

# **The Impact of the Teacher Gender on High School Learners' Achievement and Motivation in Moroccan EFL Classes: Evidence from Chichaoua Directorate**

BOUAISSANE Mohamed, BRIGUI Hind

*(Department of English Studies, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts/ Ibn Tofail University, Morocco)*  
*(Department of English Studies, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts/ Ibn Tofail University, Morocco)*

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## **Abstract:**

**Background:** Research in Morocco has hardly looked at the teacher sex as a potential variable that may explain the observed difference and change in learners' achievement in EFL classes. This illustrates that there is much to be done in terms of research and investigation in the Moroccan context. This study, therefore, sets off to bridge this gap in literature and contribute to the body of knowledge by analyzing the impact of the gender of the teacher on learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes.

**Materials and Methods:** Quantitative and qualitative data gained from 96 senior high school learners from four different high schools, Chichaoua directorate, have been used to determine and investigate the connection between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement in EFL classes. The participants were mainly questioned on their perceptions about their preferred teacher gender in EFL classes.

**Results:** The analysis of the data prove convincingly that the gender of the teacher may result in gender gaps in learners' achievement and that learners have better educational outcomes when taught by their preferred teacher gender. This study ends up with a conclusion and some pedagogical recommendations.

**Conclusion:** the gender of the teacher is a variable that directly impacts learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes in the Moroccan context. Learners' achievement and motivation are enhanced and promoted when they are taught by their preferred teacher's gender.

**Key word:** Teacher gender; gender gap; EFL learning; learners' achievement; Learners' motivation.

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## **I. Introduction**

Gender and language education have always been central issues in ELT discourses. However, research has provided evidence that very little has been said about the impact of the gender of the teacher on learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes. The aim of this study is to look in-depth into the influence of the language teacher gender on learners' achievement with special reference to the Moroccan context. The complex and rich nature of classroom environment call for a continuous classroom-based and multiple perspective research to understand the factors that directly affect learners' achievement and motivation.

Learners and teachers are usually engaged in a give-and-take process in EFL classes. Teachers' and learners' expectations, needs, opinions, conceptions, sociocultural background, educational background and gender factors come into play to constitute a complex environment that is worth investigating. These variables may positively or negatively affect the teaching and learning process. The present study intervenes to investigate one of these factors, namely the connection between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement.

Extensive research has been done on different aspects related to English language learning and teaching in the Moroccan context. However, according to Kissau and Turnbull (2008); Despite these concerns, a thorough review of the literature revealed no study that specifically looked at the relationship between the sex of the teacher and student achievement or motivation in a second language environment. This clearly illustrates the need for further research in this area. (p.163)

Interestingly, there is a need for further research on gender and language education, and precisely on the effect of the gender of the teacher on learners' attainment in the classroom. This article, therefore, aims at bridging this gap. It attempts to describe as accurately and precisely as possible the relationship between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes in Moroccan high schools. As previously mentioned, classroom environment is highly rich and complex in nature. However, understanding how the gender of the teacher influences learners' achievement and motivation will allow us to move a step forward into understanding how and when learners effectively learn.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

According to Ouakrime (2018) "In the case of north Africa, with special reference to Morocco, no study dealing specifically with gender issues in language teaching and learning is available to date (P.87)". Relatedly, the purpose of this study is to examine and investigate the impact of the teacher gender on learners' achievement and motivation in English classes in the Moroccan context. This study is significant not only because it investigates learners' perceptions towards their teachers of English gender but also because it provides us with insights on how the factor of the teacher's gender can play a determining role in how much learning takes place in classrooms. Unsurprisingly, the researchers aim to explore the impact of the teacher gender on learners' achievement. The participants therefore are mainly questioned for their opinions and perceptions on the teacher's gender in EFL classes.

### **Research Questions:**

This study aims to answer the following question:

- 1- To what extent does the teacher gender impact learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes?
- 2- Is language teaching and learning a gendered experience?

