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Investigating Teacher's Awareness and his Role when Dealing with Mixed-Ability Classes:

Case study of first year BMD students of English at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret

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Dedication

I dedicate this humble work,

To the two candles who enlighten my life, MOM

and DAD who always support and encourage me.

Endless love to you.

To my beloved sisters, my nephews and nieces.

*To my dear friend **Yasmine Bouakkaz**, thank you for*

helping, cheering me up and being here whenever I

need you. Much love to you.

Amira

Dedication

*To my beloved dead uncle **Ghlamellah Boudali***

***BENGUIT** and his wife Fatiha RAHMANI.*

*To my father **Abdelkader** who supported me during my*

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To all who encouraged me especially my dear friend

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Abstract

In the process of teaching and learning within mixed-ability classes, students differ in many aspects. In any EFL class, teachers are confronted with many difficulties; to identify each student's needs and get everyone involved in the classroom is really challenging since teachers may find themselves focusing on high achievers only because they are always active and dominate the class. Hence, along this study we attempt to investigate to what extent are teachers aware of the diversity existing in mixed-ability classes and how to cope with this issue. To carry out this research work and test the advanced hypotheses, samples of forty first year EFL students and five teachers at Ibn Khaldoun university of Tiaret were targeted relying on two questionnaires directed to both teachers and students. Accordingly, it examines the attitudes of low achievers towards high achievers and the teacher's role to establish a balanced classroom. The findings reveal that teachers are not aware to some extent of the diversity in mixed-ability classes. Moreover, some solutions and strategies are suggested to EFL teachers that would help them to promote students' involvement when teaching those classes and establish a positive environment to reach out all of them especially those with low achievements in the learning process.

Key words: Mixed-ability classes, EFL classes, high achievers, low achievers, learning process

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BMD: Bachelor Master Doctorate

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

FL: Foreign Language

L2: Second Language

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Résumé

General Introduction

General Introduction

In any FL class, it is well known that teachers are struggling with how to deal with the differences of students' level and abilities. More precisely, teaching English in mixed-ability classes at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret is really challenging, mainly because students are different from one another which makes the teacher unable to ensure understanding for each one of them, especially those with low abilities. There would be always classes which contain more than one level of ability; however, in each class teachers may find only high achievers who are often attentive, more active in the learning process and they dominate the class. Whereas, less achievers just attend the class, they seem not interested and they lack the will to learn. Therefore, teachers may find this diversity difficult to deal with and give rise to all students with knowledge. That is why it is important for them to tackle this problem and try to meet their learners' needs and get their attention to learn. Furthermore, teachers are obliged to employ a variety of teaching strategies and provide an appropriate positive atmosphere to ensure learning for all students although this is not simple to be achieved, which can be time consuming. Therefore, the teacher's awareness of such diversity has a major impact on the learners' involvement in the class to have an effective teaching-learning process.

The present work attempts to give an insightful understanding of the term mixed-ability classes, as such, it aims at identifying the main aspects of students and how the classroom atmosphere can be supportive and successful to help in the students' achievements. The study also attempts to identify the vital role of the teacher in the process of learning English as a FL.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To identify the main differences between high and low achievers in their performance in EFL classes and how a balanced classroom can be established.

- To investigate the teachers' awareness of students diversity in mixed-ability classes.

- To demonstrate the attitudes of low achievers towards high achievers.

Hence, by taking first year LMD students of English at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret as a sample of study, and using questionnaires for both teachers and learners as research instruments, the present work attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How can the teacher strive the right balance in mixed-ability classroom?
2. What are the challenges that may be faced by both teachers and students in mixed-ability classes?
3. What are the attitudes of less achievers students towards high achievers and vice versa?

And the following hypotheses are suggested to be examined:

- The teacher can make a balanced classroom by giving the opportunity to all students to learn neither by neglecting low achievers, nor focusing only on high achievers.

- Mixed-ability classes cause many challenging issues to teachers which require diversity of teaching strategies to cater for all learners' preferences and styles.

- Low achievers may consider themselves inferior.

Thus, this dissertation is devided into three foremost chapters, two theoretical chapters and a practical one. The first chapter gives an overview about mixed-ability classes and different definitions of this term are put forward. Also, the emphasis is put on teaching English as a foreign language in such classes and on investigating the main characteristics and types of students. Moreover, it will shed some light on the challenges faced by both the teacher and the students in mixed-ability classes, it will provide some instructional solutions that would help the teacher to cope with these challenges. The second chapter deals with different learning styles and the importance of varying them in EFL classes. In addition, it describes what a mixed-ability class should contain in order to have a successful teaching-learning atmosphere. At last, the third chapter of the present dissertation, which is the practical one analyses and interprets the collected data from the teachers' and the students' questionnaires. Next, the main findings are discussed altogether. And finally, some recommendations for EFL teachers are suggested in order to have a successful classroom and make all learners involved.

CHAPTER ONE:

Mixed-ability Classes/ Definition/ Challenges/ Strategies

I.1. Introduction

Mostly all classes around the world consist of learners with varied abilities, backgrounds, interests and learning styles. Different factors such as motivation, learning skills, learning background differ from an individual to another. These basic differences often cause variations in their academic achievements. In such classes, both the teacher and the students find challenges that should be identified, then appropriate strategies should be implemented in order to ensure an effective teaching and learning.

This chapter is concerned with some theoretical backdrops about mixed-ability or multi-level classes and sheds light on some types of students in this particular teaching atmosphere. For mixed-ability classes, we will try to highlight the status of such classes as well as teaching English as a foreign language in them. Moreover, we will emphasize on the types of students mentioning their characteristics as well. Besides, dealing with some challenges and barriers that may face both teachers and learners in the learning process, some strategies and solutions will be suggested to EFL teachers and how to cope with such classes accordingly.

I.2. Definition of Mixed-ability Classes

A mixed-ability class or teaching system is one in which learners are taught together in the same class, even though their abilities are different. (English Cobuild Collins Dictionary, 2003)

In this context, scholars give different explanations and definitions to the term mixed-ability classes, some define them as synonymous with multi-level or heterogeneous classes where students differ in their level and abilities. Others have agreed nearly on the same definitions; as Bremner who pointed out that mixed-ability classes do not contain just students with different

abilities, but also students who have a broad range of learning styles and preferences. That is to say, all students differ from one to another, and each one has his own way and style of learning. Chapman and King (2003) go to the same direction when they stated, *"a mixed-ability classroom consists of a group of students with different levels of learning abilities, interests and skills."* Hence, there would be always classes which contain varied interests, needs and abilities. However, Mckeown (2004) believed that many teachers see a mixed-ability class as consisting of a group of average and able learners who have learning problems.

Richards and Schmidt (2010) have further elaborated the term mixed-ability class as a class containing learners with different ability levels as reflected in differences in language aptitude, motivation and learning styles.

Moreover, Ainslie (1994) gives a more comprehensive definition to mixed-ability classes, according to him are classes where students differ greatly in ability, motivation for learning English, needs, interests, educational backgrounds, styles of learning, anxiety, experiences and so on. In the same sense, it is also defined by Matthews- Aydinli and Home (2006) as a class where students with wide range of levels are placed together. They differ in their level of competence in listening, reading, speaking and writing.

I.2.1. Teaching English in Mixed-ability Classes

The majority of classes are made up of mixed-ability students. In teaching a language; more particularly a foreign one, no two students can be the same, students differ in their attitudes, level of proficiency and language learning ability. As Scrivener (2005:69) claims that *"every learner has an individual range of levels, every class is a mixed-level class."* Since every classroom contains a broad range of learning styles, students with varied interests and attitudes,

there would be always some students who dominate the classroom. More precisely, in an EFL classroom, the teacher can find students who are active and usually raise their hands to answer questions, interested in the learning process regularly and acquire features of the language fast, while others rarely participate or they never do. They lack interest, attend the class just for attendance and they do not make any effort, this could happen for several factors. As Light bown and Spada (2006) state that, there are many factors, which differ from one student to another such as their attitude, motivation and self-discipline.

Thus, while some students find the learning task easy to deal with, others may find it difficult to understand. There are students who may comprehend easily and others who can hardly understand basic information and students who fall somewhere in between these two extremes (Reyes and Rodriguez, 2005). Furtheremore, this issue is common in both small and large classrooms, but it is much difficult to handle in overcrowded classes, and it is challenging for the teacher to involve all his students. In support of this, Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) argue that:

> In most classes, a majority of students are ready, willing and able to be part of a learning community that is safe, welcoming, challenging and supportive. There may be a few students who occasionally need additional support and reminders about procedure and guidelines. (140)

This diversity in EFL classes is interesting and beneficial not only for the teacher but for the students as well. In this context, Ireson and Hallam (2003, p.56) suggested that instructors need to appreciate the different or varied abilities of learners because it is natural for them to develop at different rates. On the one hand, these classes can provide advantages because they

contain diverse skills, as students can learn from each other by exchanging varied ideas and opinions. That is to say, all learners can achieve success, but they differ in their learning speed and this can be developed if they help each other out. On the other hand, teachers might not be well-equipped with the necessary methodologies to deal with mixed-ability classes and it is difficult for them to cope with each individual's differences and preferences. Moreover, since no two students can be the same in terms of language background, language speed, learning ability and motivation, it takes time for the teacher to determine the needs of each student.

In addition, mixed-ability EFL classes can be successful if all students are treated as individuals in order to be effective learners. Therefore, teachers should try their best to make a balance that is both interesting and challenging to ensure equal opportunities for all learners in order to help them to attain academic success. In addition, teachers should know how to facilitate learning and how to make all the students interested and have the purpose of succeeding.

I.2.2. Challenges of Mixed-ability Classes

Every mixed-ability classroom provides challenges; as students differ from each other in many factors. EFL classes can be more multileveled than other classes, thus they can be more challenging as Tomlinson (2012 and 2014) pointed out that some classes might be more multileveled than others might and as a result, they are more challenging for teachers.

Since students have varied backgrounds and language learning abilities, the diversity that exists in such classes can provide challenges for both the teacher and the students, especially that English is not their mother tongue. Students may have various problems that prevent them from participation. In the same vein, it is somehow difficult for the teacher to employ effective and various strategies to engage the whole class in the learning process.

First, students may not be aware of the significance of English itself; others may learn English just to achieve good grades. However, most of those students are actually not motivated, so that their motivation has an effect on their achievement and they are less interested in learning. In addition, laziness is a factor to low achievement in the class which can be derived from their poor motivation that makes them bored and not attentive to learn. As Alderman (2008) noted that poor performance comes from the lack of motivation, effort and effective learning strategies.

Lack of self-esteem is another factor for some learners, which makes them less active in the class because they think that they are not performing well enough, they constantly compare themselves with others and they feel inferior, sometimes such students may feel also that they are treated unequally. In addition, as Singh (2013) stated that students lack of confidence is one of the factors that impede them to be fluent in English. Thus, their self-confidence is also an influencing factor which makes some students believe that they are weaker than others.

Furthermore, a problem that cannot be forgotten is, according to Bowman (1992), the teacher's unawareness of the need for a new approach to deal with in mixed-ability classes. That is to say, the teacher does not take every individual's needs into consideration, he presents the learning task as a whole and ignores what works better with all his learners.

Additionally, since English is not their mother tongue it could be a major barrier that prevents some students from communicating in the class. According to Baker and Westrup (2003, p.12) barriers to learning can occur if students knowingly or unknowingly transfer the cultural rules from their mother tongue to a foreign language. Moreover, in EFL classes, there are students who cannot communicate in English and they usually resort to use their mother tongue.

Anxiety is also a common barrier that most of students suffer from its negative impact. It is a main cause which leads students to eschew interaction in the class because they are afraid of making mistakes, also afraid of being laughed at from their peers. Yet, Brown (2003) stated that students could be afraid of making mistakes when they write or talk because of the fear of being laughed at [by the rest of their peers in the class].

It is important to note that most of teachers, in any particular class, teach students whose shyness affects their participation in the class and they may feel ashamed to talk in front of their peers. In most cases, such students are not given enough support from their teachers, and feel that they are treated unequally.

Furthermore, the diversity in EFL mixed-ability classes causes different teaching problems and it can be more challenging for the teacher to carry out a successful communication in the class. Northcote (2006) claims that it is difficult for the teacher to deliver his lesson plans in a mixed-ability class because every individual has his own way of understanding. In addition, Ur (2005) considers the following challenges as the most significant:

- Difficulty to be certain that all students are learning effectively, here it takes time to cope with all learners and the teacher is unable to provide sufficient time to make them all attentive to the lesson.

