18 (60%)	12 (40%)

Table 4.23 lists significant data about teachers' maintaining in-group role rotation. As shown in the Table 4.23, a considerable number of respondents; 06 teachers at the University of Bejaia, 05 at the University of Khenchela, and 07 at the University of Oued Souf; predominantly prioritised active role rotation within the same group. They purposefully raised different points as they justified their stand. For them, providing students with diverse roles gained them more exposure to different tasks and responsibilities, which in turn, expanded their understanding and promote their skill set. They also believed that stepping into different roles might deepen the students' critical thinking and promote leadership and in-group communication and discussion with actually preventing the formation of more dominant practices, therefore, fostering more equitable distribution of contributions.

Another category of respondents equalling to twelve (40%) out of the total number of teachers (30) at the three universities targeted have expressed an urge to avoid rotating in-group roles though it could potentially offer substantial benefits. They pointed that changing roles too frequently could disrupt the group's workflow, impede progress, and waste time allocated for the task. They have also suggested that some members might be naturally appropriate for or enjoy certain roles more than others. Consequently, compulsory rotation could lead to frustration and reduced motivation.

In fact, both stances with the suggested justifications could possibly take place. The downsides can arise unless teachers adapt their teaching process to some skills and strategies like implementing gradual and strategic rotation starting with less frequent alternation and gradually increase the frequency basing on students' needs and learning progress.

**Section four: the interrelation between gender and culture.**

**Question twenty one**

If you are required to teach in another town, what major considerations do you prioritise to adapt your teaching style and ensure effective instruction?

- a. Learners' behaviours affected by the location.
- b. Gender stereotypes related to that place.
- c. The input you are going to provide/ the syllabus you are going to teach.
- d. The tasks you are going to assign.

**Question twenty two**

Justify your choice.

**Table 4.24:** Teachers' most prioritised considerations in case they change the social and the cultural teaching context

<b>Choice/University</b>	<b>Learners' behaviours</b>	<b>Gender stereotypes</b>	<b>The input/ the syllabus</b>	<b>The tasks to be assigned</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	10 (33.33%)	02 (06.66%)	10 (33.33%)	10 (33.33%)
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	10 (33.33%)	01 (03.33%)	10 (33.33%)	10 (33.33%)
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	10 (33.33%)	03 (10%)	10 (33.33%)	10 (33.33%)
<b>Total N°/%</b>	30 (100%)	06 (20%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 4.24 provides significant data about the teachers' consideration/s to ensure active learning and effective instruction if they were required to change the social and cultural teaching context. All of the alternatives provided have been selected with variant level of selection. Respondents (30/100%) claimed that they took into consideration learners' behaviour that could potentially be affected by the location they teach in. All of them considered the input to be imparted as well as the tasks to be assigned. However, a small proportion of teachers participating in the questionnaire (6/20%) placed particular emphasis on the examination of gender stereotypes and the amount of gender bias prevalent within the target location. As a point of fact, all of these suggestions should thoroughly be placed at the highest priority on their checklist in case they are compelled to change the area in which they teach.

**Question twenty three**

How can the culture of the target region affect gender identity and behaviour?

**Question twenty four**

Does the change in culture and region potentially entail changing the teaching reactions and practices?

**Question twenty five**

How?

**Table 4.25:** Teachers' view about the association between the change in cultural and social region with the teaching reactions and practices

<b>University/ Choice</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Univ-Bejaia</b>	10 (100%)	00 (00%)
<b>Univ-Khenchela</b>	10 (100%)	00 (00%)
<b>Univ-Oued Souf</b>	10 (100%)	00 (00%)
<b>Total N°/%</b>	30 (100%)	00 (00%)

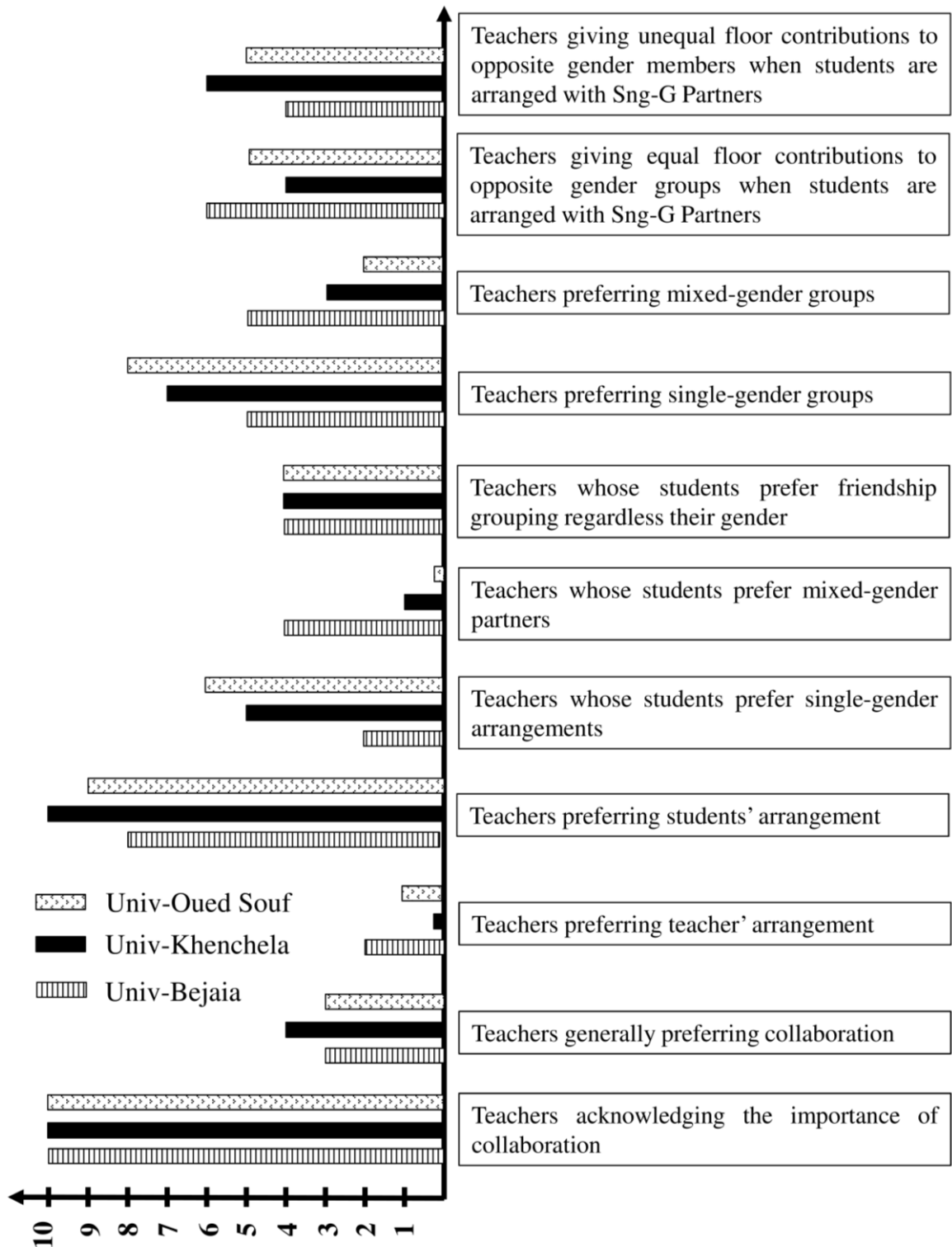
Data gathered from the three former questions serve and complement each other. Our respondents' answers were very similar though expressed and justified differently. They determinedly asserted that culture of a specific geographic area had the likeliness to exert a substantial impact on the development, understanding and expression of an individual's gender identity and behavioural patterns. Beliefs, attitudes, and customs that were deeply rooted in a particular culture, as explained by the informants, played a pivotal role in influencing how individuals perceived and manifested their own sense of gender. They also believed that Cultures generally prescribed specific roles and classifications for each gender which definitely shape the different genders' mindset and attitudes. This has clearly been highlighted and explained by scholars works discussed in chapter two of the current research.

Moreover, the very last question has depicted a deep understanding of teachers about the actual association between cultural/regional patterns and the teaching reaction/practices. All informants acknowledged that observing local communication styles, traditions, and learning preferences was crucial for effective adaptation. By embracing flexibility and understanding cultural nuances, they added, teachers could steer changes in region and culture effectively, creating a more inclusive and engaging learning environment for everyone.

