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Students' Engagement and Sense of Belonging at the University

The case of Third –Year Licence Students at Dr Moulay Tahar University

A thesis submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Master*
in Didactics.

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material that has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

Date:

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Dedication

*To my beloved parents, auntie, **Abir, Samir, Imen** and my best friends (**Khadidja, Ines, Bouchra and Ikram**). Thank you for all your love and support that you filled my journey with.*

Love you all.

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Abstract

Learning experience at university is full of different elements that can affect students' achievement and retention, students' engagement and sense of belonging are significant elements in the learners' journey. This study aims to explore how teaching practices, classroom environment and extracurricular activities influence students' engagement and their sense of belonging at the university. To carry out this study a mixed method approach was used to collect data from 50 third-year Licence students through a semi-structured questionnaire, an unstructured interview with 5 teachers, an unstructured questionnaire with scientific club members and non-participant classroom observation. The study findings reveal that a student-centered approach, interactive teaching practices and supportive classroom atmosphere notably enhance students' engagement, unlike, lecture-based sessions. Teachers provided several factors that affect belonging such as lack of motivation, language proficiency, and the rise of the new technology AI. Moreover, students' engagement is found to be average academically with limited involvement in extracurricular activities. Interestingly, female students appear to experience a greater sense of belonging compared to their male peers. Teachers' encouragement, peer relationships, and supportive classroom environment are key factors to foster students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university.

Keywords: classroom environment, extracurricular activities, sense of belonging, students' engagement, teaching practices

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List of Abbreviations

SDT: Self Determination Theory.

HE: Higher Education.

ICT: Information and Communication Technology.

General Introduction

General Introduction

In general, the university plays an important role in students' life; it shapes their academic, social and personal development. Higher learning institutions are supposed to create a suitable learning environment to guarantee significant outcomes. Universities can be challenging for many students due to learning environment pressure, commitment, adjustment, differences among learners and the obstacles that face the students during their journey at the university. In this vein, the concepts of students' engagement and sense of belonging appear to be discussed related to students' well-being, success and students' retention. Students' engagement is related to the students' actual involvement in the classroom and at university during their learning process, and the sense of belonging is associated with the feeling of being appreciated, valued and accepted by a certain group; in a university context, it is a feeling that the learner is a part of the whole institution.

This study aims to explore the students' perceptions about these concepts, the various factors that can affect both students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university, as well as examining the impact of extracurricular activities on both of them such as joining clubs, attending events and participating in different academic activities. It takes the third-year Licence students at the Department of English at Saida University as a sample population.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- How do students perceive their engagement and sense of belonging at the university?
- How do teaching practices, classroom environment, and extracurricular activities affect students' engagement and sense of belonging at university?
- What is the impact of extracurricular activities on students' sense of belonging?

To answer these questions, the researcher hypothesizes that:

- Students' perceptions of their engagement and sense of belonging are average and moderate, these perceptions are influenced by academic and extracurricular factors.
- Students' engagement in university classrooms is significantly higher when teachers adopt an interactive, student-centered approach than using traditional lecture-based methods.

- Extracurricular activities may have an impact on students' sense of belonging.

The researcher utilizes a mixed-method approach, with four distinct research instruments to collect data from third-year Licence students from the Department of English at Saida University. These instruments include a non-participant classroom observation, a semi-structured questionnaire with students, an unstructured questionnaire with scientific club members and a semi-structured interview with teachers.

The research will be presented in three chapters; the first chapter focuses on the previous studies related to students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. The second chapter will be dedicated to a detailed description of research methods, participants, and research instruments. The third chapter will include data analysis and discussion.

As far as the findings of the study are concerned, students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university are influenced by several factors which are teaching practices, classroom environment and extracurricular activities. Students perceive their engagement as average at the university and they show limited sense of belonging. Students reported that teachers are the most crucial factor contributing to their engagement and sense of belonging at the university as well as participating in the different academic activities. Concerning teaching methods, sessions with students' and teachers' interaction present high a level of engagement. In addition, extracurricular activities have a positive impact in enhancing students' sense of belonging.

**Chapter One: Students' Engagement and Sense of
Belonging at University**

Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Students' engagement and sense of belonging are significant elements impacting students' academic achievement and the overall university journey. Together create a strong relationship between students and their academic environment. This chapter presents a review of the literature related to students' engagement, its types, and factors impacting students' engagement, students' engagement and SDT, sense of belonging, sense of belonging at the university and the impact of extracurricular activities on both of them.

1.2.Students' Engagement

According to Kahu (2013) students' engagement is a complex concept with different-level phenomena and processes. It involves different components to achieve full engagement. In this vein, Kuh (2003) stated that students' engagement was characterized by time and the energy of the students spent in academic activities purposefully.

Kinzie and Gonyea (2009) added that not only influenced by students' efforts but also is influenced by certain institutional factors leading students to engage in their academic activities. These researchers highlighted three key features which are:

- Engagement is a combination of physical and psychological energy.
- Engagement is measurement; some students are engaged while others are not.
- A well designed content leads students to engage actively in academic activities.

Students' engagement requires many aspects to be fulfilled such as time and effort to complete a certain activity. In addition, it requires that students should be intrinsically motivated which helps students to stay engaged in tasks. This fosters a positive attitude that leads students to become confident. Besides, Morgan (2007) stated that students who discussed important concerns with university staff and their peers were more likely to perform well level in and outside the classrooms. At the very beginning students should have the willing to study intrinsically because when it is not the case they do not engage in certain activities. An additional key factor was peer relationship and how they affect students' engagement. Thus, a positive connection needs to be present since peers have a significant impact on students learning journey (Steenbetghs et al., 2021).

Morgan (2007) found that students who fully dedicated themselves to educational activities were more successful. When they were engaged in certain productive activities; this enhanced their success by supporting them to learn the necessary skills and behaviors. In other words, when students put all their attention and effort in studying they succeed; the more they invest in their studies the better their results are. They are not just achieving success but they also gain the needed skills while learning. According to the Australian Council of Educational Research (2008) students' engagement is the students' involvement in activities; they are likely to make high quality learning.

In higher education, at both national and international levels, students' engagement is regarded as an important element in increasing the outcomes of the learners and their success as reported by Pascarella et al. (2010) who claimed that classroom engagement was globally acknowledged as the most crucial key element in enhancing the educational results, i.e., students with higher engagement tend to participate in the class, collaborate with classmates, and be responsible for their own learning. Thus, universities and educational systems worldwide are required to improve and provide what is necessary to increase students' engagement. This link between students' engagement and students learning is not a new phenomenon; it is historical according to (Graham et al., 2007). It originated in earlier periods. It was known as Astin students' involvement theory later; it was popularized as "engagement". Astin (1984) believed that learners joined higher education institutions to develop themselves purposefully. Astins' theory declared that students' involvement is significant in their developing during their learning journey. It stated that the more students involved in academic tasks, connect with faculty, having relationships with their classmates, they are more likely to have a positive experience at university. Indeed, this involvement lets the learner persisted, satisfied and academically successful(Astin, 1985, 1993; Goodsell et al., 1992; Kuh& Vesper, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

In contrast, Harper and Quaye (2009) stated that engagement was not just involvement or participation it was beyond this, it required feelings and understanding of what students were doing in a certain activity. When students are emotionally involved in academic activities this leads them to experience affective reactions. This means that they feel interested in what they are doing; they feel enjoyment and experience the sense of belonging. In addition, students who feel such emotions will participate and be part in classroom activities or in learning experiences.

Thus, they are highly engaged and dedicate notable energy to study, to spend more time at university, to join students' organizations and have interactions with faculty members and other students (Astin, 1999).

However, Fredricks et al. (2004) argued that 'acting engaged' without feeling it is not involvement and 'feeling engaged' without acting is disconnection. This will lead students to participate meaninglessly in the learning process. For a full engagement and doing meaningful activities, it must be a combination between the feeling and the acting to have optimum results.

As reported by Sautter (2007) to effectively enhance students' engagement in classroom discussion students' engagement in the classroom discussions, different topics should be present as a pedagogical tool that fosters the involvement of the students. Another significant way is to have a clear connection between the classroom materials, classroom activities and students' prospective occupations to reinforce their engagement. Consequently, the process becomes clear for students regarding why the content of the lessons is beneficial for them and for their future professions (Bartlett et al., 2002).

On the other hand, Evans et al. (2016) stressed the following characteristics of students' engagement: First, affect (get students more involved) means let the students emotionally engaged in certain task. Second, cognition (the quality of student learning) means how students are receiving the content and how they are critically thinking. Third, behavior (active participation and interaction) refers to the students 'behaviors in the classroom such as asking questions, working with peers, and interacting with teachers. These three elements work together to give an excellent engagement in the classroom. Besides, Krause (2005) listed ten working principles to enhance students' engagement, summarized as follows:

- Creating an intellectual environment where students discuss, debate, discover and explore.
- Giving an importance to academic work and encouraging students to spend time in studying.
- Prioritizing learners knowing their needs, interests, and motivations to build a strong relationship with them.
- Communicating their expectations with them and with the faculty.
- Enhancing social connections by active and collaborative learning where learners do group work, classroom discussions and question/answer sessions.

- Mentioning challenges and makes them aware that the university members are aware of the pressure that learners are facing.
- Teachers are responsible to make learners self-regulated learners by providing strategies to develop their engagement behaviors.
- Providing continuous feedback for becoming engaged in the learning process.
- Providing online learning with the right management and care to maintain students' engagement both in class and online.
- Acknowledge the nature of engagement and its complexity and the teacher should be flexible to meet its changes over time.

These principles cover what teachers need to know in order to create an atmosphere to reinforce students' engagement and to experience a successful learning journey.

1.2.1 Types of Students' Engagement

Students' engagement is arranged into has three main types behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement, each one represents how students participate and involve in the different academic activities.

- **Behavioral Engagement:** involves the active participation in both academic and extracurricular activities and the absence of disrespecting the institution regulations (Finn, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Engels et al., 2016). Students who are behaviorally engaged would respond with behaviors such as attendance and involvement which prevent the negative behaviors.
- **Emotional Engagement:** is related to who how students feel about their classmates, studies and the university in general (Skinner et al., 2009). Students who are emotionally engage will show feeling like interest, enjoyment and sense of belonging to the university.
- **Cognitive Engagement or psychological investment:** it is related to students' readiness to learn and their efforts especially when they face new concepts and ideas (Newmann et al., 1992; Fredricks et al., 2004). Students who engaged cognitively will invest in their learning and they tackle challenges with excitement.