### **Significance of the Study**

Ouakrime (op.cit) argued that "In the case of north Africa, with special reference to Morocco, no study dealing specifically with gender issues in language teaching and learning is available to date (P.87)". In the same vein Benattabou "et al" (2021) argued that;

Educationalist in Morocco have hardly looked at the sex variable as a potential parameter which may explain some of the differential success of students in schools, and little if not daring to say none is known about it in the Moroccan context where there is still much to be done in terms of research and investigations. (p.82)

Obviously, the two quotes indicate that gender issues in teaching and learning are not given enough attention, which clearly illustrates the need for further research in this area. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by helping to bridge this gap in research and literature and determine the connection between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement in EFL classes. Language classrooms are ever-changing, highly complex and rich in nature. According to El Karfa (2014) When teachers and learners come together, a lot of variables unpredictably come into play. These variables include teachers' and learners' expectations, needs, sociocultural and educational backgrounds and gender. Interestingly, this study sets off to carefully examine one of these variables, namely gender. The gender of the teacher in English classrooms is a determining variable that directly impacts the amount of learning that takes place. The findings of this study will provide language teachers and practitioners with valuable insights on how the teacher's gender impacts learners' achievement, and how this factor may be used to explain the observed change in learners' achievement and gender gaps in EFL classes in Moroccan high schools. These insights will also help us understand and cope with a classroom environment which is highly complex and rich in nature. Hopefully, this will help improve the quality of teaching and learning and maximize learning outcomes in English classrooms in Moroccan high schools.

## **II. Literature Review:**

Dee (2006) conducted an interesting study and found that students learn best when they are taught by teachers of the same gender. He argued that "girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men". (P.71). This study reveals that learners' learning depends largely on the gender of the teacher.

Gender variable is a factor that directly impacts the amount and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning in the language classroom. It also impacts the nature of interaction between the parties involved. In 1996, Willet raised the question in TESOL Quarterly, "Why has the TESOL profession taken so long to examine gender?" (P.344). In the same vein, Ouakrim (2018) posed the following question, "Why has the Moroccan ELT profession taken seventeen years longer?" (P.87) .

Benattabou "et al" (2021) argued that educationalists in the Moroccan context have hardly looked into sex as a potential variable that may directly impact learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes.

In the last two decades, a lot of research has been conducted on gender and education in Moroccan context to describe as accurately as possible how gender impacts the effectiveness of the teaching and learning in English classes. However, research has provided evidence that further research is still needed in this area. Relatedly, Kissau and Turnbull (op.cit) argue that,

Despite these concerns, a thorough review of the literature revealed no study that specifically looked at the relationship between the sex of the teacher and student achievement or motivation in a second language environment. This clearly illustrates the need for further research in this area. (p.163)

### **Gender and Language Education: Background**

In her article on gender and language education, Bouzenirh (2018) argued that "Gender can be seen as relational concept capable of helping to detect and explore problems at the level of inequity in sex roles (P.60)". In the same vein, Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2016) noted that "In today's world we hear a lot about gender and gender differences, so we thought you would be interested in knowing how male and female teachers differ in the classroom." ( P.3)

It is important to note that there are a number of personal characteristics that influence the way teachers teach, one of these characteristics include the teacher gender. The teacher's gender determines learners' attainment and motivation in English classrooms. Relatedly, Dunkin(1987) and Weiner (1995) argued that Studies seem to indicate male teachers, on average, appear to be more dominant and authoritarian. Predictably, their classrooms are more organized and teacher-controlled. The same studies, however, report that female teachers maintain warmer classroom and are more tolerant of misbehaviour. Furthermore, in classrooms with female teachers, students are more likely to initiate a question or statement, give more incorrect answers, and take risks by guessing answers. Coulter (1987) reports on gender differences and finds that female teachers are more tender-minded and pupil-supportive and less authoritative than man.

### **Teacher's Gender and Students' Achievement in EFL classrooms:**

The main questions this paper aims to answer are whether students learn more when their teacher is male or female and whether language teaching and learning is a gendered experience. This paper, therefore, sets off to examine the extent to which the teacher's gender influences learners' achievement in English classrooms. A thorough review of the literature reveals that research yields mixed results regarding gender and language education. Cruickshank et al (2016) noted that "Neither teacher gender, race, nor ethnicity seem to have an impact upon how much students learn. (P.4)" Unpredictably, this suggests that having a male or a female teacher does not affect students achievement in class, and learners learn the same amount irrespective of the gender of the teacher. However, Dee (2006) conducted a study to examine the link between the teacher gender and students' achievement. Dee (2006) found that students learn best when they are taught by teachers of the same gender. He argued that "girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men".( 2006, P.71).

