



The effect of gender differences on the EFL learners' frequency and quality of group work contributions in speaking sessions: Case of Bejaia, Khenchela and Oued Souf Universities

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Abstract:

The present research attempts to investigate the effect of gender disparities on learning in three different University contexts at three different regions in terms of social and cultural patterns: northeast (University of Bejaia), internal eastern region (University of Khenchela) and southeast (University of Oued Souf). To do so, we have focused on a mixed research methodology laying importance on questionnaires, pre-observation and observation variations to collect our preliminary data. The results show that students (Bejaia and Khenchela) are better achievers, and the frequency of contributions within groups is relatively acceptable when teachers group them with mixed-gender mates. As opposed to learners at the University of Oued Souf, they exhibit an evident reluctance and apprehension to work in mixed groups; they achieve higher speaking potentials with more frequent contributions when they work with matched-gender mates.

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1. Introduction

The American industrialist Henry Ford once said, "coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success". In this respect and according to this investigative study, many things can be attained by having EFL students work together as well. Studies conducted by Harmer (1991); Foster et al. (2000); Alfares (2017); Richards (2008) have confirmed that students provided with group work tasks in speaking sessions demonstrate better contributions and higher achievements in speaking. Correspondingly, the teacher should scrutinise many essential aspects while designing group work tasks like the group composition; he should think of who is to be grouped with whom. In the present research; then, we have studied the aspect of gender not merely because it is a potent factor in group work's involvement but also due to the common teachers' biasing and the learners' stereotyping (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Grossman & Grossman, 1994).

For so long, the notions of gender and group work have been under research. Many scholars have tried to figure out possible effects on the learners' outcomes in the speaking sessions as linked to gender differences within groups. In fact, no exact agreement was provided on these effects and how they influence interactions

and learning. Some researchers as Riordan, Cipriani-Sklar, as cited in Wilson et al. (2013) have argued that single-gender grouping was better and more efficient since girls' self-concept and confidence in cognitive domains were found in a female-only environment. Additionally, Milliken and Martins; Robbins and Fredendall (as cited in Takeda & Homberg, 2014) respectively stated that "diversity in observable attributes such as race, ethnic background, nationality, gender and age have prevented smooth group integration in team work process", and that "homogeneity (in terms of gender) is positively related to team success and motivation" (p. 08). However, other research studies found out that a mixed-gender environment was more effective and constructive, arguing that learning groups worked best when varied characteristics (achievements, experiences, gender-mix, ethnic and linguistic mix and so on) occurred, and that mixed-gender groups helped in promoting diversity and gender equality (Stewart, 2014), and positively affected worker morale as well (Jehn et al. 1999).

According to the aforementioned research studies, it is difficult to decide which type of grouping arrangement learners require for active interaction, understanding and performance in the speaking task, precisely within an exploratory talk class atmosphere. Purposefully, Kacha 2019

carried out a research to consider one of the suggested studies in relation to the Algerian context, case of the Khenchela University.

Kacha (2019) basically pointed out that the difference in gender caused different educational experiences and, thus, affected the amount as well as the quality of contributions in group work classroom tasks. The researcher also suggested that mixed-gender groups have had positive effects on learning. Therefore, when learners were grouped with mixed-gender partners, they contributed, performed and shared more than when they were with the same-gender partners. Interestingly, these results could be pertinent in other teaching and learning contexts and, thus, generalized in other than the department of English at the Khenchela University. At this level, we should consider the social, cultural and regional common aspects of the neighbouring Universities since they share similar points of view related to gender differences. These differences were relatively overemphasised in internal regions like Tebessa, Batna and Oum El Bouaghi. Consequently, the findings could be generalised to second year students at the Universities of the stated regions, but no information about other regions and universities was practically and accurately rendered.

Research Questions

Regarding these research conclusions as well as the opposing research studies stated before, we have been faced with different research questions which are practically complementary and serve as a continuation to Kacha's investigation (2019):

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

Obviously, not all of the Algerian Universities can be separately searched. Therefore, we have based the research at hand on studying comparatively the results collected from three different Universities: the University of Bejaia (Northeastern region), the University of Khenchela (Internal eastern region), and the University of Oued Souf (Southeastern region).

