

## Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Gender-Biased Treatments in the Classroom Context

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### ABSTRACT

Much research has been undertaken to examine teachers' differential treatment of boys and girls, and the way this biased practice affects their academic achievement. There is a dearth however of research investigating students' perceptions of gender bias which shapes most of the EFL classroom practices. This study comes to fill in this gap in research assessing Moroccan EFL learners' perceptions of their teachers' differential treatment. Relying on the implementation of She & Fisher's (2002) Teacher Communication Behavior Questionnaire (TCBQ), this study examined the relationship between students' perceptions of teacher differential treatment and their academic achievement. Based on a quantitative case study design, the data were collected from a convenience sample of n= 92 Moroccan EFL students from Moulay Ismail University. The findings added empirical support for She & Fisher's (2002) TCBQ effectiveness in measuring teacher behavior. Correlational analyses provided evidence of a statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and TDT. Also, using a regression analysis test, TDT was found to be a strong predictor of academic achievement. The results also revealed a divergence in the perceptions of males and females of the five dimensions of TDT and an alarmingly significant difference in scholastic attainment in favor of girls. These findings have implications on EFL teacher-student interactions at the university level in general and on the education of boys in particular.

### 1. Introduction

Teacher Differential Treatment (henceforth TDT) in schools and gender discrimination issues in education have recently known a global rise (UNESCO, 2008; Mouaid, 2013; Pawelczyk & Sunderland, 2014; Ouakrime, 2016; Benattabou, 2014, 2015; Ait Bouzid, 2019). Gender concern however started with Women's liberation which has triggered more research on sex and language since the late 1960s. There have been multifarious trends of feminism, with various paradigms and aims, happening at the same period of time and under the same circumstances (Mary, 1995). Along these lines, multiple facets of feminism imply various effects on sex and language study. For instance, Dale Spender's (1985) approach can be viewed as a radical one, grasping the thought of male centric society as essential in women's 'battle' rather than class, which has been of prime significance to communist women's activists. Despite teachers' intentions to treat girls and boys fairly, the issue of gender bias is so often reported by students in universities (Mouaid, 2013).

The issue of TDT in education has been associated with students' poor academic achievement bringing about fewer graduates and more drop outs. Soubhi, et al. (2016) argued that "the deficit of resources and lack of communication in university are major causes of students' dropping out" (p. 195). Actually, students' positive perceptions of their instructors' communication practices help build a healthy relationship considered as very significant for their school achievement. Macklem (2008) stated that the kind of relationship is essential in "determining whether or not a learner will learn self-regulation skills, emotion regulation, take others' perspective, and develop relationships" (pp. 68-69).

Martinez & Gil (2020) found that classroom atmosphere and teacher students' relationships are key words to support inspirational perspectives towards learning. They stated that "it allows students to increase their commitment, motivation, positive assessment of learning, enthusiasm, interest and pride in success on the part of students" (p. 755). In this regard, girls seemed to have positive attitudes towards their learning environment which has lately contributed to an ascent in the social level of women, conquering the impacts of the social discrimination they have undergone for ages (Martinez & Gil, 2020).

The importance of the present study is a reaction to the scarcity of "quantitative research into whether classroom practices [...] have an impact on student learning" (Wenglinisky, 2002, p. 6), and consequently on academic achievement among male and female students. Actually, there are barriers which seem to hamper male- female students' chances throughout their academic career and their life in general. Goransson (2011) contends in this regard that "the strength or absence of Equal Opportunity [...] has an impact on gender equality in universities" (p. 50).

This study is therefore an attempt to rigorously examine, from a quantitative perspective, the type of male and female students' perceptions of teacher communication behaviour manifested through its five dimensions as developed by She & fisher (2002), along with their impact on academic achievement. In so doing, the data collected will be presented and interpreted in the light of She & fisher's dimensions namely: challenging, encouragement & praise, non-verbal support, understanding & friendly, and controlling behaviour. This will be followed by examining the predictive effect of these dimensions on academic achievement of boys and girls.

**2. Literature Review**  
**2.1 Gender inequality theory**

According to a number of researchers (Sunderland, 2000, among others), schools and universities are microcosmic versions of society as a whole. Gendered practices prevalent and characteristic of most patriarchal societies are projected, wittingly or not, through a wide range of facets pertaining to our educational systems. As a matter of fact, classroom behavior, as one form of these gendered practices, is just a reflection of a dominating culture which seems to provide imbalanced opportunities and rights to both genders.

Gender inequality theory elucidates that biological differences are inevitable irrespective of one's race, class, culture and social origin. In this connection, Lindsey (2016) made a distinction between gender and sex. The latter is the biological distinction among people while the former is the social development of both genders within their social contexts. In fact, the gap between male and female citizens in social, financial and political life is integral to understanding the differential treatment of women as opposed to men. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) nations, for example, have probably the most noteworthy gender gaps on the planet; for instance, on the World Economic Forums Gender Gap Index for 2015, Tunisia was positioned 127th-out of 145 nations; Egypt 136<sup>th</sup>; Morocco 139<sup>th</sup> and Jordan 140<sup>th</sup> (Figure 1), with a very little progress being made in narrowing the gender gap. The rate of women's ill-treatment seems to have increased in Jordan since 2008, and has been narrowing in Egypt and Morocco (WEF 2016).