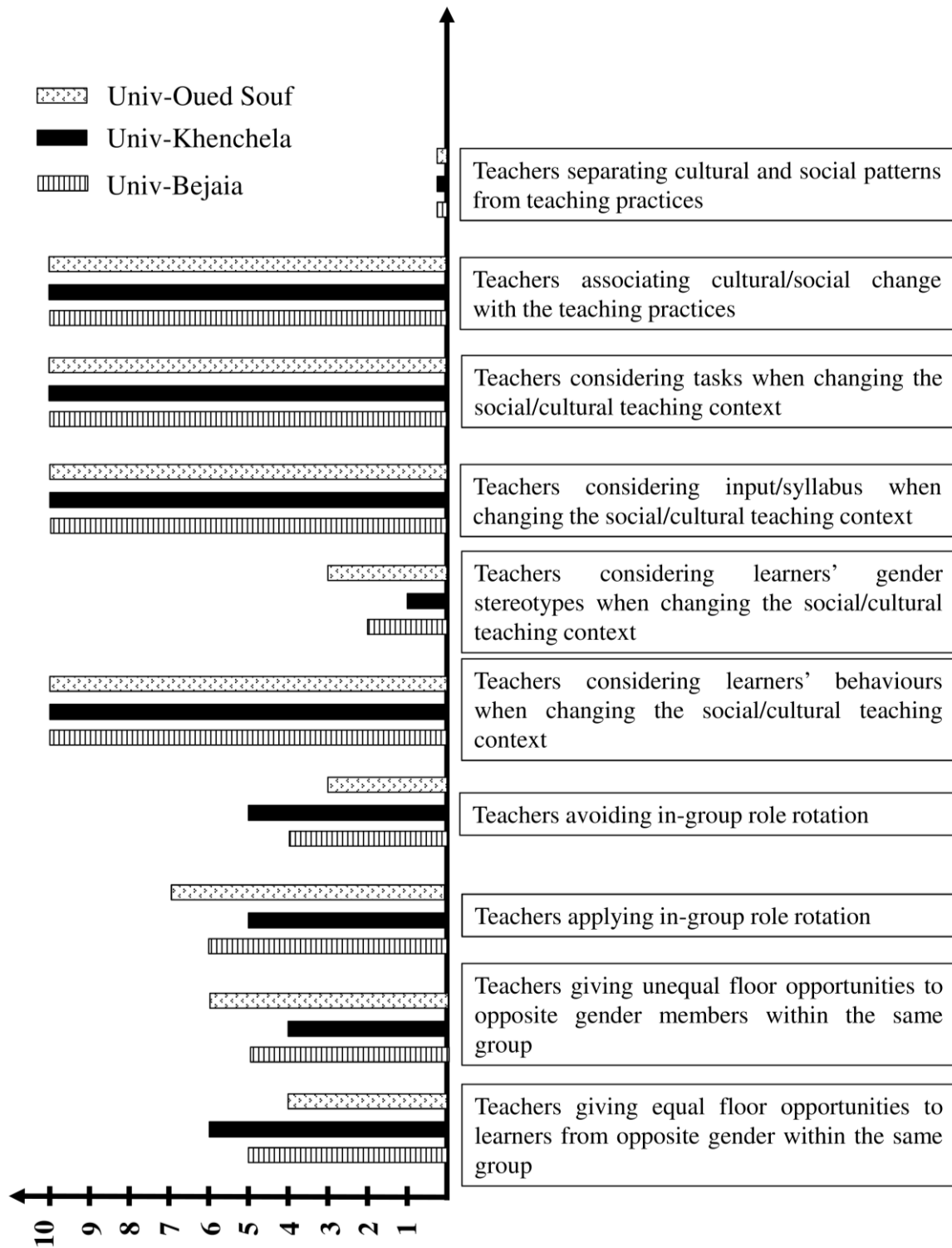
#### **1.4 Summarising and comparing results**

From the totality of the data that has been collected and condensed in the numerous tables of the questionnaire administered to teachers, we have distilled our findings into a comprehensive graphical display for the purpose of discerning any shared traits, inherent closeness, or notable distinctions among the three universities encompassed by our investigative efforts.





Bar Graph 4.2: Teachers' questionnaire summarised data (part one)



Bar Graph 4.3: Teachers' questionnaire summarised data (part two)

From the graphic representation illustrated above, we could finally draw the following conclusions:

- ✓ In the three universities, all teachers have acknowledged the importance of collaboration, particularly through group work tasks.
- ✓ The teachers' actual group work implementation was often diminished because of time restraints or in-class behavioural challenges.
- ✓ Across the three university contexts, 90% of respondents preferred students' group division.
- ✓ Around 40% of our informants have noticed that students preferred friendship group arrangements with no regard to the group members' gender; whereas the remaining 60% was essentially divided between students' going for either mixed- or single gender partnership.
- ✓ Again, mixed-gender group arrangement has witnessed a remarkable decline as we moved southward with recording the highest percentage (50%) at the University of Bejaia; then, the University of Khenchela reported around (30%) and the University of Oued Souf recorded the lowest percentage at 20%.
- ✓ For single-gender partnership, however, we have noticed an absolute increase with the University of Bejaia obviously recording the lowest (50%), the University of Khenchela around 70 %, and the University of Oued Souf reporting the highest percentage with 80 % of its population preferring same gender group mates.
- ✓ Our respondents' views of floor giving opportunities have substantially diverged with 50% of the questionnaire participants favouring equal floor giving to students from opposite gender, within the same group or belonging to different groups. Another 50% of the informants have prioritised unequal distribution of floor opportunities because of learners' motivation, conduct and language proficiency level.
- ✓ Teachers' views of in-group role rotation significance have also varied with 60% of the total population expressed that they have generally implemented it; while the remaining 40% claimed that they avoided alternating roles and responsibilities within the group because of many reasons (discussed before).
- ✓ Respondents have revealed a reflective understanding and awareness of the different factors that should be considered when changing the social and cultural teaching context such as learners' behaviours, teaching input/syllabus and the tasks to be assigned. However, gender stereotypes have been underrated with only 06/30 teachers approving its salience.

- ✓ All respondents in the three universities (30 teachers/100%) granted credit to the existing connection between the cultural/social patterns and the actual teaching practices and reactions.

More generalised conclusions can be derived from the graphic display above:

- ✓ An important number of teachers across the Algerian universities are aware of group work complexity and often avoid implementing it unless they feel it is necessary for achieving certain objectives.
- ✓ Both mixed- and single-gender group arrangements find support depending on the cultural context to which teachers belong, and the students who are the recipients to their teaching efforts.
- ✓ A significant number of teachers across the country have exhibited a clear understanding of the prominence of classroom equity and customised support rather equality and standardised learners' treatment.
- ✓ All teachers are aware of the factors they need to consider if they were requested to change the cultural and social teaching atmosphere. Nonetheless, the majority of them do not really weigh the impact of gender stereotypes on the teaching/learning processes.
- ✓ Teachers throughout the nation are aware of the prevailing correlation between cultural and social transformations and their impact on pedagogical approaches and teaching practices.

## **2. Observation findings**

From the observation that has been extensively conducted over a period of six months, the researcher was able to identify and highlight several significant points. These observations were primarily focused on scrutinising the differences between genders and the frequency at which these differences occurred in the classroom context. The purpose was obviously to provide evidence and confirm the existence of these discrepancies.

To accurately demonstrate the frequency of these occurrences, observation schedules were meticulously created and used. The top section of these schedules displayed the specific gender disparities emphasised in the undertaking. On the left side of the schedule, numbers were assigned to represent the various periods of group interactions (e. g. 30 minutes/5 minutes= 6 periods). The ticks on the schedule were used to indicate the existence of the observed behaviour during each respective period.

## **2.1 Observation findings in the first two months**

### **2.1.1 Task one: Joint decision for Dani.**

In the first task, the primary focus of the researcher was on the learners' collaborative decision-making process. She tried to assess the degree to which learners' engagement and communication contributed to, or obstructed, effective group decision-making as shown in Tables 4.26, 4.27 and 4.28. The task was divided into different periods representing the task different engagement instructions. The initial five minutes of the task, which accounted for 16% of the total task duration, were dedicated to student' discussion for the decision-making process with ordering its different steps (referred to as period one). Subsequently, students addressed the second period and flew through the text's questions within a five-minute timeframe which constituted 16% of the overall task duration as well. After that, they were instructed to discuss the 'choice card' alternatives and reach the most adequate decision for Dani, with a duration of ten minutes equalling to two periods, and collectively accounting for 33% of the task. Finally, group members engaged in a ten-minute guided interaction, during which a series of questions were asked to evaluate the decisions made in the preceding two periods, encompassing the final 33% of the task duration. These findings can be summarised as follows:

- First instruction:  $\approx 16\%$ .
- Second instruction:  $\approx 16\%$ .
- Third instruction:  $\approx 33\%$ .
- Fourth instruction:  $\approx 33\%$ .

Table 4.26: Researcher's observed gender differences in the first task of the two couple of months (Univ-Bejaia).

**Table 4.26:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the two couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

eriods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓		✓	
		FFG				✓		✓	
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
		M<FG				✓		✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
		M<FG				✓		✓	
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓
	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	5 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	6 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FFG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		M<FG						✓	

**Table 4.27:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the two couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓		✓	
		FFG				✓		✓	
		M=FG				✓		✓	
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
		M<FG				✓		✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M<FG				✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	5 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	6 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.28:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the two couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓		✓	
		FFG				✓		✓	
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
		M<FG				✓		✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓			✓
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓			
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓
	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	5 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	6 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

Beyond qualitative observations, the researcher approximately quantified group performance by measuring the percentage of group participation and task completion.

**Table 4.29:** Percentage of learners’ achievement of the first task objective in the first couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Percentages	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Instruction 1 (16%)	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 2 (16%)	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 3 (32%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 4 (32%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved
Total Percentage of task achievement	Around 60%	Around 60%	100%	100%	Around 80%



**Table 4.30:** Percentage of learners' achievement of the first task objective in the first couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Percentages	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Instruction 1 (16%)	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 2 (16%)	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 3 (32%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved
Instruction 4 (32%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved
Total Percentage of task achievement	Around 45%	Not more than 50%	100%	Around 85% or more	Around 85% or more

**Table 4.31:** Percentage of learners' achievement of the first task objective in the first couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Percentages	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Instruction 1 (16%)	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 2 (16%)	Achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Instruction 3 (32%)	Partly achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Instruction 4(32%)	Partly achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Total Percentage of task achievement	Not less than 70%	Around 80%	Around 60%	Around 60%	Around 60%

In the initial period, certain behaviours were largely absent. Surprisingly, peaceful cooperation and productive focus prevailed, in the three educational institutions studied, with minimal disruptions, displays of power, disagreements, or emotional responses. This can primarily be attributed to the ingrained nature of the instruction; it basically served as a preliminary warm up activity to enhance students' involvement and introduce the task at hand. However, the task prominently fostered strong displays of reasoning and assertiveness, as it demanded students to carefully and logically think and sequence the different decision-making steps. Therefore, politeness and collaborative spirit generally characterised the period, with all groups successfully achieving the set target.

