# The Role of Learner-Learner Interaction in Enhancing the Speaking Fluency: The Case of English Foreign Language Third Year Students and Teachers at Setif 2 University, Algeria

# دور التفاعل بين المتعلمين في طلاقة التحدث عند طلاب اللغة الإنـجليزية: حالة طلاب اللغة الإنـجليزية والمدرسين في جامعة سطيف 2، الجزائر

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**Article info:**

**Abstract**

The current research under scrutiny attempts to explore the opinions of Third Year Oral Expression teachers and students of English as a foreign language towards the role of learner-learner interaction on the students' speaking fluency at Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE Setif 2 University, Algeria. This study adopts the mixed method approach, using two instruments. First, a questionnaire is conducted with 60 students out of 284 students, who have been selected randomly. Second, an interview is conducted with five Oral expression teachers. The findings revealed that both of the samples hold favorable opinions towards learner-learner interaction strategy. Moreover, the results have shown that both of the teachers and students have convergent attitudes towards the role of learner-learner interaction on improving the students' speaking fluency. The pedagogical implications and recommendations suggest the necessity for more practice, training and research to be allocated to the interaction strategy among the students.

**ملخص**

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى استكشاف آراء معلمي التعبير الشفهي في السنة الثالثة في قسم اللغة الانجليزية و كذا طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في نفس القسم حول الدور الذي يلعبه تفاعل المتعلم-المتعلم في طلاقة التحدث لدى الطلاب في جامعة محمد لمين ديباغين سطيف 2 ، الجزائر. وقد أنجزت هذه الدراسة بناءا على منهج الطريقة المختلطة، باستخدام أداتين. أولاً، يتم إجراء استبيان مع 60 طالبًا من أصل 284 طالب، والذين تم اختيارهم بشكل عشوائي. و من ناحية أخرى، يتم إجراء مقابلة للأساتذة حيث تم اختيار خمسة من أساتذة التعبير الشفهي. وقد أوضحت النتائج أن كلتا العينتين تحملان آراء إيجابية تجاه إستراتيجية التفاعل بين المتعلم والمتعلم. علاوة على ذلك ، فقد أظهرت النتائج أن كلا من المعلمين والطلاب قد اتفقوا على الدور البارز الذي يلعبه تفاعل المتعلم-المتعلم في تحسين طلاقة التحدث عند الطلاب. وقد تم اقتراح آثار وتوصيات تربوية يراها الباحث ضرورة لتخصيص المزيد من الممارسة والتدريب والبحوث لإستراتيجية التفاعل بين الطلاب.

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# 1. Introduction

Language is used as a medium for communication to express ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experience real communicative situations. According to Rodriques **(2000)**, the communication process comprises two main skills: receptive and productive skills. Listening and reading are known to be the receptive skills, whereas speaking and writing as productive skills. Richards **(2005)** mentions that foreign language learners often perceive the mastery of speaking skill as a priority. As a result, they measure their success in language learning based on how well they feel they have developed their spoken language performance.

The speaking skill is characterized by fluency and accuracy, and being well-rounded communicators, learners need to improve the speaking fluency; in this respect, Richards and Rodgers **(2001, p. 157)** mention that "fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: Accuracy is judged not in the abstract, but in context". Meaning that, fluency and understandable language is sufficient for language learners to hold successful communications.

It is impossible to become a fluent speaker without practicing the target language. In this regard, Mackey **(2007)** states that the lack of interaction or the use of the language will negatively affect language learners in their communications. Therefore, language learners should be encouraged to participate in the acute interaction that takes place in the classroom, so that they can be fluent and well versed in the spoken language **(Saeed, Khaksari, Eng, & Ghani, 2016, p. 235)**.

English has become a prominent language all over the world; in response to the power and the need of this language, Algeria among many countries has implemented English as a foreign language in its educational system. One of the targeted aims to learn a foreign is to be able to communicate effectively and proficiently; however, our university students seem to fail to express themselves, their ideas, and struggle to hold a conversation especially in Oral Expression modules. Observing our classrooms, it has been noticed that Third-year students of English at Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE, Setif2 University encounter some problems in speaking

fluency. Some of the students tend to make long pauses and hesitations; some others struggle to speak smoothly and spontaneously, as they find difficulties to make themselves understood by both of their mates and teachers. In addition, individual students had to answer but the teacher's questions where authentic communication was missing, which may have a negative impact on the students' speaking skill, as it may inhibits learner-learner interaction. In response to this problem, this research suggests learner-learner interaction as a pedagogical strategy to improve the students' speaking fluency.

In the light of the above presentation, this research paper has generated a number of research questions and attempts to answer them. The multiple research questions are as follows;

 What are third year students' perceptions towards the role of learner-learner interaction in improving the speaking fluency?

 What are the perceptions of Oral Expression teachers towards the role of learner-learner interaction in improving the speaking fluency?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Speaking Skill and EFL Classroom

When learning a foreign language, there are four language skills to be learned: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is considered as an essential skill to be mastered by foreign language learners and it is regarded as a reflecting parameter to know the target language; in this respect, Hedge **(2001, p. 261)** defines speaking as "a skill by which they [people] are judged while first impressions are being formed". Therefore, the speaker is judged according to the way he/she speaks, for that reason much attention should be given to the speech because it represents the speakers' thoughts and personality.

Luoma **(2004, p. 1)** claims: "Speaking a foreign language is difficult and competence in speaking takes a long time to develop". The author emphasizes the crucial role of practice and experience for the development of speaking which is considered as a complex skill. Furthermore, Bygate (1987, p. 4) argues that "knowledge itself is not enough; knowledge has

to be used in action. This is true not only to the use of language, but also to any other activity". Further, Baker and Westrup **(2003)** state that there are different ways to learn a language. The authors mentioned that when learners will learn the target language if they are exposed to and taught of how to use this language for communication. However, this will take a considerable amount of time before reaching the desired level of the oral competence. The authors carried on by insisting on the significant role of practice in learning a new language; they believe learners need to practice their spoken language, and their teachers must prepare for them interesting materials in order to motivate them in the target language.