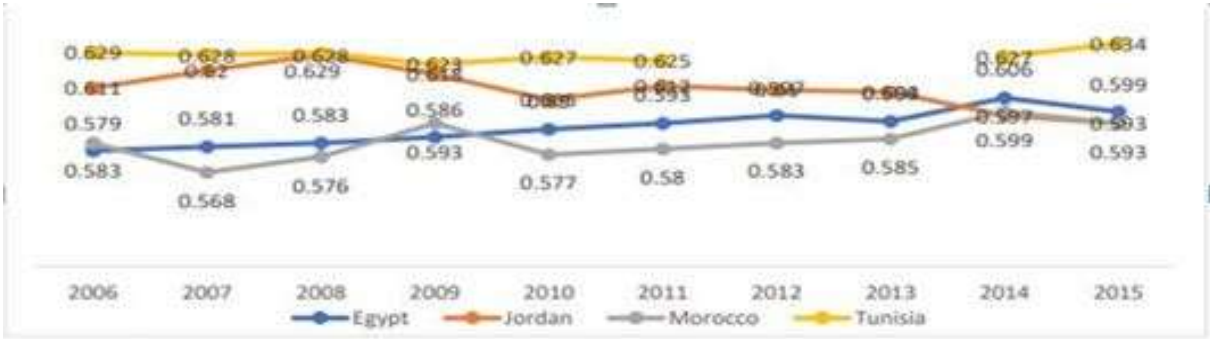
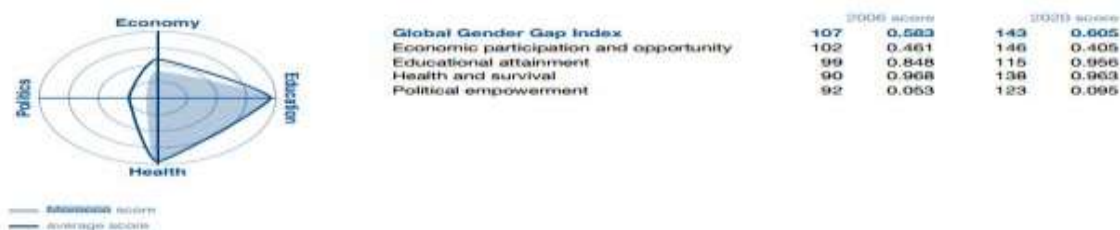


Figure 1: World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index 2006-2015, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia (0=inequality, 100=equality)(reported in Abbott & Sapsfort, 2016, p. 52)

The World Economic Forum report of 2020, with respect to the Women Political Empowerment sub-index, showed that 108 nations of the 149, including Morocco, have improved their general scores, driven predominantly by a noteworthy growth of women in parliaments contrasted with the last statistics. In certain nations, for example, Latvia, Spain and Thailand, the

percentage of female candidates in parliament has expanded significantly. Despite this fact, the representation of women up to date is just 25% of the 35,127 worldwide seats, and just 21% of the total range of 3,343 ministers; and in certain nations, women are not elected for any decision making positions (WEF report, 2020).



Figures 2: Global Gender Gap in Morocco (World Economic Forum report, 2020, p. 253)

In Morocco, the score of gender parity in educational attainment has risen from 0.848 in 2006 to 0.956 in 2020 demonstrating a satisfactory pattern where the gender gap has witnessed a significant decline. It has been reported that “female enrolment rates are above 97% in primary education and more than 64% in secondary education and sometimes, they slightly outnumber the men in tertiary education” (World Economic Forum report, 2020, p. 253). The gender gap in educational attainment in Morocco seems to get closed compared to other sectors like in economics and politics where there are still vast discrepancies often tipped at men’s favor to the detriment of their female partners. In this regard, Morocco was ranked 143 out of 153 countries, and scored 0.605 in the ‘Global Gender Gap Index’ as indicated earlier in the graph above. Egypt, Iraq and Morocco are evaluated as having a medium degree of human advancement while Jordan, Libya and Tunisia are seen as having high human improvement. Besides, women have benefited from this development as the scores on the WEF 2015 Gender Gap Index appear close to equality by sexual orientation for health and education. The gap in educated adults’ rate; however, remains nearly enormous, and particularly so in Morocco.

Gender inequality is made even worse by the biased resolutions issued by the so called political elite who enforce their decisions on individuals, families and society at large. Their imbalanced decisions seem to affect a number of sectors including, but in no way limited to, health care, education and the family. If the participation of men and women in decision making is fairly equal, institutions will guarantee social justice for all citizens. However, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the gender gap in political representativeness among MENA nations is extremely high. With 1 = gender equality, the score in Egypt on the 2015 Index was 0.048, in Jordan 0.073, Morocco 0.11 and Tunisia 0.23 (WEF, 2016).

## 2.2 Students’ perceptions of teachers’ differential treatment

No one can deny that students see and create impressions about their instructors’ practices depending on their style of teaching and their different ways of treating them. Stated differently, the manner in which teachers interact seems to impact the impression the students have of them. Nevertheless, past research relied heavily on the implementation of class observation as an elicitation technique to pin down any imbalanced tendencies among instructors in their conduct and treatment of their male and female students (Good & Brophy, 2002). Scant attention, however, has been made to address the perceptions of those students receiving that kind of treatment as an attempt to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesised gender bias in classes. Recent research in this area has attempted to explore other facets of the problem investigating male-female students’ perceptions of any potential bias in their teachers’ treatment of their behaviour in class (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, p. 238). It has been reported that research of this genre is expected to delineate the significance of students’ perceptions in examining teacher behaviour.

