

Beyond the Teacher–Learner Relationship: A Didactic Analysis of Classroom Interaction and Learner Engagement in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT: The development of learners' competencies, particularly in the English language, remains an important concern within the educational system, especially in a context where learners continue to experience difficulties in achieving the expected level of language proficiency. In this regard, the relationship that learners establish with their teachers may positively or negatively influence their attitudes toward the learning process. Indeed, the quality of the learner–teacher relationship can shape learners' classroom experiences, their willingness to participate, and their level of engagement in English language learning. Therefore, this article places particular emphasis on the learner–teacher relationship in order to examine the extent to which it influences learners' involvement in learning English at the middle secondary school level. More specifically, the study seeks to explore learners' perceptions of their English language teachers and to understand how teacher responsiveness, classroom interaction, and the relational climate may contribute to facilitating or constraining their engagement in the learning process. In doing so, the study highlights the importance of the relational and didactic dimensions of language teaching in creating a supportive environment conducive to English language learning.

KEYWORDS: Teacher–learner relationship; EFL; learner engagement; classroom interaction; teacher responsiveness; English language learning.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of the English language occupies an important place in the educational system and has been the subject of several reforms aimed at adapting to learners' levels, developing their skills, and improving the quality of their learning. Despite this, the decline in learners' English language proficiency persists, which leads us to question the conditions of learning and, more specifically, the learner–teacher relationship.

In this article, we will focus on this relationship, which constitutes the essence of the pedagogical process, and its effect on English language learning at the middle secondary school level.

Given that the learner is the main actor in the teaching/learning process, what are learners' perceptions of the learner–teacher relationship, and how does this relationship influence their involvement in English language learning?

1. The Learner–Teacher Relationship as a Pedagogical and Didactic Construct

The learner–teacher relationship is the central pillar of any learning process. It lies at the intersection of the fields of psychology and education.

Gan (2021) defines the learner–teacher relationship as a pedagogical relationship involving three types of relationships:

The teaching relationship with the agent;

The didactic relationship between the agent and the object;

The learning relationship between the subject and the object within a given educational environment.

Xie and Derakhshan (2021), on the other hand, defines it as an educational relationship:

“The pedagogical relationship becomes educational when, instead of being limited to the transmission of knowledge, it engages individuals in an encounter in which each discovers the other and sees themselves, and where a human adventure begins through which the adult will be born in the child.”

Several studies have highlighted that this relationship lies at the heart of educational success.

Methodology

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted among 243 learners in the city of Casablanca, enrolled in two middle secondary schools: one located in an urban area and the other in a rural area. The survey aimed to collect and identify learners' perceptions of their teachers in order to examine the impact of these perceptions on their level of engagement in English language learning.

2. Analysis and Interpretation of the results

The analysis of the collected data allowed us to present the findings as follows:

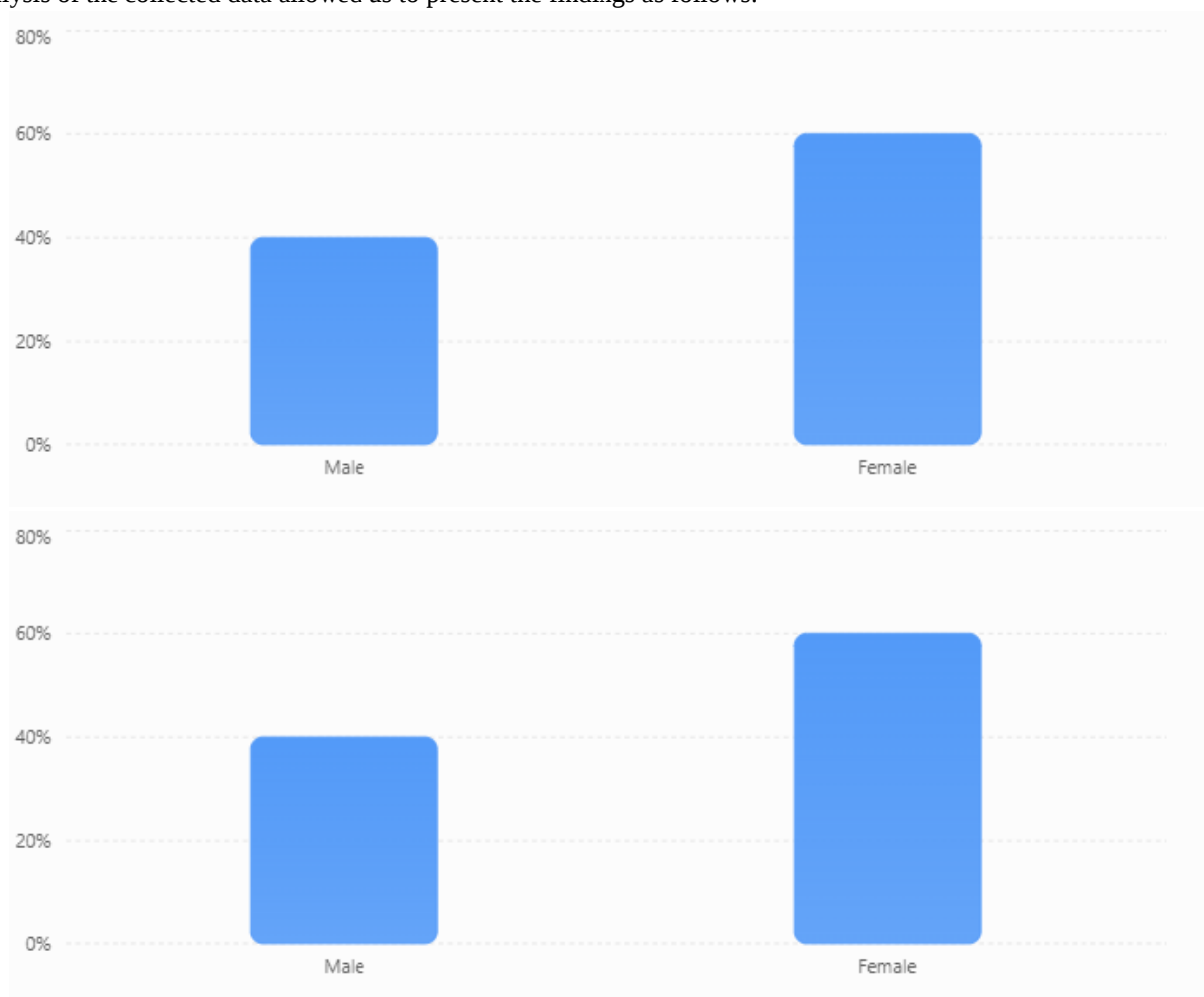


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants (N = 243)

Regarding age distribution, 50% of the participants were between 14 and 16 years old, 44% were between 16 and 18 years old, while 6% were over 18 years old.

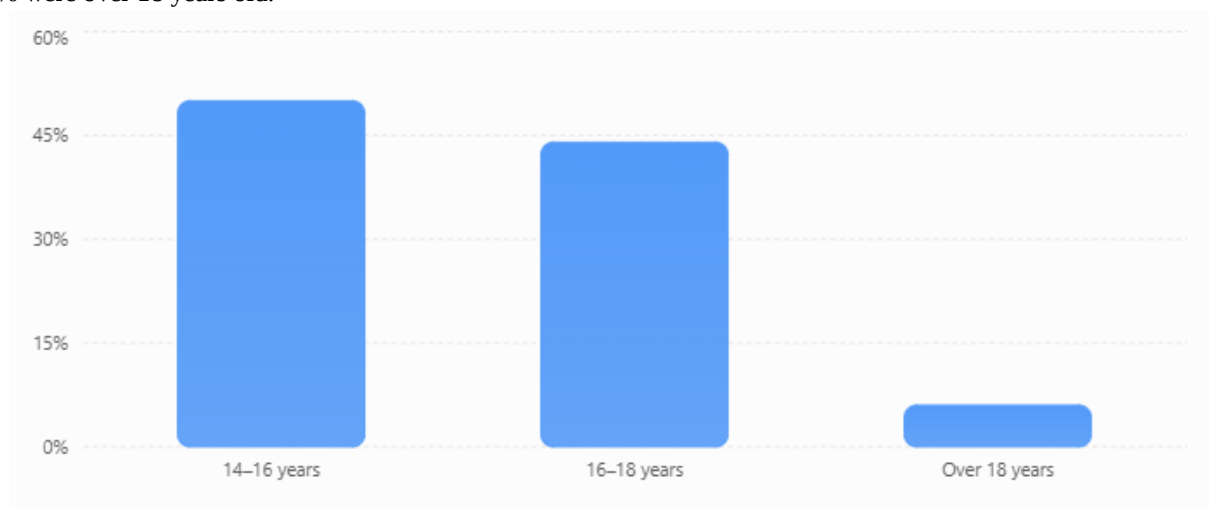


Figure 2. Age Distribution of Participants (N = 243)

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Educational-level distribution among learners in the study sample (N = 243).