1.3 Factors Impacting University Students' Engagement

The learning environment and the teaching approach may directly affect students' engagement (Willis, 1993). Everything related to the classroom affects the involvement of students. According to Hallinger and Lu (2013) suggested that active learning methods have positive results and bring change over time, and students will feel excited and more consistent in engaging in their learning. When implementing such an approach in teaching students, the impact will be positive on students' behaviors in the classroom.

Beer et al. (2010) added others factors influencing student engagement as teacher participation, course design, class size, students' gender and students' age.

1.3.1 Teacher Participation

The teachers play a significant role in the learning journey of the learners. They can affect their students positively and negatively since they are role model for them. They can engage learners and keep them motivated by encouraging them to learn, participate and be a part in the university environment. According to Mearns et al. (2007) when the teachers are well prepared and responsive to their students' needs; students will work hard, learn more and they will be ready to express their interests.

1.3.2 The Course Design

The course design is a crucial factor in students' engagement. When the course does not fit the learners' interests, they will be not motivated consequently they will not engage to learn. In addition, the teacher should know how to organize and deliver the lessons and make them interesting and engaging to facilitate the involvement of the learners.

1.3.3 Class Size

Class size is an important factor since the classroom management has a direct effect on students' engagement. If the classroom is crowded this impedes the engagement and leads to inadequate results. Besides, it will be challenging for teachers to maintain control and also to implement interactive methods in the class. Smaller class sizes are helpful to reach the students and facilitate the learning and the teaching process.

1.3.4 Students' Gender

This factor can be challenging to teachers as they have to deal with two different genders males and females with different ways of learning and preferences. Consequently, teachers are asked to provide suitable and supportive environment to engage both of them.

1.3.5 Students' Age

Students' age represents another important factor as young and adults may learn and get engaged differently. Usually adults' learners engage in learning with a clear purpose, obtaining knowledge that can be implemented in their work. Whereas, the young learners engage in learning without direction, they still depend on their teachers to guide them.

An important factor is not mentioned; which is the faculty members as they have a role in this context. They can be considered as key facilitators in students' engagement. Interacting with students helps them increase their self-worth which can positively influence their role and their sense of belonging at the university.

1.4 Students' Engagement and assessment

Many studies have showed the importance of assessment and feedback in students' motivation, learning and development (Evans, 2013). According to Tinto (2012), institutions that frequently assess students' performance and provide regular feedback, their learners are more likely to achieve success. In addition, assessment helps students refine their learning behaviors in order to guarantee their success.

However, the research carried out by Steele and Fullagar (2009) demonstrated that feedback itself does not predict students' engagement, but it was stated that it is important in facilitating it, and it helps to build autonomy and control.

Higher education institutions' facilities have its role on students' engagement; they are important in shaping the experience and involvement at university. Facilities such as: Libraries and sitting space are prominent requirements for enhancing interaction with peers, faculty and staff. Astin (1999) declared that students' engagement is positively influenced by living in dormitory because learners who live in there they are more likely to involve in different events; thus, they feel included more than the others.

These factors are considered to be external to certain extent; in addition there are some internal ones which affect students' engagement. According to a meta-analysis study there are some internal factors should be taken into consideration, which are optimism, motivation, valuing, loyalty intention and sense of belonging. This study emphasized that these factors are the most significant to be taken into account to improve the students involvement at university.

1.5 Students' Engagement and SDT

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan 1980s, it demonstrated a significant development in understanding humans' motivation and behaviors. It included three principles: autonomy (independence), competence (ability) and relatedness (belonging). In educational context, this theory helped teachers to address the classroom challenges like lack of motivation and attention. In fact, implementing this theory will increase students' engagement by encouraging autonomy through choice, relevance, and meaningful learning tasks. Students feel engaged when they have a choice in their learning, believing in their capacities to succeed, and having a sense of belonging with peers and teachers, consequently, they are intrinsically motivated. This motivation leads to higher level of engagement. Skinner et al. (2008) found that classrooms which apply SDT-strategies experienced significant increasing in emotional and cognitive engagement.

1.6 Sense of Belonging

The need to belong is considered to be a universal need which is innate and common to most human beings (Allen, 2020a; Allen, Kern et al., 2021). The concept of belonging is broad, and defined in many ways such as relatedness, sense of community, support, and identification (Osterman, 2000).

Belonging is defined as "students' perception of feeling valued and respected by other students and feeling like a valued part of the university context" (Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020, p. 377). It is something instinctive in every human being as all the individual need to belong to a place where they feel themselves.

Belonging represents perceptions of acceptance and connection, and it is associated with students' wellbeing, academic attainment, and retention. Belonging consists of four domains: academic, social, surroundings, and personal space (Ahn & Davis, 2019)

Bloom (1956) argued that sense of belonging is a part of emotional engagement (alongside behavioral and cognitive engagement). On the other hand, Strayhorn (2008, 2012) and Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted that sense of belonging as a concept is both cognitive and affective in nature. It is cognitive; as how students think about themselves and evaluate their role with their classmates, university members, and administration. Also, it is affective since there is an emotional, temperamental, and dispositional reaction to their connectedness, students' feelings and attitudes influence how they feel connected to the university.

The difference between engagement and sense of belonging is that engagement is a state that students went into it to achieve certain goals. However, sense of belonging is focused on the connections that people form to be supported. As it is mentioned the motivation to belong is the "need or desire to connect with others" (Allen et al., 2021, p. 93). Since it is essential in humans' life to socialize and fit in certain group or community. Moreover, it is individuals' subjective emotions and cognition related to their experiences (Allen et al., 2021, p. 94). It is about feelings and psychological aspects.

Sense of belonging might be an important element for students' success, according to Barnett (2022) declared that university students who feel real sense of belonging during studying are more likely to engage better in their studies and be strong to face any challenges that higher education processes pose. This sense of belonging helps students to be resilient and hard workers to achieve their academic goals regardless of the difficulties that the higher institutions have.

A greater sense of belonging has been linked with better wellbeing and mental health outcomes (Gopalan, Linden-Carmichael, & Lanza, 2022), which means that it is an essential component in the learning experience in general to have optimum results.

William and Downing (1998) stated that students think being a part of the class meant to have place in the classroom, feel welcomed, appreciated and respected by their peers and their teachers. Being familiar with their classmates and having students who understand them. The students will feel the sense of belonging to a group or to the whole class.

In educational science, Goodenow (1993) defines school belonging as how many students feel accepted, valued, and supported in their school setting. Similarly, Hurtado et al. (2007) described sense of belonging in quantitative studies as how students feel included in the

university setting, perceiving themselves as member in the university, and having a strong connection to their respective institution.

1.6.1 Sense of Belonging at the University

University students' sense of belonging is an important element in helping all students succeed in higher education; it does matter since it makes students feel that they are fitting in the community of university. Moreover, it is linked to engagement through a supportive environment and trust, along with positive connections with classmates and teachers that fosters the sense of belonging that affects engagement and performance. This, in turn, it will give positive attitudes towards university, class group and lecturers (Collins, 2021; Viola, 2021).

A sense of belonging at university reflects students' personal emotions of being connected and engaged with other members of the university (Hoffman et al., 2002; Maunder, 2018; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). It is all about how the students feel at university whether they feel included, appreciated and respected at university and also the connection they make with their peers, teachers and administration staff, these relationships will affect either positively or negatively the students' experience in general.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) (NAS), sense of belonging is key factor that enhance success, engagement and well being at the university. Indeed, Baumeister and Leary (1995) declared that sense of belonging improved mental health; it let them engage more deeply in their studies, in addition, it lead them to be persistent and successful and it can protect students from stress. This sense is significant in students' experience at university; it keeps students feeling at ease and comfortable to continue their studies and to be involved in the different events that take place in the institution.

The university members have their role in sense of belonging, they can enhance it by improving the atmosphere and putting some conditions that encourage students to feel themselves and learn adequately. According to a report related to students' retention and success, sense of belonging is achieved through:

- Supportive peers relationships; classmates have a great impact on students' experience at university since they shape their learning journey and their connections should be supportive, not the contrary.

- Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful higher education (HE) learners; students should improve their knowledge about their studies, build self-esteem and understand who they are to be good learners.
- HE experience that is relevant to the learners' interests and their future goals; students' experience at university should be meaningful and related to their concerns and their future objective to ensure that learners will not drop out.
- Meaningful interaction between staff and students; this specific connection must be insightful with mutual trust and respect for both of them to avoid any problems and to enhance a positive atmosphere.

Sense of belonging and engagement are related. According to Osterman (2000) indicated that in educational environment the need for belonging is greatly aligned with students' academic involvement. The more students feel that they belong to any academic institutions, the more they engage and the more they involve in the different learning activities.

In the same vein, Goodenow (1993b) described sense of belonging in educational context as being welcomed, appreciated, involved and supported by teachers and classmates in classrooms, feeling to be a significant part in certain activity. It is not just feeling of warmth; indeed, it is feeling of support and respect for the student as an individual and their personal autonomy.

On the other hand, the lack of sense of belonging may cause poor school achievement, school quit, and inadequate social and emotional adjustment to school (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Murray & Greenberg, 2001).

Anderman (2002) declared that a lack of sense of belonging can lead to negative results that encompassed emotional trouble, high stress and health problems. These experiencing affect directly the learners' motivation and engagement, which make learning difficult.

Goodenow (1993) stated that sense of belonging directly affected learners' motivation, engagement and academic achievement. Many scholars believed that sense of belonging was the core to retain and motivate students; also it contributed to high levels of engagement (Weiss, 1973; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Kudo & Simkin, 2003, as cited in Pearce, 2015).

Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) examined the connection between sense of belonging, motivation, classroom connectedness and students' perceptions about their teachers. The findings revealed that sense of belonging is linked to all these factors and also it serves as a basic human motivator (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). From these quotations, it is clear that a sense of belonging is significant element in the learning journey; as researchers demonstrated that personal sense of belonging to the environment within the academic institutions is a prominent element related to productive experience of student life (Freeman, Andreman, & Jensen, 2007). Sense of belonging has a great impact on students' experience at university. According to Pedler et al. (2021), students who thought about leaving the university (dropping out), they had a lower sense of belonging than students who had never thought about it. Conversely, students with high *sense of belonging* rarely or never thought about dropping out. In fact, students who feel a low sense of belonging are more likely to drop out of university, as they may feel out of place in the students' community, or they may consider their contributions are unnoticed by others (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020).

