

## **Students' Experiences of Teaching Quality in Higher Education:**

### **The Case of the Department of English at Batna-2 University**

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#### **Abstract**

One of the crucial duties in the work of any educational institution is the qualified work of the teachers. Actually, the teaching practices should be evaluated not only by the experts, or by deans of faculties; however, it also encompasses those students who are learning. In this regard, the current study is an attempt to investigate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' views and experiences of the quality of teaching in the department of English, at Batna-2 University. This research adopts exploratory and descriptive methods of research. Therefore, a survey questionnaire is randomly administered to 54 Master 2 students. The findings of the study provide us with significant results concerning the quality of teaching practices in the department of English, and the major strengths and weaknesses that students experienced.

**Keywords;** quality teaching; higher education; EFL teachers; EFL students' experiences.

#### **1. Introduction**

Success in higher education is a matter of concern, for students, teachers, and stakeholders due to its productivity contribution towards a society. As a matter of fact, higher education institutions are the imperative driver of economic competitiveness, which requires improving employment skills, and this calls for refining teaching quality within universities. For this reason, the quality of teaching in higher education has become a significant issue that intrigue the attention of many academicians and researchers. In this era of globalization, students' interests have changed due to the invasion of modern technologies and internet. Hence, students' expectations regarding the teaching and learning processes have been considerably modified at the university level. That is to say, academics are in need to develop new pedagogical strategies to enhance the quality of teaching, and to satisfy the needs of higher education students and the socio-economic environment.

Accordingly, the aim of the study under investigation is to shed light on EFL students' views and opinions about the quality of teaching (interaction, learning in the classroom, clarity, organization, preparation, feedback etc.) in the department of English language and literature at Batna-2 University. Furthermore, it aims to raise better information and awareness about the teaching practices. Ultimately, this leads to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching that students have experienced. This research revolves around answering the following main question:

What are the students' views and experiences of the teaching practices at the university level?

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Quality Teaching in Higher Education

Algeria, like the other countries, has faced many challenges of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. Hence, the need for change was imperative to provide the adequate learning and teaching conditions, and to meet the expectations of the society. This situation urged the Algerian authorities and policy-makers in the ministry of higher education to launch the so-called LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorat) system in 2004. Actually, the LMD system has been inspired from the Bologna process, and it is adopted by the ministry of higher education for the sake of aligning the Algerian universities with international systems. Lakhil Ayat (2008) states:

Initially designed in the Anglo-Saxon countries, it (The LMD) is spreading nowadays everywhere, and Algerian authorities decided to apply it in partial replacement of the current system. This degree changes the length of the studies, too: it reduces the degree from four to three years. The instructors want to deploy it aiming at students' mobility and recognition of the degree in every part of the country and even abroad.

The LMD reform calls for offering better training to students by bringing new pedagogical practices, satisfying the societal demand for quality education, and encouraging opening up to the international landscape. The increase of national and international competition for forming best students at universities lead to reinforcing pressure for quality teaching and quality assurance. Recently, in Algeria, quality assurance has been introduced in higher education institutions in order to evaluate their performance, ensure improvement, and maintain quality. According to Saadi (2019, p. 155) "Algeria's transition to the LMD reform in line with trends in quality assurance in HE required all existing practices, institutions and values to be viewed again and rethought in terms of their adequacy and compatibility for the new era". Woodhouse (1999, p 30) claims that quality assurance "refers to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced". For Arafeh (2009, p.444) quality assurance refers to procedures that target to ensure academic standards and provide students with learning opportunities of a good quality. Salhi (2016, p.64) advocates that "Quality in education thus is requisite these days, for permitting individuals, societies and nations to attain the skills and competencies necessary for living meaningfully in a competitive, global world". In this respect, quality in teaching has become a significant issue in the higher education landscape to meet the needs of students such as their studies, and future jobs as well as to fulfil the society's expectations. In order to enhance students' learning, the focus of quality teaching initiatives are undertaken at the teachers' level, department or university level, improve pedagogical methods and address the environment of students learning. That is the focus should not always be on the teacher.