Research on students’ perceptions about their educator’s feedback has been undertaken employing surveys. It has been discovered that students change extraordinarily in their reaction to instructor criticism, and they favour various sorts of feedback for several reasons. Their perspectives about the utility of the instructor’s feedback are mixed. Most students found teacher feedback helpful. A few students however found feedback on mistakes more helpful than criticism on content (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Besides, it is critical to assess teachers’ feedback on their teaching style as they are mostly ignorant of different aspects of their conduct or the feedback they give to their students (Good & Brophy, 2002; She & Fisher, 2002). More interesting perhaps, Ferris & Hedgcock (2014) contend that investigating students’ perceptions of their teachers’ behaviour in class could be highly informative yielding far more revealing findings. Van Tartwijk (1993), employing a perception instrument, found that 63% of the identified practices in a classroom are derived from the students’ perceptions of their educators. This being so, it seems primordial to see how do students’ perceptions of their teachers’ interactional patterns impact their academic achievement.

Analysing gender-based perceptions of teacher treatment, Rawnsley & Fisher's (1997) research study found that girls have positive attitudes towards their teachers' conduct compared to boys (Reported in Frumkin & Murphy, 2007). Other studies were more analytic and stated that girls perceive their teachers' behaviour as more friendly whereas boys think teachers being more controlling (She & Fisher, 2002). The present study sets out to fill in the gap regarding the scarcity of "quantitative [and qualitative] research into whether classroom practices... have an impact on student learning" (Wenglinsky, 2002, p. 6), and consequently on their academic achievement.

### **2.3 Teacher Differential Treatment Dimensions**

Central to this study is the examination of the most prevailing evidence regarding specific circumstances of school life in which respondents see differential treatment, and the analysis of contrasts in the reoccurrence of the experience of such occasions among university students. The study investigates whether students' perception of their teachers' differential treatment correlates with scholastic achievement.

Prior studies in this area reported that boys tend to interrupt their female peers far more often than the other way around. Bayyurt (2006) shows that the instructor tends to help males by issuing more incentives, while female students are denied the right of any assistance during their classroom talks. As a matter of fact, the teacher, consciously or not, is more liable to give male students more chances for more turn-takings. Females, by contrast, are left to participate but with no incentives whatsoever. What follows from this is that girls seem to be at a greater disadvantage. Holmes (1995) seems to capture the essence of the problem contending that:

opportunities to answer the teacher's questions and receive evaluative feedback, to ask the teacher for information and clarification, and to discuss material and issues with other students – these are all regarded as important educational strategies, each of which contributes to learning and understanding. If females are denied equal access to these learning resources, they are being educationally disadvantaged (p. 199).

#### **2.3.1 Challenging**

Studies which dealt with the teacher behaviour claimed that instructors frequently posed challenging questions in their classes. Yet, when observed, instructors are observed to ask simple questioning strategies addressed to all students (Dhindsa, 2007). The educators sometimes tend to pose more questions in class to challenge their students and help them use a variety of strategies to solve problem. Apparently, direct questions posed by the instructors may send a wrong impression of being tricky to the students. These differences might be related the different teaching and learning styles utilized in class. In college, for example, some teachers dictate notes or make ready-made booklets that students have to memorize. This state of affairs may surely render students as passive recipients being unable to respond to critical situations and/or to solve problems.

Hattie's (2015) research is more pertinent to be discussed here. It has been recommended that teachers need to create more challenging questions and assignments to foster their students' critical thinking skills. This, according to Hattie (2015), may contribute to the development of students learning strategies along with the reinforcement of their study skills.

To answer the inquiry whether there is gender bias in the treatment of students, Dhindsa (2007) observed that, usually, teachers tend to raise questions to the whole class and whoever raised their hands can answer. The results of this study show that it is a bit "difficult to know if the teachers asked more questions to male or female students" (128). Concerning challenging questions, teachers tend to receive either unsatisfactory responses or a total silence from the part of their students.

These is enough evidence from research indicating that more challenging questions seem to correlate well with students' scholastic results. She & Fisher (2002) elaborate more on the issue arguing that teachers' use of more challenging practices seem to contribute to the development of students' achievement levels. It has been recommended in this connection that students are more likely to learn best when the task introduced to them is more challenging than when they get it easily.

#### **2.3.2 Encouragement and praise**

She & Fisher (2002) reported significant relationships between teachers' encouragement and praise conduct and students' affective and scholastic results. Instructors' encouragement and praise seem to play a central role in motivating and improving learners' aptitudes. According to Hattie (2015), encouragement and praise assigned to individual learners is regarded as being of more educational gains than that given to the whole class.

Most research studies on students' responses to instructor criticism find that such a negative evaluation may lessen students' motivation particularly if they do not receive what they expect from them. With respect to second or foreign language students' writing, research has indicated that both educators and students believe that the instructor's positive feedback on students' composition is a good incentive that can affect positively students' writings (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014).

Some other studies demonstrate that students' motivation is directly influenced by the teacher's practices through expanding positive behaviour in class. Frymier (1994) thinks that teachers' support and praise are key elements to promote motivation among students to pay more attention and get involved in class. Motivated students are observed to report even their eagerness to attend lectures.

Research findings pertaining to this parameter are contradictory. As indicated by Brophy (1986), the use of the instructor's praise is found to be related to students' scholastic achievement. The impact of encouragement and praise on students' achievement levels might be bigger particularly among those who might be weak or underachieving. According to Brophy, weaker learners may require positive criticism more than other students because of their lack of self-esteem. Brophy (1986) rightly put it that less-achievers may substantially require more positive criticism than other peers mainly because of their lack of confidence and security in school.