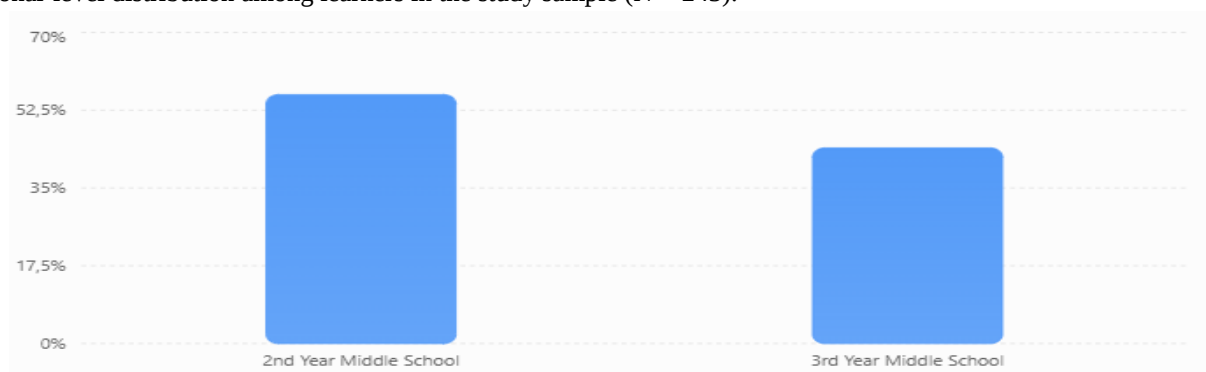


Figure 3. Distribution of participants by educational level (N = 243)

Regarding age distribution, 50% of the learners were between 14 and 16 years old, 44% were between 16 and 18 years old, and 6% were over 18 years old.

How do you perceive your English language teacher?



Figure 4. Learners' Perceptions of English Language Teacher Behaviour

Through this question, we sought to explore learners' perceptions of their English language teachers' behavior and how these perceptions may shape classroom interaction. As illustrated in the figure above, 34% of learners in urban settings and 29% in rural settings perceived their English teacher as friendly, which may facilitate communication and encourage learner–teacher interaction. In contrast, 17% of learners in urban settings and 11% in rural settings perceived

their teacher as strict, while 7% of urban learners and 2% of rural learners considered their teacher very strict. These variations suggest that learners' perceptions of teacher behavior differ according to individual experiences and classroom contexts.

How would you describe your relationship with your English language teacher?



Figure 5. Learners' Perceptions of Their Relationship with Their English Language Teacher

For the majority of learners in both rural (32%) and urban (27%) settings, the relationship with their English language

teacher was perceived as positive. Such a positive teacher–learner relationship may facilitate the learning process and

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contribute to establishing a supportive classroom climate based on trust and positive interaction.

Does your English language teacher always listen to you?

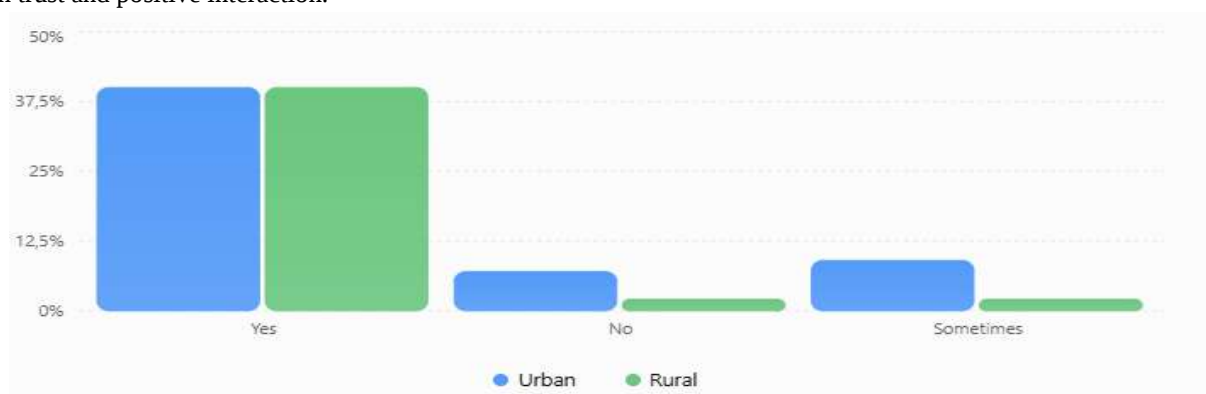


Figure 6. Learners' Perceptions of Their English Language Teacher's Responsiveness