Teaching is the major function of universities (Coaldrake & Stedman,1999), and there is an increasing demand for quality of teaching. According to Salhi (2016, p.64) "Ensuring quality teaching and learning in higher education is a key strategic focus area in higher education In the process of enhancing the quality of higher education, emphasis should be placed on the students' personal improvement for professional life". The definition of the concept quality in teaching is controversial and it can be defined in various ways. Biggs (2001) points out that "quality" can be defined as an outcome, a property, or a process. Many scholars define quality in higher education institutions as

the process of quality enhancement (Hau, 1996; Argyris & Schön, 1974). Hau (1996) asserts that quality teaching springs from a never-ending process of reduction and elimination of flaws. In the same line of thought, Argyris and Schön (1974) claim that quality enhancement in higher education institutions is a double-looped process. First, the quality enhancement is driven by the enquiry: “Are we doing things right?”, however; it remains insufficient. For the quality enhancement process to function, a second query must be asked, “Are we doing the right things?” To say it differently, it is not enough to ensure whether the quality of lectures is good or not, we must also ask if students are in need to other classes besides to lectures. To say it differently, quality teaching refers to change students' perceptions of their world, and the method they take about applying their knowledge to real world problems; as well as it changes teachers' conceptions of their role as teacher, and the culture of the institution (Elhadj , Grichi, & Ben Abid 2020).

Quality teaching has a positive effect on student learning and development through combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of educational skills and interpersonal skills or communication (Hightower et al., 2011). As stated by Elhadj , Grichi, and Ben Abid (2020, p.201) “Teachers should develop and enhance material resources, classroom activities, pedagogical techniques, and practical insight into learning, development, and human relations”. Along this vein, quality teaching is about the ability to provide instruction to different students of different abilities while incorporating instructional objectives and assessing the effective learning mode of students. Indeed, it is easy to understand that the quality of any educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

## **2.2. Evaluation of Quality Teaching**

In educational settings, students’ views and satisfaction data helps universities and stakeholders to make their curriculum more responsive to the requirements of a changing marketplace (Tessema et al., 2012). As point of fact, quality teaching is, without doubt, student-centred which aims at ensuring good learning for student. Accordingly, for better learning outcomes, attention should not be only given to the teachers’ pedagogical skills, but the focus must also be placed on the learning environment that addresses the students’ personal needs and views about the teaching and learning process.

One of the main goals of a higher education institution is to prepare students for the workforce, so measuring the value of graduates is only logical in order to assess the quality of the teaching received. Graduates who are efficient on the working place are often those who benefited from teachers for which quality teaching was a priority. The evaluation of teaching is an inseparable part of the evaluation of the institution. A broad and effective evaluation of teaching requires critical study of institutional goals, classroom environments, administrative organization and operations, curricular content, student achievement, and the impact of programs on state and society (Shultman, 1986; Cave et al., 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995, as cited in Stankeviciene, 2007). Furthermore, Ramsden (1991, p.1) states that “Student ratings of teaching measure a key attribute of higher education institutions and their component units - the quality of their instructional practice, curriculum, and assessment”.

Research increasingly addresses the impact of quality teaching initiatives. Using the assumption that quality teaching leads students to learn better. Marton and Säljö (1976) found that students learning approaches are of two sorts, the deep approach which focuses on understanding the course material, and the surface approach which focuses on memorizing the material itself. Barrie, Ginns and Prosser (2005) found that students who perceive that the quality of their teaching is good will tend to adopt a deep approach to learning, a coherent and integrated understanding of the course. Student learning is

## Students' Experiences of Teaching Quality in Higher Education:

enhanced in higher education settings that address students' personal learning environment needs and in which quality teaching thrives.

Earlier studies by Marsh (1987), Entwistle and Tait (1990), and subsequent studies by Feldman (2007), Marsh (2007), Barrie et al. (2008), Hirschberg et al. (2011), among many others, have similarly concluded that student evaluations help to inform improvements to the quality of teaching practices, and curriculum content and activities. Many scholars confirmed that students' voice or evaluation of quality teaching (views, perceptions, and experiences) is a valuable data source for showing the impact of teaching on student learning (Entwistle & Tait, 1990; Marsh, 1987; Ramsden, 1991). In addition to that, researchers, like Barrie et al., (2008), and Feldman, (2007) assert that students' evaluations have a direct impact on teaching quality which help to improve teaching practices; helping staff to refine the way they teach and what they teach. In this respect, the present study is an attempt to investigate the students' views and perception of the quality teaching basing on their experiences in the department of English language and literature at Batna-2 University.