1.7.1 Extracurricular Activities in Higher Education

According to Kuh (2002), what students do at university is prominent. It means that what is occurring at university is very important, and what students are doing there is also significant since it is a learning experience that will have an impact on students' lives. Extracurricular activity is one of the key aspects that take place at university. Astin (1984) added that enhanced students' involvement in academic, social, or extra-curricular activities lead to positive university results.

Extracurricular activity involves employment, volunteering, students joining clubs or societies also involving in personal development events. An important point to mention is co-curricular activity is not as extra-curricular activity; the latter happens outside the classroom while the other one is done in the classroom related to the curriculum (Kuh, 1995; Stuart et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2013).

1.7.2 The Role of Extracurricular Activities in Enhancing Students' Engagement and Sense of Belonging

Extracurricular activity in its nature is about group of students dealing with their classmates and it can be viewed as foundation for building sense of belonging such as involvement in peer representatives sports teams, etc. In different studies, this strongly affects *sense of belonging* and students' success (Thomas, 2002; Zepke, 2015). These extracurricular activities give opportunities that should be acknowledged since their role is important in improving sense of belonging, transition and integration (Burdett & Crossman, 2010).

Extracurricular activity happens outside the classroom, sometimes among different students from different classes and departments this strengthens retention and keep students far away from dropping out. Participating in such activities enhances engagement and sense of belonging in a positive manner. The more students share their interests and work with different learners the more they feel the sense of belonging, the more they engage in the different academic tasks. Moreover, various studies found that students who take part in extracurricular activities are more likely to feel satisfied with their university experience and they see themselves as a part of the community (Astin, 1985, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Another point Hurtado and Carter (1997) reported that students who joined different social organizations were more likely to develop sense of belonging and actively engage in university life. Joining university is a crucial transition in students' life many researchers related this to a new start or even as "culture shock" (Mann, 2001). Thus, the institution should make efforts to reach students and help them to integrate into this new experience by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

1.7.3 Psychological, Social, and Developmental Benefits

Engaging in such activities enhances both physical and psychological wellbeing among students (Bowman, 2010; Shiah et al., 2013; Kilgo et al., 2016). For instance, some students declared that they join these activities to reduce stress (Bland et al., 2012). In addition, spending time in extracurricular can foster positive psychological outcomes also they keep them away from loneliness and social dissatisfaction (Bohnert et al., 2007). Many authors emphasized the importance of pushing students to participate in clubs and societies (Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020).

Extracurricular activities make students more confident, they help them to enhance their self-esteem also they let students with less behavioral problems with good attitudes (Massoni, 2011). According to Daley and Leahy (2003), as cited in Wilson (2009), concluded that involvement in such activities had a positive impact on how students see themselves. They help them learn more about themselves and about others. Moreover, extracurricular activities let students expand their vision and their thinking.

1.7.4 Institutional Responsibility and Challenges

Although extracurricular activities are very helpful, they can make students busy or overwhelmed and they may not concentrate on their studies (Reeves, 2008, as cited in Wilson, 2009). Thus, time management should be taken into account to avoid any issues.

The university staff should care about what is happening outside the classroom because this affects students' success and motivation. Caring about extracurricular activity is very important in order to determine what activities should be done and which ones are useful for the students to keep them involved and feeling a sense of belonging.

Students' motivation, accomplishment and sense of connection are shaped by the institution. More research is needed to know how the institution can shape sense of belonging (Kahu et al., 2020). University is a place where many students from different background meet and study together. According to Zepke and Leach (2005), universities have to adjust their culture to meet the students' needs from different backgrounds; in order to make students feel comfortable and feel that they belong. In addition, students will engage easily. Indeed, the institution has to be adjustable, creating a culture which is welcoming to all students. In general, the university and its staff play a crucial role in the whole learning experience; they can facilitate or impede the students' engagement and sense of belonging at university.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter tackled an overview about students' engagement and its types, illustrating the factors that impact it such as: teachers' participation, class size, students' gender, age, the course design and assessment. It also covered the Self-Determination Theory and how affects the students' engagement. Also, a particular focus on sense of belonging especially at university; followed by the impact of extracurricular activities on both students' engagement and sense of belonging at the

university. The review highlighted the role of extracurricular activities in building the students' engagement and their sense of belonging. The review further addressed the psychological, social, and developmental benefits of participation in such activities, as well as the institutional responsibility and challenges. Then, the next chapter will deal with research methodology and research instruments used to gather data related to these concepts.

Chapter Two:

Research Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the factors that influence students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. The first chapter demonstrated the different aspects related to students' engagement and sense of belonging. This chapter presents the context of the study, the sampling, research methods and the research instruments that were used for data collection.

2.2 The context of the study

The study was carried out with third-year Licence students at the Department of English at Dr Moulay Taher University, Saida, during the academic year 2024-2025. Students were asked to answer a semi-structured questionnaire in order to measure their engagement and belonging. An unstructured questionnaire was also added for students who are members in the scientific club to have clear idea about extracurricular activities. Then, five teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview to figure out their perceptions about these concepts. Finally, a non-participant classroom observation was conducted with students to provide deeper understanding of students' engagement.

2.3 Sampling

A sample is group of people, objects or items that are taken from a large population for a measurement. The sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalize the findings from the research sample to the population as a whole (Salant & Dillman, 1994; Jopnes, 1955). The researcher in this study selected randomly third-year Licence students and five teachers from the Department of English of Saida University. Students were the main focus in this investigation and teachers were included since their practice and instructions can greatly impact students' engagement and sense of belonging.

The researcher chose students from third-year Licence because they spent at least three years at university, they are familiar with all the system and the activities that take place at in the institution and they developed a clear understanding about the university processes.

Besides the students, five teachers took place in this study to provide more data related to the given topic since they are important components in the learning process. Instructors play a prominent role in the students' experience and their journey at the university.

Including both teachers and students in this study will help the researcher to gain deep comprehension as well as demonstrating a full picture about the students' engagement and sense of belonging which will add a value and significant contribution to enhance both notions and guarantee a successful academic experience.

2.4 Research Methods

Research is a careful and systematic way of solving problems and gaining new knowledge (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011). It can also be defined as a systematic process of discovery and advancing the humans knowledge . In this vein, this study explored the factors that influence students' engagement and sense of belonging at university. Since these concepts are prominent components affect students' success and the entire experience at the university. For this study, the researcher opted for mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative. As Cresswell and Clark (2011) mentioned that "mixed methods research is a research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry". This approach enabled the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of for students' engagement and sense of belonging at university.

The quantitative approach for this study included a semi structured questionnaire for third-year Licence students at the Department of English. The questionnaire was organized to measure the different aspects of students' engagement as well as their sense of belonging. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions, likert-scale and open-ended questions for a deep understanding. This combination allowed the researcher to obtain structured and quantified data. In addition, unstructured questionnaire was used for the scientific club members to gain more insights about the club and how it contributed in increasing or decreasing the students' engagement and sense of belonging.

The qualitative approach for this study involved a semi-structured interview with teachers. This interview aimed to point out teachers' perspectives on students' engagement and sense of belonging, emphasizing on how they receive these components, interacting with students, managing the classroom atmosphere and which instructional methods they used.

By implementing both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study will provide a structured understanding about the given topic. Combining these two methods helped the

researcher to have rich, detailed and contextualized data to carry out the research in a more helpful manner, in addition, addressing the different angles of this research like students' behaviors and teachers' perceptions about students' engagement and sense belonging at the university.

2.5 Research Instruments

The process of data collection is very crucial in the field of research. The data should be unbiased in order to be useful. In this study the researcher worked with four research instruments which are a classroom observation was used to measure students' engagement and their behaviors in the classroom, questionnaire was used to collect data related to students' perceptions about their engagement and sense of belonging and another questionnaire for the scientific club members, while the interview was applied to gather qualitative insights from teachers to understand more their viewpoints linked to the topic.

2.5.1 Questionnaire

The first research instrument is a questionnaire. It is "a method for the elicitation, and recording and collecting information". (Kirakowski, 1998). On the other hand, Brehob (2001) gave another definition: "the questionnaire is a form that people fill out, used to obtain demographic information and views and interests of those questioned". Questionnaire is helpful and efficient for the research, however, the researcher must know how to design it and formulate it to match the research requirements and also to fulfill the research objectives.

In this study, a semi-structured questionnaire was chosen to obtain the relevant data from the respondents (students); this questionnaire was set by pre-determined questions such as: close-ended questions (e.g., likert scale, yes/no, multiple choices) and open-ended questions. This combination of different types of questions provides both quantitative and qualitative insights to gain measurable patterns and also exploring more students' personal views. The close-ended questions present arranged and structured data that can be easily analyzed and discussed, while, the open-ended questions allow the students to express more their opinions and their point of view, thus, improving the general understanding about students' engagement and sense of belonging.

The questionnaire used in this study was designed to examine two main notions: students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. The first section dealt with students' gender to comprehend how gender can impact their engagement and sense of belonging. The second section was dedicated for students' engagement; it included close/open ended questions that required from students to rate their engagement, demonstrated their involvement in different extracurricular activities(e.g., university clubs, sports teams, study groups), adding how often they attended university events. Further questions explored students' participation in English class discussion, how much time they spent practicing English outside class, as well as some statements measured on likert scale such as: respect, inclusion, and confidence in using English. Concerning sense of belonging, multiple-choice and open-ended questions were asked to students to identify the key factors contributing to this sense, like teachers, peers, participation in university activities and faculty support. The final elements asked whether students considered that the university staff fostered their sense of belonging and their engagement and demanding some suggestions to enhance both of them. These sections were designed to collect comprehensive insights about students' engagement and sense of belonging.

Others students who are members in the scientific club USLA (Union Scientifique des Language et des Arts) were asked to answer an unstructured questionnaire. This type was used to get in-depth answers in order to understand more how joining a club and other extracurricular activities can influence students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university

The use of semi-structured and unstructured questionnaire is appropriate for this study, as it gives a balance consistency in the process of data collection with flexibility to investigate adequately this study and to have insightful answers for significant conclusion.

2.5.2 Interview

The second research instrument is interview that the researcher utilized; it was conducted with teachers to comprehend their perceptions about students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. According to Kvale (1996, p. 174) an interview is "a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the [life-world] of the interviewee" with respect to interpretation of the meanings of the 'described phenomena'. In a similar vein, Schostak (2006,p. 54) added that" an interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having an 'in-depth information' about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon

could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviewees bring to it”. It helps the researchers understand the overall situation based on the answers provided from the respondents.