This vertical geographical choice of Universities joins three different contexts with different regional and cultural patterns. Here, it is noteworthy that Algeria is replete with diverse regional specificities and a multidimensional cultural heritage. This prompts divergence in attitudes, acting and reacting in different fields and contexts, and education is not an

exception (Sadouki, 2018). Therefore, we have been faced with further sub- research questions:

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

Based on the previous research studies (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Lakoff, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987; McConnel-Ginnet et al., 1980; Holmes, 2013), it is also worth mentioning that males are more dominant and assertive when they interact with opposite-gender partners. They also use more cognitive processes and share more rational ideas, unlike women who are more emotional and polite. This actually causes different educational experiences and affects the amount and the quality of the interactional performances in classroom group work tasks (Eckert & McConell-Ginet, 2013). Additionally, Kacha's research revealed that mixed-gender groups have positive effects on learning; when learners are grouped with mixed-gender partners, they would

contribute, perform and share more than when they are with the same-gender partners.

Hypotheses

The underlined findings have been exclusively tested on second year students at the department of English, University of Khenchela. This leads us to hypothesize that:

- The effect of gender disparities differs according to the university context learners are enrolled in.
- This difference is related to students' social and cultural patterns in the regions they live in.
- Students of English at the University of Bejaia contribute, perform and share more when grouped with mixed-gender partners. Whereas, learners at the University of Oued Souf are better achievers and more task performers when they are grouped with matched-gender peers.

Aim of the Study

In order to answer the above research questions and confirm or refute the hypotheses set, we need to determine a clear and attainable aim of the study. The main concern of this research, then, is to investigate the effect of gender on the learning process. It attempts to find out if gender differences (mainly males'

assertiveness, dominance, interruptions, arguing, rational way of thinking and females' politeness, gossiping and emotional way of thinking) affect learning within the exploratory talk classroom ambience in three different Algerian Universities located in three different regions: north east (University of Bejaia), internal eastern region (University of Khenchela) and south-east (University of Oued Souf). Through this research, a comparative study is conducted to highlight the differences and the similarities the students display during group work classroom tasks. We also try to figure out if the cultural and the social differences in these three regions intervene in learning, particularly the learners' choices, preferences, awareness and apprehension.

As a matter of fact, we believe that this work will provide EFL teachers in different parts of the country with evidence for group work task implementation to enhance the learners' contributions' frequency and quality. It also attempts to elucidate that Algeria is culturally and socially affluent and that the differences in cultural and social aspects affect gender apprehension and stereotyping. This, in turn, certainly affects learning contributions and outcomes in group work tasks when the exploratory talk principles are performed.

2. Research Procedure and Methodology

2.1 Target Population

To reach the aims determined, the researcher should primarily limit the scope of the population being under research. Therefore, we attempt to generalise the findings on the second year students at the Universities of Khenchela, Bejaia and Oued Souf. The targeted students, according to the structured higher education syllabus, have not only reached the same level of difficulty but have also been exposed to the same input and asked to realize the same output. This category of learners is selected because of two main reasons: linguistic/ language proficiency and psychological attributes. The sample group, then, has been further selected from the target population and members of the group sample were randomly chosen so as to ensure that participants were not biased.

2.2 Overview of the Method

As aforesaid, this study aims at investigating the effect of students' gender differences on the frequency and the quality of their contributions in group work tasks in which the exploratory talk principles are followed. To do so, we have guided our research on a mixed-method approach through assembling and equally prioritizing independent forms of data collection as they complement each other to answer the research questions. Therefore, data collection, interpretation and analysis were made in a convergent

parallel design. In this respect, initial data from the questionnaires results are helpful; yet, they should be further explained and elaborated through an observation stage. This variety of opinions would ensure more trustworthiness and clarity in attaining the research aim and answering its questions.

It is also important to mention that data collection tools suggested in this investigation have been implemented in the three different Universities, and that these data have been analyzed and interpreted to get significant and useful results for the three contexts already selected. Subsequently, a comparative study has been established to detect any similarities and/or differences between the three contexts, and thus, highlight any regional characteristics and specificities that can help Algerian EFL teachers choose the appropriate alternatives while designing, providing or arranging group work tasks during speaking sessions.

2.3 Method Data collection instruments

The research questions and the objectives generally determine the method of investigation needed to carry out. Similarly, the choice of the method also demonstrates the tools to be used for data collection. Hence, a variety of tools have been used according to the method suggested before; the mixed method. In this regard, the present study has involved three major tools of investigation: the

questionnaires (quantitative method), the observation (qualitative method) and the tasks provided to students (qualitative method).