## 2.2. Speaking fluency

Speaking fluency has been defined from different perspectives by many researchers. Hughes **(2002)** defines fluency as the capability to convey ideas intelligibly, reasonably and accurately without pausing in order not to make listeners lose interest. Hedge **(2001)** adds also that, fluency is concerned with the outcome skills and it is much more linked with speech. The author emphasized that being fluent in speaking requires no hesitations and pauses.

Furthermore, Redmond and Vrchota **(2006)** claim that fluency simply means an accurate word within an accurate example and with an intact pronunciation. The authors, in this respect, emphasized that fluency is related to the ability of linking words to form sentences in coherent way and taking into account the use of stress, intonation, and the correct pronunciation. In addition, Richards **(2005, p. 14)** defines fluency as, "the natural language use occurring when a spoken language in meaningful interaction and maintain comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his/her communicative competence". The author explains the term of fluency as the ability to speak spontaneously, smoothly, without too much pauses, and with a limited number of errors which may distract the listeners' attention from the speaker's message.

## 2.3. Learner-Learner Interaction

Wagner **(1994, p. 8)** defines the term interaction as "reciprocal events that requires at least two objects and two actions. Interaction occurs when these objects and events naturally influence one another", in other words, interaction shapes the process of communication that requires a mutual influence of two sides at least who send and receive messages when communicating. Besides of sending and receiving messages while interacting, there is also a negotiation of meaning, in this respect, Choudron **(1988, p. 107)** states that: "the term interaction used alone will refer henceforth to the narrower sense of the negotiation of meaning in learner-learner or teacher-learner communicative exchanges". Meaning that, in interaction there is always a negotiation of meaning, so that people can interpret and understand the messages.

According to Brown **(2000, p. 165)** interaction is a "collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings or ideas between two or more people resulting in reciprocal of each other". The author highlighted that, interaction is an important factor in the learning process which allows learners practice the target language through the exchange of ideas, reception and production of knowledge, negotiation of meaning, and cooperation with each other to reach their targets and fulfill their tasks. Further, Mackey **(2007, p. 12)** mentions that "interaction creates opportunities for learning through focusing on input and output through negotiation of meaning". In other words, the negotiation of meaning in interactions is comprehensible and communication breakdowns are avoided; consequently, learners will produce a comprehensible output.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research approach

This research opts for a mixed method approach which combines the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data. Greene **(2007)** list five reasons that researchers consider while using the mixed method approach:

☐ Triangulation: it is considered as a main reason to incorporate mixed methods into research. It enriches and enhances the credibility of the research's findings because it refers to the use of more than one method to study the same research problem.

☐ Comparisons: it provides the researcher with a full understanding to the given problem through comparing the data gained by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data.

☐ Development: Mixed methods often help in the development of the research project in which results gained from one method can help develop the other method, for example, numerical data gathered from quantitative method can shape the questions of a qualitative method such as the interview.

☐ Initiation: A research study may end up with contradictions or may raise questions that need clarifications; thus, an initiation of a new study will add new understandings to existing theories on the phenomenon under investigation. These study's findings may uncover a very new research topic that leads to the fifth reason of doing mixed methods research.

☐ Expansion: mixed methods approach opens the floor for new topics to be a subject of investigation, and thus the scope of research will be significantly expanded.

### 3.2. Sample and Sampling Procedures

As far as this research is concerned, the first population is Third year students of English at the University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine-Setif 2, Department of English Language and Literature. One fifth from the population was randomly selected to be the representative sample of the survey. The sample counted 60 students out of a population of 284 students. The reasons behind selecting the previously mentioned participants lie in the assumption that they are to be graduated students this year, so they need to develop their speaking fluency and hold successful communications, whether in their professional careers or in their personal lives. These participants are more aware about their speaking fluency and also they have already experienced two years at the university, so they have formed conceptions concerning teachers methods of teaching the speaking skill; as a result, they can give adequate and pertinent data to the research study as opposed to First and Second year students.

The second population is Oral Expression teachers at the University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2, Department of English Language and Literature. Five teachers among fifteen oral expression teachers accepted to be interviewed. The choice of this population was purposeful since the present research works on speaking fluency, so the choice will fall on those who know more about this topic, hence came the choice of Oral Expression teachers.

### 3.3. Data Collection Procedures

### 3.3.1. Questionnaire for EFL Students

As far as this research is concerned, the questionnaire is used as an instrument to gather data concerning the perceptions of third-year students of English towards the role of learner-learner interaction in enhancing the students' speaking fluency at the University of Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE, Setif 2. This questionnaire includes 13 items; the majority of the items are close-ended, whereas just few items are open-ended. These items are divided into two main sections.

The first section comprises seven questions (1 to 7). This section deals with an overview on speaking fluency, it aims at exploring the students' perceptions towards the difficulty level of the speaking skill and to what extent the students are aware of the importance of this skill. Moreover, this section sheds light on the problems that learners usually face while speaking and the strategies that they use to overcome these difficulties. Furthermore, this section attempts to explore the students' level in speaking fluency besides of the problems that hurdle this sub speaking skill. Finally, this section ends up with the speaking activities that learners enjoy most in speaking classes.