In this study, the researcher chose a semi –structured interview since it is more flexible as Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 88) stated that “it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses”. This type is suitable to explore more about students’ engagement and sense of belonging from teachers, as it allowed the researcher to explore their observations and experiences. Because instructors usually have a special perspective on students’ behaviors and the classroom environment, their contribution in the research helped the researcher to understand more about these two main notions.

The semi-structured interview with the five teachers started by asking about their perceptions of students’ sense of belonging whether they felt that students belong to the university or not, aiming to reveal teachers’ point of view into students’ connectedness. This was followed by a question about how they would rate students’ engagement in the classroom, allowing for more understanding about how students engage, participate and involve in the academic activities. To collect more concrete data, teachers were asked to provide specific lesson or activities that enhance both engagement and belonging. The interview concluded with a question that focused on some strategies for creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom, encouraging teachers to present their methods for fostering an inclusive environment.

2.5.3 Observation

Shank (2006) argued that using observation as a method in scientific research is difficult precisely because it is a natural element deeply rooted in our everyday life. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989, p.79) defined observation as: ‘the systematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study’. For this study, the researcher used observation to assess students’ engagement and the teachers’ interaction with them in order to have more concrete data. To avoid unnecessary changes and behaviors the researcher opted for non-participant observation where the researcher is observing the group but without engaging in it, the investigator is detached and separated from the group.

To conduct the observation, the researcher set some criteria to follow for an adequate process to gather the required data. The criteria are:

- Students'/ teachers' interaction: do students and teachers interact with each other or just the teachers deliver the lessons and they dismiss the class.
- Students' participation: do students participate, asking/answering questions or working in groups with their peers
- Students' attention: observing whether students were attentive, focused or distracted and observing if students took notes or not.
- Teachers' style and the classroom environment: observing how the teachers' structure and deliver the lesson as well as how they maintain an inclusive and supportive atmosphere in the classroom.

Concerning sense of belonging; since it is a feeling, psychological and an emotional construct that cannot be observed; the researcher included some questions in the questionnaire that address this notion. This will allow the students to reflect about their experience at the university and answer accordingly.

By these criteria, the researcher will be able to collect data in suitable and organized manner; ensuring all the needed aspects of the study are covered. This will facilitate the process of the observation, the analysis and the discussion. The regular application of these criteria in each session will present valid and reliable data to draw meaningful conclusions.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the methodology used to complete the study. It highlighted the context of the study, the sampling, the research methods and the research tools that were used to collect data which are: a semi structured questionnaire with students, an unstructured questionnaire with the scientific club members, a semi-structured interview with teachers and non participant classroom observation. The researcher described all the questions and the criteria that were used in each instrument. The following chapter will provide the findings.

Chapter Three:

Data Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

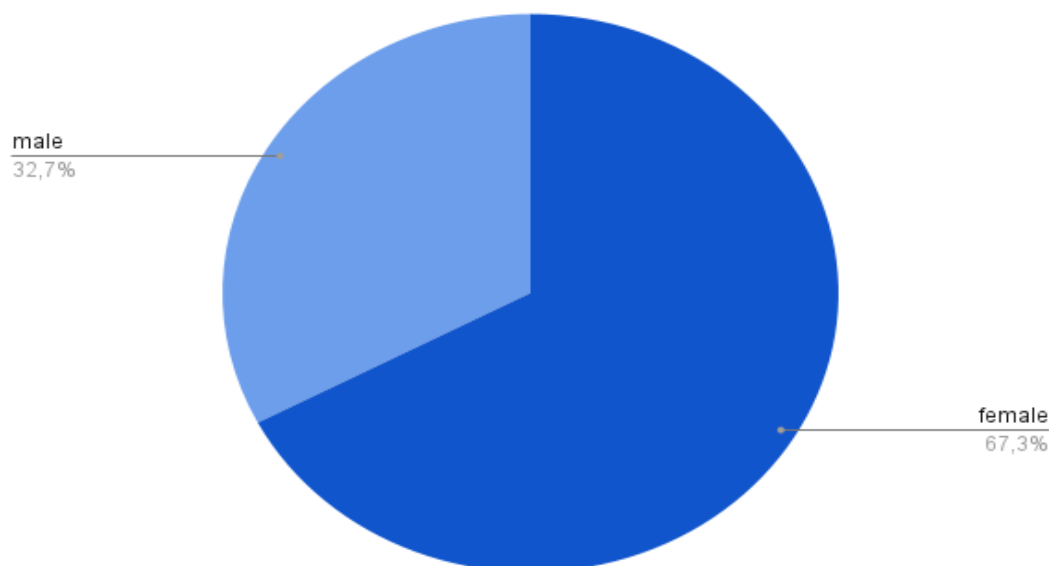
This chapter presents the finding of the research according to a detailed analysis of the data collected for the study of students' and sense of belonging at the university. It aims to uncover patterns and relationships relevant to the research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data are examined using varied tools.

3.2 Questionnaire Analysis

As previously mentioned, the researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire for students to gain a general understanding about the study under investigation; the questionnaire consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions in order to have relevant answers.

Section One: Background Information.

The first section tackled the students' gender to have a clear idea about the sample; which was taken from the third-year Licence students.

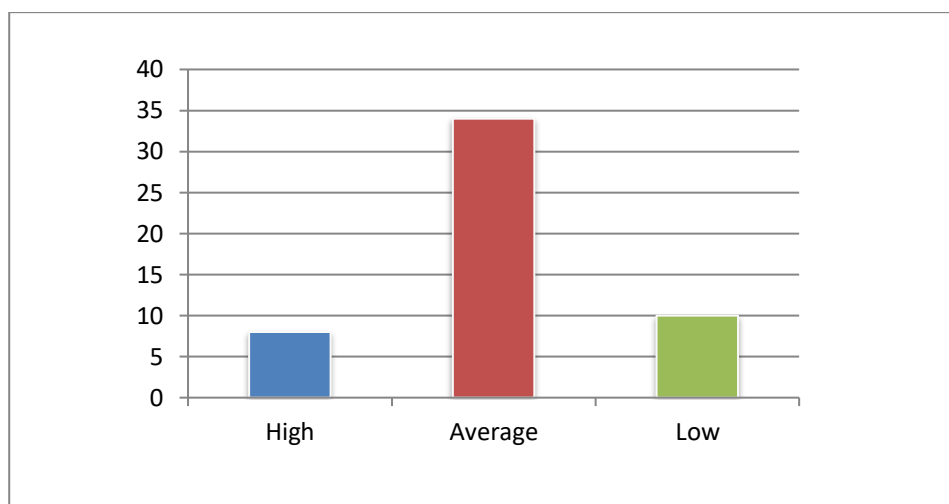


Pie-chart 3.1: the sample of the study.

According to pie-chart 3.1, the sample was 50 students, the majority of it contained female (67, 3 %) and (32, 7%) male.

Section Two: Students' Engagement.

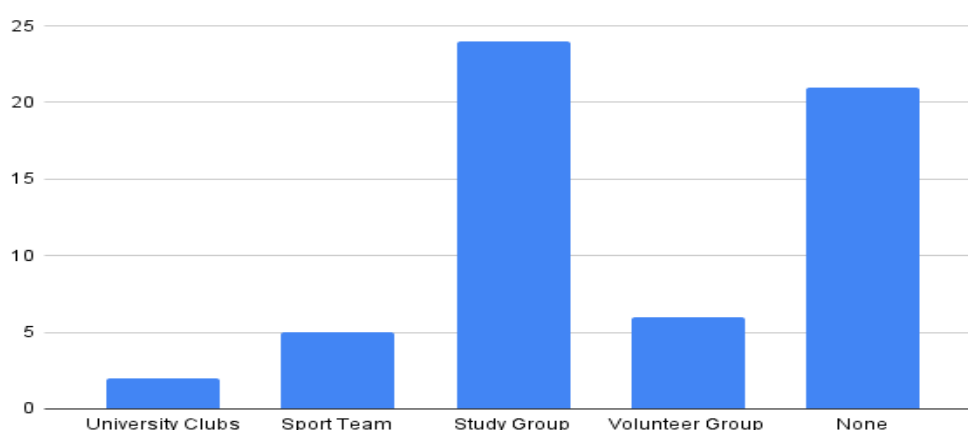
Q1: How would you rate your engagement at University?



Bar-graph 3.1: Students' Engagement at the university.

This graph represents the students' engagement at the University; the majority of the students answered that their engagement is average, showing that moderate connection to academic and university activity. Others stated that their involvement is low compared to their peers, which can be linked to some challenges in participation and motivation. Only a few students chose a high level of engagement at the university.

Q2: Which of the following activities do you participate in?

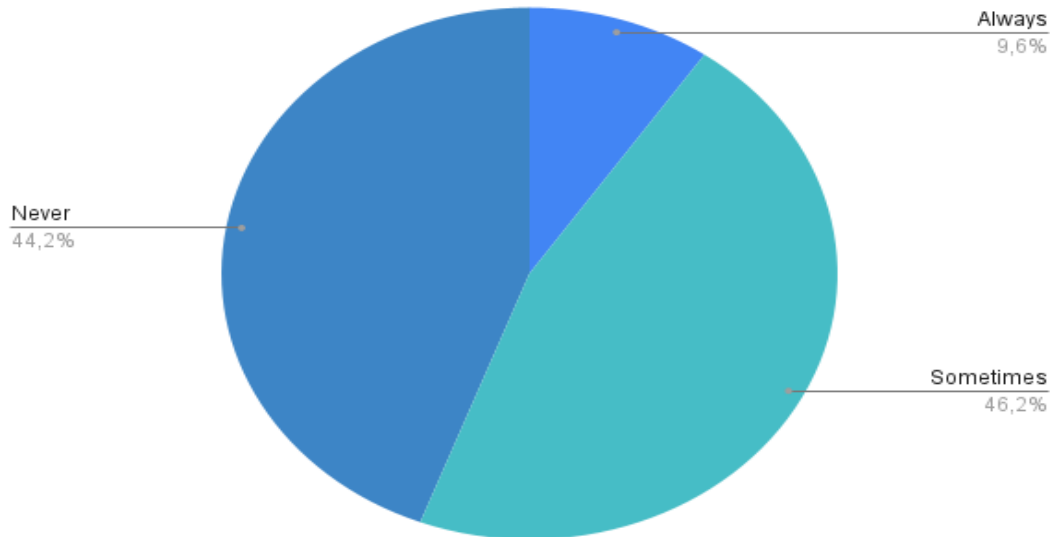


Bar graph 3.2: Students Participation in different activities.