As shown in the figure above, 40% of learners in urban settings and 40% in rural settings reported that their English language teacher listens to them and pays attention to their needs. This perceived teacher responsiveness may foster

greater learner engagement and contribute to a positive and sustainable English language learning experience.

Do you feel comfortable during your English language classes?



Figure 7. Learners' Level of Comfort during English Language Classes

According to the results, 32% of learners in urban settings and 31% in rural settings reported feeling comfortable during English language classes, whereas 6% of urban learners and 15% of rural learners reported feeling uncomfortable. The findings suggest that greater classroom comfort may encourage learners to become more actively engaged in

learning activities, thereby contributing to the development of a positive and supportive teacher–learner relationship.

Do you participate actively during your English language classes?

Through this question, we sought to assess learners' level of participation during English language classes.

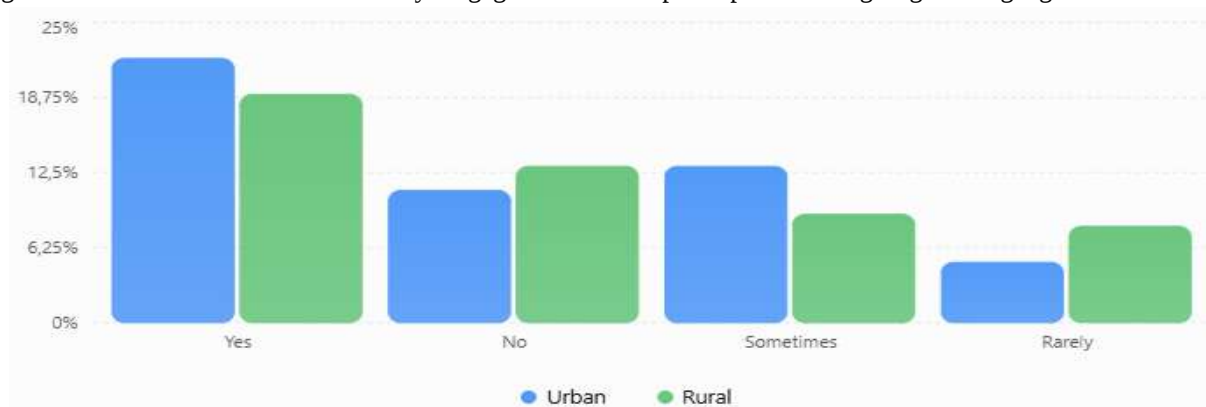


Figure 8. Learners' Participation in English Language Classes

As shown in the figure above, 22% of learners in urban settings and 19% in rural settings reported actively participating in English language classes. Such classroom

participation may foster greater learner engagement and contribute to the development of their communicative competence in English.

Is English easy to learn?



Figure 9. Learners’ Perceptions of the Difficulty of Learning English

The majority of learners, 17% in urban settings and 22% in rural settings, perceived English language learning as difficult, while 15% of urban learners and 19% of rural learners considered it somewhat difficult. These differences may be associated with the learning environment and the

educational context in which learners are exposed to and engage with English.

Do you experience difficulties with reading during English language classes?