In his speech, Obama (2007) stated that "from the moment our children step in a classroom, the single most important factor determining their achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from, it is not who their parents are or how much money they have. It is who their teacher is." This emphasizes the fact that learners are greatly affected by their teachers. Therefore, their achievement is determined by the characteristics of their teachers including gender.

According to Basow ( 2010) "women are better than men at dealing with the emotional and social needs of younger children, whereas men are better than women at dealing with the intellectual and vocational needs of older children/young adults" (P.278). Interestingly, this indicates that female teachers know how to deal with the emotional side of students, while male teachers are good at improving learners' intellectual, vocational and academic potentials in the classroom.

Winkelmann (2016) argued convincingly in his doctoral thesis that research done on teacher gender and student achievement is highly limited and it often yields mixed results. Therefore, this study attempts to approach teacher gender and language education in English classes in Moroccan high schools.

### **Perceptions on Gender and Language Education:**

Previous research on gender and language education has yielded different and mixed results. While some believe that the teacher gender directly impacts learners' achievement, and view it as a determining factor, others believe that the teacher's gender plays a minor role in how and what learners learn. Presumably, they believe that it is the teaching style and the characteristics of the teacher that determine the amount of teaching and learning that takes place.

Ouakrime (2018) stated that " .... Because of perceived differences in teaching styles between male and female staff, the presence of male teachers may function as a mediating factor for male students to adopt a less negative attitude and perform adequately in language learning." (P.95). Simply put, Ouakrime believed that male learners are often seen as less able language learners than female students. Male students consider foreign languages as fundamentally girlish. Predictably, holding these negative attitudes towards foreign languages results in male under-achievement. However, Ouakrime believed that having a male teacher enables male learners to develop a less negative attitude towards learning foreign languages. It has also been observed that female students may opt for female teachers as they believe that having the same gender as their teacher makes it easier for them to discuss classroom-related as well as intimate and personal issues with them.

### **III. Material And Methods**

The present study was carried out on second year baccalaureate learners in Chichaoua directorate, Marrakesh-Safi region, Morocco, from December 2021 to February 2022. A total of 96 learners aged between 15 and 23 participated in this study.

**Study Design:** This study is part of the human sciences research as it aimed to investigate a widely debated issue in the literature, namely how the teacher's gender influences learners' achievement and behaviour in English classroom. Unlike pure sciences, it takes a lot of efforts to guarantee a satisfying degree of validity and reliability in naturalistic research. However, to achieve a satisfying degree of validity, reliability, objectivity and to ensure that the results attained can be generalizable across and are representative of the whole population, this study used both quantitative and qualitative techniques both to collect and analyze data. The choice of mixed-method design to collect and analyze data is theoretically grounded. Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasize the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem (see Rossman & Wilson, 1985). In the same vein Creswell (2014) argued that "mixed methods research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches" (P.32). The researchers therefore used a well-designed questionnaire which yielded both quantitative and qualitative data about the impact of the teacher's gender on learners' achievement in English classrooms. The questionnaire provided data to account for and gain deep understanding of the learners' engagement in EFL classes, and their perceptions about the effect of the teacher's gender on their achievement and motivation in English classrooms.

**Study Location:** This study was conducted in four different high schools in Chichaoua directorate, Marrakesh-Safi region, Morocco. It is hoped that targeting male and female participants from different schools, with different learning experiences and with different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds would grant the study a satisfactory degree of validity and reliability. Hopefully, the results would be generalizable across and representative of the whole population.

**Study Duration:** This study was conducted between December 2021 and February 2022. The researchers intentionally chose this time of the academic year to carry on this study because they wanted to make sure that learners have gained some familiarity with their current teachers. Eventually, their perceptions would be valid and reliable.

**Sample Size:** The participants targeted in this study are 96 second year baccalaureate students from 8 different classes (12 students in each class) who enrolled in four public high schools in the directorate of Chichaoua, Marrakesh-Safi region, Morocco. Their age ranged from 15 to 23 years old of which 50% were males and 50% were females. The participants came from eight different classes taught by four male and four female teachers. The researchers targeted second year baccalaureate students to ensure that the participants had a learning experience both with male and female teachers in the previous years. The researchers also targeted different schools from different areas so that learners from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds are included in the study.