This graph demonstrates the students' participation in different activities; as it shows that students mostly participate in study group, as most of them selected this option. However, the majority of the learners do not participate in any activity. Participation in volunteer group and

sport team appears to be similar. On the other hand, university clubs are the last choice among students. This shows that the students' engagement in extracurricular activities remains limited.

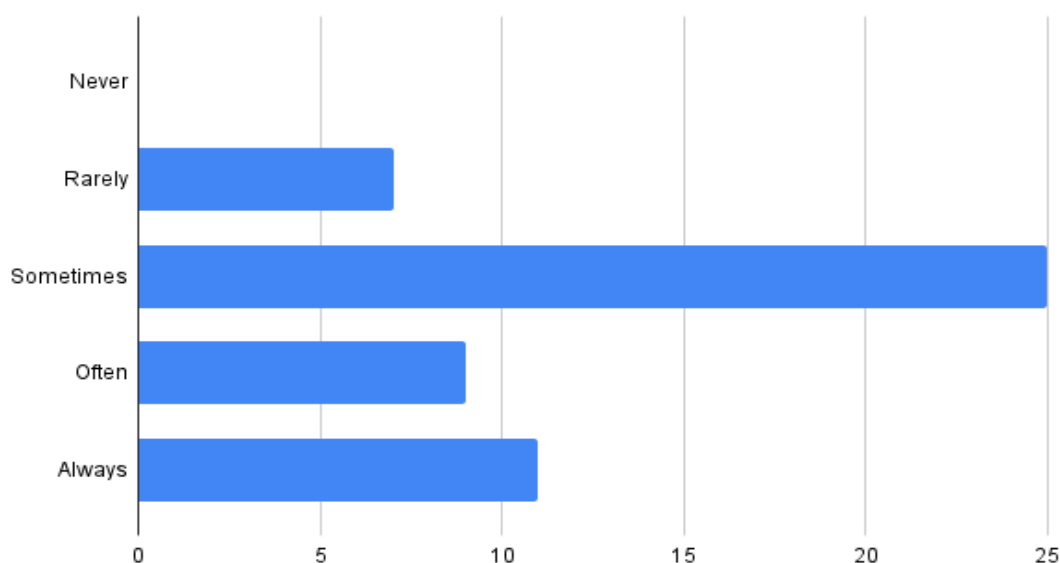
Q3: How many times do you attend university events or activities?



Pie-chart 3.2: Students Attendance in University Clubs/Events.

This pie chart illustrates students' attendance at university events/activities. Most of students (46, 2%) stated that they sometimes attend such events. While, (44, 2%) reported that they never take part in these university activities. A small percentage (9, 6%) showed that they always attend. This confirms that students' engagement in extracurricular events is low, indicating a lack of interest to participate in non-academic activities at the university.

Q4: How often do you actively participate in English class discussion?



Bar graph3.3: Students' Participation in English Class Discussion.

This bar graph demonstrates students' participation in English class discussion. The majority of the students participate sometimes in the discussion, demonstrating an average level of engagement. While, others answered that they always or often involve in the communication, a similar number answered rarely participating in the discussion. Interestingly, that among the students no one reported that they never participate. That shows that most of the students join discussion with their peers.

Q5: How much time do you spend outside of class practicing English?

Table 3.1: Students' Time Spent Practicing English outside the Classroom.

| Themes | Quotes from Students |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Regular Self-Practice | "All the time" / "2h", "4h", "5h", "7h" |
| Online Interaction | "Talking with online friends" / "Social media" |
| No Practice Outside Class | Never" / "No" / "I practice only in the classroom" |

This table presents students' time spent practicing English outside the classroom, many students reported that all the time they practice the language outside the classroom or for several hours per day. This shows that personal efforts are done to improve their speaking level. Also, some students practice English through online interaction such as using social media and talking with online friends, revealing that online platforms can be useful to

practice the language. In contrast, some students reported that they never practice the language outside the classroom, this shows that students depend only what they had in the class which lead to limited exposure to the language.

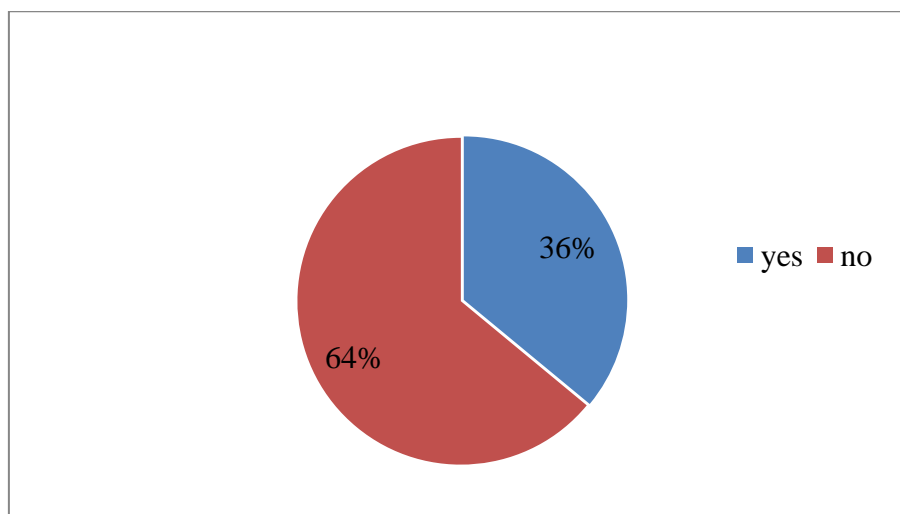
Q6: Which classroom activities help you engage more in learning English?

Table 3.2: Classroom Activities that Enhance Student Engagement in English Language Learning.

| Activity Type | Quotes from Students |
|----------------------|--|
| Presentations | “Presentations help me focus and speak confidently.” |
| Group Work | “Group work makes learning more fun and interactive.” |
| Discussions | “Oral discussions help us share ideas and improve speaking.” |

This table presents classroom activities that enhance students’ engagement in English language learning. For certain students, presentations help them focus and speak with confidence since they are ready and know what they will provide as content to their peers. Group work makes learning fun and interactive, encouraging them to work and exchange ideas. Oral discussions help learners to share ideas and improve their speaking skills. These activities are helpful for learners to enhance their level in English.

Q7: Do you feel that the University staff provides enough opportunities for students' engagement?



Pie chart3.3: Students' Perceptions of University Staff Providing Opportunities for their Engagement.

The data reveal that a significant number of students (64%); feel that the university staff does not provide enough opportunities for students' engagement. While, (36%) of students reported that the university staff provide what it is necessary for their engagement. This shows that there is gap between the students and the university staff in offering meaningful opportunities to enhance students' learning experience at the university.

Q8: What do you suggest to improve students' engagement at university?

Table 3.3: Suggestions to Improve Student Engagement at University.

| Themes | Quotes from Students |
|---|--|
| Interactive Activities | "Do more interactive activities like role plays, events, and scientific clubs." |
| Teacher Role & Communication | "Good communication with the teacher" / "We need skillful teachers." |
| Learning Environment & Resources | "Provide a good environment to participate more" / "Better classrooms, AI tools, materials." |
| Motivation & Rewards | "Do more competitions" / "Events with valuable rewards like some money." |
| Student Involvement & Autonomy | "Encourage students to find their real specialty" / "Do research and presentations." |

This table illustrates students' suggestions for enhancing their engagement at the university. They stated that interactive activities such as role play, events and scientific clubs can foster their engagement. They added teachers' role and good communication with focusing on the need of skillful teachers. Moreover, a good environment and better classrooms were mentioned as well as providing AI tools and materials. Motivation and rewards like competitions offering incentives that encourage motivation to participate and involve in the different activities. Students addressed involvement and autonomy through research and presentations also they stated that the need to know their real specialty providing guidance that facilitates this process.

Section Three: Sense of Belonging.

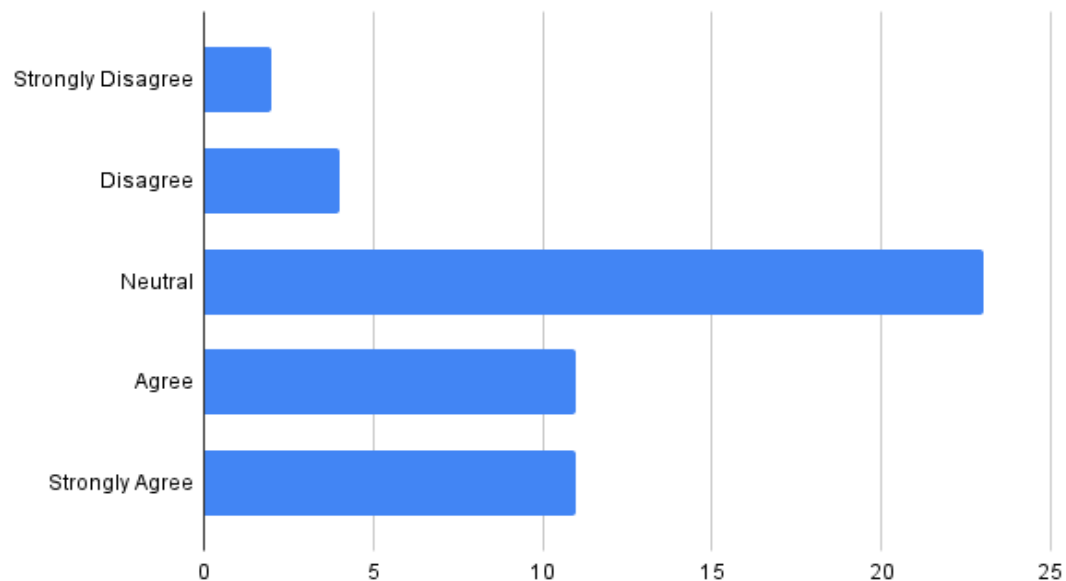
Q1: Do you feel that you belong to the University?

Table 3.4: Students' Sense of Belonging at the University.

| Gender | Yes | No |
|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Female | 42% | 26% |
| Male | 16% | 18% |
| Total | 58% | 44% |

This table shows students' sense of belonging at the university. (58%) of students feel they belong, while (44%) do not. When breaking down by gender, the results show that female students reporting a strong sense of belonging with (42%) saying "yes" and (26%) saying "no". However, male students show a lower sense of belonging with (18%) responding "No" and (16%) responding "Yes". These finding reveal that sense of belonging differs among female and male students, showing that both of them have differences in social integration within the university environment.