2.3.1 Questionnaires

The first method used to achieve the research aim is the questionnaire: one was administered to teachers and the other one to students at three different Universities (Bejaia, Khenchela, and Oued Souf). This instrument interestingly provides a larger number of participants and opinions presented in numbers. Although they might not be enough to validate or refute the hypothesis, they would be interpreted into useful pieces of information.

Through administering the questionnaires, we basically need to gather information about the actual classroom circumstances. They also attempt to give insight into the overall learning/teaching situations; the teachers' practices as well as the students' reactions and performances. The first questionnaire solely reports the preferences and the degree of awareness of one hundred and fifty students (150) equally belonging to the three abovementioned Universities (see Appendix 05). The researcher tried to feature the learners' inclinations and suggestions that could enhance/hinder their learning during group work tasks. Contrastively, she also provided data about the learners' willingness and

reluctance towards some classroom activities. The second questionnaire was exclusively administered to teachers (see Appendix 06). It gave valuable data about the teaching practices, mainly in the speaking sessions when group work tasks were designed. This questionnaire has been administered to ten (10) teachers at the three Universities. They were aware of the procedure and kindly asked to fill in the questionnaire anonymously so as to make them feel more comfortable when answering the different questions. Besides, they have also been informed that their answers are going to be treated confidentially and purposefully used for the research.

2.3.2 Pre-Observation

Group work task seems easy to implement and apply in the speaking sessions. Yet, most researchers have confirmed its complexity for both teachers and learners (Burke, 2011; Stewart, 2014). Many aspects should inevitably be taken into account before the teacher decides to carry out his lesson or part of it using group work activities. Some of these points could be summarized under size matters (large, small groups, exact number of group members), composition (ability grouping, gender consideration), and objective of the task (by the end of the task, learners will be able to...), etc (Harmer, 2010; Kutnick as cited in Blatchford et al.

2001). In addition to these, learners must be acquainted enough with several skills and tactics used to promote collaboration and improve their outcomes as a group. In the undertaking, a pre-observation phase has been separately administered during which some tasks importantly focalize on these skills and tactics. The latter includes merely listening to others without interrupting their flow of thought, exchanging and respecting ideas as well as rationally challenging them. Besides, students should also be thoughtful about the group decision making process. In fact, these tactics have been chosen among many others to match the exploratory talk principles preserved in this work. These should definitely be taught implicitly through time throughout the different tasks given to students from the beginning of the year (pre-observation). In short, group work is a complex task that requires teachers'/learners' awareness and needs preparation and planning so as to increase its efficiency and enhance collaborative learning.

Consequently, the researcher, as she plays the role of the teacher, needs to carry out some group work activities in different sessions and related to different topics during a three-month period. This step is a necessary part of the research to make sure all learners are aware of the skills mentioned previously, and that they share more or less the same knowledge about

how group work is supposed to proceed. Furthermore, these pre-observational tasks, as proposed by Lehfeldt (nd), serve as icebreakers in the sense that students get accustomed to working in opposite gender partnerships; to minimize male and female apprehension. In addition to this, they get adapted to the teacher's closeness to each group separately.

In the very first tasks, the researcher gives students the freedom to group themselves. Many remarks have been differently underlined in the three University contexts. Surprisingly, the students' choice of arrangement differs from one University to another. On the one hand, the majority of learners relatively select same-gender partners at the University of Khenchela and Oued Souf. Most of these group compositions are according to friendship grouping which confirms to a large extent the questionnaires' findings. This type of grouping might be beneficial in some activities, but it might also be an obstacle to presenting a lesson or do an activity; friends often gather to tell stories and gossip instead of performing tasks. Consequently, the researcher decided to group the students by herself (variety between mixed-gender and single-gender group arrangements) so as to avoid behavioral troubles and to reduce their apprehension to work with different and opposite-sex partners too. On the other hand, most students at the University of Bejaia show approval towards working

with opposite gender partners; this affirms that they have much less apprehension and reluctance as compared to the students belonging to the contexts stated above.

During the pre-observation phase also, the researcher kept walking around; sometimes in the front, at the back, between the groups or even involved with group members in order to get them used to her presence and her movement around. Consequently, they become more comfortable while doing the subsequent tasks.