**Sample Size Calculation:** The target population from which the researchers randomly selected their sample was estimated to be 500 learners. The target population represents 19,2% of the whole population which indicates that the confidence level is high.

**Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Male and female second year baccalaureate learners.
2. Learners with previous learning experience with both male and female teachers.
2. Learners who have had English as a foreign language in middle and high schools.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Learners from other levels (Common core and first year baccalaureate learners)
2. Learners with no previous learning experience with male or female teachers.
3. Learners who were unwilling to take part in the study.

**Procedure and Methodology**

After deciding on the topic and the target population to investigate, the researchers designed a questionnaire to collect data from learners. The questionnaire yielded both qualitative and quantitative results as it contained both forced-choice questions in which learners were given choices to select from, and open-ended questions in which learners had to write their opinions and conceptions about different areas related to teacher-gender and their achievement in English classroom. To abide by research ethics, the researchers administered the questionnaire themselves asking the teachers of the classes to step out. The questionnaire included socio-academic characteristics such as age, gender, number of years spent learning English, number of years taught by male and female teachers, preferred teacher gender, engagement and motivation in class, and reasons for choosing male or female teacher as their preferred teacher gender.

The choice of the questionnaire to collect data is theoretically informed. According to Creswell (2012) "surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals" (P.06). Apparently, the questionnaire will help the researchers identify learners' perceptions and beliefs towards the gender of their teacher in EFL classes.

### Questionnaire

One of the issues that is widely debated in the literature is how to attain and ensure validity, reliability, objectivity and scientificity in human sciences research. Unlike pure science, achieving this is no easy task. Therefore, the researchers used a multi-perspective research to make the results attained generalizable across and representative of the whole population. Given the complex nature of the classroom, and in order to get a complete understanding of the connection between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement, the researchers used a well-designed questionnaire that yielded both quantitative and qualitative results. Creswell (2012) argued that "surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals" (P.06). Quantitative data was obtained through forced-choice questions, whereas qualitative data was obtained through open-ended questions in which learners had to write their opinions and perceptions about the preferred gender of their teacher of English, and how it affected their achievement and attainment in class.

### Statistical Analysis:

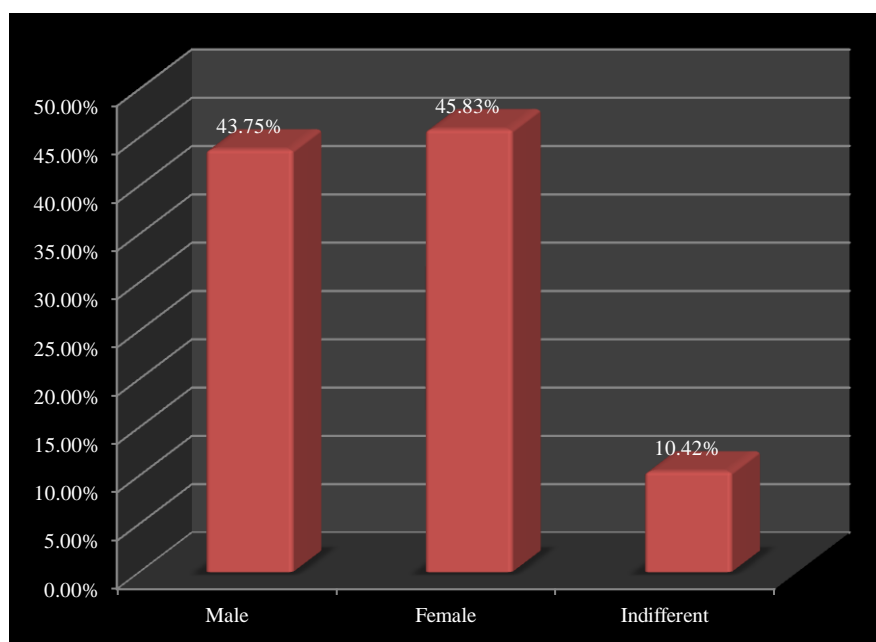
The data obtained from the learners was analyzed using Dornyei's (2007) coding stages: (1) transcribing, (2) coding, (3) growing ideas (4) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions. The researchers first decode learners' ideas about their preferred teacher's gender, interpret and analyze them and then draw conclusions based on these results.