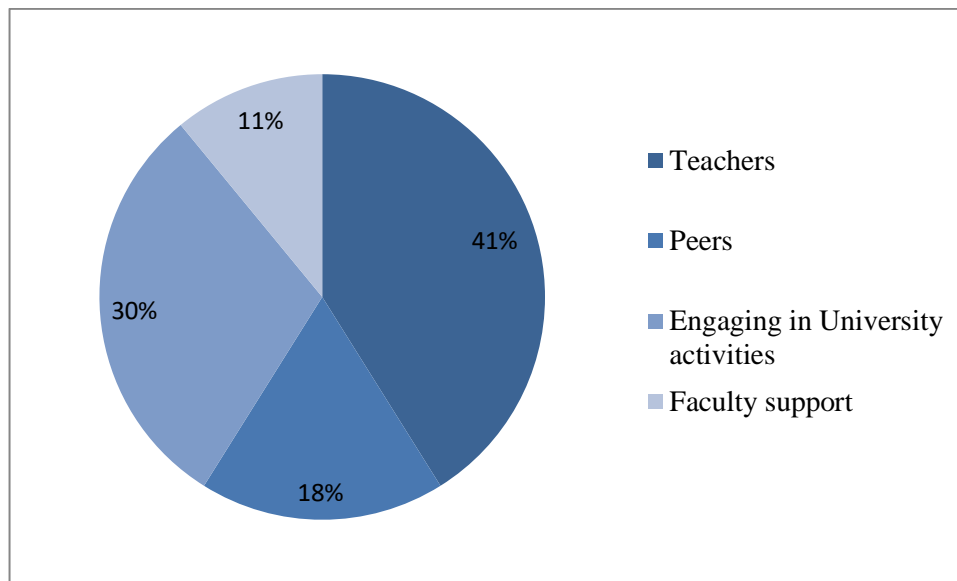
Q2: I feel like I am an important part of my English class.



Bar graph 3.4: Students' Perceptions of Their Importance in English Class.

This bar graph demonstrates students' perception of their importance in English class; most of the students answered neutrally. However, certain learners agree and strongly agree that they are important in their classes, revealing that they feel valued and important. While, few students disagree and strongly disagree about their importance in the class. Indicating that despite some students feel uncertain about their importance many students feel recognized in the English classes.

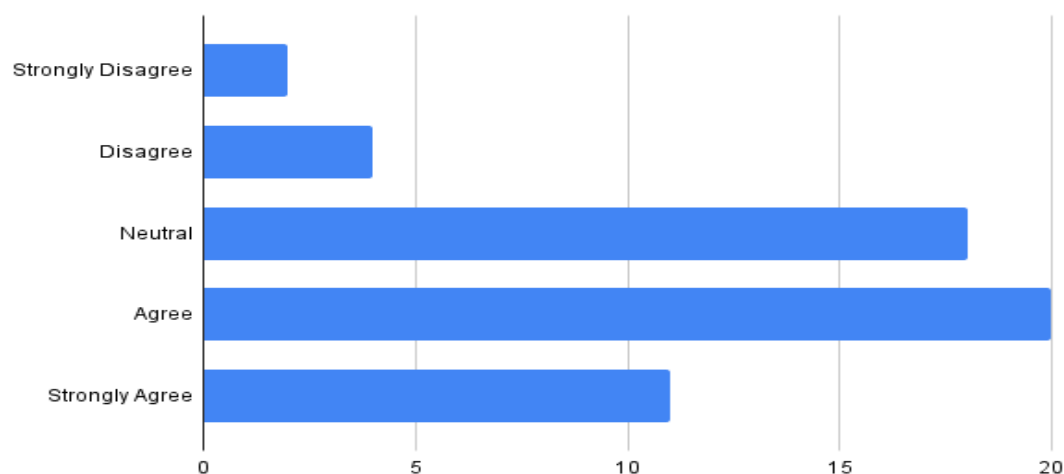
Q3: What factors do you think can impact students' sense of belonging?



Pie chart 3.4:Students' Perceptions of Factors That Influence Their Sense of Belonging.

This pie chart illustrates students' perception of factors that influence their sense of belonging; the majority of students (41%) stated that teachers are a crucial factor that contributes to their sense of belonging followed by engaging in university activities (30%) reported that involving in certain university activities contribute to the sense of belonging. While (18%) believed that peers influence this sense and significantly percent (11%) feel that the faculty support fosters students' sense of belonging.

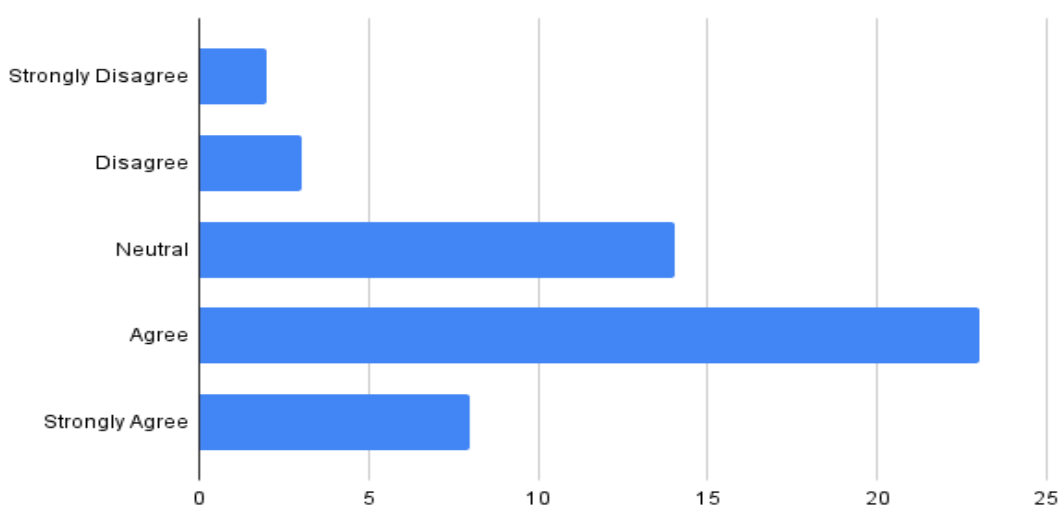
Q4: I feel respected and valued by my English teachers.



Bar graph 3.5: Students' Perceptions of Being Respected and Valued by Their English Teachers.

This bar graph represents students' perceptions of being respected and valued by their English teachers. The majority of them agree that they are respected and valued by their teachers, most of them remain neutral. More than ten students strongly agree that they feel respected and valued by their instructors. While, less than five students stated they disagree and strongly disagree, reflecting that they do not feel respected and valued by their teachers. Presenting that only small proportion feels disrespected by their teachers.

Q5: Speaking English makes me feel confident and included in academic discussion.



Bar graph 3.6: Students' Confidence and Inclusion in Academic Discussions through English.

This bar graph reveals students' confidence and inclusion in academic discussion through English. More than twenty students agreed that speaking English makes them feel confident and included, significantly seven students strongly agreed. Approximately about fifteen students remained neutral. Almost ten students reported that they are confident and included while using English in academic discussions. Less than five students disagree and strongly disagree about being confident and included in academic discussions, demonstrating that just a few learners feel unconfident in English discussions.

Q6: Do you feel connected with your classmates during English lessons?

Table 3.5: Students' Sense of Connectedness with their Classmates during English Lessons.

| Responses | Quotes from Students |
|--|---|
| Yes / Definitely | "Yes" / "Definitely" |
| Sometimes / With Specific Group | "Sometimes, and sometimes with the group" |
| No / Not Really | "No" / "Not really" / "No, because they don't like different perspectives." |
| Critical Reflection | "More effort is needed to foster an inclusive environment." |

This table illustrates students' connectedness with their classmates during English lessons. Certain students answered with "yes" and "definitely" feeling connected with their classmates, while, others replied with "sometimes" and "with the group", depending on the group they joined. However, some students reported that they do not feel connected since some of their classmates do not accept different perspectives. Other students reflected that more efforts are needed to foster an inclusive environment to feel included with their peers.

Q7: Do you feel that the University staff enhances the sense of belonging?

Table 3.6: Students' Perceptions of University Staff Enhancing Sense of Belonging.

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Yes | No |
| 50% | 50% |

This table presents students' perceptions of university staff enhancing their sense of belonging. Half of the students feel that the university staff helps in enhancing sense of belonging; the same percentage (50%) of students does not align with this view. It indicates that there is a significant amount of students do not feel supported by the

university which implies that the staff should take it into account and work on improving students' sense of belonging.

Q8: What do you suggest to foster the sense of belonging at university?

Table 3.7: Students' suggestions to foster the sense of belonging.

| Themes | Quotes from Students |
|--|--|
| Communication & Support | "Good communication with students and staff" / "Faculty support is important." |
| Respect & Inclusion | "Respect diversity" / "Students' opinions and ideas should be considered." |
| Activities & Group Work | "Being more engaged in university activities" / "Group work and events help a lot." |
| Opportunities & Future Vision | "Provide more opportunities for jobs in the future" / "Improve the mentality of students." |
| Feeling of Disconnection | "I DO NOT BELONG TO THE UNIVERSITY." |

This table shows students' suggestions to foster sense of belonging. Students provided many answers such as: good communication between students and the staff, focusing on meaningful interaction as well as the faculty support. Students mentioned that their opinions and their ideas should be recognized also and that diversity should be respected and valued. Engaging in university activities, group work and events for them is helpful to enhance their sense of belonging. In addition, students emphasized providing opportunities for the future to find jobs, interestingly, one student stated directly "*I do not belong to the university*", showing a sense of disconnection. These suggestions can be taken into consideration by the university staff to enhance students' sense of belonging.

3.2.1 Questionnaire Discussion

The questionnaire reveals that students' engagement at university is average; this shows a moderate connection to the academic environment, few students stated low engagement, which may be influenced by some challenges faced by the students like lack of motivation. Concerning extracurricular activities, students' involvement seems to be limited. Many students do not participate in university clubs and events; for the majority of students, study groups are the preferable activity, this demonstrates that students are not interested in

attending academic activities, in addition, this limited contribution affect their engagement and the feeling of connection to the university community.