In the second period, a time frame of five minutes allocated, the researcher observed a rise in male-initiated interruptions, assertiveness, and dominance in the three groups belonging to the three universities investigated with no significant divergence. This upward trend can be attributed to the nature of the instruction itself, which necessitated interactive argumentation. The male participants, then, began exerting control and seeking dominance within the group discussions; and concurrently, females' emotional thinking processes began to emerge, particularly at the end of second instruction as it required

to thoroughly reflect on certain points such as ‘success or failure of weight loss, willpower, and emotions’. Moreover, it is worth noting that female-female groups experienced instances of gossiping, as they occasionally deviated from the primary objective of the task, most particularly at the University of Oued Souf.

At this stage, all groups have attained the overall rate of the instruction, except for one single-gender group (male-male group) at the University of Bejaia and one mixed-gender group at the University of Oued Souf. On the one hand, boys in male-male group engaged in an excessively dominant manner, resulting in conflicts. Consequently, this relatively hindered their ability to accomplish the objective of the second instructional phase. On the other hand, girls in female-female group commenced engaging in informal and useless side discussions. Though not very frequent, yet it had an impact on the fulfilment of that particular portion of the assignment (refer to Tables 4.29, 4.30, and 4.31).

During the third and fourth periods, which are originally associated to the same instruction (i.e. the instruction consisted of two periods of five minutes for each), certain single-gender groups, notably at the University of Bejaia and Khenchela, had not completed their assigned task and requested additional time for that. For male-male groups, there were frequent interruptions and display of assertive and dominant behaviours, as the majority of the group members sought to impose their viewpoints. As the debate escalated, males began to engage in quarrels, resulting in more elevated voices. Evidently, these conflicts consumed a significant amount of time, leading to inadequate time management and low level of task accomplishment (as depicted in Tables 4.29, 4.30, and 4.31). As for the female-female groups at the universities mentioned, their discussions exceeded the designated time limits due to engaging in gossip. Conversely, in mixed-gender groups, gossiping was greatly restricted with the recurrent male’ interruptions. In return, the quarrels among males did not dramatically arise due to the politeness exhibited by females. In other words, boys interrupted female gossiping, and the females' polite behaviours contributed to a more harmonious atmosphere during the interaction.

At the University of Oued Souf, observations were remarkably divergent. Single-gender groups have proved their merited foreground. Both male-male and female-female groups have achieved the instruction’s main objective with deliberate and conscious time management. Strikingly, the three mixed-gender groups, with either the number of females equalling or outnumbering that of males, witnessed a clear deterioration as gender differences started to be emphasised.

For the fifth and sixth periods (representing the last instruction of the task), similar findings have conceivably been reported. At this level, approximately the same task achievement rate has been documented (Tables 4.29, 4.30, and 4.31)

**2.1.2 Task two:** Reaching a group joint decision about a critical and an imaginary situation (the surgeon and the patient list)

Tables 4.32, 4.33, and 4.34 depicted the occurrence of the previously mentioned gender disparities in the second task. It additionally examined the extent to which collective decisions were reached and whether those disparities impacted the achievement of the task's primary objective. The initial period of the task assigned a time frame of fifteen minutes, accounting for over 70% of the total task duration (comprising three five-minute intervals). The final part of the task was dedicated to whole-class discussion, during which the students deliberated on the decisions made as ‘a medical committee’. Throughout this period, learners were provided with guidance through a series of questions for duration of five minutes (equivalent to 25%).

- Instruction one: ≈75%.
- Instruction two: ≈25%.

**Table 4.32:** Researchers’ observed gender differences in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
M=FG		✓			✓		✓	✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
	5 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG				✓		✓	✓
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓					✓	✓

**Table 4.33:** Researchers’ observed gender differences in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		FPG						✓	
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	
		M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FPG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FPG				✓		✓	✓
M=FG		✓			✓		✓	✓	
M>FG		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		FPG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M>FG				✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.34:** Researchers’ observed gender differences in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		FPG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	
		M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		FPG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
		FPG	✓			✓		✓	✓
M=FG		✓			✓		✓	✓	
M>FG		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		MMG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		FPG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	M>FG				✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

The researcher sought to go beyond mere qualitative observations and instead attempted to provide a more precise assessment of group performance through the utilisation of quantitative measurements. Specifically, the researcher aimed to gauge the level of group involvement and accomplishment by relatively quantifying the percentage of group participation and task completion.

**Table 4.35:** Percentage of learners' achievements in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Percentages		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Period 1	The same instruction (=75%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	achieved	achieved	achieved
Period 2						
Period 3						
Period 4 (class sharing =25%)		Partly achieved	Partly achieved	achieved	achieved	highly achieved
Total percentage of achieving task purpose		Around 40%	Around 55%	100%	100%	Around 95%

**Table 4.36:** Percentage of learners' achievements in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Percentages		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Period 1	The same instruction (=75%)	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	achieved
Period 2						
Period 3						
Period 4 (class sharing =25%)		Partly achieved	Partly achieved	achieved	achieved	Partly achieved
Total percentage of achieving task purpose		Not more than 30 to 40%	Not more than 30 to 40%	At least 85%	At least 85%	Around 90%

**Table 4.37:** Percentage of learners' achievements in the second task of the first couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Percentages		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Period 1	The same instruction (=75%)	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Period 2						
Period 3						
Period 4 (class sharing =25%)		Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved
Total percentage of achieving task purpose		At least 90%	At least 90%	Around 50%	Around 50%	Around 60%

All along this task, the University of Bejaia and Khenchela recorded, once again, similar results though they diverge at certain levels. In general, gender dynamics shifted in mixed-gender groups during the first three periods of the task. Female contributions increased significantly as they adopted a more frequent and polite turn-taking approach, leading to a noticeable decline in male dominance. Consequently, interruptions decreased, fostering a more attentive and respectful listening environment in mixed-gender groups. It is also worth mentioning that these observations varied in their amount and intensity from one mixed-gender group to another and from one university to another as well, as we have slightly documented higher task achievement at the University of Bejaia.

While diverse thinking styles can be highly complementary in mixed-gender groups at these respective universities, single-gender environments might often displayed more pronounced tendencies. Male-male groups exhibited heightened tensions due to disagreements, with each member striving to assert dominance and defend their viewpoints, leading to internal conflicts and unaccomplished or delayed task accomplishment, as indicated in Tables 4.35 and 4.36. Meanwhile, female-female groups engaged in gossiping, diverting their focus from the task at hand and resulting in inadequate time management.

During the final five minutes, representing the fourth period of the task, it was evidently observed that male disputes and female pointless side discussions hindered the participants from entirely and successfully attaining the objective of the task when they were in single-gender groups. Conversely, individuals in mixed-gender groups were capable of achieving a satisfactory level of time management and task objective as evidenced in Tables 4.35 and 4.36.

At the University of Oued Souf, however, observations seemed to maintain a greater sense of distinctiveness compared to the previous universities. Single-gender groups have demonstrated their deserving prominence. Both groups consisting of either males or females have accomplished the primary goal of the instruction to a significant degree, through intentional time management. Interestingly, the three mixed-gender groups experienced noticeable chaotic attitudes as gender distinctions appeared on surface once again (Table 4.37).

## **2.2 Observation findings in the second two months**

### **2.2.1 Task one: anecdote/storytelling in relation to the mood or emotion expressed on faces.**

In this task, the researcher conducted an observation to determine whether the second exploratory talk principle was achieved in light of the gender differences already underlined. The objective was to ascertain whether gender differences had any impact on the attainment of the second exploratory talk principle, which entails active listening by participants. The observation in this task was divided into four periods, each lasting five minutes (25% of the total time). During each period, a group member was required to speak after selecting a slip of paper. The remaining group members then attentively listened to their group mate as they expressed their thoughts and emotions related to the selected face. Once the first member finished speaking, another member selected a face and spoke for a maximum of five minutes until all students had the opportunity to contribute.

- Instruction: Period one devoted for the first student: 25%.  
 Period two devoted to the second student: 25%.  
 Period three devoted to the third student: 25%.  
 Period four devoted to the fourth student: 25%.

Tables 4.38, 4.39 and 4.40 provided a comprehensive depiction of gender differences recurrence:

**Table 4.38:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> three mts	MMG	✓			✓			✓
		FFG					✓		✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓					✓	✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓			✓		✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓				✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓				✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓				✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG					✓		✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		M<FG	✓				✓	✓	✓

**Table 4.39:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		FFG					✓		✓
		M=FG	✓				✓		✓
		M>FG	✓					✓	✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓					✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓				✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓	✓				✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG					✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG					✓		✓
		M=FG	✓	✓			✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		M<FG	✓				✓	✓	✓

**Table 4.40:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓					✓	✓
		M>FG	✓					✓	✓
		M<FG						✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓					✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓				✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
		M<FG					✓		✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓	✓				✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG					✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
		M<FG					✓		✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> three mts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓			✓		✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
		M<FG	✓				✓	✓	✓

Tables 4.41, 4.42 and 4.43 present data on whether or not the second exploratory talk principle was met in both single-sex and mixed-sex groups.