2.3.3 Observation

The qualitative method has also been administered. It is indispensable for the validity and the authenticity of the findings since it provides the researcher with real-life data occurring in a real setting. In this respect, the observation phase has been conducted over a six-month period within the classroom borders. During this period, the researcher has played the role of the teacher and observed both events and behaviors. On the one hand, the researcher took notes about the events occurring while the task was being performed as far as the amount and the frequency of the students' contributions were concerned. On the other hand, the researcher also foregrounded their behaviors while interacting, particularly males' dominance, assertiveness and

rational/emotional thinking as well as females gossiping and politeness.

At this level, two groups in each of the three aforementioned Universities have been under-researched. These groups have been further divided into other sub-groups to perform the designed group work tasks. While arranging students, it was not feasible to get an approximate number of matched-gender and mixed-gender groupings; in almost all of the Algerian Universities, female students greatly outnumber their male peers in the

departments of English. Consequently, we have been compelled to consider only an approximate number of single-gender and mixed-gender groupings. In other words, we arranged all of the students belonging to the same class into four-student sub-groups. All of them have been actually observed, but only an equal number of single-gender and mixed-gender groups have been noted down and reported. This, will help to get enough data and equal opportunity for both types of arrangements. Table 1 explains how students have been grouped:

Table 1. Group work arrangement during the observation phase

Observed and reported													
Univs	University of Bejaia				University of Khenchela				University of Oued Souf				
Groups	G: 01		G: 02		G: 01		G: 02		G: 01		G: 02		
Total number	25		26		30		29		25		24		
Group Arrangement	Sing-gender groups		Mixed-gender groups		Sing-gender groups		Mixed-gender groups		Sing-gender groups		Mixed-gender groups		
	MM	FF	MF	MF	MM	FF	MF	MF	MM	FF	MF	MF	
Arranged, observed but not reported													
Number	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	00	09	00	10	01	14	01	13	00	09	00	08	

During the Oral Expression class, teachers largely encourage the 'Exploratory Talk atmosphere wherein a set of conditions are maintained. These conditions considerably help promote both the teachers' and the students' quality of talk and interactions (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In this study, the

researcher focuses only on three conditions investigated during six months Oral Expression sessions. Each couple of months is devoted to observe events and behaviors under one specific condition including the following:

- The group seeks agreement for joint decisions;
- Every one listens actively;
- Ideas may be challenged and logical reasons are given for challenges.

Two main tasks matching the first Exploratory talk principle have been respectively performed during the first two months at the Universities of Bejaia, khenchela and Oued Souf. At this level, the researcher (playing the role of the teacher) explained the instructions and gave the students time to work, share, and contribute as members of the same group. During this period, the participants were observed, and their behaviors were recorded. While they discussed on the task, the researcher focused on the existence of politeness, arguing, gossiping, dominance, assertiveness and rational/emotional thinking exhibited by both genders. As the students finished their in-group discussions, they were asked to share with the whole class their achieved activity. Again, the researcher observed the students' frequency of contributions; checked out if they took part as active participants. In other words, she investigated if the gender differences stated above hindered students' learning as a group and prevented them from fulfilling the first Exploratory Talk principle.

In the second and third couple of months, the second and the third Exploratory Talk' conditions were respectively considered. During these phases too, the researcher kept the same group and sub-group arrangements but gave different tasks that served to investigate the two other Exploratory Talk' conditions; mainly two group work tasks which were provided in each observation period in the three Universities.

2.3.4 Tasks

In this research, the tasks have been in a form of group work activities. Group work is undoubtedly an important activity that teachers may use in the speaking class to maximize and enrich the learners' interactions since the target language exposure and exchange is very limited, most of the time absent, outside the classroom. Additionally, group work activities are of much importance in creating and maintaining the exploratory talk ambience. In the present investigation, some of these tasks, in fact, have been either adapted or adopted from researchers' suggestions (e. g. the balloon debate by Harmer) or online resources (decision-making activities), and some others have been designed by the researcher herself (storytelling and problematic situations).

In the first task, students were provided with an envelope including the steps of the decision making process clipped apart

inside (see Appendix 01). Groups had to put the slips in the correct order of the decision making process as a reinforcement of what they had learned in the pre-observation period. After that, a story manifesting Dani's weight loss plan and trouble she has encountered, as she was invited to a party and urged to eat unhealthy food, has been shared. Then, the teacher passed out a 'choice card' to each group of students encompassing a comprehensive list of alternatives that Dani might decide to do under her friends' pressure to eat unhealthy food. As a group, learners should put themselves in Dani's shoes and choose for her the decision they agreed to be mostly appropriate. After that, they were asked to cooperate so as to demonstrate and discuss advantages and disadvantages of the selected action.

The second task required the students to make a group decision about a specific situation (see Appendix 02). The situation explained a critical and imaginary story about a surgeon at a well-known hospital. The hospital committee and 'the students' must take a very important decision. Seven patients needed heart transplant and there was only one heart donor. All the patients were physically able to receive that heart donour. All of them had compatible tissue and blood typing. As a group, which patient would they choose to transplant the heart to?"

In the third task, then, students were given slips of papers picturing faces (see Appendix 04). Each face showed up specific mood or emotional situation. Then, individual learners in each group were instructed to choose randomly a slip of paper, and tell a story/anecdote in relation to the mood or emotion expressed on the face in the paper. Learners could also express their feelings and emotions towards a person, a place, an object as far as the pictured face was concerned. While students were actively working on the task, the teacher observed the participants to detect whether they listened to their peers attentively, or kept interrupting them; the focus was mainly on male's politeness, and their effect in fulfilling the second condition of the exploratory talk.

In the fourth task, one learner was required to start telling a story which was not known (created by group members) to his mates (see Appendix 03). Then, each and every time a member of the group continued telling his peers part of it, the others kept listening and predicting what would come next in order to take turn in narrating the story's events until time allocated was over (three minutes for each short story). Then, another student in each group started again another created story, and the others still kept listening and predicting to add events until the second three minutes finished. The same was done every three minutes till the end of the instruction. After that, group members

were asked to summarise and link their four stories' events in front of the whole class so as to get a more complex set of events and a more complete story. In this activity, the teacher observed and checked whether gender differences (politeness and interruptions) affected learners' interactional behaviors, particularly listening to others when they produced and performed the language orally. The focus was on listening or interrupting the mates' storytelling by each group member.

In the fifth task, the teacher gave the students the balloon debate (suggested by Harmer). Students imagined themselves they were in a damaged basket of a balloon which was losing air. Only one of them could stay and survive, and others had to jump out. Individual students representing famous characters and influential figures in society (e. g. Napoleon, Gandhi, Cleopatra), or needed professions (e. g. teacher, doctor, lawyer) had to argue why they should be allowed to stay in the balloon and survive.

In the last task, the teacher gave different problematic situations and asked students to think of the provided dilemmas and to find out persuasive reasons to convince others of their points of view.

3. Findings

3.1 Findings of the Questionnaires

Since the research tools have been conducted in three different Universities, the obtained results evidently diverged according to the context. Therefore, we could suggest that most second year students at the University of Khenchela prefer single-gender grouping. Similarly, students who contributed to filling the questionnaire from the University of Oued Souf have shown clear reluctance to work with opposite-gender partners. In both contexts, learners felt more motivated to work with the same-gender partners and believed that this type of group was more helpful in achieving the task objectives. However, this is not the case at the University of Bejaia. Participants revealed more tolerance as well as willingness to work in mixed-gender groups. They believed that their learning would be enriched and more varied when group members are different in terms of number and gender.

In the three University contexts, the teachers' answers agreed with what has been reported from different literature like the necessity to vary the tasks, consider the characteristics of speaking, and understand the obstacles usually faced by teachers in the speaking session, and so on. All teachers also consented to what have been determined during the pre-observation (group and topic

variation, group size). In contrast, data gathered from teachers at the University of Khenchela and Oued Souf supported the learners' answers and claims. An important number of teachers at these Universities preferred to arrange their students in a single-gender type of grouping. They thought this type of group division might keep students motivated and higher task achievers since they do not feel shy or inhibited by other opposite-gender group members. Thus, these findings refute the hypothesis assumed at the beginning of this investigation. However, teachers at the University of Bejaia have a different stand and attitude at this level. They reckon that mixed-gender groups positively affect learning, and when learners are grouped with mixed-gender partners, they will probably contribute, perform and share more than when they are with the same-gender partners. Regarding these divergent perspectives and frames, there is an urge to conduct a qualitative method of investigation to ensure the validity of these findings or the preset hypothesis in order to know which type of grouping is more beneficial to boost the students' contributions in group work tasks.

3.2 Findings of the Observation

From the observation phase we have conducted during six months in three different Universities situated in three different regions in Algeria, the

researcher could highlight several remarks. These remarks mainly focused on gender differences and the frequency of their occurrence to confirm their existence as well as their impact on learning. In order to display this frequency, observation checklist tables have been provided. The top of the table exposed the different gender disparities emphasized during the observation phase. The numbers on the left side refer to the periods during the group interactions (e.g. 30 minutes/5 minutes= 6 periods for different instructions, for example), while the ticks represent the existence of the behavior being observed during that period. This is illustrated in the Table 2.

From all of the considered data and remarks during the observation phase right from its beginning in three different regions, it is important to note down that:

- Whenever dominant and interruptive behaviors increasingly exist, quarrels and struggles occur.
- Whenever gossiping exists, the deviation from the task objective and the inadequate time management are inevitable.
- Assertiveness is more noticed in groups to which males belong at the University of Khenchela and Oued Souf as well.

- Emotional thinking is more provided by female participants in all of the three contexts.
- Logical reasoning and challenging are more provided by male participants in the three Universities.
- Female politeness always softens the sharpness of the interaction.

We also noted that gender was a crucial factor in the EFL classroom, particularly in group work tasks during the speaking sessions. At the University of Bejaia, all

students reflected a high willingness to work with different gender partners. They theoretically claimed that opposite in-group gender brought out variety and richness of learning. This has been practically confirmed by the observation findings as they achieved their aims with noticeable gender equity and almost no gender conflicts or anxiety.

Table 2. An example of the observation checklist table

Periods	Sub-groups	Interruption		Assertiveness		Dominance		Arguing				Politeness		Gossiping		Emotional Thinking		
		G: 01	G: 02	G: 01	G: 02	G: 01	G: 02	Reasoning		Quarrelling		G: 01	G: 02	G: 01	G: 02	G: 01	G: 02	
								G: 01	G: 02	G: 01	G: 02							
1 st period	1 st five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓					
		FFG	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓				
		M=FG	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓				
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				
2 nd period	2 nd five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓					
		FFG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓				
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
3 rd period	3 rd five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
		FFG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
4 th period	5 th five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓				✓	✓
		FFG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
4 th period	6 th five mnts	MMG	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		FFG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M=FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
		M>FG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓

At the University of Khenchela, it was not typically the same. Although students' preferences and awareness from the questionnaire findings confirm that learners are more motivated and willing to work in single-gender groups, data from

the observation-based method emphasized that males and females should work together. That is to say, it is more beneficial to group them with mixed-gender partners as it helps in creating a satisfying atmosphere with

more affluent, frequent and elaborated contributions, and thus, lifting the members' achievement of the task objective. Eventually, findings from the University of Oued Souf definitely contrast what have been reached at the Universities already mentioned. Surprisingly, students exhibited apprehension towards working with opposite gender partners during all of the tasks performed during the observation phase. In this context, learners at the University of Oued Souf are better achievers and more task performers when they are grouped with matched-gender peers.

4. CONCLUSION

Gender is considered an influential social and cultural element that can affect achievements and learning. In the light of this warrant, we have conducted the exploration at hand. It attempted to investigate the effect of gender on the learning process mainly in the speaking sessions. This has studied whether gender differences could affect learning within the exploratory talk classroom ambience in three different Algerian Universities of the aforementioned three different regions. In this regard, a comparative study was conducted to accentuate the differences and the similarities the students exhibit during group work classroom tasks. We also tried to determine if the cultural and the

social/regional differences in these three regions intervene in learning, particularly the learners' choices, preferences, awareness and apprehension.

The researcher, consequently, intended to provide EFL teachers in different parts of the country with a meaningful demonstration of group work tasks implementation to enhance the frequency and quality of the learners' contributions and interactions. Additionally, the investigation also tried to explain and underline the fact that Algeria is culturally and socially rich and that the differences in cultural and social aspects affect gender apprehension and stereotyping. This, obviously, affects the learning process and outcomes in group work tasks when the exploratory talk principles are worked out.

Results apparently show that students (Bejaia and Khenchela) are better achievers when teachers group them with mixed-gender mates. The quality of their contributions is more varied; emotional and rational ideas are provided, and ideas are challenged. Additionally, the frequency of group contributions is relatively acceptable though it may differ from one group to another and from one task to another. Although girls avoid face threatening acts, they are able to take part in the interactions and gain turns after being interrupted. As opposed to learners at the University of Oued Souf, they are

reluctant to work in mixed groups; they achieve higher with more frequent contributions when they work with matched-gender mates.

At this level, it is significant to mention that the difference in students' awareness, practices, interactions and performances in the three different Universities is explained by the diversity of the cultural patterns and the social fabric in Algeria. As these differences increase; actions, reactions, apprehension or willingness differ. Importantly, teachers in Algeria should be aware of these variations and regional specificities as they help them know more their students, their needs, preferences, and fears. Therefore, they can bridge the needs gap with the most flawless and constructive manner.

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6. Appendices

Appendix 01: Dani's Story

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

The choice card: Dani may:

- Say 'No thanks', eat nothing, stay strong.
- It's only one time, what damage could it do?
- Say 'maybe later I'll eat...not hungry right now'.
- Say YES, but only eat little portions of healthy foods and nibble.
- Say YES, eat whatever looks good.
- Storm out of party telling friends if they really cared they wouldn't pressure and they would be more understanding.
- Say yes to the food and run 5 miles on the treadmill before bed.
- Eat any food you want tonight but skip all meals the next day.
- Tell friends you already ate (even if you haven't).
- Make a big scene to let everyone know you're on a diet.

Appendix 02: The Patient Waiting List

- 50 year old male: a scientist, important research studies, unmarried.
- 12 year old female: orphan, poor, and blind.
- 35 year old male: from different origins, doctor, at the height of his career, 2 children.
- 80 year old female: have severe diabetes and blood pressure, 4 married children, 10 grandchildren.

- 30 year old female: married, 6 months pregnant.
- 40 year old male: Imam, married, 4 young children.
- 19 year old female: shopkeeper, secondary school dropout, supports/cares for a brother who is severely disabled.

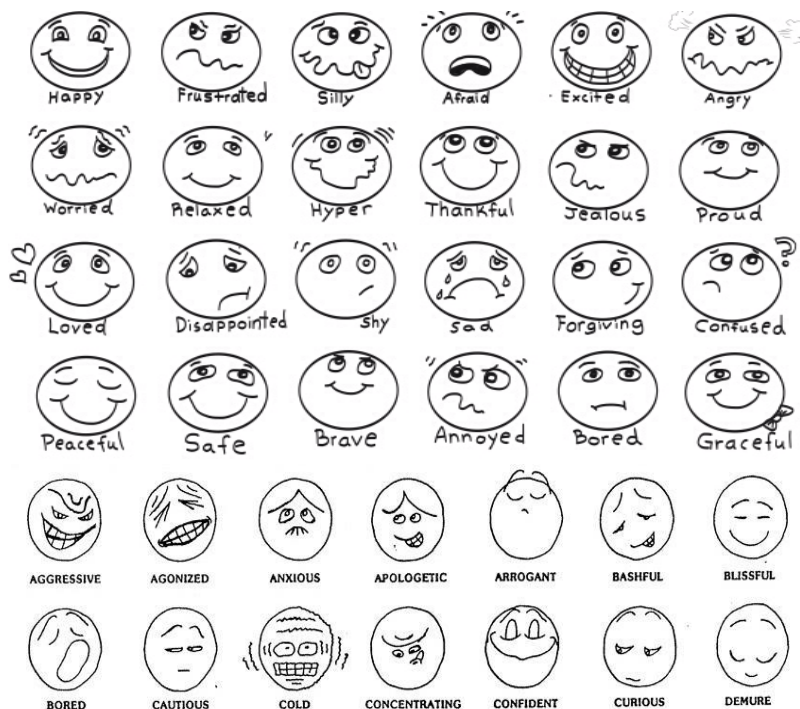
Appendix 03: The problematic situations

- **Situation 01:** "Your friend lost interest in school and her grades are suffering. As a result, she will be repeating the year. She decided to quit and work as a waitress to support herself. She says that she does not need to go to school." Compose a logical argument to convince her stay in school showing the benefits she can make.
- **Situation 02:** "Your father was considering a job in Oran. If he takes the job, this means that your family had to relocate soon. For you, this means adapting to a new town, a new school, and new friends. Your parents solicited you in making decision about the situation." Compose logical arguments to support either moving or staying where you are.
- **Situation 03:** "Someone has stolen a precious object from a down town shop. After interrogating the shopkeeper, he declared that you were in the shop during the moment of theft and the accusation was directed towards you." Imagine yourself being interrogated by police officers. Find out convincing arguments with proofs to claim your innocence.
- **Situation 04:** "You are an employee in a new cosmetics' brand company. Your job is to convince people to buy and try your products." Give possible arguments to make people appreciate and buy the products.