### **2.3.3 Non-verbal support**

With regard to the role of teachers' non-verbal conduct with students, it has been shown that an average of 63% of the variance of perceived impact of instructors on what occurs in the class can be related to it (van Tartwijk, 1993). Reporting gender differences in students' perceptions of teacher communication behaviour, Dhindsa (2008) stated that there existed no gender differences in the teacher's use of the 'non-verbal support dimension', and that both female and male students received the same non-verbal support from their teachers.

Bambaeeroo & Shokrpour (2017) observed that teachers' use of supportive non-verbal practices can have a positive impact on students' life in general. They can also impact their sense of accomplishment both at the level of their personal as well as their professional careers. They actually found that the correlation coefficient among the teachers' non-verbal communication skills, their verbal communication and the students' academic achievement was 0.81 which reveals the significant relationship among these factors; a significant relationship was also found between the lecturers' communication support and the increase in the students' motivation to learn and their academic success ( $p=0.60$ ,  $p=0.54$ ), respectively.

Eye contact, facial expressions, physical appearance express a wide range of messages. Facial expression is more compelling than different methods of non-verbal signs and may give us a great deal of data about the emotional status of others. One of the primary qualities of good instruction in the field of language teaching is teachers' aptitude in the use of non-verbal communication practices, and the majority of the observed worries in the classroom may emerge from the absence of appropriate non-verbal supports.

Using non-verbal language, educators may grab students' attention for more understanding, which may help enhance their motivational levels to seek more input. Students can understand very well the non-verbal signs as issued from their educators; they promptly notice that the one standing before them is either fully willing to teach them or is waiting for the class to come to an abrupt end. The more common the non-verbal support is used in the classroom context, the more adequate it is to the students. Educators who use non-verbal language appropriately have an excellent rapport with their students.

### **2.3.4 Understanding and friendly**

Regarding the dimension of 'understanding and friendly', She & Fisher (2002) found discernible differences in scale means among male and female students. They used a t-test and discovered measurably significant contrasts among young men's and young women's' perception of the learning condition ( $p<0.05$ ) on two of the five sizes of the TCBQ. Young female students saw their instructors as more understanding and friendly than did the young males. These findings are in complete concordance with past investigations demonstrating that young female students will in general see their learning condition in a more positive manner than do their male peers (Rawnsley & Fisher, 1997, as reported in Frumkin & Murphy, 2007).

Teachers' friendly behaviour seems to have great impact on students' willingness to achieve their objectives and stimulates changes in their behavioural conduct. Students without friendly and productive affinities are more liable to be indifferent about discipline and may feel that educators do not care about them. This may have deleterious effects on some students specifically those who might feel being discouraged and marginalized altogether causing them not to attend regularly their classes particularly at the tertiary level where attendance is not compulsory.

In the same vein, Fisher (2002) reported a relationship between instructors' friendly and understanding conduct and students' learning outcomes along with their learning attitudes. Fisher (2002) also inspected gender contrasts in teacher communication behaviour utilizing a two-way MANOVA with the five TCBQ scales as dependent variables and the scale means and standard deviations for male and female students' scores. Noteworthy, gender contrasts were evident in participants' reactions to the TCBQ, with females seeing their teachers as more friendly and understanding, and males seeing their educators as being more controlling. Despite the slight differences in the two scores, it is clear that girls see their educators' friendliness and understanding in a more positive manner than do boys.

However, classroom observation research indicates that teachers are more liable to be 'friendly and understanding'. They are generally recommended to be friendly to students yet they keep 'distance'. They may believe that this distance is required to maintain and foster discipline in their classes. Instructors are frequently observed to re-establish order when the learning environment in class is threatened and/or when they feel that their 'friendliness' was misunderstood.

### 2.3.5 Controlling

Controlling means directly and fully manipulating the behaviours of students or the opinions and the beliefs they adopt in class. This may include such strategies as enforcing a certain learning pace, issuing more directives, and not allowing students to express their opinions. These behavioural conducts may conflict with such democratic tendencies characteristic of learner-centred approaches to education where students are given a top priority to participate, raise more questions and interrupt the flow of the course (Assor et al., 2005).

Controlling behaviour implies that the educators are in charge of classes; classes should be quiet and everybody doing what they are assigned to do. In the greater part of the classes, students should by all accounts be agreeable. Controlling teachers expect from their students to comply with a set of guidelines, do not enable them to do things another way. For instance, students do not have the right to argue with an idea introduced by the teacher. They cannot construct their own learning the way they like. Sometimes instructors may display more rigid guidelines in the class and exercise teacher-centred instruction to keep the whole class under control. There is a worry that this inadequate treatment may engender more frustration among students as their motivation to learn may fade away.

A controlling behaviour can also have negative effects on students' engagement' in learning as it weakens students' tendency to be autonomous and learn on their own. Perceiving the deleterious side-effects of this authoritarian way in the treatment of students, Assor et al. (2005) claim that such an austere environment may only trigger more negative outcomes. The motivation of students under the supervision of a controlling teacher is mostly extrinsic reinforced by the fear of punishment and/or by a desire to get rewards like good grades necessary for their graduation.