The second section is concerned with learner-learner interaction. This section includes five questions, the first question (8) aims at finding out whether students are familiar with learner-learner interaction or not through giving their own definitions to this strategy. Moreover, this section tries to find out whether students are in favor with learner-learner interaction or not, and if yes, what are the benefits that they can get from this strategy. Furthermore, this section aims also to discover the problems that hinder the students'

interaction. Finally, the last two questions (12 and 13) link the previously mentioned sections to see whether the students agree or disagree that learner-learner interaction might enhance their speaking performance in general and fluency in particular.

### 3.3.2.  Interview for EFL Teachers

This study opts for a semi-structured interview in order to explore the perceptions of Oral Expression teachers towards the role of learner-learner interaction in enhancing the students' speaking fluency at the University of Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE, Setif 2. The interview comprises eight (8) open-ended questions. The questions in the interview aim at exploring the teachers' perceptions concerning the students' level in the speaking skill in general and fluency in particular, the challenges that learners may encounter while speaking, the kinds of fluency problems they may face, and the reasons behind their failure to be fluent speakers. In addition, other questions aim at exploring teachers' experiences with learner-learner interaction strategy in EFL classes, and the obstacles that hinder the students' interaction. Finally, the last questions aims at exploring the roles that teachers should play in Oral classes to promote learner-learner interaction, and how teachers perceive the role that learner-learner interaction has in enhancing the students' speaking fluency.

### 3.4. Data Analyses Procedures

For the students' questionnaire, the close-ended-items are analyzed through SPSS software, and the open-ended items are analyzed through content analysis. According to Schreier **(2012, p. 1)** content analysis "is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way. You do this by assigning successive parts of the material to the categories of your coding frame". The author continues to explain that the coding frame is the heart of content analysis, in which it covers all the meanings that are presented in the description and the interpretation of the qualitative material.

For the interview, the questions are analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Boyatzis **(Boyatzis, 1998, p. VI)** "thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an

explicit "code". This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms". Meaning that, in thematic analysis, the qualitative information is transformed into codes that will form set of themes, which may in turn, include sub themes that are causally related.

## 4.  Analysis of the Results

After finishing the phase of data collection, the current phase is concerned with the classification, description, analysis, and interpretation of the results obtained from the students' questionnaire and teachers' interview at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University, the department of English and literature. This section includes also a section of discussion where all the results gained are linked to the research question, and a section of pedagogical implications, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

### 4.1.  EFL Students' Data

This question attempts to identify EFL students' opinions, and attitudes towards the role of learner-learner interaction on students' speaking fluency.

### 4.1.1.  Students' Attitudes towards Speaking in English
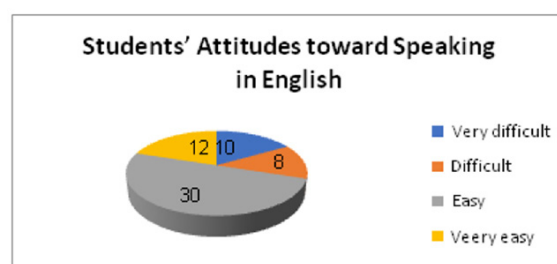


**Figure 1**

After classifying the answers gathered from question 1, it seems that 30 out of 60 students (50%) think that speaking in English is easy, and 12 out of 60 students (20%) believe that it is very easy. The researcher assumes that these answers do not necessary reflect the students' proficiency in the speaking skill; however, it may reflect their positive attitudes about this skill, 10 out of 60 (16.7%) students reported that speaking the English language is very difficult, and 8 out of 60 students (13.3%) believe that it is difficult. It seems

that these answers may represent those students who have a low level in the speaking skill, as it may reflect their negative attitudes about this skill.

### 4.1.2. Students' Perceptions towards the Importance of the Speaking Skill

| Statement | Frequency | percentage |
|---|---|---|
| To a moderate extent | 13 | 21.7% |
| To a large extent | 47 | 78.3% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

**Table 01**

As presented in the above table, the answers revealed that 47 participants out of 60 (78.8%) believe that the speaking skill is important to a large extent, and 13 out of 60 (21.7%) think that it is important to a moderate extent. Concerning the second option, no one from the participants opted for the choice of a less extent. Based on these answers, and as argued by Hedge **(2001)** that the majority of the students believe that the speaking skill has a great importance, possibly because they might perceive the proficiency in this skill as priority; therefore, their mastery of English language is evaluated based on how well they feel they improved in the spoken language.

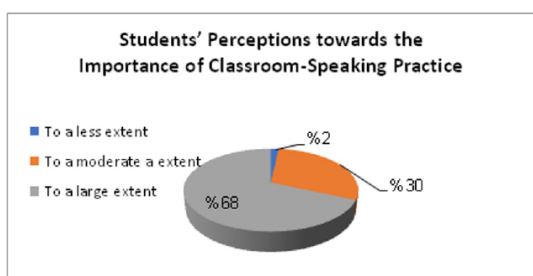### 4.1.3. Students' Perceptions towards the Classroom-Speaking Practice



**Figure 2**

Concerning this question, the above figure shows that 41 out of 60 (68%) students believe that classroom-speaking practice is important to a large extent, and 18 out of 60 (30%) students think that it is important to a moderate extent. It seems that those students believe that having substantial amount of vocabulary and mastering the grammar rules without practice is not sufficient to develop their oral proficiency; in this

respect, Bygate **(1987, p. 4)** states that " knowledge itself is not enough: Knowledge has to be used in action". Finally, 1 student out of 60 (2%), considered classroom- speaking practice as important to a less extent. This might be due to an introverted personality which, as argued by Howarth **(2006)**, shows a feeling of anxiousness and embarrassment when asked to talk in public.