**Table 4.41:** Percentage of learners’ achievement in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Students/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Student 01	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Student 02	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Student 03	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
Student 04	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved
Total Percentage	Around 45%	Around 60 to 70%	Around 90%	Around 80%	Around 90%



**Table 4.42:** Percentage of learners' achievement in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Students/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Student 01	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Student 02	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
Student 03	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
Student 04	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Total Percentage	Around 40%	Around 60%	Around 85%	Around 80%	Around 85%

**Table 4.43:** Percentage of learners' achievement in the first task of the second couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Students/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
Student 01	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Student 02	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Student 03	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
Student 04	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Total Percentage	Around 40%	Around 60%	Around 85 to 90%	Around 80%	Around 85%

The emotionally-charged nature of the topics in the interactional performances related to this task may have shifted the focus away from purely rational arguments towards exploring personal experiences and feelings. This has generally been observed in the three universities we have selected. Additionally, mixed-gender groups witnessed a drastic decline in interruptions, dominance and FTAs, fostering a more collaborative environment. Consequently, the intended purpose of the task was exceedingly accomplished, with achievement levels ranging from 80% to 90% at the three universities (as depicted in Tables 4.41, 4.42 and 4.43).

These gender differences persisted, however, within male-male groups potentially driven by the desire to assert dominance and to contribute heavily, leading to competitive in-group dynamics and challenged task achievement (around 40% to 45% of the learners' task achievement across the three universities have been scored).

Moreover, gossiping remained apparent in female-female groups though not impacting with the same vigor; it visibly decreased throughout all groups, particularly female-female

groups at the three university contexts. This resulted higher task achievement rate compared to the former tasks (from 60% to 70% of the learners' task achievement across the three universities) as shown in Tables 4.41, 4.42 and 4.43.

### 2.2.2 Task two: Storytelling

Shifting gears from the prior activity, the study now examined how gender influences collaborative storytelling. Each group began with a student creating a tale, while the others actively listened, imagined, and anticipated the narrative's twists and turns with making predictions regarding the subsequent course of events. The narrative responsibilities were shared amongst the four group members until the conclusion of the initial period (lasting approximately three minutes, and accounting for roughly 12% of the task's total time allocation). Following this, the aforementioned process was replicated, with each group member assuming the role of storyteller for duration of three minutes per individual (resulting in four periods of three minutes each, totalling twelve minutes or approximately 50% of the allotted time), thereby enriching the group with distinct tales. Subsequently, learners were required to disclose and present their respective stories to the entire class. At this juncture, it was expected that members of each group would synthesise and interconnect the events narrated in the four short stories, thereby yielding a multifaceted progression of occurrences. The task, therefore, spanned twelve minutes (50%), with three minutes dedicated to each group sharing.

- First instruction: 12 minutes= 50% = 3mnts for each student.
- Second instruction: 12 minutes= 50% = 3mnts for each group sharing.

Tables 4.44, 4.45 and 4.46 detailed the specific areas of focus during each observation period, while Tables 4.47, 4.48 and 4.49 presented the corresponding percentage of learners achieving the task objectives.

**Table 4.44:** Researcher's observed gender differences in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Bejaia)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> 12 mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓				
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓				✓	✓
		M>FG	✓					✓	
		M<FG	✓					✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> 12 mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓				
		FFG						✓	✓
		M=FG							✓
		M>FG	✓					✓	
		M<FG						✓	✓

**Table 4.45:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> 12 mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓		✓		
		FFG	✓				✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
		M<FG	✓				✓	✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> 12 mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓				✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓				✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
		M<FG					✓	✓	✓

**Table 4.46:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> 12 mnts	MMG	✓	✓					
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓			✓		✓
		M>FG		✓	✓		✓		✓
		M<FG	✓				✓	✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> 12 mnts	MMG		✓					✓
		FFG					✓	✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓					✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
		M<FG					✓	✓	✓

**Table 4.47:** Percentage of learners’ achievement in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Bejaia)

Instructions		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
First instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> 3 mnts	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
	2 <sup>nd</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved
	3 <sup>rd</sup> 3 mnts	Achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	4 <sup>th</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Second instruction		Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved
Total achievement of the task objective		Around 65%	Around 65%	Reaching 100%	Around 95%	Around 90%

**Table 4.48:** Percentage of learners' achievement in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Khenchela)

Instructions		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
First Instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
	2 <sup>nd</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved
	3 <sup>rd</sup> 3 mnts	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	4 <sup>th</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
Second instruction		Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved
Total achievement of the task objective		Around 60%	Around 50%	Around 80%	Around 95%	Around 80%

**Table 4.49:** Percentage of learners' achievement in the second task of the second two months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Instructions		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
First Instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	2 <sup>nd</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved
	3 <sup>rd</sup> 3 mnts	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	4 <sup>th</sup> 3 mnts	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved
Second instruction		Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved
Total achievement of the task objective		Around 60%	Around 50 to 60%	Around 80 to 85%	Around 70%	Around 70%

Communication patterns in single-gender groups varied across the task periods, with some instances of interruptions and dominance observed in male-male groups and gossiping in female-female groups. From the one hand, certain male participants endeavoured to exert control and contribute more frequently to the groups' amount of talk. This ultimately resulted in a lack of organisation and the emergence of more passive and unmotivated members especially in the second instruction. This has, approximately, been observed in the three universities with different recurrence. The University of Bejaia recorded a little less frequent interruptions than the University of Khenchela and Oued Souf resulting slightly higher task achievement percentage (around 65% and 60%) (See Tables 4.47, 4.48 and 4.49).

Girls, from the other hand, failed to effectively manage their time due to engaging in gossip. As a result, they more often dissipated valuable time and failed to fulfil the objective of actively listening. This has also been noted at the three universities with the University of Bejaia demonstrating a less frequency of occurrence and obviously a marginally higher

objective achievement rate (65% at the University of Bejaia, around 50% to 60% at the remaining universities) as shown in Tables 4.47, 4.48 and 4.49.

Tables 4.44, 4.45, 4.46 and 4.47, 4.48, 4.49, furthermore, demonstrated that mixed-sex groups accomplished the goal of the task more effectively. The instances where males interrupted were primarily correlated with females engaging in needless side talk. Males demonstrated a propensity to restrain unnecessary conversation and instead placed greater emphasis on the task's instructions. Additionally, females' avoidance of face-threatening acts significantly curtailed conflicts and misunderstandings, while males' rational thought processes and females' emotional orientations complemented each other in bringing about endings that were both emotionally resonant and grounded in reality. Taken as a whole, the second principle of exploratory discourse was held in higher regard within mixed-sex groupings than in groupings consisting solely of the same gender. The members of such groups were more receptive to each other's perspectives and more stringent in their pursuit of the ultimate objective.

## **2.3 Observation findings in the second two months**

### **2.3.1 Task one: The Balloon Debate by Harmer.**

The researcher, in this task, directed her attention towards investigating the impact of gender differences on the existence of the third principle of exploratory talk. Specifically, they sought to determine whether these differences influenced the overall atmosphere of exploratory talk which is regarded as an advantageous classroom approach for promoting learning. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to ascertain if learners' engagement in small group discussions involved ideas challenge and rational explanations provision. Accordingly, the task required participants to select either an influencing figure/celebrity or a profession deemed necessary, and then convinced their peers to remain in the balloon basket. Participants were given a total of fifteen minutes to complete the task, which was divided into three observational periods of five minutes each (equating to approximately 33% of the total allocated time).

- Instruction: 15 minutes/3periods= three periods of five minutes.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> five minutes devoted for to discuss the 1<sup>st</sup> figure
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> five minutes devoted for to discuss the 2<sup>nd</sup> figure
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> five minutes devoted for to discuss the 3<sup>rd</sup> figure

Tables 4.50, 4.51 and 4.52 provided a detailed breakdown of the key areas examined during each of the three observation periods; while Tables 4.53, 4.54 and 4.55 revealed the corresponding percentage of learners' task objective attainment.

**Table 4.50:** Researcher's observed gender differences in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Bejaia)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
One instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓			
		FFG				✓			✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.51:** Researcher's observed gender differences in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
One instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.52:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
One instruction	1 <sup>st</sup> five mmts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG				✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mmts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mmts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.53:** Percentage of learners’ task achievement in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Bejaia)

Instruction/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The instruction	Not fully	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved
Total percentage of achieving the task purpose	Around 50%	Around 45%	100%	100%	Around 80%

**Table 4.54:** Percentage of learners’ task achievement in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Khenchela)

Instruction/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The instruction	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved
Total percentage of achieving the task purpose	Around 45%	Around 40%	Not less than 80%	Around 80%	Around 80%

**Table 4.55:** Percentage of learners’ task achievement in the first task of the third two months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Instruction/Groups	MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The Instruction	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved to large extent	Partly achieved	Achieved to large extent
Total percentage of achieving the task purpose	Not less than 80 to 85%	Not less than 80 to 85%	Not less than 70%	Around 40%	Around 70%

Tables 4.50, 4.51 and 4.52 indicated that the frequency of the observed gender differences remained relatively consistent across all groups and observation periods. Interruptions and dominance were predominantly present in male-male groups. As indicated by all preceding tables, these behaviours led to conflicts and misunderstandings, consequently resulting in quarrels and unfulfilled objectives in male groups, more pronouncedly at the University of Khenchela with around 45% of the total task achievement rate (refer to Tables 4.53). At the University of Bejaia, objective attainment rate was slightly higher but still falling short of optimal outcomes with 50% of the task achievement rate (Table 4.54). In addition to this, assertiveness was more frequently observed when males were part of a group as opposed to female collectives, where FTAs avoidance and gossip were more prominent. It is also important to mention that logical reasoning and justification were more prevalent in mixed-gender and male-male groups compared to female-female groups, where participants exhibited a greater inclination towards emotive orientations based on their given rationale.