In English class discussion, most students participate from time to time, presenting average classroom engagement. While other learners are active and some of them rarely participate, interestingly, no student answered never participating. Language practice outside the classroom differs. Many students practice frequently through online platforms and daily with their friends, while others rely only on the classroom content. Students emphasized on presentations, group work, and discussions in fostering engagement. These practices help in interaction and communication in language learning environment. For institutional support, many students (64%) assumed that the university members did not provide enough opportunities for their engagement. Students suggested some improvements such as: interactive activities, better classrooms, material and the use of technology.

The questionnaire also tackled sense of belonging at university. The results show that (58%) of students feel they belong to the university, when(44%) do not. However, when taking a look on gender; (42%) of female students belong to the university, compared to (16%) of male students. This demonstrates that female students have a positive experience rather than their male peers. In English classes, the majority of students feel neutral about their importance, but many of them agreed or strongly agreed that they feel important, just few students disagreed but most of them feel recognized in the class. Concerning factors impacting the sense of belonging, (41%) of students perceive that teachers are the most crucial, followed by participation in university, peer relationships, and faculty support. These results highlight the importance of the teachers and how they contribute to students' sense of belonging because when there is no contribution and concrete decisions from the institution the sense of belonging can be negatively affected.

Most of the students feel respected and valued by their teachers. The feeling of connectedness with classmates differs. Some students feel connected; few of them do not since there is a lack of receiving different perspectives among their classmates. The university staff support is divided with (50%) of students feeling supported and (50%) do not, it indicates that the university staff should reach students and communicate with them their concerns. Students were asked to suggest some improvements to enhance their sense of belonging, they stated improving communication with staff, increasing faculty support, and setting more group

work. Overall, the findings show that teachers, peer relationships, classroom experiences and university support play a significant role in fostering their sense of belonging.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Scientific Club Questionnaire

The questionnaire was conducted online with three members of the scientific club to get more data about the extracurricular activities and how it can impact students' engagement and sense of belonging at university. The first question was about whether students feel interested in joining the club, the first and the second members stated that most students are interested especially first-year students who are excited to make connections with others. The third member believed that most students joined because they knew the club members.

The second question was about what they do to help students feel welcomed and comfortable in the club. The students reported that they invited them to the office and introduce the club's activities and their future plans. They also try to involve them directly in the events to build comfort and connection and they make it clear from the beginning that it is not mandatory.

The third question was about students' progress in academic and social behavior after joining the club; the members reported that, at the social level, it is generally observed that shy students usually do not join the club. Therefore, the students who join the club are usually socially active. At the academic level, members do not believe that their club has a direct academic impact. Only one student reported significant academic progress after joining the club.

The fourth and fifth questions were about whether students felt a sense of belonging to the university and how they demonstrated it, besides, how taking part in the club affected their sense of belonging. The club members stated that most students do not feel strong sense of belonging. They tend to view it as a means to get degree. All the members agreed that taking part in the club affected positively students' sense of belonging as it fosters a sense of community and connection to the university. From their perspective, they made the club as a "family".

3.2.3 Discussion of the Scientific Club Questionnaire

The findings from the questionnaire emphasize how extracurricular activities affect students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. There is interest in joining the club, especially among first-year students looking for connections. The club plays an important role in developing a welcoming atmosphere for the new members by introducing the club and its activities as well as involving them in the events, which encourage social integration. Although the club's impact on academic performance seems to be limited, it enhances notably their social development. In general, students perceive university as a means to an end but participation in the club can provide another meaningful experience. Highlighting that active contribution through participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility helps to build great sense of belonging. All the members stressed the club's role in improving students' sense of belonging and connection with the university.

3.3 Interview Analysis

The researcher conducted a semi structured interview consisting of open-ended question with five teachers from the Department of English. This interview aims to explore more about these two concepts from teachers which are the students' engagement and the sense of belonging at university.

Q1: Do you feel that students belong to the University?

In this question, teachers provided many different responses. The first teacher said that students do not demonstrate their sense of belonging at the university. Especially in this modern era most of them they are in a virtual world, they are connected with a world that it is not real. They do not really care about their studies rather they just come here to meet friends and share trends. There are two other teachers who share this point they stated that students attended classes to avoid absences and exclusion, no one cares about the lecture, there are only few students they can be counted. The other teacher related sense of belonging to the students' level of English; they belong because they have good level and good attitudes while others do not belong because they do not have that good level in English. The fourth teacher declared that most of the students are motivated, engaged and they are interested in the things they are doing; added that some students are obliged to attend classes because they would say, *"I'm just here, because I'm obliged to study, because I did not choose this stream"*.

The fifth teacher emphasized on many points such as: socio-economic background, motivation and personal goals. Some of the students are studying to get grade and to have a future occupation, others they see that English is a way to have many opportunities and the others students attend because of their social or economic background. The teacher did not state clearly whether the students belong or not just presenting many points that can affect sense of belonging.

Q2: How would you rate the students' engagement in the classroom?

Teachers provided different answers which are; the first teacher stated that, students are no more interested in the classroom content; they are no longer motivated when the teacher is up to give a lecture, even if it is a TD they just do not care also the teacher mentioned the misuse of technology especially the new AI techniques where everything is available *“so I do not think that students are engaged; they are just here to have a grade”*. The second teacher declared that it depends on each group sometimes I prepare 5 activities I finish them in just one session, the other groups it takes me more than one session to complete all the tasks so the engagement is 6/10 depending on each group. Moreover, the teacher stated that whenever students have an activity to do *“I have to bring the red pen to correct, check and call names in order to make sure that they will all complete the task”*. The third teacher mentioned the teachers' role, the instructor is responsible to make them immersed and engaged in the classroom, and in addition, the teacher added that there are some students who are already motivated others are not. The fourth teacher announced that: *“the rate in my class is 100% because of the controversial topics that make students interested; I always try to create activities where learners are engaged which enlightens the class”*. The fifth teacher related engagement to students' behaviors, the instructor can observe their facial expressions kind of sparks that may appear in their faces, they are trying to participate or participating especially when they are involved in dialogues with their peers, they communicate and exchanging ideas. In these moments, they are engaged when they are active not just passive. Moreover, it seems in their actions some students may day-dreaming or using their phones not for learning but for chatting even if they claim that they are attentive and they are following with the teacher.

Q3: Can you give a lesson or an activity that enhances students' engagement?

In this question, all the teachers agreed on one point that they are creating and designing lessons which make students engaged and involved. It is their duty to guarantee that the learners are taking and absorbing what the teacher delivers to them. They stated that real-world tasks, group work and thing that the students are familiar with are important to motivate learners. Also they emphasized on understanding the students' needs and interests to design lessons that meet what they are interested in. The last point is that all the lessons and activities should be linked to creativity and critical thinking to push students to participate, involve and engage.

Q4: How can you create a positive atmosphere in the classroom?

Teachers provided many responses. The first teacher declared that the first thing to do is to ban smart phones to avoid distractions. The instructor should control the class and push them to work in groups because this generation is relying too much on the self so they become too individualistic. This can help to create an atmosphere where everyone is included. The second teacher stated that the relationship with the learner is very important; it comes before the cognitive material and it should be built on respect and care, if the students are not psychologically comfortable, the teacher cannot get them engaged, and the instructors must not show themselves as figures of authority, power or source of intimidation, students have to love the session and they have to love learning. The third teacher asserted that a positive atmosphere is created through meaningful topics like mental health. This can capture the students' attention and they will all share their experiences which make them involved. The fourth teacher affirmed that: "*the first time I approach my students by giving a positive talk using polite expressions tolerating some behaviors but if this fails I will move to a rigid atmosphere*". The fifth teacher stated that to have such an atmosphere the instructor needs to motivate the learners with tasks that they are not beyond their cognitive level because if they are overwhelmed they will not perform and study well so the tasks should be achievable.

3.4.Interview Discussion

From the teachers' responses to the first question which was about whether students belong to the University or not, it is revealed that many of them affirmed that students do not demonstrate the sense of belonging to the university because they focus more on social media and they are not interested in their studies. These teachers believed that students attend classes

only because they must to be present, while other instructors related sense of belonging to students' language capacities, they believe that learners who have good skills in English they can feel the sense of belonging. One other teacher stated that socio-economic background, motivation and personal goals can have an impact on students' sense of belonging. Thus, students do not feel that they belong to the university according to teachers and many factors contribute as it is mentioned in their responses.

The second question was about the rate of students' engagement in the classroom. Teachers gave many different answers. Some of them believed that the engagement is decreasing recently, especially with this new AI technology which affects the learners in a negative manner; they become less interested and less engaged during the class. Other teachers stated that it depends on certain groups some of them are fully engaged and active while the remaining ones need more encouragement like using the red pen to correct and check and calling names to guarantee that all students will be able to absorb and understand everything related to the lesson. Some teachers emphasized on the importance of the instructor in helping students to engage and being involved in the classroom noting that the lessons should be well designed and attractive to keep students focused and engaged. According to one teacher the engagement in the class is 100% because of the controversial topics which attract the learners that interest them. In general, the engagement varies and differs. From the responses it is clear that the teachers can enhance and refine the engagement since they are the controller and prominent figure in the classroom. Besides, the students also should be responsible of their own learning.

The third question was about activities or lessons can enhance students' engagement. All the teachers agreed on one point that the lessons and the activities should be designed in a way that makes the learners engaged and involved. They should include real world scenarios, group work and meaningful topics that attract the students' attention. In addition, the teacher should know the learners' needs and interests to opt for what suit them also to facilitate the teaching and the learning process. A significant note to be mentioned which is that these lessons and activities must be linked to creativity and critical thinking to ensure that the students are focused and engaged.

The fourth question tackled the positive atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers provided many strategies to create such an atmosphere. One of them is to eliminate distractions like

mobiles and encouraging working in groups to improve the interaction between students and reduce isolation. Another significant point is the teacher-student relationship that it should be built on mutual respect and trust to avoid any issues, discussing topics that make students fit in the discussion and feel connected with the whole class also encouraging an inclusive environment to have a positive atmosphere.

The teachers' responses highlight different factors influencing students' engagement, their sense of belonging and the classroom environment at the university. The dominant theme is the teachers' role in shaping the learners' academic journey; through enhancing an inclusive and supportive atmosphere, designing relevant lessons, also taking into consideration the students' needs and interests. The teachers addressed some challenges like social media, the new AI technology and language proficiency. Thus, to foster both students' engagement and sense of belonging a well dynamic teaching approach that includes meaningful content, strong relationship between students and teachers and an effective interactive learning environment.