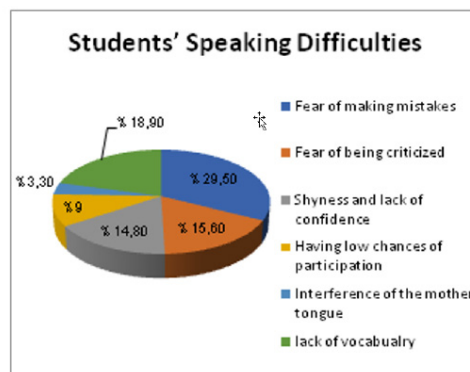### 4.1.4. Students'Speaking Challenges



**Figure 3**

From those who mentioned answers that the groups of respondents face challenges while speaking skill; the results in the figure 3 above show that, the majority of the students (29.5%) stated that they feel fearful of making mistakes. It seems that those students do not master the grammar rules or they may not be sure about the correctness of the grammatical structures, as confirmed by Backer and Westrup **(2003)**. Moreover, (18.9%) of the participants mentioned that their main problem is the lack of the vocabulary to express themselves, possibly because this is due to the lack of practice. Other participants (15.6%) claimed that they feel fearful of being criticized by their classmates which seems to be due to their fear of making mistakes, and this may result for another problem that was stated by (14.8%) of the participants who claimed that they are shy and have a lack of self-confidence when they come to practice their speaking skill. This result confirms Ur's claim **(2012)** that making mistakes or loosing face are often inhibiting factors to say things in a foreign language. Additionally, the (9%) of the participants who stated that they have low chances for participation inside the classroom might be due to the crowded classes which reduces their time of speaking, as it might be due to

the dominance of classroom participation by certain learners, as confirmed by Howarth (2006). Moreover, an equal number of the participant (9%) claimed that when they come to speak in English they find nothing to say.  Possibly those students might think that they have nothing relevant or original to add, as Ur **(2012, p. 118**) argues that "students need to feel that they have something relevant and original to contribute to the discussion, so that it is worth making the effort to speak".

Furthermore, the minority of the participants (3,30%) mentioned the interference of the mother tongue as the main problem that they usually encounter while practicing their speaking skill. As confirmed by Ur **(Ur, 2012),** it seems that those students feel more comfortable and at ease when speaking in their mother tongue since it is more natural, simple, and easy for them. Finally, from all the results gained supra, it seems that the obstacles that hinder the students' oral production and impede their communications are due either to psychological or linguistic factors.

### 4.1.5. The Communicative Strategies Used



**Figure 4**

From those who face speaking challenges as stated in the previous question, the figure above is concerned with the communicative strategies used by students to overcome speaking difficulties. (26.6%) from the participants reported that they use paraphrase strategies, (23.3%) opted for cooperative strategies, (20%) went with avoidances strategies, and the remaining (13.3%) of the participants picked up guessing strategies.

From the answers obtained supra, it seems that learners face many speaking problems (see the previous questions), and to compensate this lack in the spoken language; the learners use different communicative strategies, which seem to have a significant role in overcoming the problems that hurdle their oral delivery. These results confirm the claim of Ellis and Barkhuizen **(2005, pp. 170-171)** that communicative strategies are "speakers-oriented: that is they are used by students to compensate for the lack of FL knowledge or their inability to access the FL knowledge that they have".

### 4.1.6.    Students' Fluency in English

| Statement | Frequency | percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 17 | 28.3% |
| No | 43 | 71.7% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

**Table 02**

For this question, 43 students out of 60 (71.7%) answered that they believe that they are not fluent English language speakers, while the other 17 students out of 60 (28.3%) said that they are. From the answers obtained regarding this question, it seems that the majority of the students who claimed that they are not fluent speakers in English possibly struggle when they come to practice their speaking fluency, which might be due to many problems. Concerning the minority of the participants who stated that they are fluent speakers might have no problems that impede their speaking fluency, as they might be proficient English language speakers.

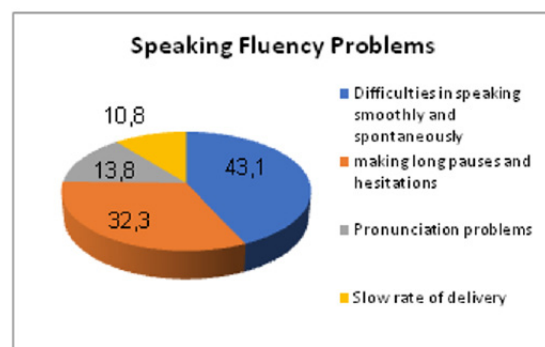### 4.1.7. Speaking Fluency Problems



**Figure 5**

From those who claimed that they are not fluent English language speakers in the previous question (06), the above figure demonstrates the problems that hinder the students' speaking fluency.  It seems that 28 participants out of 60 (43.1%) mentioned

that they have difficulties in speaking smoothly and spontaneously. 21participants out of 60 (32.3%) stated that they make long pauses as they hesitate a lot when speaking in English, and 9 out of 60 (13.3%) reported that they have difficulties to make themselves understood, because they have problems concerning pronunciation. The remaining seven participants out of 60 (10.8%) stated that they cannot speak quickly.

From the students' answers, it seems that the majority of the students (41.3%) who reported that they have problems in speaking smoothly and spontaneously. Possibly those students might think about the language itself rather than the meaning, for that reason their speech do not sound natural. Moreover, concerning those students who stated that they pause for a long time and hesitate a lot when speaking in English, might be due to their anxiousness and fear of making mistakes, as confirmed by Ur **(2012)** when he talked about the problems that hurdle the students' speaking skill.