## IV. Results

The main objective of this study was to determine the connection between the teacher's gender and learners' achievement, and to investigate the extent to which the teacher's gender impacts learning outcomes. The questionnaire targeted learners' perceptions about their preferred teacher's gender in English classes. After submitting the questionnaire to learners, we found that it yielded mixed results as shown in the following table and graph.

**Table no 1:** Shows learners' preferred teacher's gender.

Preferred teacher's gender	Number of the students	Percentage
Male	42	43,75%
Female	44	45,83%
Indifferent	10	10,42%



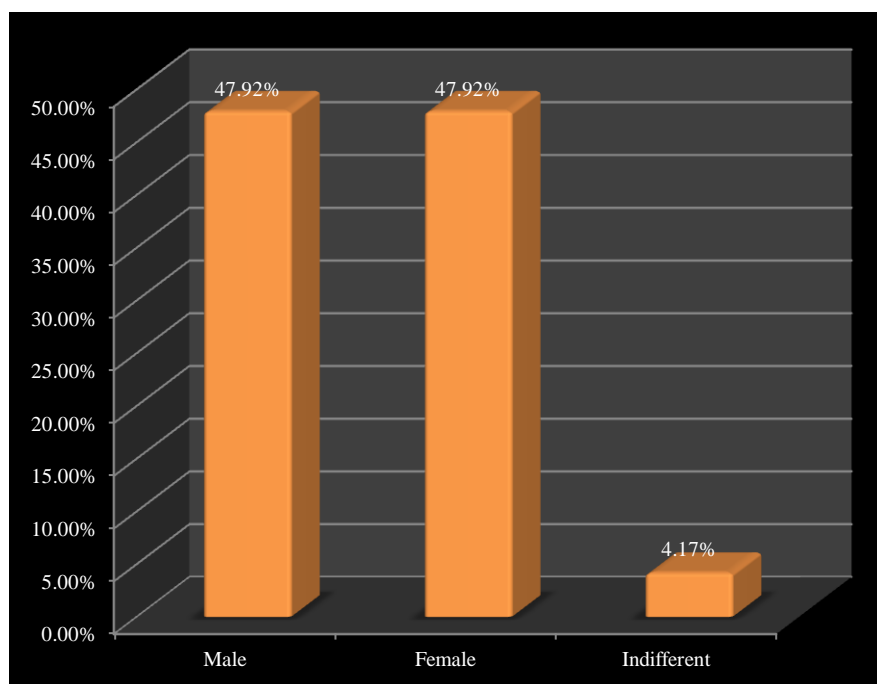
The table and the graph clearly show learners' preferred teacher's gender. It is noted that the results obtained are mixed. Accordingly, 43,75% of the participants chose male teacher as their preferred teacher's gender, 45,83% went for female teacher as their preferred teacher's gender in English class. Interestingly, only 10,42% of the participants were neutral and noted that the teacher's gender is not a determining factor for them. They believed that the teacher's gender plays a minor role in what and how they learn. They also believed that what determines the amount of learning that takes place in class is the teaching style, personal characteristics and qualifications of the teacher rather than their gender.

The number of the participants who chose female teachers as their preferred gender slightly exceeds the number of the participants who chose male teachers. This suggests that each learner is unique, and each one of them learns best when taught by their preferred gender. This supports the claim that the gender of the teacher can positively or negatively affect learners' achievement in class. This also suggests that each category of the participants interacts more and is more engaged in the lesson when they are taught by their preferred gender. Therefore, there seems to be a connection between what and how much learners learn and their teacher's gender. Additionally, the small number of the participants who expressed their impartiality towards the teacher's gender further provides evidence that gender is a variable that directly influences and intervenes in what we teach and how much learning takes place.

To further elaborate more on the issue of the teachers' gender and learners' achievement in English classes. The researchers investigated learners' perceptions and opinions about the gender of the EFL teacher they wish to have in their future studies, as will be shown in the following table and graph.