Single-gender groups, at these universities, were not able to satisfactorily fulfill the purpose of the task, although male-male groups performed better in terms of reasoning and logical thinking. In fact, the presence of interruptions and dominant behaviours resulted in an uneven distribution of opportunities for group members to contribute. Consequently, the quality of contributions was more characterised by logic and reason, but the frequency of contributions was not equal among all participants. Moreover, female-female groups often deviated from the task's objective, as evidenced in Tables 4.50, 4.51, due to engaging in gossip. As a result, the quality of their contributions was often questionable and the task achievement percentages were not at their height (45%, 40% at the University of Bajaia and Khenchela, respectively). They also displayed more emotional contributions, leading to a more submissive and unconvincing stance with a tendency to accept ideas without actually challenging them.

As opposed to single gender-groups, mixed-gender groups more successfully achieved the primary goal of the task, which involved challenging ideas and providing logical and reasoned arguments (Tables 4.50, 4.51). The occurrence of disruptive behaviours appeared to decrease, and female FTAs may have contributed to more positive dynamics. Additionally, reasons and arguments put forth by male and female participants offered a richer and a more diverse range of ideas; therefore, task achievement at the former universities was significantly higher, ranging from 75% to 100% (Tables 4.53, 4.54).



The University of Oued Souf yielded the most unexpected outcomes in this task. Although several males' and females' disruptive behaviours occurred in all group arrangements, they did not heavily affect the assigned task objective because of their low recurrence and intensity, most particularly in single-gender groups. Emotionally- and rationally-oriented ideas were provided with low occurrence of disorderly conduct. An analysis of performance revealed that the majority of groups met the task objectives, with single-gender groups exhibiting marginally higher success rates (80% to 85% documented in both single-gender groups) than mixed-gender groups (70%).

**2.3.2 Task two: Problematic/knotty situations**

This task extends the exploration of gender and communication patterns initiated in the previous one, now focusing specifically on how groups adhere to the third exploratory talk principle. The duration of this assignment spanned 20 minutes. Each interval of five minutes was dedicated to discussing a particular scenario.

- Instruction: Discussing the 1<sup>st</sup> situation: five minutes (25%)  
                  Discussing the 2<sup>nd</sup> situation: five minutes (25%)  
                  Discussing the 3<sup>rd</sup> situation: five minutes (25%)  
                  Discussing the 4<sup>th</sup> situation: five minutes (25%)
- } 20minutes (100%)

Tables 4.56, 4.57; 4.58 and 4.59, 4.60, 4.61 provide details on both the key areas examined during the observation of this task (4.56, 4.57; 4.58) and the level of success achieved by learners within their groups (4.59, 4.60, 4.61).

**Table 4.56:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the second task of the third couple of months (Univ-Bejaia)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG				✓		✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.57:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the second task of the third couple of months (Univ-Khenchela)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			
		FFG	✓					✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.58:** Researcher’s observed gender differences in the second task of the third couple of months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption	Assertiveness	Dominance	Arguing		Politeness	Gossiping	Emotional Thinking
					Reasoning	Quarrelling			
1 <sup>st</sup> period	1 <sup>st</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG	✓					✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	2 <sup>nd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓		✓	✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	3 <sup>rd</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓			✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
4 <sup>th</sup> period	4 <sup>th</sup> five mnts	MMG	✓	✓		✓			✓
		FFG				✓		✓	✓
		M=FG	✓			✓		✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
		M<FG	✓			✓		✓	✓

**Table 4.59:** Percentage of learner’s’ achievement in the second task of the third two months (Univ-Bejaia)

Instruction		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The instruction	S 01	Highly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 02	Achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 03	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
	S 04	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Total achievement of the objective		Around 65 to 70%	Around 65%	Around 95%	Around 95%	100%

**Table 4.60:** Percentage of learner’s’ achievement in the second task of the third two months (Univ-Khenchela)

Instruction		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The instruction	S 01	Achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 02	Highly achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 03	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 04	Partly achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved
Total achievement of the objective		Around 65%	Around 60%	Not less than 85 to 98%	Around 90%	Not less than 95%

**Table 4.61:** Percentage of learner’s’ achievement in the second task of the third two months (Univ-Oued Souf)

Instruction		MMG	FFG	M=FG	M>FG	M<FG
The instruction	S 01	Achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved
	S 02	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Highly achieved	Partly achieved
	S 03	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Highly achieved	Achieved	Achieved
	S 04	Partly achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Partly achieved	Partly achieved
Total achievement of the objective		Around 70 to 80%	Around 70 to 80%	Around 60 to 65%	Around 70%	Around 70%

In fact, the researcher observed consistent patterns in her notes during the final two months of the study. According to Tables 4.56 and 4.57, male-only groups performed well in providing justifications and logical reasoning relevant to the task objectives at the University of Bejaia and Khenchela. However, the breakdown of respectful and collaborative communication, evidenced by dominance, interruptions, and less receptivity, fostered an environment conducive to raised voices and conflict, and consequently led to unconvincing task achievement rate (60% to 65% at these universities). Similarly, female single-only groups were able to achieve a significant percentage of the task objective (approximately 60 to 65% at the University of Khenchela and Bejaia, respectively, refer to Tables 4.59 and 4.60), but unnecessary side talk unconstructively impacted the quality of communication and floor distributions within the groups, more particularly at the University of Khenchela.

At these universities, the contributions made by members in mixed-gender groups at the former university contexts exhibited a considerable degree of variation, some of which were based on logical and rational reasoning, while others were driven by emotional considerations. Members of these groups demonstrated an impressive ability to successfully accomplish the task objective with minimal disruptions stemming from gender-related issues. They reached a well deserved 90 to 100% of task attainment rate (Tables 4.59, 4.60).

An analysis of task outcomes, once again, revealed unexpected results for the University of Oued Souf. Despite the presence of occasional disruptive behaviours across all group compositions (as shown in Table 4.58), their limited occurrence and acuteness did not appear to substantially hinder task completion, especially in single-gender settings. Emotionally- and rationally-charged ideas were provided with fewer occurrences of uncontrollable behaviours. Accordingly, an analysis of task performance indicated that the majority of groups reached the task objective, to a large extent, with some differences in

success rates favouring single-gender groups (around 80% versus 65 to 70% in mixed-gender groups, see Table 4.61).

## **2.4 Summarising and comparing observation findings**

From an examination of all the data and remarks that were taken into account during the observation phase, which started at the very inception of the process in three distinct geographical regions, it is of utmost significance to duly highlight and record the fact that:

- ✓ As dominant and interrupting behaviours become more frequent, the likelihood of conflict and disagreements within groups increases.
- ✓ The presence of off-task conversations can lead to a tendency to stray from the task objective and potentially compromise time management.
- ✓ At the Universities of Khenchela and Oued Souf, groups with a higher proportion of male participants tended to exhibit more instances of assertive communication.
- ✓ Female participants exhibit a greater inclination towards emotional thinking across all of the three contexts.
- ✓ Across the three universities, groups with a higher proportion of male participants tended to exhibit more instances of logical reasoning and challenging during discussions.
- ✓ Female politeness and more often FTAs avoidance, with focus on respectful and constructive communication can create a more productive and positive atmosphere for interaction.

The influence of gender disparities on EFL classrooms deserves attention, especially in group speaking activities. At the University of Bejaia, students demonstrated strong overall openness to collaborating with partners of different genders. Their general reflection revealed that diverse gender composition within groups can enhance the variety and richness of learning experiences. Furthermore, creating inclusive learning environments that promote gender equity could contribute to positive group dynamics, potentially leading to improved performance and reduced conflict.

The findings at the University of Khenchela diverged from this general pattern. While students' questionnaire findings suggest a preference for single-gender groups, observational data highlighted the potential benefits of mixed-gender collaboration. Simply put, mixed-gender group composition might foster a more positive learning environment characterised by increased engagement, variety of perspectives, and ultimately, improved task performance.

The University of Oued Souf presented a unique case, with results that differed significantly from the overall trend seen elsewhere. There was evidence of varying degrees of apprehension and discomfort among students when collaborating with opposite-gender partners throughout the observed tasks. Accordingly, students at the University of Oued Souf seemed to demonstrate higher achievement and task engagement within same-gender groups.

From all of these remarks, we could finally put forward the following generalisation:

- ✓ Students are high achievers in almost all group compositions at the University of Bejaia, more particularly within mixed-gender arrangements.
- ✓ Students are better achievers when grouped with opposite gender partners, at the University of Khenchela.
- ✓ At the University of Oued Souf, students generally perform better within matched-gender groups arrangements.
- ✓ At the University of Oued Souf, the third exploratory talk principle was successfully met and relatively high achievement rates have been recorded, within almost all group compositions. However, the quality of talk and the distribution of in-group contributions are sometimes questionable and unfair.
- ✓ In certain collaborative assignments, incorporating active listening for example, results may come to close resemblance at different university contexts. Yet, in-group equity, turn taking and the quality of the language used are often subject of doubt.
- ✓ The divergence in results could have been attributed to the diversity of the cultural patterns and the social fabric in Algeria.
- ✓ Diversity in geographical, social and cultural patterns has a noticeable impact on the overall collaborative task performance.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this study, the investigator elucidated and detailed the research design, its procedure, with the various methods employed to address the research inquiries and assess the soundness of the hypothesis posited at the outset. Our primary focus was to ascertain which arrangement of groups yielded greater efficacy in enhancing the learners' frequency and quality of their in-class group work contributions across three distinct Algerian universities.