What follows from this is the possibility that the instructor's controlling behaviour could be associated with students' scholastic attainments. One may hypothesize in this respect that instructors who are uncompromising with their students' misbehaviour may have a less troublesome classroom atmosphere which may by implication be more conducive to more educational gains.

There is some evidence from research indicating that girls are more likely to accept frequent directives from teachers than boys. Kenny et al. (2010) also reported that students who perceived their teachers' behavior as highly controlling were less motivated than those who perceived their teachers' behavior as not very controlling.

## 3. Methodology

Starting from the conviction that teachers' treatment of students happens within the classroom and anything that happens there is considered communication, the researchers adopted the Teacher Communication Behavior Questionnaire (henceforth, TCBQ) with its five dimensions (challenging, encouragement & praise, non-verbal support, understanding & friendly, controlling) as a research tool for this study. The instrument was developed by She & Fisher (2002). Figure 3 below clearly illustrates the dimensions of Teacher Differential Treatment, and clarifies the relationships that are assumed to exist between the five sub-scales and the scholastic achievement of both boys and girls. We declare here that academic achievement (represented by the students' grades) is the dependent variable and students' perceptions of TDT and gender as independent variables in this study.

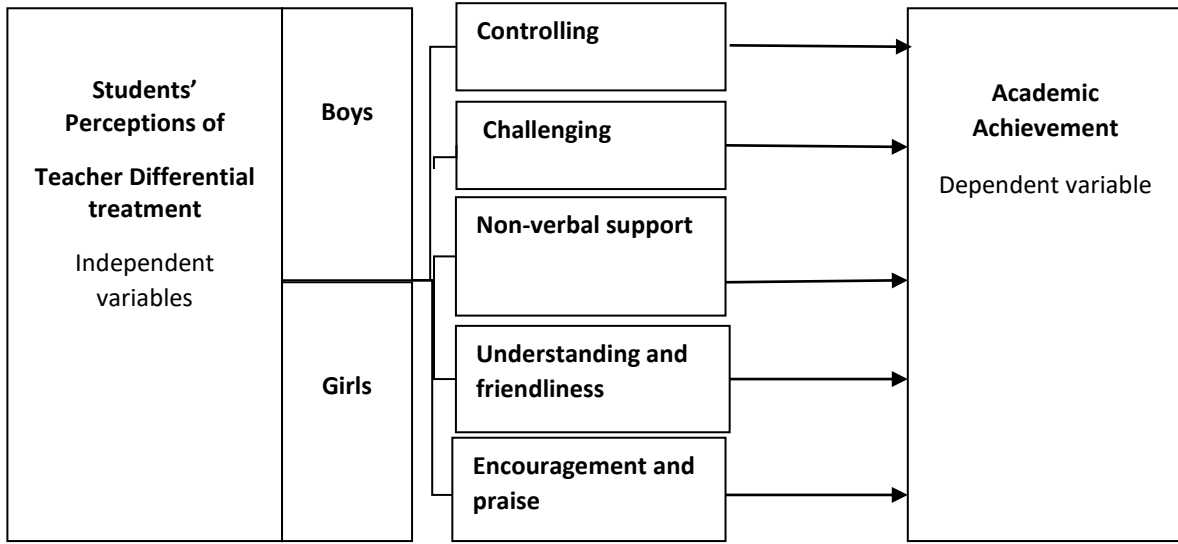


Figure3: The possible relationships between TDT subscales and academic achievement.

### 3.1 Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- Is there any significant difference between Female and male students in academic achievement?
- 2- How do students from different sexes perceive of teachers' differential treatment?
- 3- Can differential treatment predict advantage of one sex over another in academic achievement?

### 3.2 Research hypotheses

The present study sets out to test the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is a significant difference between boys and girls in academic achievement.
- 2) There is a significant difference between female and male students in their perceptions of their teacher differential treatment.
- 3) There is a significant predictive relationship between students' perceptions of TDT and academic achievement.

The researchers settled on a quantitative case study research design as an optimum research tool for this investigation. In specific, the survey (TCBQ) was employed as an elicitation instrument mainly because of two major reasons. First, the survey is efficient as it permits to elicit data from an enormous populace in a moderately brief time frame. Second, because of its anonymous style of measurement, the survey helps ensure the collection of authentic data from respondents.

### 3.3 Data collection

#### 3.3.1 Population and sampling

This study utilized convenience sampling as the respondents were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their accessibility as this is the only research alternative available for the researchers. In this small scale study a total number of n=100 of Moroccan university students from the department of English at the School of Arts and Humanities, Moulay Ismail university were questioned. In fact, a total number of n= 100 questionnaires were administered by the researchers. However, only 92 questionnaires were handed in by the participants.

#### 3.3.2 Reliability of the questionnaire's subscales

As mentioned earlier, the researchers opted for The Teacher Communication Behavior Questionnaire (TCBQ) as designed by She and Fisher (2002) because it is assumed to be the most insightful tool to measure Moroccan university students' perceptions of teachers' differential treatment. It is composed of five sections namely 'challenging behavior', 'encouragement and praise', 'non-verbal support', 'understanding and friendly' and 'controlling behavior'. Each section includes 8 items that participants had to react to on a likert scale that ranges from 1 never to 5 always.

All these five dimensions of the survey were believed to reveal the characteristics associated with teacher behavior/treatment. In table 1, we can see the total correlation statistics and a comparison of Cronbach alpha of the overall subscales. The results have shown that the scale possesses a satisfactory level of internal consistency. The Cronbach's

coefficient alpha for the whole TCBQ for our sample was .882, while the alpha values for ‘challenging behavior’, ‘encouragement and praise’, ‘non-verbal support’, ‘understanding and friendly’ and ‘controlling behavior’ were .878, .900, .938, .920 and .888, respectively.