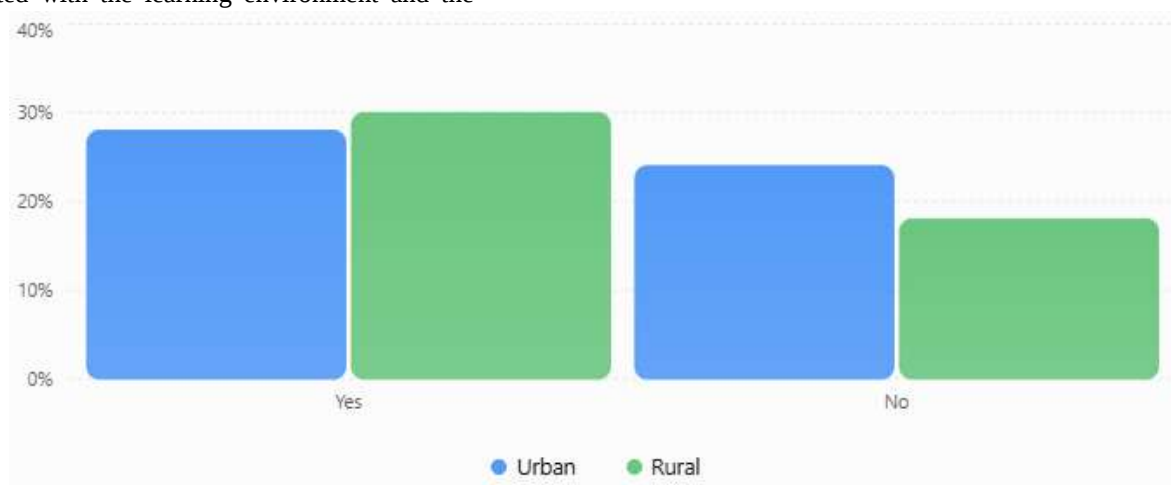


Figure 10. Learners’ Reported Difficulties with Reading in English

As shown in the figure above, 28% of learners in urban settings and 30% in rural settings reported experiencing difficulties with reading in English. These findings indicate that reading difficulties remain a recurrent challenge in English language learning and may affect learners’ reading comprehension, classroom participation, and overall engagement with the target language.

The difficulties encountered are more specifically related to pronunciation and comprehension.

If you experience difficulties with comprehension, do you ask your English language teacher for clarification?

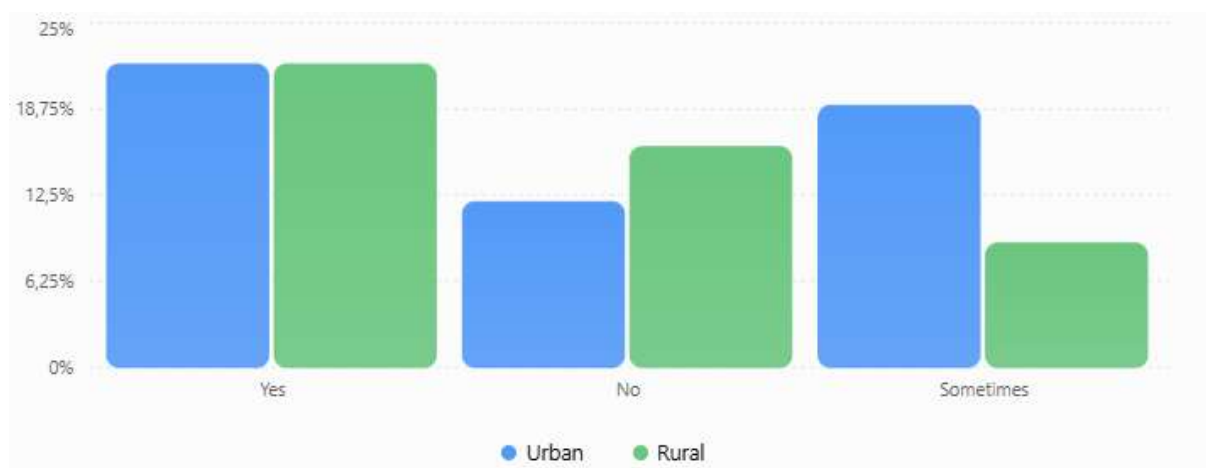


Figure 11. Learners' Requests for Clarification from Their English Language Teacher

Faced with these difficulties, 22% of learners in both urban and rural settings reported asking their English language teacher for clarification, which may reflect a positive teacher–learner relationship and learners' willingness to seek pedagogical support. In contrast, 12% of learners in urban settings and 16% in rural settings reported not asking for clarification. This reluctance may be associated with factors such as a lack of confidence or fear of being judged in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that learners' perceptions can help identify their learning barriers and pedagogical needs, thereby contributing to the creation of a classroom environment conducive to English language learning. The findings suggest

that the learner–teacher relationship constitutes a key dimension of the teaching–learning process and may play an important role in learners' academic success.

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