In order to bring about this aim, a diverse range of research methodologies were employed. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data from two distinct questionnaires were undertaken. The initial questionnaire was administered to a total of ninety second-year students enrolled at the esteemed universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf, while the second questionnaire was distributed to a smaller sample size consisting of ten teachers at the same academic institutions. An observation was subsequently executed to substantiate the supposition of the researcher or the discoveries derived from the two questionnaires. Over the course of six months, the researcher endeavoured to meticulously observe, record, and document the behaviours of the students while engaging in the designated group work activities.

At this level, we have been faced with the fact that gender deservedly seized a significant consideration within the Algerian context. In addition to the approved associations between gender and culture, gender and behaviour, there could also appear a transitive interconnection between culture and behaviour that considerably mark instances of behavioural specificities across the different regions of the country.

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## **General conclusion**

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## **General conclusion**

Unlocking fun in speaking starts with choosing the right activities and presenting them in a way that empowers students, which ultimately turn your classroom into a vibrant stage. For boosting motivation, raising interest, and deepening learning in speaking sessions, in-class group work tasks can be a powerful tool. Collaborative learning through in-class group work tasks not only motivates students to speak but also fosters profounder understanding and diverse perspectives. As a matter of course, various aspects influence group work outcomes, and effective group work hinges on thoughtful composition. In this study, we have basically focused on gender as one factor that can impact collaboration and learning during group tasks since some teachers possess limited knowledge regarding how to effectively address gender disparities within the classroom setting. As a result, they unintentionally perpetuate gender biases and solidify learners' gender stereotypes, thereby creating an unequal learning environment and widening the gap between learners' current knowledge and their potential achievements.

The interaction between gender roles, social interactions, and cultural values can influence learning styles, collaborative dynamics, and ultimately, achievements in various domains. Given the established need for further inquiry, we have conducted the research at hand, aiming to examine the effect of gender on the learning experience, particularly in speaking sessions. The primary objective of this study, thus, was to assess whether gender disparities could have an effect on learning outcomes within the exploratory talk classroom ambiance in three distinct Algerian universities located in the three different regions. Accordingly, a comparative analysis was carried out to highlight the divergences and similarities exhibited by students during collaborative tasks in the classroom across the universities selected. Additionally, we sought to ascertain whether the cultural, social, and regional disparities in these three areas have an impact on learning, specifically in terms of learners' choices, preferences, awareness, and apprehension.

Through a comprehensive study, the researcher aimed to, hopefully, develop and show case effective group work task implementation for EFL classrooms, to enhance student engagement and interaction, from the one hand, and to empower EFL teachers' understanding about gender equity nationwide, from the other hand. In addition, the investigation also sought to elucidate and emphasise the fact that Algeria possesses a culturally and socially rich

background and that differences in cultural and social aspects have an impact on student's apprehension and gender stereotyping.

To achieve this purpose, mixed-method approach has been conducted in which we have assembled and given equal priority to independent forms of data collection. These different forms of data collection complement each other and contribute to answering the research questions. Consequently, a convergent parallel design was employed for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. In order to enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of the findings, the initial data obtained from the questionnaires should have been further elucidated and expanded upon through an observation phase. This inclusion of diverse opinions would ensure a higher level of credibility and clarity in achieving the research objective and addressing its associated inquiries.

Importantly, the data collection tools suggested in this research have actively been used at three different Algerian universities; University of Bejaia, University of Khenchela and Oued Souf. Furthermore, these data have been analysed and interpreted, resulting in significant and valuable outcomes for the chosen contexts. Subsequently, a comparative analysis has been employed to uncover similarities and differences in terms of EFL speaking sessions. The resulting insights into regional characteristics and specificities will serve as valuable tools for Algerian EFL teachers when designing, delivering, and structuring effective group work tasks.

As a matter of point, the present research findings helped in facilitating our determination to either validate or refute the established hypothesis, and to provide necessary responses to the research questions. Following the administration of diverse research approaches to test the hypothesis, we were able to ascertain that students, at the University of Bejaia, exhibited a pronounced inclination to engage in collaboration with individuals of varying genders. From them; gender-diverse groups create more dynamic learning environments, leading to richer and more meaningful experiences for all participants. However, results obtained at the University of Khenchela deviated from its preceding. The students' questionnaire demonstrated an inclination towards single-gender groups. The observational data, yet, emphasised the potential advantages of mixed-gender collaboration; it may cultivate a more favourable learning atmosphere marked by heightened participation, a diverse range of perspectives and enhanced task performance. For the University of Oued Souf, there was a larger deviation from the prevailing pattern observed elsewhere. Evidently, students showed different levels of unease and apprehension when working alongside partners

of the opposite gender. Consequently, students at the University of Oued Souf revealed higher performance and involvement in tasks when grouped with same gender mates. Finally, we could, after all, affirm that diversity in geographical, social, and cultural patterns is characterised by a wide range of variations in terms of physical location, societal structures, and customary behaviours, which in turn, exert a discernible influence on the overall efficacy and accomplishment of collaborative tasks.

Apart from the target population of the current study, we posit that these findings have applicability in other educational contexts. This implies that the results can be extended beyond the English department at the University of Bekaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf. In this regard, it is important to consider the social, cultural, and regional similarities with their neighbouring areas, as they potentially share similar perspectives on gender differences. These variations are comparatively magnified in internal regions such as Khenchela, Tebessa, Batna, and Oum Bouaghi, with greater emphasis on gender differences as we move southward to southern areas like Oued Souf, Ouergla and Ghardaia. Consequently, the outcomes obtained in the three universities could be extended to second-year students at the universities sharing more commonalities.

### **Pedagogical implications**

The field of education thrives on continuous improvement. Dedicated teachers actively engage with research findings, seeking fresh perspectives and effective methods to optimise learning and maximise their teaching efficacy. Based on the findings reached, we can confidently identify these pedagogical implications:

- ✓ Group work emerges as a powerful tool for boosting learners' oral performance in exploratory talks.
- ✓ Evidence reveals a strong link between collaborative learning and positive outcomes. In classrooms, this approach fosters active participation in diverse tasks and enriches teacher-learner interactions.
- ✓ In-class group work tasks imply that learners work better in small groups to reach shared goals.
- ✓ To overcome group work challenges, students need prior awareness of the difficulties and strategies/skills for success. Sharing a clear understanding of the task and common knowledge is crucial.

- ✓ Teachers can enhance the learning experience by not only creating balanced groups that consider individual strengths and areas for growth but also gender.
- ✓ Algerian teachers need to consider social and cultural differentiations attributed to the different regions nationwide.
- ✓ Cultivating a classroom environment conducive to exploratory talk is crucial for successful group work, and teachers play a key role in creating this atmosphere.
- ✓ Through applying the exploratory talk, when critical yet constructive exchanges and active listening prevail, students not only refine their contributions but also internalise valuable life lessons.

Although several conclusions were drawn and numerous implications were established for EFL instructors, the present study encountered several challenges that could conceivably manifest as drawbacks; certain limitations in methodology, analysis, or interpretation deserve consideration to inform future studies.

### **Limitations of the study**

A multitude of constraints, undoubtedly, manifested themselves throughout the course of this study. These constraints served as barriers in attaining the research objectives, potentially compromising the strength of the conclusions. As a result, we will now proceed to provide a concise overview of the most influential difficulties encountered by the researcher.

While group work offers valuable benefits, diversifying classroom activities with individual and other collaborative formats ensures a well-rounded learning experience for all students. In other words, group work serves as one strategy among various alternatives in the classroom setting to enhance students' oral performances and is primarily utilised to disrupt the monotony and routine of the class. The implementation of diverse activities reduces the frequency of relying solely on group work tasks. Consequently, a longer duration was necessary to gather the requisite data from the different activities during both the observation and pre-observation phases.

It was also a challenging endeavour for the researcher during the realisation of this work to investigate the determined variables and their connection within the blended-teaching method during the quarantine. Consequently, data collection methods have been conducted twice through two succeeding years to get more trustworthiness and reliability.

Another constraint that must be taken into consideration is the overall males' and females' number within the classrooms. It is worth noting that the total number of students is not substantial, which enabled teachers incorporate collaborative tasks and use various instructional materials and resources. However, it is evident that girls outnumber boys, particularly in foreign language classes. This particular scenario raises doubts regarding the validity and reliability of the investigation if it were to be conducted with a small number of male students and a larger number of female students. Such an imbalance would result in shaky research data, as there would be an abundance of information pertaining to female-only groups, while the data regarding male-only groups and mixed-gender groups would be noticeably lacking. After that, we finally came to a resolution through incorporating observations from the entire class' group arrangements, while actually reporting data from certain groups only. In other words, all students have been grouped and observed, but only equal number of group' compositions throughout the three universities have been documented.

### **Suggestions for further research**

At this level, some ideas, that may be of value to other research topics within this field, are provided. These ideas can possibly help researchers in narrowing the scope of their thinking when exploring new variables.

Recognising the limitations of traditional speaking methods, we propose the potential of exploratory talk classrooms. This student-centered environment offers teachers a rewarding platform to facilitate learning, while empowering students to actively participate and refine their speaking skills. Given the extensive list of exploratory talk principles outlined by Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008), and acknowledging the time constraints, we strategically selected three key principles, within the available timeframe, allowing for a thorough examination of their relationship to gender differences. Therefore, this study provides interesting steps for further research. We encourage both students and researchers to explore the remaining exploratory talk principles in the context of gender differences, to build a more comprehensive understanding of their impact.