Table 1: TCBQ subscales internal consistency

Subscales Cronbach's Alpha	
TCBQ 40 items	.926
Challenging	.878
Encouragement & praise	.900
Non-verbal support	.938
Understanding & friendly	.920
Controlling	.888

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The first research question (Is there any significant difference in academic achievement between girls and boys?) requires descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies to compare male and female students’ language achievement grades. To answer the second question (How do students from different sexes perceive teachers’ differential treatment?), descriptive statistics were also used to examine means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum for the 5 communication behavior variables to determine how students perceive their instructors’ treatment. To answer the third research question (Can Differential treatment predict advantage of one sex over another in academic achievement?), the researchers applied Nonparametric Spearman’s correlations to assess the relationships between student achievement (grades) and the 5 communication behaviors examined. Also, a Mann-Whitney U tests was employed to examine differences in the 5 communication behavior variables based on the gender of students.

##### 4.1 Findings regarding the academic achievement of girls and boys

The second variable in the questionnaire deals with the participants’ academic grades of last semester. The frequency distribution in table 2 below indicates that the majority of our respondents received a grade above 10 representing a percentage of 80, 4%, while only 19, 6% among them were below average. These results suggest that a larger proportion of students in our sample have attained good grades as far as academic achievement is concerned.

Table 2: Differences in respondents’ grades across gender

		Grade of last semester		Total
		below 10	above 10	
Gender	male	20,9%	79,1%	100,0%
	female	18,4%	81,6%	100,0%
Total		19,6%	80,4%	100,0%

As depicted in Table 2, a slight difference was found between male and female students in academic achievement, the fact which might seem to suggest that there is no significant difference in scholastic achievement between boys and girls. Yet, relying on students’ self-reported data concerning their grades may not be a good indicator of their academic achievement as some of them, particularly weaker ones, might be reluctant to reveal the right responses.

To substantiate the findings of this study with regard to this dimension, we consulted the administration of Moulay Ismail University, at the School of Arts and Humanities, for the scores of five groups out of 10 enrolled in the English Department in semester 1. Grades of a total number of 833 students (group 1=183, group 2=167, group 3=144, group 6=167, and group 7=172) were randomly collected and analyzed. A percentage of 49% are females and 51% are males, and their grades of autumn semester (2019-2020) are demonstrated in figure 4. We should mention that each group is represented twice in the bar graph demonstrating each gender’s grades which are below 10 (in blue) and the ones above ten (in red).



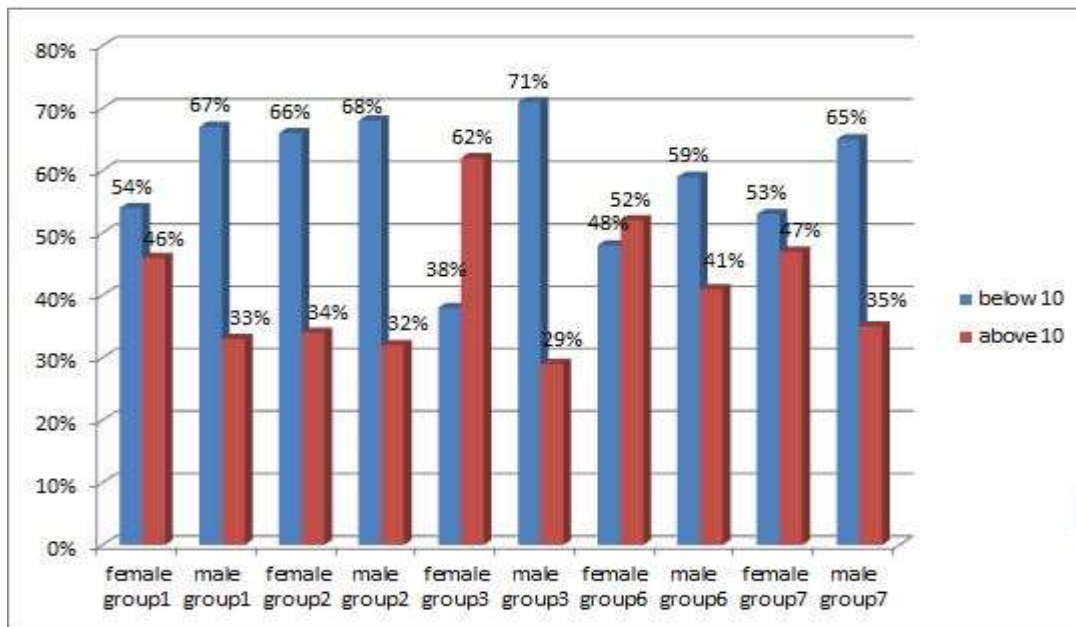


Figure 4: Grades' differences between female and male students for 5 groups

The exact grades of students in figure 4 display a significant difference between males and females in exam scores of some disciplines picked up almost randomly. Precisely, female students received higher grades and the percentage of success among them was higher (44%). By contrast, a great number of boys received lower grades and the percentage of success among them was only 40%. The biggest difference was noticed in group 3 where girls' success reached 62%, whereas boys reached only 29%, which is a very significant difference. Nearly the same remark was gleaned from group 1 (females=46%; males=33%); group 2 (females=34%; males=32%); group 4 (females=52%; males=41%); and group 5 (females=47%; 35%). These official grades and the percentage of successful male and female students support the research hypothesis which assumes that there is a significant difference between female and male students in academic achievement tipped in favor of female students.