- Difficulty to follow each individual's progress in large classes, this could be difficult, if not impossible to deal with each student's needs and the teacher might not be able to devote time and attention for all the students, especially that they are numerous.

- Difficulty to activate all learners' participation, notably in such classes teachers are not able to make all students interact with the whole class, thus they can find only high achievers active and generally participate the most.

- Difficulty to control all learners' attitude, since their motivation differs from one another, some students may get bored which leads the teacher to seek for methods in order to make them all interested and motivated in learning.

Mixed-ability problems can be associated with many different causes, thus EFL teachers should be aware of these challenges and try to provide varied strategies in order to be able to overcome them, to ensure an effective understanding for the whole class and further support to reach the lower achievers.

I.3. Types of Students

Researchers have explained that students are different from one another in many aspects; however, they all need to be part of the learning process and manage their learning in the most accurate way in order to improve their own progress.

I.3.1. High Achievers

The term high achiever defined by Kotinek et al (2010) to refer to students who academically perform well in their studies. High achievers are students who are the most interested in learning, they achieve high scores and their abilities are constantly outstanding. They are the fast ones who raise their hands and try to answer the questions and they are usually the teacher's preferred students in the class.

I.3.1.1. Characteristics of High Achievers

- They can find their own way to succeed without being guided, they are more curious to know new information and the ones who usually ask questions.

- They are creative and seek their own opportunities for practice, they are hard workers to achieve good marks.

- They are often motivated to learn, their self-confidence is high which enables them to be active and participate frequently in the classroom.

- High achievers, as stated by Zewdie (2015), know how to manage their time and spend time more wisely, the difference he found is in time they invest in studying, they manage their time in a strategic way, it means that they distribute their practice over multiple times while they monitor their performance.

I.3.2. Low Achievers

"Low achievers" or "slow learners" are two similar terms used by researchers to refer to students who are commonly seen as less proficient, less effective and unsuccessful learners. Griffin (1978) defines them as students who learn more slowly than their peers do. They are usually considered as learners who obtain low grades. In addition, Vann and Abraham (1990) define low achievers as students who move relatively slowly through an intensive English program. Similarly, Wen and Johnson(1997) define them as learners who spend more time learning English and with low scores.

I.3.2.1. Characteristics of Low Achievers

- They tend to try to make efforts to answer questions, but they do not interact in the class.

- They take a longer time than their peers do to understand a new concept and they react slowly to learning tasks than the rest of the class.

- They face difficulties when transforming information and applying skills to other situations or in exams.

- Their self-esteem is low, they feel that they are neglected by their teacher and they generally have less interest in learning.

- Lack of belief in their abilities to be improved, they fear of making mistakes and they may keep silent in order not to be laughed at by their classmates.

I.2.3. The Teacher's Role in Mixed-ability Classes

When teaching a mixed-ability class, which contains students who have different attitudes, interests, skills and learning styles, EFL teachers need to have a concern towards such students and try to provide each individual with support and motivation. However, when dealing with such diverse students, the teacher might not be able to meet each individual's needs and it is challenging for him to devote sufficient time for all of them.

Needless to say, the teacher plays a vital role when dealing with such classes since students are more or less different from one another. Each individual has unique characteristics and needs, which are different from the rest of students in many aspects (Ireson & Hallam 2001, p. 57). The teacher should appreciate the differences of individuals because they make each student unique. Thus, in a way or another, one of the most effective ways to increase participation in the class and involve all learners is through differentiating instruction (Bryant, 2008, p. 203). Students have different interests and factors that make them unlike, differentiation will help the

teacher to recognize the students' level and their needs; as a result, he will be able to apply the appropriate methods to ensure understanding for them all, especially the lower achievers.

The teacher's determinant role in the class lies when he promotes cooperation and provide opportunities for all students to respond on a question without neglecting low achievers, more importantly, when asking a question and the student's answer is wrong, the teacher should not give negative feedback but rather to say for instance; (you are similar to the correct answer, try again). This will direct students' motivation in a positive way as well as encourage them to take part in the classroom activities and it can also enhance their performance. Students' efforts should not be underestimated and as a result, their intention and desire to learn will be increased.

In addition, it is important how the teacher behaves with his students in order to promote a good learning atmosphere. The teacher should be patient with his learners and know his significant role in the students' improvement, that is to say, students should have equal value because there are some students who can achieve success but at a pace slower than their peers. Although it is not easy for him and it requires time to enhance all students' intention to participate, but it has a positive impact not only on the students achievement but also on the teacher's development of teaching-learning process.

Using a variety of teaching methods and strategies can make the students more involved in the class, since they are different they do not learn the same way, as Pica (2000, p.3) argues that, *"no single method could possibly meet all of the learners' needs."* This can be done by enabling students to work with what matches their learning styles and suits them better to learn, because they may feel uncomfortable with the teaching technique being used by their teacher.

The teacher should not emphasize only on good learners when explaining the lesson, but try to get the attention of low achievers too. He can explain the given lesson by clarifying, explaining the task more than once and illustrating different examples for them. Bowman (1992) claims that *"students are very resourceful. They can create problems or generate solutions, depending on how you engage and maintain their attention."* (p 23)

In sum, the teacher has a significant impact on the students' achievements in the classroom, so he should treat all his students the same without bias and take their different abilities into account in order to ensure an accurate learning for all of them.

I.4. Strategies and Solutions to cope with Mixed-ability EFL Classes

As an EFL teacher, focusing on helping students to become more effective learners can be achieved by finding out what strategies and methods they prefer in order to reach all of them especially those with low achievements. These strategies are meant to help both teachers and students cope with the many challenges they face when teaching and learning English as a foreign language in a mixed-ability class.

Students should be set as a priority in the class, it means the emphasis is not on what the teacher teaches, but on what the students learn. Whitaker (2014) stated that, *"the main variable in the learning environment is not the student, but the teacher."* By doing so, students will be motivated to achieve their goals, expose themselves to language and be involved in the classroom.

Tasks should be designed according to students' abilities and interests to meet their needs (Brown, 2002.p. 28). Teachers should focus more on simplifying the task with remaining the same content and objectives. In addition, because learners differ in processing information, they

should be allowed to respond in different ways, teachers should provide their learners the opportunity to respond differently, this will allow them to be more creative and encourage them to be more interested in what they are learning. According to Lessav-Hurly (2003) it is important for the teacher not to rely too much on correctness to focus on communicative competence and create motivating situations with a calm and welcoming environment where the students know that is normal to make mistakes as it is part of learning.

Assessment is also important for both the teacher and the students, it allows the teacher to know the students' level, as well as it enables him to know whether the current methods are matching learners' level and preferences or not.

Learning styles: the learner would prefer different things extending from learning styles, how they receive information and how they do their activities. As not all students learn best with the same way, teachers have to implement varied techniques and learning styles in order to serve all learners' needs, no matter what their learning abilities are, teachers should deal with them using different methods because when depending on student's learning style, he can be motivated and develop a positive attitude toward classroom learning.

Motivation is also a way of fostering an effective teaching and learning. In order to engage all students throughout the lesson, it is important for teachers to encourage their learners and give them the opportunity to express their thoughts in order to facilitate communication among them because they may lack confidence or enough knowledge. Students can participate if they feel comfortable in the class and if they are getting enough support and motivation from their teacher. By doing so, the teacher will improve interaction in his class and create a good atmosphere for both of them.

Supportive environment: a positive learning environment can greatly influence the success of students and increase their will to learn. Learners need to be supported, motivated in different ways and treated equally regardless their gender, level and abilities. It is important for the teacher to show his own positive attitude towards his learners for what he teaches them, thus he will increase their motivation. Dörnyei (2001) claims that: *"…enthusiasm for ones' specialization area and the ability to make this enthusiasm public rather than hiding it, is one of the most important ingredients of motivationally successful teaching."* (p. 33)

Good relationship: creating a good relationship among students themselves and with the teacher is important in order to have a successful classroom atmosphere, teachers should know and learn about their students' interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes…this will make them comfortable to learn as well as it will reduce their anxiety and stress. Also, when teachers know the names of their students it can be an effective way to get their attention, according to Hess (2002) *"Learning students' names quickly in large classes is not easy but it is essential, as it promotes a good basic relationship."*

Group working : Hess (2001) argues that teachers should encourage their students to help each other out, to ask classmates for help and give each other feedback on their work. As a result, this will improve the students' ability to be responsable for their own learning. Moreover, it is beneficial since it gives the opportunity to students to feel less anxious as they will not speak in front of the entire class. In addition, teachers should know how to work in group effectively and teach students to work together in a productive way. Students would eagerly help each other if they have a qualified teacher who can help them and applies the appropriate strategies (Hermandez, 2012). That is to say, students can be divided into groups with different ways; either by forming them containing both higher and lower ability students, or matching learners' level

together, it means a group contains just students with high ability and the other just for low ability students. Both higher and lower achievers would benefit from working together if a wide range of learning activities were provided for them (Millan & Joyce, 2011).

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the focus was on reviewing different explanations and definitions of the concept "mixed-ability classes", as well as mentioning the different types of students and their characteristics. Moreover, a description of ELT in this particular learning atmosphere was included by identifying the teacher's role when dealing with such classes. The chapter also showed the main difficulties and challenges that may be encountered by both the teacher and the students in mixed-ability classes. Furthermore, suggesting solutions that would be help both of them in order to develop teaching and learning.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Main Aspects of a Mixed-ability Classroom Environment

II.1. Introduction

In EFL mixed-ability classes, it is obvious that students are different in many aspects, the teacher should be aware of how to manage the classroom and his students by knowing their styles of learning because they do not learn the same way. In addition, in order to provide a successful language learning class, the teacher should promote a good teaching-learning environment and make students being more involved in the classroom.

This chapter sheds light on identifying the different learning styles and their importance in mixed-ability EFL classes, also highlights the main aspects of a successful learning-teaching classroom environment.

II.2. Classroom Environment

The students' learning is influenced by many factors, classroom environment is one of the main factors that affect either the students' achievement positively or negatively. Although in an EFL mixed-ability class it is difficult for the teacher to address every student's needs and attention to participate, a good and supportive classroom environment will reflect on the students' achievement positively and increase their interest to participate. Khumalo confirms *"…a classroom needs to provide a safe and supportive environment in which all learners are willing to participate in class activities without feeling ridiculed"*. (2000, p. 34)

To accomplish this, the teacher is the one who plays the greatest role in setting the atmosphere (Whitaker, 2004), so that students must feel the teacher's awareness of the necessity of their active involvement which will allow all of them to feel part in the process of learning by providing them with an appropriate classroom environment. Therefore, in order to create an effective and supportive learning environment and make the classroom more organized, some

features should be implemented as well as enhanced by teachers; for instance their attitudes towards teaching-learning and interaction. Yet, these principles in which a mixed-ability class is based might make the contribution of students in such classes different such as their motivation and learning styles. Furthermore, the diverse skills in such classes can be improved by learning in a comfortable classroom atmosphere.

II.3. Definition of Learning Styles

In any particular class, especially an EFL class, learners differ in how they prefer to take in, process and acquire new information, so that they have different learning styles.

The term learning style refers to the way a learner focuses, processes, approaches and acquires new information as well as complex skills. Learners differ in their preferred way(s) of how they process or retain new information and skills (Reid, 1995). In addition, it is the student's favourite way he receives, perceives, understands and activates information. It also, has been defined as a preferred way of using learners' abilities, a learning style is not in itself an ability but rather a preferred way of using one's abilities. (Sternberg, 1994).

II.4. Different Types of Learning Styles

Every mixed-ability class contains different students' learning preferences, an effective way to accommodate these learning styles is for teachers to change their own styles and provide a variety of activities in order to meet the students' different learning styles. Learners have been categorized in general as visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.

II.4.1. Visual Learners

This type of students prefers to think in pictures or in words. Fatt (2000) points out that learners with visual learning preference would prefer reading, observing and the display of data and visual aids. This means that when dealing with this type of students the teacher is supposed to present the lesson using textbook, data show or whiteboard in order to list what is important for his students.