Finally, for both of the participants who reported that they have problems concerning pronunciation and the slow rate of delivery, might be due to the lack of practice which play an important role in developing the students' speaking fluency, as confirmed by Kayi **(2006)** that practices considered as pivotal key to any fluency based program. From all the results obtained, it seems that learners face many problems that hinder their speaking fluency.
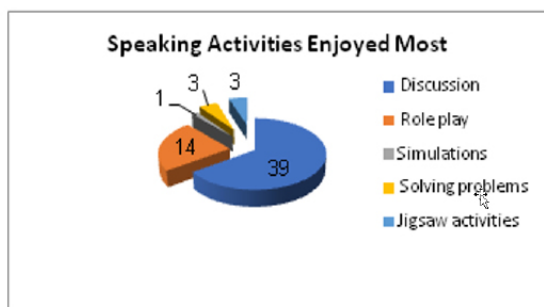
### 4.1.8. Speaking Activities Enjoyed Most



**Figure 6**

When asked about the speaking activities they enjoy most in Oral classes, the majority of the participants (65%) mentioned discussions. (23.3%) of the participants, selected role-plays, and an equal number of the participants that are (5%) went with solving problems and jigsaw activities. Finally, only one participant (1.7%) selected simulations. The following sub item 07 presents the students' justifications to their choices.

From the answers obtained from this questions, as demonstrated in the above figure, it seems that 33 out of 60 (58.32%) participants prefer activities that involve discussions in oral sessions, because they believe that this kind of activities help them to develop their speaking skill since they have more chances to practice their pronunciation and acquiring more vocabulary. Moreover, those students prefer this activity because they believe that it provides them with a good chance to exchange their ideas with their classmates, acquire new information, and be engaged in conversations that help them overwhelmed misunderstandings through asking questions and receiving answers.

Concerning those participants who selected role-play, it seems that 12 out of 60 (20%) of the students believe that this technique is beneficial because it heightens their self-confidence. Furthermore, the 3 out of 60 (5%) participants who picked up solving problems activities believe that these activities create that kind of challengeable learning, which they enjoy a lot during speaking sessions. An equal number of the participants (5%) selected jigsaw activities, they believe that this activity is beneficial because it provides them with a supportive environment for the learning process, in which they entertain a lot with such kind of activities. Finally, the only participant who opted for simulations mentioned that he prefers such technique because he enjoys a lot when he is exposed to situations that are similar to their life situations and acting as a real character in such scenes; in this respect, Hedge **(2001)** argues that simulations make learning more enjoyable and effective.

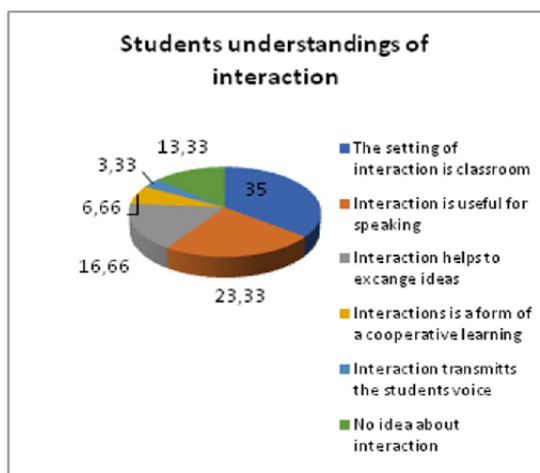### 4.1.9.    Students' Understanding of the Learner –Learner Interaction



**Figure 7**

After classifying the answers regarding this question, it seems that 21 out of 60 (35%) from the participants perceive learner-learner interaction as the interaction that occurs among learners inside the classroom. 14 out of 60 (23.33%) consider learner-learner interaction as an important chance to practice their speaking skill, and hence developing their spoken English language. Other participants (16.66%) think that learner-learner interaction is an opportunity to exchange their ideas; they believe that this strategy stands on discussions in which they discuss a particular topic through asking questions and debating about the answers provided. Moreover, 4 out of 60 (6.66%) of the participants, perceive this strategy as the cooperative learning that occurs between the students when accomplishing the collaborative tasks. The minority of the participants, who were just 3 out of 60 (3.33%) students, consider that learner-learner interaction as an opportunity to participate and transmit their voice in the classroom. The remaining 8 out of 60 students provided no answer, possibly they have never been exposed to this term, so they could not give any definition.

### 4.1.10.    Students' Preferences of Cooperative Learning

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Yes   | 50        | 83.3%      |
| No    | 10        | 16.7%      |
| Total | 60        | 100%       |

**Table 3**

As presented in the above table, 50 out of 60 (83.3%) of the participants mentioned that they prefer the activities that involve cooperative learning, while just only 10 out of 60 (16.7%) of the participants said that they do not like cooperative learning activities.

From the answers obtained by the participants, it seems that the majority of the students who claimed that they prefer the activities that involve cooperative learning possibly they feel at ease when working with their mates or peers, as they might feel that they are more responsible for their own learning as opposed to the traditional teacher-teacher classrooms. The minority of the participants mentioned that they do not prefer the activities that incorporate cooperative learning; they might prefer to work individually, because they are not enthusiastic to work in pairs or in groups.

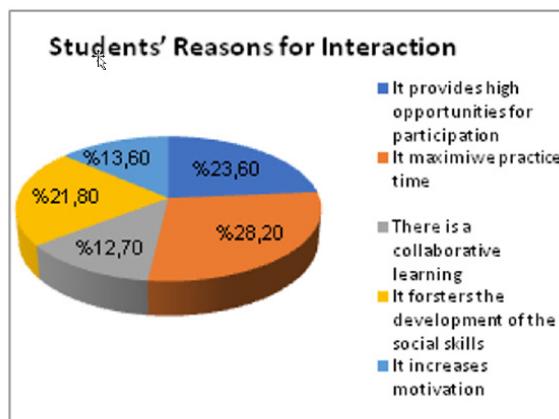### 4.1.11.    Students' Reasons for Interaction



**Figure 8**

Concerning this question, the figure 3.11 show that, (28.2%) of the participants claimed that learner-learner interaction is desirable for them, because it maximizes the practice time of their speaking skill. (23.6%) believe that learner-learner interaction provides them with high opportunities to participate in the classroom, (21.8%) think that it fosters the development of social skills, and (13.6%) replied that it increases their motivation. The remaining (12.7%) of the participants selected the collaborative learning as an important feature that is highly stressed in learner-learner interaction.