### 3. Research Method and Tools

To investigate EFL students' views and experiences of quality teaching in higher education, the researcher opted to use two methods mainly; exploratory and descriptive research design. To collect the needed primary data, a rating scale questionnaire (1-5) was directed and completed by 54 master 2 students who are enrolling in the department of English language and literature for the academic year 2020-2021. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version.20.

#### 3.1. Research Method

To explore the students' experiences and perceptions of quality teaching in the department of English language and literature at Batna-2 University, the researcher adhered to an exploratory descriptive research because little is known about quality teaching in the department of English language and literature. Accordingly, a quantitative approach was opted in this research study via the use of a quantitative closed survey questionnaire.

#### 3.2. Population and Sampling

The population targeted in this study is EFL-Master 2 students at the Department of English language and literature. They have been selected because they have enough experience of teaching practices in department of English. The whole number of Master 2 students who are enrolling at the department of English is 287 students; however, it is difficult to conduct a research on the whole population and it is not possible to be covered in the time-span that we had. Hence, this urges the researcher to select a representative sample of 80 students out of the given population of afore mentioned department and university. Furthermore, the researcher adhered to the random sampling technique.

#### 3.3. Data Gathering Tools

In this study, a survey method was used in order to collect the data required for the study. To investigate the above stated research question, a questionnaire was administered to 80 students. From 80 questionnaires, only 54 are returned back. The Teaching Quality Survey was adopted from the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College as it based on in- and out – of classroom teaching practices and it is the best measures of teaching effectiveness, which emerged from earlier studies. The questionnaire was based on a rating scale questionnaire (1-5) ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and from very often to never. Besides to the students' personal information (age and sex), the questionnaire also includes four important components of high-quality teaching as stated below:

- ❖ *Quality of Non-classroom Interactions with Teachers:* It contains five statements.

- ❖ *Teachers Interest in Teaching and Student Development*: It consists of five statements.
- ❖ *Prompt Feedback*: It includes two items.
- ❖ *Teaching Clarity and Organization*: It involves ten statements.

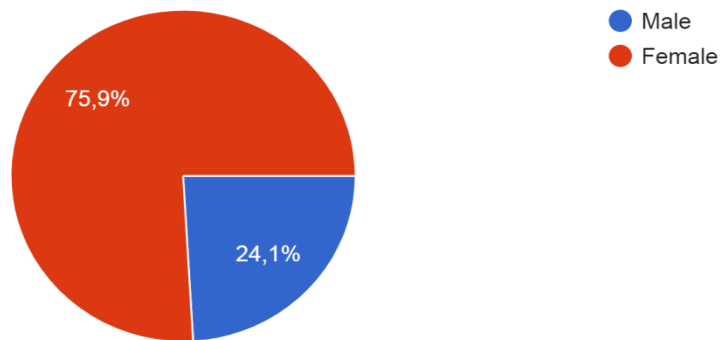
#### 4. Results

The data obtained through the survey questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using the descriptive analyses of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20) to calculate the frequencies of the participants' responses.

##### 4.1. Section One: Students' Background Information

Table (1): Students' Age.

	22-25	26-29	30-33	34-37	Total
<b>Numbers</b>	32	11	7	4	54
<b>Percentage (%)</b>	59.27%	20.37%	12.96%	7.40%	100%



**Figure (1):** Students' Gender.

The above table reveals that there are four (04) age groups in our selected sample. The majority (59.27%) of the students' ages range from 22 to 25. The second rank of the participants' age varies between 26 and 29, which represents 20.37% of the participants. Seven students come in the third rank their ages are between 30 and 33 years old. As well as, we find 4 (7.40%) students who represent the last category which is between 34-37 years old. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, the number of females outnumbered males. Females represent 75.90% of the participants, while males represent 24.10%.