In addition, visual learners prefer what they hear or read is usually seen in colours, their memory reacts and responds positively when data are presented by drawings, paintings, images, graphs, maps or illustrations, as Coker (1996) claims that *"teaching strategies used for visual learners could contain demonstrations, pictures or graphs"*. Such strategies can be used by teachers to get a visual learner's attention, which will help him to organize and remember the given information.

II.4.2. Auditory Learners

An auditory learner is the most talkative of all the learning types. He learns best by listening or speaking, that is to say, listening is the main tool to understand and absorb ideas and knowledge. Auditory learners prefer to learn verbally rather than by written information because it is difficult for them to remember what has been read or written.

Therefore, if the teacher presents a lesson orally such as (discussion, debate and any other verbal presentation) or through audio, video, it would be more effective for his students.

II.4.3. Kinesthetic Learners

Many students prefer to use the whole-body approach to learn. This is a more comfortable way of learning which includes the tactile method. Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing (Fatt, 2000). Moreover, the learner will learn best by using a combination of learning styles, he may need to listen or look the given information, he needs also to move a lot, they prefer to be physically involved; movement and being involved are important for them.

II.5. Learning Styles Importance in EFL Mixed-ability Classes

In EFL mixed-ability classes learners are aware of the way they learn, and since students are different from each other in many aspects, each student has his own way of learning. There are some students who learn faster than their peers and there are others with low abilities, thus they differ in the way they prefer to be able to obtain information. In addition to that, since a learning style indicates how one's brain absorbs and organizes information, an effective learning process should involve listening, demonstrating and interacting. Students learn better if multiple of learning styles when presenting a lesson are used and developing the ways by which they learn best will improve their ability to learn.

Learning styles have a significant role in classroom improvement. Teachers should try to design some activities, which involve different students' learning styles and encourage them in which they can relate in terms of learning experiences. In addition, teachers should not depend on one single style but rather to adopt varied learning styles, in this way the teaching style is effective for both teachers and learners.

Moreover, when teachers are aware of the differences of their students' learning styles, they can reach all of them in the learning process and ensure learning for all. Reid (1998) states

that, *"in an effective classroom, everyone (the teacher and the student) learns, and that learning about learning styles is essential in order to all students have equal opportunities to use their strengths to learn"*. Therefore, the teacher's ability to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies in order to indicate the way his students prefer to learn has a great impact on the success of EFL classes because students can enhance their academic achievements by learning the way that suits them and matches their learning style preferences.

II.6. Basic Elements for a Successful Classroom Learning

In this section, we will present the necessary ingredients that make classroom learning successful.

II.6.1. Interaction

Foreign language classes are bounded by many factors, communication is a major goal which should be involved in any classroom, especially in EFL mixed-ability classes communication is essential and it can be derived from interaction. Thus, interaction is strongly needed in such classes as an important feature since it improves the students' communication and encourages them to participate in the class.

Ellis (1994) defines interaction as when the participants of equal status with similar needs make an effort to understand each other. In addition, Simpson and Galbo (1986) argue that interaction is an important component of the learning process, they defined it as *"behaviour in which individuals and groups act upon one another"* and added that it is *"a continually emerging process, as communication in its most inclusive sense"*. (p. 38)

Furthermore, the term interaction is a two-way process in which two sides as minimum are commonly effected by each other and that is through exchanging messages in order to accomplish communication. In this sense, Wagner (1994) stated that: *"interactions are reciprocal events that require at least two objects an two actions"*. She further argued that *"interactions occur when these objects and events mutually influence one another"*. (p. 8)

II.6.1.1. Classroom Interaction

An active learning process involves classroom communication. Communication that occurs among learners and their teacher involved in the process of teaching and learning which is the main feature in interaction. Classroom interaction was defined by Celce-Murcia (1989, p.25) as *"a system of giving and receiving information"*. In other words, interaction happens in the class when students share information either among themselves or with their teacher. Moreover, according to Kalantari (2009), classroom interaction is the interaction between teachers and learners in classroom settings.

Particularly, in first year English classes of Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, teachers can find only high achievers who usually interact in the class, whereas others are passive and as much as a classroom is passive, learners become less interested to learn. In such classes, those students who do not participate they do not pay attention to study and they are not interested to learn for many reasons, which prevent them from interacting properly in the class. However, they can participate if they are allowed to express their thoughts and opinions freely.

In fact, in most classes, teachers interact more often with students with high achievements and fewer opportunities are given to low achieving students. Richards and Lockhart argue that it is a common issue in EFL classes:

…teachers sometimes interact with some students in the class more than others. Although they generally try to treat students fairly and give every student in the class the opportunity to participate in the lesson, it is often hard to avoid interacting with some students more than others… (1996, p. 139)

Further, classroom interaction is not a simple process as it seems to be, teachers need to be familiar with the factors that prevent interaction in class and strategies that can be used in order to give equal opportunities for all students to be motivated to participate and more involved in the class. Learners also should be aware of the significance of classroom interaction and its impact on their academic achievements.

In addition, for carrying out a successful communication in the class EFL teachers should achieve some methods in order to improve classroom interaction. It can be difficult for students especially as they have a low level of language proficiency. So in order to engage them to interact in classroom communication, teacher's positive feedback is an effective way to do so. Richards & Lokhart (1994, p. 188) indicate that: *"feedback may serve not only to let learners know how they have performed but also to increase motivation and create a supportive classroom climate."* In addition, teachers should make efforts to encourage their students to participate throughout discussing interesting topics in order to stimulate and make them able to express themselves effectively.

Thus, by using classroom interaction appropriately students are more active, it helps them in developing their competencies and communicative skills as they will gain more confidence.

II.6.1.1.1. Types of Classroom Interaction

In a classroom, interaction takes place in different ways, the teacher interacts with his students and students interact with each other, this will help in improving both the teaching and learning process.

II.6.1.1.1.1. Teacher-learner Interaction

The relationship between students and their teacher is important in EFL classes; it is the most important part of an effective teaching. This type of interaction occurs between the teacher and students when asking a question and discussing a topic together. As Harmer (2017) claims that teachers should encourage learners to produce communication outputs and be engaged in communicative activities. Hence, when the teacher provides corrective and challenging instructions, students would be excited to acquire knowledge and interact with their teacher. Brown (1988) claims that *"teaching is the interaction that facilitates learning. If you cannot interact with them, you cannot teach them."* That is to say, the teacher's interaction with students significantly influences their learning progress by increasing and improving their will to interact within the class.

II.6.1.1.1.2. Learner-learner Interaction

Learners' interaction with each other is necessary for developing the learning process. Ohta states: *"Overall, in the classroom corpus, peers interaction increases accuracy rather than reducing it, because learners catch their own and each others' errors during the interactive process."* (2001, p. 124)

In this type of interaction, students can interact with two ways, either by pair work which takes place between two students or by group work and this form takes place between many students. Dagarin (2004) states that the two forms of student-student interaction are useful for

encouraging interaction among students. That is to say, the interaction that happens among learners when working in groups or in pairs encourages them to work together in order to exchange opinions and share knowledge. They can be guided and organized by their teacher when doing so, as they are given the chance to create and build a good relationship among them.

II.6.1.1.1.3. The Importance of Interaction in Mixed-ability Classes

In any language classroom, especially EFL one, participation is an essential part of the process of teaching and learning since it provides opportunities for learners to foster their communication through classroom interaction.

Previous studies show that interaction is the main aspect which should be provided in any classroom, Brown (2015) pointed out that it is the basis of L2 learning. As it helps students to increase their communicative skills and measures their progress in learning the language, according to Brown (2002), *"In the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about."* (p.35)

As a matter of fact, interaction is beneficial not only for students but also for the teacher, as it tells how the students have communication with their teacher and even among the whole class. Additionally, it is also important in improving learners' language performance by actively involving students in the learning process and their learning would be more exciting to them.

Therefore, a collaborative classroom can create a good classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable to gain information and knowledge from the whole class and allows them to express their thoughts and ideas freely and enjoy learning.

In a mixed-ability language learning classroom, interaction is considered as an important skill which both teachers and students need to acquire in order to have an effective and successful teaching-learning process.

II.6.2. Motivation

Motivation considered as an essential component and one of the main factors that influences the success of the English language learning and determines the success of English teaching-learning in mixed-ability classes as well.

II.6.2.1. Definition of Motivation

Many researchers dealt with the term motivation but there is no specific definition of it, as Gardner (2006, p.242) claims: *"motivation is a very complex phenomenon with many facets…Thus, it is not possible to give a simple definition.*"

However, Pinder (1998) claimed that motivation is *"a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behaviour and to determine its form, direction, intensity and duration."* (p.11) It enhances the willingness of people and pushes them to achieve and reach their target.

Additionally, Harmer (2007, p.51) claims, *"motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something"*. In the same sense, Burden (2004) states that motivation is something that energizes human activities or gives an individual the desire to achieve certain goals and objectives. That is to say, it refers to someone's desire to do or to learn something.

II.6.2.2. The Impact of Motivation on Learners' Achievements

In EFL teaching context, there is a strong connection between motivation and students' FL development. Motivation of learners is different from one to another and it has an impact either positively or negatively on their language achievements. As a result, the student's low achievement can be derived from their lack of motivation.

According to Oxford and Shearin (1994) motivation has an impact on the level of the learners' language (cited by Çolak, 2008, p. 32). It means that motivation influences the students' achievements and they cannot achieve their goals without being motivated. Therefore, it affects their language learning by facilitating and paving the way for them to be more involved and interested in learning and acquiring a foreign language.

In addition to that, it creates a stimulating environment in the classroom. For instance, when asking a question, the teacher is supposed to make his learners feel comfortable by helping them and offering positive feedback to their response, the latter would feel a kind of self-confidence and then this will increase their motivation and participation as well as it reduces their anxiety.

In spite of the fact that the teacher is the one who is responsible for the classroom to provide learners with tasks that make them motivated to acquire the language. There are teachers who neglect this important aspect in the classroom and do not provide their students with enough motivation or facilitate learning to make them involved, also lessons should be well structured by the teacher in order to make students more attentive to learn. In this regard, Prapphal (2001, p.8) claimed that *"tasks and activities should be designed to expose the students to the target language and increase their motivation to learn the language in class and acquire it outside the*

classroom". Indeed, it is almost the teacher's role to provide the appropriate tasks in order to maintain the classroom active and make the learners more motivated.

II.6.3. Attitudes toward the Teaching-learning Process

Attitude is another major factor which provides a successful environment in EFL classes. A positive attitude of both the teacher and the students towards the language teaching-learning are important in the development of the process.

II.6.3.1. Teacher's Attitude

In EFL classes, all students need to have the sense of being able to learn well, a positive learning environment includes the teacher's attitude which has an important influence not only in the classroom environment but also in students' achievements, mainly because teachers are leaders of the class and responsible for creating a positive classroom atmosphere. In the case of EFL mixed-ability classes, the teacher should value his learner's diversity in these classes, Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) claims that the key of creating a supportive and effective classroom environment is a teacher that his goal and objective is to be aware of the individual needs of students and encourages them to be successful learners. (p. 44)

Besides, Erwin (2004) states that: "*students' genetic instructions are to seek a safe, orderly environment, feel a sense of importance, experience a sense of independence and have fun"*. That means, by starting the lesson with a humorous story for instance, can attract the learner's intention to interact within the class.

Meanwhile, the teacher's positive attitude towards teaching and building a good teacher-learner relationship will increase students' responsibility to learn and develop a supportive learning atmosphere.

II.6.3.2. Learner's Attitude

In EFL classes, it is naturally observed that all students are interested in learning English as a foreign language, but their attitudes towards learning the language is the main key for their achievements which can be different from one to another.

Margeret & Gardner (2003) defined a student-attitude as, *"the individual's reaction to anything associated with the immediate context in which the language is taught"* (p. 172-173). Yet, the efforts the students make for learning is the most important way to reach knowledge as well as to increase their desire for learning. Llowellyn and Cahoon (1965) claim that:

> Learning is more encompassing, it includes not only factual content
> but the pupils' positive feelings about what is learned. It seems,
> moreover that the effective element, such as the learner's delight
> with what he is doing, actually establish the basis for meaningful
> and autonomous learning. (p. 471)

Moreover, students' attitude towards learning increases their motivation, Edwards and Porter (1972) additionally stress that *"a student's attitude toward a given course or subject area can be a contributing factor to his achievement"* (p.107).