Within the expansive realm of gender differences, we deliberately chose to investigate selected aspects identified by prominent researchers in the field. This study deliberately opens doors for further exploration of diverse gender disparities and their impact on learning. Future research in this area can significantly enhance our understanding of in-class gender dynamics.

Our research also focused on how learners interact and collaborate within in-class groups as a strategy for promoting cooperative learning. In fact, beyond in-class groups, educators have a wealth of cooperative learning options at their disposal, including in-class pair work, paired and group projects outside the classroom, and various forms of collaborative learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. Investigating the nuanced interactions between gender and various cooperative learning formats, including in-class pair work, out-of-class projects, and beyond-the-classroom collaboration, holds immense significance for enriching our understanding of gender dynamics in learning environments. These findings equip teachers with a diverse toolbox of engaging and effective tasks, enabling them to cater to individual needs and promote learning outcomes.

In this research also, we tried to study the effect of gender differences in enhancing or hindering learning in the speaking sessions and across three different universities situated in three different regions in Algeria. These regions, in fact, have been carefully selected as they share apparently different social and cultural patterns. This seemingly contrasting social and cultural fabric provided a valuable platform to examine aspects of gender and their association with the teaching/learning experiences. This might trigger students' and researchers' attention to investigate other areas across the country to form a more comprehensible understanding of how culture, gender and learning interconnect.

### **Validity and reliability of the research questions**

Q 01: To what degree are gender differences apparent in higher education in Algeria?

While this study explores the impact of gender on group work learning among second-year students at the University of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf, its findings are obviously applicable to the stated regions and the areas sharing commonalities with. Therefore, findings may not necessarily apply to all students nationwide.

Q 02: Do these differences affect the frequency and the quality of the learners' contributions at all of the Algerian Universities?

Within the collaborative environment of exploratory talk classrooms, research highlights the significant role of gender differences in shaping the amount, effectiveness and quality of student contributions. As the undertaking employed data selection methods across three distinct regions, findings are strictly related to these regions along with others with which they share social and cultural specificities.

Q 03: Are the findings of Kacha's study applicable at the University of Bejaia?

Q 04: Can these research findings be implemented at the department of English, University of Oued Souf?

Kacha 2019 has investigated the effect of gender differences on the learners' frequency and quality of contributions in speaking group work tasks at the University of Khenchela only. Her findings could not be overgeneralised neither to the University of Bejaia, nor to the University of Oued Souf because of the occurring social and cultural attributes.

Q 05: Do these University contexts share the same/similar regional and cultural aspects?

These university contexts belong to different regions socially and culturally exhibiting certain uniqueness.

Q 06: Which type of grouping is more appropriate to match the exploratory talk principles in these Universities?

Mixed-gender group arrangements proved its effectiveness at the University of Bejaia and Khenchela; while single-gender type of grouping is more often favoured at the University of Oued Souf. The latter might credit mixed-gender collaboration, in terms of task completion; yet, turn taking within the groups is more frequently a subject of doubt.

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# Appendices

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**Appendix 01: Departments' group divisions (Universities of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf) (from the official Universities' websites, and departments' official Facebook pages)**

Univs	Bejaia								Khenchela								Oued Souf							
<b>Total Number</b>	104								161								143							
<b>Department's group divisions</b>	<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>		<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>		<b>Group One</b>		<b>Group Two</b>		<b>Group Three</b>		<b>Group Four</b>	
	29		27		25		23		40		40		40		41		38		37		34		34	
	10 males	19 females	06 males	21 females	03 males	22 females	06 males	17 females	08 males	32 females	12 males	28 females	04 males	36 females	12 males	33 females	12 males	26 females	11 males	26 females	07 males	27 females	02 males	32 females

## Appendix 02: Learners' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the learners' preferences and suggestions in the speaking class wherein the exploratory talk is respected. The researcher tries to check the learners' awareness, willingness and reluctance towards some classroom actions. You are kindly invited to answer the questions objectively taking into account that your answers will be treated confidentially.

### Section One: Target language skills and the learners' preferences.

1. Which language skill do you find most difficult? Please rank them in order of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficulty	Very difficult
<b>Listening</b>				
<b>Speaking</b>				
<b>Reading</b>				
<b>Writing</b>				

2. Which language skill do you find most rewarding? Justify.

- a. Listening      b. Speaking      c. Reading      d. Writing

3. Which language skill are you most interested in? Justify.

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.....  
.....

4. What are the most common difficulties you face during speaking sessions?

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.....

5. Do you think that the speaking skill is: (put a cross next to the answer you find more appropriate).

- a. Extremely important in TL learning.  
b. Important in TL learning.  
c. Not really important in TL learning.

6. What recommendations can teachers follow to ensure the success of speaking sessions?

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.....

.....

**Section Two: Class management and types of arrangements.**

7. Rank the following activities in order of preference, using numbers from 1 to 3.

- a. Individual work activities.
- b. Pair work activities.
- c. Group work activities.

8. Justify your choice.

9. If you prefer group work activities, would you rather like to:

- a. Be assigned to a group by the teacher?
- b. Choose your own group members

10. Justify your answer.

11. If the teacher assigns students to groups, what should be the primary consideration?

(Check the one option that you choose):

- a. Gender of the learners in the group (males, females).
- b. Abilities of the learners (high achievers, low achievers).
- c. Origins of the learners (social, cultural, regional).
- d. Personalities of the learners (extroverts, introverts, etc).
- e. None of the above.

12. If you have chosen 'e', suggest others.

**Section Three: Gender differences and classroom work in the speaking session**

13. If one were to consider gender, which form of arrangement do you believe is more advantageous for enhanced educational attainment?

- b.** Mixed-gender groups (comprising both males and females) or
- c.** Single-gender groups (consisting of only females or only males)?

14. What are the underlying reasons?

15. Do you think that classroom behaviours are tied to gender?

- a. Yes.    b. No.

16. Do you think that the type of gender grouping (single-gender/mixed-gender) affects learning? (Put a tick by your choice).

- a. Yes.    b. No.



- 17. Is this effect:
  - a. Positive or
  - b. Negative.

18. How do you think gender grouping might influence students' learning outcomes?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Section Four: The interrelation between gender and culture.**

19. It is commonly believed that gender is a characteristic that exhibits a reciprocal connection with culture. In fact, both gender and culture have an impact on one another and are mutually influenced. Do you agree? Explain.

.....  
.....  
.....

20. Does the association between the two terms intervene in the process of establishing collaborative work?

*Thank you for your contribution*

### Appendix 03: Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the current teaching situation in the speaking sessions. The researcher tries to gather necessary data about the teachers' practices when they teach the speaking skill in order to reinforce the research assumptions. Additionally, it serves as a continuation to the current learning situation deduced from the learners' questionnaire findings. You are kindly invited to answer the questions objectively taking into account that your answers will be treated confidentially.

#### Section One: The target language skills and the teachers' practices

1. Which of the following skills you find challenging to teach? Classify them according to their level of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficulty	Very difficult
<b>Listening</b>				
<b>Speaking</b>				
<b>Reading</b>				
<b>Writing</b>				

2. What features of a speaking session can enhance student engagement and improve their speaking skills?

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.....

.....

3. What is/are the problem/s that you frequently encounter when conducting speaking sessions?

- a. Learners' low language proficiency level.
- b. Learners' inhibitions.
- c. Mother tongue interference among learners.
- d. Lack of motivation and the low participation.
- e. Shortage of ideas in specific topics.
- f. Others.

4. Please share any additional challenges you face when facilitating speaking activities.

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5. In the speaking session, teachers typically incorporate a range of classroom activities like storytelling and jigsaw; could you mention some specific examples of speaking activities that you have already employed with your students?

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**Section Two: Class management and types of arrangements**

6. It is stated that classroom arrangement can have a direct effect on the students' engagement, attention, and academic performance. What is the in-class arrangement that you frequently lean toward during speaking sessions in order to improve learners' contributions?

7. Explain your choice.

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8. When incorporating group work activities, do you favour:

- a. Smaller groups (less than five participants) or
- b. Larger groups (more than five participants)?

9. Explain your choice.

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.....

10. These groups are generally arranged by:

- a. The teacher himself. Or
- b. The students.

11. Explain your choice.

.....  
.....

**Section Three: Gender and classroom work**

12. When given the option to choose their partners, do students generally gravitate towards:

- a. Single-gender grouping,
- b. Mixed-gender partners, or
- c. Simply prefer to work with friends regardless of their gender?

13. Which group composition promotes more active participation and engagement for learners?

- a. Single-gender groups? Or

b. Mixed-gender groups?

14. Please, explain how.

.....  
.....

15. If you arrange your students in single-gender groups, do you give equal opportunities to learners' participations from opposite gender groups?

a. Yes.

b. No.

16. Please, explain.

.....  
.....

17. In case you assign them to work in mixed-gender partnership, do you grant equal opportunities to learners' contributions from opposite gender within the one group, itself?

18. Explain why?

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.....

19. Do you consider role rotation in mixed-gender type of grouping?

20. Explain your choice.

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.....

**Section Four: The interrelation between gender and culture**

21. If you are required to teach in another town, what major considerations do you prioritise to adapt your teaching style to the learners' needs and ensure effective instruction?

a. Learners' behaviours affected by the location.

b. Gender stereotypes related to that place.

c. The input you are going to provide/ the syllabus you are going to teach.

d. The tasks you are going to assign.