**4.2 Findings of the subscales**

There are 5 subscales and each one includes 8 items dealing with 5 different behaviors: 'challenging', 'encouragement and praise', 'non-verbal support', 'understanding and friendly', and 'controlling'. They form a total of 40 items whereby respondents have to decide whether each behavior/item never happens, seldom happens, sometimes happens, often happens or always happens, in a scale from 1(never) to 5(always). The scores for each category are counted using the average mean and standard deviation as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation of response categories

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Challenging	23,7814	6,06661	92
Encouragement & praise	20,5095	5,77239	92
Non-verbal support	23,9457	7,30352	92
Understanding & friendly	25,5421	6,83801	92
Controlling	26,9239	7,28273	92

The scores for each TDT category were calculated by taking the average mean for the eight items under each category. In table 3 above, the means range from the lowest for 'encouragement & praise' with an average mean of (M= 20,50, SD= 5,77) to the highest for 'controlling' with an average mean of (M= 26,92, SD= 7,28). The average means for 'challenging' and 'non-verbal support' subscales are almost identical (M=23,778, SD=6,06) and (M=23,94, SD=6,83), respectively. 'Understanding & friendly's average mean is almost as high as 'controlling' with (M=25,54, SD=6,83).

### 4.3 Comparing males' and females' perceptions of teacher differential treatment

This part's main objective is to calculate any differences that might exist between boys and girls in their perceptions of their teacher differential treatment. Percentages, cross-tabulations, correlations and t-tests were implemented to test the hypothesis which states that:

H2: There is a significant difference between female and male students in their perceptions of their teacher differential treatment.

Table 4: Comparing females' and males' perceptions of their teacher differential treatment.

Gender		Challenging	Encouragement & Praise	Non-verbal support	Understanding & friendly	Controlling
male	N	43	43	43	43	43
	Mean	23,2145	19,0901	21,9767	24,6163	27,9767
	Std. Deviation	5,74100	5,49393	6,14884	6,82735	7,03220
	% of Total Sum	45,6%	43,5%	42,9%	45,0%	48,6%
female	N	49	49	49	49	49
	Mean	24,2789	21,7551	25,6735	26,3546	26,0000
	Std. Deviation	6,35563	5,77677	7,84372	6,81309	7,44424
	% of Total Sum	54,4%	56,5%	57,1%	55,0%	51,4%
Total	N	92	92	92	92	92
	Mean	23,7814	20,5095	23,9457	25,5421	26,9239
	SD	6,06661	5,77239	7,30352	6,83801	7,28273
	% of Total Sum	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As presented in Table 4, the results showed a slight significant difference in means between boys and girls on some sub-scales namely 'challenging' (for males M=23,21; for females M=24,27) and 'controlling' (for males M=27,97; for females M=26,00), and a bigger difference in the other sub-scales: 'encouragement & praise' (for males M=19,09; for females M=21,75), 'non-verbal support' (for males M=21,97; for females M=25,67) and 'understanding & friendly' (for males M=24,61; for females M=26,35).

### 4.4 The relationship between TDT and academic achievement

The findings presented in table 4 indicate a significant relationship between students' perceptions of Teacher Differential Treatment and academic achievement  $r = ,287^{**}$ ,  $p = ,006$ . This result leads us to confirm the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between students' perceptions of TDT and academic achievement. This may surely suggest that the more students view their teacher differential treatment positively, the higher are their academic scores.

Table 5: Spearman Correlations between perceptions of TDT and academic achievement

		scale	Grade of last semester
TDT scale	Pearson Correlation	1	,287**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,006
	N	92	92
Grade	Pearson Correlation	,287**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,006	
	N	92	92

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As one may observe from above in table 5, there is a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of the four dimensions of TDT and academic achievement. More precisely, academic achievement values positively correlate with students' perceptions of 'encouragement and praise'  $r = ,423^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 'non-verbal support'  $r = ,353^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and 'understanding and friendly'  $r = ,560^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Put differently, the overall results elicited from the data pertaining to this dimension seem to indicate that the variables tend to move in the same direction. If perceptions of 'encouragement and praise', 'non-verbal support', and 'understanding and friendly' scores increase, academic scores increase as well. However, academic achievement is found to correlate negatively with students' perceptions of 'controlling behavior'  $r = -.395^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ . When perceptions of 'controlling behavior' increase, scores of academic achievement decrease. Note shall be made here; however, that the results related to this parameter indicate that the relationship between students' perceptions of challenging behavior and academic achievement is not statistically significant averaging merely a value of  $r = .028$ ,  $p = .794$ .

The findings also show that gender positively correlates with 'encouragement and praise'  $r = .232^*$ ,  $p = .026$ , and 'non-verbal support'  $r = .254^*$ ,  $p = .015$ . However, it appears that there is a small but not significant relationship between gender values and 'understanding and friendly'  $r = .128$ ,  $p = .226$ , and a small negative but not significant relationship with 'controlling' values  $r = -.136$ ,  $p = .196$ . The table also shows no statistically significant relationship between gender values and the other three dimensions namely 'challenging', 'understanding & friendly', and 'controlling'; and no statistically significant relationship between gender and academic achievement which is represented by the grades students reported about themselves.