II.7. Conclusion

Learning English in mixed-ability classes is of great importance if the students are provided with enough understanding of their learning styles as well as some basic elements, which should be identified by their teacher to provide a successful classroom.

Therefore, this chapter was set up to clarify some aspects that are needed in an English as a foreign language teaching and learning classroom environment. Moreover, a description of the main aspects that go hand in hand within an EFL mixed-ability classroom to have a successful teaching and learning environment were provided.

CHAPTER THREE: Data Collection and Interpretation

III.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the methodology applied in this research paper. The case study is presented, the sample size and characteristics of participants are described altogether. It also includes a description of the research instruments used as well as the analysis of data gathered which are presented by tables and figures for better understanding of the results.

III.2. Participants

The sample that has been chosen in this research consists of 40 first year EFL university students and 5 teachers at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria. Students' ages ranging from 17 to 24. They were chosen as participants for many reasons. Among these reasons, they are more likely to have difficulties when learning English in mixed-ability classes. Another reason is we can easily reach them. Therefore, since they are familiar with such phenomenon and they are not occupied well with the target language, they can provide reliable answers.

The study also concerned with TEFL teachers who hold either the degree of 'Magister' or 'Doctorate'. Their experience in teaching English ranged from 5 to more than 10 years. Two of them were males and three were females The main purpose of dealing with EFL teachers is to explore their perception about having different levels in the same class because they are more concerned with this issue. Also, were selected because they are responsible of the success of the teaching-learning process and they are experienced with how to deal with such classes, so that they can give reliable conclusions about the topic discussed.

III.3. Research Instruments

In the purpose of gathering information for the research work, the study was carried out quantitatively using two questionnaires in order to collect the data needed. First, the questionnaire was designed to first year students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret in order to identify their attitudes concerning learning with students whose their level and abilities are different, also to identify the main barriers and challenges that may encounter them when learning English in mixed-ability classes.

In addition, the teachers' questionnaire aims at answering the research questions. It was addressed to know their attitudes towards teaching mixed-ability classes as well as the challenges they may face in such classes and how to cope with the latter to have a successful teaching-learning process. Also, it aims at obtaining the teachers' perception on students with low achievements and how can they make a balanced classroom.

III.3.1. Teachers' Questionnaire

III.3.1.1. Description of Teachers' Questionnaire

Due to the current situation of COVID-19, the assigned questionnaire was delivered online to Ibn Khaldoun University teachers of English. In order to get various opinions concerning the studied issue, the questionnaire was divided into two major sections; the first section was about the teachers' personal information (gender, academic qualification and their teaching experience). The second section included questions about mixed-ability classes environment. The questions asked started out as more general ones and then became more focused on. Those questions were a mixture between open-ended and multiple choice questions which were based on 12 items, in most questions, teachers were given space where they are free to add any other important ideas.

III.3.2. Students' Questionnaire

III.3.2.1. Description of Students' Questionnaire

In order to have better understanding about mixed-ability classes' atmosphere and challenges, the researcher administered an online questionnaire to students due to the circumstances of COVID-19. The questionnaire consisted of 14 items. It covered three types of questions, close-ended, multiple-choices and open-ended questions. The first two questions are about gender and age. The second part consists of questions about mixed-ability classroom environment, students' attitude toward their peers, challenges and if their teacher takes the diversity in such classes into consideration.

III.4. Data Analysis and Discussion

III.4.1. Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

1) **Background information :**

Question 1: Teachers' gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	2	40%
Female	3	60%
Total	5	**100%**

Table.1.Teachers' Gender

From the table results, it can be observed that female teachers are more than males with 60%, while males with 40% and that is because it is known that they dominate the community .

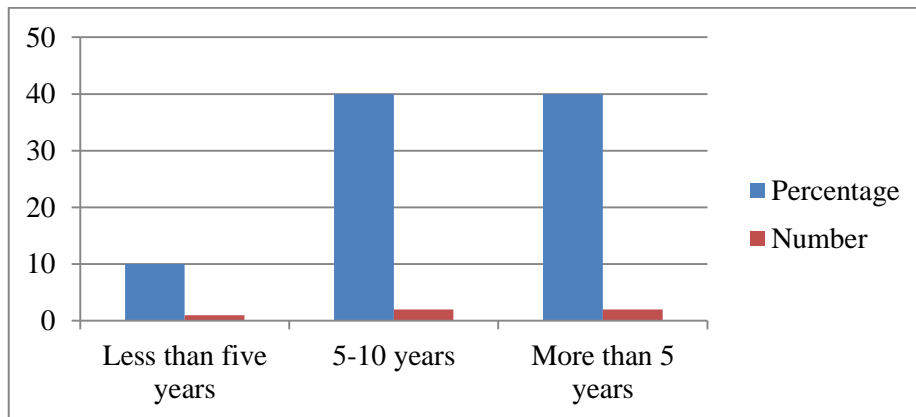**Question 2:** Teachers' teaching English experience.

Figure.1. Teachers' Teaching Experience

In the above figure, it is shown that one teacher (10%) has experienced in teaching English less than 5 years, while two teachers (40%) mentioned that they taught English about 5 to 10 years, whereas the rest 2 teachers have a long experience as they have been teaching English for more than 10 years.

Question 3: Teachers' academic qualification:

Degree	Number	Percentage
Magister/ M.A	2	40%
Doctorate/ Ph.D	3	60%
Total	5	**100%**

Table.2. Teachers' Academic Qualification

It can be noticed from the table that two teachers (40%) have "Doctorate/Ph.D. and (60%) hold a "Magister/ M.A degree.

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Question 4: Employed status:
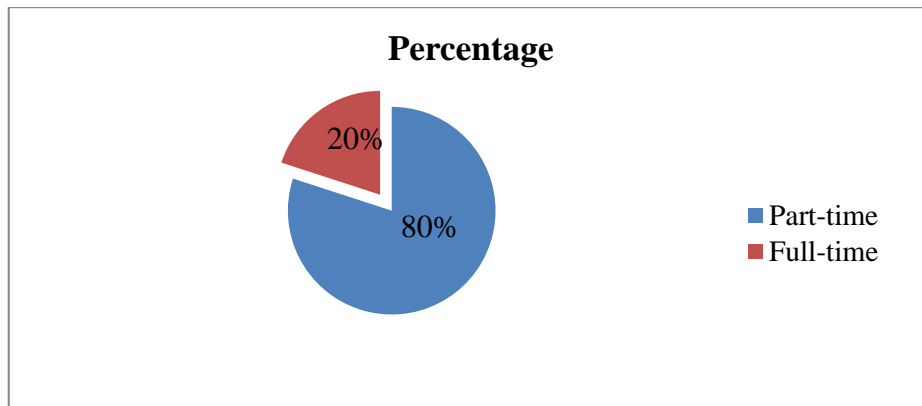
Figure.2. Teachers' Employed Status

The figure above shows that most of teachers (80%) are part-time teachers, while one of them is a full-time teacher.

2) **Mixed ability Classroom Environment:**

Question 1: What type of students dominates the classroom?

Figure.3. Dominant Students according to Teachers

Teachers' response to this question is clear in the above figure. Most of teachers said that students who dominate their classes are low achievers, while (40%) of them said that high achievers are dominant in their class.

Question 2: What makes a student excel?

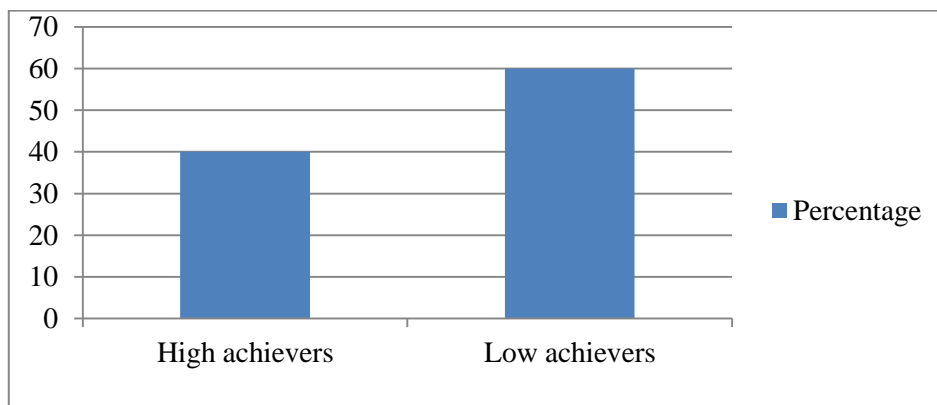From the teachers' answers there are many factors which are taken into consideration. For them a high achiever student is the one who is always ready to listen, follow advice and practice constantly, they agree that a high achiever is a good listener. Moreover, one teacher thinks that enthusiasm, dedication and commitment are the main features that make a student a high achiever. In addition, high achievers for them are the ones who are interested in autonomous learning (extra work) and who have a balanced level in the four skills (writing, speaking, listening and reading).

Question 3: What prevents some students from not participating in class?

Statement 1: They are afraid of making mistakes.

Statement 2: They are afraid of getting negative feedback.

Statement 3: They are not confident about the answer.

Statement 4: They feel shy even when they have the right answer.

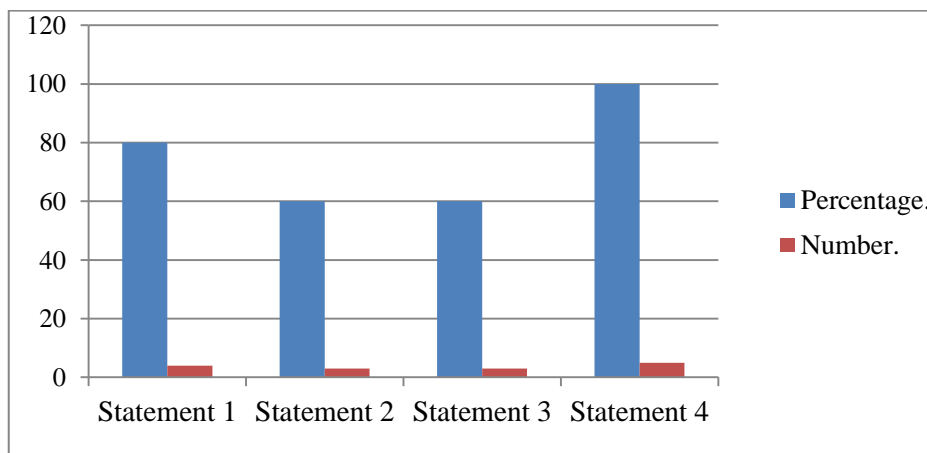The following figure presents the teachers' answers:

Figure.4. Students' Participation according to Teachers

When answering this question, teachers were allowed to choose more than one option. As it is shown in the figure, all teachers agreed that students do not participate because they feel shy even when they have the right answer. In addition, most of them (80%) believe that students are afraid of making mistakes. While (60%) of them indicated that the fear of getting negative feedback is the reason that prevents some students from participating. Also (60%) of teachers think that when students are not confident about the answer, they do not participate.

Question 4: Do you find yourself inattentively giving much importance to students who are usually active in the class and neglecting the others? Explain how?

Most of teachers disagreed with the statement above. They highlighted that they do not give importance to excellent learners only but they give chances to all. They usually pay attention to both types of students, and in some cases they find themselves trying to question the silent students who never make efforts in taking the teacher's question into a high consideration, they ask those who fail to concentrate with the lecture, then they move to those who usually keep participating. In short, the difference gives the priority to those who neglect the lecture. However, one teacher admitted that she does that sometimes but unconsciously because high achievers are very concentrated with the lesson, but whenever aware she tries to engage and address all of them.

Question 5: What is the way you prefer your students to work with in the class?
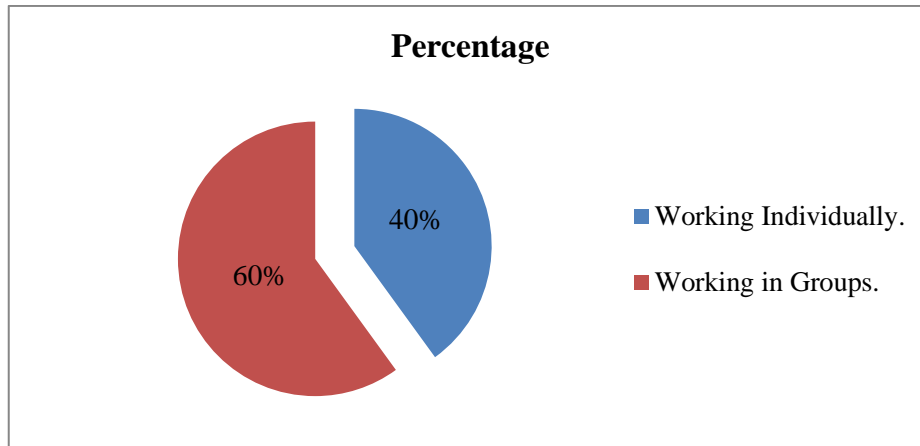
Figure.5. Teachers' Preferred Way of Working

As illustrated by figure, the majority of teachers (60%) replied that they prefer their learners to work in groups, whereas (40%) of them said that working individually is their preferred way.