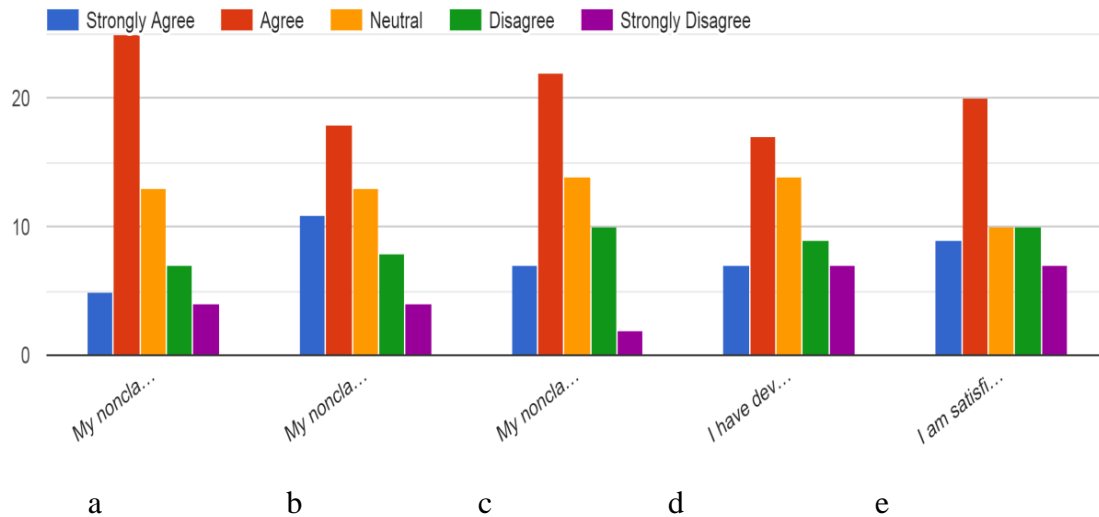
##### 4.2. Section Two: Quality of Non-classroom Interactions with Teachers

The following statements about the contact and interaction between students and teachers:

- a. My non-classroom interactions with teachers have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.
- b. My non-classroom interactions with teachers have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
- c. My non-classroom interactions with teachers have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.

## Students' Experiences of Teaching Quality in Higher Education:

- d. I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one teacher.  
 e. I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with teachers.



**Figure (2):** Contact and Interaction between Teachers and Students

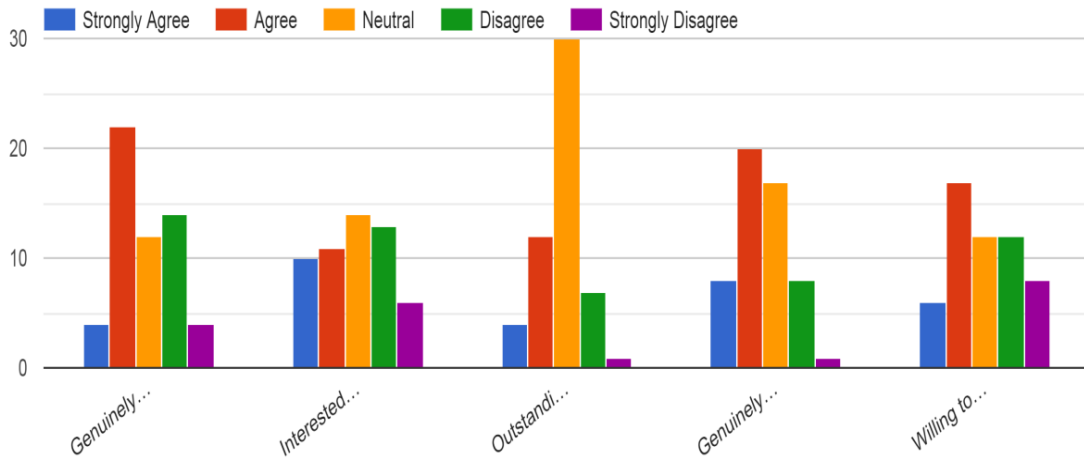
As illustrated in Figure 2, the respondents agree and disagree with varying degrees concerning the level of interaction and its impact on their intellectual growth. The majority of students (strongly agree 9.3%, agree 46.3%) ponder that the non-formal interaction with teachers outside of the classroom has a positive influence on the development of their personalities, values and attitudes. By contrast, 24.1% of participants remain neutral, besides 13% disagree and 9.3% strongly disagree with this idea. Moreover, more than the half of responses (strongly agree 20.40%, agree 33.30%) reveal that informal contact with teachers helps them to develop their intellectual abilities. Nevertheless, 16.7% of the participants took a neutral point of view, and the remaining participants express their disagreement (strongly disagree 7.40% and agree 14.80%). As far as career goals, ambitions and desires of students are concerned, about half of respondents strongly agree 11.10% and agree 40.50% with the idea, yet a considerable number of students did not agree with the clue (disagree 18.5% and strongly disagree 7.4%). The rest of participants 25.9% preferred to take a neutral point of view. When it comes to their close relationship with teachers, less than a half of answers agree 31.5% and strongly agree 13.00%, however; a substantial number of responses are varied between neutral (25%), disagree (16.7%) and strongly disagree (13%). The results of the last item indicate that the majority of students (Strongly agree 16.7%, and 37% agree) are satisfied with the opportunities to meet teachers outside the formal settings though the rest of students are between neutral (16.7%), disagree (16.7%), or strongly disagree (11.1%).