**4.5 The predictive power of TDT on academic achievement**

The results in the model summary presented in table 6 below generate a regression coefficient  $R = .645$  and  $R^2$  of  $.416$  and an adjusted  $R^2 = .382$  which represents the percentage of predictive power of the variable, the adjusted R square is what researchers report. Therefore, TDT was able to predict 38% of the variance in academic achievement scores, which is considered as a high predictive power of the model. We can conclude that TDT has an overall impact on academic achievement.

Table 6: Model Summary of Forced Entry Multiple Regression Analysis for TDT and academic achievement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.645 <sup>a</sup>	.416	.382		.314

**4.6 Discussion**

The analysis of the quantitative data pertaining to university students' exam scores indicates a significant difference between male and female achievement levels. The findings seem to demonstrate that girls tend to outperform boys with regard to their scores in English. This supports our first hypothesis stating that there is a significant difference between boys and girls in academic achievement.

The results of this study seem also to suggest a reversed gender gap in favor of girls. One is reasonably led to agree with Ouakrim (2016) contending that language learning in Morocco is becoming female language learners' exclusive domain par excellence. Similar results have been echoed in Morocco and elsewhere where female language learners continue to surpass their male peers at almost all language skills (Powell, 1979; Burstall, 1981; Benattabou, 1990; Halpern, 1992; Murphy, 2010; Głowska, 2014).

On a similar note, Boyle's (1987) study in an Asian context has reached essentially the same pattern of results. The research was conducted among 490 Chinese university students in Hong Kong. Female learners have been found to achieve overall higher mean scores in ten tests of general L2 English proficiency than the corresponding male group.

Ouakrim (2016) elaborates more on the issue arguing that foreign language learning is increasingly becoming 'girlish', which may put male peers at a greater disadvantage affecting in a negative way "their motivation and attitude, and hence achievement" (p. 124).

The analysis of the data of the questionnaire and particularly the subscales suggests a noticeable discrepancy in the perceptions of boys and girls of the five dimensions of TDT. Differences in the frequency of their responses concerning the first dimension of the scale "equal treatment of students" are clearly observed as girls tend to perceive their teacher behavior more positively than boys. For instance, in our study, the analysis of the data of the questionnaire and particularly the subscales suggested a divergence in the perceptions of boys and girls of the five dimensions of TDT declaring that boys are less positive regarding their TDT.

This particular finding somehow contradicts with Mouaid's (2013) argument which stated that, though instructors do not demonstrate any deliberate victimization of young men or young women, their attention was more geared to boys than girls when presenting their input and/or when issuing some comments on students' learning practices. Our findings seem also to

reject the arguments of Sadker & Sadker (2009) who claimed that male students were given more open doors for interruption. They were reprimanded; they got more and more individual assistance, and that they were given more praise. On the other hand, our study concurs with a bunch of research which showed that girls hold positive attitudes towards their teachers' conduct compared to boys (Martinez & Gil, 2020). Similar results have been reported delineating the fact that girls perceive their teachers' behaviour as more friendly, whereas boys think teachers are more controlling (She & Fisher, 2002; Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Exploring this diversity in perceptions would help us discover which teacher's behaviour is mostly expected by students to boost their learning progress or stop it once for all.

The findings in the current study indicate a significant relationship between students' perceptions of Teacher Differential Treatment and Academic Achievement  $r = .287^{**}$ ,  $p = .006$ . This result tends to substantiate the second hypothesis of this study stating that there is a significant relationship between students' perceptions of TDT and academic achievement. This suggests that the more students view their teacher differential treatment positively, the higher are their academic achievement scores.

Using the Regression analysis test, the TDT was also found to be a strong predictor of academic achievement. Accordingly, when students see their teachers as challenging, we can predict a decrease in their grades; and as long as students think that their teacher is understanding and friendly, their grades go higher and we can predict an increase in academic achievement. As a matter of fact, the null hypothesis was rejected substantiating the fact that there is a significant predictive link between TDT and academic achievement. This fact is a serious warning for educators to reconsider their unintentional biased practices. Teachers' verbal as well as non-verbal classroom practices may impact students' psychology as they are internalized and subsequently transformed into a positive or negative attitude towards learning. Raising teachers' awareness of the potential threats their differential treatment of the two sex groups may engender will surely be the most propitious path contributing to the building up of a well-grounded society where men and women are placed on equal footing enjoying all their basic human rights.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of teacher differential treatment and their academic achievement. The issue of TDT in education has been associated with students' poor academic achievement bringing about fewer graduates and more drop outs. In Morocco, for example, 47.2 % of undergraduates leave school before being graduated (Morocco World News, 2018). While communicating with students, an educator's conduct can cause positive or negative effects depending on how the students perceive the learning circumstances that he/she made for them. A perfect learning environment begins with making a well-balanced atmosphere in which students feel free to pose inquiries and add to the existing knowledge of the teacher without feeling ashamed or scorned. Good and Brophy (2000) reasoned that educators who stress this kind of treatment will in general be more viable than those who are more inclined to be more authoritative. In fact, results from the current study firmly support prior research evidence indicating that an appropriate treatment of students irrespective of their gender is a vital key promoter conducive to more successful educational outcomes. Now more than ever, there is an urgent need for action research to improve teachers' practices as the number of students, particularly males, who drop out of school is getting higher; knowing that the culprit is 'communication' (Soubhi, et. al., 2016).

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