Question 6: How can you describe the attitudes of less achievers students towards high achievers?

Teachers have varied opinions when they replied to this question. Some of them believed that low achievers feel demotivated and underestimate themselves when they see only high achievers are dominating the classroom. According to some of them, low achievers annihilate the work of high achievers and neglecting the lecture is highly appearing in them when they cannot interact within the rest of the class as high achievers are doing.

Question 7: How does students' diversity in such classes influence your choice of a teaching method?

All teachers claimed that the choice of their teaching method matters since it depends on their capacities and level. Some of teachers claimed that they will be obliged to be average, it

means they choose a method that suits all levels. Another teacher indicated that the diversity in mixed-ability classes imposes on him a plurastic method (using principles of many methods at the same time) in order to cope with the variety of abilities, fulfill the students' needs and address all at the same time despite their level, learning styles and preferences.

Question 8: Do you use any specific way in order to improve low achievers' attention?

- If yes, what is it?

All teachers replied that they use ways in order to improve low achievers' attention. Some of them said that they motivate, encourage and even praise students with low achievements. Others stated that they try to simplify the lesson by facilitating their English for instance; they depend on translation when it is needed, they found this way effective for their learners in order to draw their attention to the subject matter. In addition, one of the teachers indicated that he always use challenges to break the students' neglecting attitude. Some teachers said they make pairs of a low achiever with a high achiever so that, they can work collaboratively and use peer tutoring, for them it works well with their students. Then, keep students busy with acitivities, load them with questions, practice and assignments. When doing so, the teacher should make them feel in ease and more comfortable in order to express themselves, reduce their anxiety and increase their self-confidence.

Question 9: Mixed-ability classes are challenging, how can you make a balanced classroom?

Teachers shared the same opinion that making a balanced classroom when dealing with a mixed-ability class is exhausting for them, but they are naturally occurred to resolve such problems and they have to look for methods to ensure learning for all. Try to make students in groups in order to make them influenced and challenged it may be an effective way to involve

both high and low achievers in the learning process by working together. In addition, when they plan they consider the students' differences, they virtually divide them in groups according to their level and provide each group with what it needs. This way, students are given equal opportunities without bias. Another way is, oral discussions and warming ups, for some teachers this can strongly help the them in maintaining the highest quality of academic contributions since every teacher knows that his students need to be motivated and followed.

Question 10: Put a tick according to your level of (dis)agreement with the following statements:

Teachers' answers are summarized as follows:

a) According to you, to what extent does learner's self-confidence help him to be involved in the classroom?
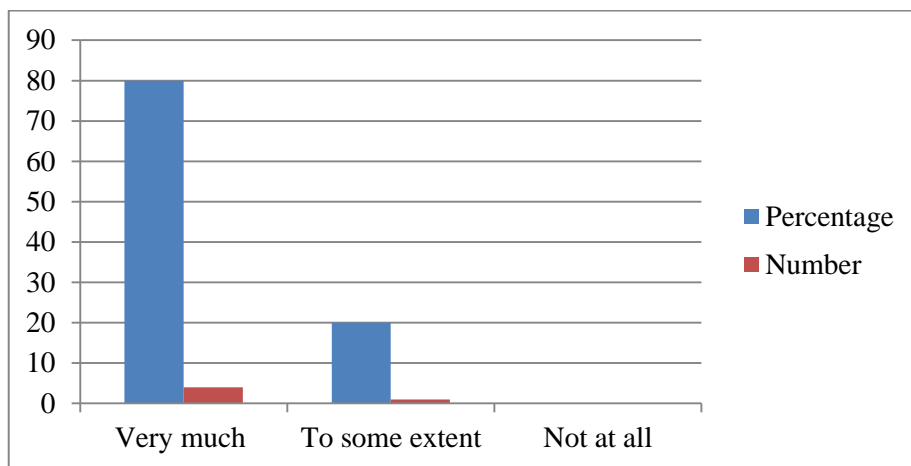

Figure.6. The Role of Learners' Self-confidence to be Involved

b) According to your professional experience, does the teacher's motivation have an impact on students' interaction.

All teachers (100%) indicated that they are strongly agree that, indeed the teacher's motivation has a great impact on students' interaction.

c) There are students who do not participate in class but they perform well in written exams.

In this statement also all teachers were strongly agree that in any class there are students who do not participate in class but they perform well in written exams.

Question 11: In mixed-ability classes, what are the challenges that you encounter most and you find yourself unable to cope with them?

From the results obtained for this question, teachers provided many challenges that face them when dealing with mixed-ability classes. Some teachers said that lazy students are hard to get involved and sometimes, low achievers affect other students who are always expected to participate in classroom, which becomes difficult for the teacher to run the course. Others claimed that when working with students with low achievements, high achievers do not do anything so they feel bored and they create chaos in the classroom. Moreover, there are teachers who found difficulties in explaining some lessons and it is hard to pay attention to every individual and make them all involved in the learning process.

Question 12: What are the strategies that you think are effective to reach all students in a mixed-ability class?

Teachers provided different strategies which are illustrated as below:

- – Do not discriminate and deal with them in the same way.
- – Motivate students and let them run the course from time to time in order to foster their self-confidence.

- Create new methods and promote group working in order to push students work hard in using assignments.

- Adhering to a principled eclectic approach is the best working strategy.

III.4.2. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

III.4.2.1. Section one: General Information

Students' Gender and Age:

This table illustrates the answers of this question:

Gender	Number	Percentage	Age
Male	14	35%	
Female	26	65%	Ranged from 17 to 24.
Total	40	**100%**	

Table.3.Respondents' Gender and Age

The above table showed that the majority of the students are females with 26 (65%), whereas males are 14 (35%) of the whole participants, and their age ranged from 17 to 24 years old.

III.4.2.2. Section two: Mixed-ability Classroom Environment.

Question 1: Was asked to know if English was the students' first choice.

The results of this question are illustrated in figure below:
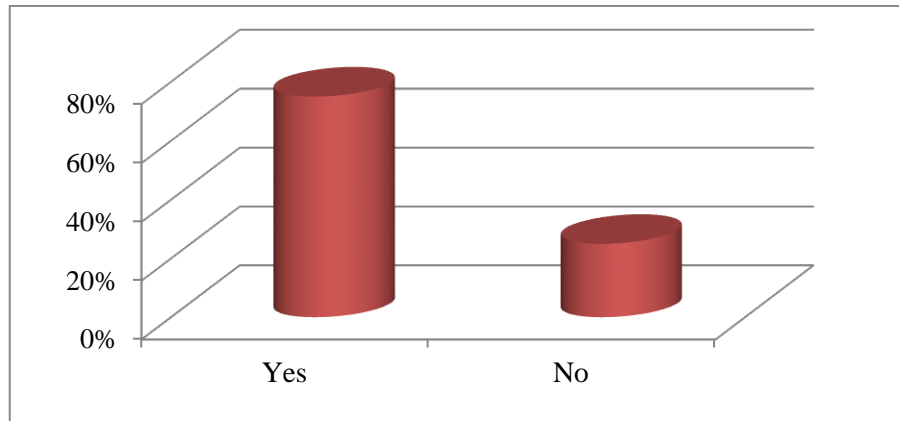
Figure.7. Student's Choice to study English

From the results obtained, it is noted that 75% of participants have chosen to study English as a first choice, while the remaining 25% said that studying English was not their first choice.

Question 2: Asked about the students' self rating of their level in English.
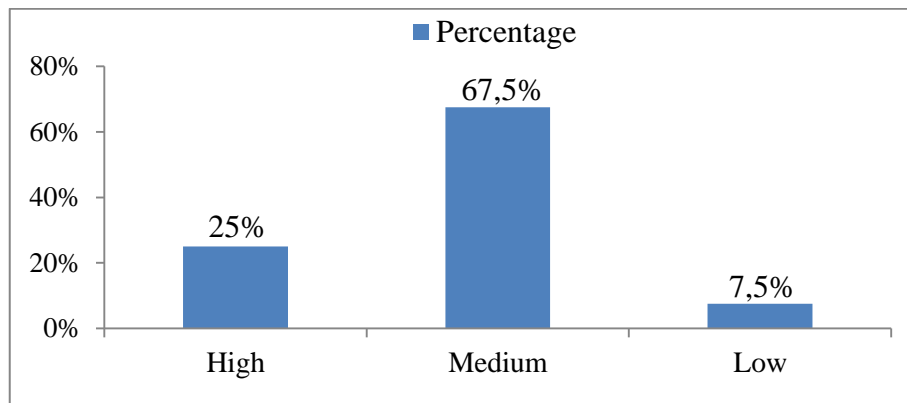
Figure.8. Students' Evaluation of their Level in English

From the results, it can be seen that 27 students (67,5%) reported that their level is medium, (25%) of them answered that their level of English is high, whereas the remaining 3 (7,5%) said that their level is low.

Question 3: Asked about students' English marks they usually get.
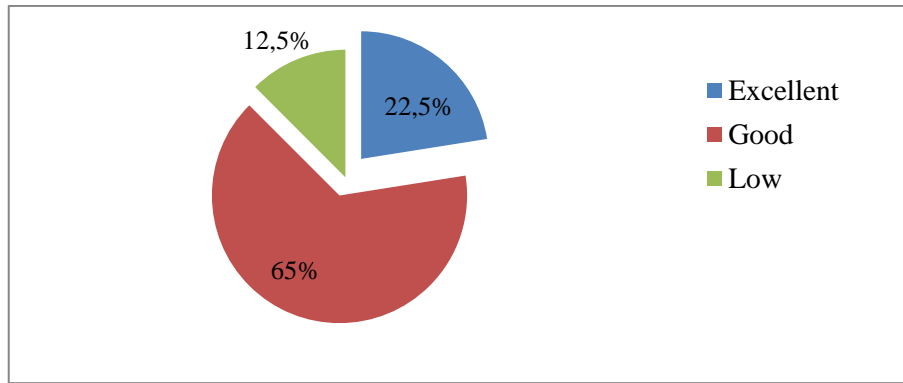
Figure.9. Students' Marks

The above figure reveals that the majority of students (65%) showed that their marks in English are good, (22,5%) said that they usually get excellent marks and the other (12,5%) answered that their marks are low.

Question 4: Do you participate in class?

Their answers are illustrated in the following figure**:**
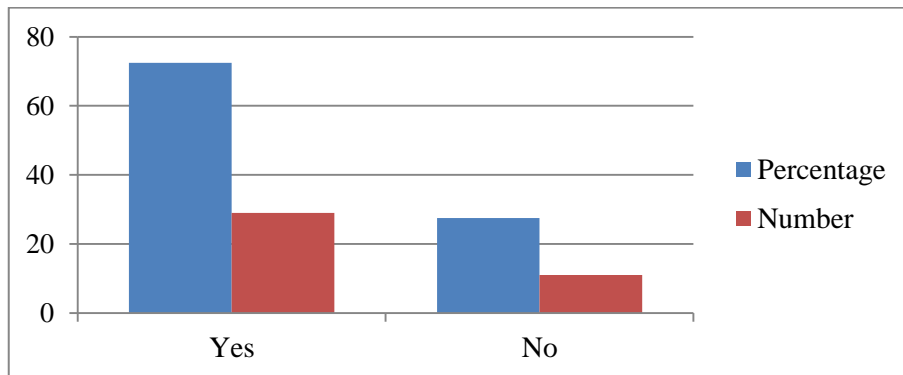
Figure.10. Students' Participation in Class

In this question, the majority of students (72,5%) it means 29 of them indicated that they participate in class, and the rest (27,5%) said that they do not participate.

-If yes, how often do you participate ?

The answers of this question are represented in the figure below:
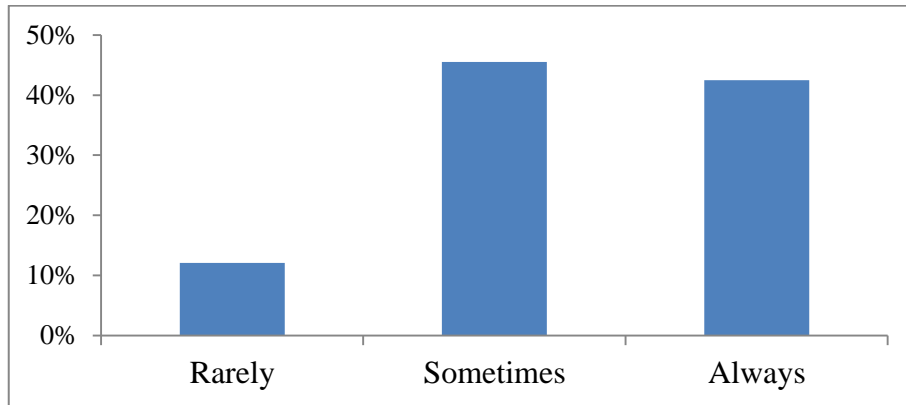
Figure.11. Students' Participation Frequency

From the results gained for this question, 33 students indicate that they participate in class, (42,4%) of them argued that they always participate and (45,5%) mentioned that they participate sometimes. Whereas (12,1%) of the remaining participants claimed that they rarely participate in class.

-If no, what prevents you from doing so?
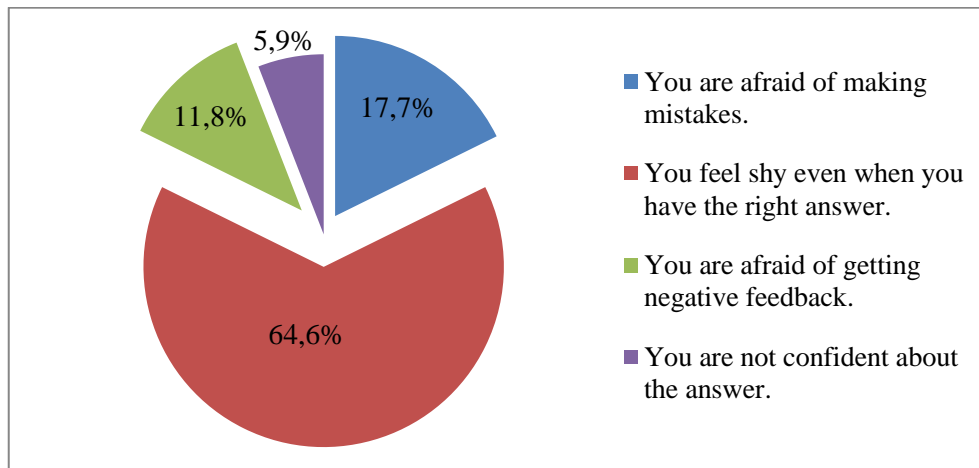
Figure.12. Barriers that Prevent Students from Participation

From the answers shown above, 17 students reported the varied reasons that prevent them from participating in class. Most of them 11 (64,6%) agreed that shyness is the main barrier that keeps them from participating in class. In addition to this, 3 (17,7%) of them said that fear of making mistakes prevents them from participating, whereas 2 (11,8%) mentioned that they do not participate in class because they are afraid of getting negative feedback, and only one student (5,9%) claimed that when he is not confident about the answer.

Question 5: Asked to know whether the teacher motivates students or not and how often he does.

Students' responses are represented as follows:
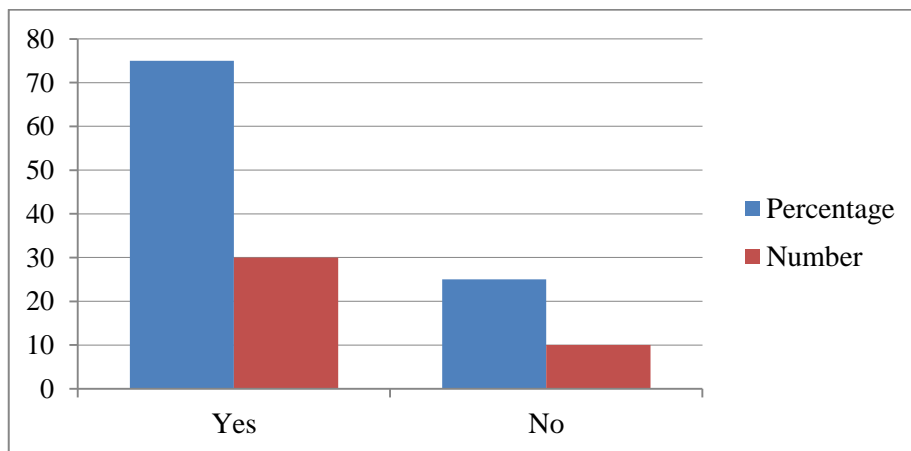
Figure.13. Teachers' Motivation

The results revealed that (75%) of students said that they get motivated by their teacher, while (25%) replied that their teacher does not motivate them.

- How often do students get motivated by their teacher?

The following figure illustrates the results of this question:
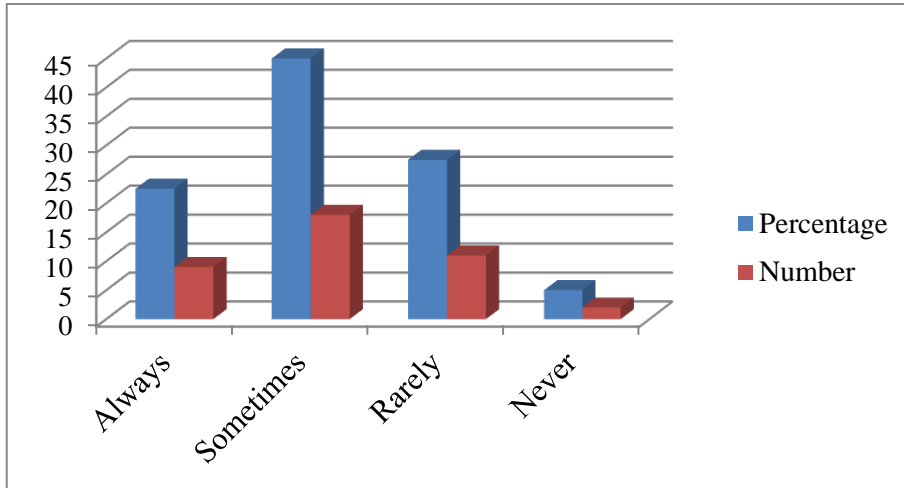
Figure.14. Teachers' Motivation Frequency

The results showed that 18 out of the total number of students sometimes get motivated by their teacher, whereas 9 (22,5) said that their teacher always motivates them and 11 (27,5) rarely, while only 2 of them claimed that they have never got motivated by their teacher.

Question 6: Asked about students' opinions about their teachers' awareness of learners with low achievements.
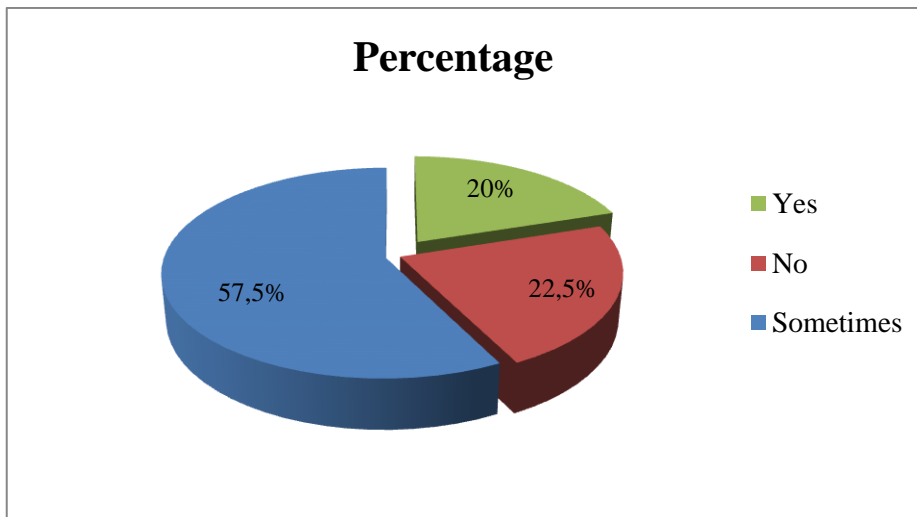
Figure.15. Teachers' Awareness of Low Achievers

As it is clearly mentioned in the graph, (20%) of participants claimed that their teachers are aware of students with low achievements, while over half of the number of students (57,5%) indicated that their teachers are sometimes aware of low achievers, and the rest (22,5%) showed the unawareness of their teachers of low achievers students.

Question 7: It aimed to know if the teacher is giving much importance to excellent students only.
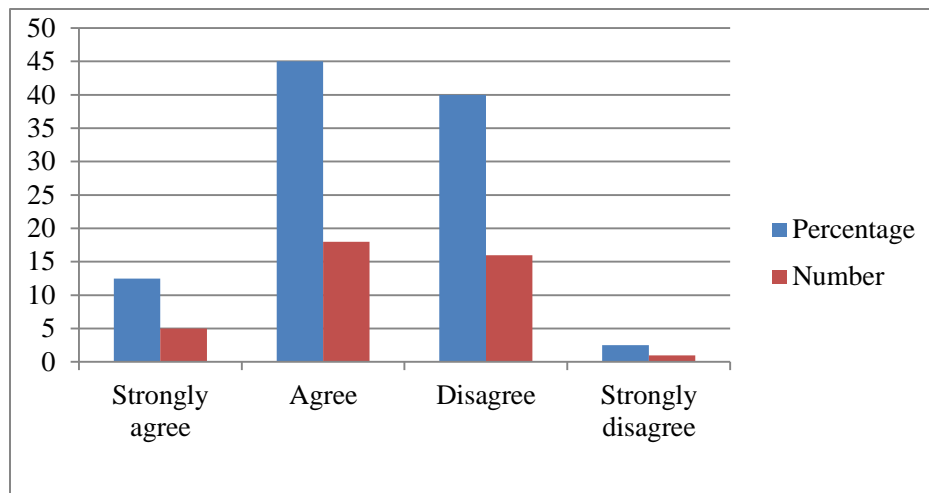
Figure.16. Inequality of Importance between Excellent Learners and Others

When participants were asked if their teacher gives more importance to excellent students only, a remarkable number of students (45%) commented that they agree with the statement and (12,5%) which means 5 of them were strongly agree. However, the other (40%) answered that they do not agree and only one student (2,5%) was strongly disagree.

Question 8: Asked students if they feel neglected by their teacher. And if yes, does this neglection demotivate them?
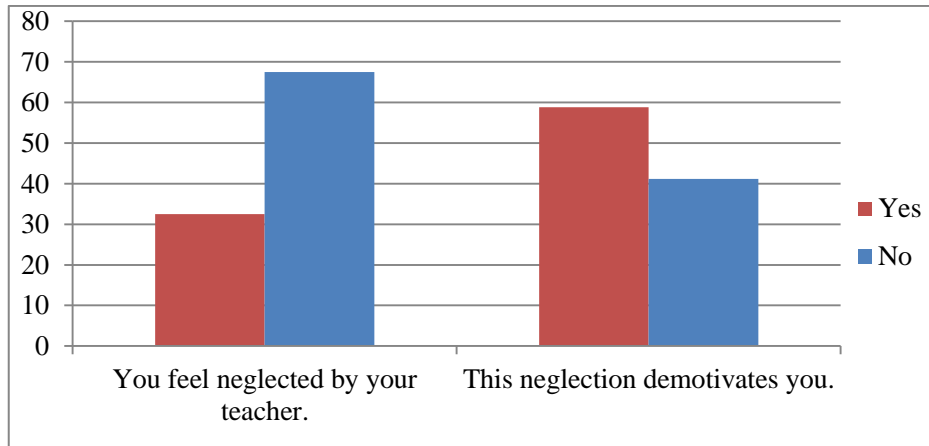
Figure.17. The Impact of Teacher's Neglection on Students' Motivation

Almost all students (67,5%) indicated that they do not feel neglected by their teachers, while 13 (32,5%) of them feel neglected. In addition, the (58,8%) of participants who feel that they are neglected by their teacher replied that this neglection demotivates them, while (41,2%) of them said that it does not demotivate them.

Question 9: Intended to see wether being with peers who have better level decreases other students' motivation. Explain how?
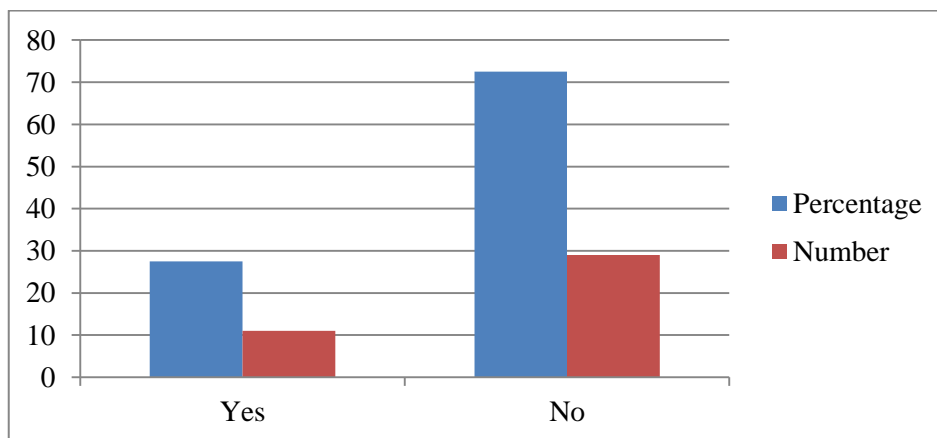
Figure.18. The Effect of Being with Peers who have Better Level on

Demotivating Students

In response to this question, nearly all students 72,5% (29 of them) agree that being with peers who have better level does not decrease their motivation, their responses were similar that on the contrary, being with good learners in the same class increases their self-reliance as they will do more efforts and work harder to be like them. Others, think they are all learning and it does not make any influence on their motivation because that creates a sense of challenge and competition among learners to achieve high grades. However, the others (27,5%) believe that being with peers who have better level than them indeed decreases their motivation because when good students dominate the classroom they make other peers feel frustrated and are not good enough.

Question 10: This question aimed to know to what extent do students agree with the statement claiming that working in groups helps them to develop their level in English?

The results of this question are represented in the following figure:
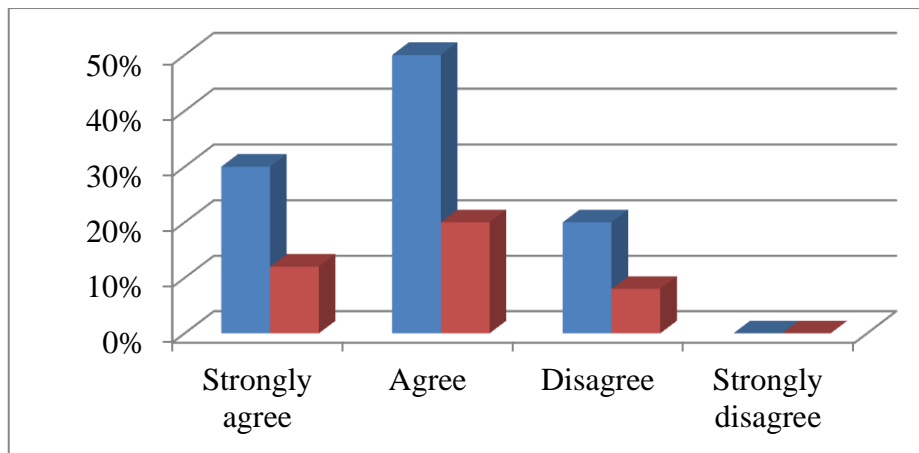
Figure.19. Students' Opinions towards Group Working

As illustrated in the figure above, (30%) of participants strongly agree and almost the half number of students (50%) agree that working in groups can develop their level of English, while (20%) of them disagree with the idea of group working.

Question 11: Asked students if their teacher is aware of the diversity in mixed-ability classes or not. And if no, why do they see so?

The figure below represents the students' answers:
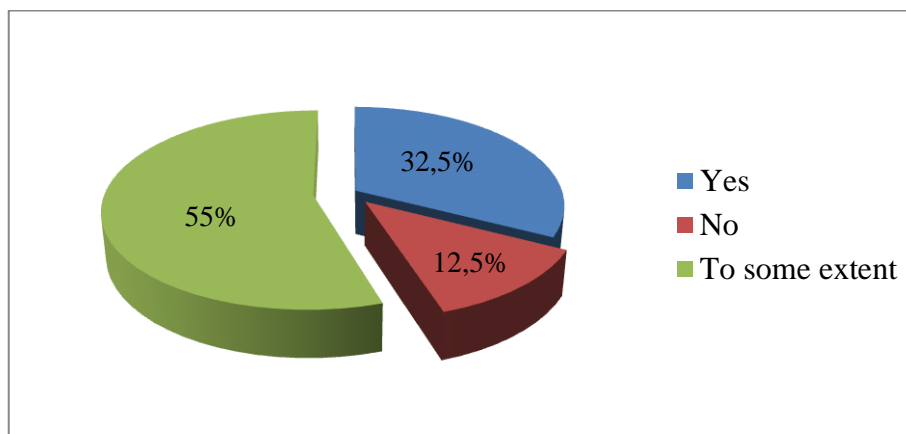
Figure.20. Teacher's Awareness of Students' Diversity

It is clear from the figure's data that most of students (55%) said that their teacher is aware to some extent of the students' differences in mixed-ability classes, (32,5%) of them mentioned that yes their teacher is aware, while the other (12,5%) indicated that their teacher is not aware at all of the diversity in such classes.

For participants whose answers were to some extent or no, they agreed that the students' differences in mixed-ability classes are not taken into account by their teachers. They justified their answers as the following: some of them said that sometimes the teacher explains the lesson briefly which allows only students with high abilities understand and grasp information fast.

Moreover, others claimed that due to the huge number of students in large classes the teachers feel less motivated and they connot ensure comprehension for all learners. In addition to that, teachers are not well prepared with how to cope with different learners' levels and abilities that is why they focus on some students and ignore others, also they lack the ability of stimulating shy students with high capacities. However, few students indicated that even when the teacher takes different students' abilities into consideration, there are learners who do not try to participate in the class and they do not make any effort.

Question 12: In your opinion, what is/are the most challenging aspect(s) that may face you in a mixed-ability class?

The answers of participants to this question are presented in the following table:

Challenging Aspects	**Number**	**Percentage**
Anxiety	7	17,5%
The teacher's unawareness	8	20%
Lack of motivation	10	25%
Lack of self-confidence	4	10%
Shyness	11	27,5%
	40	**100%**

Table.4. Challenging Aspects for Students

According to the results of the table above, it can be said that shyness is the major challenge that most of students are suffer from with (27,5%). In addition, 10 of them (25%) indicated that lack of motivation is the main challenge that they encounter most in the class. Other (20%) of the total number of participants said that the teacher's unawareness and other (17,5%) claimed that anxiety are the factors that challenging them in a mixed-ability class. While just 4 of them said that lack of self-confidence is the challenge that faces them most in the class.

Question 13: In this question, students were asked to identify what motivates them most in classroom to have good results.

To answer this open-ended question, we provided participants with space where they were allowed to express their opinions and insert anything that motivates them in the classroom to achieve good grades. From the participants' responses, there are different aspects which motivate students in the class. It can be noticed that most of students consider the teacher's awareness and good treatment as the main factors that affect their motivation, when the teacher is aware of all his students' needs and work with them without bias, they will be more motivated and involved in the classroom. Besides, other participants indicated that a relaxed classroom is an effective factor which allows them to be comfortable and motivated in the class as well as it reduces their anxiety. Additionally, according to some students, they believe that when there are interesting topics to be taught and when their teacher provides good explanation for all of them, they will understand the lesson well, and as a result they can be motivated to learn and achieve good grades.

III.5. Discussion of Findings

The participants of the study are forty (40) first year students of English at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, twenty-six (26) females and fourteen (14) males. Their age ranged between seventeen (17) and twenty-four (24) years old. The analysis of students' questionnaire revealed that the majority of them are female. In addition, most of them have chosen English as a first choice. Concerning their level, a high number of students indicated that they have a medium level. Although most students said that they participate in the class, but there are who do not. The majority of them mentioned that they do not participate because they feel shy even when they have the right answer.

From the questionnaire results, a remarkable number of students indicated that they are not given individual attention and stated that they feel neglected by their teacher and his focus is only on high achievers, which makes them demotivated and less interested to learn. Apparently, many students indicated that their teachers do not take students' diversity in mixed-ability classes into account, they further mentioned that most of the time, their teachers do not take lower abilities into consideration when explaining the lesson and they give the priority to high achievers only. In addition, the results have shown that students have mentioned certain challenges that face them in a mixed-ability class such as their shyness, others said also that lack of motivation and teachers' unawareness are the main challenges that face them in class. Furthermore, it was obvious that most students are strongly agree and agree that group working is helpful and effective for them to develop their level. As a result, a high number of participants viewed that if their teacher provide them with appropriate activities and treat them equally, their interaction in the class will be enhanced. Thus, it was essential to stress the need for using new strategies in order to establish a good teaching-learning process and make all students involved.

The participant teachers are five (5), three (3) females and two (2) males. Their teaching experience ranged from 5 to more than 10 years in teaching English. Some of them hold a Doctorate degree and most of them a Magister degree. The majority of them (4 teachers) are part-time teachers, while just one is full-time teacher. According to the answers provided in teachers' questionnaire, teachers claimed that low achievers are the ones who dominate the class, whereas a minority of them said that high achievers are dominant in the class. But when it comes to participation, it could be noticed that not all students take part in classroom learning and some students' interaction is limited, if not absent. Teachers can see only high achievers dominante and they practice most in their classes, while others remain silent because of many reasons that prevent them from participation such as their fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, in admitting this, some teachers asserted that sometimes they unconsciously give more importance to excellent learners because are always concentrated with them more than the others, but they usually try to engage and address all of them. In addition, when responding to the question in which teachers were requested to indicate the attitudes of less achievers towards high achievers, the results obtained reveal that low achievers underestimate themselves and feel demotivated when they see only high achievers are participating and interacting in the class. Moreover, according to the questionnaire answers, all the questioned teachers agreed that shyness is the major barrier that their students suffer from, it is considered as the most challenging aspect that can face the students during learning. Approximately, all of the questioned teachers showed that they are encountered by many challenges when dealing with mixed-ability classes, but as teachers it is their role to solve such problems and look for strategies that match all learners' abilities and level. From the main challenges is that they can hardly determine and meet the needs of each student and ensure understanding for all, and here the second hypothesis has been proved. Therefore, both teachers' and students' motivation have a positive influence to acquire the

language in EFL classes, which should be taken into consideration during the process of teaching and learning. As a result, it is worthy to state that teachers can make a balanced classroom by motivating learners and letting them work collaboratively. In addition, teachers should try to stimulate students to participate by creating a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where students can share their ideas and express themselves effectively. Teachers are also demanded to use a variety of teaching strategies in order to let all students be part of the process of learning and give the opportunity to all of them to be more involved which could lead students' learning to success. Thus, the research hypotheses have been confirmed by the questionnaires.

III.6. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the practical part of this research paper. It is concerned with a description of the case study and revealed the data obtained from the analysis of the research instruments (students' and teachers' questionnaires). It also showed the discussion of these findings gathered from the questionnaires. Therefore, the research hypotheses were confirmed by the results of these questionnaires. To conclude, although students differ in their abilities but if a supportive learning atmosphere and a good teacher's treatment were provided, students' level can be improved and they will be more involved. At the end of this chapter, we tried to provide some suggestions to EFL teachers that would help to promote a successful teaching and learning.

Limitations of the Study

Any undertaken research might have limitations. This research paper has also some limitations which can be pointed as follows:

- Due to the current situation of the country, a crucial research tool which is classroom observation was missing, otherwise the study would be more clear and comprehensive.

- Small number of participants is another limitation. It would have had more valuable results if a larger sample of students and teachers had been investigated.

Suggestions and Recommendations for EFL Teachers

➢ Teachers should motivate and inspire learners, accept their mistakes and avoid giving any negative feedback which will decrease their self-confidence, this could be done by encouraging them and reducing their anxiety in order to get all of them involved.

➢ Teachers need to build a positive teacher-learner relationship and avoid comparing high achievers with less achievers students in front of the whole class, this will engage students to be more active in the class.

➢ Activities should be designed according to their abilities without bias. Teachers should simplify tasks and make them more interesting, and presenting them by providing appropriate strategies that suit all learners.

➢ Implement cooperative learning and allow learners to work in groups, this will boost their self-confidence and they will be no longer shy to interact within the class.

➢ Using a multiple of teaching methods will give the teacher the opportunity to identify his students' individual abilities and differences, then he can promote an effective learning for the whole class.

➢ Try to give the opportunity to all students to participate and take part in learning; try to not focus and depend only on high achievers and ignore the others.

➢ Establish a supportive learning environment and avoid assessing students, especially less achievers with humilating ways in front of their peers.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

In EFL classes at Ibn Khaldoun University, students have different abilities and levels which make the teacher unable to cope with this challenge and make all students involved in the class. In this research paper, we tried to demonstrate low achievers' attitudes toward high achievers, how can teachers make a balanced classroom and the main aspects that make the diversity in mixed-ability classes as well as the challenges that both teachers and students face.

This dissertation started with a theoretical overview of the concept mixed-ability classes, as it sheds light on types of students and their characteristics. It revealed also teaching English as a foreign language in such classes by mentioning the challenges that may be encountered by both teachers and students.. Also, to identify the teachers' role when dealing with these classes. By the end of this chapter, we try to provide some solutions to cope with the diversity in this learning atmosphere. Then, in the second chapter, we illustrated the main elements that are needed in EFL classes to build a supportive classroom teaching and learning. Besides, we sought also, to identify the main aspects of a successful classroom atmosphere in order to reach all learners. Therefore, teachers' motivation appears to be one of the main aspects that should be present in any learning classroom and its absence lead students to be less interested. Thus, teachers should know the significant impact of their motivation on students' involvement in the process of learning.

As a research tool, two questionnaires were used one for teachers and the other for students in order to gather the data of this research. Regarding the results of this research paper, most of first year students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret see that their teachers are not aware to some extent of low achievers and their teachers give more importance to excellent

learners since they are dominating the class and always active. Some students with lower abilities feel that they are neglected by their teacher which can decrease their motivation. In addition, the findings of the questionnaire prove that students have many learning problems which cause difficulties in their performance such as their shyness. Moreover, teachers need to take students' different abilities into account in order to enhance their level. The findings reveal that teachers were aware of the need to employ a variety of strategies and methods and as long as they use multiple of teaching methods, they will be able to know their learners' level and needs which can make a progress of the teaching-learning process and overcome the challenges they face in mixed-ability classes. Therefore, the results of the questionnaires confirm the hypotheses which indicated that, low achievers underestimate themselves with high achievers and feel inferior. In addition, if teachers treat students equally without depending on high achievers, nor neglecting low achievers they can establish a balanced classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

The present questionnaire is a data collection tool for a Master Dissertation about "Investigating Teacher's Awareness and his Role in Mixed-Ability Classes". The questions below aim at tackling the issue of having varied students abilities in the same class, challenges they encounter in these classes and how can teachers create a balanced classroom to involve all learners in the learning process. Hence, you are politely invited to answer the following questions either by ticking (x) in the appropriate option, or by filling in the space provided with the required information. Bear in mind that your information will remain anonymous, and used just for gathering the information needed. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

1) Background Information:

1- Gender:

      a. Male   ☐

      b. Female ☐

2- How long have you been teaching English?

      a. Less than 5 years.   ☐

      b. 5-10 years.   ☐

      c. More than 10 years. ☐

3- Your academic qualification:

    a. Magister /M.A   ☐

    b. Doctorate /Ph.D ☐

4- Employed status:

    a. Full time. ☐

    b. Part time. ☐

2) Mixed-ability Classroom Environment:

1- In an EFL class, students differ from one another, what type of student do you see is the most dominating in your classes?

    a. High achievers.   ☐

    b. Low achievers.   ☐

2- In your opinion, what makes a student an excel?

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3- According to you, what prevents some students from not participating in the class?

    a. They are afraid of making mistakes.   ☐

    b. They are afraid of getting negative feedback.   ☐

    c. They are not confident about the answer.   ☐

    d. They feel shy even when they have the correct answer.   ☐

4- Do you find yourself inattentively giving much importance to students who are usually active in the class and neglecting the others? Explain how please.

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……………………………………………………………………………………………

….………………………………………………………………………………………..

5- How can you describe the attitudes of less achievers towards high achievers?

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……………………………………………………………………………………………

6- What is the way you prefer your students to work with in the class?

    a. Working individually. □

    b. Working in groups. □

7- How does students' diversity in such classes influence your choice of teaching method?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

8-   Do you use any specific way in order to improve low achievers' attention?

    a. Yes   □

    b. No   □

If yes, what is it?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………...

9- Mixed-ability classes are challenging, how can you make a balanced classroom?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

10- Put a tick (√) according to your level of (dis)agreement with the following statements :

A. According to you, to what extent does learner's self-confidence help him to be involved in the classroom:

    a. Very much   ☐

    b. To some extent   ☐

    c. Not at all ☐

B. According to your professional experience, does the teacher's motivation have an impact on learners' interaction?

    a. Strongly agree   ☐

    b. Agree   ☐

    c. Disagree ☐

    d. Strongly disagree ☐

C. There are students who do not participate in class but they perform well in written exams.

    a. Strongly agree   ☐

    b. To some extent   ☐

    c. Disagree ☐

11- In mixed-ability classes, what are the challenges that you encounter most and you find

yourself unable to cope with them?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

12- What are the strategies that you think are affective and should be followed to reach all

students in a mixed-ability class?

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…………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your collaboration.

Appendix II

Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

You are kindly invited to be part of our research entitled "Investigating Teacher's Awareness and his Role in Mixed-Ability Classes, case study of first year BMD Students of English at Ibn Khaldoun University - Tiaret". The main aim of this study is to figure out the reasons behind this issue and identifying the challenges faced by both the teacher and the students, to come up with some solutions and techniques that may help dealing with such classes. Thus, your answers are important to the accuracy of our research and your information will remain anonymous. So please, tick the appropriate answer in the gaps provided and give a full statement when it is necessary. Your honnest answers would be appreciated.

N.B: Mixed-ability classes are classes which contain different types of students who have varient levels, abilities, learning speed and learning styles.

1) General Information:

Gender:

Male ☐

Female ☐

Age: …………………………….

2) Mixed-ability Classroom Environment:

1- Was English as a specialty your first choice:

Yes ☐

No ☐

2- How do you rate your level in English:

    a. Low ☐

    b. Medium ☐

    c. High ☐

3- Your marks are usually:

    a. Low marks ☐

    b. Good marks ☐

    c. Excellent marks ☐

4- Do you participate in class?

Yes ☐

No ☐

- If yes, how often do you participate in class:

    a. Rarely ☐

    b. Sometimes ☐

    c. Always ☐

- If no, then what keeps you from participating in class:

    a. You are afraid of making mistakes. ☐

b. You are afraid of getting negative feedback. ☐

c. You are not confident about your answer.   ☐

d. You feel shy even when you have the right answer. ☐

e. Others…………………………………………………

5- Do you get motivated by your teacher (s)?

Yes   ☐

No   ☐

- How often do you get motivated by your teacher (s)?

a. Always   ☐

b. Sometimes ☐

c. Rarely   ☐

d. Never   ☐

6- In your opinion, do you find your teacher(s) aware of students with low achievements?

a. Yes   ☐

b. No   ☐

c. Sometimes ☐

7- Do you think that your teacher (s) is giving much importance to excellent students only?

a. Strongly agree ☐

b. Agree   ☐

      c. Disagree   ☐

      d. Strongly disagree ☐

8- For you, do you feel neglected by your teacher in the classroom?

      Yes   ☐

      No   ☐

   - If yes, does this neglection demotivate you?

      Yes   ☐

      No   ☐

9- Does being with peers who have better level than yours decrease your motivation?

      Yes   ☐

      No   ☐

   - Explain how :

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

10- To which extent do you agree with the statement claiming that working in groups helps you

to develop your level in English:

      a. Strongly agree   ☐

      b. Agree   ☐

a. Disagree ☐

b. Strongly disagree ☐

11- Mixed-ability classes are challenging classes, do you see your teacher aware of such diversity?

Yes ☐

No ☐

To some extent ☐

- If no or to some extent, why do you see so? Provide reasons please.

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12- In your opinion, what do you think is/ are the most challenging aspect (s) that may face you in a mixed ability class?

a. Anxiety. ☐

b. The teacher's unawareness. ☐

c. Lack of motivation. ☐

d. Lack of confidence. ☐

e. Shyness. ☐

f. Other : …………………………………………………………………….

13- What motivates you most in the class to have good results?

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Thank you for your collaboration.

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ملخص

في عملية التدريس والتعلم في الفصول ذات القدرات المختلفةٍ يختلف الطلاب في العديد من الجوانب. في أي فصل دراسي، يواجه الأساتذة العديد من الصعوبات؛ تحديد احتياجات كل طالب وإشراك الجميع داخل الفصل الدراسي يمثل تحديًا حقيقيا لأن الأساتذة قد يجدون أنفسهم يركزون على المتفوقين فقط لأنهم دائمًا ما يكونون نشيطين ويهيمنون على الفصل. ومن ثم، نحاول في هذه الدراسة التحقق من مدى إدراك الأساتذة للتنوع الموجود في الفصول ذات القدرات المختلطة وكيفية التعامل مع هذه المشكلة. ولتنفيذ هذا العمل البحثي و اختبار الفرضيات المطروحة، تم استهداف عينات أربعون طالب من طلاب السنة الأولى للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وخمسة أساتذة في جامعة ابن خلدون بتيارت إعتمادا على استبيانين موجهين لكل من الأساتذة والطلاب. وعليه، فإنه يفحص اتجاهات ذوي التحصيل المنخفض تجاه المتفوقين ودور الأساتذة في إنشاء فصل دراسي متوازن. تكشف النتائج أن الأساتذة غير مدركين إلى حد ما إلى التنوع الموجود في الفصول ذات القدرات المختلطة. أيضًا، تم اقتراح بعض الحلول والاستراتيجيات لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية التي من شأنها مساعدتهم على تعزيز مشاركة الطلاب عند تدريس هذه الفصول وخلق بيئة إيجابية للوصول إليهم جميعًا خاصة أولئك الذين لديهم إنجازات منخفضة في عملية التعلم.

كلمات مفتاحية: فصول مختلطة القدرات، فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ،المتفوقون، ذوي القدرات المنخفضة، عملية التعلم.

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Résumé

Dans le processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage dans les classes à capacités mixtes, les étudiants diffèrent dans de nombreux aspects. Dans n'importe quelle classe EFL, les enseignants sont confrontés à de nombreuses difficultés; identifier les besoins de chaque étudiant et de impliquer tout le monde en classe est vraiment difficile puisque les enseignants peuvent se concentrer sur les élèves les plus performants seulement parce qu'ils sont toujours actifs et dominent la classe. C'est pourquoi, tout au long de cette étude, nous tentons de déterminer dans quelle mesure sont les enseignants conscients de la diversité qui existe dans les classes mixtes et comment faire face à ce problème. Pour mener à bien ce travaille de recherche et tester les hypothèses avancées, des échantillons de quarante étudiants de première année EFL et de cinq enseignants de l'université Ibn Khaldoun de Tiaret ont été ciblée en s'appuyant sur deux questionnaires adressés aux enseignants et aux étudiants. En conséquence, il examine les attitudes des étudiants peu performants envers les étudiants très performants et le rôle de l'enseignant pour établir une classe équilibrée. Les résultats révèlent que les enseignants ne sont pas conscients dans une certaine mesure de la diversité des classes mixtes. De plus, certaines solutions et stratégies sont proposées aux enseignants de l'EFL qui les aideraient à promouvoir la participation des étudiants lorsqu'ils enseignent dans ces classes et à créer un environnement positif pour les atteindre tous, en particulier ceux qui ont de faibles résultats dans le processus d'apprentissage.

Mots clés : Classes mixtes, classes EFL, élèves performants, élèves peu performants processus d'apprentissage