**Table no 2:** Records learners' preferred EFL teacher's gender in their future studies.

Future Teacher preferred gender	Number of the Students	Percentage
Male	46	47,92%
Female	46	47,92%
Both	4	4,17%



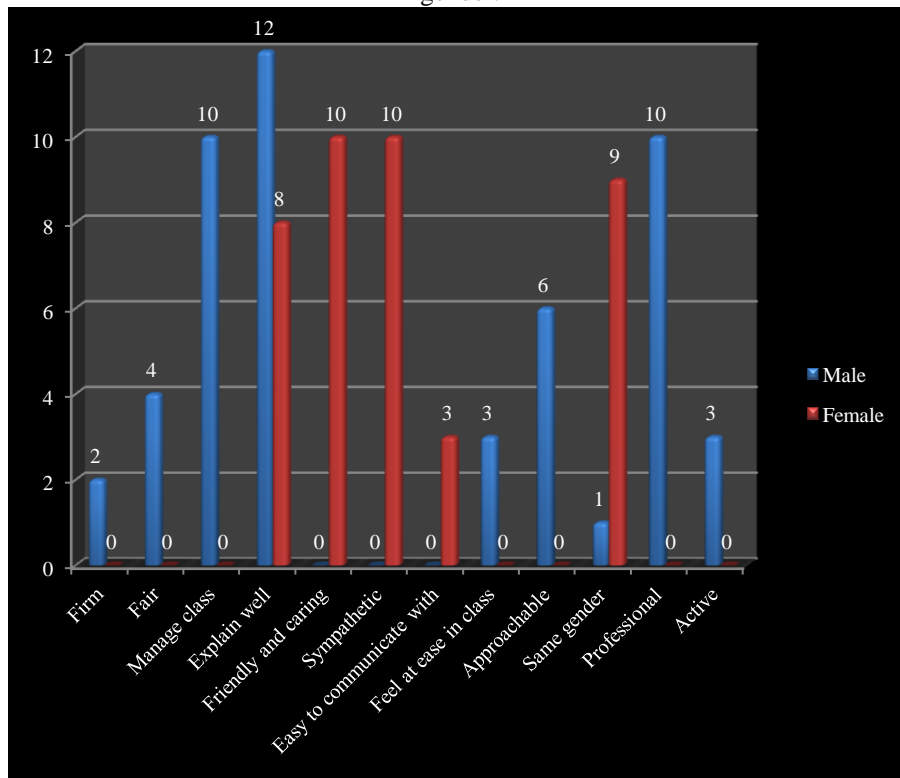
The researchers targeted learners' opinions about the teacher's gender they would like to have in their future studies. As expected, the questionnaire yielded mixed results. Interestingly, the number of the participants who expressed their wish to have a male teacher equals the number of the participants who preferred to have a female teacher in their future studies and endeavors. 47,92% of the participants in the study chose male teacher as their preferred teacher's gender, 47,92% chose female teacher as their preferred teacher's gender, and only 4,17% expressed their indifference and impartiality towards their teacher's gender.

Gender and language education is a topic which is often overlooked but much needed. Researchers and educationalist should focus more attention on gender and how it contributes to or hinders learning in EFL classes. The participants in the study openly expressed that their achievement, engagement and motivation in

EFL classes depend largely on the gender of their teacher. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that the teachers' gender directly impacts learners' achievement in EFL classes.

As previously mentioned, this study is quantitative and qualitative. Learners were given forced-choice questions followed by open-ended questions to justify their choices and preferences. The qualitative side of the study allows us as researchers and readers to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon that is being investigated. After they have chosen their preferred teacher gender, learners were given the opportunity to give reasons and arguments that justify their choices as will be shown in the following graph.

**Figure N 3:** Shows learners' arguments and reasons for choosing male or female as their preferred teacher gender.



The coding process of learners' responses and feedback provided us with very interesting insights that can help us get a comprehensive understanding of the connection between the teachers' gender and learners' achievement and motivation in EFL classes. The graph above includes learners' arguments and reasons for choosing male or female teacher as their preferred teacher gender. As the graph clearly shows, the participants provided different arguments to justify their choices. However, there are three arguments that they frequently used to justify choosing male teachers and three frequent arguments to justify the choice of female teachers. The participants who chose male teachers believed that male teachers manage classroom, explain well and are professional, whereas the participants who chose female teachers believed that female teachers are friendly and caring, sympathetic and easy to talk to due to same gender.