### 4.3. Section Three: Teachers Interest in Teaching and Student Development

Below are statements about your views of the teachers' interest in teaching students. Most teachers with whom I have had contact at this department are:

- a. Genuinely interested in students.
- b. Interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.
- c. Outstanding teachers.
- d. Genuinely interested in teaching.

- e. Willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.



**Figure (3):** Students’ Views about Teachers Interest and Student Development

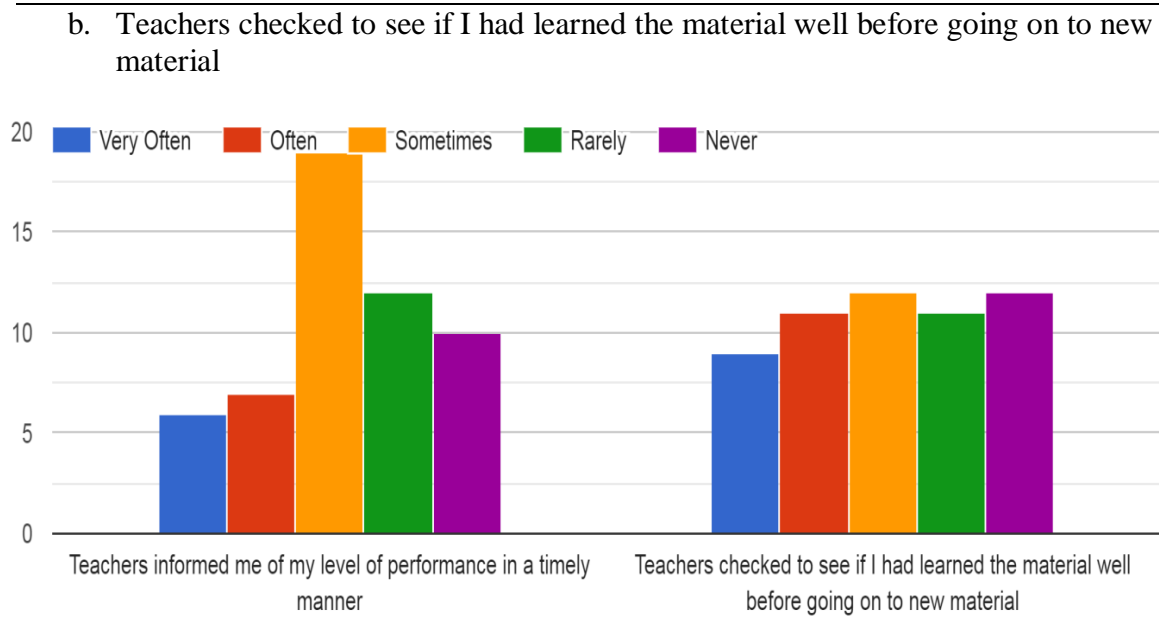
Participants’ views and attitudes towards teachers’ interest in the development of students was somehow conservative. Some students strongly agree 7.4% and agree 38.9% with the fact that teachers are sincerely interested in students. While, we can not ignore the fact that the majority of students’ answers are varied between neutral (20.4%, disagree 26%, and strongly disagree 5.6%). With regard to the second item, responses are nearly the same between agreeing and disagreeing (Strongly agree, 18.5%, agree 20.4%, disagree, 24.1%, and strongly disagree 11.1%). A slightly significant number of participants 25.9% give a neutral point of view. A high proportion of students 55.6% stay neutral regarding the point of outstanding teachers. Still, 22.5%, 7.4% of respondents agree and strongly agree with this indication, respectively. The rest of the participants (disagree, 13%, and strongly disagree, 1.9%) do not accept this proposition. When it comes to students’ interest in teaching, less than a half of participants agree 37% and strongly agree 14.8% with this conception. In the other hand, 14.8% of participants disagree and others strongly disagree 1.9%. A significant number of students 31.5% neither agree nor disagree with this view. Additionally, a considerable number of participants (strongly agree 11.1%, and agree 31.5%) claim that they want to spend more time out of the class to discuss issues that interest them as students with their teachers. However, a slightly significant number of participants disagree 22.3 and strongly disagree with this notion, and 20.4% of the respondents remain neutral.

**4.4. Section Four: Prompt Feedback**

Below are statements about receiving feedback from teachers concerning your learning in the classroom.

- a. Teachers informed me of my level of performance in a timely manner.

## Students' Experiences of Teaching Quality in Higher Education:



**Figure (4):** Frequency of students' reception of teachers' feedback

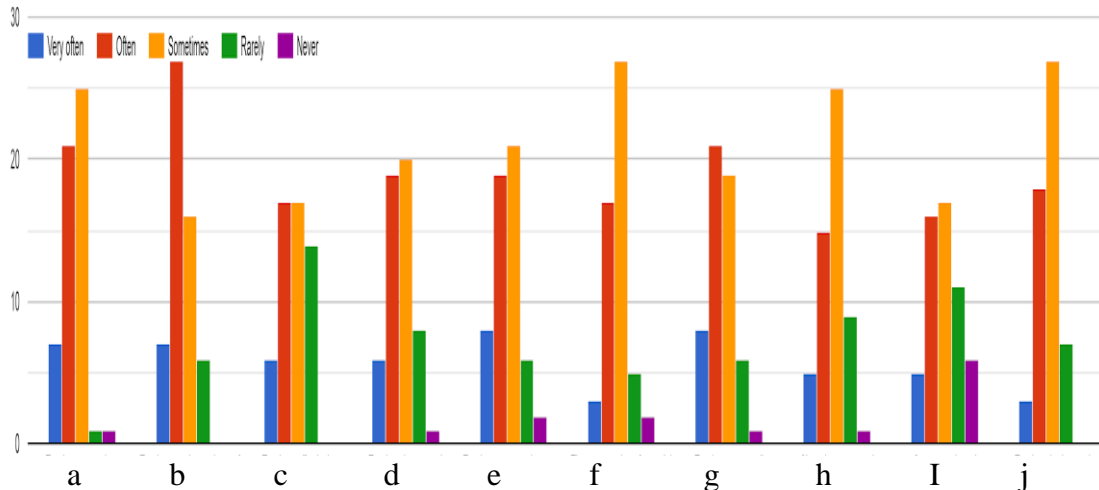
When students are asked about their opinions and experiences of the feedback received from their teachers, they show dissatisfaction about this issue. The results illustrate that a notable number of respondents declare that teachers are sometimes inform them about their performance, however; a considerable number of students affirm that they rarely (22.2%) and never (18.5%) receive feedback whilst a slight number of students choose often 13%, and very often 11.1%. With regard to statement b, the results are close. The participants' responses are displayed as follows: very often 14.8%, often 20.4%, sometimes 22.3%, rarely 20.4%, and never 22.2%.

### 4.5. Section Five: Teaching Clarity and Organization

This section introduces statements about teachers' skill and clarity as preparation and organization in teaching.

- a. Teachers gave clear explanations.
- b. Teachers made good use of examples and illustrations to explain difficult point.
- c. Teachers effectively reviewed and summarized the material.
- d. Teachers interpreted abstract ideas and theories clearly.
- e. Teachers gave assignments that helped in learning the course material.
- f. The presentation of material was well organized.
- g. Teachers were well prepared for class.
- h. Class time was used effectively.
- i. Course goals and requirements were clearly explained.
- j. Teachers had a good command of what they where teaching.





**Figure (5):** Students' opinions about clarity and organization of the teaching materials.

As denoted in Figure 5, the majority of informants 44.4% state that teachers sometimes provide them with a clear explanation of the lesson materials, and the other participants' views ranged between very often, 13% and often 37%. By contrast, a slight number of students are not very satisfied with the teachers' way of explanation (rarely 11.1% and never 1.9%). In addition, a significant number of participants assert that they regularly (often 46.3%, and very often 11.1) benefit from the teachers good use of examples and illustrations. Other informants declares that they do not receive such a good explanation (sometimes 27.8%, rarely 11.1%, never 1.9%).

Concerning the revision and summarization of the teaching materials, students claim that they frequently deliver good summaries for revision (very often 11.1%, very often 31.5%, sometimes and 31.5%), yet other participants 25.9% claim that they rarely benefit from this option. For the interpretation of abstract ideas and theories, informants divulges the following responses (very often 11.1%, often 35.2%, sometimes 37%, rarely 14.8%, and rarely 1.9%. Furthermore, the majority of informants declares that they habitually receive assignments from teachers to do (very often 14.8%, often 33.3%), the percentage of participants who sometimes get assignment from teachers is 37%. The remaining students never 1.9% or rarely 9.3% benefit from it.

It is clear from the above figure that half number of teachers (50%) are sometimes succeeded in organizing and presenting the teaching materials. Other participants claim that they are usually well presented and organized (very often 5.6%, often 31.5%), while others occasionally notice this feature (rarely 9.3%, and never 3.7%). As well as, from the point of view of students, the frequency of a good preparation of the lesson comes as follows, very often 14.8%, often 37%, sometimes 33.3%, rarely 11.1%, and never 1.9%.

Regarding the effective use of time inside the classroom, less than a half of informants 44.4% indicate that teachers sometimes exploit the time inside the class effectively. The rest of participants' responses are varied between very often 9.3%, often 27.8%, rarely 14.8%, and never 1.9%. Besides, a slight considerable number of participants 29.6% note that the goals of the lesson are sometimes explained, however; 27.8% of them they are regularly informed about these requirements, while others do not receive them regularly (rarely 20.4% and never 11.1%). Finally, about half of the participants 48.1% declares that teachers have a good command of their teaching, and the remaining answers sorts between very often 5.6%, sometimes 31.5%, rarely 13%, and never 1.9%.

## Students' Experiences of Teaching Quality in Higher Education:

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### 5. Discussion

The teaching quality is considered as an integral component of the educational process. Ergo, teaching evaluation should be conducted to ensure and promote professional teachers, and as a result enhancing learning outcomes. The results of the questionnaire revealed that the teaching quality in the department of English language and literature has its weaknesses and strengths as any other educational institutions.

In one hand, basing on the students' views and experiences, the vast majority of EFL teachers have developed positive personal relationships with their students. That is, some of students express their positive point of view regarding interaction and communication with their teachers in informal settings, which effectively contributed in developing their personalities, growing their intellectual abilities, values, and attitudes. Indeed, the majority of teachers in the department are young flexible teachers who build a good relationships with their students even outside the classroom and department by using new technologies such as social networks, and e-mails. Hence, more attention should be given to this notion of interaction by all the remaining rigid teachers to help knowing the students' needs and interests. Moreover, the majority of students indicate that the teachers provide them with a clear explanation using examples and illustrations; they also give them assignments for better understanding. In fact, EFL teachers do their best in order to make the information, ideas or theories clear for their learners.

On the other hand, the majority of students remain neutral concerning the notion of outstanding teachers. In addition, students receive less attention and interest from their teachers out of class studies and in other areas of life, though they have asserted that their good relationship with them. Furthermore, as far as feedback is concerned, most of the participants are not satisfied with this clue. Actually, teachers prepare assignments for students, however; they do not provide them with the necessary key answers or a feedback of their performance, and this is may be due to the time constraints during this period of Covid 19. Another striking point is that teaching materials are not always presented and organized in an effective way. As a matter of fact, in our department there is a severe lack of effective teaching materials that may help teachers to present them appropriately, and attract the students' attention and raise their motivation. In addition, basing on the students' views, timing in the class is not efficiently exploited by teachers. Indeed, recently, many teachers consider time management as a difficult issue that cannot be manipulated appropriately due to the new protocols adopted by our university as a reaction to the spread of Covid 19.

### Conclusion

Much of the success of teaching is dependent on its acceptance by teachers and the use of the instruments at teachers' disposal. This study helps us to raise better information and awareness about the quality teaching in the department of English; it also contributes to raise weaker point and parameters of the teaching process. Ultimately, this leads to the improvement of the quality teaching, and fulfilment of its objectives.

As any educational institution, teaching practices has strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, based on the results of the questionnaire, some conclusions and recommendations have been drawn. Firstly, teachers should be aware of the fact that enhancing their quality of teaching is the power to improve students' learning. In addition, teachers have to keep interaction with students alive even outside of the classroom using new technological tools such as e- learning platforms or invite them for informal meetings to launch discussions and raise problems. Moreover, they have to raise concerns about teaching, organization of materials, and interest of their students. Teachers have to start providing students with the adequate feedback using the recent technological

tools. For the sake of enhancing the level of teaching effectively, we must continue evaluating teaching practices very regularly. Actually, it is an occasion for teachers to consider their own role in the enhancement of quality in order to teach better.

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