From the answers of the participants mentioned supra,

it seems that the majority of the students believe that learner-learner interaction maximizes the practice time of their speaking skill. Possibly, those students might think that interaction through pair and group work provides them with more opportunities to talk. The students, who agreed that interaction among learners provides high opportunities to participate in the classroom, might believe that being engaged in the target language has an important role in developing their abilities. Some of the participants think that learner-learner interaction fosters their social skills. It seems that those students believe that interaction does not only promote language development, but it also fosters their social skills needed to operate successfully with any culture, e.g. politeness and respect for others.

Furthermore, It is assumed that the participants who picked up collaborative learning possibly because there are collaborative tasks through which the students work and interact with each other, and thus they promote their language development. The remaining participants who selected motivation might believe that interaction provides them with chances to use language successfully and evaluate their progress, which in turn lead to increase their motivation. All the answers obtained confirm what Howarth **(2006)** explains concerning the benefits of learner-learner interaction strategy in EFL classes.

### 4.1.12. Students' Encouragements

| Answers | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------|-----------|------------|
| Never | 8 | 13.3% |
| Rarely | 39 | 65% |
| Sometimes | 13 | 21.7% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

**Table 4**

Regarding this question, the above table shows that, the majority of the participants that are 39 out of 60 (65%) said that their teacher rarely that he fosters them to interact with each other, while 13 out of 60 (21.7%) reported that he sometimes does. The remaining 8 out of 60 (13.3%) of the participants claimed that their teacher never encourages them to interact with each other, while no one from the

participants opted for the choice often. From the results mentioned above, it seems that the lack of learner-learner interaction possibly due to the teacher's dominance inside the classroom in which he directs most of the talk; consequently, the students' opportunities to talk are massively reduced. These results confirm the findings of Howarth **(2006).**

### 4.1.13. The Rate of Students' Interaction Challenges

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 44 | 73.3% |
| No | 16 | 26.7% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

**Table 5**

Concerning this question, the above table shows that, 44 out of 60 (73.3%) of the participants claimed that they face difficulties that hinder their interaction with each other, while 16 out of 60 (26.7%) stated the opposite. Based on these results, it seems that the majority of the students struggle when interacting with their classmates, which might be due to many factors (see the following figure).
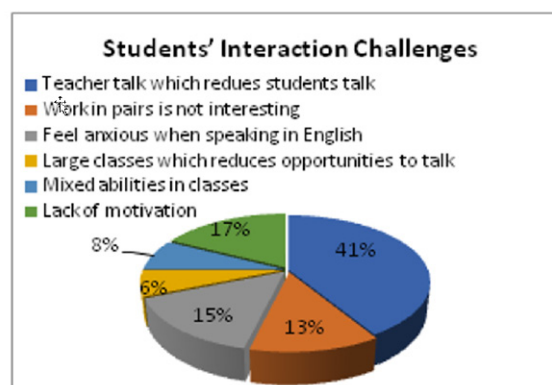
### 4.1.14. Students' Interaction Challenges



**9Figure**

Concerning those who answered that, they face challenges that hinder their interactions, the above figure shows that, (42%) of the participants mentioned the problem of teacher talk, which reduces their opportunities to speak in the classroom.

Some of the participants (17.3%) reported that they feel anxious and embarrassed when the teacher asks them to talk in English and some others (14.8%) declared that they are not motivated to interact with their classmates. (12.3 %) of the participants stated that they are not enthusiastic to work in pairs or in groups, others (7.4%) picked up the problem of mixed abilities, and the remaining (6.3%) of the students selected the problem of large classes.

From the answers obtained regarding the question mentioned above, the majority of the participants believe that teacher talk reduces their opportunities to speak in the classroom. It seems that the students' chances to talk are reduced possibly because the teacher might think about what to say next, so he will not be attentively listening to his students, consequently; students will be demotivated because they might think that their teacher do not appreciate their efforts, and this is another problem that was stated by some participants. Additionally, it is assumed by the researcher that the participants who claimed that they are not enthusiastic to work in pairs or in groups, might be introverts students who prefer to work individually.

Moreover, the participants who stated that they feel anxious and embarrassed when the teacher asks them to speak in English might feel fearful of making mistakes , and thus being criticized by their mates. Furthermore, it seems that the participants who declared the problem of mixed abilities could be due to difficulties that face teacher when managing the students who are with different levels in a pair or a group work. Finally, the minority of the participants who stated that large classes hinder their interactions might be due to the large number of the students which is hard to be monitored by the teacher, because there will be a lot of problems if the students interact with each other, (e.g. the noise and the use of mother-tongue). All the results mentioned supra confirm the findings of Howarth (2006) concerning the challenges that face learners when interacting with each other.

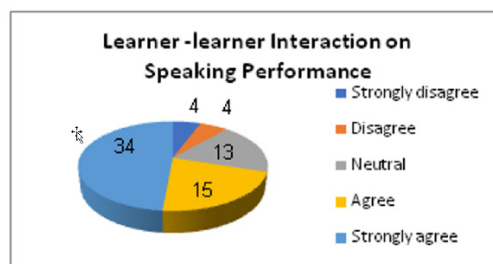## 4.1.15. Learner -learner Interaction on Speaking Performance



**Figure 10**

As demonstrated in the above figure, 49 out of 60 (81.7%) of the participants agreed with the statement that interacting with classmates enhances the students' speaking performance. 8 out of 60 (13.4%) disagree, and the remaining 3 out of 60 (5%) were neutral.