3.5. Observation Analysis

The researcher attended six observation sessions with the third-year Licence students. There were four modules. The investigator took a place at the back to observe the group well. The first session was module 1 in which students were asked to work in groups and discuss different topics then each group chose just one student to present the topic to their classmates; during the session, the teacher was moving and checking the students' ideas and suggestions. In this session, students were fully engaged; they were discussing, brainstorming, exchanging ideas and asking the teacher.

In the second session, the researcher attended module 2. At the beginning of the lecture; the teacher started recalling what they had before and continued explaining the lesson. In this session, just a few students were taking notes, most of them were just following and they did not interact a lot with the instructor.

The third session also module 2 but this time it was dedicated to presentations. The students had different topics to present and discuss. The first group was reading from the paper and providing examples related to the topic and the rest of the students were following but not really focused. When they finished; they were asked some questions from the teacher but none of them answered just one student was trying to answer but the instructor pushed them to speak

and discuss the presentation with their classmates. In the second group, two students presented orally, the rest of the students followed and some of them asked for clarification they were able to answer and give some clarifications. Then, the teacher interfered to explain more. The third group; included just one student reading from the paper and most of the learners did not follow well with the presenter.

The fourth session was module 1. At the very beginning the teacher started by recalling what they had before, most of the students were discussing the previous session which was a story and they were asked to imagine the end of it. They started one by one giving its end, they focused on each one and they were all interacting together. Then, the teacher provided the original end of the story; the learners were all silent following with the instructor.

The fifth session was module 3, at the beginning; the teacher started linking the previous lesson with the current session. Following this, the teacher distributed the handouts and proceeded to explain the lesson orally. During the explanation, the instructor gave real-life examples related to the given text, just few students took notes. At one point, a quote was mentioned in the text the teacher asked the students to explain it; they participated but not all of them. After, they had presentations but the students were presenting from their seats, and most of the students were not following.

The sixth session of module 4 was dedicated to presentations. At the beginning of the session, students encountered some ICT issues because the computer was not connected properly to the projector. They had to go to the administration and change the cable which caused a significant delay. Once the problem was solved, the first student started presenting followed by the second. The remaining students were following but some of them were not attentive to their peers. From time to time the teacher was interfering to clarify some ideas. When they finished presenting the teacher asked students to provide any feedback or questions about the presentation.

3.6 Observation Discussion

The observation was guided by a set of criteria, including students'/ teachers' interaction, student participation, attention, the teachers' style and classroom environment. These guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for students' engagement.

3.6.1 Students'/Teachers' Interaction

Students'/teachers' interaction differed considerably in the sessions. In module 1 and group work sessions were more active, with the teacher moving among the students, checking their ideas and providing guidance. In the first and the fourth sessions, the teacher regularly cooperated with the learners, encouraging discussions and dialogues. However, in the lecture sessions like module 2 and module 3, the interaction was limited. Teachers provided lessons while students were passive. During these sessions, students were less responsive and more interaction was needed.

3.6.2 Students' Participation

During group work and creative activities, participation levels were high. In module 1 where students were asked to imagine another end for the story, almost all the students participated. As well as in the group discussion session, students exchanged ideas and worked together. However, in the presentation sessions, especially when students read directly from the papers, this demonstrates that he/she was not engaged with the task assigned to them and this affected the other students' engagement and participation.

3.6.3 Students' Attention

This criterion is influenced by the type of the activity and the teaching approach used. In the interactive session, students focused, engaged and participated. However, during lectures or presentations many students were distracted. In the module 2 and module 4 sessions, just few students took notes and remained attentive. This suggests that more engaging activities and lessons are needed to maintain students' attention.

3.6.4 Teachers' style and the classroom environment

Sessions with student centered approach like discussing different topics and encouraging interaction were more successful in creating a supportive learning environment. Conversely, lectures sessions lead to a passive and disengaged atmosphere in the classroom.

The findings from the observation demonstrated that students' engagement is related to the teaching methods used. Sessions that encourage interaction, group work, and creativity lead to high level of attention, engagement and participation. While, lectures in general indicated low

levels of engagement since the students remained passive without showing interest in the content being provided, this passive atmosphere impeded both motivation and engagement. These results emphasize the importance of selecting more interactive sessions to foster students' engagement and creating supportive learning environment.

3.7 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, the interview and the classroom observation, it is apparent that students' engagement and sense of belonging influence by several academic and institutional factors. Thus, the researcher will provide some recommendations related to this study.

3.7.1 Select Students- Centered Teaching Approach

Using interactive methods like group work, open discussions and creative activities as well as designing lessons related to real life situation that match the students' interest and ideas. This helps students to engage and participate in appropriate manner.

3.7.2 Rise Institutional Support for Engagement and Sense of Belonging

The institution staff should take into consideration all what concern the students at the university such as better classrooms with the integration of new technology. Organizing more extracurricular activities, including clubs and scientific events, in order to improve students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university.

3.7.3 Providing Inclusive and Engaging Classrooms

The teachers should be trained to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere where all students feel included and valued along with providing for teachers a special professional development on students' engagement methods to ensure a successful learning journey.

3.7.4 Improve Communication between Students and University Staff

Set up more open space for communication where both students and university staff share their interests and concerns, one hour per week, this enables a good relationship between them and also encouraging the staff to hear their voice and suggestions.

3.7.5 Encourage Students/ Teachers Contributions

Acknowledge students' and teachers' contributions their efforts, participation and accomplishments; this opens the door for other meaningful contributions, consequently, improving both students' engagement and sense of belonging.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data analysis and discussion related to students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. It began with the analysis of student questionnaire responses, supported by illustrative graphs. Next, responses from university club members were included to provide additional perspectives. Then, examining interviews conducted with teachers, offering insights into their perspectives. Finally, an analysis of classroom observations was presented, followed by a discussion of the key findings.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

University is an important phase in the learners' journey. It can be affected by many factors like teachers, peers, and participation in different extracurricular activities. Students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university are essential in shaping the learners' experience. This study explored several elements that can influence these aspects. The research addressed three primary research questions which are:

- How do students perceive their engagement and sense of belonging at the university?
- How do teaching practices, classroom environment, and extracurricular activities affect students' engagement and sense of belonging at university?
- What is the impact of extracurricular activities on students' sense of belonging?

The main research results revealed that the teaching practices, classroom environment and extracurricular activities affect both students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university. The findings also demonstrated that extracurricular activities impact positively students' sense of belonging.

The students' questionnaire demonstrated that students' engagement at university is average with limited participation in extracurricular activities; most students prefer to study in group rather than university events or clubs. Group work and discussions are considered as effective practices for engagement. A large number of students feel that the university staff offers inadequate opportunities for their engagement. Concerning sense of belonging, female students feel they belong to the university more than their male classmates. In English classes, most students feel valued by their teachers, while, their connectedness with the peers differs. Thus, teachers, peers, classroom environment and faculty support are key factors to improve students' engagement and sense of belonging at the university.

Another questionnaire with members of a scientific club reveals that students who join the club are first-year students in order to have connections. However, its effect on students' academic level is limited. This club provides meaningful experiences for students to feel welcomed and comfortable this fosters sense of belonging since most students do not demonstrate the sense of belonging at the university.

Teachers' interview highlighted the importance of designing engaging and relevant lessons that match students' needs. They also mentioned some challenges like the influence of

General conclusion

AI and social media that distract students from their studies. Moreover, teachers addressed their significant role in enhancing students' engagement. This notion can be fostered through encouragement, controversial topics and mutual respect between teachers and students.

The data collected from classroom observation indicated that students' engagement is affected by teachers' style and the classroom environment. In the sessions where teachers used student-centered approach and interactive methods like group work and discussions, students were highly engaged and involved in the class. In contrast, lectures and presentation sessions show low engagement and limited interaction.

It is important to address some limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, the researcher did not include the university staff in the study. Second, the observation sessions were not sufficient because of a delayed start, which may affect the depth of data collection. Moreover, the researcher did not have access to the whole population, addressing just one sample was not sufficient to evaluate the whole situation, especially how students' engagement and the sense of belonging increased or decreased through the years.

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Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students, you are kindly invited to answer this questionnaire that deals with students' engagement and sense of belonging at university. Engagement is the act to be involved in different academic activities; Sense of belonging when you feel accepted, appreciated, valued and fit in certain group, your answers will be valuable and be sure that your information will be kept confidential.

Section One: Background Information.

1-Gender:FemaleMale

Section Two: Students' Engagement.

1-How would rate your engagement at university?

High ☐ Average ☐ Low ☐

2-Which of the following of activities do you participate in?

- University' clubs
- Sports teams
- Study groups
- Volunteer work
- None of the above

3-How many times do you attend university events or activities?

Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐

4-How often do you actively participate in English class discussions?

Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

5-How much time do you spend outside of class practicing English?

.....

6-Which classroom activities (e.g. group work, presentations, discussions) help you engage more in learning English?

.....

7- Do you feel that the university staff provides enough opportunities for students' engagement? Yes ☐ No ☐

8-What do you suggest to improve students' engagement at university?

.....
.....

Section Three: Sense of Belonging.

1-Do you feel that you belong to the university?

Yes ☐ No ☐

2-I feel like I am an important part of my English class.

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

3-What do you think contributes to sense of belonging?(You can choose more than one answer)

- Teachers
- Peers
- Engaging in university' activities
- Faculty support

4-I feel respected and valued by my English teachers.

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

5-Speaking English makes me feel confident and included in academic discussions.

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

6-Do you feel connected with your classmates during English lessons?

.....

7-Do you feel that the university staff enhances sense of belonging?

Yes No ☐ ☐

8- What do you suggest to foster sense of belonging at university?

.....

Appendix B: Scientific Club members Questionnaire

Dear student, I am working on Students' Engagement and Sense of Belonging at the University. In this study, I include the impact of extracurricular activities on these notions. Your contribution will be helpful to carry out this investigation. Your answers will be valuable and be sure that your information will be kept confidential.

- Are the students interested in joining the club?
- What do you do to help the new members in particular and students in general feel welcomed and comfortable in the club?
- Have you observed any progress in students' academic and social behaviors after joining the club?
- Do students feel a sense of belonging at the university, and how is this demonstrated in the Department?
- In your opinion, how does taking part in the club affect students' sense of belonging?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for teachers

1-Do you feel that students belong to the university?

2-How would you rate the students' engagement in the classroom?

3-Can you give a lesson or activity that enhances students' engagement and sense of belonging?

4-How can you create a positive atmosphere in the classroom?