22. Justify your choice.

.....  
.....

23. How can the culture of the target region affect gender identity and behaviour?

.....  
.....

24. Does the change in culture and region potentially entail changing the teaching reactions and practices?

25. How?

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*Thank you for your contribution*

#### **Appendix 04: Dani's Story**

Dani is on a weight loss plan to lose 30 lbs. She has been trying really hard to eat healthy food and watch her fat and calories intake. So far, she's been successful and seen results. She's been invited to a party where there are a lot of unhealthy food choices. She isn't so sure that she'll be able to resist the temptation to eat these foods. She really wants to be social but her friends don't understand how difficult this is. Dani doesn't want to be a food snob but she doesn't want to blow her diet either. This would really mess up her progress so far. After all, healthy eating and exercising has not been easy, nor has the will power she's developed. Her friends are really putting the pressure on her.

**The choice card:** Dani may:

- Say 'No thanks', eat nothing, stay strong.
- It's only one time, what damage could it do?
- Say 'maybe later I'll eat...not hungry right now'.
- Say YES, but only eat little portions of healthy foods and nibble.
- Say YES, eat whatever looks good.
- Storm out of party telling friends if they really cared they wouldn't pressure and they would be more understanding.
- Say yes to the food and run 5 miles on the treadmill before bed.
- Eat any food you want tonight but skip all meals the next day.
- Tell friends you already ate (even if you haven't).
- Make a big scene to let everyone know you're on a diet.

#### **Appendix 05: The Patient Waiting List**

- 50 year old male: a scientist, important research studies, unmarried.
- 12 year old female: orphan, poor, and blind.
- 35 year old male: from different origins, doctor, at the height of his career, 2 children.
- 80 year old female: have severe diabetes and blood pressure, 4 married children, 10 grandchildren.
- 30 year old female: married, 6 months pregnant.
- 40 year old male: Imam, married, 4 young children.
- 19 year old female: shopkeeper, secondary school dropout, supports/cares for a brother who is severely disabled.

### Appendix 06: The problematic situations

- **Situation 01:** “Your friend lost interest in school and her grades are suffering. As a result, she will be repeating the year. She decided to quit and work as a waitress to support herself. She says that she does not need to go to school.”

Compose a logical argument to convince her stay in school showing the benefits she can make.

- **Situation 02:** “Your father was considering a job in Oran. If he takes the job, this means that your family had to relocate soon. For you, this means adapting to a new town, a new school, and new friends. Your parents solicited you in making decision about the situation.” Compose logical arguments to support either moving or staying where you are.

- **Situation 03:** “Someone has stolen a precious object from a down town shop. After interrogating the shopkeeper, he declared that you were in the shop during the moment of theft and the accusation was directed towards you.”

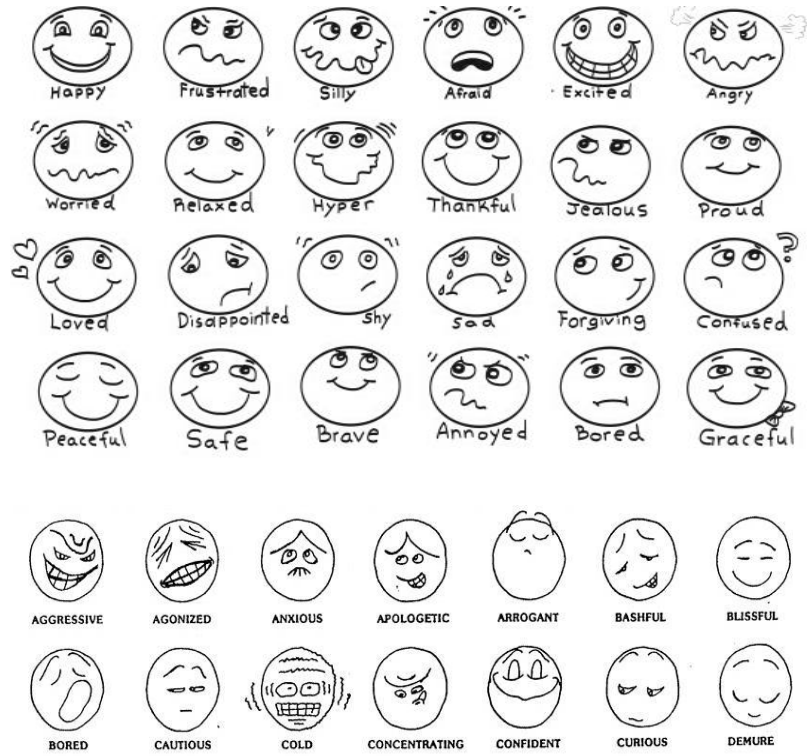
Imagine yourself being interrogated by police officers. Find out convincing arguments with proofs to claim your innocence.

- **Situation 04:** “You are an employee in a new cosmetics’ brand company. Your job is to convince people to buy and try your products.”

Give possible arguments to make people appreciate and buy the products.

### Appendix 07: Slips of papers picturing faces

These slips of faces give ideas about different emotions and moods. In relation to these pictures, students were required to tell stories and anecdotes.





## ملخص

يوجد تفاعل معقد بين النوع الاجتماعي والتواصل في الصف الدراسي، حيث يمكن أن تتأثر مدخلات المعلم وتوقعاته بالإضافة إلى مخرجات الطلاب وتعبيرهم بشكل دقيق بالتحيزات الأساسية. وبالتالي، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى دراسة تأثير هذه الفوارق الجندرية على التعلم في ثلاث بيئات أكاديمية متميزة تقع في مناطق مختلفة، وتتميز كل منها بأنماط اجتماعية وثقافية فريدة. وتشمل هذه المناطق منطقة الشمال الشرقي والمنطقة الشرقية الداخلية والمنطقة الجنوبية الشرقية وتحديدًا جامعات بجاية وخنشلة ووادي سوف على التوالي. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، يتم إجراء تحقيق مقارنة من خلال استخدام منهجية بحث مختلطة تركز على استخدام الاستبيانات، والملاحظة المسبقة، واختلافات الملاحظة لجمع البيانات الأولية. تشير نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى أن طلاب جامعة بجاية وجامعة خنشلة يميلون إلى الأداء الأكاديمي بشكل أفضل ويظهرون مستوى مقبول نسبيًا من المشاركة في مهام العمل الجماعي عندما يتم تكليفهم بمجموعات مختلطة بين الجنسين. وعلى العكس من ذلك، يُظهر الدارسون في جامعة واد سوف إيجابًا وتخوفًا واضحًا تجاه العمل في مجموعات مختلطة بين الجنسين، مما يؤدي إلى قدرات أعلى في التحدث ومساهمات أكثر عندما يتم تجميعهم مع أفراد من نفس الجنس. ومن الجدير بالذكر أيضًا أن تنفيذ أنواع معينة من المهام في جامعة واد سوف يمكن أن يُظهر معدل إنجاز أعلى ضمن مجموعات مختلطة بين الجنسين. ومع ذلك، فإن الجودة داخل المجموعة وتوزيع الأدوار تكون في كثير من الأحيان موضع شك. باختصار، كانت الخصائص الاجتماعية والثقافية المتأصلة في مناطق مختلفة بمثابة مرشحات متميزة، حيث شكلت النتائج في كل منطقة مستهدفة وأنتجت مجموعة متنوعة من النتائج.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفروق الجندرية، مهارة التحدث، مهام العمل الجماعي، الاختلاف الاجتماعي والثقافي، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

## Résumé

Il existe une interaction complexe entre le genre et la communication en classe, dans laquelle la contribution et les attentes de l'enseignant ainsi que la production et l'expression des élèves peuvent être subtilement influencées par des préjugés sous-jacents. Par conséquent, la présente étude vise à examiner l'impact de ces disparités entre les sexes sur l'apprentissage dans trois environnements académiques distincts situés dans des régions différentes, chacun caractérisé par des modèles sociaux et culturels uniques. Ces zones comprennent la région du Nord-Est, la région intérieure de l'Est et la région du Sud-Est, à savoir respectivement les universités de Bejaia, Khenchela et Oued Souf. Pour atteindre cet objectif, une enquête comparative est menée en employant une méthodologie de recherche mixte qui met l'accent sur l'utilisation de questionnaires, de pré-observations et de variations d'observation pour recueillir des données préliminaires. Les résultats de cette étude indiquent que les étudiants de l'Université de Bejaia et de l'Université de Khenchela ont tendance à avoir de meilleurs résultats académiques et à afficher un niveau de participation relativement acceptable aux tâches de travail en groupe lorsqu'ils sont affectés à des groupes mixtes. À l'inverse, les apprenants de l'Université d'Oued Souf démontrent une réticence et une appréhension évidentes à l'idée de travailler dans des groupes mixtes, ce qui se traduit par des capacités orales plus élevées et des contributions plus fréquentes lorsqu'ils sont regroupés avec des individus du même sexe. Il convient également de mentionner que la mise en œuvre de certains types de tâches à l'Université d'Oued Souf peut potentiellement démontrer un taux de réussite plus élevé au sein de groupes mixtes. Pourtant, la qualité au sein du groupe et la répartition des rôles à tour de rôle sont plus souvent douteuses. En bref, les spécificités sociales et culturelles enracinées dans différentes régions ont agi comme des filtres distincts, façonnant les résultats dans chaque domaine cible et produisant un large éventail de conclusions.

**Mots clés :** Différences de genre, Compétence orale, Travail en groupe, Différence sociale et culturelle, Etudiants EFL.