## V. Discussion

After the coding process of the learners' responses and feedback, it is noted that learners are divided into three categories. The first category openly expressed their wish to have a male teacher both in their present academic year and in their future studies in their English class, the second category preferred to have a female teacher and the last category, which represents the minority of the participants, expressed their impartiality and refused to pick a side. This provides a wealth of evidence that learners are directly affected by the teacher's gender. Human beings are too emotional and sensitive especially when it comes to gender. Learners' readiness to learn and engage in the activities that take place in class is no doubt connected to their teacher's gender. The amount of learning that takes place in class is determined by how learners perceive their teacher and by how they feel during the session. When the students are taught by their preferred teacher gender, it is likely that they would feel excited and engaged in the activities in class. Eventually, learners' achievement, motivation and academic performance will be enhanced and promoted. The fact that only 4,17% of the participants expressed

their indifference and impartiality further supports the claim that gender is an inextricable and deciding factor that directly affects learners' achievement in English classes.

Learners who chose male teacher as their preferred teacher gender provided many arguments. However, the arguments that are frequently mentioned by learners are classroom management, appropriate explanation of lessons and professionalism. They used these qualities as the basis for choosing male teachers as their preferred gender. For them, male teachers can manage their classrooms successfully. They believed that teachers who have control over their classes create a learning environment that facilitates learning and promotes educational outcomes. These results are in accordance with Marzano and Marzano (2003) who stated that "classroom management had the largest effect on student achievement" (p.6). The second frequent argument that learners provided is male teachers' ability to explain the lessons well. They believed that male teachers are more active and dynamic in the class. According to them, male teachers' dynamism in class helps them engage in the lesson and keeps them highly motivated and excited during the lesson. The last crucial argument that learners mentioned is professionalism, they believed that male teachers are more professional. To put it differently, learners believed that male teachers do not usually bring their personal life into class. They also believed that male teachers are professional as they can control their emotions so that they do not interfere with their professional life in class.

Learners who chose female teacher as their preferred gender also provided different arguments. However, three arguments are frequently used by the majority of learners to justify their choice. These arguments are friendliness, sympathy and having the same gender. Learners who chose female teachers as their preferred teacher's gender believed that female teachers are friendly and kind. They argued that they maintain warmer classroom environment in which they feel that their self-esteem is not threatened. For them, the humanistic side in classroom is also important. Consequently, they believed that their performance, achievement and attainment are promoted in female-led classes. The second argument put forward by learners is that female teachers are sympathetic and caring. They pointed out that female teachers show learners sympathy during the process of learning. These results are in accordance with Coulter's (1987) findings. He argued that female teachers are more tender-minded and pupil supportive and less authoritative than man. They also believed that female teachers care about how they feel and show understanding when they encounter any difficulty or challenge. The last argument that female learners convincingly used is that they prefer female teachers because they have the same gender which is in accordance with Dee' findings "girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men".(2006, P.71). For them, they can share and talk with their female teachers about personal matters that they cannot otherwise discuss with male teachers. In other words, they argued that there are personal matters they can discuss only with their female teachers.

All in all, the analysis of the learners' responses and feedback has provided us with interesting insights. Learners who preferred male-led classes are more interested in classroom management, organization and professionalism. They therefore preferred authoritarian male teachers. However, learners who preferred female teachers are more interested in the humanistic side of the teaching and learning process. They believed that their achievement is enhanced in female-led classes because female teachers are more sympathetic, caring and friendly. For them, female-led classes are stress-free and stimulating. Consequently, their affective filter is lowered and their performance is enhanced and sustained.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Gender and language education is a topic which is often overlooked but much needed. This study has provided us with thoughtful insights pertinent to gender and language education in EFL classes. It has also provided a wealth of evidence that the gender of the teacher is a variable, among others, that directly impacts learners' achievement and motivation in English classes in the Moroccan context. The results have shown that the teacher's gender is a parameter that affects learners' academic performance in EFL classes. Learners excel when they are taught by their preferred teacher gender. Learners' performance and motivation are enhanced and promoted when they have their preferred teacher gender. Educationalists and researchers in Morocco are therefore invited to focus more attention on gender and language education. It is hoped that studying this variable in-depth will improve the quality of education, and promote learning outcomes in EFL classes in the Moroccan context.

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