From the answers regarding this question, it seems that the great majority of the students seem to agree that learner-learner interaction has an important role in enhancing the speaking performance, possibly because when they are engaged in interactions with their classmates, they have observed the benefits of such strategy on themselves. Even though those students have not witnessed the benefits of learner-learner interaction, they may have positive attitudes about the significant role of this strategy on their speaking performance. Furthermore, the participants who disagreed with the statement might be those students who claimed that they do not like activities that involve cooperative learning, as they may have negative attitudes about this strategy. Finally, the minority of the participants who stated that they are neutral might be uncertain about the role of learner-learner interaction, possibly because it is rarely that they are exposed to such strategy inside the classroom.

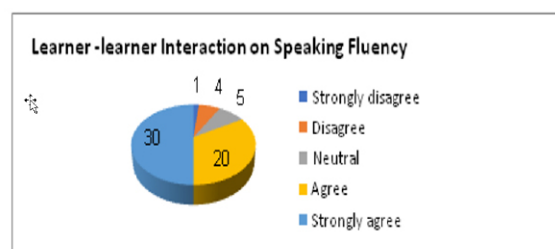## 4.1.16. Learner -learner Interaction on Speaking Fluency



**Figure 11**

Concerning this question, figure 11 shows that, 50 out of 60 (83.3%) of the participants agreed with the statement, that learner-learner interaction enhances the speaking fluency. 5 out of 60 (8.3%) disagreed, and the same number of the participants (8.3%) were neutral.

From the students' answers, it seems that the majority of the participants agreed that learner-learner interaction might enhance the speaking fluency, possibly because those students might believe that this strategy is valuable, as it may provide them with high opportunities to communicate and talk inside the classroom, consequently, they will be fluent and well versed in the spoken language. The latter confirms the claim of Mackey (2007).

Concerning the participants who disagree, it is assumed that those students are introverts students who do not support such kind of strategies which incorporate collaborative learning and interaction among learners because they are afraid of making mistakes, or it is may be due to their insufficient vocabulary in the target language. This result confirms what Ur (2012) and Howarth (2006) have explained. Finally, the participants who were neutral might be not sure about the role of learner-learner interaction in enhancing the speaking fluency, because they might be not interested about such strategy.

### 4.2. EFL Teachers' Data

This section attempts to identify EFL teachers' opinions, and attitudes towards the role of learner-learner interaction on students' fluency.

**Question 1**: How would you describe the level of Third Year students in speaking skill and fluency?

Five Oral Expression teachers have answered this question; all the teachers agreed upon the level of Third Year students in speaking skill in general, and fluency in particular. The teachers claimed that the students' level in the speaking skill is average, whereas their level in fluency is poor, as stated by teacher five, "the level of Third Year students in the speaking skill is average, but their level in speaking fluency is poor". Based on these opinions, it is clearly noticed that Third year students struggle with the

speaking fluency; hence, this sub speaking skill needs to be improved.

**Question 2** : What are the challenges that learners usually encounter while speaking in English?

The analysis of this question revealed that the majority of the teachers agreed on three main problems that learners usually face while speaking; these problems are associated with anxiety, the fear of making mistakes, and the lack of vocabulary. Moreover, two teachers agreed on shyness as a noticeable problem encountered by learners, whereas another teacher added the lack of motivation. Such opinions mentioned supra indicate that the problems that face learners concerning the spoken language are attributed to two factors. The first one is related to anxiety and shyness problems which are supported by Ur (2012).  Second, linguistic factors including fear of making mistakes, as Ur (2012, p.118) claims that "students are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom because they are worried about making mistakes", and the lack of vocabulary.

**Question 3**: What kinds of fluency problems do learners face while speaking?

Concerning this question, the analysis of the results revealed that all teachers attributed fluency problems to the long pauses and hesitations, and the lack of spontaneity and smoothness in the students' speech, besides to the pronunciation problems. It seems that these fluency problems are common between Third year students; the researcher assumes that those problems are due to many reasons, so the following question attempts to explore those reasons.

**Question 4** : Based on your experience in your module, why do students fail to be fluent speakers?

It appears from the analysis of the results regarding the question mentioned supra, is that all teachers agreed on the lack of practice which is considered as the main reason behind the students' failure to reach a satisfactory level in the speaking fluency, as stated by teacher 1 "I think because they rarely use the target language in real life situations, as said by experts, when we do not use a language, we lose it".

Moreover, four teachers agreed that students' inefficiency in speaking fluency is due to the lack of strategies and methods that aim to boost the speaking fluency, as well as the target teachers are not well trained to implement such strategies. Another teacher adds the topic selection as a main reason, meaning that, the topics in the classroom speaking practice are not interesting, so the majority of the students keep silent. Based on the previously mentioned opinions, it seems that practice is considered as a crucial element in the development of speaking fluency, as stated by Kayi **(2006)** that practice is a pivotal key to any fluency-based task. Hence, teachers should implement strategies which include activities that require the negotiation of meaning, as explained by Richards **(2005)**.

**Question 5** : How would you describe your experience with learner-learner interaction strategy?

From the analysis of the teachers' responses concerning question five, the opinions revealed that all the teachers agreed that learner-learner interaction strategy is beneficial, fruitful and useful in EFL classes, and it yielded satisfactory results; yet, it is not easy to be applicable. Based on these opinions, it seems that despite the difficulty in applying learner-learner strategy in Oral Expression Classes; however, all teachers agreed on its benefits in EFL teaching and learning process, as confirmed by Allwright **(1984, p. 156)** that "the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy" and "successful pedagogy involves the successful management of classroom interaction".