Appendix 04: Slips of Papers Picturing Faces

These slips of faces give ideas about different emotions and moods. In relation to these

pictures, students were required to tell stories and anecdotes.



Appendix 05: The Learners' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the learners' preferences and suggestions in the speaking class wherein the exploratory talk is respected. The researcher tries to check the learners' awareness, willingness and reluctance towards some classroom actions. You are kindly invited to answer the questions objectively taking into account that your answers will be treated confidentially.

Section One: The Target Language Skills and the Learners' Reactions.

- Which of the following skills is difficult for you? Please, classify them according to their level of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficulty	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

- What is the language skill you prefer most?
 a. Listening b. Speaking c. Reading d. Writing
- Justify your choice.
- What are the difficulties that you usually face in the speaking sessions?

- Do you think that the speaking skill is: (put a cross by the most appropriate answer).
 a. Extremely important in TL learning b. Important in TL learning c. Not really important in TL learning.
- What are the suggestions that teachers may consider in order to make the speaking session as successful as possible?

Section Two: Class Management and types of work

7. Classify the following activities according to your preferences: (use numbers in front of each alternative 1, 2, 3).
 - a. Individual work activities
 - b. Pair work activities
 - c. Group work activities.
8. Justify your choice.
9. In case of group work activities, do you like:
 - a. To be grouped by the teacher? Or
 - b. Choosing your partners?
10. Justify your answer.
11. If the teacher is the one who groups the students, what is **the aspect** that he/she should **mostly** consider while grouping? (put a cross in front of the aspect that you choose):
 - a. Gender of the learners in the group (males, females).
 - b. Abilities of the learners (high achievers, low achievers).
 - c. Origins of the learners (social, cultural, regional).
 - d. Personalities of the learners (extroverts, introverts, etc).
 - e. None.
12. If you have chosen 'e', suggest others:

Section Three: gender Differences and Classroom Work in the Speaking Session

13. If gender is to be regarded, what type of arrangement do you think is more beneficial to better learning?
 - a. Mixed-gender groups or
 - b. Single-gender groups.
14. Give possible reasons.

.....

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

 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
15. Is this effect:
 - a. Positive or b. Negative.
16. Why do you they think they affect learning?
 - a. Single-gender groups:
 - b. Mixed-gender groups.....

Thank you for your contribution

Appendix 06: The Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the current teaching situation in the speaking sessions. The researcher tries to gather necessary data about the teachers' practices when they teach the speaking skill in order to reinforce the research assumptions. Additionally, it serves as a continuation to the current learning situation deduced from the learners' questionnaire findings. You are kindly invited to answer the questions objectively taking into account that your answers will be treated confidentially.

- o In multiple choice questions; please, put a cross by the right choice

Section One: The Target Language Skills and the Teachers' reactions

1. As a teacher, which of the following skills you find difficult to teach. Classify them according to their level of difficulty.

	Very easy	Easy	Difficulty	Very difficult
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				

2. What are the characteristics that make the speaking session successful?

3. What is/are the problem/s that mostly challenge/s your speaking sessions?
 - a. The learners' level of language proficiency.
 - b. The learners' inhibitions.
 - c. The mother tongue use among learners.
 - d. The lack of motivation and the low participation.
 - e. The shortage of ideas in specific topics.
 - f. Others.
4. If you are faced with other problems, please state them.
5. Teachers usually use a variety of classroom activities in the speaking session (e. g. storytelling and jigsaw); please, give some examples of speaking activities you have already provided your students with.

Section Two: Classroom Management and Types of Grouping

6. In the speaking sessions, do you prefer to arrange your students:
 - a. In groups? b. In pairs? c. Individuals?
7. Please, justify your answer.
If you use group work tasks, do you prefer:
 - a. Small groups Or b. Large groups
8. Please, justify your answer.
9. These groups are generally arranged by:
 - a. The teacher himself. Or b. The students.
10. Justify your answer.

Section Three: Gender and Classroom Work

11. In case your students choose their partners, do they generally prefer:
 - a. Single-gender partners?
 - b. Mixed-gender partners? Or
 - c. Friends regardless their gender?
12. Which type of group arrangement enhances the learners contributions:
 - a. Single-gender groups? Or b. Mixed-gender groups?
13. Please, explain.
If you arrange your students in single-gender groups, do you give equal opportunities to learners' participations from opposite gender groups?
 - a. Yes. b. No.
14. Please, explain.

Thank you for your contribution