**Question 6** : What are the obstacles that hinder learner-learner interaction?

Concerning this question, it appears from the analysis of the participants' answers that the majority of the teachers (3 teachers) attributed the problems that hinder learner-learner interaction to the large classes, which seem to turn a bit messy and noisy. Consequently, teachers find difficulties to monitor this large number of the learners, as explained by Howarth **(2006)**. Two teachers agreed that those problems are related to teachers' talk, as stated by Howarth **(2006)** that teacher talk reduces the students' opportunities to talk in the classroom. Two other teachers reported that those problems are individual such as of anxiety, shyness, and the lack of the learners' motivation to engage with their classmates in interactions inside the classroom; this result confirms the findings of Howarth **(2006)**.

**Question 7** : What are the roles that teachers should play in to promote learner-learner interaction?

As far as the question above is concerned, the analysis of the interviewees' answers revealed that the majority of the teachers (4 teachers) agreed on certain roles that teachers should play in Oral English classes to promote learner-learner interaction. Moreover, two teachers agreed that the teacher should be a prompter and participant, and two others agreed on facilitator.

**Question 8** : In your opinion, how might learner-learner interaction enhance the students' fluency?

Concerning question 8, all teachers reported that learner-learner interaction as a pedagogical strategy has a significant role in enhancing the learners' speaking fluency. The teachers agreed that the more learners are engaged in interactive activities, the more they will practice their spoken language, and thus developing their speaking fluency, as stated by teacher 3 " there is a proverb which supports the idea of experience is the best teacher i.e. more you are exposed to the language the more you are fluent".Based on these results, it seems that learner-learner interaction have a significant role in enhancing learners' speaking fluency, so Third year learners need to be engaged in interaction with each other, so that they will be fluent English language speakers, as stated by Mackey **(2007)**.

**4.3. Discussion**

After analyzing the items of the questionnaire, the results have shown that regarding to the problems that impede the students' oral production, Third Year students are aware of the great importance of mastering the speaking skill when learning the English language as a foreign language, as stated by Ur **(2012)** that speaking skill is considered as the most important skill and a major priority for language learners.

Moreover, the results in the questionnaire and the interview revealed that Third year students are not

fluent speakers. The teachers' responses attributed the students' failure to be fluent speakers to the lack of practice, which is considered as an important element in developing speaking fluency, as Kayi **(2006)** stated that practice is a necessary element to any fluency-based program.

Furthermore, the results from the questionnaire and the interview revealed that both of Third year students and Oral Expression teachers are aware of the advantages, strengths and the central role that learner-learner interaction has in aiding the students enhance their speaking fluency. This result concurs with the claim of Mackey **(2007)** who stated that language learners need to be engaged the acute interaction that takes place in the classroom in order to be fluent and well versed in spoken language.

In short, the results obtained revealed that both teachers and students have favorable perceptions towards learner-learner interaction strategy; more interestingly, the results of this study prove the significant role of learner-learner interaction in enhancing the students' speaking fluency.

## 5. Pedagogical Implications

According to the results obtained from the analyses of both students' questionnaire and teachers' interview. This current study emphasizes important points to be taken into account by the Oral Expression teachers. So teachers should to be well trained and equipped with the pedagogical strategies that aim at making the English language speaking instruction more effective and ask the administration for more labs and materials. Therefore, when the teachers understand and know how to apply the pedagogical strategy learner-learner interaction, the teaching and learning process will be facilitated, and thus achieving good results regarding the students' speaking performance in general, and fluency in particular. More interestingly, the teachers should be more aware of the significant role of using learner-learner interaction to enhance the students' speaking fluency.

## 6. Recommendations

Since the results of the current study revealed that learner-learner interaction has an important role in enhancing the students' speaking fluency, the following recommendations could be of great help for both Oral expression teachers and learners as well:

♦ Since learner-learner interaction is an effective strategy, which helps learners speak fluently, teachers should apply this strategy especially with first year students of English, who are newly exposed to the target language.

♦ Teachers should diminish their talk inside the classroom, and give learners more opportunities to express themselves and share their ideas with each other.

♦ Teachers should encourage their learners to take more responsibility of their learning, and being the protagonists of the classroom teaching, at the same time teachers should bear in mind that they are guides, facilitators, and prompters.

♦ Teachers should raise their students 'awareness towards the importance of learner-learner interaction on their speaking skill in general, and fluency in particular.

♦ Leaners should practice their speaking skill in real life situations, and not relying only on the classroom-speaking practice.

## 7. General Conclusion

Speaking a foreign language fluently is one of the most targeted aims of EFL learners; however, many students struggle in reaching a satisfactory level in this sub speaking skill. Therefore, teachers should implement strategies and methods such as learner-learner interaction that aims at boosting and upgrading the students' speaking fluency. This study is an attempt to explore the teachers' and students' perceptions towards the role of learner-learner strategy in improving the students' speaking fluency at the University of Mohamed Lamine DEBAGHINE Setif 2 .A mixed method approach has been adopted, using two tools in order to collect data needed for the current research; these tools are respectively: a questionnaire and an interview. The results obtained from the students' questionnaire and teachers' interview revealed that teachers and students hold favorable perceptions towards learner-learner interaction

strategy. More interestingly, the results have shown that teachers and students agreed upon the important role of learner-learner interaction in enhancing the students' speaking fluency. Finally, some related pedagogical implications, recommendations and suggestions for further research were given at the end of this paper to ensure the validity and the reliability of the findings. To conclude, all the procedures of the research from the first steps to the last ones may help the researcher to suggest that all the main and sub-research questions are answered to some extent.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## How to cite this article according to the APA method: